

Ed Sherman is a family law attorney, divorce expert, and founder of Nolo Press. He started the self-help law movement in 1971 when he published the first edition of *How to Do Your Own Divorce* and founded the paralegal industry in 1973. With more than a million books sold, Ed has saved the public billions of dollars in legal fees while making divorce go more smoothly and easily for millions of readers. His latest book, *Make Any Divorce Better*, does exactly what the title says. You can order his books from <http://www.nolodivorce.com>

**Your divorce: It's about time!
(and children) (and money)**

To have a better divorce, you need to take some time to read, think about and act on the advice in my book, *Make Any Divorce Better*, and the specific steps you can take. No matter what your situation, if you follow my advice, things will soon get better.

As a family law attorney for over 35 years, I can tell you that unless you face a serious emergency like those in my online “emergencies” article, then

- * The worst thing you can do is run to an attorney before you are more informed.
- * Divorce problems are almost never legal, they are almost always personal.
- * There are no—zero, not any—solutions for personal problems in law, in court, or in a lawyer’s office. To the contrary, taking divorce problems into the legal system will almost certainly make things much worse.
- * At least 90% of all divorces can be done better with little or no attorney involvement.
- * After you take the steps I recommend, if you still have trouble working out terms with your Ex, you don’t need an attorney, you need a mediator.

The things you can do for yourself are far superior to anything an attorney can do for you. Court is not good for you, your child, your health or your bank account. If you and your Ex can reach an agreement about how to deal with your assets, debts, and support (if relevant), then you don’t need to battle in court, and you can save yourself a lot of time, trouble and money.

Your first job is to find a way to make yourself safe and secure for at least a few weeks, maybe a few months. You need time to let things settle down, get centered in a new direction, let your spouse and children adjust to changes, and . . .

You also need some time to take some important early steps, noted in my online Pre-divorce Checklist.

What’s the hurry—children? money? Apart from needing to get on with your life, or make a bold declaration of independence, the most common and deeply felt sources of urgency are about children and money. You might be worried about how the bills will

get paid, or when you will get to see your children. It will be hard to find peace and work out terms for anything unless you can make some arrangements, at least temporary ones, about children and money.

Money. Here are some things to think about regarding money in the early stages of divorce.

If your spouse depends on you to pay the bills and you don't give some reassurance that you'll help, your spouse will be forced to get an attorney and file for a support order. Then your life gets dragged into court, lawyer wars, conflict and huge expense. You really don't want that. It's no solution when the lawyers end up with all of your money and you still owe them for fees.

Much better if you promise to help with the bills until you've both had some time to think, adjust, discuss the terms of your separation. Be very reassuring. Ask your spouse to work with you on these steps. Offer to make a temporary agreement in writing that will reassure both of you about money and parenting, just for the short term.

If you depend on your spouse to pay the bills, your goal is to get stable and secure for a few weeks or months while you figure out what to do next. Here are some suggestions.

- While you wait to see if the ideas below work out, struggle hard to find a way you can take care of yourself, at least in a very modest way in which you can be safe and secure for a while. Maybe you can get help from friends or family or your faith community. As a very last resort, consider public assistance.

- If your spouse does not actually have money to spare, you're stuck with the self-help steps above, but if you think there's enough to share, move on to the next steps.

- Send your spouse this article.

- Wait a few days, then send a polite message to your spouse, either in a letter or through a diplomatic friend or clergyman—someone who definitely will not add to the tension—that you know it's hard for both of you, but you need some help with the bills and if you can't work out a temporary arrangement for at least a few months, you will be forced to get an attorney and go to court for a support order. You really don't want to do this because it will be hugely upsetting and expensive—an unnecessary waste that will be bad for everyone. It would be so much better for both of you to make a temporary arrangement.

If nothing works with your spouse and you can't get short-term help from friends or family, you have three choices:

- If your spouse has wages or assets you can attach for support, get an attorney and go to court for a support order. Read my online article, Who can I call? At <http://www.nolotech.com/help.html>
- Got kids? Every state has an office in charge of obtaining and enforcing child support orders. Ask at the courthouse where they are and how to contact them.
- If your spouse doesn't work or changes employers frequently or otherwise isn't worth taking to court for support, you'll have to try to get public assistance until you can support yourself on your own. Focus on stability first, then work toward a peaceful resolution of your divorce.

Debts. If debts are weighing heavily, read my article, Dealing With Debts, at www.nolodivorce.com/articles/debts.html

Children. If you are worried about parenting arrangements, read my article online, Dealing With Debts at <http://www.nolotech.com/articles/debts.html>

Parting thoughts. Don't go to an attorney until you first get organized and prepared, figure out what you want from the attorney, and particularly what attorney to go to. Don't talk to your Ex about divorce or parenting until you learn how to reduce upset and lay the groundwork for successful negotiation. And, please, be very careful who you listen to. Do not take advice from anyone who is not truly expert on exactly your topic. Friends and relatives can be great for moral support but do not get your advice there. If you take the time to learn and apply my advice, your divorce will go much better. Millions have successfully gone before you and if they can do it, then with a little time and effort, so can you.

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