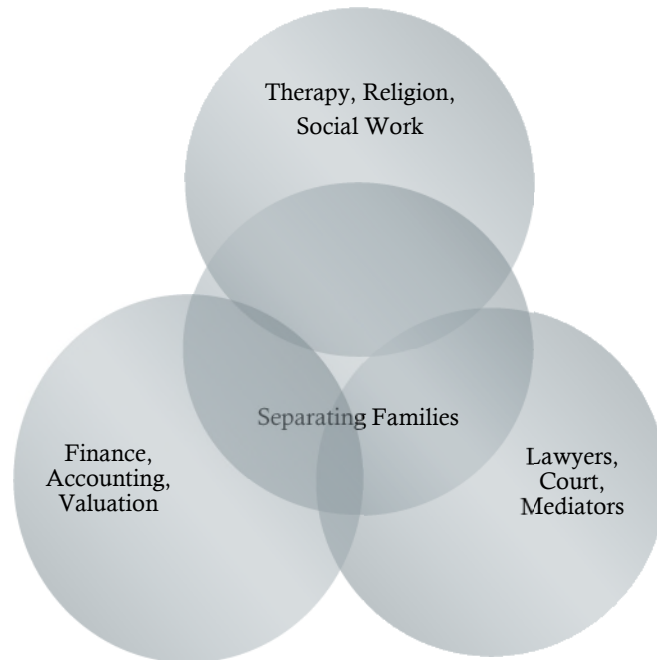


# SENSIBLE SEPARATION

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*Sensible Separation* is an interdisciplinary newsletter for professionals assisting families with divorce or separation. If you would like to contribute an article, please submit to [gkincaid@hrkklaw.com](mailto:gkincaid@hrkklaw.com). For more information about divorce mediation, please visit [www.SensibleSeparation.com](http://www.SensibleSeparation.com). Another opportunity to share helpful thoughts or insights about our work exists on the *Sensible Separation* FACEBOOK page, which is located at [www.facebook.com/sensibleseparation](http://www.facebook.com/sensibleseparation). Please visit our site. We are just getting it started and would appreciate the traffic and any helpful information that you would like to share.

This issue of *Sensible Separation* will focus on high quality, low cost services that are available in our community for divorcing and separating families.

<b>Schools</b> Did you know that our local school districts have programs for children going through a divorce? Until recently, I didn't. Learn more. Page 2	<b>Churches</b> Many of our local churches have excellent programs to support divorcing families. I'll look at one in particular. Page 4	<b>Help Center</b> The Help Center is a true game changer for families with limited resources. You'll be surprised at what they can do. Page 5
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There is a shortage of divorce professionals that work for free. Probably for some of the same reasons you can't find a decent bricklayer that will work for free. For backbreaking work, most expect to be paid. Still, from time to time, all of us receive requests from our families, friends and clients for low-cost or no-cost divorce assistance. As we are all working in "helping professions," we don't like it when we are less than helpful. For years, I had to shrug my shoulders and admit that I was at a loss to offer much help. Over the last 10 years, this has changed dramatically. There are now a wide variety of services and resources available for families going through a divorce with limited resources. This edition of *Sensible Separation* is devoted to identifying for you some of those options. Even though these resources are excellent and available for little or no cost, this does not mean that are designed for the financially-strapped, alone. No matter your W-2, these are great programs!

I hope you'll save this copy of *Sensible Separation* somewhere handy. That way, when asked for low cost options, you won't be caught delivering the I-don't-know-shrug! I investigated three different programs, all of which are excellent. One comes from a school district, the second a church, and the third, the new Help Center is supported by Johnson County. If you know of more great programs for little or no cost, feel free to post on Sensible Separation's, Facebook page, [www.facebook.com/sensibleseparation](http://www.facebook.com/sensibleseparation).

