

Get Help

Hiring a Lawyer

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What Can a Lawyer Do for You?

A lawyer can do more than just represent you in Court. They can be your guide through a difficult time in your life. They can explain how complex legal issues apply to you.

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 can ultimately cost more. A lawyer could help settle a matter quickly, before expenses add up. Having a lawyer also increases your chance of success in Court. Not hiring a lawyer could leave you at risk of an unnecessary loss in Court.

If you are injured and are looking for compensation, many lawyers will take your case on a “contingency” basis. This means that they will not get paid until you get paid.

Many lawyers are now offering “unbundled” legal services. This allows you to use a lawyer for some parts of your case, and do other parts yourself. For example, you might hire a lawyer to draft your Notice of Civil Claim, but choose to represent yourself through the discovery phase.

If you are in a legal dispute, there is no question you will be better off with a good lawyer. However, finding a good lawyer can be hard. If you have not used a lawyer before, or rarely used a lawyer, it can be hard to tell who will be good. Lawyers are

often highly specialized. A lawyer who did a wonderful job on your friend's divorce may not be able to help with a landlord dispute.

Get Help



Lawyer Referral Service This service will put you in touch with a lawyer who will meet to discuss your case for 15 minutes free of charge. This service used to cost \$25, but has recently been made free. After this initial meeting the lawyer may provide you with advice, and you may be able to work out an arrangement to hire them.



Learn More

For more information on how to hire a lawyer, see also the **Justice Education Society's website on free and low cost legal services**.

Before You Hire a Lawyer

What Information to Learn About Your Lawyer

Hiring a lawyer is a big decision. Having a good lawyer who you trust will make your problems much more manageable.

All lawyers are certainly not the same. The law is very specialized. Lawyers who are excellent at one sort of case may have no idea how to handle a different sort. Further, you may find that some lawyers are just a better fit for you.

For that reason, it is important to speak to more than one lawyer, if that is at all possible.

When evaluating a lawyer, you may want to want to consider some of the following things:

- Character
- Experience
- Expertise, and

- Fees

Check their Discipline History

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, and if there is a record of them being disciplined by the Law Society you can find out more details.

You can also see how long the individual has been called to the bar in British Columbia on the **BC Law Society's Lawyer Directory**. However, it is important to know that a lawyer may have been practicing in another jurisdiction before being called to the bar in British Columbia. This means that the individual may have more experience than shows up in that directory. You should be able to find out more about a lawyer from their website and by talking to them about their experience.

Just because a lawyer has faced discipline in the past may not mean that they are not a good fit for you. Lawyers can and do learn from past mistakes. However, this is information that you will want to take into account when deciding whether to hire them.

There are also people who say they are allowed to give legal advice but are not. You may search the Law Society's **unauthorized practitioners database** to make sure that the person you are speaking to is not listed.

Take Online Reviews with Caution

Some lawyers will have online reviews which come up when you search their names. These are not always a good representation of a lawyer's skill. Very few clients actually leave reviews for lawyers. It is not like restaurants, where you will get possibly hundreds of opinions. If you have heard positive things about a lawyer from trusted sources, one negative review online might not be a good reason not to use them. On the other hand, if you have doubts about a lawyer, one good review perhaps ought not be enough to change your mind.

Get details on their Billing Practices

Lawyers will bill in different ways. Make sure you know if the lawyer is offering hourly, flat rate, or contingency billing.

“Hourly” is where the lawyer will charge you for the time they spend on a file. This is the most common method of billing.

“Flat rate” billing is where a lawyer sets an amount they will charge you for to accomplish a task. This avoids surprises when you get a bill. However, for more complex matters most lawyers will not offer flat rates, because they cannot predict how much work your case will involve.

“Contingency” billing is where a lawyer will not get paid unless they successfully resolve the case for you. This is often done in personal injury cases where there is little question that you are entitled to some amount of money. You may however have to pay certain expenses, even if you are on a contingency arrangement. Check with the lawyer as to whether expenses (also called “disbursements”) will be your responsibility even if you lose. These can be very expensive, particularly if the lawyer hires experts to help prove your case. Note: in British Columbia, a lawyer is not allowed to charge more than 33 1/3% of the total amount they recover as a contingency fee.

When you are ready to hire a lawyer, see the [Lawyer Meeting Preparation](#).

