

Budgets, Income and Support

The mediator must learn the steps involved in getting the couple to agree upon child support and spousal support issues.

Specifically, the mediator must help the couple decide:

- 1) How will the two of them share the costs of raising their children?
- 2) How will they resolve the problem of one of them being dependent on the marriage income for their support?
- 3) Additionally, now that they are each unhooking from the other, will they be able to support themselves in two separate living arrangements or will one of them need to send monthly support to the other for some period of time?

Here's what Doug and Sylvia's budget would look like on a flip chart or on the computer screen after the budget discussion is completed: The following observations may help you as you complete the budgets with the couple.

Start by noting that each of them can raise questions about the other's budget, but if it becomes too contentious, you as the mediator will ask them to save all of their remarks until the end.

While it is not necessary to allocate housing costs to the children, all budgets should contain a children's column in order to help them see the actual costs of the kids

Housing and utilities are usually straight forward and do not create a great deal of controversy

Part of determining whether one should stay in the house or not is determining what it costs each month. This is the essence of future planning.

Cleaning assistance could be needed if one spouse is disabled. Be careful, this is a hot one. If there is any dispute, just put up their numbers.

This clothing amount expects that Mom will buy most of the kids' clothes, but also allows for Dad to buy some, because part of parenting is taking a child out and buying a pair of shoes (for example) sometimes.

Budget Item	Doug	Sylvia	Dad	Shared	Mom
Rent	855				
Mortgage		1,124			
Second Mortgage		150			
Real Estate Taxes		Incl.			
Home Insurance		Incl.			
Maint. & Repair		65			
Utilities					
Electric	35	81			
Heat	Incl.	76			
Phone	26	37			
Water		18			
Trash		25			
Cell Phone		65		25	
Cleaning Assistance					
Lawn Care / Snow Removal		20			
Housing Subtotal:	916	1,661			
Food & Groceries	170	225	50		150
Lunches @ Work/School	40				37
Eating Out	30	30	30		25
Clothing	50	50	10		120
Dry Cleaning & Laundry	30	10			

Doug is likely to have higher laundry costs because he is living in an apartment.

Sylvia could pay up to \$600/mo. for COBRA depending on her age and the policy provisions.

Doug will cover the two minor children on his policy.

Doug is currently taking Prozac, which is not totally covered by his policy. Sylvia expects some dental work in the near future.

They are thinking about paying off the \$2300 left on Sylvia's car loan, which will improve their cash flow.

Recreation and Entertainment are often volatile categories. Couples should be encouraged to put some amount here because the budget is a goal for a new life.

Doug and Sylvia have a 5 year old who will need day care for at least another year.

Sometimes each parent will pay half of the allowances.

Doug would rather pay child support and have Sylvia pay all of the activity fees for the kids.

It is useful to keep their personal living expenses side by side so as not to create the illusion that Sylvia's total expenses are much greater than Doug's. She has higher housing and children's expenses than Doug will have.

Budget Item	Doug	Sylvia	Dad	Shared	Mom
Medical Insurance	Thru wk.	\$__?	60		
Uncovered Medical	10	10		10	
Uncovered Dental	20	20		35	
Prescriptions	15	5			3
Eye Doctor & Glasses	30				
Orthodontia				75	
Car Payment	325	350			
Gas & Oil	60	75			
Insurance	50	55			
Maint. & Repairs	20	35			
License	15	12			
Parking	10				
Life Insurance	28	35			
Recreation & Entertainment	30	20	40		40
Vacations & Travel	75	30	75		50
Personal Care	10	15		20	
Dues & Clubs		35			
Reading Materials	15	10			5
Hair Cuts & Hair Care	10	20			25
Children's Expenses					
Day Care				200	
Activity Fees				30	
Allowances				86	
Dance Lessons				20	
Sports				25	
Contributions & Charities	30	50			
Gifts	40	50			
Housing Expenses:	916	1,661			
Personal Living Expenses:	+1,113	+1,142	265	526	455
Totals:	2,334	2,803			
Plus Children's Expenses:	+265	+455			
Shared Exps Pd by Each:		+526			
TOTALS WITH CHILDREN:	2,294	3,784			