

WHAT IS A DIVORCE MASTER?

A Divorce Master is an attorney with experience in family law who has been appointed by the Court of Common Pleas to conduct the trial in a contested divorce action. The Divorce Master will meet with the attorneys and the parties before a trial is scheduled in order to identify the contested issues (which could include any or all of the following: fault divorce, two-year separation, irretrievable breakdown of the marriage, distribution of property, temporary alimony pending the litigation, alimony after the divorce, counsel fees, costs, or expenses).

The Divorce Master will help the attorneys and the parties obtain the information necessary to resolve these issues (called "discovery"). This will help eliminate some of the disagreements and may enable the parties to resolve their issues through negotiation. The Divorce Master will then conduct the trial with respect to issues that cannot be resolved between the parties. This trial will be conducted with the same formality as if it were being conducted by a Judge. After the trial, the Divorce Master will then write a formal report to the Court, recommending a resolution for these issues.

If either party disagrees with the recommendation, he or she can ask a Judge to review it for errors by filing "exceptions." The Judge will review the transcript of the master's hearing, the exhibits admitted at hearing, and the master's report. The Judge will not hold another hearing and will not consider information that is not contained in the transcript or exhibits. If the Judge finds errors in the Divorce Master's Report, then the Judge may adopt a final order that differs from the Report. If exceptions are filed, the Judge will review the entire report, not just the parts addressed in the exceptions.