

Family Law: Legal Help

There are different ways to work through your family law issues. This booklet tells you about some ways you can:

- get free legal information and advice
- work with your partner to make an agreement
- find a lawyer
- get help if you cannot afford a lawyer
- get help if you have experienced family violence

Free legal information and advice

Legal information can help you understand family law issues like separation, divorce, parenting, and child support.

Community Legal Education Ontario

CLEO's **Steps to Justice** website has step-by-step information that can help you work through family law issues. The site also has practical tools like forms and checklists, and links to legal and social services where you can get help. Visit stepstojustice.ca.

CLEO also has a series of family law publications available online and in print. To order these publications or view them online, visit family.cleo.on.ca.

CLEO has other resources to help with the family law court process:

- **Steps in a Family Law Case** has 3 interactive flowcharts that help you understand and work through the family law court process. Visit familycourt.cleo.on.ca.
- **Family Law Guided Pathways** are a series of online interviews that help you fill out family court forms. Visit stepstojustice.ca/guided-pathways.

Family Law Information Centres

There are Family Law Information Centres (FLICs) in every Ontario family court. All FLICs have free pamphlets on family law. Many also have staff, called Information and Referral Coordinators, who can give general information and refer you to other services. To find a FLIC in your area, find your local courthouse at ontario.ca/page/family-law-information-centres.

Legal Aid Ontario

Legal Aid Ontario (LAO) has a phone line that you can call to get up to 20 minutes of free general legal advice and information in different languages. Call **1-800-668-8258**.

Ontario Legal Information Centre

The Ontario Legal Information Centre offers 30 minutes of free advice in English or French. You can speak with a lawyer over the telephone or meet in person at their Ottawa office. Call **1-844-343-7462** or visit legalinfocentre.ca.

Law Society Referral Service

The Law Society of Ontario (LSO) has a service that gives you the name of a lawyer in your area that you can speak with for up to 30 minutes for free. You can ask for a lawyer who speaks your language. Visit findlegalhelp.ca or call their crisis line at

416-947-5255 or **1-855-947-5255**, if you cannot use their online service.

Ontario government website

The Ontario Ministry of the Attorney General has guides and information on many family law issues. Visit ontario.ca/document/guide-procedures-family-court.

Ontario court websites

Ontario's family courts have information about their court process. Go to the Ontario Court of Justice website at ontariocourts.ca/ocj and search for **Representing Yourself at Your Family Law Trial – A Guide**. Go to the Superior Court of Justice website at ontariocourts.ca/scj and search for **A Guide to Process for Cases at the Superior Court of Justice**.

Making an agreement

You and your partner can try to make a separation agreement about the things you agree on. You can talk to your partner on your own or with the help of someone you both trust.

You can also work with a family law professional, such as a mediator, arbitrator, parenting coordinator, or collaborative family law lawyer.

These out-of-court options are sometimes called **alternative dispute resolution (ADR)** or family dispute resolution processes.

Each family court location offers subsidized mediation services for up to 8 hours. And if you have a court case, you can get up to 2 hours for free. See ontario.ca/page/family-mediation-service-providers.

In family law cases, you **must** think about using ADR to resolve your issues out of court if it is suitable for your situation. ADR might not be right for you if:

- you are afraid of your partner because there is a history of family violence
- there are serious mental health or drug abuse issues

For more information on ADR and for help finding a family law professional, visit stepstojustice.ca/legal-topic/family-law/out-of-court-options.

Finding a lawyer

You do not have to hire a lawyer to help you with your family law issues. But, only a lawyer can give you legal advice. This means they can explain what the law says, how it applies to your situation, and what your options are.

You and your partner should not have the same lawyer because you may have different rights and responsibilities.

Unbundled services

Some lawyers provide “unbundled services”. This means you pay a lawyer to help you with part of your case. For example, you might only hire a lawyer to prepare your documents, or to represent you at a motion or conference.

Unbundled services are also called limited scope services or legal coaching.

You can find directories of lawyers that offer unbundled services through:

- Ontario’s Family Law Limited Scope Services Project: visit familylawlss.ca and click on “Find a lawyer”.
- The National Self-Represented Litigants Project: visit representingyourselfcanada.com and click on “Initiatives”, and then “National Directory”.

Law Society of Ontario

The Law Society of Ontario (LSO) has a directory of all lawyers who can practice law in Ontario. You can search the directory by area of law, name, city, postal code, or language spoken. Visit lso.ca and click on “Public Resources”, and then “Finding a Lawyer or Paralegal”. You can also call **416-947-3300** or **1-800-668-7380**.

