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Note: This is Part 1 of two-part series on breaking down The List. In Part 2, I addressed whether the additional [advice in The List](#) is leading you in the right direction or if it could possibly have devastating and lasting long-term effects.

The [Dads Divorce Forums](#) are extremely popular and one of the more valuable features on DadsDivorce.com. In particular, one post called "[The List](#)" has received a lot of attention since it was posted in 2005.

The List is a collaborative view on how to prepare for and win a [contested](#) divorce or [custody](#) case. As an attorney who practices solely in domestic litigation, I found that many of the suggestions in The List are helpful while others should be carefully considered and evaluated.

The List sets out seven "cardinal rules" that should be considered the law in your divorce litigation. Today, I will break down each of the posted rules and give you a family law attorney's viewpoint on them.

Tomorrow, I will address whether the additional advice in The List is leading you in the right direction or if it could possibly have devastating and lasting long-term effects.

The List's Cardinal Rule No. 1: Keep your mouth shut! Loose lips sink ships!

This rule is valid in nearly any contested case. Discussions with your wife should be kept to a minimum, and only regarding [parenting time](#) issues that need to be addressed for the immediate needs of the children.

You should not be discussing the status of your custody or divorce case with your wife, or how you intend to proceed. Just like the Miranda warning states, anything you say can, and will, be used against you in a court of law. Let your attorney do the talking for you.

The List's Cardinal Rule No. 2: Never let your guard down! Watch your back!

The overarching message of this rule is to be civil with your wife even if you don't want to be. This is a great piece of advice, which is often hard to swallow.

Watch what you say and do around your wife. Just like you are looking for ways to catch her, she is waiting for you to mess up. Put on your poker face, and deal with her in a business-like manner.

The List's Cardinal Rule No. 3: Be the best dad you can be! Do whatever it takes!

This rule should be your number one rule whether you are contesting custody or not. Divorce proceedings are hard on the parties involved, but even harder on the children caught in the middle.

The court, and your children, will notice your extra efforts, and they will be rewarded for years to come. As The List indicates, make everything you do in the best interests of your children.

The List's Cardinal Rule No. 4: Get connected! Stay informed!

Having knowledge of the courts, procedures, and the laws that will be applied to your case is critical. You must have an excellent working relationship with your attorney. Your attorney must know everything that you know, good or bad, and must communicate with you frequently.

The List also advises to network and connect with dads support groups. What you are going through is tough, but you are not the first to do it. Don't be afraid to ask for help.

The List's Cardinal Rule No. 5: Hire the best father-friendly attorney you can find.

Having excellent legal representation is essential. Many attorneys are "general practitioners" who take any case that comes in their door.

These types of attorneys are missing out on the years of experience and familiarity with family courts that an attorney who specializes in domestic litigation can provide.

Family court is its own animal, and you must have an excellent attorney to navigate the system effectively.

The List's Cardinal Rule No. 6: Never give or sign anything to your soon-to-be-ex in advance.

This rule encourages you to use everything as a bargaining chip. It is a good idea to keep track of anything you give to your wife (or that she takes). Even seemingly small things add up when the numbers are crunched.

The List's Cardinal Rule No. 7: You file first!

Filing first for divorce does have advantages. You can choose the jurisdiction the case is filed in, you can prepare yourself ahead of time, and you can set the tone for how the case will proceed.

The List suggests filing only when you have a solid game plan, and only when you are ready. This suggestion is invaluable. Preparing for your divorce by gathering relevant documents, investigating your assets and liabilities, and protecting yourself is essential.

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