



Your first appointment with a family lawyer

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There is a common misconception that your first appointment with a family lawyer means you are locked in and preparing to head to the Family Court. This is not the case. In this blog, we talk through what to expect when you meet with your family lawyer for the first time.

Your first meeting with a family lawyer is the best way to learn your rights, obligations and entitlements under the *Family Law Act 1975* for married couples or if in WA, the *Family Court Act 1997* for de facto couples.

When should I meet with a family lawyer?

It is often a valuable appointment to [meet with a family lawyer prior to a separation](#), if your circumstances allow for it.

Family law and all the processes that go with it can become both complicated and emotional. Once you've made the decision to separate, becoming fully informed through a knowledgeable source, about what lies ahead, could be one the most beneficial initial steps you take.

There is no obligation, after your initial appointment, to instruct or engage the lawyer or the firm.

There is also no requirement to notify your spouse or partner that you have met with a family lawyer.

What should I expect at my first meeting?

At your first meeting, we will explain to you the various options available to avoid your situation entering the Family Court system. It is our aim, wherever possible, to keep our clients out of court.

Rather, we use dispute resolution options, negotiating skills, financial agreements and parenting agreements. Keeping your matter out of court saves money and reduces stress.

We will provide practical advice to deal with the myriad of issues you may experience when your relationship comes to an end. These include financial and estate planning, [parenting and custody of children](#), dealing with joint and personal assets and [where domestic violence is involved](#), guidance and legal advice to protect the health and wellbeing of both you and any children of the relationship.

What do I need to bring to the first meeting?

The more information you can prepare and collate prior to your appointment, the more value we can add.

Prior to the appointment, you will receive a New Client Information Sheet which provides the basic information for your lawyer to review prior to your appointment. You should fill this out and send it back at your earliest opportunity.

If Family Court proceedings have commenced prior to engaging your lawyer, bring in a copy of all court documents that have been filed and orders of the court (if made).

If a Single Expert Witness or Family Therapist has produced a report, it is important you bring this with you (or provide it prior to your appointment).

For [financial or property settlement](#) enquiries, if you have any information setting out your estimated assets, liabilities, superannuation and financial resources (for example, trust distributions), this is also helpful.

At the time that you make an appointment with our office, ask a member of our team what information would best assist the lawyer in maximising the most value you can from your first appointment.

Can I bring a friend or family member with me for support?

This is always up to you.

If you have a family member or friend who would like to come and support you, we would always recommend you bring them along.

It was once said that on your first appointment, you will retain up to 20% of what advice is given. Your family member or friend may assist you with the other 80%.

In addition to listening carefully, the family member or friend may assist in adding context to your instructions or pertinent facts that have been missed.

Make sure if you are bringing a support person with you, you think of someone who is pragmatic and understanding of your situation.

Will you put in writing what was discussed at my initial consultation?

Depending on the nature of your first appointment, we like to follow up our advice in writing. This provides the opportunity for you to review what was said (and what you told us).

We would often do this within 2–3 days after your first appointment and we will set out actions for you and actions for us moving forward.

What is the cost for an initial consultation with a family lawyer?

We have many lawyers at Meillon & Bright on differing rates. Please give us a call and we can provide these rates to you.

It is not an easy time when a relationship comes` to an end. If your relationship is ending, we encourage you to contact a lawyer who has specific experience in family law.

The information contained in this article is of general nature and should not be construed as legal advice. If you require further information, advice or assistance for your specific circumstances, please contact us.