

Top #5 Questions My Clients Ask

When a client steps into a conference room, usually before they've offered up any information about their case, they have **five main questions they desperately want the answers to.**

1. How much?
2. How long?
3. Why me?
4. Where will I live?
5. Who gets the kids?

The solicitor answers to these questions are pretty much:-

1. It depends
2. It depends
3. It depends
4. It depends
5. It depends

Ridiculous. I know.
True....absolutely.

If a solicitor can give you the exact answer to any of these questions you should either excuse yourself and make a sharp exit (because these questions cannot be answered with exact precision and so your solicitor is filling you with false hope) or ask them for next week's lottery numbers, because they're obviously moonlighting as Mystic Meg.

Clients have certain expectations about their case. Managing expectations is hard and as solicitors we have to be realistic. Here I'm hoping to help shine a light on what are the greyest areas for a family law client:

HOW MUCH?

Whilst it's almost impossible to say with any certainty exactly how much your case will cost, your solicitor should be able to tell you a ball park figure of what you might be charged depending on a certain set of circumstances – for example, a solicitor should be able to give you a rough estimate of the costs that might be incurred up to a particular hearing or event, and they should absolutely tell you their hourly rate. If your solicitor can't (or won't), run for the hills and don't look back.

HOW LONG?

The length of time your case will take can vary wildly! There are so many factors which will affect a case's length.

If your opponent decides from the beginning that they wish to take all of their anger, pain and self-loathing out on you and be

difficult about the proceedings, this will inevitably lengthen your case (and perhaps make you want to tear your hair out. Strand by strand).

I've seen every trick in the book when it comes to putting a spanner in the works by lengthening proceedings, usually by unrepresented parties who don't understand the implications of their actions. Not filling out court paperwork; avoiding service of court documents; pretending to be someone else; hiding in the attic. You name it - I've seen it.

The court also plays a part and in recent years the backlogs of paperwork the court has to wade through gets longer and longer, resulting in more delays in judges box-work. And that's nothing when compared to getting a listing for a hearing down at the Central Family Court. Those of you who've tried to get a listing here for anything over half a day in the next three months will share my pain.

WHY ME?

Whilst it may feel that you are the only one going through family court proceedings, I can absolutely promise you one thing. You are not alone. There are thousands of people just like you who are going through the same thing and they are probably also feeling similar emotions to you, even if the facts of their case are different. Keep your head high, I promise there is an end in sight.

WHERE WILL I LIVE?

When it comes to financial proceedings at court, a court will not leave either party destitute and/or without a place to live. The need to rehouse the parties, and especially children, will be at the forefront of everyone's minds. It may be true that there is not enough in the "matrimonial pot" to buy two separate properties for you and your soon-to-be-ex to live in, but it doesn't mean you can't rent in the short term.

Your solicitor should, in any event, be making the best case possible for you and should be advising you on various strategies that can be implemented so that your housing needs are met.

WHO GETS THE KIDS?

If I've said it once, I've said it a thousand times: the kids is the real fight when a marriage or a relationship breaks down.

There will be tears, anger, and probably a bit of name calling. The best way to approach it is with a reasoned, composed and rational outlook.

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Your solicitor should be advising you about how best to achieve your goal, whatever that may be – to have extended contact; that the children live with you etc etc.

There will be solicitors who are more aggressive and those who are more conciliatory. Really, the solicitor you choose is up to you and is wholly your decision. I've never found overtly aggressive approaches to achieve better results (however cathartic for the client that may be), and usually this just gets on judges nerves. Judges like reasonable people. I promise.

Make your solicitor aware of exactly what it is you want. Your solicitor should tell you how reasonable that is and what the best way to get there is. What you want may not be possible, however, and you need to be prepared for that.

Solicitors, are not magicians, after all.