

Selling your home guide.



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Keeping or selling the house.

Going through a divorce or separation is never easy. And when it comes to selling a property at the same time, it can just add to the stress you're already experiencing. While a good real estate agent will be able to help, there are lots of things to consider.

Will you sell or keep the house?

When you end a de-facto relationship or marriage, dividing property will be necessary. If you hold property as joint tenants it is assumed the split will be 50/50 unlike tenants in common where the split of proceeds may vary according to what was agreed at purchase; or a Court directs otherwise.

There are a number of options for you to consider:

1. Buy out your partner.

You may be able to keep your home. You'll have to buy out your partner, which could involve refinancing and starting a new mortgage. If you have other assets, such as an investment property, you might be able to agree on an asset swap. Alternatively your partner may offer to buy you out.

2. Sell the property.

The other option is to sell your home. Since it is a shared asset, if you can't come to a mutual agreement, the Family Court will decide whether the property will be split down the middle or if one partner gets a larger share than the other.

3. Keep the property for a period of time.

You and your former partner might also agree to keep the property for a period of time. For example, if a child is in high school and neither of you want to cause any disruption to their life. One party may be able to live in the home until the child finishes school, but will likely be responsible for mortgage payments or some form of rental payment until the home is sold.

4. Agree that one partner should keep the property.

If one partner will be keeping the property, make sure you obtain an appraisal if the value of the home is in question.

Refinancing your property and buying out your partner?

If your home is in both of your names, you can't simply remove the name of your former partner from the loan agreement. You need to come to a mutual agreement first and then you can go through the refinancing procedure.

Your bank will do a valuation of the property to work out its current market value for lending purposes. If you plan to buy out your partner, Westpac or your bank will want to know:

- If you have the necessary funds to buy-out your former partner.
- Your record of repayments.
- Your savings and current earnings.

Child support payments can also be considered as part of your income. Lenders generally need six months of statements from Centrelink to confirm that you're receiving the payments regularly. Some lenders may not consider support for older children to be included. You may need to contact your lender for more information on what is accepted as additional income sources.

Preparing your property for open homes.

Once your home is on the market, both you and your ex-partner will want to get the highest possible sale price. In order to do that, you might need to spend some money on things like:

- Renovations and repairs.
- Garden maintenance.
- Cleaning.
- Home staging.

The condition of your property will determine how much you need to shell out for renovations, repairs and styling. If your agent recommends that these improvements could make a big difference to the sale price then it's important that you and your ex-partner communicate and agree on what to spend and where.

You'll also need to agree on who will be responsible for getting the work and preparation carried out.

How to prepare your property for sale.

The condition of your property can make a big difference to its valuation and ultimate sale price. Buyers are usually going to pay more for a property that feels clean, well maintained and ready to move into.

We've compiled a list of 7 things you can do to help you get the highest possible sale price for your home without blowing the budget.

1. Increase your kerb appeal.

When it comes to real estate, appearances matter. An attractive property is more likely to entice passing buyers and encourage them to have a further look at what your property has to offer.

Simple ways to increase your kerb appeal can be:

- The addition of new house numbers.
- Cleaning the front verandah.
- Adding some striking plants and pots and ensuring your garden is presentable.
- Painting the front door, gutters, railings and window frames.
- Repairing any front steps, railings or pathways.
- Brushing away all dirt and cobwebs.

2. Remove any clutter.

When inspecting homes, potential buyers are looking for clean and spacious areas where they can see themselves living. Removing everyday items as well as personal possessions such as family photos and children's toys can allow prospective buyers to mentally 'move in' and make themselves at home.

If you are a little tight on space, it may be worthwhile taking out some furniture and/or decor and putting it in storage while you're selling.

3. Make your kitchen shine.

A full kitchen makeover can take up a lot of time and be quite expensive. You can, however still add a lot of value by making minor repairs and concentrating on some of the more inexpensive cosmetic changes that can transform this all important zone into an inviting, modern living space.

