

## What to expect in your first meeting with a family law solicitor

By Michael Allum

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Booking an initial appointment to see a solicitor can feel like a very daunting experience. It doesn't need to be that way. This gives some guidance on what to expect together with some pointers of what you can do in advance to get the most out of your first meeting with a solicitor and make it time and cost effective.

1. Even if the law firm does not offer free initial consultations, it is usually possible to speak with the solicitor briefly on the phone before the first meeting. This can often help to put your mind at ease and means you will have already spoken with them before you meet in person. You can also view their profile on the firm's website so that you know what they look like and check out their experience: are they the right person for you and your dispute?
2. Just because you go to see a solicitor it does not mean that you have to pursue court proceedings. For example, booking an appointment to see a divorce lawyer does not mean you have to get divorced. Many initial meetings are used to explore the rights and options available to you without any commitment going forward.
3. If you are worried about your partner finding out you have seen a solicitor, then check whether it is possible to pay for the meeting in cash. Most firms can take up to at least £1,000 in cash which will avoid the transaction (and potentially the name of the law firm) appearing on your bank or credit card statements, especially if these are shared with your partner. You should check this with the firm in advance of your meeting.
4. If you are communicating with your solicitor via email, make sure it is a secure account. If you have any concerns you should change your password or even create a new email account just for the purposes of e-mailing your solicitor. Make sure you do not leave your computer on if your e-mails can be accessed from it. Also, if you are still living with your partner make sure you tell your solicitor not to send any correspondence to your home address.
5. Check which documents you need to bring before you come to the meeting. Just like when you open a bank account, a solicitor will usually need to ask you for your passport or driving licence and a recent bank statement or utility bill to confirm your current address. It may also be helpful to provide them in advance with a chronology of key dates and, if you are considering a divorce with financial claims, a summary of your financial situation.
6. Make sure you know how much you will be charged for your meeting before you agree to it. Most law firms charge in accordance with hourly rates. You should therefore find out the hourly rate of the solicitor and how long they anticipate the first meeting will last. It is usually between approximately one hour and 90 minutes but can vary depending on your circumstances.
7. Remember solicitors charge a client based on the amount of time spent on your matter, so you may be charged for any follow up questions you ask over the phone or by e-mail. It is therefore preferable to take a list of questions with you to the meeting so that you can discuss them with the solicitor at the end if they have not already been covered in the meeting.
8. Law firms are becoming increasingly flexible in terms of the services they provide. For example, if you do not want your solicitor to conduct the entire case on your behalf, it can sometimes be possible to have an "unbundled" service. This

means that the solicitor just helps you with certain aspects of the case and you do other parts yourself with the solicitor available to give advice in the background if needed. This can often be a much more cost-effective way of dealing with your matter.

9. Although legal aid is now much more restricted, if you are not able to afford to instruct a solicitor for your entire case it can be possible within certain types of proceedings (including financial proceedings when getting divorced) to make an application for your spouse to contribute towards your legal fees. Your solicitor can discuss this possibility with you at the initial meeting if you let them know it might be relevant in your case. Litigation loans are also available.
10. If you or your partner have any connections with other countries, make sure you take specialist advice urgently. There are numerous additional issues which can arise in such circumstances and fast action can often prove decisive in achieving a good outcome. For example, the financial outcome can vary significantly depending on the country in which the divorce proceedings take place and quick action can prove decisive.
11. If you are served with any correspondence or proceedings, go and see a specialist family law solicitor before responding to or acknowledging the papers. Steps taken at the beginning of proceedings can often have a significant impact and it is therefore vitally important that early advice is sought to avoid steps being taken which could potentially damage your case.

The International Family Law Group LLP are the first firm in the UK to use Artificial Intelligence software (called Settify) with new clients. It enables new clients to provide their solicitor with a comprehensive summary of their position which means that the first meeting is often more productive and cost effective.

If you would like to speak with a solicitor at The International Family Law Group LLP you can complete Settify online by clicking this [link](#). You can also call 020 3178 5668 or contact them by e-mail at [enquiries@iflg.uk.com](mailto:enquiries@iflg.uk.com).

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