Free and Low Cost Legal Services

When a lawyer takes on a case for free it is called acting “pro bono”. Sometimes lawyers will offer highly reduced rates, which is sometimes called acting “low-bono”.

Clicklaw Help Map: This valuable website guides you to places you can get help with your case. You describe the issue you are facing, and it will provide links to places to get help.

Justice Access Centres: Located in Nanaimo, Surrey, Vancouver, and Victoria. Justice Access Centres are funded by the British Columbia government. At a Justice Access Centre they will talk to you about your legal problem and let you know what help may be available. The Justice Access Centre also maintains a self-help website, which is available [here](#).

Justice Education Society's website on free and low cost legal services: This website provides further information on where to find, and how to hire, a lawyer in BC.

Access Pro Bono – *Runs clinics throughout the province and helps people find lawyers who may work for free*

Access Pro Bono is an organization dedicated to helping those in need get legal help.

Access Pro Bono offers a range of assistance. A list of the available services can be found **here**. Notable services offered include:

- **Clinics:** It runs clinics throughout the province where lawyers provide free advice. You can find out more information about their clinics by calling 604-878-7400 (in Greater Vancouver) or 1-877-762-6664 (“1-87PROBONO4”) in other areas
- **Roster Program:** It also runs a “Roster Program” where it will help pair lawyers with clients who they may help throughout their case on a pro-bono basis. If a lawyer agrees to take on your case, they might agree to provide help only with one part of the case, or may represent you through the entire case

In addition, Access Pro Bono has programs aimed specifically at providing help with Supreme Court Civil Chambers, and assists with matters before the Residential Tenancy branch, Mental Health Act reviews, and appearances before the Employment Standards Branch.

This is just an overview of what Access Pro Bono is and does. Contact them directly to see if they could provide more assistance with your case.

Contact Access Pro Bono:

Email: **appointments@accessprobono.ca**

Telephone: 604-878-7400 (Vancouver Area) or 1-877-762-6664 (toll-free)

Legal Aid – *Provides advice, as well as representation with some family, criminal law, immigration, mental health, and prison law issues*

Legal Aid, run through the Legal Services Society, is a program aimed at getting people help, particularly with family and criminal law issues. It also has a range of free legal information.

There are locations throughout the province, which can be found [here](#).

Information on how to apply for legal aid can be found [here](#).

Information on whether you qualify for legal aid can be found [here](#).

Contact Legal Aid

Telephone: 604-408-2172 (Greater Vancouver) or 1-866-577-2525 (elsewhere in BC)

The Law Centre – *University of Victoria clinic providing advice, assistance, and representation to those who cannot afford a lawyer*

The Law Centre is run by the University of Victoria. It focuses on assisting people in the Capital Regional District. It also provides legal education programs to the public. Staff lawyers are supported by law students to provide representation, information and advice on a range of legal issues. Some examples of the cases that they take on are found [here](#).

Contact the Law Centre

Email: reception@thelawcentre.ca

Telephone: 250-385-1221

Law Students' Legal Advice Program – *University of British Columbia clinic providing advice, assistance and representation to those who cannot afford a lawyer*

The Law Students' Legal Advice Program is run by the University of British Columbia. It focuses on assisting people in the Vancouver area. Staff lawyers are supported by law students to provide representation, information and advice on range of legal issues. Information on what sorts of cases they can help with can be found [here](#).

Contact the Law Students' Legal Advice Program

Telephone: 604-822-5791

Community Legal Assistance Society (CLAS) – Can provide free assistance for certain issues

The Community Legal Assistance Society can provide free legal assistance to some people in relation to some disputes. Specifically, they can assist with some housing, human rights complaints, mental health issues, access to government benefits, and work-related issues.

Contact the Community Legal Assistance Society

Telephone: 604-673-3112 or 1-888-685-6222

Online intake form: Available [here](#).

Assistance With Tribunals – There are a number of organizations that provide free or low cost help to individuals appearing before tribunals

If you are appearing before an administrative tribunal (such as the Workers' Compensation Board), there may be specialized help available. For example, the **Worker's Advisers Office** provides free advice and assistance to people making Workers' Compensation claims. Similarly, the **Tenant Resource & Advisory Centre** (TRAC) can provide assistance with a matter before the Residential Tenancy Branch. Contact the tribunal you are going to appear at. They may be able to tell you where to go for assistance.