A thorough scrub down is a good place to start to make sure your kitchen is sparkling clean. Other things to consider may be:

- Painting tired or old-fashioned cabinets a neutral colour.
- Re-grouting old tiles with a grouting pen which you can pick up from the local hardware store.
- Updating door knobs, kitchen handles and old taps.

The last step is to clear everything off the bench tops and dress it with smart, tasteful items such as a bright bowl of fresh fruit or fresh flowers.

4. Scrub your bathroom.

Many prospective buyers will forgive an old-fashioned bathroom, but not a dirty one. Make sure to clean down every surface to make your bathroom look good as new.

Just like in the kitchen, consider a fresh coat of neutral paint on the walls and re-grouting drab tiles. If your budget can stretch, installing a new set of taps, handles and even towel rails can make all the difference.

Finish it off with some new fluffy towels and maybe a few fancy touches like a scented candle or luxury soap.

5. Let in the light.

Natural light always makes a property look great, so let it in wherever you can to make your home feel bright and spacious to potential buyers. Be sure to open all your curtains and blinds, wash all your windows, prune any plants or trees that might block light out, and think about replacing heavy or dark drapes with some lighter ones.

6. Brush up on painting.

Painting your walls is one of the cheapest and simplest ways to quickly transform your home. If any part of your home is looking worse for wear, with a little work, you can do it yourself or you can choose to hire a professional.

7. Don't forget outside.

For most Australians, outdoor living comes naturally, and the garden is just another room of the house. Sprucing up your outdoor areas by fixing fences, cleaning pavers, weeding the garden and adding new plants could add thousands to your final sale price.

What is your home worth?

Working out what your home is worth.

When you're looking to sell, one of the first things you'll want to have an understanding of is how much your home is worth. This is crucial when it comes to getting your finances in order, agreeing on an agent and understanding the possible financial position you'll be in once your property is sold.

There are three main ways to get an idea of how much your property is worth: a bank valuation, an appraisal and an online estimation.

1. A bank valuation.

A property valuation is the most formal way of estimating the value of your property. It's generally done by an independent professional valuer who works with a banking or financial institution. A valuation will take a more in-depth look at:

- Your property's location.
- Nearby amenities.
- Infrastructure of your neighbourhood.
- The structural condition of your property.
- The visual appeal of your property.
- Renovations and home additions.
- Ease of access.
- Local zoning restrictions.

By taking into account every aspect of a home, a valuer can make an accurate valuation of not only your home's current value, but it's future value as well. Valuations are generally more on the conservative side, taking into account the price that the property would sell for in the event that a buyer can't make repayments.

2. An online estimation.

You can use an online estimation tool to get a rough guide of what your property is worth. Online estimation tools will generally work off transactional data from providers such as CoreLogic and Australian Property Monitors. A computer algorithm will generate an estimate based off the data that's available.

Before you meet with an agent, it's a good idea to use an online estimation tool. If you have an idea of what your home's worth, it'll make you better prepared when you start comparing appraisals. Keep in mind though, an online estimate isn't a valuation - rather, they're price estimates and they provide indicative averages.

Here is a comprehensive property estimation tool that may help you find out how much your home might be worth.

[OpenEstimates by OpenAgent](#)

For a more comprehensive property report, please visit your nearest Westpac Branch and speak with one of the Home Finance Managers.

3. An appraisal.

A property appraisal is done by a real estate agent to get a rough idea of what your home might sell for in the current market. Before you appoint an agent, they will typically visit your home and come back to you with a sale price estimation. They do this by comparing your home with similar properties that have recently sold in the same area. Agents will generally give you an estimated sale price range (between \$x and \$x) or a starting price (offers from \$x).

Generally, this involves looking at homes that have sold in your area that are of similar size, condition and with similar features. If they can't find a perfect match, they'll base their appraisal on the condition of your property and make adjustments based on their past experience.

Like every home seller, you will have a 'wish' price in mind or a price that you won't want to go below. It's important to remain impartial and realistic when it comes to the sale price of your home, because sometimes home seller price expectations can be greatly influenced by emotion rather than fact.

Comparing agent appraisals.

When you start engaging agents and they give you their appraisals, how do you know which one is the most realistic?