Lawyers at reduced rates

JusticeNet

JusticeNet is a not-for-profit organization that helps people whose income is too high to get legal aid but too low to afford legal fees. If your net family income is less than \$59,000, they refer you to an online directory of lawyers and mediators whose fees are based on your income and the size of your family. Visit justicenet.ca.

You must register and pay a fee to use the website. This fee may be returned to you if you do not find a lawyer to work with.

The Advice and Settlement Counsel Project

The Advice and Settlement Counsel Project provides up to 1 hour of advice with a lawyer for \$200 plus HST. If you want to hire the lawyer for more time, ask about their rates and if they can take your case. Visit ascfamily.com.

If you cannot afford a lawyer

Legal Aid Ontario

Legal Aid Ontario (LAO) offers free legal help on certain family law issues to people with low incomes. This includes:

- **Legal aid certificates**

You can apply for a legal aid certificate to get LAO to pay a lawyer to represent you in court for a certain number of hours. And you can use LAO's online tool to find a lawyer who accepts certificates. Visit legalaid.on.ca/lawyers.

- **Lawyers at family courts**

Talk to **duty counsel** for help on the day of your court hearing. They may be able to give legal advice, explain the court process, or help you work out a settlement. They cannot represent you at trial.

Talk to **advice counsel** for general information. If your income is low enough, they may be able to give you free legal advice.

- **Metro Toronto Family Law Services**

There are 8 locations where you can talk to a lawyer, get information about other legal aid services, and, in some cases, prepare court documents. Call **416-696-2992**.

- **Family Law Service Centres**

There are 8 centres in Ontario with staff lawyers and legal workers who can help prepare court documents, provide referral information, and help with applications for a legal aid certificate.

- **Family Law Offices**

There are 3 offices located in Kenora, Ottawa, and Thunder Bay with lawyers and paralegals who help with family court cases and accept legal aid certificates.

- **Law school clinics**

Each law school in Ontario has a legal aid clinic staffed by law students who are supervised by lawyers. These clinics are located in Kingston, London, Ottawa, Thunder Bay, Toronto, and Windsor.

For more information about these services, visit legalaid.on.ca or call **416-979-1446**, **1-800-668-8258**, or the Bell Relay Service at **1-800-855-0511**.

Pro Bono Students Canada – Family Justice Centre

The Family Justice Centre is staffed by law students who are supervised by family law lawyers. People with low incomes who do not have a lawyer can get summary legal advice and help with court forms. Visit probonostudents.ca/family-justice-centre or call **647-952-3354**.

Domestic violence resources

Legal Aid Ontario

LAO has special programs if you have experienced family violence. You can get a certificate for 2 hours of free advice from a lawyer or a certificate for 6 hours of free help to get a restraining order. You can get help applying for these programs at some women's shelters, community legal clinics, and Family Law Service Centres. Or call **1-800-668-8258**.

Sexual Assault Survivors Pilot Program

If you have experienced sexual abuse and live in Ontario, you might be able to get 4 hours of free advice from a lawyer. Visit ontario.ca/page/independent-legal-advice-sexual-assault-victims or call **1-855-226-3904**.

Luke's Place

Luke's Place provides legal advice, support, and referrals to abused women across Ontario. They have a Virtual Legal Clinic that connects women with lawyers for free legal advice on family law issues. Visit lukesplace.ca/for-women/lukes-place-virtual-legal-clinic or call **905-728-0978**, ext. 235 or **1-866-516-3116**, ext. 235.

Barbra Schlifer Commemorative Clinic

The Clinic helps women in Toronto who have experienced physical, sexual, or psychological abuse. The Clinic represents women in family and immigration court for free. Visit schliferclinic.com or call **416-323-9149** or **416-323-1361** (TTY).

Jared's Place

Jared's Place provides information and legal support to women in Hamilton who have experienced abuse. A legal advocate can help prepare documents or provide support at court. Visit intervalhousehamilton.org or call **905-522-0127**, ext. 207.



Visit stepstojustice.ca/legal-topic/family-law for more information about family law and how to get legal help. This is general information for people in Ontario, Canada. It is not intended to be used as legal advice.

Si vous parlez français

Vous pourriez avoir droit à des services en français devant les tribunaux judiciaires ou administratifs ou auprès d'organismes gouvernementaux. Pour plus d'informations, veuillez visiter justicepasapas.ca/droits-linguistiques-des-francophones.