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## ***"Divorce with Dignity"*** **Collaborative Divorce**

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The term collaborative divorce may seem confusing to a couple who are facing the prospect of ending their marriage. Collaboration is a skill that one or both of them may have abandoned some time ago. But Collaborative Divorce is a strategy designed to save money, privacy and even a little emotional torment, vital if children are involved.

If divorce is inevitable, for the initiator or the receptor, managing the process outside of a courtroom through a collaborative effort can help preserve family relationships while protecting the financial well-being of those involved.

Collaborative Divorce is a new approach to divorce based on mutual respect, trust, and common goals to manage an unfortunate situation for the family.

The couple retains their own individual collaborative law attorneys. No one loses their own legal representation and everyone pledges in writing to put forth their best, good faith effort to settle all issues without going to court or threatening litigation.

A "divorce coach," who serves as a neutral party to help the couple with the issues involved with divorce, is often assigned to each case. These coaches work with couples to sort through custody arrangements and the fear that each may feel about this life-altering transition.

Financial professionals, who have also been collaboratively trained and remain neutral, are used to analyze and evaluate the financial status of the marriage, its assets and liabilities. Through four-way meetings, the couple work through assets and liabilities to find amicable terms for separation.

Collaborative Divorce can be more cost-effective than traditional divorces, as there are no expensive and time-consuming motions and papers to file before the court. Since the matter is being negotiated outside the court system, the privacy of the husband and wife are upheld, as it is not subject to the same public record as a traditional divorce litigation.

Every member of the team is collaboratively trained in this process. If a therapist is needed by anyone involved, they are encouraged to seek outside assistance for any additional assistance they may need to help them through this life-altering process.

The couples are screened to determine if Collaborative Divorce is an option. Those instances where there has been a history of domestic violence or neglect would prohibit

involvement in the program. Traditional legal proceedings are required for such circumstances.

When Collaborative Divorce is used however, it allows the parties to work out their issues in a private, non-threatening environment with qualified professionals at their side. In the long run Collaborative Divorce helps to preserve the family relationships and statistically, usually costs less than the traditional litigious divorce.

*Karen P. Sampson, Esquire is a Collaboratively trained Divorce Attorney and Mediator in Moorestown, New Jersey. She is an advocate of the Collaborative Divorce and Divorce Mediation processes and is committed to handling divorces in a respectful, dignified manner. She is a Founding Member and First Vice President of the South Jersey Collaborative Law Group. Karen can be reached at [karen@karenpsampson.com](mailto:karen@karenpsampson.com) or through her website, [www.karenpsampson.com](http://www.karenpsampson.com).*