

# MY CO-PARENTING HANDBOOK II

HANDBOOK II

A  
RESOURCE  
FOR THE  
DIVORCING  
FAMILY

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# **Conflict Management Handbook for Co-parents**



**THERE IS NOTHING MORE  
POWERFUL THAN A PERSON  
ARMED WITH INFORMATION  
AND OPTIONS**



# Handbook

J U N E 2 0 2 1

## MISSION

Our job has been and will continue to be to help parents reach solutions, avoid court, and to co-parent. By definition it is my job to help parents define their conflict, learn basic communication skills with the goal of ensuring that the parents have the skills not only to manage present conflict but future conflict as well. Regardless of where you are in the process, it's not too late to turn things around and begin the co-parenting process!

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# On Apples and Oranges

You have fundamental differences. Take that for granted. All that matters to a co-parent is how you work together to achieve a solution.



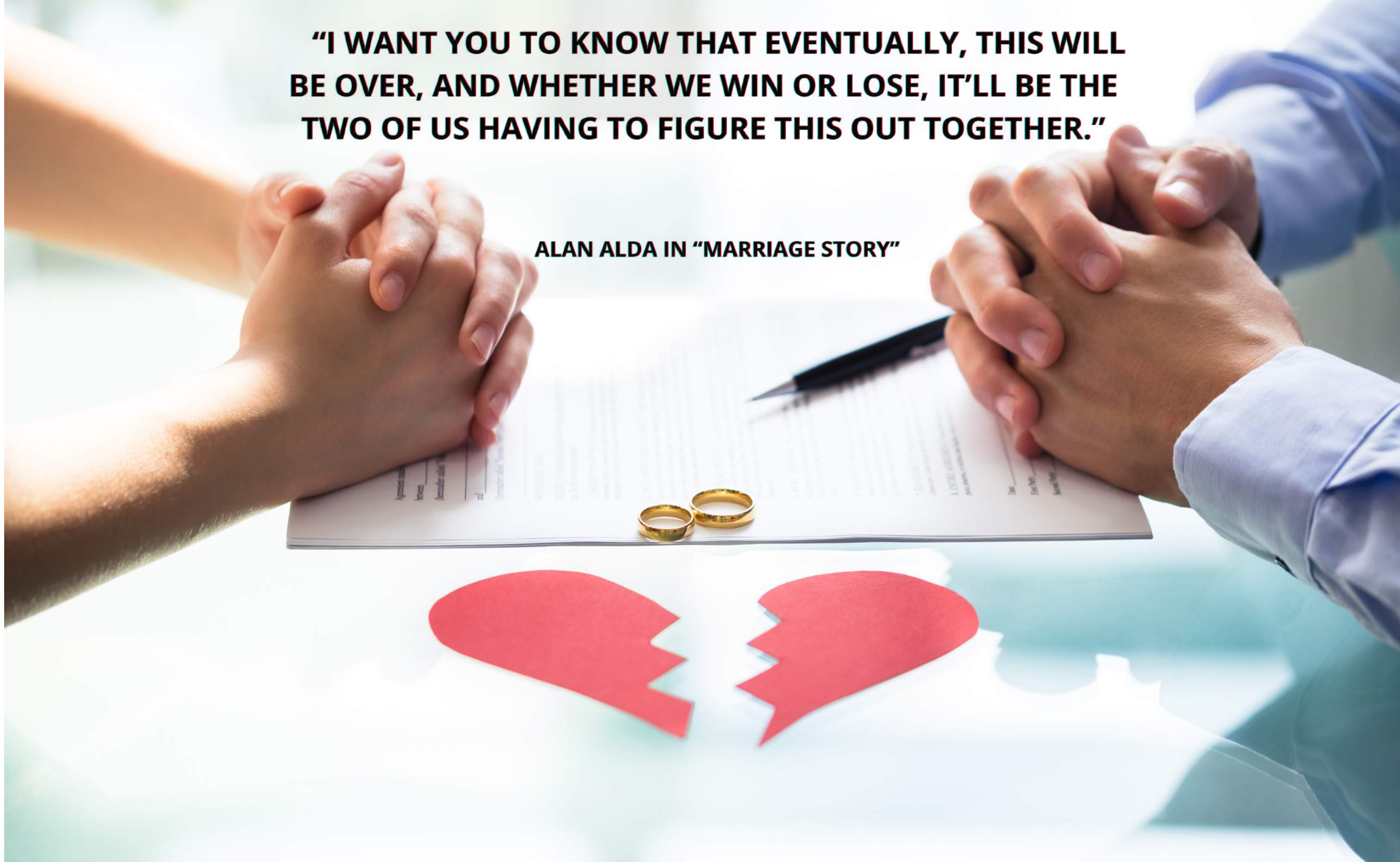


# CONTENTS

- 6. CO-PARENTING BEFORE DIVORCE**
- 8 LEARNING BIFF**
- 10 THE THREE CONVERSATIONS**
- 11 TELLING THE KIDS**
- 14 MEDIATE LITIGATE COLLABORATE**
- 18 PLANNING A BUDGET**
- 20 CO-PARENTING DURING YOUR DIVORCE**
- 24 TEAM BASED APPROACH**
- 29 CO-PARENTING AFTER THE DIVORCE**

**"I WANT YOU TO KNOW THAT EVENTUALLY, THIS WILL BE OVER, AND WHETHER WE WIN OR LOSE, IT'LL BE THE TWO OF US HAVING TO FIGURE THIS OUT TOGETHER."**

**ALAN ALDA IN "MARRIAGE STORY"**



# COPARENTING

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## Before You Consider Court

You have yet to file your divorce. For many parents the question at this point is how to resolve disputes and begin the process of co-parenting.

The question is how?

Without skills, your plans to co-parent will fail at some point and you will be in court. How are you planning to resolve not only your present conflict but your future conflict as well?

# Are you Ready?

At present, there are now online sites and online forms to help parents file their petitions for divorce.

The issue arises when the parents have a dispute. Overcoming conflict during the divorce process may seem like an insurmountable process.

*The last place divorcing parents want to be is before a family law judge hearing their case.*



