



GO DIVORCE CLINIC®
THE END OF THE UGLY DIVORCE

13 Things to Consider Before Starting Your Uncontested Divorce

Working master - locked Sections 1 through 12

1. Disagreement Doesn't Require a Winner

An uncontested divorce does not mean you agree about everything.

You may disagree about money, property, support, parenting, timing, or what either of you believes is fair. You may even disagree strongly.

But can you still listen?

Maybe in your marriage you weren't able to. But you're no longer married in a very real sense.

The truthful irony is that in 20 years of mediating divorces, I saw people finally hear each other for the first time in my office while going through their divorce.

The startling fact is that marriage gave you the opportunity not to listen. Divorce does not.

Now it is time to negotiate in good faith, consider alternatives, compromise when appropriate, and accept that neither of you is likely to get everything you want.

A successful uncontested divorce doesn't require two people who align on every issue. It requires two people who can remain open enough, even on opposite sides of those issues, to find a way through them.

Remember, the absence of a loser is itself the win.

2. No Cards Under the Table

Divorce requires you to put some things on the table that you may have spent years believing belonged only to yourself.

Money. Debt. Property. Income. Spending. Accounts. Obligations. Sometimes mistakes.

You don't have to arrive at the GDC Portal knowing every answer. Most people don't.

But you do have to be willing to disclose everything-even the things you may consider yours alone or would rather just keep private.

An agreement can only be as sound as the information shared to create it. Don't hide assets, conceal income, withhold important information, manipulate the facts, or selectively reveal only what benefits your position.

If you are inclined to do so, please do not use this service. Deception doesn't fit our model. GDC has taken great care to create a process that is both accessible and humane. We ask only that you

take care with each other while using it.

Finally, there is another compelling reason full disclosure matters: California law requires it. The State of California requires financial disclosure, including disclosure of assets and debts, as part of the divorce process. Failing to properly disclose material financial information, assets, or debts can have serious consequences, including putting portions of your eventual agreement or judgment at risk of being challenged later.

Transparency doesn't mean surrendering your interests. It doesn't mean you stop advocating for yourself or disagreeing about what something is worth or how it should be divided.

It simply means the facts themselves aren't part of the negotiation.

Put all the cards on the table. Then you can decide together how they're going to be dealt with.

3. Pain Is Not a Strategy

You may have every reason to be angry.

You may feel betrayed, abandoned, disappointed, resentful, or deeply hurt. You may even believe the person sitting across from you is responsible for the end of your marriage.

Divorce does not require you to pretend otherwise.

But emotion and what your divorce requires of you need to remain two separate things.

When property becomes punishment, money becomes leverage, parenting becomes retaliation, support becomes revenge, or delay becomes a way to make the other person suffer, you are no longer processing a divorce.

In my experience, some have come to this process trying to use the divorce to keep fighting a war the marriage has already lost. But most GDC clients have not let the fog of war completely blind them.

And because you came to the GDC Portal, you are probably not inclined to wage war. But it is helpful to recognize that pain is pain, and fear is fear. Divorce comes with both in abundance.

So do be careful here.

Even people with the best intentions can lose their balance when something hurts enough.

An uncontested divorce asks something difficult of both of you:

Let the pain be real without letting it co-opt the process.

There are places to work through anger, grief, betrayal, and the story of what happened between you.

Your settlement agreement is not the place.

And that doesn't mean surrender.

Protect yourself. Ask questions. Advocate strongly for what matters to you. Say no when you need to. Take the time necessary to make an informed, clear decision. Insist upon an outcome you can reasonably live with.

But before you take a position simply because it hurts the person on the other side of it, ask yourself one honest question:

Am I trying to solve something-or am I trying to make someone hurt as much as I do?

Pain deserves a space somewhere to live.

But don't make your divorce a home for it.

4. Two People. Two Voices.

Two people can reach an agreement without having equal personalities.

One of you may be louder. One may be more comfortable with numbers. One may know more about the family finances. One may make decisions quickly while the other needs time. One of you may have spent much of the marriage taking the lead.

None of that necessarily prevents you from completing an uncontested divorce.

But both of you need a voice.

Each person must be free to ask questions, raise concerns, propose alternatives, disagree, and ultimately say yes or no without intimidation, coercion, or fear of what will happen if they do.

A reluctant yes can still be a yes. A frightened yes is something we cannot use.

This doesn't mean every conversation will feel perfectly balanced. Human relationships rarely are. It means that when an important decision is being made, neither person's voice disappears simply because the other's is louder.

Sometimes the person who speaks less needs more time.

Give it to them.

