

COLLABORATIVE GROUND RULES

1. Attack problems, not one another. The past has passed. You are creating a future. You may have developed a dysfunctional pattern of communication with your spouse. Build a new pattern.
2. Avoid taking positions. Express your needs and interests. Exert yourself to understand your spouse's needs and interests. Let brainstorming and solution construction occur without predetermining their outcome. Focus on long term goals. Work toward creating the most fair and constructive agreement for you and your family, including your spouse.
3. During meetings:
 - Keep team meetings a safe place to explore ideas, even ones you do not like. Don't make threats. Don't attempt to coerce your spouse. Well-informed, fully-deliberated, consenting people make durable agreements.
 - Don't interrupt. You will have full and equal opportunity to speak to every issue.
 - Use calming language. Blaming and fault-finding encourage anger and fear.
 - Be respectful of each team member, including your spouse. Paranoia comes easily during stressful changes. Believe in the good faith of others until you have verifiable evidence to the contrary. If evidence of bad faith emerges, discuss that evidence with your attorney before introducing it into team meetings.
 - Use first names. Do not talk past people, for example, by calling a person "he" or "she." Avoid cursing and name-calling. If you are irritated, ask for a break. Find a calm spot inside yourself; stay there.
 - Use "I" statements. Say what you know is true about yourself. Don't speculate about the unstated motivations of others. Assume the best. Optimism matters in collaboration.
 - When complaining, suggest a solution to the problem. Let your creativity loose.
 - Work on emotionally volatile subjects with your divorce coach. Focus on parenting issues with the child specialist. Address your financial status and future with the financial expert. Avoid using full team time to work through emotional issues; it is financially inefficient.
 - If you cannot express yourself in team meetings, explain your thoughts to your attorney so that he or she can inject your concerns and interests into the process, and help you talk.
 - If anything in the collaborative process bothers or puzzles you, talk it over with your attorney. The collaborative lawyers help explain and shape your collaborative process.
 - Work hard at listening. Understand without judging the person or their message. Understand, then evaluate, then speak.
4. Carve time from your schedule to meet regularly. Prepare thoroughly for each meeting. Preparation saves you money and grief. Collaboration requires your hard work to create better future for yourself, your children, and your spouse.
5. Since you are working with others, expect uncomfortable paces. At times, your process will progress both faster and slower than you might wish. Assume everyone, including your spouse, is acting in good faith. All team members are advancing your process as rapidly as seems wise to that person.

Adapted from "Ground Rules for the Collaborative Process,"
in *The Collaborative Review*, Spring 2001, page 8.