

# Law Office of J.J. Dahl

BOARD CERTIFIED IN MARITAL & FAMILY LAW

## ACTING FROM CLARITY

Your thoughts, your words, and the actions you take at this time will direct your way into your future. You can carefully and deliberately draw on your courage, faith, and grace during this time. Dissolving a union can be one of the most painful experiences in life, and though it may seem hard to believe when you are in the throws of it, you will be much better off in the end if you do everything you can not to make the situation any worse than it already is. Whether you are the one who is being left or the one who is leaving, the way in which you behave during this period lives on with you long after the pain of the dissolution has faded. If your thoughts and words are full of hate, anger and rage then those emotions will direct your actions. No matter how hateful and angry you feel right now – and, by the way, hate and anger may be perfectly appropriate emotions for you to feel – I ask you to recognize the power of your anger to impair your judgment, and to set the tone of your future.

## LANGUAGE OF BREAK UP

Listen carefully to your language of breakup in dissolution:

**‘I’ll never get through this.’** Watch your words. You will get through this just as you have gotten through other difficult times in your life. During this transition period, you are going to have to make quite a few decisions and it is vital that when you do so, your mind and body are as strong as possible.

**‘I’ve never been so angry.’** Acting from anger not only threatens to hamper your good judgment when it comes to making vital decisions, it can also increase your attorney’s fees. Working with clients through dissolutions, I have noticed a direct correlation between the amount of the bills and the amount of anger. What usually happens is that those who angrily refuse to settle end up in court, and end up paying a lot more. Generally, a dissolution trial will cost at least three times as much as an out-of-court settlement. Ironically, those who go to court often do not have a clue as to how their case will end up because through the lens of their anger, they can see only one side—theirs. If the court’s decision is at odds with their expectations, they get angrier still. Even if they ‘win’, there is no guarantee that their anger will subside. For what often happens is that a disgruntled ex-spouse may refuse to comply with the court order and then their anger escalates to a whole new level. Please don’t allow your anger today to cast a dark shadow upon your tomorrow.

On the other hand, if your estranged spouse is being unreasonable, do not be afraid to go to court.

**‘I don’t care what happens.’** Remember that words are very powerful and that when you say you don’t care what happens, you are in fact creating a situation that almost surely will prevent you from getting on with your life in a productive way. You may spend many more years

divorced from your spouse than married to him or her; therefore, the decisions you make during this critical time will affect you for many years to come. Do not take this casually.

**‘I’m going to take him or her to the cleaners.’** Interesting expression because it suggests that he or she emerges clean, and where does that leave you? Dirty? Banish this thought, if only for the simple reason that the law won’t let you impoverish your spouse. There’s room to maneuver in some cases, it’s true, but the law has been created to protect you both.

**‘I don’t want anything. He or she can have it all.’** Don’t be a martyr. You were half of this marriage. You are entitled to half, you deserve half, and if you push away this money now, you’ll regret it. Please let the laws give you what is rightfully yours.

**‘Not today.’** During the proceedings, your emotions are going to go up, down, and all over the place. One day you will feel great and the next you will be wretched. On the bad days, take a break. Do not make decisions on these days.

This is not a contest to see who can get through the dissolution with the fewest breakdowns. If you are the one who has been left, do not be surprised if your spouse seems to be doing much better than you are. Please remember that the chances are good that he or she has been thinking about this for a long time, long enough that the shock at the idea has worn off, whereas for you, this shock is brand new and devastating. Your job now is to rebuild your life and act in your best interest. If you are the one leaving, your responsibilities are immense. Regardless of your feelings today, you have most likely just delivered a terrible blow to the person who was once the love of your life. For your own benefit, as well as your spouse’s, proceed slowly and with compassion. Your relationship failed. Now it is your responsibility to conclude it as successfully as possible.

This may sound shocking to you but after working with many clients who have experienced dissolution, I have come to believe that a death – whether foreseeable or unexpected – is almost easier to cope with over the long term. With death there is no blame, everybody loses, a life is gone. Your friends and family may surround you, the house is yours to sell as you see fit, the car is yours, the retirement account is yours, the life insurance policy, and the possessions are all yours.

In a dissolution however, everything is different. If you are the bereaved party in the event of the dissolution you may be faced with a partner who is living a perfectly happy life with someone else. You may feel that for all you gave the relationship, you got little back. Perhaps you are making due with less, while your partner is living on more. If you have children, your partner may take them away from you one night a week and every other weekend and show them a great time. The children themselves are likely to be confused and angry. As for the community, not everyone is rallying around you unconditionally, the way they would have if your spouse had died; no one is dropping off supper for you. Rather some of your friends are not feeling very comfortable around you, and some of them are taking the other side, thus compounding your loss.

## **SEEKING HELP**

No one can go through dissolution alone, even with the help. You will need an attorney, and the more you know about your situation, the easier and less expensive it will be to work with your attorney. With respect to your attorney, remember that he or she is there to represent you legally—not emotionally. Seek therapy or counseling. It is one thing to receive emotional support from family and friends who will probably provide you with all the sympathy that you need. But if you constantly let them see you at your very lowest point, it will be harder for you to restore the equilibrium of your relationships later, when you feel stronger. They simply go on seeing you as a victim, and treating you like one. Plus, what if you need more than sympathy? A professional counselor's impartiality may help make you stronger, both in short and long term. If there are children involved, a counselor may also help you in dealing with their pain, and deciding whether they, too, need professional help.