Sometimes the person who has always taken the lead needs to step back long enough to hear a perspective they may not like.

Let them give it.

And sometimes someone who has spent years saying, "Whatever you think," is going to have to discover what they think.

Let them find it.

GDC can provide both of you with the same process, the same structure, and the same opportunity to understand what comes next.

It is time now to make room for both voices.

Not an identical voice. Not an equally loud voice. Not even a comforting voice. Just their voice.

There will be two signatures on your divorce settlement agreement.

Trust me when I say this: in my experience, no one signs an uncontested divorce agreement until they have been heard.

5. Uncomfortable Doesn't Mean Unworkable

Let's clear something up.

If this process feels uncomfortable, that does not mean you're doing it wrong, or that it's impossible.

You're ending a marriage. You may be making decisions about a home, money, children, retirement, possessions, debts, and a future that looks very different from the life you've been living or the one you imagined was coming.

Some of those conversations are supposed to be hard.

The question isn't whether you can avoid discomfort.

It's whether you can remain functional while you're in it.

Can you stay with a difficult conversation long enough to understand what actually needs to be decided? Can you take a break without abandoning the issue? Can you hear something you don't like without treating the entire process as broken?

Sometimes a decision needs another conversation.

Sometimes it needs a night's sleep.

Sometimes it needs more information.

And sometimes you simply need to admit, "I'm not ready to answer that yet."

That's okay.

There is a difference between a process that is uncomfortable and a process that is unsafe, coercive, or impossible. GDC is built for the former, not the latter.

You don't need to be calm all the time. You don't need to become detached from what matters to you. And you certainly don't need to enjoy getting divorced.

You just need enough steadiness to keep discomfort from making every difficult moment a dead end.

A hard conversation doesn't define the entire process. Nothing does. That's why it's a process.

I've seen many souls through this process. Discomfort alone rarely determined whether they made it through or not. Something else did. I'll just leave you with that.

6. Good Enough to Get It Done

You do not need to get along famously with your spouse to get an uncontested divorce.

Indeed, if communication were one of the great strengths of your marriage, you might not even need to be visiting this website.

Perfect rapport with your spouse is a unicorn in a divorce.

In my experience, the average divorce on the street musters communication that works barely well enough to get the job done. Period.

That means being able to exchange information, ask and answer basic questions, make proposals, respond to proposals, and eventually arrive at decisions.

Divorce is not therapy. Nor is it a hearty debate. It's a very task-oriented exercise working against a backdrop of emotional turmoil. Some useful strategies I've seen can help keep that turmoil from taking over the conversation:

Some couples talk things through face-to-face. Others do better by phone, text, or email. Some need time to think before responding. Some discover that writing things down removes enough emotion from the exchange to make a difficult conversation possible.

Use what works. There ain't no rules here but those that work.

You may misunderstand each other-it happens.

You may become frustrated-almost guaranteed.

You may need to say something twice-or hear it twice.

You may occasionally need to walk away and come back later-who hasn't?

That's not bad communication. It's trying to talk during difficult times.

Ordinary people feel extraordinarily messy in a divorce.

Cut yourself some slack. The standard here isn't elegance.

It's a sauntering hippo through the mud.

Just enough to get from Point A to Point B.

7. It Takes Two to Finish This

One of you may be attending more closely to the limited work the GDC Portal requires, or simply moving at a faster pace than the other.

That happens and is not uncommon.

In a lot of marriages, personality differences and natural strengths mean each person naturally gravitates toward different tasks. One person reads the instructions first, the other just launches right in. One person researches more, the other moves primarily on instinct. You get the picture.

When couples use the DIY Portal, this dynamic often remains the same. So if one person tends to be the one who gathers the documents, keeps track of what needs to happen next, and occasionally reminds the other person that it's time to get X, Y, and Z done-that's kinda normal.

Roll with it if it works. Just don't let a familiar division of labor turn into one person carrying the process and decision-making for both of you.

An uncontested divorce doesn't require equal enthusiasm. It does require two participants to show up.

Both of you will need to provide information. Both of you will need to review documents. Both of you will need to make decisions. Both of you will need to complete certain tasks, respond when something requires your attention, and ultimately sign your own name.

One person can lead, but do remember...

Taking the initiative and managing the process doesn't make one spouse the author of the other spouse's decisions. Both parties end the race together, and neither should be carried across the finish line by the other.

This matters because sometimes a couple believes they have an uncontested divorce when what they actually have is one person who wants to get divorced and another person who has agreed not to fight about it.

Those aren't necessarily the same thing.

Not opposing the divorce is passive. Participating in an uncontested divorce is active. Passivity can so easily devolve into resignation, apathy, or inertia. Know the difference.