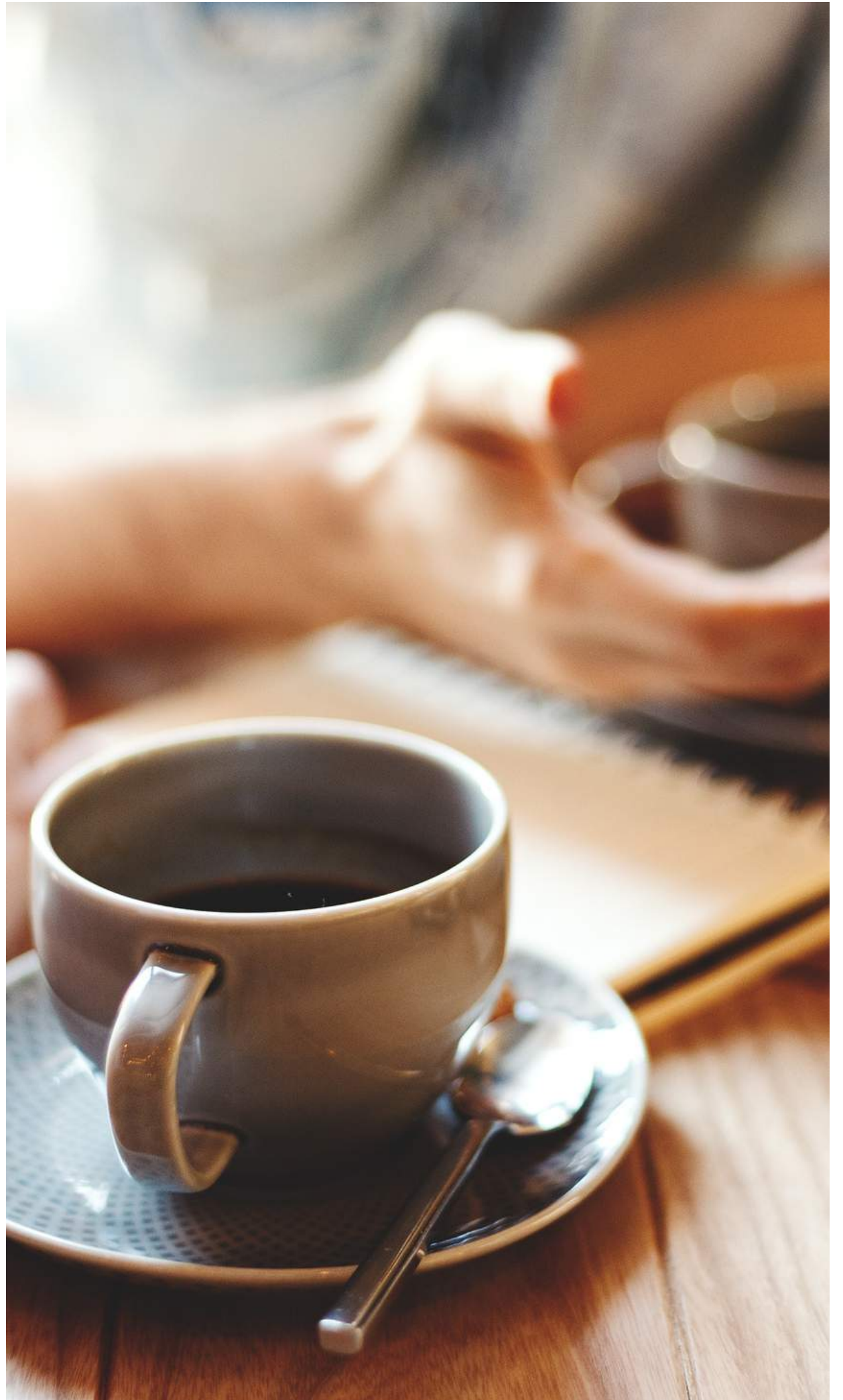


# COMMUNICATION STARTS NOW

For co-parents, the divorce process should be all about transitioning, ending your relationship as husband and wife, and beginning your journey as co-parents.

Co-parenting is going to mean reframing the manner in which you interact with your spouse.

You relate with your spouse on an emotional level. Co-parents communicate with each other as though they were employees working a task on a job.



## Resources:

Book: Amazon and purchase Bill Eddy's BIFF for co-parent communication. Practice the BIFF method in all of your communications!



# Bereavement Counseling

It can be hard to transition through the divorce process when your ex (or perhaps yourself) is not ready to end the divorce.

Bereavement counseling is to help divorced couples who feel lost in the trauma of divorce.

Bereavement counseling helps couples answer some basic questions troubling divorcing parents.

Can we stay married?

What happens next?

Bereavement counseling is an excellent way for a mental health professional to intervene and assist among divorcing parents, helping them to continue to communicate.





# TELLING THE KIDS

Talking to your child separately may be your only option, but can you agree with me that it is not your best option? Dad may say one thing to the kids and providing one reason for the divorce, Mom saying another. Your **INDIVIDUAL EFFORTS** are not going to provide the best recipe to reduce anxiety and stress for your children.

Moms and Dads who intend to co-parent after divorce should together plan how to discuss the news with their children.

Thinking through **HOW** to talk to the children most likely will mean visiting a third-party professional, such as a child therapist, who can provide a guideline of what and what not to say.





# ACCENTUATE THE POSITIVES

Talking to the kids may have just changed your approach to your divorce.

