



Divorce Planning Guide

A resource to help you prepare for your first meeting with a divorce attorney

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Overview

Divorce can feel overwhelming, especially at the beginning. Preparing a few items in advance can help you make the most of your first meeting and allow your attorney to provide meaningful guidance about your situation.

At Goranson Bain Ausley, we have guided thousands of clients through complex family law matters, and thoughtful preparation can help make the process more efficient and productive.

You do *not* need to have everything prepared before your consultation. This guide is simply meant to help you begin organizing information that may be helpful for your conversation with your attorney.

This Guide Covers

1. What to Expect in Your First Meeting
2. Divorce Preparation Checklist
3. Financial Documents to Gather
4. Common Mistakes to Avoid
5. Helpful Questions to Ask Your Attorney

Before Your Consultation

If you have time before your meeting, consider:

- Thinking about your top priorities for the divorce
- Gathering any financial documents you already have
- Writing down questions or concerns

Your attorney will guide you through the rest.

1. What to Expect in Your First Meeting

Your first meeting with a divorce attorney is designed to help you understand your options and begin developing a plan for moving forward.

During the consultation, your attorney will typically discuss:

- The [divorce process](#) and how cases generally progress
- Potential timelines and key milestones
- Options for resolving disputes, such as [negotiation](#), [mediation](#), [collaborative divorce](#), or [litigation](#)
- Immediate steps you may need to take to protect your interests

You may also discuss:

- Your goals for the divorce
- Parenting arrangements and your children's needs
- Financial issues such as property division and support
- Any urgent concerns about safety, finances, or parenting

The goal of the consultation is to help you leave with greater clarity about your options and the path forward.

Understanding The Timeline

One of the most common questions clients have is how long a divorce will take. Every case is different, and the timeline depends on many factors, including whether the parties are able to reach agreements and the complexity of financial or parenting issues. During your consultation, your attorney can help you understand the factors that may influence the timeline in your specific situation.

What Happens After the Consultation

After your meeting, your attorney may recommend next steps such as:

- Gathering additional financial documents
- Developing a strategy for negotiation or settlement
- Filing initial legal paperwork if appropriate
- Identifying experts or professionals who may assist with financial or parenting issues

Not every case follows the same path. Your attorney will help determine the best approach for your circumstances.

2. Divorce Preparation Checklist

Preparing a few items in advance can make your consultation more productive.

Identify Your Priorities

Consider the outcomes that are most important to you.

Examples:

- Stability and well-being for your children
- Financial security after divorce
- Protecting certain assets or inheritances
- Minimizing conflict during the process

Identify Concerns

Your attorney should understand any concerns early in the process.

Examples:

- Concerns about parenting or safety
- Financial transparency or hidden assets
- Children with special needs
- Issues the other party may raise

Prepare Helpful Lists

It can be helpful to prepare:

- A list of assets and debts ([see our Inventory and Appraisement preparation checklist](#))
- A list of monthly household expenses
- Names of individuals who may have knowledge of relevant facts

Prepare Short Background Summaries

You may also want to think about:

- Your relationship history
- Your parenting roles and responsibilities
- Your employment and financial background
- Any issues that may affect the case

Helpful Tip

If possible, bring any financial documents you already have to your consultation. Even partial information can help your attorney provide more specific guidance.

3. Financial Documents to Gather

If possible, begin gathering the following documents. Do not worry if you cannot find everything right away.

Common documents include:

Income information

Pay stubs
W-2 or 1099 forms
Bonus or commission records

Retirement accounts

401(k)
IRA
Pension plans

Tax returns

The last three years of federal tax returns

Debt records

Credit cards
Personal loans
Student loans
Lines of credit

Bank and investment accounts

Checking and savings accounts
Brokerage accounts
Cryptocurrency accounts (if applicable)

Real estate documents

Mortgage statements
Property tax records
Closing documents

Business ownership records (if applicable)

Ownership agreements
Financial statements for the last three years
Organizational charts
Tax returns for the last three years

Gathering these documents early can help reduce delays and legal costs. In many Texas divorce cases, parties will eventually prepare an Inventory and Appraisement, which is a detailed list of assets and debts.

To learn more:

- [Inventory and Appraisement in a Texas Divorce: What It Is and How to Complete It](#)
- [Download the Inventory and Appraisement Preparation Checklist](#)

4. Common Mistakes to Avoid

Many people unknowingly make decisions early in divorce that complicate the process later.

Common mistakes include:

- Making major financial decisions without legal advice
- Posting about the divorce on social media
- Moving or hiding money
- Letting emotions drive important decisions
- Discussing legal issues with children
- Taking advice from friends instead of professionals

Thoughtful decisions early in the process often lead to better long-term outcomes.

5. Helpful Questions to Ask Your Attorney

You may want to bring a list of questions to your consultation.

Examples include:

- What are the next steps in my situation?
- What timeline should I expect?
- What outcomes are realistic in my case?
- What can I do to help keep the process efficient and cost-effective?
- Are there immediate steps I should take to protect myself or my children?

Every divorce is different. With the right preparation and guidance, you can navigate the process thoughtfully and move forward with greater clarity and confidence.