

Tips for Keeping Your Family Lawyer's Legal Fees Down

A divorce or separation can be an emotional, painful and very expensive process. However, there are certain steps you can take that may keep your legal costs down. Consider the following:

1. Lawyers are entitled to bill you for every voicemail sent or received, therefore it is best to speak to a law clerk to book a telephone appointment with the lawyer. If the question is non-legal in nature it may be more cost-effective to speak to the law clerk first to see if they can help you.
2. Using email and fax to communicate with your lawyer and their staff is less expensive than an in-person meeting. But don't expect a reply right away...your lawyer has many other clients. Don't flood your lawyer's inbox with email. You will be charged for this. Keep your questions short and clear. Email also allows you to keep track of your lawyer's advice for future reference.
3. Be honest and forthcoming right from the beginning. You don't want your lawyer wasting time discovering what you could have told her at the outset.
4. Keep your expectations and goals realistic based on what you are advised.
5. Keep your documents organized. Many documents will need to be reviewed during litigation. Compile as many as you can yourself, and keep them neatly organized either in folders or as PDFs on your computer. If acceptable, send soft copies of all the requested documents to your lawyer's law clerk, via email. This will reduce both the lawyer's and law clerk's time spent working on your case.
6. Prepare for all meetings, telephone calls and correspondence with your lawyer. Make note of questions you would like to ask. If you have questions of a general legal nature, it may help to do an internet search first. Being as informed as possible can save you a lot of money.
7. Consider taking notes during your meetings and telephone calls so that you don't have to ask the same question twice. Always remember that you are usually billed by the hour, so make the most efficient use of the time.
8. Establish a good rapport with your lawyer's law clerk. While a law clerk cannot give you legal advice, they can answer many procedural questions, and the billing rate is much lower. For example, the law clerk can tell you if your ex-partner has served a reply to your application, or what documents are still required to be completed.
9. You may be asked to provide your lawyer with written material. This is often an efficient way to get the necessary information from you in order to prepare court documents. The written material you provide may be used in several aspects of your case, and will result in greater efficiency for the lawyer and reduced legal fees for you. Lawyers prefer to get this material from you via email attachments. This is cheaper than faxing the material.

10. Your lawyer may need to prepare your financial statement. To do this your lawyer needs documentation of all your bank accounts, mortgage/line of credit accounts, paystubs and your income tax returns to substantiate all the figures asserted in your financial statement and to provide a copy to the opposing counsel. To reduce processing costs, you should provide your lawyer with two copies of all documentation.
11. When you are giving documents to your lawyer's office or transferring your file from another lawyer, organize court documents and letters in chronological order and make a list of all the documents. Providing an electronic version of the list will save the law clerk's time and therefore, save you money.
12. Make sure you choose an experienced family law lawyer.
13. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, respond to your lawyer's requests in a timely manner. Lawyers have deadlines they must meet and also need to be responsive to opposing counsel's requests. You don't want to pay extra for your lawyer to keep following up with you or for unnecessary appeals and motions.