- Rather than litigating and placing your children in a high conflict situation, the parties focus on meeting the needs of their children and not introducing conflict over each parent's needs.







# Telling the kids

**What will you  
tell your kids  
when they ask.**

**Was this my fault?**

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**Can I still love (my  
other parent)?**

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**Why is this happening?**

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**Where am I going to  
live?**

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**Am I still going to see  
my friends?**

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# Checklist



# Do We Mediate Litigate or Collaborate?

Most parents hire a litigation attorney when they file for divorce. Why?

While litigation may be necessary you need to explore your options.

Simply put do you litigate, mediate or choose collaborative divorce?

## Litigation Costs!

Litigation is the most expensive election you can make. There are not just the initial retainers paid to your lawyer, retainers will be expended, and billable hours will continue. There are court reporter fees, there are deposition costs, videographers, etc. The more litigious you want to be the higher your costs.



**Mediation costs are significantly lower than litigation or electing a collaborative divorce.**



# Have You Defined Your Conflict?

Conflict is defined in one of two ways, one as a misunderstanding, the other is defined as an entrenched battle.

**Defining Your Conflict Helps Answer the question.**

Litigation is designed to resolve deeply entrenched conflict.

Mediation may be a better path to work through the problem.

Electing a Collaborative approach may be necessary depending on the complexity of your divorce.





# Engage, Listen, Understand and Respond

- Identify Your Goals
  - State Your Differences
  - Actively listen
  - Define Your Conflict
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- Talk to a Family Law Attorney, Mediator and Collaborative Family Practitioner

