A LISTENER GIFT FROM THE WE CHAT DIVORCE PODCAST

Should You Keep the House?

The Complete-Picture Checklist Before You Decide

Companion guide to the Divorce Explored episode:
"Should You Keep the House in Divorce? Why Your Realtor Can't Answer That Alone"

The marital home is one of the most emotional decisions in divorce — and one of the easiest places to get advice that is accurate but incomplete. A realtor can tell you it's a great time to sell. Your spouse can say "just keep the house." Neither answer tells you what the decision means for your settlement, your cash flow, or your future. This guide helps you see the whole picture first.

The Silo Problem at a Glance

Every professional in your divorce answers the question you ask — from inside their own discipline. Good advice becomes risky when one silo's answer is treated as the final answer.

PROFESSIONAL	WHAT THEY SEE	WHAT THEY MAY NOT SEE
Realtor	The market, the sale price, the timing	Your equity after debts and costs, what you give up to keep it, whether you can afford it
Attorney	Legal process, discovery, negotiation	Your post-divorce budget — they answer the questions you ask, not the ones you don't
Accountant	Tax reporting and tax savings	What a year-end divorce or bifurcation costs you elsewhere in the settlement
Mortgage pro	Whether you qualify for financing today	How your support order structure affects what a lender will count as income
Financial planner	Investments and long-term planning	The divorce analysis already underway — or a referral's true scope

REMEMBER

Good professional advice is not automatically complete divorce advice.

The House: Beyond the Sale Price

"What's the house worth?" is the wrong first question. The right question is: what does each option leave you with — in cash, in assets, and in monthly breathing room?

Step 1 — Find the real (net) value

- ☐ Current market value (recent comparable sales, not a guess)
- ☐ Minus: first mortgage payoff balance
- ☐ Minus: second mortgage or HELOC balance
- ☐ Minus: liens or judgments against the property
- ☐ Minus: estimated selling costs (commission, transfer taxes, closing costs)
- ☐ Minus: repairs needed to sell — or deferred repairs you'd inherit by keeping it
- ☐ Minus: potential capital gains tax exposure

= Net value. This — not the sale price — is the number that goes in your column.

Step 2 — If you're thinking about keeping it, answer these first

- ☐ What asset do I give up to offset the equity? ("You can keep the house" almost never means keeping all its value — your spouse will want their share from another asset.)
- ☐ Can I assume the existing mortgage, or qualify for a refinance on my own income?
- ☐ If support is part of my income, is it structured so a lender will count it? (A support order reduced by a mortgage your spouse pays directly may not help you qualify.)
- ☐ What does my monthly budget look like with this house in it — taxes, insurance, utilities, maintenance?
- ☐ What happens if the home needs a roof, an HVAC system, or a major repair in year one?
- ☐ What assets remain for my retirement after this trade?

WHY THIS MATTERS FINANCIALLY

Without the broader analysis, the house becomes the decision that drives your settlement instead of an asset evaluated within it. Keeping a home you can't refinance or maintain — or selling before you know how it affects support and the rest of your agreement — can cost far more than any realtor's commission. Net value, offsets, and cash flow decide whether the house is a gift or a burden.

5 Questions to Ask Before Acting on Any Recommendation

These apply to every professional in your divorce — realtor, attorney, accountant, planner, or mortgage professional. Ask them before any recommendation becomes part of your settlement.

1. **What information did this professional actually review?**
   Advice built on a partial picture is a partial answer — no matter how confident it sounds.

2. **What assumptions are built into the recommendation?**
   "Sell now" assumes a market. "File before year-end" assumes the tax savings outweighs what you give up.

3. **What else would this decision affect?**
   Other assets, debts, income sources, taxes, support, and settlement terms all move together.

4. **Does it work within my post-divorce cash flow?**
   A recommendation that looks right on paper still has to survive your actual monthly budget.

5. **Which other professional needs to evaluate this before it's final?**
   If a professional refers you onward ("you need a forensic accountant"), ask for the scope: what report will I get back, and how does it relate to my decisions?

PRO TIP: PUT IT IN WRITING

We all hear things differently — and you carry each professional's advice to the next one's door. After every meeting, follow up in writing to confirm what you heard, the next steps, and where the advice applies in your case. It prevents the "telephone game" that derails negotiations.

One picture. Every professional. The same financial facts.

The MDS Financial Portrait™ organizes and verifies your complete financial picture — so your attorney, accountant, and every other advisor are solving the same problem with the same verified information.

Start at MyDivorceSolution.com · Clarity is power.