

UNBUNDLING LEGAL SERVICES:

Options for
CLIENTS, COURTS & COUNSEL



A GUIDE FOR CONSUMERS



UNBUNDLING LEGAL SERVICES:

A GUIDE FOR PARENTS SEEKING AFFORDABLE LEGAL ASSISTANCE IN FAMILY SEPARATION CASES

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Introduction

Family separation can be very stressful. Everyone in the family goes through changes, including parents, children, and other family members. You may also have more expenses, such as a second home, while living on the same income. Dividing property, moving to a new home and other costs of separation, can strain your finances. The cost of lawyers, mediators, and other professionals may also be much higher than you think.

What are the challenges for people who are not represented by lawyers in family court?

Many people cannot afford to hire lawyers during a divorce. Some people think that they can handle the legal process on their own. Others feel that lawyers could make their problems worse instead of better. Unfortunately, not having a lawyer can be confusing and can hurt your case. This is because the legal system has special rules that must be followed. Lawyers are trained to understand these rules and get the best results possible. If you do not understand the rules, you may lose parenting and financial rights. There is nothing worse than feeling powerless about the most important things in your life.

It is possible for you to have the help of a lawyer who can help you at a cost you can afford through unbundled legal services.

What are unbundled legal services?

Lawyers typically work on a case from beginning to end. A lawyer providing unbundled legal services works on and charges you for only those tasks that you agree to in advance. Unbundled legal services are becoming a more popular and less expensive way to help separating families in family court.

What can a lawyer providing unbundled legal services do?

A lawyer providing unbundled services can:

- Write your divorce petition, that you can then file on your own;
- Write the letters and other legal documents that are needed for your case;
- Review settlement agreements;
- Help you with your parenting time schedule;
- Help you complete financial papers;
- Represent you in court.

How do unbundled legal services work with dispute resolution processes?

Unbundled legal services can also help you in dispute resolution processes, such as mediation or parenting coordination, that are designed to help you resolve conflicts outside of the courtroom. When they are successful, dispute resolution processes allow you and your former partner to make your own decisions about separation and divorce. This may be better than having a judge make a decision because he or she does not know your family as well as you do.

Making your own decisions in a dispute resolution process has many advantages, but many people are worried about doing so without the help of a lawyer. This is especially true if the other person has a lawyer. Just like court, dispute resolution processes can be confusing if you do not know how they work. This can make it hard to take part in the process because you may fear that you will make a mistake or give up too much.

Having the advice of a lawyer can help you understand the tasks you need to do and give you more confidence in the process.

How can unbundled legal services help the dispute resolution process?

When you are participating in a dispute resolution process, a lawyer providing unbundled legal services might help you understand:

- The rules of the dispute resolution process;
- The role of the mediator or facilitator;
- How to prepare for the process;
- Whether the process is confidential;
- How an agreement can become a court settlement;
- What happens if you do not reach an agreement;
- Any documents or information you will need;
- The issues that you will discuss;
- How much time you will have to explain your concerns;
- How to present yourself during the process.

A lawyer who understands the dispute resolution process can help you do a better job to protect yourself and your children, and to be more informed and prepared. As a result, your family separation may cost less. It may also prevent you and your family from going through a costly, time-consuming, and emotionally difficult court process.

What are some of the challenges of unbundled legal services?

Unbundled legal services are not for everyone. It is important for you to think about whether unbundled legal services can work for your family. Some questions to ask include:

- Can my case be broken down into small steps, easily divided between me and my lawyer?
- Are there complicated issues that cannot easily be split between me and my lawyer?
- Are there important deadlines approaching that I am not able to meet?

The more complicated your case is, the harder it might be to divide into separate parts. As you decide whether to use unbundled legal services, you should think about and talk with the lawyers you might hire about how unbundled services can work in your case.

How do I find unbundled legal services?

To find out more about how Unbundled Legal Services work in your area, contact a local family lawyer, your family court, or your local bar association.

To learn more about unbundled legal services, go to:

<http://divorceinfo.com/unbundling.htm>