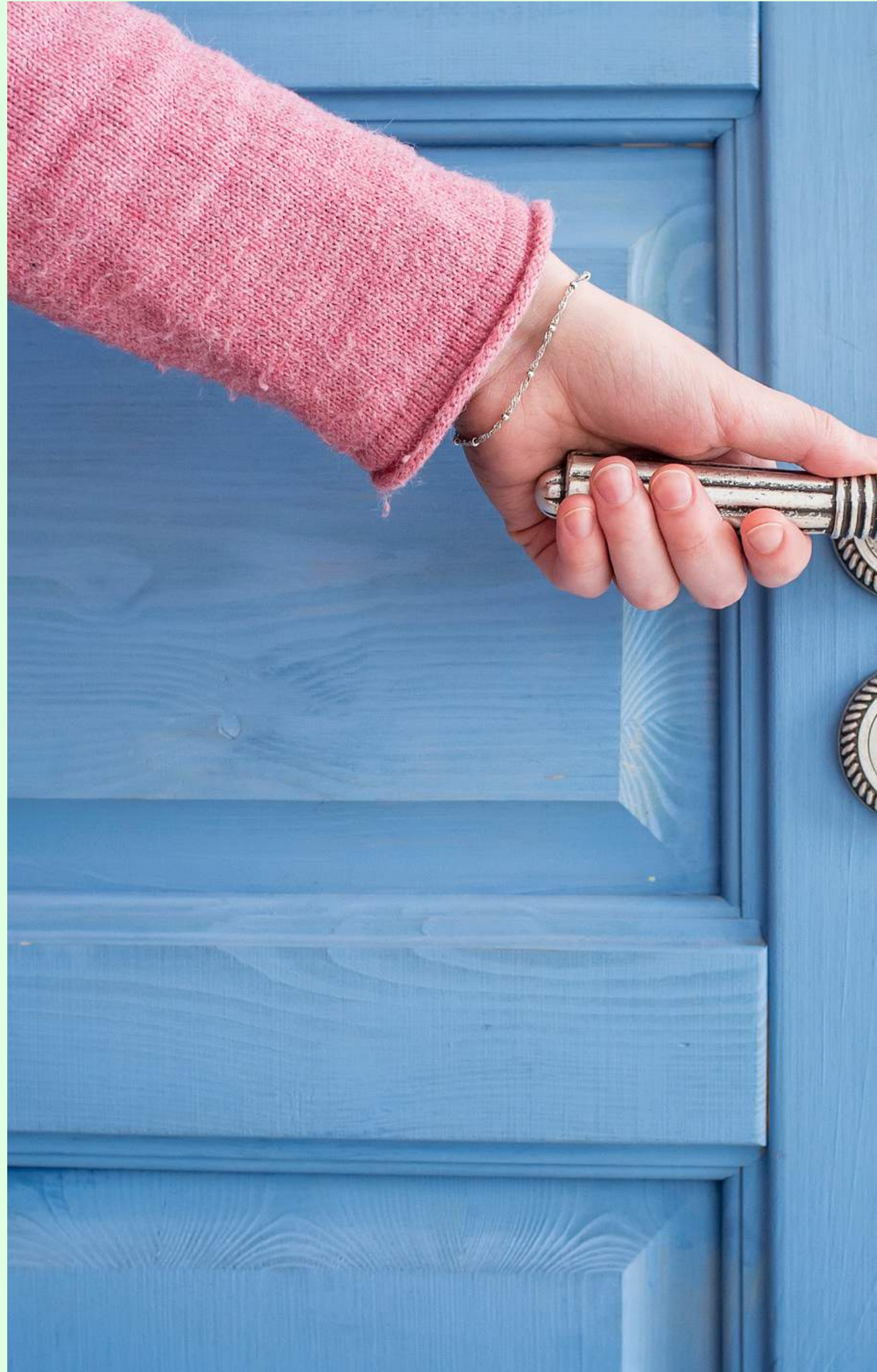
**HAVE THE TALK**

**Mediate  
Litigate  
or  
Collaborate**

**Checklist**

# THE POSITIVES

- You expressed your goals and concerns to your ex.
- You Defined your Conflict
- You empowered yourself and attempted to direct how conflict should be managed.
- Succeed or fail you and your spouse found a new way, a problem-solving way, to work through your problems.





