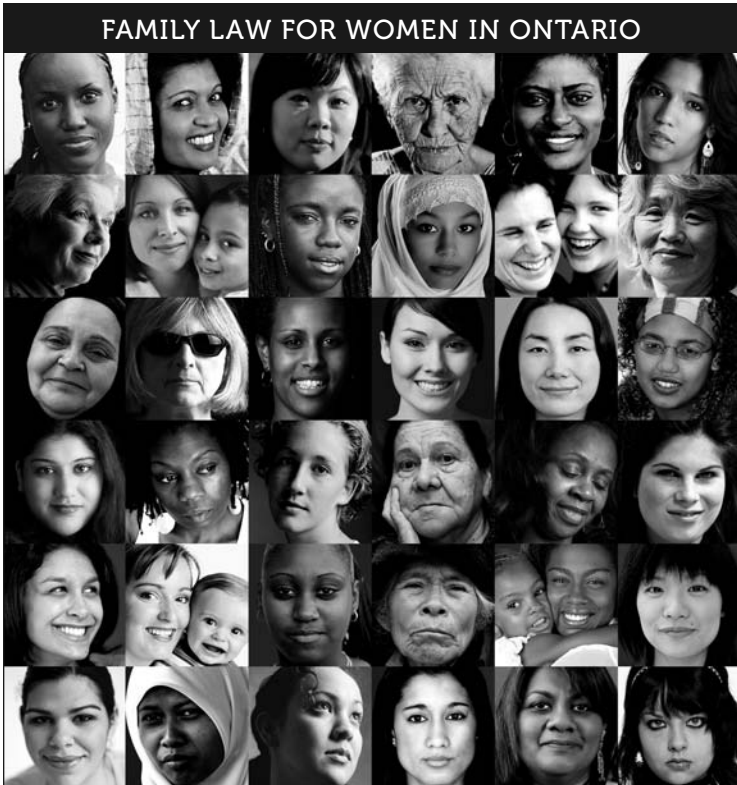


Finding Help with your Family Law Problem

ENG 009



All Women. One Family Law.
Know your Rights.

flew Family Law
Education for Women
Women's Right to Know

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Finding Help with your Family Law Problem

This booklet is meant to give you a basic understanding of legal issues. It is not a substitute for individual legal advice and assistance. If you are dealing with family law issues, get legal advice as soon as possible to protect your rights. For more information about how to find and pay for a family law lawyer, see our booklet on "Finding Help with your Family Law Problem" on our website at www.onefamilylaw.ca.

Family breakdown is a difficult, stressful time for women and their children. If you and your partner separate, you will have to sort out many legal issues. You must decide about financial support, make arrangements about the children and divide your family property. These are difficult issues. Some couples are able to deal with them on their own. But in most cases, you will need some help to sort out these arrangements.

When your relationship ends, you should have a lawyer who knows family law to help you. If you do not get legal advice, you may give up some important rights that you do not know you have. It is very important to have a lawyer help you if:

- your partner was abusive or violent;
- your partner tried to bully you or scare you;
- your partner has taken advantage of you;
- your partner has more power than you;
- you cannot read, speak or understand English;
- your partner has a lawyer.

How to find a family law lawyer

If you do not know a family law lawyer, here are some places that can help you find one:

- Your local community legal aid clinic.
- Your local women's shelter or other community agency.
- The **Assaulted Women's Helpline** at 416-863-0511 in Toronto or toll free at 1-866-863-0511. The TTY line is 1-866-863-7868. This is a 24-hour crisis line.
- The **Family Law Office**, if you live in Toronto, Ottawa or Thunder Bay. These offices have lawyers who can help with family law cases. The lawyers are paid by Legal Aid Ontario (LAO). They only accept clients who have legal aid certificates.
- If you have been abused, the **Lawyer Referral Service** at 1-800-268-8326. If you have not been abused, you can still use this service by calling 1-900-565-4577, but you will be charged \$6 for your call.

When you call a new lawyer, make sure to ask if they have experience with family law. Try to get a lawyer who has experience.

How to pay for your family law lawyer

Hiring a lawyer will cost money. If you cannot afford a lawyer, you can apply to **LAO**. They offer help for some family law issues. To apply for legal aid, you can go to any one of LAO's offices across Ontario. Look in your phone book to find the address and telephone number of the closest office, or call 1-800-668-8258 or for TTY call 1-866-641-8867. If you live in Toronto, call 416-979-1446. You can find out more about LAO on their website at www.legalaid.on.ca.

To get Legal Aid you must have:

- a low income, and
- a legal issue that they think is "serious enough" to need a lawyer.

If you have been abused or bullied, tell Legal Aid. They are more likely to give legal aid to women who experience violence.

If you meet Legal Aid's criteria, they will give you a **legal aid certificate**. You can use this certificate to hire a lawyer. Sometimes, Legal Aid may offer to pay for a lawyer on the condition that you pay them back.

If your partner has abused or bullied you, you can get a legal aid certificate for two hours of free legal advice. You do not have to prove you have a low income to get this certificate. You must fill out a form called the "**Advice Lawyer Family Violence Authorization**" that you can get from community legal clinics or women's shelters.

Not all lawyers accept legal aid certificates. When you call to make an appointment, make sure to ask if the lawyer does legal aid work.

What you can do if you do not have a lawyer

If you do not have a lawyer to help you with your family law case, you may still be able to get some legal information and advice at the courthouse. You can find two kinds of help at every family law court:

- **Duty counsel lawyers.** Their job is to speak to low-income people who do not have a lawyer. They can offer you advice. If they are not busy, they may be able to help you in court.
- **Family Law Information Centres (FLICs).** They can give you legal information on family law and explain how family court works. They can also tell you about other kinds of supports for families, such as parenting classes, family mediation, or how to contact community agencies. Some FLICs have **advice lawyers** who can meet with you. The advice lawyer can discuss your situation and give you some legal advice but will not help you in court.

At some family law courts, you can get help from law students. They help people who do not have lawyers fill out court forms.

If you are a francophone woman living in Ontario, you have the right to access French language services in family law court proceedings. For more information regarding your rights, contact a lawyer, a community legal clinic, or the support line Femaide at 1-877-336-2433, TTY 1-866-860-7082.

You can find more information on how to access services in French on our website at www.onefamilylaw.ca or www.undroitdefamille.ca.

Family Law topics available in English*

1. Alternative Dispute Resolution and Family Law (ENG 001)
2. Child Protection and Family Law (ENG 002)
3. Child Support (ENG 003)
4. Criminal and Family Law (ENG 004)
5. Child Custody and Access (ENG 005)
6. Domestic Contracts (ENG 006)
7. Family Law Arbitration (ENG 007)
8. Family Law Issues for Immigrant, Refugee and Non-status Women (ENG 008)
- 9. Finding Help with your Family Law Problem (ENG 009)**
10. How Property is Divided in Family Law (ENG 010)
11. Marriage and Divorce (ENG 011)
12. Spousal Support (ENG 012)

** This booklet is available in multiple formats and languages. Please see www.onefamilylaw.ca for more information. You can also find additional materials on the website to help you understand your family law rights.*



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