



# FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS OF DIVORCE

## COUNSELEE CHECKLIST

MARINE CORPS FINANCIAL READINESS

Studies at the National Institutes of Health (NIH) verify that money is a leading cause of stress in relationships. Even when a relationship ends in divorce, money often continues to be an issue. This checklist, supplemented with information and referrals from the Marine Corps Community Services (MCCS) staff, can help you reorganize your finances efficiently as you work through the many dimensions of this difficult life event.

Use this checklist as a solution-focused tool to help set goals, establish priorities, and develop a personal action plan. Space is provided to add local resources and reminders about additional topics.

## HANDOUTS

- ✓ Spending Plan Worksheet
- ✓ Understanding Credit
- ✓ Military Consumer Protection
- ✓ Sources of Help for Military Consumers
- ✓ Major Purchases
- ✓ 5 Rules of Buying a House
- ✓ Education Benefits and Savings
- ✓ Paying off Student Loans
- ✓ Military Retirement
- ✓ Thrift Savings Plan
- ✓ Estate Planning
- ✓ TRICARE Overview
- ✓ Survivor Benefits Overview



## BASIC FINANCE

- ☐ Update your personal spending plan using the *Spending Plan Worksheet* Handout. A good spending plan helps you manage your money, plan for your financial goals, and prepare for emergencies. Here are four steps financial experts suggest to get started.

### Step 1: Understand your current situation.

In this step, it's important to understand what's REALLY going on with your money today. Start tracking all your income and spending for the next 30 days. How you do the tracking is up to you, but what's important is you do it.

### Step 2: Know where your money should go.

Financial experts offer these general guidelines when budgeting your money:

- Try to save and/or invest 10% – 15% of pretax pay.
- Strive to keep transportation expenses including car payments, insurance, gas and maintenance to 15% – 20% of pretax pay.
- Limit housing expenses, including mortgage or rent payment, taxes, utilities, and maintenance to your Basic Allowance for Housing or 25% of pretax pay.

### Step 3: Create a plan.

Build a plan for setting aside money and putting limits on how much you'll spend each month per category.

- Prioritize your financial goals.
- Establish an emergency fund. Financial experts suggest you should keep at least three to six months of living expenses in reserve. If you do not have that much saved, consider setting aside a little each paycheck to help get you there.

### Step 4: Make adjustments.

Update your spending plan as your life changes. Monitor your plan until you have fully adjusted your finances to reflect your new situation.



- ☐ Where appropriate, close all joint bank and/or credit union accounts and open new ones in your own name as soon as possible. Seek professional financial counseling and/or legal counsel before acting if you are unsure about taking this step.
- ☐ Settle all outstanding debts, if appropriate. Continue to pay and monitor outstanding joint debts, as these continue to be your legal responsibility until your name is removed from the account or the debt is paid off.
- ☐ Establish an effective bill-paying system to ensure that bills are paid on time.
- ☐ Use a written receipt system to document payment or receipt of alimony/maintenance funds.
- ☐ Check each of your three major credit reports for free at ***annualcreditreport.com***. Marines can request free credit monitoring services from the nationwide credit reporting agencies: Equifax, Experian, and TransUnion. Review the *Understanding Credit* Handout for more information.
- ☐ Review your new tax situation and change federal and state withholding as needed via <https://mypay.dfas.mil/#/>. Reserve members will need to do this with their employers as well.
- ☐ Update personal property tax records in your city and/or county to reflect your new marital status, if appropriate.

Additional notes: \_\_\_\_\_

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## CONSUMER PROTECTION

- ☐ Review the *Military Consumer Protection* Handout for additional information on identity theft, the Servicemembers Civil Relief Act (SCRA), and Military Lending Act (MLA).
- ☐ Protect yourself from misleading consumer practices and know basic procedures for handling a consumer complaint or dispute. Review the *Sources of Help for Military Consumers* Handout.

Additional notes: \_\_\_\_\_

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## MAJOR PURCHASES

- ☐ Analyze your housing and transportation needs and be sure to prepare your finances for any major purchases. Review the *Major Purchases* and *5 Rules of Buying a House* Handouts for more information.
- ☐ Work with the base housing office for any housing needs related to the change in your marital status.
- ☐ Review the *Education Benefits and Savings* and *Paying off Student Loans* Handouts to learn more about financing education, available benefits, obligations, and repayment options.

