

Working with your legal aid lawyer

What you can expect your lawyer to do

This guide explains what to expect from your legal aid lawyer. It includes tips on how to work with them on your case. It is expected that you and your lawyer treat each other (and support staff) with respect, and without discrimination, harassment, or abusive language.

Your lawyer will:

- Set a date to meet with you to discuss your case. You can also ask to book an appointment with your lawyer.
- Discuss arranging an interpreter, if you need one, and provide an accessible and inclusive environment.
- Explain to you:
 - Your confidential relationship with your lawyer and the reasons for it
 - Your role and the lawyer's role
 - Legal process steps
 - Your legal options — and their pros and cons
 - Your chances of getting what you want
 - Risks you may face
 - Scope, details, and limits of your legal aid contract, including how many hours are available, if applicable
- Ask you for information you have about your case.
- Ask you what results you want from your case and let you know that they *cannot* guarantee the outcome.
- Give you legal advice about what to do. (It may be different from what you want.)
- Answer your legal questions.
- Try to complete work on time and let you know if they expect a delay.
- Try to return your calls and respond to emails or letters as soon as they can.
- Keep appointments or contact you to make another appointment, when needed.
- Hold meetings in safe, private, and professional settings.
- Discuss all important decisions about the case with you.
- Keep you informed at each stage.
- Give you copies of documents or other information, if this is a reasonable request.
- Let you know right away if they forgot to do something important or made a mistake.
- Explain to you whether you can appeal the result of your case (ask for a review), if you are unhappy with the outcome.

Your lawyer should *never*:

- Ask you for money or anything that benefits them for their services. Legal Aid BC (LABC) will pay your lawyer. You do not have to pay them.
- Engage in sexual contact, or form a personal, sexual, or intimate relationship with you (even if you agree).
- Provide or accept drugs or alcohol.
- Request, pay for, or receive any services from you.
- Communicate with anyone in a way that is racist, sexist, homophobic, ableist, harassing, bullying, or abusive in other ways. Any language that is sexualized or suggestive is not allowed.



What to do if your lawyer is not doing what you expect

If you think your lawyer has not met their responsibilities, discuss this with them. If you need more help, call your local legal aid office.

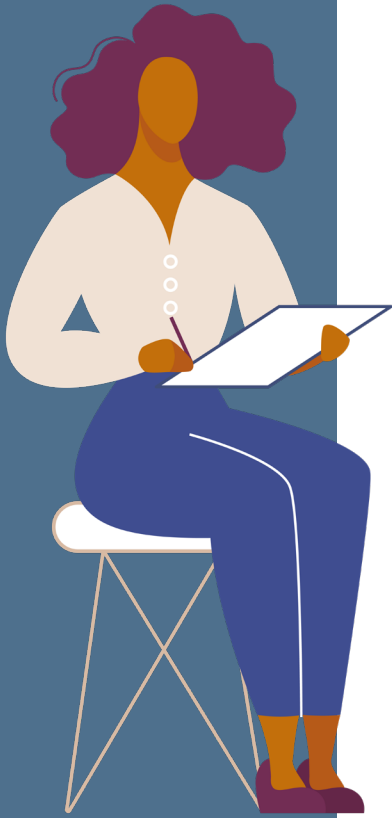
See legalaids.bc.ca/lao or call **604-408-2172** (Greater Vancouver); **1-866-577-2525** (elsewhere in BC).

You can change your lawyer only in *limited* circumstances, and only if you qualify for services.

If you apply through LABC to change your lawyer (**change of counsel request**), you must have a *good* reason (such as quality-of-service concerns). Your request must also be *fair* and *reasonable*. Changing your lawyer in the middle of your case can create problems.

If you ask LABC to change your lawyer, LABC will let your lawyer know. If LABC approves your request, your lawyer must give your file to the new lawyer as soon as possible.

What your lawyer expects **you** to do



You should:

- Ask your lawyer how much time the contract gives them on your case and what you need to do. The amount of time depends on the contract.
- Plan with your lawyer how to use the contract's hours. Your lawyer's time includes your emails; phone calls; meetings; court preparation and attendance; research; and review and preparation of legal documents.
- Make sure your lawyer knows how to contact you and let them know where they can leave messages.
- Be on time for every appointment and court appearance.
- Prepare for meetings; decide what your most important legal issues are and get the documents you need.
- Give your lawyer documents about your case and new information; do this by email, letter, or tell their assistant.
- Write down important dates and events in the order they happened, if possible.
- If possible, write down your questions before calls or meetings. This will avoid many emails and phone calls.
- Give your lawyer all the facts about your case — be open and honest. While it may be difficult, if you do not tell them everything, or bend the truth, it may hurt your case.
- Talk only about your case and the important facts.
- Take notes while talking with your lawyer at meetings and on calls. Write down your tasks and when you can finish them. Note your lawyer's instructions and keep a checklist for your next talk.
- Tell your lawyer what you want to happen and when you hope it will get done.
- Tell your lawyer about court dates, appointments, or other urgent issues, such as family violence.
- Answer all of your lawyer's questions as soon as you can.
- Ask questions if you do not understand something.
- Tell your lawyer what you decide at each stage and give them clear instructions.
- If you do not agree with your lawyer about something, or if you feel they are not paying enough attention to your case, talk to them about it.
- Never communicate with your lawyer in a way that is racist, sexist, homophobic, ableist, harassing, bullying, or abusive in other ways. Any language that is sexualized or suggestive is not allowed.
- If you have accessibility needs and would like support communicating with your lawyer, a navigator might be able to help you. Email navigators@legalaidsbc.ca to see if you are eligible.
- Tell your lawyer if you want to have your criminal trial in French.

Complaints

If you are unhappy with any LABC service, you have the right to make a complaint.

For more information, see legalaidsbc.ca/about/complaints.

If your lawyer wants to withdraw from your legal aid contract, and they have a good reason and their request is fair, they can withdraw. They must tell you and submit a change of counsel request to LABC.