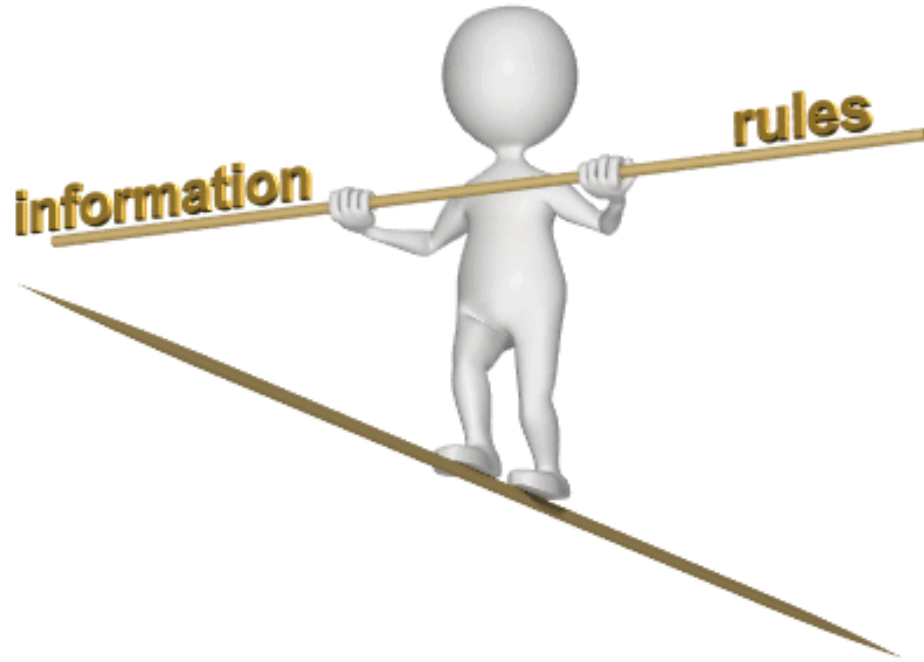




Welcome to the 29th Annual AB 1058 Conference

September 19, 2025



Self represented
litigants--
ENSURING
ACCESS TO
JUSTICE IN A
NEUTRAL
COURT

AB1058 Child Support
Conference

BONNIE HOUGH

How do people feel when they come to
court for child support?



How do people feel when they come to court for child support?

Nobody has responded yet.

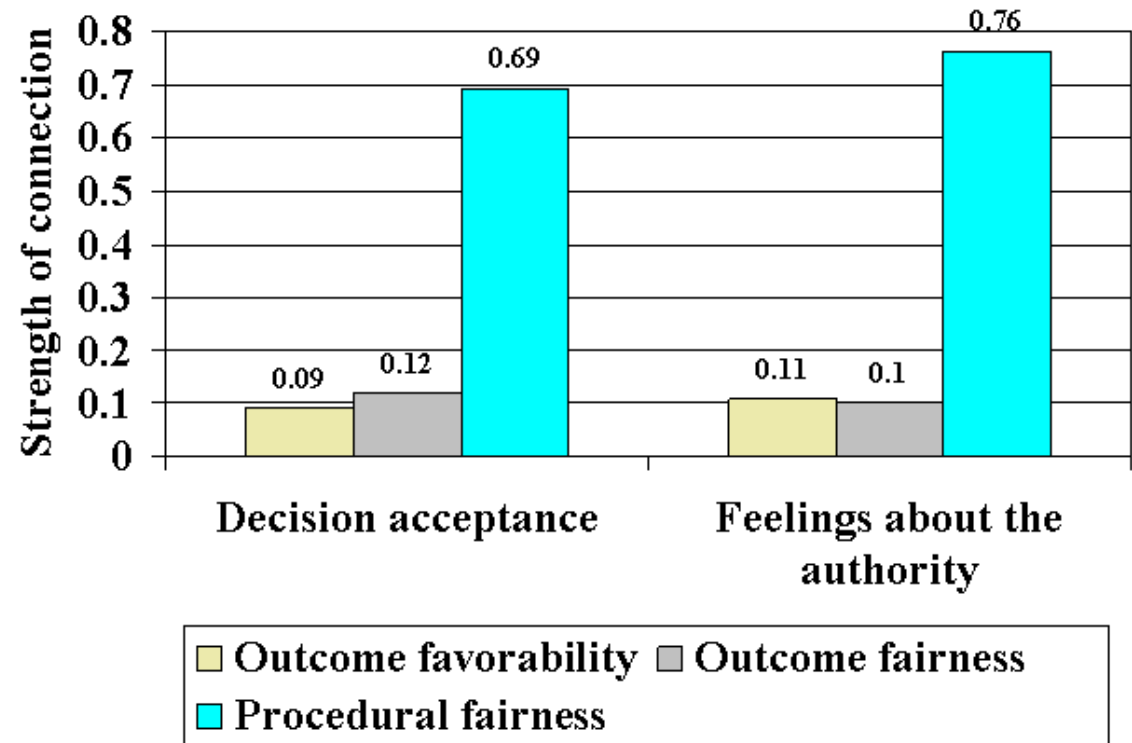
Hang tight! Responses are coming in.



