

14 Tips for the Client Going Through a Divorce

Like most litigants, the end result and the cost of legal representation are among the most important concerns of anyone involved in a family law dispute. With these concerns in mind, clients frequently ask if there is anything they can or should be doing to reduce the time we need to spend on their case or to help move things forward. The answer is a resounding “Yes!” Here are 14 tips on how to be a good family law client and, at the same time, help your attorney achieve the best possible result without incurring excessive cost:

1. In advance of the first meeting with your attorney, assemble as much relevant documentation as possible. For instance, in a typical divorce case, this would include (at a minimum) complete copies of recent tax returns, pay stubs for both you and your spouse, a detailed list of all assets and liabilities, and any legal paperwork already filed and/or served upon you.
2. Speaking of documentation, organize every piece of paper that you give to your attorney. Documents should be stapled, labeled and assembled in an orderly fashion. Keep in mind that your attorney and his/her staff will do whatever is necessary to organize the documentation that you provide to him/her if you don't do so. It will, however, take time and cost money.
3. Keep a detailed diary of all significant events pertaining to your case and make sure to share copies with your attorney. A "Week-at-a-Glance" calendar often serves this purpose well. This may be especially important in a custody case. Your memory may fade with time, but a well-kept diary can be used to refresh your recollection prior to and/or during a hearing. Additionally, your attorney can use your diary to assist in preparing your testimony in advance of a hearing.
4. A picture is worth a thousand words. Besides documenting things in your diary, document what you can with photographs and/or videos. For instance, if you decide to move out of the marital residence, take photographs of the condition of the residence and all property that you left behind.
5. Ask questions. There is no such thing as a stupid question. More often than not, questions from clients are highly relevant and serve as a basis for helping to frame out the issues and develop strategies.
6. If you need to discuss non-legal issues with someone, you may not want to call your attorney. His/her hourly rate is probably much higher than a therapist's, and the therapist probably is better equipped to handle the issue. While your attorney may be a very good listener, it will be to your economic and emotional advantage to discuss non-legal issues with your therapist, family members, friends, priest, rabbi, pastor, etc.
7. Do your best to pay your attorney's bills on a timely basis. If you cannot pay a bill within a reasonable amount of time, call your attorney and ask to work out some payment arrangements. If you are making a genuine effort, most attorneys will be understanding and work with you.
8. Promptly respond to calls and inquiries from your attorney. If it was not important, your attorney would not be contacting you. Furthermore, if you are not being responsive to

your attorney, he/she will have no choice but to spend his/her time and your money trying to get a response.

9. When you leave a message for your attorney (either on voicemail or through a secretary) leave your phone number and the time when you will be available to speak. While your attorney likely has your number, it will take less time for your attorney to call you back if he/she does not have to find your number. This is especially true if your attorney is not in his/her office.
10. If you have left messages for your attorney and have not received a response in a reasonable period of time, realize that there is probably a good reason why he/she has not returned your call (i.e., tied up in court or meetings, or handling an emergency situation). If the reason for your call is of an urgent nature, do not hesitate to explain the situation to your attorney's secretary and/or ask if you can speak with another attorney in the firm. If your call is not urgent, ask your attorney's secretary when she expects the attorney to be available so that you can call again or ask if an appointment can be placed in the attorney's calendar for a phone conference.
11. Do not believe everything that you hear from your spouse, family and friends as it pertains to your case and the law. Even though your spouse may act like he/she is trying to be accommodating, the reality is that he/she is likely out to get the best possible result for himself/herself. Similarly, realize that every case is different. Just because your friend's cousin got a particular result does not mean that you will get a similar result.
12. Do not sign or agree to anything without first speaking with your attorney. Attorneys are usually in favor of parties speaking and trying to reach amicable resolutions between themselves. An attorney, however, can and will help you determine if the terms discussed are in your best interest. There is nothing wrong with telling the opposing party that you need some time to think about it and will get back to them after speaking with your attorney. If the opposing party is pushing you to sign something on the spot, be suspect.
13. Be discreet and resist the urge to deliberately annoy or antagonize your spouse. If you do or say something that you know will annoy your spouse, be prepared for appropriate retaliation. Also be prepared to pay your attorney who will, no doubt, get a call from the opposing counsel when your spouse calls to complain about your behavior.
14. Last, but not least, be candid and truthful with your attorney. Attorneys do not like surprises. If your Attorney is well-informed, he/she can be fully prepared to deal with potentially damaging information if and when it is raised by the other side.