

For many couples, divorce is not seen as the end result of a failing relationship, but rather the beginning of a lengthy war with each other. This is understandable; by the time divorce is seriously considered the relationship has obviously decayed, and the pent-up frustration and resentment can be toxic and poisonous. It's little wonder that many divorces commence in a spirit of total war and simply go downhill from there.

However, divorce is not a war; it is a negotiated end to your legal partnership. As such it's to everyone's benefit to approach divorce cooperatively. As we've seen many times over the years when bringing warring couples into divorce mediation environments, even people who are no longer on speaking terms can find ways to work with each other to mutual benefit, transforming divorce from a brutal conflict to a peaceful closure. Here are eight simple concepts that we've found help almost every couple we've worked with in divorce mediation find their way to a more peaceful divorce process.

Separate the issue from the person. It isn't easy, but keep in mind that this is now a negotiation, not a punishment. Figuring out how to mutually solve problems benefits everyone.

Listening is not weakness. Divorcing couples often enter divorce mediation angry and defensive. But listening to and understanding your partner's point of view does not mean you must agree.

Stick to your issues. We always discourage the use of 'You' statements – don't speak for them, speak for yourself.

Give the benefit of the doubt. Anger makes it easy to demonize your partner, but that gets us nowhere. If you're not certain they're in the wrong, at least consider they may not be.

Embrace the awkward. Sadly, divorce mediation is often the first time certain things are said. It's never easy, but embrace the awkward and power through.

Keep talking. The worst thing you can do is walk away from the table. Keep talking. If you're angry, say so – but don't shut down.

Winning isn't always winning. Sometimes winning an issue actually retards our progress. At every point of contention, ask yourself if winning that battle will actually get you anything, or if you're just opposing for the sake of opposing.

Be open to the conversation. If you come to a divorce mediation session or a negotiation unwilling to discuss, it's a failure before it's even started.

Not everyone can embrace all of these suggestions at once. Divorce is an emotional experience and we can't always master our emotions. But just keeping these in mind can be incredibly helpful. Even managing to fully embrace just one of these suggestions can open the path to a fruitful negotiation.

Remember, divorce is shaped by the people involved. It can be as brutal, awful and damaging as you make it – or as relieving, empowering and emotionally satisfying as you make it. The choice is yours.