

QUICKSTART Checklist

Blindsided? Confused?

Angry? What do I do first?

1. Are you safe? If NO, you must have a plan to keep yourself and your children safe, before you leave. Find a friend or shelter where you and your children can stay in case of an emergency. Call the local domestic abuse hotline for a course of action. See [shift Are You Safe?](#) page.
2. Otherwise, stay in the house while making an action plan. There are many considerations in one of you staying or leaving. Status quo may be best when your whole world was just turned upside down. Keep the kids on schedule and somebody move to another room. There can be consequences for leaving, so stay put until you can be advised by a Legal Professional. This is a good time to discuss marriage counseling, it's worth the try. See [Counseling & Therapists](#).
3. Start shopping for that Lawyer. It's good to ask around, but do your homework and trust your gut. A lawyer will advise on what you what type of divorce you'll need, protect assets, determine child custody and support. Beware of online divorces. Even if you feel it's going to be 'simple', you won't regret having someone make sure things stay fair. Hiring a State licensed family law attorney is worth the cost. See [Legal Professionals](#).
4. Secure your funds. Run your credit report. Identify which accounts are joint, nobody will talk to you if you're not on the account. Cancel any accounts not absolutely necessary. You and your partner will share the bills until the divorce is final, try to keep spending under control. Open your own checking account and get a credit card. You will have to disclose any funds to the court, but at least you will have secured some independence while in process. A private email and a pay-as-you-go phone isn't a bad idea. See [Financial Specialists](#).
5. Copy documents. Make copies of everything: personal and business tax returns, investment and retirement account statements, life insurance policies, mortgage documents, credit card statements, car titles, etc. If your spouse is self-employed, get as much information as possible about the finances of the business. Copy any financial data stored on your home computer, have at least the last 3 years records. Do not remove or damage the originals! Keep your set of files in a safe place away from home, update as necessary. See [Mailbox & Copy Services](#).
6. Inventory household items. List the major items: furniture, artwork, jewelry, appliances, automobiles, etc. Grab a trusted friend as a witness and a legal pad, note everything room by room. Take pictures for proof of condition. Don't forget the storage areas of your home, outside and rental storage units, and your safe deposit box. Remove your treasured heirloom jewelry, family photos, yearbooks – anything special to you that might disappear in anger! Know all your assets and possessions, it all adds up when it comes time to splitting the household stuff.

Now, What NOT To Do!

- Don't trash your spouse (in front of the kids) Spite is simply not attractive.
- Don't spend like there will be no tomorrow, as tomorrow does come.
- Don't hide assets or stash joint property — want to be in contempt of court?
- Don't live like you're single until you are, another embarrassing mistake.
- Don't compare your divorce to another, every situation is different.
- Don't fight over things that really don't matter...just to 'win'.
- Don't rush a divorce. The devil is in the details you don't want any regrets later.