

Living Under the Same Roof during Divorce

Due to the state of the economy, more and more couples are getting divorced and can't afford to live apart during the divorce process--and sometimes even afterwards.

Living under the same roof during this difficult period increases the stress for the clients, creates a negative environment for the children, and makes it harder for clients to remain constructive with each other.

As a divorce mediator, my job is to help couples come to practical decisions they can both live with. To help clients who can't afford to live apart while they are getting divorced, I developed and use a strategy that allows each client to be able to relax in their own home with their children on certain evenings while also having time away from the home other evenings to work out, run errands, etc. The strategy can be applied for the majority of the evenings in a week or only for part of the week depending on the level of tension and the needs of the clients and their children. The approach is as follows:

Each client has the family home for 2 - 3 nights a week.

For example:

Client A has Monday, Wednesday, and Friday;

Client B has Tuesday, Thursday, and Saturday.

On 'nights off', each client schedules dinner with friends, goes to the gym, works late or gets quiet time reading at the local library or Starbucks and returns just before bedtime--usually to a separate sleeping area.

With this arrangement, the client who is in the house can relax with the children without constant tension in the air or worrying about when things are going to blow up—and they don't dread coming home the entire time they're at work.

Although this arrangement definitely takes some planning and getting used to, clients have told me that the minor work involved pays significant dividends in lowering their stress levels and increasing their positive time with their children. I see the results, too, in how they interact more positively during the next mediation session.

And even for couples who aren't at the point of considering divorce, (but are experiencing significant relational stress) maybe a night or two off each week could help lower the tension enough to allow them the space to work through their issues and start to re-connect--so that they don't end up needing divorce mediation services.