

Family Law Legal Help

Introduction

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Get Organized

Family law is complex. It's a process. For most separating couples, it takes more than one year from the date of separation to the date when the divorce is finalized. The process may continue even after you reach a final order or agreement on parenting as such arrangements can be revisited as the children's needs change. Throughout the process, it is important to be organized and keep good records. It can be helpful to create a binder with information like: legal questions and answers, parenting issues, financial information, issues to be resolved, legal documents, etc.

When it comes to representing yourself in your family law matter, nothing is more important than preparation. Being organized is the first step you can take to help ensure a positive outcome in your case.



DIY Tools

Use the **[Family Law Information Worksheet](#)** to note key information related to your case.

Get Help

SupremeCourtBC.ca provides a series of Family Law Guidebooks for Self-Representing Litigants. Review this information and take notes when you have questions or need more information.

In BC, there are a range of free legal help services and resources available to support you through the separation and divorce process. This Guidebook provides information on how you can get help to move your divorce forward. It outlines free and low-cost legal help options, and categorizes available legal help services and resources. In addition, this Guidebook encourages you to hire a lawyer based on how much you can afford and assists you to choose the right lawyer for you.

Filing Fees

Even if you are going to handle all aspects of your divorce yourself, there are costs to be paid for filing court documents. These are called Filing Fees. There may be other costs to pay as well, such as payments for Sheriff services and witness fees.



Read the Rules

See the [BC Supreme Court fees](#) for more information.

Services

In BC, there are a range of free legal help services available to individuals going through separation and divorce. The information below provides a summary of these services, with information on how to learn more about accessing these services.

Legal Aid BC

Legal Aid BC can provide legal advice, representation and information for those who qualify. They usually will only provide legal representation in family matters for those who meet their income requirements and where safety is at risk.

Family Justice Counsellors

Family Justice Counsellors (FJs) are trained mediators and family law specialists that work out of more than 40 Family Justice Centres throughout BC, as well as Justice Access Centres. FJs help families resolve their issues about guardianship, parenting arrangements, contact with a child and support. There are no costs for services.

BC Lawyer Referral Service

Access Probono provides BC's Lawyer Referral Service which helps British Columbians get legal advice and find a lawyer, regardless of their income. Users of this service can schedule a free 30-minute meeting with a lawyer to discuss their legal issues, including questions about separation and divorce. Visit the website to learn more or call: 1-800-663-1919 to book an appointment.

Ask JES

The Justice Education Society (JES) provides free answers to legal questions. Each year, this service responds to thousands of inquiries across a wide spectrum of legal issues, including separation and divorce. Have a legal question? Ask JES! Visit LegalHelpBC.ca to use the live chat (Monday to Friday, from 11am to 2pm) or call toll free: 1-855-875-8867.

Family LawLINE

Legal Aid BC provides this phone-based service for low-income households with a family law issue. If you have 4 or less people in your household and earn about \$50,000 per year or less (net \$3680/month), you may be eligible for free legal advice over the telephone from a family lawyer. See the website for more information and to see if you qualify.

Family Duty Counsel

Legal Aid BC provides free legal advice by Family Duty Counsel lawyers that are located in many courthouses throughout the province. This assistance is most often to help clients in court on the day of their hearing or trial. Low-income individuals going through separation or divorce may be eligible for up to 3 hours of legal advice from Duty Counsel. See the website for more information and to see if you qualify.

Rise Women's Legal Centre

Rise is an independently operated legal clinic that provides support to women with family law matters, including divorce, custody, protection orders, support, etc. Rise is a teaching clinic, with services provided by supervised students. Rise determines the type and level of assistance they provide. Visit their website to learn more and complete their intake form.

Clicklaw HelpMap

The Clicklaw HelpMap provides a searchable directory of legal help services available in BC. Users can search by topic and/or location to identify family law services available in their area. There are currently more than 90 BC services listed under family law.

Resources

In addition to these SupremeCourtBC.ca Family Law Guidebooks, there is a range of information available online to help British Columbians move forward with their separation or divorce. It is free to access all the websites listed below.

HowToSeparate.ca

This website provides an online course to help British Columbians learn more about separation and divorce in BC. It is free to use the website and no registration is required. Each year, more than 50,000 users learn about the legal process of separation. Course content is divided into 2 sections: Working it Out and Going to Court. The course includes text, videos and worksheets.

Legal Aid BC Family Law Website

The website provides a broad range of information to help British Columbians learn more about separation and divorce in BC. The site includes practical guides, information and videos. Among the many resources available on this site, users can access a Separation Agreement Guide, Uncontested Divorce Guides, the multilingual Living Together Living Apart publication and more.

BC Government: Family Justice

The BC government provides a range of information to help separating British Columbians. From the government website, users can learn more about Family Justice Counsellors, the Family Maintenance Enforcement Program, family law court forms, inter-jurisdictional support orders and more.

Dial-A-Law: Divorce and Separation

People's Law School provides Dial-a-law resources that provide information and an audio script on a range of legal help topics. The separation and divorce content covers some of the basics of family law legal issues, such as Requirements for Divorce, Desk Order Divorce, Responding to Divorce Proceedings and more.

