



Legal Insurance



How to Work with an Attorney

People hire attorneys because they need expert advice, right? Sometimes, though, the process of finding and working with an attorney ends up being more stressful than the legal matter itself.

But it doesn't have to be that way. In fact, working with an attorney can be a great experience. You just need to do a little prep work first.

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How to Find the Right Attorney

There are more than 1.3 million licensed attorneys in the United States.¹ So you clearly have a lot of options — which can make the idea of finding the right one seem overwhelming.

It really isn't hard, though. These steps will help:

1

Identify your legal issue.

Not all attorneys handle all areas of law. Some limit their practice to particular legal matters; others may have broader practices but concentrate in a few areas. Just like finding a doctor who specializes in certain kinds of illnesses, finding an attorney with specific experience in your legal matter can lead to better results.

2

Ask for referrals.

Once you know what type of attorney you need, it's time to look for referrals. Talk to others who've experienced a similar legal issue and find out if they were happy with their attorney. You can also ask other professionals, like accountants or bankers, if they can recommend an attorney for your legal issue.

3

Ask questions.

After you have names, contact the attorneys and ask specific questions. Ask about rates, past experience, expectations, payment options, communication style and more. (See the checklist to the right for examples of questions).

4

Consider your preferences.

Think about the attorney's answers, and consider which characteristics are most important to you.

5

Make it simple.

If you're an ARAG plan member, call our Customer Care team at 800-247-4184. We'll provide resources so you can take the next step and help you connect with local network attorneys whose services are covered under your plan. If you're not an ARAG plan member, visit [ARAGlegal.com](https://www.araglegal.com) to learn more about legal insurance.

Questions to ask before hiring an attorney

- How familiar are you with this area of law?
- How many cases like this have you handled in the past?
- What are the likely outcomes for my situation?
- What are your fees and other costs?
- What options do I have for lowering those costs?
- Will I work only with you, or will you delegate to others?
- If others will work on my case, what are their fees?
- What are the best ways to communicate with you?
- How long will I need to wait for replies when I have questions?

What to Expect from an Attorney

There are a lot of ways an attorney can help you. They can serve as:

An advisor

An attorney can help you understand your legal rights and obligations. The law can be (very) complicated, so legal advice is more than just “what’s in the books.” An attorney can find and weigh the right set of legal tools that apply to your individual situation.

An evaluator

There are many sides to most legal situations. An attorney can give you an outside perspective while also looking out for your interests.

A negotiator

Hate negotiating? An attorney can help. In fact, even if you enjoy a good negotiation, it’s usually better to have your attorney negotiate on your behalf – so they can help you make the best use of the legal system.

Written fee agreements

Always ask for a written fee agreement from your attorney. And make sure you understand it.

This agreement should spell out what your attorney will handle. And it should explain your responsibility for out-of-pocket costs and professional services fees.

Overall, written fee agreements should include the following:

- Legal fees and payment terms
- The rates for anyone who will work on your case (in addition to your attorney)
- Details on different rates for different stages of the case
- Costs if your attorney consults another attorney about your case

- Specific services included in flat fees
- The type and frequency of payments that can be made from the retainer, as well as whether or not the retainer will need to be replenished

How attorneys charge

It’s a good idea to talk fees during your first meeting with your attorney. This will help to prevent any misunderstandings down the road. Generally, attorneys charge a “consultation fee” for the initial meeting with a client. In that meeting, the attorney gathers a general impression about the case. Then they advise the client of the likely fees and costs for handling the matter.

Rules of conduct for attorneys

The rules of professional conduct should govern the ethical conduct of attorneys in serving their clients. They should be competent, prompt and diligent. Your attorney should also keep you up to date on the status of your legal issue – and must keep the details of your case confidential.

You have the right to participate in the decisions of your case. Some of your goals may not be met due to the laws in your state or the facts of your situation. But it’s the attorney’s job to tell you what you can reasonably expect to happen.

Tips for Working with Your Attorney

You can avoid problems in the first place by taking these steps:



Be prepared.

Before each meeting, gather the necessary information. Make sure you know what you want to get out of the meeting, and write down some questions or concerns in advance. This will help everyone save time (and help you save money).



Communicate.

Listen to your attorney's questions, and share all the facts and developments related to your case. Agree on the best times and methods to reach you (cell phone, email, etc.). And ask the attorney how they prefer to communicate, how often you can expect updates and the best times to contact them.



Clarify.

You and your attorney's goals should be aligned. If you have questions about a certain course of action your attorney is taking, talk to them. Discuss what's involved and how long each step may take during your initial meetings.



What to Do if You Have a Problem with Your Attorney

Most attorneys and their clients work together well. But if a problem develops, there are things you can both do to get things back on track.

- Handling communication problems. If your attorney isn't sending you copies of the paperwork in your case or responding to your calls, set up an appointment and go over your expectations and your attorney's expectations. This will help you find a middle ground.
- Dealing with decision-making problems. Make sure you and your attorney are on the same page about strategic decisions that are only yours to make, the tactical decisions that the attorney should make and the tactical decisions that require consultation with you.

If you've talked with your attorney and things still haven't improved, it may be time to find another attorney. Be straightforward and respectful with your current attorney about the change. You'll need their help with the transition.

'American Bar Association. "Demographics." 2024. <https://www.americanbar.org/news/profile-legal-profession/demographics/>



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