# THE MONEY TALK

**Divorce costs no matter what.**

**If you are not careful you will lose control over how money is spent along the process.**

**As you manage your finances during your marriage you will need to budget during your divorce.**

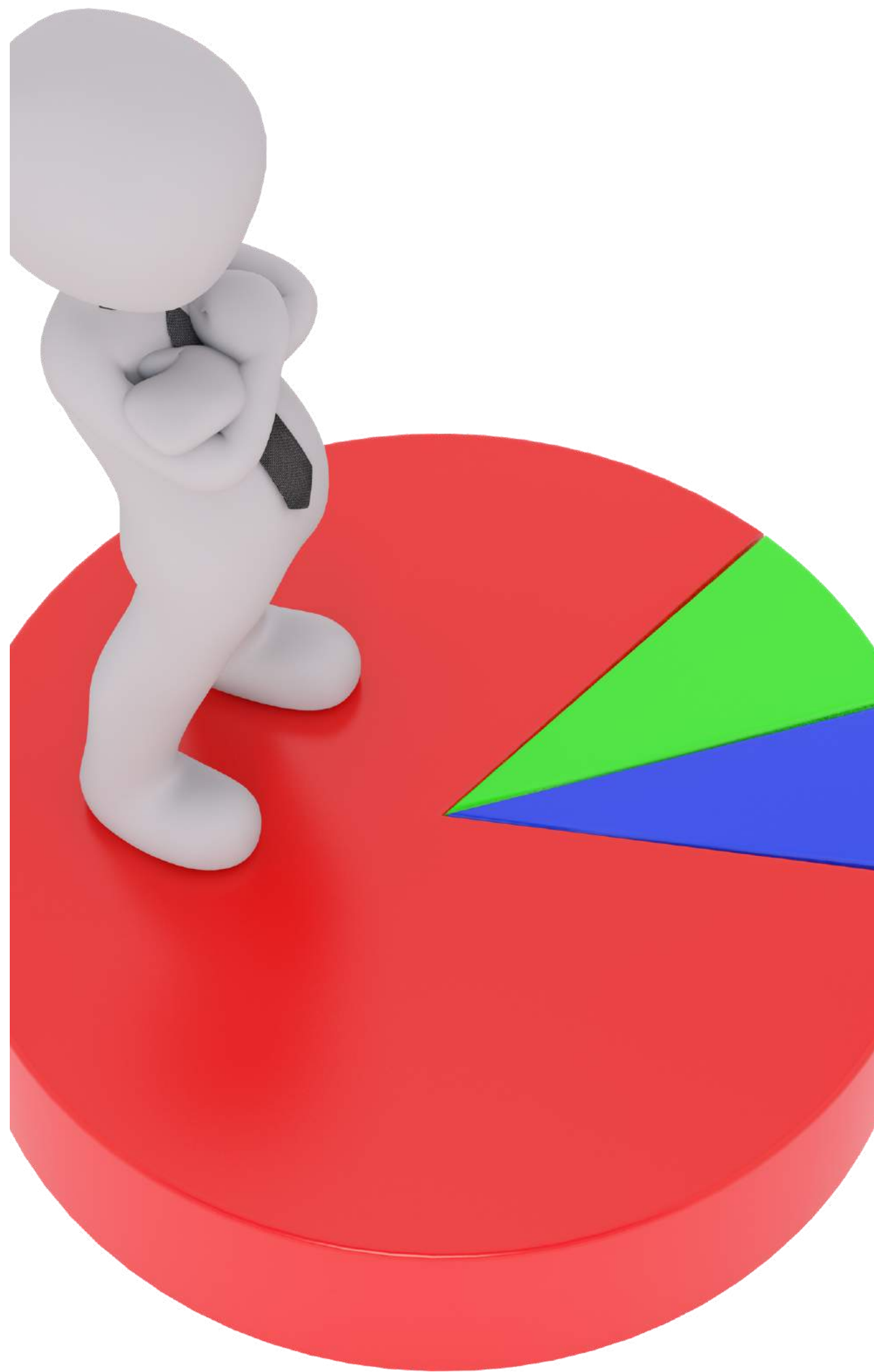
**Things to consider;**

**Consolidate existing loans**

**Pay minimum payments on credit cards**

**Obtain forbearance on mortgage or car loans**

**Find affordable solutions:  
Stay with Family, share furniture as best as you can, do not get into further long-term debt.**



# CREATING YOUR BUDGET

The average price of a contested divorce is approximately \$20,000.00 when custody is at issue.

The cost does not include child custody evaluation reports, amicus fees, etc.

Courts may have to be involved if you can not figure out how to cover present expenses. Parties who can come up with agreements as to who will pay what expense can save thousands of dollars in attorneys fees.







# TRANSITION TO COPARENTING

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## During The Court Process

You've filed for divorce, perhaps been to court. You are in an adversarial process. The judge is asking you to co-parent at this point.

How?

# WHY ARE YOU LITIGATING YOUR DIVORCE?

## MAIN FACTORS

**Inability to Communicate with Ex During Divorce**

**The presumption that Divorce has to be an adversary process.**

**Lack of information on alternate processes**

**Fear that collaborative divorces can be Expensive and Unproductive**

**Mediation Resolves 99% of all Disputes.**





# Are you Ready?

At present, there are now online sites and online forms to help parents file their petitions for divorce.