What do people want from the court?



Why People accept decisions



PROCEDURAL FAIRNESS -- what matters

- ◆ Four key elements:
 - ◆ Voice
 - ◆ Neutrality
 - ◆ Respect
 - ◆ Trust



Equality



Equity



Justice





Try some
user testing –
at the doctor,
the DMV

When people don't understand or are frustrated by the procedure

- 1) If they are upset, show empathy and understanding
- 2) Explain the procedure and make it clear that it is based on the law
- 3) Explain the reason for the procedure
- 4) Provide an example that demonstrates why the law is fair
- 5) Define any legalese

Overarching obligation

Dispose of
cases on the
merits

Judicial canon 3B(8)

3B(8) A judge shall dispose of all judicial matters fairly, promptly, and efficiently. A judge shall manage the courtroom in a manner that provides all litigants the opportunity to have their matters fairly adjudicated in accordance with the law.

Commentary to 3B(8)

The obligation of a judge to dispose of matters promptly and efficiently must not take precedence over the judge's obligation to dispose of the matters fairly and with patience. For example, when a litigant is self-represented, a judge has the discretion to take reasonable steps, appropriate under the circumstances and consistent with the law and the canons, to enable the litigant to be heard.

ALWAYS ASK

AM I TRYING TO BE
FAIR?

AM I BEING
PERCEIVED AS FAIR?

WHAT WE CAN DO

- ◆ Explain procedures
- ◆ Provide forms/access to forms
- ◆ Liberally construe pleadings
- ◆ Ask questions
- ◆ Allow in evidence
- ◆ Provide information about next steps

WHAT WE CANNOT DO

**Allow
violation of
orders**

**Allow
unreasonable
delay**

**Allow
negative
affect on
access**

**Allow SRL to
“game”
system**

**Become SRL’s
lawyer**

Code of Ethics for California Court Employees

Tenet One - Impartiality

◆ Provide impartial and evenhanded treatment of all persons

Tenet One - Impartiality

All persons coming to the court for assistance are entitled to fair and equitable treatment, regardless of their personal behavior or legal situation. **Court employees must remember that they are often dealing with people who may be having one of the worst experiences of their lives. They must offer to angry, confused, and sometimes deceitful court users the same level of competent and impartial help that they provide to those who are pleasant and appreciative.** While every court employee has the right to freedom of association and political expression, he or she does not have the right to take sides in a legal dispute, interject himself or herself into the legal decision-making process, second-guess a judge's ruling, or give the appearance of partiality on any issue that is likely to come before the court. The procedural integrity of the court must be protected at all times.

What do you do to provide impartial treatment when people are at their worst?



Tenet Seven – Prohibition Against Giving Legal Advice

Serve the public by providing accurate information about court processes that is as helpful as possible without taking one side over the other, or appearing to favor one side of a case.

Tenet Seven – Prohibition Against Giving Legal Advice

- ◆ Given the experience and visibility of court employees, it is natural for those who deal with the court, including attorneys and litigants as well as the general public, to ask questions such as: “Should I fight this?” “How do I fight this?” “To whom should I go for legal assistance?” “What does the law say?” **Court employees can and should provide information that is within their own level of professional training and experience, so long as the information does not compromise the neutrality of the court or the court’s appearance of neutrality. For example, court employees can and should patiently explain how to file forms and pay fines, and should clarify legal language and the court’s policies attendant to procedural due process and assist self-represented litigants in court self-help centers. They should provide litigants with information about non-profit legal services agencies, certified lawyer referral service programs and courtbased self-help assistance.** They must not, however, cross the line separating court employees, whether licensed attorneys or not, from attorneys practicing law in the community. Court employees must not give any legal or procedural information that tends to favor one side of a case. Court employees should cite this tenet when pressed by those seeking legal advice.

How to handle “legal advice” questions

- ◆ Rather than starting your response with “I can’t do that but...” you can start with “Let me tell you what I can do...”
- ◆ Refer to the self-help website

Self-Help Guide to the California Courts

Resources and information to help you navigate your court case, including step-by-step guides for following procedures and help with understanding your options.

What would you like to do?



Get help with papers I was served

Look up by form number to understand your options. (Find the form number in the upper right or upper left corner of your papers.)



Go

Start a court case

Find your case type to get started



Go

Work on my court case

Take the next step, update an order, see all the options during or after your case



Go

Get information about a legal topic

Get general information and learn about your options



Go

Look up a court case or citation

Find a traffic ticket or court case using the county court's website



Go

Get help from the court

Find self-help centers, forms, interpreters, disability access, and more



Go

Onramps (I was served...)

For someone served, explains:

- What the papers mean
- Important deadlines
- If they have a court date
- Options to respond
- What happens if they ignore papers
- Where to get help

WHAT DO THESE PAPERS MEAN?

