

Before You File for Divorce, California Preparation Checklist Family Court Ready - CA™

Companion to the Courtroom Ready™ series.

With Jennifer J. Moore, California family law attorney.

Legal education, not legal advice. Every family differs — adapt to your child and your court.

Everything from Episode 3, in one worksheet: the documents to gather, the numbers to know, the questions to write down, and the decisions to slow down on. Companion to the Courtroom Ready™ series. With Jennifer J. Moore, California family law attorney.

1. Gather while access is easy

Access changes once a divorce begins — gather what you have legitimate access to, now. Photograph, scan, or download, and store copies somewhere the other party cannot reach (a new email account or a trusted relative's house).

- ☐ Tax returns (last 3 years)
- ☐ Pay stubs (both spouses, recent)
- ☐ Bank account statements
- ☐ Retirement account statements
- ☐ Investment account statements
- ☐ Credit card statements
- ☐ Mortgage or lease papers
- ☐ Vehicle titles and registrations
- ☐ Insurance policies (health, life, auto, home)
- ☐ Monthly household bills (utilities, phone, subscriptions, childcare)
- ☐ **Confirm you can log in to important personal and joint online accounts — and that password recovery uses YOUR phone number and new email.**

The bright line: only gather what you have legitimate access to — your own accounts, joint accounts, documents in the home you share. Never guess passwords, log into accounts that aren't yours, or install anything on anyone's phone. It can create legal problems, and it destroys your credibility.

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2. Know your real numbers — the four lists

These lists feed your mandatory financial disclosures (your DOD and Income & Expense Declaration) later. Accuracy counts.

List 1 — What I owned before marriage, plus anything I inherited:

List 2 — What we acquired during the marriage, jointly:

List 3 — My debts from before the marriage (e.g., student loan):

List 4 — Debts acquired during the marriage (e.g., home loan, tax debt):

3. Your flexible starter plan — six questions

Plans will change — that's expected. Answer in pencil.

- 1) How will I pay my financial obligations — will I need help from my spouse or family?
- 2) Where will I live — together during the process, or will one of us move out?
- 3) What are my transportation options?
- 4) Who cares for the kids and pets — school runs, activities, overnights, parenting time?
- 5) How will filing affect daily life — kids' routines, work, extended family, conflict level?

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6) My questions about the divorce process:

4. Slow down on the hard-to-undo

Get advice BEFORE these — a decision that can wait a week for good advice should wait the week:

- ☐ Moving out of the family home
- ☐ Decisions about the children
- ☐ Moving large sums from a joint account
- ☐ Taking a loan against a retirement account
- ☐ Quitting a job
- ☐ Signing anything the other person or their attorney drafted

Safety first: if there is violence or fear in your home, your safety and your children's safety come first — don't stay in an unsafe situation. Your court's self-help center and domestic violence organizations can help you plan safely. National DV Hotline: 800-799-7233.

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