The issue arises when the parents have a dispute. Overcoming conflict during the divorce process may seem like an insurmountable process.

*The last place divorcing parents want to be is before a family law judge hearing their case.*



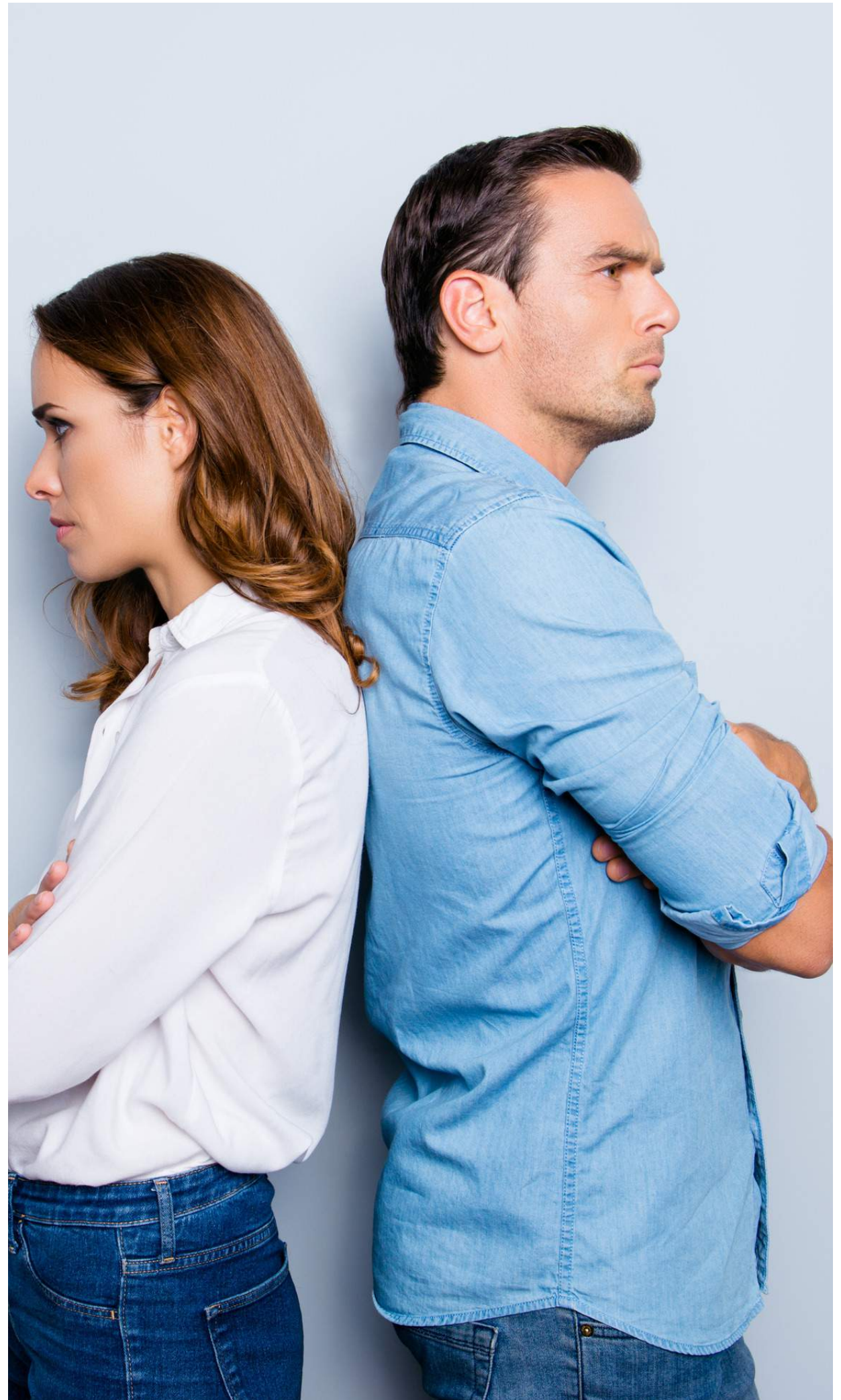
# RELAY INFORMATION

**During the litigation process relay information - rely on the BIFF method. Be brief, informative factual, and forceful. You are in an adversarial setting hoping that you can transition from litigant to co-parent.**

## **Resources:**

**Book: Amazon and purchase Bill Eddy's BIFF for co-parent communication. Practice the BIFF method in all of your communications!**

**App Close/OFW: Apps that allow you and your ex to communicate in a more focused setting.**





# TEAM MEMBERS

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**TEAM BASED  
APPROACH**

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**COURT REFERRED**

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**PARENT  
RESOURCES**

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## CO-PARENTING HANDBOOK

# USING A TEAM BASED APPROACH (TBA)



A team-based approach (TBA) is defined as parents working with neutral professionals after they agree to the existence of a problem.