You don't have to work at the same pace. You don't have to divide every task equally. And you certainly don't have to be equally excited about getting this done.

But when the process needs something from either of you, each of you will eventually have to show up and provide it.

That's the deal.

GDC can organize the process, tell you what comes next, and make your respective responsibilities as clear as possible.

But the engine of participation belongs to both of you.

It took two people to create a marriage. It takes those same two people to finish one.

8. Nothing Feels Fair When You're Letting Go of "Ours"

Let's talk about fair.

I've heard that word literally thousands of times in divorces.

"That's not fair."

"I just want what's fair."

"Why should I have to give that up? It just isn't fair!"

"It's not fair to the kids."

There is something about fairness in divorce that took me years of working with couples to fully appreciate:

It simply isn't going to feel fair to either one of you to settle out what once belonged to both of you-or what the two of you once managed together.

A house was ours.

The retirement you accumulated was for our future.

The money coming into the household was ours.

The children were with us.

The holidays were ours.

The future you imagined was ours.

Divorce takes that shared architecture and begins the difficult work of turning it into yours and mine without leveling that structure to useless rubble.

Of course that's going to feel terrifying. Of course that's going to hurt.

And very often, hurt feels unfair.

But those aren't necessarily the same thing.

An agreement can be reasonable and still involve pain. It can be balanced and still require sacrifice. It can be mutually agreed upon and still leave both people wishing some things had turned out differently.

Is it even possible to find a sense of fairness amid the stark reality of two people dividing a life they once built together?

But allowing for that doesn't mean you should accept an agreement you believe is fundamentally unreasonable. It doesn't mean you shouldn't ask questions, understand the numbers, protect important interests, or negotiate strongly for an outcome you can live with.

You should.

But somewhere along the way, you may need to stop asking:

"Does this feel fair?"

And begin asking:

"Is this reasonable? Is this equitable? Can I live with it? Can they live with it? Can we move forward from here?"

Can you feel the difference there?

Because those are very different questions.

And in divorce, they are often much more useful ones.

Letting go of "ours" may never feel fair. Letting go of the marriage you created may never feel completely peaceful either. That's the darn human piece, right?

It's messy. And some of it may need to be reconciled privately, perhaps spiritually, in your own heart and in your own time.

Your divorce settlement will settle many necessary things. It cannot, and will not settle everything.

That's my two cents from the trenches anyway.

9. What Do You Want Left Standing?

A divorce ends a marriage.

It doesn't necessarily end everything the marriage created.

You may still be parents together.

You may still own a business together.

You may share friends, extended family, a community, property, financial interests, or responsibilities that will continue long after your divorce decree is entered.

And even if very little will remain between you, there is still something more vast and worth considering that you might not be aware of right now:

Who do you want to be when this is over?

Divorce has a peculiar way of narrowing the field of vision. When you're standing in the middle of it, the moment's argument can feel enormous and all-encompassing. The disputed account, the parenting schedule, the house, the thing somebody said in an email Tuesday night-everything can begin to feel like you're trapped inside an untenable pressure cooker with that frustrating spouse doing that same old thing again.

How many times I have sat with one spouse or the other who is feeling this way I can't begin to count. But here's what I almost always remind them:

Eventually, the paperwork will be finished.

The decree will be entered.

And life will continue.

There is life on the other side of divorce. How you conduct yourselves during this process will very much influence what that life looks like, and how you feel about yourself later in life. You get one at-bat with this divorce. Make it count toward character. You'll need that inner strength later in life.

And when there are children, this is particularly important.

A marriage can end.

Parenthood doesn't.

When children are involved, divorce doesn't necessarily end the family so much as reorganize it.

How you conduct yourselves after the divorce becomes part of the family story your children will carry forward; for better or for worse.

How did Mom and Dad conduct themselves through that painful chapter?

They may consciously ask themselves that eventually.

So remember that you are not only negotiating the end of something. You are setting the foundation for something brand new.

As co-parents, you will be establishing the terms of a relationship that will endure in another form for decades.

And that doesn't mean preserving a previous form of closeness. It doesn't even have to mean remaining close friends.

So before every disagreement during this process becomes a hill you feel is worth dying on, take a wider look.

What matters after the decree?

Your children?

Your dignity?

Your peace?

Your future?

You don't have to preserve the marriage to care about how you end it.

Some things should end with a divorce.

Some things have to.

But if there are things worth carrying forward, know what they are before entering a process that grants the possibility of destroying them.

Imagine all the things that a divorce cannot award or take away. That's the stuff.

Sit with that.