## I. School Districts



Schools are in unique position to help children of divorcing parents. Teachers and counselors have a portal into the everyday lives of children that are not available to lawyers, judges, therapists and sometimes even parents. Teachers and counselors have a long list of warning signs that they watch for including unusual anger, shutting down, withdrawal, depression, grade drops, friend choices, dress, and in some, drug involvement, self-harm, or suicidal thoughts.

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I recently heard from a client of mine that the Olathe school district has several excellent programs for children going through a divorce.

On a rainy Thursday morning, I spoke with Kathryn Feightner, LMSW and Stephanie Allegre, LSCSW, both of the Olathe School District.

Kathryn and Stephanie, both school social workers, described to me that the Olathe school district employs counselors, social workers and school psychologists to meet educational, emotional, academic, career readiness and special education needs of their students. Because of the differences in educational backgrounds, these professionals are involved in different types of programs and tasks. Intervention by any of these professionals is based on individual needs of the students and availability of services within the specific schools. Parents with concerns about their children should call their school to inquire about which of the counseling professionals would be most appropriate to address their specific needs.

The Olathe school district also has different programs depending upon the age of the children.

Elementary school counselors run a “Divorce Group” that might have several children in it that are all experiencing a divorce in their family. There is not always a Divorce Group going because it is on an as-needed basis. The structure and content of the discussion is tailored to the size and age of the group.

At the secondary school level, the interaction with the student is much more likely to be one-on-one.

Referrals come from many sources and often include: parents, grandparents, teachers, neighbors, and outside therapists, but anyone, presumably including a lawyer or judge, can call the school counselor and suggest that the district consider making these services available to a particular student. Given the cost of outside therapist and their often full schedules, this can be an excellent option.

As you might imagine, the school district does not want to be pulled into the parents’ conflict and lawyers, in particular, need to keep the school isolated from the parent’s drama. If lawyers start dragging these professionals into court, these programs will be at risk.

The Olathe School District also has the HELP clinic that can be reached at (913) 780-7051. This program is done on a self-referral basis and provides for six free counseling sessions at an offsite building on any topic. The clinic is staffed by school district psychologists, social workers and counselors.

While I had Stephanie and Kathryn on the phone, I could not resist asking if they would mind volunteering some advice to divorcing parents. Here is their top 10!

1. Keep your kids out of the middle; fight your battles privately and not through your children.
2. Don’t discuss finances with your children.
3. Try to be consistent with the rules and visits from house to house.
4. Don't make promises you can't keep.
5. Don’t turn kids into parents, friends, spies, messengers, or confidants.
6. Don’t manipulate or bribe, e.g. I'll pay for your car, if you live with me.

7. Understand the impact dating can have on your children. When introducing a new partner, the beginning of that relationship is very important. If there is animosity in the beginning, after that, relationships almost never improve. Understand, too, that children often see the new person in your life as a threat to your relationship with them. Avoid introducing the two until you are comfortable that you are in a long-term, committed relationship.

8. The grief process for children also includes the "bargaining" stage. My parents will get back together if I do this or that. Help children to understand that the divorce has nothing to do with them. Kids need to be reminded over and over and over that they are not responsible for the divorce.

9. Children take on mythical and magical thinking to avoid reality. Help them to deal with their anxiety about the unknown by being prepared to answer appropriate questions, e.g. where will I live, will I have to change schools, etc.

10. Children cannot process criticism and the rejection of those they love without feeling rejected or criticized themselves. Keep the negative comments about the other parent to yourself. The more civil your relationship is with your ex, the healthier your children will be.

If you know a child that needs help, you should contact the principal or guidance counselor at the child's school and find out what resources are available.

## II. Churches



Although many churches, synagogues and temples offer programs for divorcing families, the Church of the Resurrection (or "COR") is a leader in this area. Based on their webpage and some emails I exchanged with one of their program directors, here is a brief summary of what they have to offer.

1. Divorce Recovery Groups are groups that meet on a weekly basis, and you can begin attending at any time. There are two groups; one for men and one for women. Each is designed with a weekly focus, a time for individual sharing, and goal setting. Information shared is confidential, and each group is designed as a safe place where men and women can share their feelings. Leadership is provided both by staff members and trained volunteers.

