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### A Saner, Smarter Way To Say Goodbye

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More than 40% of American marriages end in divorce, at a whopping average cost of \$20,000 to \$50,000 per couple in legal fees. But there is a much less expensive way to dissolve a marriage—a mediated divorce. Typical cost: \$4000 to \$5000.

This huge saving leaves more money for both spouses and for their children. There is a big emotional benefit too, says attorney Katherine E. Stoner, a mediator in Pacific Grove, Calif. Unlike a standard divorce, mediation isn't an adversarial procedure, so it helps to lay the groundwork for a civilized relationship after the couple has split. That is particularly important if children are involved.

The couple need not feel amicable toward each other for mediation to work, says Marc Fleisher, a New York City lawyer and mediator: “You can be angry and hurt and still negotiate an agreement.” But, he adds, mediation is not a good choice in cases of domestic violence, drug or alcohol abuse.

### **How It Works**

In a standard divorce case, each spouse hires his or her own lawyer. The lawyers do all the negotiating—and you pay for every minute they spend talking to one another.

In mediation, you and your spouse negotiate your own divorce agreement with the help of a mediator trained in conflict resolution. The mediator does not take sides or impose a settlement on you, says attorney Elena Karabatos, a mediator in Garden City, N.Y.

Mediators usually charge hourly fees comparable to those of lawyers, ranging from about \$150 to more than \$300 an hour. But a case that might require 170 hours in a standard divorce might be resolved in less than 20 hours of mediation, says Katherine Stoner.

### **You Still Need Legal Advice**

Before or during mediation, you should each consult a lawyer for a basic explanation of your legal rights and options. (You’ll pay a fee for the consultation but no retainer.) If your mediator is a lawyer, you still should have your divorce agreement reviewed independently before signing it, says Marc Fleisher. Even with consultation fees, however, 85% of mediated divorces cost less than \$5000.