

Basic Information for Self-Represented Litigants

1. If you have decided to represent yourself in a case, it is important for you to know that you are about to enter into a process that can be very complicated or confusing. If your case involves children, real estate (land, buildings, a home or anything attached to the land), a pension or retirement account, important heirlooms or keepsakes, property you own separately from your husband or wife, or large debts, you should seriously consider visiting with an attorney about your case. If there is a lawyer on the other side, he/she cannot give you legal advice and that lawyer is prohibited from representing both sides.
2. By representing yourself, you are acting as your own attorney. You will be expected to know and follow the law and court rules just as any attorney, including the Texas Rules of Evidence, Texas Rules of Civil Procedure, the Court's Local Rules, and the Lawyer's Creed. If you do not follow the rules, you may permanently lose important rights.
3. The Judge, court staff (including the court coordinator, court clerk, court reporter, bailiff) and opposing counsel cannot give you legal advice. That means they cannot tell you what you should do or say in your case or how the law applies to your case.
4. Do not attempt to communicate directly or through another person to the judge outside of the courtroom. That means you should not call the judge on the phone, leave messages, send a letter, fax or email message or talk to the judge face-to-face. The only time you may communicate with the judge is if everyone involved in the case is present. Also you may write something to the judge if you send a copy of it to everyone else in the case (see paragraph 5 and 7 below). Any communication that does not include everyone else in the case is called an *ex parte* communication and is not allowed. The Court will return any *ex parte* communication to you unread and will notify the other side of your attempt to communicate with the Judge.

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11. **The Hearing** - At the hearing, the judge will hear your case. Each party will have a chance to tell his or her side of the story. It's important to bring your paperwork and your evidence such as photos, witnesses, bills, receipts, contracts, or anything else that will prove your case.
12. **How to Dress** - Dress as though you were going to an important job interview. Be neat and clean. Do not wear shorts, bare feet, tank tops, halter tops, sandals, hats, or other casual clothing. The court will order you removed from the courtroom if you violate court dress code; if you are not in the courtroom you may lose your case.
13. **Timeliness** - Always get to court on time. Plan to be at the courtroom at least thirty minutes early. Remember that you will need to locate parking, clear the security check and find the proper courtroom.
14. **Courtroom Demeanor** - You and your witnesses should be quiet in court.
 - Court is not like you may have seen on T.V. You will be expected to be respectful of the opposing party, the opposing party's attorney, the Judge and the Court staff *at all times!*
 - Don't smoke or chew gum.
 - Turn your off cell phone, pagers or other audible devices when you are in the courtroom.
 - Do not go in and out of the courtroom while waiting for your case to be called.
 - Do not bring children to court unless the child has been subpoenaed.
 - During your case speak clearly and loudly enough to be heard, and stay calm.
 - Stand when speaking to the Judge.
 - Call the Judge "*Your Honor.*"
 - Do not interrupt the judge, the attorneys or any other party in the courtroom.
 - At all times you should control your emotions and pay attention, whether you are in the audience, appearing as a witness, appearing as a party.

HIDE WARNINGS These instructions provide general information and are not a substitute for the advice and help of a lawyer.

You can print these instructions to use as a checklist. (<https://texaslawhelp.org/print/763>)

Hide Checklist

- Step 1: Determine where to file your divorce.**
- Step 2: Fill out the starting forms.**
- Step 3: File (turn in) your starting forms.**
- Step 4: Notify the Office of the Attorney General (if applicable).**

Has your child ever received TANF or Medicaid?

- If NO, skip this step.
- If YES, you must send a file-stamped copy of your Petition to the Office of the Attorney General (OAG) Child Support Division (and be able to prove that you did so).
 - **Send your Petition by Email** - You can scan a file-stamped copy of your Petition and email it. Find the email address for the OAG child support office in the county where your case is filed here: **Email Addresses for Child Support Offices (<https://texasattorneygeneral.gov/cs/service-of-citation-notice-directory>)**. Write the cause number and the county where you filed your case in the subject line of the email. Print a copy of your email. This is your proof. Bring it with you when you go to court to finish your case.
 - **Send your Petition by Certified Mail Return Receipt Requested** - Or, you can mail a copy of your Petition by certified mail return receipt requested. The post office has the forms for certified mail return receipt requested. Find the mailing address for the OAG child support office in the county where your case is filed here: **Mailing Addresses for Child Support Offices (https://www.texasattorneygeneral.gov/apps/cs_locations)**. The post office will give you a receipt when you mail the Petition. The OAG will sign the return receipt (often called the "green card") and mail it back to you. This is your proof. Bring the receipt and the return receipt (green card) with you when you go to court to finish your case.

- Step 5: Ask your spouse to sign the Answer or Waiver of Service form.**

Free or Reduced Rate Legal Services

MEDINA County Seat – Hondo Texas

FAMILY LAW CLINICS - Meet face to face with a licensed attorney over video chat every 3rd Tuesday of each month from 10 a.m. – 1 p.m. at the Pearsall Public Library, 200 E. Trinity Street, Pearsall Texas 78061. This is a free service for low- income patrons. (See attached pages for description of services provided)

RioGrande Legal Aid, Inc. 210-212-3783 (San Antonio) 888-988-9996 (Main Office) www.trla.org
Provides free legal services to low-income residents; represents migrant and seasonal farm workers; operates public defender programs in several Southwest Texas counties; call Monday through Thursday 8:30am-7:30pm; Friday 8:30am-5:30pm.

