

The New Model for Divorce: Texas' Collaborative Team Model Offers a Constructive, Respectful Approach

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It's About Time — Divorce with Less Confrontation, Less Destruction, Less Emotional Trauma

About one-half of all marriages in the United States will end in divorce. This is a sobering statistic because we know that divorce can be a painful experience — emotionally, financially, and even spiritually.

Many wish to divorce amicably and accomplish this life transition in a civil and respectful manner. Yet the standard divorce process divides the legal, financial, and psychological estate into two opposing camps. This is why divorce, even when it starts out friendly, usually ends up in conflict and emotional turmoil for the participants.

Thankfully, today there's an alternative divorce method called the Collaborative Team Model, also known as the Texas Team Model. The Collaborative Team Model is a constructive, problem-solving, team-oriented approach, rather than the destructive confrontational exercise that can end up taking forever with a judge ultimately making decisions.

The Collaborative Team Model: An Interdisciplinary Approach

The Collaborative Team Model is utilized by many members of the Dallas collaborative community. Each client hires an experienced collaborative lawyer, then neutral individuals known as "allied professionals" are jointly engaged — one Mental Health Professional (known as a Communication Coach, Collaboration Coach, or Communication Specialist) and one Financial Professional, who are on the team from the beginning of the case.

How the Collaborative Approach Works — A Structured Process

Each participant retains a separate, specially-trained collaborative attorney. The attorneys' main goal is to help both clients come to a fair agreement without court intervention. The attorneys contractually agree not to go to court.

Commitment: The participants pledge, in writing, to work together respectfully, honestly, and in good faith to resolve issues and reach agreements beneficial to all involved. Participants also agree to up-front, honest disclosure of all pertinent information and documentation. If at some point participants decide they want to litigate, they have to release their collaborative attorneys and hire new ones.

The Collaborative Team: Other collaborative law professionals join the team for assistance with emotional, financial, or parenting issues. Specially trained financial advisors and communication coaches make the progress toward agreement more efficient and effective.

Settlement: Private meetings are held to resolve all issues, including parenting decisions and division of marital property. During meetings, everyone strives to remain civil and respectful to one another. Once the participants reach agreement mutually and collaboratively, the attorneys create legally binding documents and file them with the courts. This holds all parties accountable to the settlement terms.

The Communication Coach — A Critical Role for Success

Divorce can be more emotional than it is legal. Prior to the Collaborative Team Approach, lawyers often dealt with their client's emotional issues surrounding and impacting the divorce, even though most of them had no formal psychological education.

The role of Communication Coach is an exceptionally critical component of the collaborative team. The Communication Coach is a neutral party used by both participants, helping them deal with the emotional aspects of divorce in a way that allows them to focus and move forward positively.

Jennifer Leister, MA, LPC: Collaborative Law Communication Coach

Jennifer Leister, MA, a Licensed Professional Counselor, is a highly competent collaborative law allied professional and a well-respected psychotherapist who counsels adults, adolescents and children. She is professionally trained in cognitive behavioral therapy as well as play therapy for children, and has extensive experience in a broad scope of community programs and settings which add great depth and dimension to her professional practice and life experience.

Jennifer works with all aspects of family dynamics, including individuals, couples, marriage and family counseling.

"My role as an allied professional is to help the participants communicate effectively and to assist parties with making decisions, whether they involve children and parenting plans or lifestyle changes," explains Jennifer. "Managing the emotional

Benefits of a Collaborative Team Model Divorce:

- Reduce stress and animosity rather than nurture bad feelings
- Promote effective communication between partners instead of fostering the "blame game"
- Parties retain decision-making control
- Results reflect everyone's needs rather than winning at all costs
- Provide a healthy co-parenting relationship that meets the children's needs rather than having children caught in the middle
- Matters are private versus public record
- Money is not wasted in litigation
- Improved long-term cooperation so agreements will be kept rather than broken


side of the case helps people recognize how their communication may be working against their goals. By facilitating new communication skills it reduces contention, confrontation, and the psychological trauma that often occurs with traditional divorce proceedings."

"Jennifer is an excellent Communication Coach," says Melinda Eitzen, a family law and collaborative attorney at McClure Duffee & Eitzen, LLP, Attorneys and Counselors at Law. "She is insightful, has great instincts, and is a huge aid to the process and the participants."

McClure Duffee & Eitzen www.mde-lawfirm.com provides clients with high-quality legal services in the areas of divorce, child custody, other family law matters and civil litigation. "The difference between the traditional divorce process and the Collaborative Team Model is dramatic and speeds up the process," explains Melinda. "Every dollar spent is well spent. It's also completely confidential, unlike litigation."

Jennifer Leister MA, LPC, specializations include:

- Child & Adolescent Behavioral Issues
- Child & Adolescent Adjustment Issues
- Couples and Marriage Counseling
- Depression
- Anger Management
- Anxiety
- Self-Esteem Issues
- Substance Abuse & Dependence
- Trauma Issues
- Divorce & Custody Issues

If you're considering divorce, contact Jennifer Leister today at 972-672-6825 to find out more about the Collaborative Team Model, or to schedule counseling to help you with the decision and issues surrounding divorce. 

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