

TIP SHEET FOR RELATIVES AS PARENTS

ATTORNEYS AND THEIR FEES: WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW

You will save time, expense, and frustration if you prepare as completely as possible for your first conversation with a prospective attorney, whether it is over the phone or in the office.

1. Stick to the Facts

Almost any issues that moves you to seek legal advice is likely to affect you emotionally, and it's natural for you to want an attorney to understand how you feel. It will be easier for an attorney to assist you, however, if you focus on facts more than feelings.

2. Present It In Print

Bring any documents that pertain to your problem, such as contracts, citations, deeds, will, e-mails, letters, or photographs, to your first meeting.

3. Don't Leave Things Out

Your attorney needs to see the situation from every side in order to determine how the law can serve you best. Your information will be held in strict confidence. Attorneys are bound by the same code of confidentiality as clergy and doctors, and without your consent, an attorney cannot reveal anything that you say as part of a professional relationship - even in this first meeting, before you have actually made a decision to retain the attorney. No court or other authority can force the attorney to violate that confidence. Good or bad, flattering or unflattering, tell the truth, don't leave out any relevant facts about yourself or the problem.

4. Ask Questions

If you don't understand something, ask. And it's also ok to ask about an attorneys professional education, background, and familiarity with the kind of problem you are presenting.

5. Discuss Fees and Payments

Legal fees pay for your attorney's time and professional experience, as well as for the business expenses of a legal practice: trained support staff, specialized computer systems, office equipment, law books and references, communication services, postage, supplies, rent, travel, insurance, professional fees and more. Discuss both the ways you will be charged and the way you will be billed. If you think you will have difficulty paying what the attorney asks, say so. If it doesn't put your welfare or the attorneys' ethical obligations in jeopardy, you may be able to arrange for the attorney to do part of the project (called "unbundled law"), and do the rest yourself ("pro se".) Or you may be able to make a payment plan. At the end of your first meeting, ask the attorney to send you a letter stating the rates and fee arrangements you have agreed to, so there will be no question later on.

Lastly, to keep your costs down:

Be Clear	Know what outcome you want.
Be Informed	Make sure you understand how your attorney plans to assist you.
Be Prepared	Have contact information for everyone involved written down.
Be Business- Like	Focus on the facts.
Be Brief	Avoid unnecessary phone calls.

This tip sheet is an extract from *Attorneys and Their Fees: What You Should Know*, a publication of the Lawyer Referral & Information Service (LRIS) of the Maine Bar Association. For additional information or assistance finding an attorney, call LRIS at 1-800-860-1460; or go to the LRIS section of the Maine State Bar Association website, at www.mainebar.org; to get a copy of the full brochure contact Maine Kids-Kin at 1-866-298-0896.

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