



“We’ve never agreed on anything. Why do you think we’ll start with the issues in our divorce,” you might be thinking.

Never is a formidable concept. The two of you probably agree on a few things. Use the cooperative skills you already have to maximize your cooperative potential as you discuss the issues in your divorce.

Cooperative skills are those things that we all do naturally when we want to work with someone. It is most helpful if spouses in a divorce can leave their emotional selves at home when they have a “business” meeting to discuss their divorce. Instead, they need to bring their better self – the one that will focus on practical and realistic planning for the future.



Ten tips that your better self will recognize as familiar may help maximize the cooperative potential resolving your dissolution.



1. Pick the least threatening way to make your point. Begin this approach with the way you start your divorce. Consider informing your spouse that you want a divorce and using a non-embarrassing method of serving the court papers.



2. Respect the emotional work that goes along with major life change. It may take some time for your spouse to get “up to speed” emotionally if you are the one who wants the divorce.



3. Make a list of the differences it will make in your daily life to be divorced. Then pretend you are your spouse, and make a list of what might be on his/her list.



4. Talk about divorce issues in terms of future planning for your daily lives, living separately.



5. Acknowledge that both of you need “enough” money and “enough” time with the kids. Remember that

“enough” can be defined many ways, not just by your definition.



6. Ask your spouse what he/she needs/wants. And then re-state your spouse’s answer in your own words. Be sure you understand. Use your knowledge of how your spouse processes information – oral, written, slow, fast, good with numbers, fearful of numbers, etc.



7. Speak for yourself, not your spouse. Use “I” statements which together with a focus on future planning usually eliminate unproductive blaming.



8. Listen. Be sure the other side is done. Then speak. Try to make sure that one person speaks at a time with minimal interruption. If interrupted, politely ask if you might finish.



9. Be willing to write down topics and discuss them later if raising them now will undermine progress in resolving the issue that is being discussed.



10. Look for agreements. If you cannot see an agreement on specifics, are you in agreement in general – on a goal or a solution? If you cannot agree on all issues, can you agree on some? If you cannot agree on a fact, can you agree on a procedure to determine the fact?



Maximizing cooperative potential is an art – not a science. If one meeting with your spouse does not seem productive – whether it was the two of you, a mediation session, a four-way conference with your attorneys, or a court appearance – go back to the drawing board. Try to identify one or more factors that got in the way. Next time give your discussions a little different slant. Good luck!

The goal of The American Academy of Matrimonial Lawyers is *"To encourage the study, improve the practice, elevate the standards and advance the cause of matrimonial law to the end that the welfare of the family and society be preserved"*.

For information on the national organization see www.aaml.org; for information on the Minnesota Chapter see www.aamlmn.com or contact Executive Director Nancy Keyes at (952) 832-9986.

Feel free to make copies of this brochure.

AAML MN CHAPTER
7618 York Avenue South #1311
Edina, MN 55435

THE ART OF MAXIMIZING COOPERATIVE POTENTIAL

Ten Tips for Communicating With Your Spouse About Your Marital Dissolution



**A Publication of the Minnesota
Chapter of the American Academy of
Matrimonial Lawyers**