

Article

Family Law



11 Practical Ways to Save Money on Family Law Matters

By Joanne Cliff

Family law matters are often emotionally draining and stressful, and that's before you even consider the financial costs. Your family is your top priority, and you want to achieve the best outcome, which often requires expert legal support. Hiring lawyers that can achieve your desired outcome is expensive, but there are ways to engage the best while reducing the cost of your legal bills.

Before we meet with a new family law client and during the initial consult, we always offer these 11 practical tips:

1. Keep a diary that details important events on the dates they occur.

There are a number of reasons why this is important, and you might start doing this before you've even started thinking about lawyers. Credible evidence like a well-kept diary that lists important events can dramatically reduce the time spent on a family law matter. This is particularly useful in parenting matters when the children spend time with the other parent. For example:

1. What arrangements were agreed upon and when?
2. Was there a dispute about parenting arrangements?
3. Did spending time with the other parent go well? If not, why not?
4. Was a child unable to spend time with the other parent for a particular reason?

5. Did the other parent neglect a child's special needs? What and when did the neglect occur?
6. Did an event occur that put a child's safety at risk?

2. Take advantage of offers from law firms for a free no obligation 30 minute meeting for general legal advice, and use it wisely!

Prepare a list of questions that will help you to understand what you have to do, the court process and the potential costs. But, remember, lawyers cannot provide detailed advice about your particular circumstances during these sessions. Also, use this time wisely to make sure you select a lawyer that makes you feel confident and comfortable that your family's needs will be cared for during the course of the matter.

3. The more information and documents you can share with your lawyer, the less they have to do.

Before you meet with your lawyer for the first time to discuss property settlement matters, it's worth the time and effort to gather together:

1. any existing court orders;
2. property valuation or appraisal statements;
3. bank, mortgage and superannuation statements for the last 12 months;
4. personal and company tax returns for the past 3 years;

continued overleaf...

5. trust deeds; and
6. all financial information relating to a partnership and company.

To save time, speak to your accountant first. They will have a lot of this information on file.

If you don't know the value of your home and any other properties, then real estate agents will provide an appraisal (not valuation) of your property free of charge. To obtain a valuation for any vehicles, use the Redbook website. It is a recognised way to agree on the value.

4. Supply documents in hard copy and try to arrange them in chronological order.

If there is a large volume of documents, this will save your lawyer time and printing costs, which means fewer fees for you.

5. Time is money when you meet with a lawyer, so always come prepared to a meeting with relevant documents and a list of questions to ask.

6. Make notes of things your lawyer asks you to do.

This will prevent additional phone calls or follow-up conferences.

7. Respond promptly to letters and emails from your lawyer for requests for information or instructions, even if it involves responding to your former partner's lawyer.

Follow-up letters or emails will attract a fee.

8. Ask your lawyer about fixed fees.

Preparing documents (e.g. applying to a court for consent orders) where you have already agreed or negotiated a resolution of financial and/or parenting matters can often be done for a fixed fee.

9. If you are not happy or satisfied with the service or advice you are receiving, try to work through it with your lawyer.

Finding a new lawyer who will have to read all the documents and meet with you will cost you more in the long term.

10. Ask your lawyer about any time limits, particularly court time limits, to ensure you comply.

Another hearing may be listed if you don't comply with a court time limit. Multiple hearings will just cost you more money.

11. Always remember that the longer the duration of a legal matter, the more it will cost.

If you follow these tips, you will be in an excellent position to negotiate or attend mediation. Resolving the matter quickly and staying out of court will save you thousands of dollars that is better spent on you and your family.

If you would like to discuss any of these tips or arrange a free no obligation chat to discuss a family law matter, please get in touch with Joanne, our family law expert.



MORE INFO

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