

Welcome to the Dad Allies Provider Learning Series

Co-Parenting 201 – Collaborative Divorce

February 20, 2025

**Washington
Fatherhood
Council**



Fathers and Parenting

We know that:

Child and family well-being improve when fathers are positively engaged in their children's lives.

Fathers play a unique and important role in children's development.

Fathers should have support and resources to become the fathers they aspire to be.



Washington
Fatherhood
Council



CO-PARENTING 201

Collaborative Divorce





Sydney Swonigan

CEO & Co-parent Coach
Exes & Babies

- Mompreneur with ADHD
- Boymom to Dior, 9 yrs
- Microsoft Program Manager
- Seattleite
- Intermediate Skier



Sarah Elerson

Attorney, Family Law
Elerson Law

- Specialized in traditional litigation and collaborative divorce
- Over a decade of experience
- Seattleite



Uplift and up-level the co-parenting community by sharing real stories and resources that inspire positive relationships within blended families.

- Certified Coaching
- Podcast (YouTube, Apple, etc.)
- Workshops
- and more to come!



Objectives

- Understand the difference between traditional divorce and Collaborative Divorce.
- Learn the key steps involved in Collaborative Divorce, from initial consultation to settlement agreement.
- Review the roles of attorneys, mental health professionals and financial advisors in supporting clients through Collaborative Divorce.
- Identify characteristics couples who'd be good candidates for Collaborative Divorce and how to refer them to qualified professionals.
- Explore how Collaborative Divorce may benefit fathers.

Design Our Alliance

01

**Be
Respectful**

Ask for what
you need

02

**Open up
and share**

03

**Judgement-
free zone**

04

Be Present

AND HAVE FUN!

**In the chat, write
words that come to
mind when you hear
divorce.**

What is divorce?

Divorce is the legal dissolution of a marriage.

Divorce laws vary by state, but it generally involves filing a petition with the court, serving the other spouse, and addressing issues like property division, spousal support (alimony), child custody, and child support.

**Where are there
breakdowns in the
current divorce
process, particularly
for fathers?**

What is collaborative divorce?

Collaborative law is a legal process that allows families to resolve issues such as divorce, child custody, and parenting plans without going through traditional litigation.

This approach focuses on cooperation, transparency, and mutual respect, enabling both parties to work together to create solutions that are in the best interest of their children.

84% of collaborative divorce cases were completed in 9 months.

Faster Resolution. (Source: Florida Academy of Collaborative Professionals)

90% of collaborative divorces reach a settlement without going to court.

Effective way to reach agreement. (Source: Modern Family Law)

92% of collaborative cases were completed with full agreement.

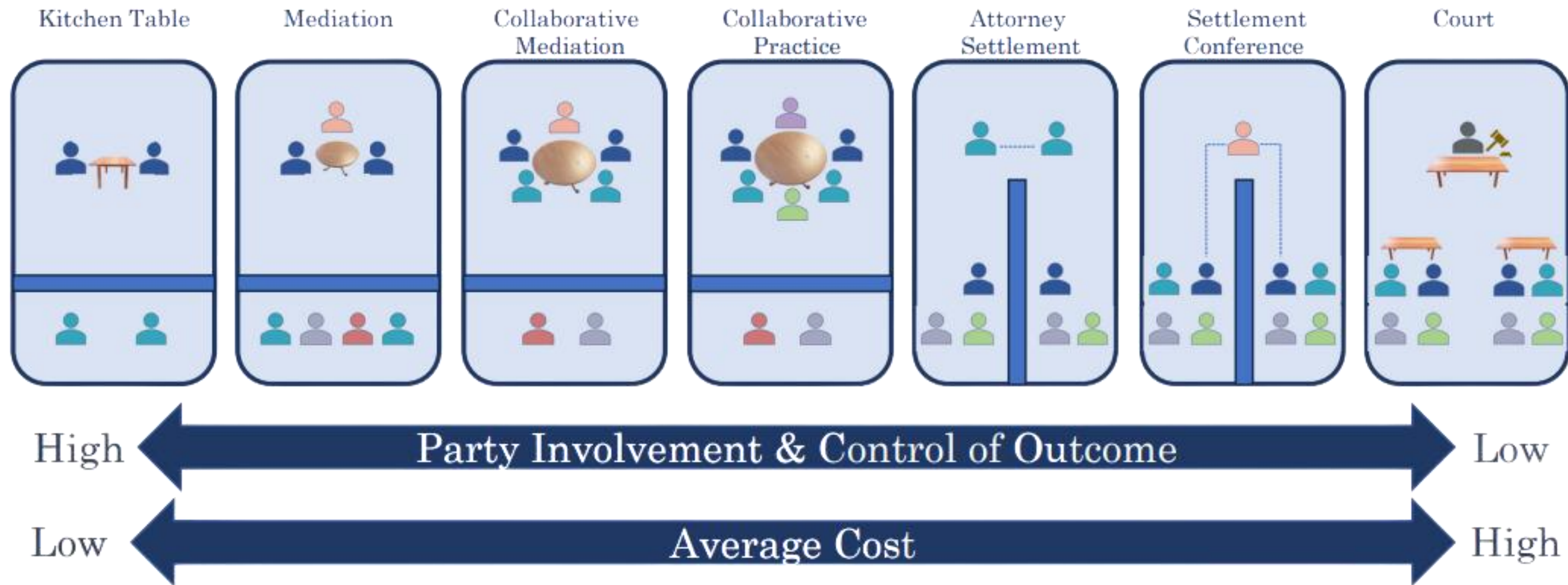
High likelihood of reaching mutual agreement. (Source: Florida Academy of Collaborative Professionals)

Collaborative Divorce is 1/3 of the cost of litigated divorces.

