

How To Divorce: How Do I File For Divorce?

Wondering how to file for divorce? Here's what you need to know, from family law attorney.

The first thing you need to do after deciding to divorce is schedule a consultation with an experienced divorce lawyer for at least an hour. Doing research on the Internet is not a substitute; You need a face-to-face meeting to get your questions answered and find out how the laws of your state apply to the particulars of your situation.

In order to get the most out of that meeting, gather as much information as you can about assets, debts and income, and bring it with you. Don't worry about title -- the lawyer will want to know about what's in your name, what's in your spouse's name and what's in both names. Assets include real estate, bank and investment accounts, retirement plans, cars, and valuable personal property such as jewelry. Debts include mortgages, balances owed on credit cards, car and student loans. Also, bring your most recent tax returns and current pay stubs or other documentation of income.

It's okay if you don't know where to find all this information. Even if your list is incomplete, it will help a lawyer give you specific, rather than general, information about what a settlement of your case might look like.

A consultation is a one-time event; it does not mean you have to hire that lawyer to represent you, or even to hire any lawyer at all. The point is to come away with enough information to decide if you definitely want to get divorced and, if so, what you can expect going forward.