Alamo Area Resource Center 800-308-2437 (San Antonio) 210-625-7200 (Main Office) www.aarcsa.com
Offers referrals to persons with HIV/AIDS seeking general civil legal services including advocacy, wills, guardianships, directives, and powers of attorney.

Atascosa Family Crisis Center 830-281-2001 (Pleasanton) 830-569-2001 (Main Office)
www.atascosafamilycrisis.org Provides legal advocacy, particularly with obtaining protective orders and referrals to free and sliding scale legal assistance, for survivors of domestic violence and sexual assault, dating violence, and stalking; provides a 24-hour hotline.

Catholic Charities Archdiocese of San Antonio Caritas Legal Services 210-433-3256 (Main Office)
www.ccaosa.org Offers legal services to low income members of the community at a reduced rate. Fees are assessed on a sliding scale based on income. Areas of practice include: immigration, family and civil law, and probate.

Catholic Charities Archdiocese of San Antonio - Guardianship Services Program 210-222-1294 (Main Office)
www.ccaosa.org Provides legal guardianship protection, including less restrictive alternatives such as financial, medical and living wills for those who lack mental capacity due to age, illness, or disability and who are at risk of abuse, neglect, and/or exploitation; offers powers of attorney for those with sound mental capacity.

Disability Rights Texas 800-880-8401 (San Antonio) 800-252-9108 (Main Office)
www.disabilityrightstx.org Handles disability-related issues including access and discrimination. Can submit 24/7 online intake at <http://www.disabilityrightstx.org/contact/24-7-online-intake>. 108
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Equal Justice Center - Employment 210-308-6222 (San Antonio) 800-853-4028 (Main Office)
www.equaljusticecenter.org Provides free legal assistance to low-income persons seeking enforcement of wage and employment rights, regardless of citizenship or immigration status.

Family Violence Prevention Services, Inc. 210-733-8810 (Main Office) www.fvps.org Provides free legal assistance to income-eligible victims of domestic violence; offers emergency shelter and community-based intervention and prevention services.

Refugee and Immigrant Center for Education and Legal Services (RAICES) 210-226-7722 (Main Office)
www.raicestexas.org Provides immigration-related legal services for asylum seekers, unaccompanied minors, immigration detainees, and victims of domestic violence, crime and human trafficking.

Southwest Family Life Center 830-426-5131 (Hondo) 830-426-5972 (Main Office) Provides shelter and legal advocacy for survivors of domestic violence, particularly with obtaining protective orders and provides referrals to Texas RioGrande Legal Aid.

St. Mary's University School of Law, Center for Legal and Social Justice 210-431-2596 (Main Office)
www.stmarytx.edu/law Offers limited legal assistance through the law school's three clinics: Civil Justice Clinic, Criminal Justice Clinic, and Immigration and Human Rights Clinic;

Family Law Clinics

We're hosting monthly family law clinics in libraries, neighborhood centers, and other local centers in rural Texas communities. We can answer your questions about family law topics like divorce, child custody, visitation rights, paternity, and name changes.

Our attorneys are able to meet with clients living deep in the heart of Texas through private video chat. During the thirty-minute appointments, clients and their attorneys can together create a plan for getting the best outcome for their case. We offer what is called, "limited-scope representation." That means we're able to give advice, review legal paperwork, and help you navigate the justice system -- but we're unable to represent you in court.

Eligibility

We're funded by a grant that requires us to serve those living at or below 125% of the federal poverty guidelines.

We understand that can be confusing. We recommend submitting an online registration form, that way we have all the information to determine if you qualify.

How It Works

Select the clinic location you would like to attend below. Our registration form will ask you for information we need to determine if you qualify for our free services. If we review your information and you do not qualify, we will call you at the number you provided to let you know.

During registration, you can select an appointment time. That way you can get in, get out, and get on with your busy day. Bring any legal documents related to your case, do your best to arrive on time, and we'll see you there!

If you have any questions about your appointment time, registration, or the clinics -- email familyclinics@tlsc.org

Frequently Asked Questions

Does it cost anything?

No, our services are free to those that qualify.

How do I know if I qualify?

We're funded by a grant that requires us to serve those living at or below 125% of the federal poverty guidelines.

We understand that's confusing -- we recommend registering for the clinic you want to attend. Once we receive your registration form, we'll look through the information to determine if you qualify for our services. If you do not qualify, we will call you to let you know.

Do I need to register?

No. We accept walk-ins, but we do give priority to those who've made appointments or are on the waitlist.

How long will it take?

Each meeting with our attorneys is 20 minutes. However, if you were not able to select an appointment time, you may have a wait while we work to squeeze you in.

Do I need to bring anything to the clinic?

No, you don't need to bring anything but yourself. But if you have any court documents related to your case, it would help us if you brought them.

What legal issues can you help with?

Our attorneys and paralegals specialize in family law. Family law includes divorce, custody, visitation, child support, paternity, and name changes.

What kinds of services do you offer?

We're able to offer what is called, "limited-scope representation." That means we can offer advice, review legal paperwork, and -- in some cases -- draft legal documents. We cannot represent you in court.