10. Some Assembly Required

Every divorce requires work. There's no way around it.

The question is how much work-and where you want your valuable resources of time, effort, and money to go.

A DIY divorce can save a divorcing couple a seriously substantial amount of money. There is a reason for that: you are being given access to a comprehensive tool for the job while taking responsibility for a small portion of the simpler tasks yourselves.

Go Divorce Clinic provides the procedural structure, documents, detailed instructions, comprehensive settlement agreement, and the how-to. For a DIY divorce platform, it is a uniquely comprehensive, full-service product.

But with our product, you do provide some of the legs.

That's going to mean simply printing some required documents, handling straightforward service between spouses when instructed, arranging the documents provided by GDC, and submitting them to the court for filing.

It's not a lot. But taking responsibility for these few practical tasks is one of the reasons GDC can provide such a comprehensive service at a fraction of the cost of traditional representation.

GDC will always tell you what needs to happen next and clearly explain how to do it.

To keep the GDC DIY process this accessible, the GDC Portal leaves these few tasks to you.

That's part of why you can save so much while still having a top-shelf professional structure beneath the entire process.

But let's put that limited DIY responsibility into some real perspective compared with a traditional divorce:

Choosing a professionally represented or contested divorce does not necessarily relieve you of participation. A litigated case can require extensive meetings with attorneys, document production and discovery, depositions, mediation or settlement conferences, preparation for hearings, court appearances, trial preparation, and considerable amounts of your own time scheduling appointments and answering emails, texts, and phone calls.

Paying attorneys certainly does not eliminate the work required of their clients in a divorce. It changes the nature and volume of the work-which will, in turn, dramatically change its cost.

The work GDC asks you to perform is relatively limited and directed toward moving your divorce forward:

You gather information because it is needed to make clear choices and decisions.

You complete a task because it advances the process to the next productive step.

You file a document because it allows the court to process your paperwork.

You communicate with your spouse because reaching your own agreement keeps control of the important decisions out of the courtroom and in your hands.

You obtain outside expertise when needed because better information allows you to make better decisions.

And here's the good news:

A successful GDC client does not need to understand California divorce procedure before beginning.

It's already built into the GDC workflow. We took care of that.

Your job is...

Bring the initiative.

Keep moving as directed by the GDC Portal and follow through.

Ask questions when you need information or clarification.

Make informed choices and decisions.

The savings are real with GDC. But so is the limited participation required to achieve them.

Participation is not a flaw in the GDC self-help model.

Participation is the bargain.

Every divorce is, ultimately, a family project.

GDC gives two people who are capable of working together the structure to manage that project themselves-directing their time, energy, and financial resources toward an objective they still share, even in divorce.

11. The Process Moves at the Speed of Two

An uncontested divorce has two people in it.

That sounds painfully obvious until one of them stops moving.

One spouse completes a task. The other doesn't.

One provides the requested information. The other says they'll get to it.

One reviews the document. The other hasn't opened the email yet.

One is ready to make the next decision. The other needs another week.

None of these things, by themselves, mean your divorce isn't working.

You have jobs. Families. Responsibilities. Vacations. Bad weeks. Occasionally somebody gets the flu.

GDC doesn't require the two of you to move at exactly the same pace. But the process itself can only move as quickly as the person currently holding the baton.

That's something worth understanding before you begin. GDC's dual-party workflow makes the process something of a relay event. That's not a weakness in the model. It's part of its strength: you're moving through the same process together.

But that shared process comes with a requirement: responsiveness.

In fact, this may be one of the bigger challenges of any uncontested divorce. We aren't hiding that fact. We're pointing it out because knowing where a process can begin to degrade is one of the better ways to keep it from completely breaking down.

There will be moments when the next step belongs primarily to one of you. Information may be needed. A document may need review. A question may require an answer. A signature may be necessary before anything else can happen.

At that moment, the other person is depending on you.

The baton needs to change hands.

An uncontested divorce will require many of these small handoffs.

The problem isn't that one spouse occasionally needs more time. The problem starts when delays become a common part of the process.

A request sits unanswered for too long.

A task gets postponed-again.

A reminder becomes yet another in a string of reminders.

I've seen them all.

Eventually, the spouse who has been waiting isn't simply waiting for a document anymore. They're beginning to wonder whether the other person is actually committed to finishing the divorce.

And frustration has a way of filling the space where forward movement used to be.

I've watched otherwise cooperative divorces become completely mired down for this very reason alone.

It's not about having to answer every question immediately.

And of course you don't have to drop everything because the Portal needs something from you. This process has room for ordinary life.

And of course one person's reasonable pace can be another person's irritation.

