

Family Law: Meeting with Your Lawyer for the First Time

▪ When is it time to speak with a lawyer?

When family issues arise, it can be crucial to engage a Family Lawyer to protect your interests and help you achieve an efficient and effective outcome.

Even where you have an amicable relationship with the other party, engaging a lawyer can speed up the necessary processes, ensure your interests are protected and avoid further problems from arising down the track.

Meeting with a lawyer for the first time can seem like a daunting experience, however the earlier you take that first step, the easier it will be for your lawyer to provide you with critical and time-sensitive advice.

It can even be beneficial to speak to a lawyer before separation. Meeting with a lawyer does not mean you have to separate, and you can speak to your lawyer without the knowledge of your partner. This can allow for essential advice to be provided regarding what you can expect in the event you do decide to separate.

▪ What if I don't want to go to Court?

In Family Law matters, it can be extremely important to have the preservation of relationships form a key aspect in resolving disputes – particularly in situations where children are involved.

Your lawyer will work with you to make sure that disputes do not escalate unnecessarily and to resolve them before going to Court wherever it is possible.

This may involve participation in mediation with the other party, with the view to resolving your matter by consent.

As Court can be costly and stressful for all parties involved, it is only used as a last resort.

▪ What should I expect to happen in my first meeting with my lawyer?

In your first meeting, your lawyer will ask that you explain your situation and will then ask you questions to better understand the issues that are at play in your dispute.

While it may seem intimidating beforehand, meeting with your lawyer can be a calming process as you gain an understanding of the issues at play giving you a sense of control over your own situation.

Your lawyer can give you advice about the process of resolving your matter, what you can expect, as well as what to do and what not to do.

You will generally be given an estimate of the legal costs. It is very important that you understand the potential costs involved and your lawyer will walk you through the legal options available to you and the difference in costs of those options.

At the end of the day, your lawyer's role is to help you understand your legal and practical options to allow you to use this understanding to make the best decision for your personal situation.

▪ What should I bring to our first meeting?

Generally, you won't be required to bring anything in particular to the first meeting with your lawyer. However, there are documents you can prepare that will make it easier to discuss the matter at hand with your lawyer in a more efficient manner:

- A chronology of the events during your relationship. This would mean the birth dates of both parties and any children, the date the parties began to live together, the date of marriage and the date of separation among other dates such as property purchases and dates you received any inheritances or redundancy packages or any other form of pay out.
- A list of all the issues you wish to discuss. It may sound unnecessary – but you want to make sure you tell your Lawyer all the important points. It can be difficult to remember all the specific issues in the moment, and a list can be a great tool to ensure you don't have to be making follow up telephone calls.
- Any Court documents or correspondence you have received from your spouse, or your spouse's lawyer.
- A list of assets and estimated values if there is to be a property settlement, so that your lawyer can gain an understanding of the types of assets involved.

Do not worry if you are unable to have this information prepared before your appointment – the most important thing is that you get legal advice early and any necessary documents can be provided at a later date.

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