More cost effective. (Source: Gearing, Rackner & McGrath, LLP)



Conflict Resolution Options



Litigation vs Collaborative

	Traditional Litigation	Collaborative Divorce
Process	Adversarial, court-focused	Cooperative, interest-based negotiation
Decision-making	Judge makes decisions	Parties make decisions
Communication	Often limited and formal, through attorneys	Open and direct communication between parties and professionals
Conflict level	Can be highly contentious and stressful	Focus on minimizing conflict and preserving relationships
Control	Parties have less control over the outcome	Parties retain control over the process and decisions
Cost	More expensive due to court fees and attorney time	Less expensive due to reduced court involvement
Timeframe	Can be lengthy and unpredictable	Often faster resolution
Privacy	Court proceedings are public record	Collaborative process is private and confidential
Emotional impact	Can be highly stressful and damaging to relationships	Focus on reducing distress and preserving relationships
Future interactions	Can make future co-parenting or interactions difficult	Can lay the groundwork for more positive future interactions
Legal representation	Attorneys advocate for their client's position	Attorneys trained in collaborative law facilitate negotiation and problem-solving
Use of experts	Experts may be used to provide testimony in court	Experts (financial, mental health) work with both parties to provide information and support



Steps of Collaborative Divorce

1

***Initial
Consultation
and Decision***



Collaboratively Trained Lawyer

- Philosophy and principles centered around problem-solving via mutual respect, open communication, and the best interest of the family
- Interest-based negotiation which focuses on underlying needs and interests of each party verses just stated positions
- Communication and conflict resolution skills
- Teamwork and interdisciplinary collaboration
- Commitment to keeping the divorce out of court
- Legal and ethical considerations of collaborative practice

2

Assemble the Collaborative Team



Collaborative Team

Attorneys

Each spouse hires their own attorney who is trained in collaborative law. These attorneys guide their clients through the legal aspects of the divorce, but their primary role is to help the couple reach a mutually agreeable settlement. They don't fight each other in court.

Coaches

They work with the couple to become aware of mental barriers and find healthy ways to uncouple. They can help with communication, conflict resolution, and developing parenting plans.

Therapists

They help the couple manage the emotional aspects of divorce and can also act as coaches.

Financial Specialists

They help the couple understand their finances, including assets, debts, and income. Often are CPAs or CFAs.

Child Specialists

If the couple has children, a child specialist, often a child psychologist or social worker, can be involved. They act as the voice of the child, ensuring their needs are considered in the divorce process. They can help develop parenting plans that are in the best interests of the children.

3

Signing the Participation Agreement



4

Information Gathering and Disclosure



5

***Identify Goals
and Interests***



6

***Exploring Options
and Developing
Solutions***



7

Negotiation and Settlement



8

Finalizing the Agreement



9

Implementation and Moving Forward

[Video clip - last collaborative meeting](#)



**How might
Collaborative
Divorce align with
father inclusion?**

Benefits to Fathers

- Greater involvement in parenting decisions
- Improved communication with the other parent
- Reduced conflict and stress
- Focus on Children's needs
- More control over outcome including child support decisions
- Preservation of relationships
- Confidentiality
- More flexible, creative solutions

What else?

Best candidates for collaborative

Cooperative and able to compromise

Respectful

Willing to work together

Communicative

Transparent and honest

Ability to manage emotions

Relatively equal power dynamic in the relationship

NOT candidates for collaborative

History of abuse or DV

Significant power imbalances

Hidden assests

Dishonesty

Unwillingness to compromise

Severe communication
issues

Severely mentally unwell

**Would you recommend
Collaborative Divorce
to your clients? Why or
why not?**

**What do you wish to
see that neither
divorce processes
offer regarding
fathers?**

Low bono option

King County Collaborative Law

For more information email
access@kingcountycollab.org.

KCCL has a sliding-scale reduced fee program. This means that clients with limited means may still be able to pay for Collaborative professional services — attorneys, financial professionals, coaches, and child specialists.

To qualify, you and the other party must :

- Earn a combined income of less than \$124,000;
- Have total household assets not exceeding \$30,000 excluding personal residences and a single car per person.

The Collaborative professionals who participate in this program commit to supporting your case at hourly rates that are significantly less than what they usually charge, depending on your income level.



Thank you

Subscribe to our newsletter for more
co-parenting tips and events:

www.exesandbabies.com



For more information on Collaborative Divorce:

www.elersonlaw.com

<https://kingcountycollab.org/>