



DCA[®] STANDARDS OF PRACTICE

A Professional Performance Framework for Certified ADR Divorce Coaches

Every DCA Certified ADR Divorce Coach (ADRDC) Adheres To And Is Governed By The Following Standards of Practice

0. Foundational Alignment With the ABA Definition of Divorce Coaching

0.1 Divorce Coaching as a Voluntary ADR Process

DCA-certified divorce coaches honor and operationalize the American Bar Association’s definition of divorce coaching as a discrete, voluntary, client-centered, dispute-resolution-oriented process that enables individuals to participate more effectively in the family dispute-resolution system. As defined by the ABA, divorce coaching strengthens a client’s ability to:

- identify and articulate goals,
- make informed decisions, and
- engage more constructively in their chosen divorce process.

Within this construct, divorce coaching is recognized as a form of individual-level ADR—a professional, non-clinical intervention that enhances clarity, emotional regulation, communication strategy, and decision-making capacity. Divorce coaching is voluntary and client-driven: clients define their desired outcomes, set the direction, and maintain full autonomy. The divorce coach’s role is facilitative, not directive, empowering clients rather than influencing decisions.

0.2 ADR Mindset Across All Pathways

While divorce coaches prepare clients for ADR-forward processes such as mediation, negotiation, and collaborative divorce, they also support individuals navigating adversarial or litigated pathways. In every context, divorce coaching remains voluntary, autonomy-protective, and client-led. Divorce coaches do not orient clients toward settlement outcomes. Instead, they work to minimize barriers to effective decision-making by stabilizing emotional reactivity, enhancing clarity, strengthening communication, and ensuring choices align with the client’s self-defined goals, values, and overarching desired outcomes.

0.3 Client Empowerment Through Process Readiness

Divorce coaches elevate readiness for all pathways—ADR and adversarial—by strengthening process literacy, emotional regulation, conflict-awareness, and communication strategy. This enables clients to participate with agency, stability, and informed clarity throughout mediation, negotiation, collaborative practice, administrative processes, parenting coordination, and litigation.

1. Professional Orientation & Scope Alignment

1.1 ADR-Aligned Practice

Divorce coaches operate from a dispute-resolution foundation, reinforcing clarity, stability, and constructive engagement across the full range of divorce processes.

1.2 Non-Legal, Non-Clinical Boundaries

Divorce coaches do not provide legal advice, clinical services, diagnosis, evaluation, or legal strategy. They maintain clear boundaries consistent with ADR orientation and professional ethics.

1.3 Systems-Informed Perspective

Divorce coaches maintain fluency in mediation, negotiation, collaborative divorce, parenting coordination, administrative processes, and litigation to support accurate process literacy and informed client participation.

2. Client-Centered Engagement

2.1 Behavior-Based, Non-Pathologizing Language

Divorce coaches describe behaviors, patterns, and impact—not diagnoses, labels, or clinical characterizations.

2.2 Strength-Based, Future-Focused Approach

Divorce coaches orient clients toward resilience, capability, adaptability, and forward-thinking action grounded in values and interests.

2.3 Empowered Informed Consent

Divorce coaching is voluntary. Divorce coaches ensure clients understand scope, expectations, boundaries, confidentiality, and their autonomy in directing the engagement.

3. Conflict Competency & Emotional Regulation Support

3.1 Emotional Stabilization Skills

Divorce coaches build capacity for grounding, emotional regulation, cognitive flexibility, and composure during high-stakes decision-making.

3.2 Conflict Pattern Recognition & Disruption

Divorce coaches help clients identify and interrupt escalation cycles, positional rigidity, adversarial narratives, and unproductive communication patterns.

3.3 Comprehensive Threat-Response Integration

Divorce coaches embed literacy in the full continuum of threat responses—including SCARF, fight/flight/freeze/fawn, shutdown patterns, and cognitive narrowing—to reduce reactivity, preserve clarity, and minimize conflict. These competencies are essential to effective participation in all divorce processes.