The Divorce Recovery group is designed to promote healing. Time limits for sharing are observed, so that no one is usurping all of the class time, thus a limited amount of time can be spent in “bashing.” Each group provides a number of speakers, including, but not limited to attorneys who are COR members, therapists and counselors, former class members, and financial counselors who share important information with class members.

Both groups are open to anyone within the community—membership of Resurrection is never a requirement to attend any class or meeting, nor is there a cost for either of these groups.

2. Mid Life Divorce Recovery. This is a ten-week program offered in the Fall and Spring and is designed for participants who have completed their divorce, but feel like they need help “moving on” with life. There is a small registration fee. The groups are separated by gender. Topics covered include loss and grief, stages of divorce, coping with anger, basic rights and needs, healthy relationships, effects on children, exploring forgiveness, negotiating the holidays, and moving forward with the healing process.

3. Coaster Kids (Fall & Spring sessions). This is a program for children of divorce, ages 6-12 years old.

For more information on services offered at COR or other local churches and synagogues, just visit their webpage, or call. See, for Example: <http://www.cor.org>

### III. Local Governments.



From time to time, divorce laws change. Typically, however, the law is a slow moving train with the legislature and the judiciary making minor course adjustments and not major direction changes. Yet, I would argue, a more substantive revolution has been quietly gathering momentum. I have reported in an earlier issue of *Sensible Separation* that a skyrocketing number of clients are finding ways to process their divorces *pro se* or without counsel. While it was never impossible to do on your own, in the past, it was very difficult. The best we could do was give the rather absurd advice that they should go the law library, find the forms, and try to

figure it out on their own. Or, they could call Legal Aid. Often times, Legal aid offered a slight discount over the rates they might otherwise pay in the open market.

The times are changing.