Using a TBA is not about right and wrong. The TBA approach is about finding a solution to the problem.

## Steps to TBA

1. State the Problem without taking a position
2. Agree to a referral to a neutral professional
3. Allow time for each parent to communicate with the professional.
4. Professional to provide options and resources to parents.
5. Parents and professionals come up with a team-based response to the problem.





A group of people are sitting in a circle in a meeting room, engaged in a discussion. The room has a bookshelf in the background. The text is overlaid on the image.

**1.**

## **PARENT COORDINATOR**

**PARENT COORDINATORS** engage the parents in a confidential setting to help parents work through the process and determine what issues are in conflict.

## **2 PARENT FACILITATOR**

**PARENT COORDINATORS** engage the parents in a non-confidential setting to help parents learn how to communicate and work through certain designated issues are in conflict.



3

## THERAPISTS - MENTAL HEALTH PROFESSIONALS

Mental health professionals are assigned particular roles in your case. Examples of appointed therapist would include the following:

Child Therapist

Family Therapist

Reunification Therapist

Bereavement Counseling

Individual Therapy

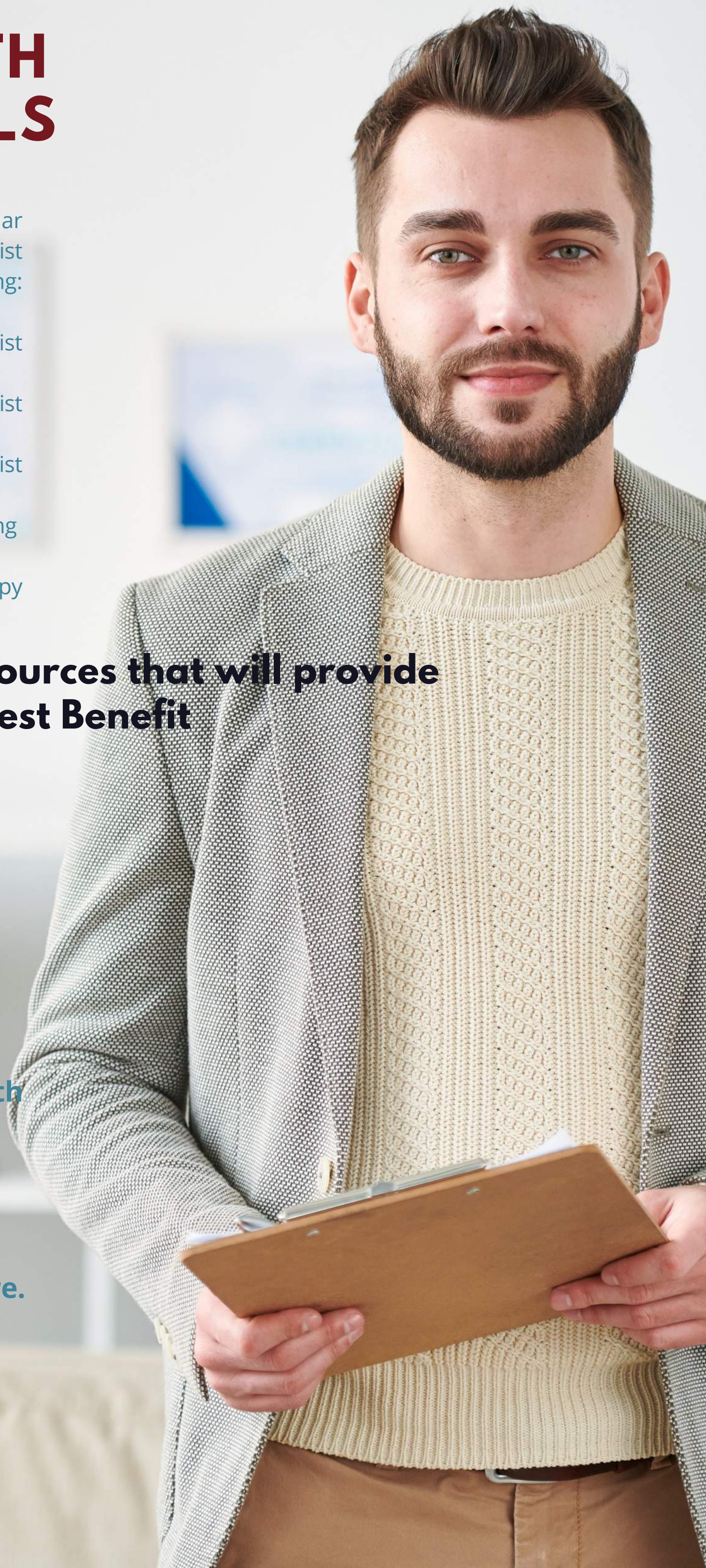
**Allocate Your Resources that will provide  
the Best Benefit**