4. Communication Excellence & Skills Transfer

4.1 Clarity & Transparency

Divorce coaches model clear, neutral, respectful communication across all interactions.

4.2 Framework Application: FLOW, IMPACT, RESOLVE

Divorce coaches apply DCA's signature frameworks to strengthen communication, stabilize emotions, support structured thinking, and guide productive engagement across ADR and litigation contexts.

4.3 Decision-Making Rigor

Divorce coaches support values-aligned, interest-based decision-making, realistic scenario planning, and thoughtful consideration of trade-offs—always anchored to the client's self-defined goals.

5. Process Literacy Across the Divorce Ecosystem

5.1 Full-Spectrum Divorce Process Literacy

Divorce coaches ensure clients understand the full range of pathways—mediation, negotiation, collaborative divorce, parenting coordination, administrative processes, and litigation—while reinforcing the value of ADR-informed engagement.

5.2 Interests-Based Preparation for All Processes

Divorce coaches support clients in:

- Developing interest-based proposals
- Identifying negotiable vs. non-negotiable issues
- Anchoring decisions in values and goals
- Preparing agendas and communication scripts
- Strengthening emotional regulation skills for high-intensity interactions
- Understanding the expectations and roles of each professional involved
- Engaging constructively in adversarial environments using ADR-aligned tools

5.3 Litigation Support With an ADR-Informed Mindset

Divorce coaches do not direct legal strategy. Instead, they help clients:

- Stay regulated and grounded
- Communicate effectively with legal counsel
- Clarify goals, priorities, and desired outcomes
- Avoid escalation traps and reactive decision-making
- Maintain focus on future-oriented, sustainable choices

6. Ethical Collaboration Across Disciplines

6.1 Interdisciplinary Respect & Role Clarity

Divorce coaches collaborate ethically with attorneys, mediators, therapists, financial neutrals, and court-appointed professionals, honoring boundaries and professional distinctions.

6.2 Neutral, Factual Professional Communication

Divorce coaches communicate with other professionals using neutral, factual, client-authorized information that aligns with client goals.

6.3 High-Integrity Referrals

Divorce coaches recognize when clients require specialized support and make timely, transparent referrals.

7. Safety, Trauma Sensitivity & Risk Awareness

7.1 Trauma-Sensitive Practice

Divorce coaches create psychologically safe environments, use attuned pacing, and avoid retraumatizing interventions.

7.2 Behavioral Risk Identification

Divorce coaches identify patterns such as coercive control, intimidation, manipulation, and destabilizing behavior, without diagnosing or labeling.

7.3 Collaborative Safety Planning

Divorce coaches help clients access appropriate safety and support resources when risk indicators emerge.

8. Cultural Humility & Inclusive Practice

8.1 Global Cultural Competency

Divorce coaches adapt to cultural, regional, and jurisdictional differences across DCA's international footprint.

8.2 Non-Assumptive Inquiry

Respect, curiosity, and humility shape all exploration of identity, culture, values, and lived experience.

9. Professional Accountability & Continuous Development

9.1 Commitment to Ongoing Training

Divorce coaches pursue continuing professional development at a minimum of 15 hours per year aligned with ADR, conflict resolution, family systems, trauma awareness, and advanced communication.

9.2 Reflective Practice & Peer Engagement

Engagement in consultation, mentorship, and peer communities strengthens professional excellence and accountability.

9.3 Integrity in Representation

Divorce coaches represent credentials, experience, scope, and training accurately and ethically.

10. Documentation, Confidentiality & Information Management

10.1 Purpose-Driven Documentation

Divorce coaches maintain documentation for clarity and continuity, not for legal record creation.

10.2 Confidentiality Standards

Divorce coaches uphold rigorous confidentiality, data protection, and ethical information management.

10.3 Digital Practice Governance

Divorce coaches follow best practices for privacy, professionalism, and ethical conduct across virtual and digital environments.