Generally, if your property appraisals from each agent are roughly the same, then you can be confident that the guide is a realistic expectation. If the appraisals are quite different, then you may need to understand how the agent has arrived at that price. There are some things that you can do:

- Get an online estimation so you can compare it to the appraisal by your real estate agent.
- Talk to the agent to discuss how they arrived at their appraisal price.
- Consider the reasons why agents arrived at their appraisal figure.
- The highest appraisal may be overvaluing your property to get your business and the lowest may be undervaluing your property to get a quick sale.
- The appraisal price given by individual real estate agents can differ as they may use different methods to arrive at a price. Some things to ask your agent can be:
- The positioning of your property in comparison to another property. A property in a quiet area is often worth more than a property on a busy street.
- The quality and fit out of your property can make a difference to price. This can include electrical fittings and the age of your kitchen and bathroom.
- The level of maintenance to your property and surrounding homes can impact its value.
- The layout of your property compared to others around the area.

After further discussion, you may be able to better choose the agent that you felt gave you the most accurate appraisal.

If you are still unsure or confused, paying for a valuation of your home may be something to consider. A property valuer will be objective and use more tools to arrive at a more accurate valuation price for your property.

How to find the right agent to sell during a divorce.

When you're going through a divorce or separation, finding the right real estate agent is important for successfully selling your home. Not only do you want a high performing agent, but you also want someone who's honest and who knows how to deal with both parties sensitively and compassionately.

To ensure you get the right agent to sell your home, it's a good idea to interview at least three to get an idea of:

- Their knowledge of the local area.
- Their fees.
- How they work with vendors.
- If they have experience with divorce and separation sales.
- Their proposed plan for marketing and selling your home.
- Their appraisal of your home.

It's strongly encouraged that both parties should meet face to face with any agent they're considering so that they're on the same page. From initial appraisals and interviews, all the way to the finish line. A big factor in making sure you get the best outcome is communication, and all parties should be present whenever you meet to discuss the property.

This is important, because if there's a misstep, it could cost you financially. If you can't agree on an agent, then your case is likely to end up in court.

If you want help to find an agent, you may want to consider organisations such as OpenAgent, an independent service that uses a rating system based on agent performance, proximity and suitability to your needs.

[Find a local agent.](#)

Interviewing real estate agents.

After you've done your agent research and compiled a list of shortlisted candidates, you might be wondering "how do I choose the right one to sell my home?"

To ensure you make an informed decision and choose the agent best suited to you, here are 10 questions to ask when interviewing a real estate agent.

It is always best to ask each agent the same questions so you can compare your thoughts based on all the facts.

Question 1: How long have you been a real estate agent?

In any real estate market there are some agents who have more experience than others. This isn't the only factor you should be considering, but it is definitely important. Part of what you are paying for when you hire a great real estate agent is someone who has "seen it all" and knows how to read people and situations.

A real estate agent who has been selling properties for many years will have a lot of experience negotiating prices and terms on behalf of their clients. You want to find someone who can help you through the process and offer you the benefit of his or her years of experience.

On the other hand, you are balancing this with the energy, enthusiasm and hunger that can come from an agent newer to the industry. Sometimes less experienced agents work the hardest to get you a great outcome.

Question 2: What properties similar to mine have you sold in the last 6 months?

Knowing who is selling homes similar to yours in the area will help you make sure you have the right agents on your short-list to start with.

But once you know you have the right agents you are interviewing, it is worth noting that every property is a little bit different. Perhaps your property has a big backyard or is in a particularly special street?

If you are interviewing an agent who has been recently selling properties like yours, nearby to yours, in the last 6 months then there is a good chance he or she already has some suitable buyers in mind. Ask them if they have any buyers in mind that recently missed out on a property like yours.

Question 3: What is the sentiment in the market for properties like mine?

A good real estate agent who has a lot of experience as well as recent experience in your area should be able to give you an intelligent and considered answer to this question. Follow up with a few additional questions to gather extra details:

- How many people are coming out to open homes at the moment? How does that compare to this time last year?
- What is the current auction clearance rate in the market? Is that up or down?
- Is it harder to get listings or to sell properties at the moment?

