

FAMILY LAW 101:

Know your rights!

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Dissolutions, as divorces are called in Washington, and custody disputes are an unfortunate part of some relationships. If you have been served court documents or think you need assistance to protect your rights and the rights of your children, a consultation with an attorney will help you sort through the legal issues surrounding your case.


Here are some tips to follow when going to your family law consultation:

Paperwork! Take as much paperwork regarding your assets as you can. Most of the documents will be used for filing a family law case. Clients should try to bring W-2's, tax returns, pay stubs, court orders, and written communications between the parties about the property or the care of the kids, medical reports and police incident reports. These are all important for your attorney to understand the full picture. Providing this information early will save you time and money because your efforts won't be duplicated by the attorney.

Ask questions! Be prepared with a list of questions for your attorney. This is YOUR consultation. Do not be shy, and there are no stupid questions. When you leave the attorney's office, you should understand your rights and the direction your case will be going. A family law case can move very quickly in the beginning. If you do not understand the process, ask the attorney to explain the process slowly and in layman's terms.

The child's personality is also something to consider when looking at the effects of divorce. If the child has a personality that is more withdrawn or shy then they may have a harder time expressing their feelings about the divorce. It is important to get this child talking and expressing how they feel. One tool you can use is art. Have your child with a quiet personality draw how they are feeling. This can give the child an opportunity to start putting colors to feelings or words and unlock the healing process.

If your child has an outgoing personality you may need to help them funnel their emotions and reactions to the divorce appropriately. For example, if your child starts to have angry outbursts randomly, give them an opportunity to express their anger in appropriate settings. One thing you may want to do is purchase a "wet noodle", the long foam toy for swimming pools, and have your child set a timer for 10 minutes. The child is to express what they are angry about while hitting their bed with the noodle. The emotion is expressed while in a contained timed setting. Also, one technique that helps to reduce tantrums and outbursts is to first recognize that the child is struggling. Stop and give the child words to express their emotion verbally. (Jack you are pestering your sister a lot today. Are you frustrated or sad? Let's talk about how you can express this in a better way than pestering your sister.) There are many tools to help a child express themselves given their specific personality type that can be quite helpful. Oftentimes, I will meet with parents for a couple of sessions to give them



**Journaling or
keeping a diary
can help kids
get feelings out
that they may not
understand.**

KEYS TO MINIMIZING THE EFFECTS OF DIVORCE:

- No arguing in front of the children.
- Both parents should maintain daily involvement in the child's life. This can be by helping with transportation, attending practices or a phone call.
- Parents have the same rules for children in their individual homes.
- Maintain the same schedule, bedtime routine, etc.
- Use a friend or counselor to process the divorce with your children.
- **ABSOLUTELY NO TALKING BADLY ABOUT THE OTHER PARENT.**