

# Cooperative Divorce

Getting a divorce can be hard, especially if you and your spouse don't agree on everything. But not all divorces have to be full of arguments or long court battles. In Wisconsin, a cooperative divorce is a way to work things out peacefully and respectfully.

This article explains how cooperative divorce works and how it can help if you're going through a divorce on your own (this is called being a pro-se litigant).

## What Does "Cooperative Divorce" Mean?

A cooperative divorce means that both people agree to work together to settle their divorce without fighting in court. You may still go to a hearing, but the goal is to solve problems outside of court as much as possible.

Each person usually has their own lawyer, but those lawyers promise to help find fair solutions instead of "fighting it out" like in a traditional divorce.

If you're going through the divorce without a lawyer, you can still use the cooperative divorce idea. It means being willing to talk things through, share information, and make fair decisions with your spouse.

## What Makes a Divorce "Cooperative"?

Here are some things that happen in a cooperative divorce:

- Both people agree to be honest and share information like income, debts, and property.
- You both try to settle things outside of court, if possible.
- You agree to treat each other with respect, even if you don't agree on everything.
- You focus on what is best for your children (if you have kids).

# What Can Be Decided in a Cooperative Divorce?

In a cooperative divorce, you and your spouse can work together to decide:

- Who gets what (money, house, cars, etc.)
- Who pays debts
- If one person will pay support to the other (called spousal support or maintenance)
- Where the children will live and how much time each parent gets
- How child support will be paid

## Why Choose a Cooperative Divorce?

Here are some benefits of cooperative divorce:

- It can save time and money.
- You have more control over the decisions, instead of letting a judge decide.
- It can be less stressful, especially if you have children.
- It helps you stay more peaceful and respectful, which can make things easier later on.

## What If We Can't Agree?

Even in a cooperative divorce, sometimes people don't agree on everything. That's okay! You can still try to solve problems by:

- Talking it out calmly
- Using a mediator (a neutral person who helps you agree)
- Asking the court to help with just the parts you can't agree on

If you reach a point where working together no longer works, you can still go through the regular court process.

## Can I Do a Cooperative Divorce Without an Attorney?

Yes. You can do a cooperative divorce on your own, but you will need to:

- Fill out the right court forms
- Be prepared to talk about your money, property, and children
- Be organized and honest
- Be willing to work together with your spouse

There are websites, court staff, and legal clinics that can help you understand the steps. Some lawyers also offer limited help (called limited scope services), where they help with just parts of your case for a lower cost.

## **Helpful Tips for Divorce Without an Attorney**

- Stay calm and respectful when talking to your spouse.
- Write down what you both agree on.
- Keep copies of all your court papers.
- Ask for help if you need it; court staff can answer questions about forms, and legal clinics may be able to help you for free or at a low cost.

A cooperative divorce is a way to make your divorce easier, more respectful, and less expensive. If you and your spouse are willing to work together, even without lawyers, it can be a smart and peaceful way to move forward with your lives.

Last updated on August 18, 2025.

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Table of Contents

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