

**Professional Profile**  
**Written by Catherine Canadé, Esq.**

As a mediator and collaborative attorney, I help my clients separate and divorce outside of the court system through the Collaborative Process. When people hire me they are deciding to put “two feet in the boat” of the Collaborative Process and their commitment is unambivalently conveyed to their partner or spouse. While all professionals sign a Participation Agreement to begin the Collaborative Process that states that they will not represent the clients if the Collaborative Process fails, I make that commitment to my clients every day.

I started my career in the civil litigation department of a large NYC law firm. When I began specializing in family law, I did some *pro bono* work at a non profit organization where we represented women who were victims of domestic violence. In one case in particular I represented a woman who had moved out of state with her young son to escape the marital abuse in their home. She subsequently contracted cancer. The exorbitant medical bills led her to ask for an increase in the small amount of child support her son’s father was paying her. It seemed like any judge would be sympathetic and understanding, but while we lost that case over a technical rule of evidence, we actually believed it was because the judge had a social relationship with the husband’s attorney. Not only did my client and her child suffer as a result, but I was also completely demoralized by the process and felt that the legal system did not deliver justice. I was determined to find a better way to practice.

Fast forward to 10 years ago and I have been lucky enough to be working exclusively as a mediator and a collaborative attorney, firmly committed to the Collaborative Process, which is appropriate for couples with good communication who wish to decide for themselves, and not leave to a judge, how they will parent their children, pay their children’s expenses and divide their assets and debt.

The tremendous amount of emotion that is part of separation and divorce can cloud judgment and decision making. The Collaborative Team Approach provides a couple with a skilled mental health professional, the Family Support Specialist, to work with them on a parenting plan and/or serve as a coach to the many couples who need emotional support and guidance, even if they have no children.

Similarly, a Financial Neutral can help parties make informed decisions when there are financial decisions to be made with regard to how to share the family’s assets with the least tax impact, or where stock options, restricted stock units, family businesses or trusts are part of the equation, particularly if one member of the couple is less financially well versed than the other.

I participated in the Collaborative Process for my own divorce many years ago. My children’s father and I are on more-than-cordial terms, sharing holidays, birthdays and vacations, along with our new spouses and partners. We worked well as co-parents and even better now as co-grandparents. The Collaborative Process is, in my opinion, the best way to re-organize your family and honor the fact that, however your “modern family” looks, you will be family forever.