Divorce impacts every aspect on one’s life. While a divorce can be very intimidating and frustrating for the litigants, the approach which the attorney takes can make a significant difference in the outcome. The practice of family law includes, but is not limited to, division of property, both real and personal, determinations of custody and access time for children, and calculation of child support and spousal maintenance. Given the high-stakes involved it can become a very toxic environment for everyone involved, including the attorneys.

There are many different methods of practicing law; most of which they do not teach you in law school. With Fogel Family Law, our Minneapolis divorce attorneys believe that the most important thing we as family law attorneys can do for our clients is to recognize when we need to call on someone else’s expertise. That is the reason we strongly believe in a "team" approach to handling family law cases, especially divorces. From the very first meeting with our client, we will attempt to identify what other experts our client may need. If our client has very little financial understanding of their situation, we will put them in touch with a financial advisor. If a house needs to be sold, we will have our client meet with a realtor, a mortgage broker, and maybe even an appraiser. We call these other experts members of our "team."

Here are the five professionals we believe to be essential "team" members in any divorce situation:

1. **FINANCIAL ADVISOR.** A financial advisor can be critical in helping clients not only understand their present financial circumstances, but also how best to achieve their long-term financial goals. Remember, an equal division of assets does not always result in an “equitable” division of assets. A good financial advisor will meet with your clients, help them to develop a budget, organize their assets, help determine the impact of selling and/or buying a house, and much more. There is also a Certified Divorce Financial Analyst (CDFA). In order to be considered for this designation, a professional must have at least two years experience in the financial or legal industry. To obtain this designation, a professional must complete a series of four examinations based upon material learned from four self-study courses, including the treatment of property during divorce, alimony and child support, and tax implications of property division.
2. **CERTIFIED PUBLIC ACCOUNTANT (CPA).** A CPA can help clients deal with all financial issues, including valuation of assets, marital and non-marital tracing, income determination, spousal maintenance and child support analyses. The CPA can also help with general property settlement structuring and cash-flow analysis. The CPA should also be capable and qualified to testify in Court if necessary.

3. **MORTGAGE BANKER.** If a client is selling a house, buying a house, being awarded some interest in a house, or being ordered to pay their ex-spouse some equity from their house, it is a good idea to put them in touch with a mortgage banker. A mortgage banker can help clients decide which kind of mortgage is best for them. There are so many different types of loans with varying term lengths. The choice is extremely important and can take some time and effort to research and using a mortgage banker can be very beneficial. While often neglected by home buyers, a little research before choosing a mortgage can save your clients thousands of dollars in the long run.

4. **OUR FAMILY WIZARD(R).** Parents often struggle with communication and organization before separating, so it is no surprise that sharing important family information becomes even more difficult after the emotions of divorce are added to the equation. The result is often poor, combative communication with children having to serve as "messengers" between squabbling parents. This is both a cause and symptom of bad communication which in turn leads to more stress for everyone.

   Our Family Wizard(R) is a tool which provides a bridge for the difficult moments that are sure to arise when children’s activities span two households. It allows parents to communicate in a manner that is thoughtful and reflective, rather than reactive.

   The Our Family Wizard(R) parenting website helps eliminate harmful game playing between parents by documenting every entry on the site. The time and author of the entry is shown on each page, and entries cannot be post dated. Each page is printable to provide evidence of what information was actually provided to the other parent on a given date.

   The website was designed to be easy to use for all members of the family. It has six sections - Shared Family Calendar, Message Board, Journal, Information Bank, Expense Log, and Resources - which can be used in any combination depending on the needs of each family. While some families utilize all of the site’s life management tools, others benefit from using just one or two.
The Shared Calendar provides basic calendaring functions, as well as many additional features such as color coding, notice of conflicting events scheduled for the same child, trading of days to accommodate special circumstances and many other items designed to assist parents in coordinating the busy schedules of separate households.

The Message Board allows families to communicate directly with one another. Because it is not the same as e-mail, users will never be distracted by non-family materials such as spam mail and advertisements. It also serves as a way to shield children from harmful materials that may be associated with email. The message board acts as the secure mailbox for the family.

The Information Bank is a place where family members can access the information maintained in several areas on the site. Information on everything from health histories to shoe sizes can be readily available to both households. The Information Bank also accommodates the online storage of important files. These files can be documents, pictures or anything else that may be needed by one or both parties.

The Journal functions as a virtual diary. Family members may maintain personal and/or shared Journals for their children. Parents can give each other detailed records of the children's daily affairs in an non-intrusive manner. It is especially important because children no longer need to carry messages or notebooks between parent's households.

The Expense Log allows parents to track the shared expenses of their children. Parents can set up expense types that will automatically calculate each parent's share of an expense. Receipts can be uploaded and parents can review expenses and approve them before payment.

The Resource Section has information and links to family law professionals who use the Our Family Wizard(R) parenting website, helpful books and articles, support groups, family-friendly websites and online tools.

5. THERAPIST. One of the biggest mistakes clients make when going through a divorce is forgetting to take care of themselves. Most people are so busy worrying about everybody and
everything else that they overlook the importance of their own emotional health. I always tell my clients that if they are not emotionally healthy they will not be any help to me, their children, or themselves, during the divorce process. A therapist can play a pivotal role in this process. A therapist should also be considered on behalf of the children. Even when the children are not displaying any outward or obvious signs of distress, it is important to provide them with a "safe harbor" in which they can express their feelings in a safe and confidential therapeutic environment.

There are a number of professionals who can help make the divorce process much less intimidating. These professionals should be part of your "team" approach to handling a family law matter. We strongly believe that the job of a family law attorney is not only to provide clients with expert legal advice, but also to provide them with the tools necessary in order to move onto the next stage of their life.