Lawyer Meeting Preparation

Whether you are paying for your lawyer or receiving free legal advice, be prepared and make the best use of the time you spend with your lawyer. If you have formally retained a lawyer every moment spent with them is billable time. You don't want to spend valuable time with your lawyer searching for documents when you should be focusing on the important legal aspects of your case.

If you are receiving free ("pro bono") legal advice, it is likely that your time with a lawyer will be limited. Generally, "pro bono" appointments are of a thirty-minute duration. It is important that you have your information organized so you can make the best use of this time.

If you follow the four steps in this guide, you will be well-prepared and know what to expect when you meet your lawyer. This will help you to make good use of your time and be in a better position to understand your rights.

Step 1: Prepare Your Story

Write out your story. Do this in the order that things happened (chronological order). Don't worry about writing in sentences. Point form is fine.

This is your written statement. Put in all the facts that you consider important. Be specific as to the dates and who said what if you can.

This statement does not need to be long. Usually a good goal is about two pages.

This document will remain confidential, between only you and your lawyer.

- Take the written statement with you to the interview. It will help refresh your memory when you are talking to the lawyer
- If you have questions you want to ask the lawyer, write them out and take them with you. It's easy to forget the questions if you don't write them down. The lawyer will want to know all the details

The lawyer will want to know:

- Exact dates, if possible
- Who said what to whom – the exact words, not a summary
- Who was present during conversations and how long the conversations lasted

Important: The lawyer needs to know all the details, good and bad, about your case. If you are completely frank, the lawyer will be in the best position to handle your problem and advise you on the same.

Lawyers, even in an initial interview, have to keep what is said confidential. You can be open with your lawyer.

Step 2: Organize Your Documents

Take all letters and documents about your legal problem with you to the interview. If you are in doubt about an item, bring it anyway.

Organize your documents in a logical order, preferably according to their dates. If you have a lot of documents you may wish to create a document list with the description of each document, who created it and when. Try to put your documents in a binder and use a posit or tab to separate them.

Step 3: Go to the Interview

There are four “S’s” to a successful interview with a lawyer:

1. Slow

People tend to talk too fast in a lawyer interview. This is natural. Many of us are nervous when we have to see a lawyer. We want to tell all. Think about it this way: hearing your story is like eating dinner.

- If the lawyer is eating too fast, they won’t be able to digest it properly
- If you tell your story slowly, this gives the lawyer time to digest and understand your story. If you talk slowly, you give the lawyer time to ask questions. You will avoid missing important facts

The better prepared you are for the interview, the better advice the lawyer can give you.

2. Straightforward

All of us want to be seen in a good light. When we talk to other people, we usually try to emphasize the favorable things about ourselves. There is nothing wrong with this. It helps us all get along. However, when you’re talking to a lawyer, things are different. You need to give the lawyer both good information and bad information. If you did something wrong, admit it to the lawyer. It will most likely be brought to their attention later anyway, by the opposing party.

Be open and completely honest with your lawyer. The lawyer needs to know the good and the bad information at the beginning. That will help the lawyer to give you

good advice and save time and possibly money in the long run. Unless the lawyer knows everything, they cannot give you good advice.

3. Specific

The law requires specific information. If you are asked a question such as: "On what date did this happen?", it is best to give a specific date, e.g., March 15, 2006. If you can't be specific, be as specific as possible. "It happened the week of March 12, 2006." Do not summarize conversations. Instead, tell the lawyer, "Mr. Jones said...and then I said..." Repeat the exact words that were said if you can remember them. The more straightforward you are in the interview, the better advice the lawyer can give you.

4. Systematic

When you are telling your story to the lawyer, tell it in chronological order. That is, tell it in the order that it happened. Try not to skip from one time period to another. You cannot tell everything at once, but you can get to all the important parts.

If you have papers and documents, get them in order before you go to see the lawyer. It is a waste of your time to spend several minutes looking for one letter in a pile of letters.

Conclusion

- Fill out the Information Sheet and take it with you
- Fill out the Document List and take it with you
- Write out your story before you go to the lawyer. If you have questions to ask the lawyer, write them down before you go. That way, you won't forget them
- When you meet with the lawyer, remember to be slow, straightforward, specific and systematic