

Tip Sheet: How to reduce your Family Law legal fees.

You can help reduce your legal fees. The most effective ways are to provide complete information early, communicate efficiently, organize financial disclosure, and review draft documents carefully. This guide explains how these habits reduce avoidable work, expense, and delay.

Understanding your legal fees

What is a retainer and how is it used?

At the beginning of a family law file, clients are asked to make a deposit into a trust account, called a retainer. The amount of the retainer will vary depending on the complexity and the degree of conflict of the file.

How am I billed?

As work is done on your file, the tasks and time taken are recorded, and billed to you monthly. The bills are paid from your retainer, or invoiced to you directly. There is a lot you can do to optimize the work your team does on your file and minimize your bills.

It is our shared goal to make the most efficient use of the retainer, and to keep costs down as much as possible. As a bonus, many of these tips help improve efficiency and avoid unnecessary delays.

How to reduce legal fees at each stage of your family law file

What does Murphy Family Law do to bring your file to its conclusion? Here are some of the main tasks that take place in the course of a typical family law file, and strategies for minimizing your costs.

01 Onboarding

At the beginning of your matter, your team must understand the facts, identify the legal issues, and develop a strategy. At the initial consultation, we will give you a list of information and documents to provide. Depending on your matter, this may include financial statements, tax returns, correspondence from lawyers, court documents, marriage certificates, and cohabitation or separation agreements. Providing complete and organized materials as early as possible helps the team avoid repeated requests and unnecessary follow-up work.

✓ TIP

Give the team a complete and clear picture from day one.

Why?

Your team builds a legal strategy with the information you provide to them. Some information may be in your favour, and some may not. Nevertheless, a full picture is required so that challenges can be mitigated in the early stages.

⊖ AVOID

Not sharing the scope of the issues in a complete or open fashion.

Why?

If new information comes to light partway through negotiations, your position may be weaker since the team hasn't incorporated it into the strategy. Think of it as being like changing your mind partway through a home renovation. It may cost more and take more time to get to the finish line, and you may not get the results you hoped.

02 Client communication

Excellent client communication is the bedrock of a strong relationship with your legal team. Communicating effectively is one of the easiest ways to save money on your legal fees.

✓ TIP

Group issues into a single email/call when communicating with the team.

Unless the matter is urgent and requires immediate action, collect related questions, updates, and concerns and send them in one organized email or address them in one telephone call. This allows the team to review the issues together, respond more efficiently, and incorporate the information into your legal strategy while reducing the time billed for separate communications.

Bonus

Be mindful to keep calls with your team task-oriented as much as possible.

⊖ AVOID

Multiple emails/calls each dealing with single or potentially conflicting issues.

Why?

Our firm manages, organizes and takes action on a significant volume of email communication daily. Each time an email/call is received, the team responds to the new information. Dealing with each communication separately is less efficient, takes time, and costs money.

03 Disclosure

Disclosure of financial information is a key part of most family law files, from separation agreements to court applications. It allows the parties to clearly share and see what exactly they are agreeing to. Thorough disclosure is the foundation for accurate calculations based on the Family Law Act, and a durable agreement that is less likely to be challenged in the future.

✓ TIP

Gather every financial document requested by the team, check that each document is complete and legible, and identify anything that is missing or unavailable.

Why?

Providing organized disclosure promptly helps the team prepare accurate calculations and reduces the need for repeated requests, corrections, and revisions. Financial statements like the 13.1 are considered to be living documents and are refined as the file progresses. However, starting with a strong foundation is important.

⊖ AVOID

Failing to disclose income, assets or liabilities or submitting incomplete information.

Why?

If information comes to light that changes the calculations significantly, re-drafting the forms and re-calculating the formulas takes time. In addition, it can materially affect negotiations with the other party.

04 Drafting

Well-drafted documents provide the foundation for a strong case. This may include letters, agreements, documents required by the court, or the pleadings of your case.

Creating these documents is highly skilled work and relies on complete, high quality information from our clients. Correcting or updating those documents based on new information takes time. Our team will work with you to get complete and reliable information before drafting begins. We work hard to reflect what you have told us with fidelity and persuasiveness.

Documents will be sent to clients in draft form for revisions and approval.

✓ TIP

When you receive a draft, read the entire document before responding. Confirm that the facts, dates, names, and requested outcomes are accurate; collect all comments in one place; and send one complete set of feedback whenever possible.

Why?

A careful, consolidated review reduces repeated revisions, saves time and money, and helps maintain progress toward resolving your matter. Your team works hard to present your situation and desires in the most compelling way possible. Incorporating all client feedback at once saves significant time and money, and helps keep momentum towards the conclusion of a file.

⊖ AVOID

Sending feedback piecemeal to the team over several drafts.

Why?

Multiple rounds of back-and-forth in drafting takes time and money. If feedback is received piecemeal, it becomes more challenging to create high quality documents. Although clients are always given an opportunity to suggest revisions, being thorough and consistent in your feedback will help keep momentum and minimize re-drafting.

CLEAR GUIDANCE. PRACTICAL NEXT STEPS.

Contact Murphy Family Law

Speak with our team about your family law matter and the next steps for your file.

CALL

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