

INTERESTS, NOT POSITIONS

Figuring out what you actually want

The most useful thing you can do before any negotiation is get clear on what you're really after. Not the demand you'd open with, but the thing underneath it. This is a plain explanation of the difference, with a long sample list to help you find your own.

Positions vs. interests

A **position** is the thing you say you want: "I want the house." An **interest** is the why underneath it: "I want the kids to keep their school," or "I want to feel financially secure," or "I don't want to have to move twice in a year."

The difference matters more than it sounds. Positions tend to collide head-on, because there's only one house and you both want it. Interests usually don't, because there's more than one way to meet them. Once we know *why* you want the house, there may be three or four ways to get you there, and some of them might work for your spouse too. Collaborative negotiation works by digging past the positions to the interests, then building solutions that hit as many of them as possible.

Positions are what you fight over. Interests are what you can actually solve.

So the prep work is this: figure out your interests before you sit down. What follows is a list I hear, in some form, over and over. It isn't a form to fill out, and most of it won't be yours. Read through, mark the ones that land, ignore the rest, and write down anything that's missing.

Money and security

- I want financial stability I can actually count on.
- I want to understand our finances and how to manage them.
- I want to learn to live within my means, and I want the same for my co-parent.
- I want to get out of debt, and stay out.
- I want to start saving.
- I want to keep a home and a lifestyle close to what we had.
- I want to be able to retire someday.
- I want to keep the cost of the divorce down.
- I want to rebuild my credit.
- I want a settlement that will actually last.

Work and the future

- I want to finish my education, or get more of it.
- I want to learn a skill or a profession.
- I want to be able to choose the work I do, and maybe change careers down the road.
- I want work I don't dread.
- I want to be able to stay home with the kids for a while, or not work outside the home at all.
- I want some control over my hours.

How you come through it

- I want to be treated fairly and with respect, and to treat my spouse the same way.
- I want both of us to keep our dignity intact.
- I want to settle this amicably, and keep it private.
- I want to be able to trust my ex, and to be trusted.
- I want a respectful relationship with my ex going forward.
- I want to keep good relationships with our mutual friends and each other's families.
- I want to know we made our best effort before ending the marriage.
- I want to handle my own anger, sadness, or fear better.
- I want to keep my sobriety, or keep working on what I need to.
- I want my spouse to understand how much this hurt.
- I want to settle it in a way that fits my values or faith.
- I want closure, and to start healing.

The pace

- I want this done soon.
- I want to slow down and not rush it.
- I want it finished by a certain date: a birthday, an anniversary, before the school year.

Your kids

There's more to say here than anywhere else, so this gets its own set. It still sits alongside everything above, not on top of it.

Their well-being and stability

- I want our kids to know the divorce isn't their fault, and that we both love them.
- I want them to feel secure and well-adjusted in both homes.
- I want a parenting schedule that's predictable, and that we both honor.
- I want them to be able to stay in their school, and live close to both of us.

Time with them

- I want consistent, meaningful time with both parents.
- I want us to share parenting time fairly.
- I want enough flexibility in the schedule to adjust around the kids' real needs.

Keeping them out of the middle

- I don't want our kids carrying messages, or feeling they have to pick a side.
- I want them free to enjoy the other parent's home without walking on eggshells.
- I want to keep money and adult disputes away from them.

Raising them together

- I want consistent rules, expectations, and discipline across both homes.
- I want us to make the big decisions about school, health, and activities together.
- I want us to communicate about the kids respectfully, with a shared app like Our Family Wizard for the logistics.
- I want us to be thoughtful about when and how new partners meet the kids.
- I want us aligned on money for the kids, including setting something aside for college.

What to do with your list

What you end up with is the real material of the negotiation. Not a list of demands, but a picture of what you're actually trying to protect. It's normal for some of your interests to be in tension with each other, and it's normal for some to overlap with your spouse's more than you'd expect. Both of those are useful to know going in.

This is exactly what the first stage of the [Process Roadmap](#) is for: getting your interests on the table before anyone starts proposing solutions. Bring your list there.

BUILD IT INTERACTIVELY

The Interest Explorer

If you'd rather work through it step by step than start from a blank page, the **Interest Explorer** walks you through the whole thing – naming your interests, digging past your positions to the *why* underneath, and ranking what matters most. Everything you type stays on your own device; nothing is sent anywhere.