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Take The Drama Out Of Divorce

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CINCINNATI -- Statistics show a walk down the aisle will usually end in divorce for 40 to 50 percent of couples.

The break-up can lead to bitter arguments during divorce proceedings in a courtroom.

A typical divorce usually ends with two people meeting across from each other inside a courtroom.

One group of attorneys say there's a way to eliminate the courtroom drama by seeking a collaborative divorce.

Peter Merten and Cathryn Merten are no longer together after 20 years of marriage. They say the collaborative divorce was one of the things that made it possible for them to remain friends.

"If you really love your children, this is the only way, I think, to have to go through a difficult process like divorce. It really is," said Peter Merten.

The process known as collaborative divorce is when spouses work out the terms of their divorce with respect.

The divorcing couple will usually meet at an attorney's office to work out their settlement instead of inside a courtroom where a judge would normally make decisions about alimony, child support, and visitation.

Attorney Sherri Goren Slovin is the President of the International Academy of Collaborative Professionals.

"When things get difficult, and sometimes they get quite difficult, the collaborative process really forces people to sort of take a deep breath and say all right we know we're in a difficult place here, we're with good professionals that can help us through that difficult place and we're going to keep working forward," Slovin said from her Downtown office.

Peter and Cathryn had to work through several sticking points, but say keeping the power to decide their futures for themselves made for a stronger friendship after divorce.

"The fact that it was a friendly process and it wasn't a hostile kind of environment and also we were able to write all the terms of our divorce ourselves like our shared parenting plan and the division of our assets and debts, so we had what I felt like was good control of the future," Cathryn Merten explained.

Attorney Sherry Davis worked as Peter's mediator during the divorce process. She says even though Peter and Cathryn were able to work through the process without much conflict, there are some couples that need to have a judge work out their settlement.

However, Davis says she's seen spouses, who were barely speaking, still come to the table to work through a divorce agreement.

"I worry sometimes that people think that you have to be very, very friendly in order to engage in this way and that's not correct. We have a lot of cases that actually are quite high conflict, that can still be resolved by using this collaborative method," Davis said.

Peter says another plus to using mediators is the cost.

The collaborative divorce can cost thousands less than going to court.

"It's the least expensive way to go through the process. If they weren't interested in going through it as kind of a

reconciliation or more of a healing process, then I would try to appeal to their sense of thrift," Peter said with a chuckle.

If you're already divorced, collaborative attorneys say you may still be able to use a mediator to talk through your ongoing differences, especially if children are involved.

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