Additional notes: \_\_\_\_\_

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## PLANNING FOR THE FUTURE

- ☐ Review your retirement savings goals. Ensure you understand your ex-spouse's rights to your retirement funds and benefits, and ensure that Individual Retirement Account (IRA) and other investment accounts are in your name only or your interest in those accounts is legally protected to the fullest extent possible under the law. For more information on components of military retirement and the TSP, refer to the *Military Retirement and Thrift Savings Plan* Handouts.
- ☐ Update beneficiaries of your Thrift Savings Plan (TSP) and Individual Retirement Accounts (IRA), as appropriate.
- ☐ Evaluate your life insurance needs to ensure you have enough coverage, the right type of coverage, and correct beneficiaries. A simple method to calculate your life insurance needs is to use the acronym LIFE. Start by totaling all four categories listed below.

<b>L</b> liabilities	Debt you would like to pay off, like a mortgage, auto loan, or credit cards(s)	\$
<b>I</b> ncome to be replaced	Multiply targeted annual income amount by the number of years to replace	\$
<b>F</b> uneral and final expenses	The amount you would like to set aside for final expenses	\$
<b>E</b> ducation and other goals	The amount you want to set aside to fund education and other goals for family, friends, or charitable organizations	\$
<b>Total life insurance needed</b>		\$\$\$\$

Then compare your life insurance needs with your current amount of coverage plus any assets and benefits available at death. If you find you need additional coverage, then consider supplementing Servicemembers' Group Life Insurance (SGLI) with a commercial life insurance policy. Review the policy for any restrictions, such as a war clause. Common life insurance policies include:

- **Term insurance** — provides a stated amount of coverage over specific period of time and is designed to provide a large amount of coverage for the least cost.
- **Permanent insurance** — provides coverage designed to last for your entire life and can build cash value.

There are several permanent life insurance options offered such as universal life, whole life, variable life and even variable universal life insurance. These policies may have a surrender period and be subject to fees and penalties if canceled during this time.

- ☐ Update the beneficiaries of your Servicemembers' Group Life Insurance (SGLI), if appropriate.
- ☐ Review and update your homeowners or renters property and liability insurance policies to ensure that they are adequate for your new circumstances.
- ☐ Update your auto insurance policies, to inform your insurance carrier of your new marital status.
- ☐ Consider insuring any sources of income you are receiving from your ex-spouse. If your ex-spouse pays alimony or child support, if it is possible and feasible, consider taking out a life and/or disability insurance policy on him or her.

- ☐ Speak with the Legal Assistance Office on base to discuss changes to property ownership per your divorce decree. (Examples: car titles and deeds to property).
- ☐ Review the *Estate Planning* Handout and see your Legal Assistance Office on base (or other legal counsel) to establish or update estate planning documents such as wills, power of attorney, trusts, etc.



## COMPENSATION, BENEFITS, AND ENTITLEMENTS

- ☐ If you are covered by TRICARE, change your TRICARE medical and dental enrollments, as necessary. If you are covered by any other health policies, adjust coverage to suit your current circumstances. Review the *TRICARE Overview* Handout for more information.
- ☐ Speak to a Survivor Benefit Plan (SBP) counselor if you are close to retirement to discuss the impact of the divorce on SBP. Refer to the *Survivors Benefits Overview* Handout for a brief overview of the benefits provided.



## SAVING AND INVESTING

- ☐ Establish an emergency fund. Financial experts suggest you should keep at least three to six months of living expenses in reserve. If you do not have that much saved, consider setting aside a little each paycheck to help get you there.



## ADMINISTRATIVE TASKS

- ☐ Obtain an official copy of your Marital Settlement Agreement (divorce decree).
- ☐ Obtain a new Social Security card, driver's license, and passport if you are changing your name.
- ☐ See your Legal Assistance Office on base (active duty) or other legal counsel (Reserve) to determine the proper course of action regarding powers of attorney (POA) of your ex-spouse, if POAs are in place.
- ☐ Bring the divorce decree to the nearest Defense Enrollment Eligibility Reporting System/Real-Time Automated Personnel Identification System (DEERS/RAPIDS) office. Obtain a new military ID if you are changing your name.
- ☐ Check your Leave and Earnings Statement (LES) after DEERS updates.

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CFS/PPM Printed Name

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Counselor Printed Name

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Signature

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Date

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Signature

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