Parenting After Separation Course

This online course is provided by the BC Ministry of Attorney General. For many separating parents with issues in BC Provincial Court, it is mandatory to take the course. The course focuses on the emotional experience of separation, communication, problem-solving and making decisions in the best interests of the children.

FamiliesChange.ca

This website provides age-appropriate information for kids, teens and parents about separation and divorce. It is not a how to divorce website. The content helps British Columbians deal with the realities of coping with family changes due to separation and divorce. The site includes unique resources for kids and teens to

deal with their feels, communicate with their parents and understand that it's not their fault.

Clicklaw

This website provides thousands of legal help resources available from a range of organizations in BC. The Family Law section includes more than 300 publications, websites, videos and other resources. There is also a section on Common Questions that is especially helpful.

Working with a Lawyer

You don't need to have a lawyer to get a divorce. Lawyers are expensive and cost may be a barrier for you. However, family law is complex and even if you are going to represent yourself, it is a good idea to have a legal expert – a lawyer – provide assistance. The information below will help you understand ways that you may be able to hire a lawyer to work with you in a way that meets your needs and budget.

Should I Hire a Lawyer?

Yes. Even if you are going to represent yourself, a lawyer can provide expert guidance that can make a big difference in the outcomes of your case. Family law cases involve important decisions that will impact the rest of your life. When it comes to parenting issues, support and property division, it is important to understand your legal rights and options.

A lawyer can do more than just represent you in court. A lawyer can help guide through separation and divorce, supporting you through what can be a very difficult time in your life. They can explain how complex legal issues and help you understand how law and case law can apply to your situation.

A lawyer is on your side. Their job is to make sure that your interests are represented and expressed. They will explain what your rights are and can identify where you may have risk. You can be completely honest with your lawyer, which can be a great relief.

Hiring a lawyer can be expensive, but not hiring a lawyer may ultimately cost more. You need to consider your budget and how much you can afford for legal services.

In BC, lawyer rates usually start around \$250 per hour and can be much higher than that. It is also important to consider the complexity of your case. The more you and your former spouse can agree, the less you will have to pay in lawyer fees. A complex divorce can cost each party over \$50,000.

To learn more about how to hire a lawyer that fits your budget, see the next section on “Unbundled legal services”.

Unbundled Legal Services

Many lawyers offer “unbundled” legal services. This allows you to use a lawyer for some parts of your case and do other parts yourself. Unbundled family law lawyers provide a range of services that you can choose from a-la-carte. Most provide fixed fee pricing, so that you know what you are going to get for the fee you will be charged.

Unbundled legal services help support you to move your case forward, providing expert opinion that can assist you at various steps of the process. For example, you might hire a lawyer to draft your Notice of Family Claim, but choose to represent yourself through the judicial case conference process.



Learn More

You can read more about unbundled legal services on the [Law Society of BC website](#).



Get Help

You can find a lawyer by searching the [BC Directory of Unbundled Family Law Lawyers](#).

If you choose unbundled legal services, be sure to talk to your lawyer about your budget. Discuss how best to use the funds you have available. Also keep in mind that things may not go smoothly with your former spouse. Try to keep some money available just in case you need more legal advice before your case is completely concluded.

Collaborative Family Lawyers

Another way to save money on lawyer fees is for you and your former spouse to both hire collaborative family lawyers. The goal of collaborative family lawyers is to settle your case fairly, without having a trial. The lawyers are hired to reach a settlement, not to go to court. The two of you and your lawyers all sign an agreement promising to work together to find acceptable solutions. To learn more, visit the [**BC Collaborative Roster Society**](#).

Legal Aid Lawyers

Legal Aid BC provides free legal services to people with low incomes. They may provide legal information, advice and representation for certain legal issues. They will only provide representation in family cases that involve serious issues usually where safety is at risk. To learn more, visit [**Legal Aid BC**](#).

Choosing a Lawyer

Hiring a lawyer is a big decision. Having a good lawyer that you trust can make a big difference on how your case moves forward. It is important to select the lawyer who is the right fit for you – based on your budget and your personal preference. It is also important that you ensure they provide the type of service you are looking for: full service, unbundled services, collaborative lawyer, etc.

It's a good idea to meet with more than one lawyer. Provide an outline of your family law case, along with specific legal issues or questions that you have prepared. Also, be prepared to talk about your budget and ask about their billing practices. Treat these meetings like job interviews, where you are trying to discover who can do the best job for you.

Learn More



You can check whether a lawyer has been subject to Law Society discipline by looking them up in the [**BC Law Society's Lawyer Directory**](#). You can search by the lawyer's last name, how long they have been called to the bar in British Columbia, and if there is a record of them being disciplined by the Law Society you can find out more details.



Before your meet with a lawyer, or talk to a lawyer on the phone, complete the **Family Law Information Worksheet**. This worksheet provides the key information a lawyer will want to know about your case. Also, if you have specific questions, be sure to write these down before the meeting.