



SUPERIOR COURT OF CALIFORNIA, COUNTY OF SAN DIEGO

FAMILY LAW CASE RESOURCE INFORMATION

Family law cases include dissolution of marriage (divorce) or domestic partnership, legal separation, annulment of marriage (nullity), paternity, and domestic violence. Detailed information about each type of family law case can be found on the court's website www.sdcourt.ca.gov, and the California Judicial Council website www.ca.courts.gov. Among other information, these websites provide answers to frequently asked questions, terms and definitions used in family law cases, forms with step-by-step instructions, local rules, California Rules of Court, and information on where to find help. The attached Legal Steps for a Divorce (Dissolution) (JC Form #FL-107-INFO) provides an overview of the legal steps for a divorce, important notices, statewide resources, and services available at all California courts. The following topics contain general information specific to the San Diego family court.

SELF-REPRESENTED LITIGANTS (SRL)

Individuals who want to represent themselves may get help through the Family Law Facilitator's Office which is located at every division of the court. The facilitators provide both one-on-one services and group workshops. The services are free but they are offered on a first-come, first-served basis. You must sign-in at the courthouse the day you want to meet with the facilitator. Sign-in time is generally at 7:30 a.m. but varies among the different court locations. Workshops are by appointment only. The court's website under "Self Help Services" provides specific times, dates, places, telephone numbers, and services provided by the Facilitator's Office.

Procedural Assistance: If you do not have an attorney, you can get help with filling out forms, filing documents, serving papers, and other similar procedural assistance from the Family Law Facilitator's Office as discussed above.

LOCAL RESOURCES

Legal Advice: If you want to consult with or hire an attorney but do not know anyone, you can contact the San Diego County Bar Lawyer Referral Service at www.sdcba.org or (800) 464-1529. The Bar Association's referral service will provide you the names of licensed family law attorneys which you can then contact to possibly represent you. While there is no charge for the referral assistance itself, legal representation by these attorneys will be at their individual rates. If you would like to be represented by an attorney but cannot afford one, you can contact the Legal Aid Society at www.lassd.org or (877) 534-2524, or the San Diego Volunteer Lawyer Program at www.sdvlp.org or (619) 235-5656, to inquire into the availability of low cost or free services.

Settlement Opportunities:

- **Child Custody:** Before any court order can be made on a dispute over child custody and visitation, the parties must participate in a child custody recommending counseling session with a court counselor from Family Court Services (FCS), or stipulate to private mediation at the parties' expense. The FCS session allows both parents to work together toward a mutually acceptable agreement which is in the best interest of the children. For additional information, view the *Family Court Services Orientation Video* available on the court's website www.sdcourt.ca.gov.
- **Before Trial:** Before any trial, the parties will generally be required to participate in a mandatory settlement conference (MSC) with a qualified family law attorney appointed by the court. The appointed attorney is often called a "settlement judge," but he or she cannot make any rulings or orders. The purpose of the MSC is to informally discuss the disputed issues and facts in your particular case with a neutral third party. The settlement judge may offer his or her legal perspective on the areas of disagreement and suggest a fair and equitable resolution. The goal of the MSC is to reach a signed settlement agreement on some or all of the disputes without going through a time-consuming and expensive trial. There is no charge for the settlement conference.
- **Private Resources:** Mediation, collaborative law, and other types of settlement resolutions are also available from any number of private businesses at the parties' own cost. The court does not provide a list of these outside resources, nor does it endorse any private business.

LOCAL RESOURCES, *continued*:

Domestic Violence Victim Services: Domestic violence clinics are located in each of the branch courts. The downtown clinic is in the Madge Bradley court located at 1409 4th Avenue and not in the Family Court located at 1555 6th Avenue. These clinics are staffed by volunteer lawyers and provide free assistance in the preparation of forms required to obtain a restraining order. The Family Law Facilitator's Office in each branch court also provides help in preparing papers for a restraining order. Comprehensive information about domestic violence is on the court's website including forms, a domestic violence hotline and local shelters.

**FAMILY CENTERED CASE RESOLUTION CONFERENCE (FRC) &
SELF-REPRESENTED FAMILY CASE RESOLUTION CONFERENCE (SFRC)**

A Family Centered Case Resolution Conference (FRC) is a less formal hearing at which the parties, their attorneys, and a judicial officer work together to develop a case resolution plan for managing the case and resolving issues as quickly, fairly, and efficiently as possible. A Self-Represented Family Case Resolution Conference (SFRC) is similar to an FRC except it is set in cases with two self-represented litigants. Initially the self-represented litigants meet with a family law facilitator and then, if necessary, with a judicial officer.

The court sets the initial FRC or SFRC. A request for a conference earlier than or in addition to the conference set by the court can be made by ex parte application. Information regarding ex parte applications and procedures is on the court's website under the "Family Law Rules."

PERSONAL CONTACT INFORMATION

You must keep the court informed of your current mailing address and telephone number by promptly filing a Notice of Change of Address or Other Contact Information (JC Form #MC-040). The form is available online or in the court's business office.

DISCLAIMER:

This information sheet is intended to provide general information for litigants in family law cases. It may not include all information that is legally required, is not legal advice, and it should not be used as a substitute for legal advice from an attorney licensed by the State Bar of California. If you have any questions about your legal rights, you should talk to an attorney.

With the exception of the San Diego Superior Court's website, the San Diego Superior Court does not control or maintain the websites referred to on this information sheet and cannot be responsible for the accuracy of the information or content they contain. In addition, the content of a website may change, and the court would not necessarily be made aware of the change. When you access one of these websites, you are subject to the terms of use and privacy policies of that website.