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PERSONAL FINANCE | TURNING POINTS

They Want to Split Up. The Housing Market Won't Let Them.

High mortgage rates and housing costs pose new problems for couples who are divorcing or separating



By [Clare Ansberry](#) [Follow](#)

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Divorced and separated couples are facing their worst nightmare: sharing a house with the person they want to get away from.

Behind the uneasy arrangement is the housing market. Mortgage rates are over 7% and average home prices have hit record highs. This means more couples can't afford to leave their home with its less than 3% mortgage interest rates and set up two different households.

Renting isn't always an option either given that rents have risen more than 9% over the last two years.

Estranged couples stuck together are trying to create boundaries. Husband on the second floor. Wife on the first. They assign his and her cupboards in the kitchen, schedule laundry time and text whereabouts as needed. One woman locks her bedroom door and keeps her supply of batteries and toilet paper in her closet.

Many don't tell colleagues about the set up because it seems unthinkable or they are embarrassed. They try to maintain civility for the kids and hold tight until they can afford to buy, rent and furnish two homes.

Danielle Tantone and her soon-to-be ex-husband, Michael Tantone, bought their Mesa, Ariz., area home in July 2022 with a mortgage of about \$600,000 that carried an interest rate of 5.62%. Both planned to refinance when mortgage rates fell.

Instead, they are divorcing and saddled with a house that has fallen in value and that neither can afford on their own.



Danielle Tanton and her soon-to-be ex-husband, Michael Tanton, are stuck with a house that has fallen in value and that neither of them can afford. PHOTO: MICHAEL TANTONE

“It’s currently worth less than we paid for it, so we are forced to short sell,” says Danielle, a nurse.

The couple, who get along and remain amicable, continued living together in the house for two months, until it became too awkward for them and confusing to their daughters.

Danielle moved out last month after finding an affordable rental on a friend’s Facebook page. Michael, an insurance agent and part-time elementary-school instructional

assistant, plans to stay in the home, although they have stopped making payments, until it sells.

“We’re negotiating with the bank to accept a price lower than the house is worth,” says Michael, who plans to live with friends temporarily.

Navigating higher costs

Some people on the brink of divorce are pulling back from actually filing because of uncertainties about jobs, and added expenses of setting up two households, on top of credit-card debt and student loans they might have.

Others are proceeding, but negotiating agreements to defer selling or refinancing the house.

Ana Lia Eyzaguirre and her ex-husband worked out a deal where she bought out 40% of his equity of their Phoenix area house, which has a low 3.25% mortgage rate, and agreed to pay the rest within three years. She would have preferred a clean break from her ex, rather than dragging the commitment on for three years, but she says it was the only option given today’s elevated mortgage rates.

“If rates weren’t so high, I would have sold the house and moved somewhere within the city or refinanced,” she says.

Homes are often a couple’s main asset and deciding what to do with it remains a main issue in divorce. Typically, couples sell the home and split the proceeds or one spouse refinances the mortgage and buys out the other spouse’s interest. But with average mortgage rates at 20-year highs, it can be harder to sell or refinance.

“We are working on what some days feels like the impossible: cohabiting and co-parenting in a 1,200-square-foot home,” says one mom sharing a ranch house in Portland, Ore., with her estranged husband.

Another divorced couple decided against buying or renting a separate Chicago-area house because of high prices and use the money for their kids’ sporting activities. A 47-year-old woman, who didn’t have her own car, bought one to get away for a few hours from the house she shares with her soon-to-be ex-husband and their two adult children.

Nancy Hetrick, a divorce financial mediator in Phoenix and founder of Smarter Divorce Solutions, worked with a couple, who had five kids and had to move 30 miles away.

“To get a four-bedroom house for each of them, they had to get out of town and go where houses cost less,” says Hetrick.

New rules

Sharon Jackson, a family-law attorney in the metro Atlanta area, has seen more estranged couples sharing homes this year because they can’t afford to move.

“They’re staying together for housing sake,” she says. It can work if couples respect each other’s private space, create separate accounts for personal expenses and child-care schedules, Jackson adds.

Liza Caldwell, co-founder of SAS for Women, a divorce-coaching business, believes it’s more common for older divorced couples to continue living together. Regardless of age, she says, it’s important to create new boundaries.

“If you can’t stay married and you can’t leave, you can create a new set of rules to symbolize that things are not the same,” she says, like buying your own groceries and doing your own laundry.



Marilyn Maycock says she and her estranged husband lived together in their shared home for months after she filed for divorce. PHOTO: ORIE THORNTON

Marilyn Maycock, 69, a retired microbiologist, says she is too old for new rules, but she and her estranged husband did have boundaries in their shared home, which had a 3.5% mortgage rate.

Maycock, who lives in Snellville, Ga., filed for divorce in August 2022 and her spouse didn’t move out until April 2023, she says. During that time, they barely spoke. She bought her own groceries and he bought his. It helped, she says, that she could get away and go to her son’s house to care for grandkids.

She finally decided to refinance her home, paying a 6.45% rate—well above the previous 3.5% rate—to buy out her husband’s interest. She says her husband, who couldn’t be reached for comment, has since moved.

“I’m going to have to wait until rates go down to refinance it again,” she says.

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