



FOUNDATIONS

FAMILY LAW & MEDIATION CENTER

Top Ten Ways to Reduce Your Legal Fees in Family Law Cases

1 Read and Understand Your Legal Services Agreement

Before signing a Legal Services Agreement with an attorney or firm, look for hidden fees in the contract, including:

- Monthly administrative fees
- Billing minimums (.2 or .3 hour minimums, minimum billing charges for court appearances, etc.)
- Travel charges
- Early termination fees if you cancel your agreement within a certain timeframe

If you don't understand the firm's billing policies and procedures, ask for clarification and get answers to your questions. Make sure you know how often invoices will be issued, the deadline to pay those invoices (this is important to avoid potential late fees/interest), and if/when you may be expected to add to your retainer.

2 Consider Alternative Forms of Dispute Resolution, Especially Mediation

In a traditional contested divorce or custody case, the parties are paying two separate attorneys throughout the duration of the case. In a mediation, the parties are sharing the fee of one professional to resolve their matter. Each party can still obtain legal advice from counsel of their own choosing (you can hire an attorney for an hour of their time to review a proposed agreement before signing), but the total cost of a mediation is much lower as numerous court appearances are not needed and less pleadings will need to be drafted and filed. Not every case or situation is suitable for mediation, but it's a process worth considering.

3 Get Organized

In cases that involve child support or financial issues, your attorney is going to need you to provide certain documents to them. In fact, you may be required by court rules to provide specific documents to the other side. If/when your attorney sends you a list of documents that you need to send to them, it will cut down your legal expenses significantly if you provide him/her with complete documents in an organized format, instead of incomplete records in piecemeal emails that they will have to follow-up with you about. The more (free) work that you do on the front-end will result in less billable work that your attorney will have to do on the back-end.

4 Strategically Communicate with Your Legal Team

Most family law attorney bill by the hour. This means, the more that you communicate with your attorney (this includes texts, emails, phone calls, and meetings), the higher your legal bills will be. Consider making a list of questions to ask your attorney in one email per week or during your next meeting/phone call instead of sending multiple communications per day. This does not apply to urgent issues which you should immediately relay to your attorney.

5 Answer Questions that Your Attorney Asks You

If your attorney asks you a question, be sure to answer it. This may sound like a no-brainer, but emotions can run high in family law cases and parties can sometimes be so focused on a particular issue that they forget to answer questions that their attorneys ask them. If your lawyer is asking for specific information, there is a reason for it (and perhaps a deadline that they need to obtain this information), so be sure to answer those questions to avoid unnecessary follow-ups.

6 Find Support for Non-Legal Needs

Although attorneys are professionals, they are trained *legal* professionals. Most are not qualified to act in any therapeutic or personal coaching capacity. Building a support team of family, friends, counselors, therapists, parenting coaches, support groups, and more can save you a boatload of cash instead of venting your emotions and frustrations to your attorney who will most likely be paying at a much higher rate than these other available and more appropriate options.

7 Just Because You *Can* Do Something, Doesn't Always Mean You *Should* Do Something

Just because you can take your ex's deposition or bury him/her in discovery requests, does not mean that these tools are necessarily needed in your case. Not only will you be billed for your attorney's time for these tasks, but it is likely that the other party will serve you with similar discovery requests and/or take your deposition in retaliation to "even the playing field," which will skyrocket your fees even further.

8 Do a Cost/Benefit Analysis to Aid in Your Decision Making

In family law cases, there is not only a financial cost, but there is also an emotional cost. If you and the opposing party are at odds on an issue, it is wise to do a cost/benefit analysis of whether it is worth your time, mental wellbeing, and attorney's fees to draw a hardline on the issue, or if it would be wiser to concede or compromise on the issue.

9 Listen to Your Attorney or Hire New Counsel

You are paying your attorney for legal representation and advice. If all the facts about a situation are provided to the attorney and he/she gives you their legal opinion, especially if it is one that you don't agree with, their opinion is not going to waver despite how much you may want their answer to change. Fighting with your own lawyer is just going to end up adding to your bill and increasing your frustrations. In this scenario, you have two choices to help minimize your legal fees: (1) you rely on your attorney's expertise and follow his/her suggested course of action, or (2) you hire a new attorney whose opinion aligns with your own.*

*With this second option, beware of hiring an attorney who is simply a "yes" person to get you signed up as a client at their firm. A good attorney provides realistic expectations to their clients, even when those expectations are difficult for the client to accept.

10 Keep an Open Mind for Some Compromise

It is extremely rare for parties in family law litigation to get everything they are looking for. Make a list of a select few non-negotiables, and be prepared to compromise on some issues to bring the case to a more cost-effective resolution.

About Foundations Family Law

Foundations Family Law & Mediation Center, founded by The Compassionate Divorce Attorney, Jolee E. Vacchi, was created to be an intentionally different family law firm. Instead of creating more drama, we resolve it. Because at the end of the day, that's what's best for you and your family in the long-term. We believe there is a simpler and better way to resolve family law cases. Instead of increasing conflict through traditional litigation methods, we prioritize using mediation and strategic attorney negotiations to amicably disentangle family law issues and optimize results for our clients. And the results have been nothing short of stellar for the families that we work with.

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