Asking these kinds of questions will give you a good sense of the real estate agent's depth of understanding and knowledge of the market. It will also show that you do your research and that you are a savvy seller.

Question 4: What would your past clients say your strengths are - how would they see you as different to other agents in the area?

All agents are different. That's why there's no perfect single answer to the question.

Beyond their pure track record, there are a number of different factors that come into the question of who is the right real estate agent for you:

- Personality and rapport: Do you get along well with this real estate agent? Do you feel comfortable with them in your home and showing others around your home?
- Trust: Is this real estate agent someone who you believe, who you feel you can trust to tell you the truth about your property and what buyers are saying?
- Individual needs: Does this real estate agent deal well with your particular needs?

Question 5: What would you emphasise in selling my home?

Another way of asking this question is: "What is the 30 second pitch for my home?"

Real estate agents will meet a lot of people and have the chance to tell them about your property. You want to hear how they would describe the selling points of your home, to see if you are happy with the way they would market it to prospective buyers.

There is a good chance that if you find their sales pitch compelling, so will prospective buyers.

Question 6: What type of sale process do you recommend and why?

There are different ways to go about selling a property. And different methods work for different types of properties in different markets.

The top real estate agents will be able to clearly explain which method is best for you and your ex-partner and why.

The most common ways to market a property are:

- Fixed Price: The property is advertised at a fixed price e.g. \$500,000.
- Offers Over: E.g. "Offers over \$450,000".
- Tender: Private bids are requested, often with a 10% deposit.
- By Negotiation: When a buyer is interested in making an offer, the real estate agent asks them to submit a contract or may negotiate verbally.
- Auction: The Agent sets an auction date and designs a marketing campaign in the lead up to that date (usually this lasts 4-6 weeks). The sale happens publicly and an auctioneer runs the process.

There are often good reasons to choose one of these methods over another, so it is important to understand why each agent recommends a particular method for you and your property.

Question 7: What marketing and advertising would you recommend as part of that process?

It is typical in Australia for real estate agents to propose a marketing and advertising plan for your property. This usually involves a significant upfront cash outlay for you, the seller, and is therefore a crucial part of the overall package.

Like with sales methods, there is no one right answer for the best kind of marketing plan. It depends on the property you are trying to sell and the market you are operating in. The biggest driver is where potential buyers of your property are looking for real estate listings.

Most marketing plans will involve some combination of:

- Advertising in digital channels.
- Professional photography.
- Signage on your property.
- Real estate agency catalogues.
- Local flyers/mail-box drops.
- Mail/email marketing to their buyers lists.
- Local newspapers / classifieds.

Question 8: Using that sales method and marketing plan, what sale price do you think is achievable?

This is the question you are probably the most interested in hearing the answer to. We recommend asking it towards the end of the interview as it gives you a chance to show the real estate agent you are serious and you have done your research.

The most important thing is to ask for examples that they are basing their estimate on. You should also ask for a range: "if everything goes perfectly, what price could you expect; and what is the low end of the range, if this was a fire sale?". Once you have an estimated range from two or three real estate agents, you should have a good sense of what the market will pay for your property at that point in time.

Question 9: How long would you expect my property to be on the market before getting offers in that price range?

This will more than likely be a range. But it will give you a good idea of their expectations, and you can compare to the average time on the market to understand how quickly this agent is likely to get results.

Typically, the most ideal time to sell is within the first few weeks on the market. This can however be affected by factors such as the current market, state of the economy and your own personal circumstances and reasons for selling.

Question 10: What commission do you charge?

If it hasn't come up in conversation already, you will need to directly ask what commission the agent charges for their services.

A great real estate agent will be able to confidently justify their price if it is above cheaper alternatives. In our experience, you will be better off with the perfect real estate agent rather than the cheapest real estate agent.

Why do we say that? Well if you look at the high-end and low-end estimates of the real estate agents you will quickly realise that the difference in price far outweighs differences between commission structures. The key instead is choosing an agent who is capable of delivering and who will work hard to get you a price in the upper end of the range.

