

Fact sheet

Separating from your partner? Worried about losing custody of your kids?

What is a legal aid certificate?

If you're financially eligible and have a legal issue that Legal Aid Ontario covers, you may be able to get a "certificate." You can use this to pay for a lawyer to represent you for a certain number of hours.

How LAO can help

If you qualify, Legal Aid Ontario may be able to help you in these situations:

- **If you're interested in working on your legal issues outside of court, you and your ex-partner may want to try mediation.** It's a process where a mediator helps you to brainstorm workable solutions that focus on the best interests of your children.
- **If you're separating from your partner and feel you can come to an agreement outside of court, LAO could pay for a lawyer to help you negotiate and draw up a separation agreement.** The lawyer can help you decide which parent the kids will primarily live with, when you or your ex-partner can visit the kids, how to divide your money and other things you own together, and how much financial support you get (or have to give). If one of you is financially eligible and the other earns \$50,000 or less, you may both qualify for legal aid.
- **If the Children's Aid has removed your child from your home, you may be able to get a lawyer to give you advice and represent you in court** to work out how you can see your child as well as whether and how you can get your child back.
- **If you are involved with Children's Aid outside of court, you may be able to get a lawyer to help you:**
 - negotiate a customary care agreement, temporary care agreement, or voluntary care agreement
 - take part in an Aboriginal alternative dispute resolution process, such as Talking Together or Talking Circles



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- **If you are a grandparent, a relative or a member of the community who wants custody of a child that the Children's Aid is involved with and is seeking to place in care.**
- **If you are a parent who wants to try and stay in touch with your child once the Children's Aid has placed him or her up for adoption.**
- **If you need the help of a family lawyer and one or more of these applies to you:**
 - Your family law case includes many different legal issues.
 - You are a self-employed parent.
 - You are making a Hague application (your lawyer will tell you about this if it's relevant).
 - You are claiming matrimonial property on a reserve.
 - You are making a mobility claim.
 - You have mental health or addiction issues.
 - You have literacy issues.
 - You do not understand English or French well, or have another language barrier.
 - Your case involves many other people.
 - You are a parent aged 18 or under.
 - You are under 22 years old and need legal advice and support about starting an access or child support claim against your parent(s).
 - You are 65 years old or over.
 - You self-identify as First Nation, Métis or Inuit.

Need a lawyer? Call us toll-free at 1-800-668-8258

Service is available from Monday to Friday, 8 a.m. to 5 p.m.

If possible, please have the following ready:

- all papers you have received from the courts or from the other party (e.g., your ex-partner)
- all agreements you have signed or have been asked to sign
- information about whether you have hired a lawyer and if not, whether you have a referral form from a duty counsel lawyer.