4

## PSYCHOLOGIST/ PSYCHIATRISTS

- When there are issues of mental health at hand a psychiatrist or psychologist may be needed.

Psychologists may be needed to help parents who are high conflict in nature. Psychiatrist may be needed to help diagnose parents with mental health issues and even, at times, prescribe treatments.





# OPERATION CO-PARENT

**Educate Yourself  
on potential team  
members, roles  
and duties.**

**Pick members  
wisely.**

**Use a cost-benefit  
approach when  
possible.**





# Transition to Co-parenting

You've learned the principles of BIFF and you worked through the process

You have used the team-based approach and did the best you can to resolve conflict to benefit your kids.







# TRANSITION TO COPARENTING

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## After the Divorce

You are on the road to co-parenting. Co-parenting at this point is more about the journey than the destination.

- I. Maintain Communication
- II. Apply Skills Learned
- III. Direct Challenging Conversations



# MAINTAIN LINES OF COMMUNICATION

Don't forget what you learned from the divorce process.

Maintain communication using the BIFF approach.

IF possible schedule co-parenting meetings once or twice a year - stay on the same page about goals, desires, and objectives that you and your children have.

When times get tough, feel free to use App Close or Our FamilyWizard (Smart Apps) to continue communication.



## Resources:

Book: Amazon and purchase Bill Eddy's BIFF for co-parent communication.

Smart Apps: OFW and App Close.

## When its Time for A One on One Conversation...

### Plan Your Meeting

You may want to communicate with your ex on issues that you see as problematic or that have the potential for conflict. Think about what you're going to say before you say it. Think about how he or she will react to what you have to say.

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### DON'T FORGET TO LISTEN

Actively listen when you hear your ex speak actively listen. Could you be seeing things incorrectly? Do you have all the information that you need? Does your ex have all the information that they need?

### UNDERSTAND

You and your ex will each have your own viewpoints as to why you believe you are right. Viewpoints are lenses. Lenses can be based on your prior experiences, values, belief system. |

In preparing for this conversation ask yourself basic questions: How will your ex respond? Are you prepared for the response? Is there a better way to present the issue you are facing? Would using TBA be beneficial in this situation.

### RESPOND

Can you agree at this point? Do you believe collaboration is necessary to solve your dispute?





CO-PARENTING HANDBOOK

# CONTINUE THE TBA APPROACH

During the divorce process, you may have used a team-based approach with court-assigned professionals such as parent facilitators or parent coordinators. After the divorce process, you can use the TBA approach with any neutral person you believe can provide options and resources to the table when confronted with a co-parenting problem.

Team Members could include:

- a. Psychologists
- b. Licensed Professional Counselors
- c. Dentists
- d. Teachers
- e. Doctors or Nurses
- f. Coaches

Never allow a conflict to develop when options and resources are available to solve the problem.



# Co-Parenting Handbook

## ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Matt Sossi is a family law attorney in San Antonio, Texas. Matt Sossi is an amicus attorney, parent facilitator, parent coordinator, and family law mediator. Trained as a collaborative family law attorney, Matt Sossi has been helping to divorce families in San Antonio, Texas since 1995.

Joy Curbow is a family law mediator in San Antonio, Texas. Joy Curbow's background is in social work. Joy Curbow is a member of AFCC and has received training through Cornell University in conflict management.

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# Mission Statements

**My job has been and will continue to be to help parents reach solutions, avoid court, and to co-parent.**

**Matt Sossi**

**My goal is to empower parents with options and resources and guide them towards a healthy transition to co-parenting.**

**There is no more powerful advocate than a person armed with information and options.**

**Joy Curbow**

**Thanks for  
Reading!**



# MY CO-PARENTING HANDBOOK II

HANDBOOK II

JUNE 1ST, 2021

FACTS AND  
FORMS