Download and print out this handy agent interview checklist.

Selling your property.

Reviewing offers.

When offers are made on a home it can often be a point of disagreement for separated couples. Generally, this is because one party is happy to sell while the other wants to wait for a higher offer. This can lead to serious disagreements, but the right real estate agent can help to reduce the stress by getting both parties to focus on the facts of the sale:

- If the offered price was fair, an agent will be able to show both parties examples of similar properties nearby that have sold for a similar price.
- If the offer was too low, the real estate agent may suggest that you ask for a higher offer or wait until a more realistic offer is made.
- If neither party can agree, the agent may be able to help them come to a mutually agreeable (and realistic) price.

Dividing the sums.

It's not your real estate agent's job to divide the sums of the sale. That's to be decided by you and your former partner through legal advice, or by the Family Court of Australia or Family Court of WA. Your real estate agent's job is to get the highest possible price for your property and to help you both communicate and cooperate in the interests of a successful sale.

After your property is sold, it's time to put the past behind you. In the best-case scenario, both parties will feel they got a fair deal and will be able to move on. Good divorce lawyers and real estate agents may help you to get the best outcome from the sale of your home. Your next step is to take your share of the funds and set yourself up for the next stage of your life. For more information on this, visit our [plan for life guide](#).

Check that you have:

- Researched how much your property is worth.
- Arranged for at least two separate real estate agents to present you with a marketing plan and appraise the likely selling price of your property.
- Asked prospective agents for sales records of similar properties for comparison.
- Chosen an independent legal/conveyancer representative to prepare the vendor's statement and contract for sale.
- Prior to selecting and signing with your preferred agent, considered negotiating the rate of commission and the cost of marketing and advertising.
- Reviewed the sales authority and other documentation the agent has provided.
- Provided written instructions to your agent clearly stating which items in the property are not to be included in the sale.
- Agreed with your agent on the price the property is to be advertised at.
- In the sales authority, specified the service the agent is to perform for you.
- Given your agent instructions about the offers you are willing to consider.
- Discussed and settled the terms of your proposed contract, including the time for settlement with your agent, conveyancer or legal practitioner.
- Before accepting an offer on your property, discussed the details.
- Having accepted the offer, confirmed with your agent that the full deposit stated on the contract of sale has been paid by the buyer.
- Arranged a legal practitioner or conveyancer to do the conveyancing, if not doing it yourself.

What you should do after selling your property.

1. Keep copies of all paperwork related to the closing and settlement after you sell your property.

Whether you keep hard copies or electronic duplicates, it is always important to hold on to all relevant document in case you need to review it in the future.

2. Stay on top of tax laws after you sell an investment property by seeking advice.

If you've sold an investment property, you'll likely make a capital gain or capital loss. It is therefore important to keep up to date with current laws and regulations to know how it might affect you. For more information on capital gains tax when selling a rental property, visit [here](#).

3. Understand the potential benefits for your super.

From 1 July 2018, if you are 65 years old or older and meet the eligibility requirements, you may be able to choose to make a downsizer contribution into your superannuation of up to \$300,000 from the proceeds of selling your home. For more information, visit [here](#).

4. Decide what to do with the proceeds of sale.

If you sell and don't immediately purchase a new property, you will need to decide on a secure place to put your money. Some things to keep in mind is the safety of the funds, if there is a reasonable rate of return and ease of access to your money.

5. Review your personal finances.

If your situation changes before you are ready to buy another property, for example getting a promotion or relocating for a job; you may need to rethink your finances and calculate how much of your income you can contribute to repayments. Speak to your local banker or financial planner.

6. Consider your next home needs.

Understanding your home ownership needs compared to your wants can help you:

- Save time as you will not look at properties that don't "fit".
- Put your emotions aside to the best of your ability.
- Make the best decisions when your budget meets reality.
- Act quickly and confidently when the right home comes along.

This guide was written in collaboration with the independent real estate agent finder OpenAgent, who can help you find the right agent for the sale of your property.



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