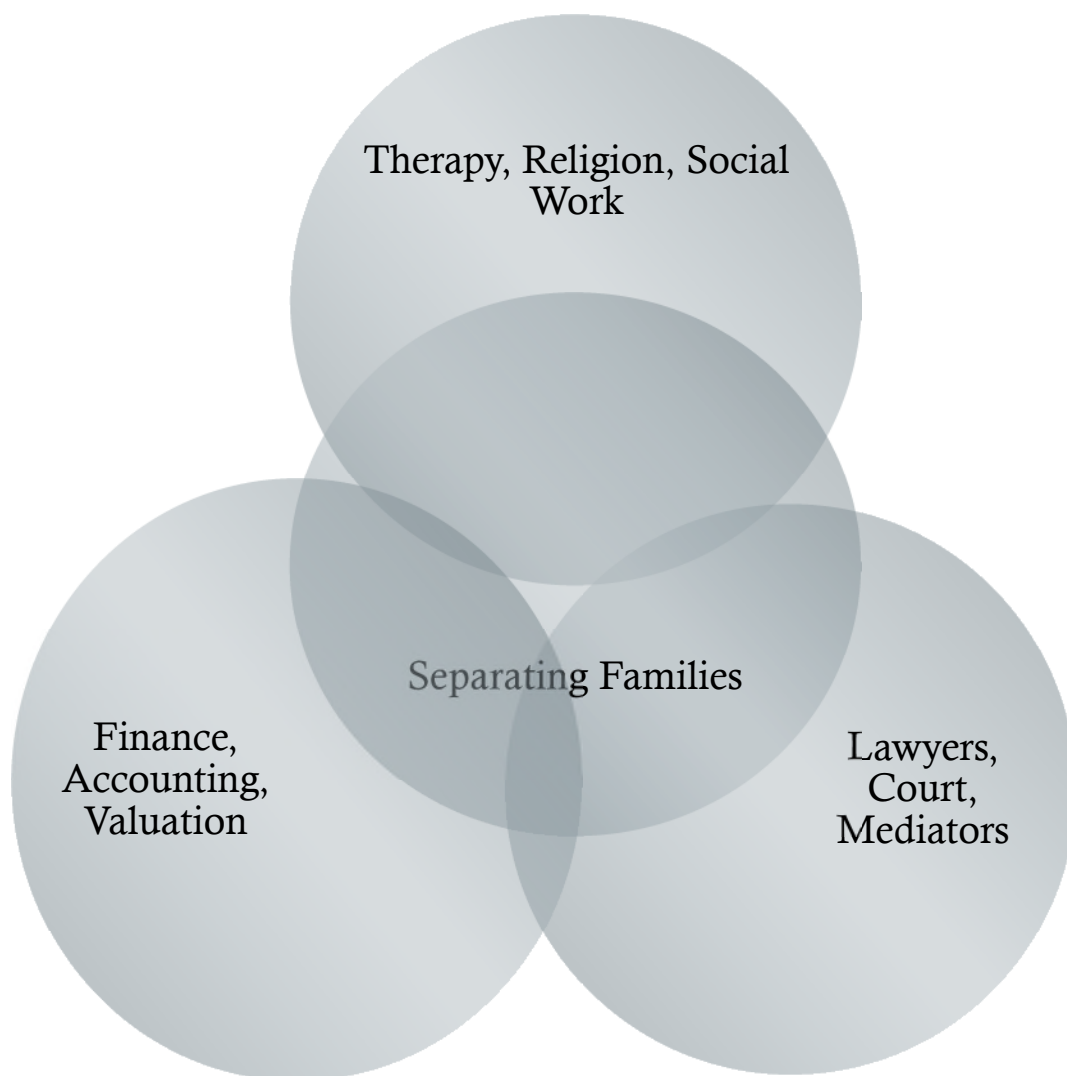
First, several years ago, the Office of Judicial Administration posted *pro se* divorce forms on their webpage. You can find them at [www. http://courts.jocogov.org/hc\\_selfhelp.aspx](http://courts.jocogov.org/hc_selfhelp.aspx). The forms are well done and make it much easier to go it alone. Being tailored to the nuances of Kansas law, they are also far better than what you can buy on the Internet and facilitate a more uniform system for processing *pro se* divorces within the State. Still, there were hurdles for *pro se* divorcing families. Filling out the forms was daunting for some and they really only work well for very simple cases where the parties have agreed on all the essential terms.

The Kansas Disciplinary Administrator's office sanctioned a new form of representation, known as limited representation. In the limited representation format, clients can hire attorneys to prepare or assist them with forms without entering an appearance or otherwise accepting the responsibility for the entire case. The bar has been slow to warm to this concept and often times, as I speak from personal experience, for good reasons. The clients too often don't seem to understand that the lawyers are supposed to be doing less work for less money. Not the same or more work at a discounted rate. As a result, it's often hard for *pro se* families to find attorney willing to accept this role.

Earlier this year, Judge O'Grady and others made an effort to address this problem. On the first floor of the Johnson County Court House, where part of the Sheriff's office used to be, there is the new Help Center. They not only have new and improved forms of their own, but they help you fill them out and file them! It may sound like a bold statement, but we are very near to the place where a low income family, a family that would not otherwise be able to hire an attorney at all, with an uncomplicated divorce can do it themselves. The Help Center is designed to provide legal information to people with very limited resources and uncomplicated run-of-the-mill type cases. For these families, this is a blessing.

So, if you have few complications and a modest budget, the Help Center is an excellent resource. While the Help Center staff cannot provide legal advice to those with complications, you are not necessarily out of luck. Kansas Legal Services has received a grant, from the Johnson County Car Foundation, so that they may staff the Help Center a couple of days a week and deal with more complicated matters. Plans are in the works to expand this service to reach more families with financial needs. How about paternity and post-divorce matters? The Help Center is equipped to assist here as well. For more information, you can call the Help Center at 913 715 3385, or visit the Johnson County District Court's Web page, [jocogov.org](http://jocogov.org) and click the Help Center Tab.

We're fortunate to live a community with so many recourses for families that need to divorce or separate and have limited funds.



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