



Divorce Resources

Questions to Ask When Hiring an Attorney

Questions to Ask Yourself

- Were you able to get an initial appointment quickly?
- Was the office friendly or efficient when you contacted them by phone or online?
- Do you feel comfortable in the waiting room?
- Are the office personnel friendly and polite?
- Does the office appear organized?
- Are you kept waiting longer than you are comfortable with?
- Does the office seem frantic or calm?
- Is parking nearby and convenient?
- Is the office convenient to get to from your home or workplace?

Questions to Ask the Attorney

- Where did you go to law school? The answer isn't terribly important, but if he or she went to a school overseas or to one you have never heard of, you should be wary.
- How long have you been practicing this type of law? Look for an attorney who has been practicing family law for at least several years. Many attorneys who have a general practice do handle divorces, and you may feel comfortable with someone like this, but be aware that there are attorneys who solely focus their practices on divorce and family law and thus will have more experience.
- How many divorce cases have you handled in the past six months? Look for an attorney who has handled at least ten in the last six months.
- What are your fees? Find out what the attorney charges for expenses such as copying, phone calls, emails, and paralegal work.
- What is your hourly rate? Fees vary across the country, but you should expect to be charged \$200 an hour and up. The more experienced the attorney, the higher the fee. It is also common for your attorney to charge a higher hourly rate for time spent in court. Find out if you will be charged for travel time to and from the courthouse.
- Is there a retainer fee? A retainer fee is like a down payment you make when you agree to hire the attorney. Expect there to be one, but make sure it is an amount you can afford. The attorney bills against the retainer and any unused portion is refundable.
- How much are the court fees? Court filing fees will vary from state to state. If you have concerns about the fees you are quoted, call your local bar association for confirmation or check your state court website.
- Can I get my spouse to pay the court fees and part or all of the attorney fees? This will depend on your situation, but the attorney can give you an educated guess.
- Can you estimate a total cost for my case or at least a ballpark figure.
- Will I receive a written contract for your services? The contract might also be called a retainer agreement or a retainer letter. Make sure you work with an attorney who will provide one.
- What expenses am I responsible for? Find out what office expenses and court fees are not included in the hourly rate.
- How often will I be billed? Most attorneys will bill monthly.
- Can a payment plan be worked out? Some attorneys are willing to do this, so if you need a flexible payment schedule, keep looking until you find one who offers it.
- Will you personally be handling my case? If not, ask to meet the person who will be, and make sure one person is in charge of your case.

- How long do you estimate the case will take? The attorney should be able to estimate when the case will be concluded.
- Do you feel I have a good chance to get what I want? Try to get a feeling for how this attorney views your chances.
- What am I asking for that I might not get? This question will require the attorney to be specific. Even if the news is bad, it is important to know it now.
- Do you plan on trying to settle this case? Most attorneys will engage in settlement negotiations.
- How long does it take you to return phone calls? You want an attorney who will return calls within twenty-four hours.
- Do you use email for client communication? This is often the fastest way to reach your attorney, but there are still some attorneys who do not use email.
- Will I be able to track my case online? Your state court may have a system you can log in to and your attorney's office may also have an internal system for clients.
- Who can I reach if there is a problem after hours? It is rare to find an attorney who has a twenty-four-hour emergency line, but it is still a good idea to ask.
- Is there someone available to handle emergencies if you are unavailable? This can be a paralegal or another attorney.

Think about the answers you got and evaluate whether this is someone you feel comfortable with!



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