

# What We Know

## ARTICLES & INSIGHTS

### ABOUT THE AUTHOR



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## Do I Have to pay a lawyer for this? Good ways to save on legal fees when going through a divorce

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Separation and divorce is expensive; and even in a good economic climate, people are always looking for ways to save money when going through a divorce. Most of us do not have a divorce attorney as a line item in our family budgets, but the good news is that there are great ways to save money on legal fees. On the other hand, there are also some not-so-great ways that might save a few dollars up front but could cost you an arm and a leg in the long run.

So what are the good ways to save on legal fees?

1. **Consult with a family law attorney early in the process:** Before you can even begin to move forward in the separation and divorce process, you need a basic understanding of your legal rights and obligations. Many people desire to leave lawyers out of the process as long as possible and try to do as much as they can on their own. While this approach is tempting, you want to be negotiating with your spouse armed with as much accurate legal information as you can. Paying an attorney a reasonable fee for an initial consultation to provide you with an understanding of what the law would require in your situation is a great investment and can help you both negotiate fairly and preserve the assets that you already have.
2. **Be organized:** In so many separation and divorce cases, mountains of documentation are required. Make sure you have a clear understanding of the documents you need to gather then go about doing so in a methodical way. For example, if you need to supply twelve months of bank statements; gather each month separately, make sure all pages are accounted for, put the pages in order, staple them by month, and then put the months in chronological order. Go one step further and make a copy for yourself and two copies for your attorney. The more organized and complete you are in preparing and delivering your documentation to your attorney, the less time is needed for him or her to review it, copy it, and prepare it to best accomplish the goals in your case.
3. **Take advantage of paralegals:** At our firm, we are very fortunate to have amazing paralegals. Each of our paralegals care about your case, can flawlessly complete necessary administrative tasks, are often easier to reach than the attorney, and their time costs more than fifty percent less than the lawyer! Paralegals cannot give you legal

advice, but they can help you get organized and answer procedural questions so you can become intimately familiar with the legal process.

One of the not-so-good ideas that might save you a few dollars up front but could cost you dearly in the end is drafting your own separation agreement. So many sample separation agreements exist on the internet, in libraries (and in the world of virtual books), and from other do-it-yourself divorce resources. Additionally, almost every one of us knows someone else who has gone through a divorce and who is willing to share his or her separation agreement to give you an idea of what you might want to do with your own.

**USE CAUTION!!!** A separation agreement is an important document that covers some of the most sensitive and significant issues you will ever have to address. Some internet and other do-it-yourself resources are woefully inadequate. Divorce laws vary greatly from state to state, and you want to make sure that whatever agreement you are able to negotiate is enforceable. Additionally, there are many seemingly boilerplate provisions in a separation agreement that can change the entire nature of the agreement.

Finally, each case has its own set of unique and specific facts, and your agreement needs to be tailored to those facts. I have spent a lot of time (and my clients' money) fixing agreements that they have drafted on their own. Make the investment and do it right the first time.

There are so many good ways to help manage your legal fees in a separation and divorce. Take advantage of these tips, and be on the lookout for more in future posts!

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