

# 'Therapy can save City workers thousands of pounds on divorce bills'

London Evening Standard (West End Final B) 12 Jun 2017 Martin Bentham



DIVORCING City professionals and other “high-fliers” could save tens of thousands of pounds by undergoing counselling before they agree a financial settlement, a leading London lawyer said today.

Deborah Jeff, who heads the family department at Seddons law firm, said too many people embarked on legal proceedings while suffering mental health problems that affect their judgment.

She said costs could spiral as a result, with risk particularly prevalent among those “in financial services or similar highly pressurised professions” who have the added stress of their jobs and large sums to lose.

The best way to counter the threat, she said, was to delay litigation and seek counselling — or even psychiatric treatment — to ensure mental stability was regained before details of a split were agreed.

“In extreme cases, costs can double because of untreated mental health issues,” Ms Jeff said. “One woman was described by her doctor as a ‘functioning depressive’ during proceedings. She wanted her husband to feel all the hurt and anger she felt upon her discovery of his adultery and double life with a woman 10 years younger.

“Costs increased unnecessarily, and because proceedings had begun that way it was impossible to bring the temperature down. It was eventually settled 18 months later after unnecessary legal battles and costs.” In another case a man with a mental health condition would not accept legal advice and disappeared “for weeks at a time” without giving his lawyers any instructions.

One woman with a “child-like personality” refused to deal with male lawyers and ran up “unnecessarily high” costs by requiring long meetings, where she raised points driven by emotional needs that were not relevant to the legal proceedings.

Ms Jeff said Londoners were prone to such problems because of the combination of the stress of divorce and the pressure of their jobs. Those from overseas who lacked a support network of friends in the capital could be particularly vulnerable.

She added: “Divorce or relationship break-up puts an immense strain on one’s wellbeing. Trying to carry on with normal life while psychologically and emotionally trying to process the ending of a relationship can often result in mental health issues such as anxiety and depression.

“My experience has shown it tends to be high-flying individuals with a lot of career responsibilities who are affected most. Therapy can be immensely helpful and get the parties to the healthiest conclusion.”

‘Costs can double due to untreated mental health conditions’ Deborah Jeff, below, of Seddons law firm