But both of you do need to respond within a reasonable amount of time, complete the things that belong to you, and communicate when something is going to take longer than expected.

Yes, "reasonable" is subjective. That's why communication matters.

Even so, sometimes all it takes is:

"I saw this. I need a few days. I'll get back to you Friday."

That's participation too.

There is an enormous difference between "I'm on it" and silence.

One tells the other person where you are.

The other leaves them listening to crickets after the starting gun fires.

GDC will tell you what comes next and what needs to happen to get there.

So when the baton comes to you, take it.

Run your leg of the race.

Then hand it back.

The process moves at the speed of two.

12. The Decisions Are Yours

There is a question people have asked me many times during a divorce:

"What do you think I should do?"

It's an understandable question.

Divorce can put you in unfamiliar territory, making decisions about things you may never have thought about before. Sometimes you simply want someone who knows the terrain to point in a direction and say, There. That's the right answer.

But there is an important distinction at the heart of the GDC process:

We can tell you how to proceed. We cannot tell you what to choose.

GDC can explain what information is needed.

We can tell you what needs to happen next.

The GDC process is built around the procedural requirements for moving your divorce through the court.

We can help you understand what a particular part of the process is asking of you.

But when the question changes from:

"What do I procedurally need to do next?"

to:

"What should I agree to?"

something important has changed.

The first is a question about process.

The second question needs an answer from you.

This means both spouses using GDC need a certain amount of personal agency.

You need to be able to look at your own circumstances, consider the information available to you, decide what matters, develop a position, communicate it, listen to the other person's position, and ultimately decide what you will and will not agree to.

That doesn't mean knowing every answer immediately.

It doesn't mean refusing advice.

And it certainly doesn't mean you should make an important decision without enough information to understand it.

Sometimes the most responsible place you can come to is:

"I don't know enough yet."

Then finding out is how you show up. Simply being told what to do may not be the wisest way to build a future you'll have to live in.

Get more information. Ask another question. Run the numbers. Think about it overnight. Talk to a qualified professional when the issue requires expertise outside the GDC process.

GDC is not an authority you hand those decisions over to simply because making them feels difficult.

Your divorce requires your judgment, not just your signature.

I've worked with people over the years who were intelligent, capable, and entirely sincere-but who struggled with this part of the process.

They wanted someone else to help determine what direction they should take. People looking for that level of individualized advice may be better served by traditional legal representation.

The entire point of an uncontested divorce is that the important decisions remain with the people whose lives will actually be shaped by them.

Hopefully, that's you.

13. Self-Help Doesn't Mean No Help

One of the great misconceptions about a self-help divorce is contained right there in the name.

Self-help doesn't mean no help.

Processing your own divorce never meant that you should be an expert in taxes, real estate, retirement plans, business valuation, investments, insurance, mortgages, parenting, or every other subject that can suddenly become relevant when two people begin separating a shared life.

You may need to do some homework.

Sometimes self-help can require some “shelf-help.” So don't hesitate to pull a respected resource off the shelf when you need it.

At times it is simply prudent to make important decisions informed by professional data and insight when those choices require a broader understanding than you alone can muster.

And not just information.

Sometimes you need counsel about what might constitute a prudent exercise of judgment on a particular issue.

So what self-help really means in a divorce is that you remain responsible for directing your transition out of the marriage and all that entails. And no director functions without a team of support.

A house may need an appraisal.

A retirement plan may require specialized information.

A business may need to be valued.

A tax question may need an accountant.

A mortgage question may require a lender or other real estate professional.

A difficult parenting issue may benefit from a therapist or parenting professional.

A particular legal question may require independent advice from an attorney.

Use them if you need them.

There is considerable wisdom in being able to say:

“I just don't know enough about this to make a solid decision yet.”

But you can find someone who does.

They can explain consequences you may not have considered.

They can value something, calculate something, clarify something, analyze a problem, or advise you from within their particular area of expertise.

Then it's back to you, now the informed director.

That's self-help at its best.

From our perspective, DIY never meant going it alone.

So remember...

You have GDC at your service managing the process.

Use expertise where expertise is needed.

Seeking sound advice will never require surrendering your authorship.

Don't be afraid to bring in the pros with the accurate answers and assessments.

I've seen trustworthy, accurate information resolve disagreements faster than almost anything else. When a reliable fact confronts two competing opinions, there is suddenly very little to argue about.

That is why there is nothing second-tier about a well-informed self-help divorce handled properly.

Quite the opposite.

GDC provides the structure.

Your professionals can provide the expertise needed.

But hey, those are still your own hands on the wheel.

That's self-help.