Request for Order (form FL-300)

If you received a *Request for Order* (form FL-300), it means the other person in your family law case is asking the judge to make a decision. The court sets a date to hear from both sides (a **hearing**) before it makes a decision.

WHAT THIS FORM TELLS YOU

Hearing date and time

What the other person is asking the judge to decide

Orders made before the hearing

STREET ADDRESS: CITY: TELEPHONE NO.: E-MAIL ADDRESS: ATTORNEY FOR (NAME): STATE: ZIP CODE: FAX NO.: SUPERIOR COURT OF CALIFORNIA, COUNTY OF STREET ADDRESS: MAILING ADDRESS: CITY AND ZIP CODE: BRANCH NAME:		CASE NUMBER:
PETITIONER: RESPONDENT: OTHER PARENT/PARTY:		
REQUEST FOR ORDER ☐ Child Custody ☐ Child Support ☐ Property Control		TEMPORARY EMERGENCY ORDERS ☐ Visitation (Parenting Time) ☐ Domestic Violence Order ☐ Spousal or Partner Support ☐ Attorney's Fees and Costs ☐ Other (specify):
CHANGE ☐ CHANGE ☐ TEMPORARY EMERGENCY ORDERS		
NOTICE OF HEARING		
1. TO (name(s)): ☐ Petitioner ☐ Respondent ☐ Other Parent/Party ☐ Other (specify):		
2. A COURT HEARING WILL BE HELD AS FOLLOWS:		
a. Date: _____ Time: _____ Dept.: _____ Room: _____		
b. Address of court ☐ same as noted above ☐ other (specify):		
3. WARNING to the person served with the Request for Order: The court may make the requested orders without you if you do not file a Responsive Declaration to Request for Order (form FL-320), serve a copy on the other parties at least nine court days before the hearing (unless the court has ordered a shorter period of time), and appear at the hearing. (See form FL-320-INFO for more information.)		

PAGE 1

(Forms FL-300-INFO and DV-400-INFO provide information about completing this form.)

Hearing date and time

[< Previous Page](#)[☰ Index: All Pages](#)

WHAT DO THESE PAPERS MEAN?

Notice of Motion or Order to Show Cause (form FL-680 or FL-683)

If you received a *Notice of Motion* ([form FL-680](#)) or an *Order to Show Cause* ([form FL-683](#)), it means the Local Child Support Agency (LCSA) has filed papers asking for a court date (a hearing). At the hearing, the court may make orders for child support or other issues. If you do not respond or go to the hearing, the court may make a decision without your input.

This page will help you understand what the form means and your options for what to do next.



PRINT



EMAIL

WHAT THESE FORMS TELL YOU

You have a court date

What the LCSA wants the court to decide

You have a court date



Was this helpful?

[Chat Now](#)

The court date, time, and location are listed on Page 1 of the *Notice of Motion* ([form](#)

Case introductions

- Simple explanation of a case
- Answers key questions
- Clarifies misconceptions
- "Wayfinds" users to the right next step

Do you and your spouse have children together?

"Children" refers to children younger than 18 years old.

Yes

No

JUDICIAL BRANCH OF CALIFORNIA

Supreme Court

Courts of Appeal

Superior Courts

Judicial Council

 CALIFORNIA COURTS
SELF-HELP GUIDE

Type of Case ▾

Court Information ▾

 Español



< Previous Page

☰ Index: All Divorce Pages

Divorce in California

This guide can help you

- [Start and finish](#) a divorce
- [Respond](#) to a divorce
- Understand legal issues like [property](#), [spousal support](#), [child custody](#), or [support](#)

This guide uses the term spouse to mean spouse or domestic partner, unless noted.

Ready to get started?

Answer 2-3 questions to see which type of divorce matches your situation and get step-by-step instructions.

Go to the questions

Overview

In California, you get a divorce by starting a court case. No one has to prove someone did something wrong to cause the divorce (this is called **no fault divorce**). You can get a divorce even if the other person doesn't want one.

You can divorce to end a marriage or domestic partnership. A [legal separation](#) has a similar process, you can use these instructions. You need different instructions for an [annulment](#).

Make sure you can file in California

To file for divorce in California, either you or your spouse has to have lived in California for the past 6 months and in your current California county for the past 3 months.

There are other residency rules for legal separations, same sex couples, and domestic partners. [Learn more](#) ▾

File papers to start the case and pay a fee

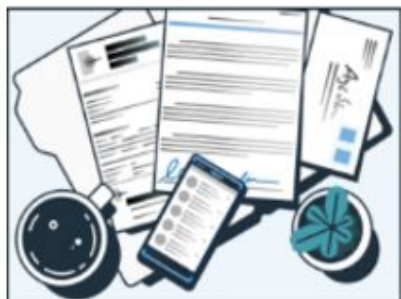
When you file forms with the court, you'll pay a fee.

Step-by-step

How to ask for a Fee Waiver

1

Gather the information you need



You may need information about your income and expenses to fill out the fee waiver form.

If you receive public benefits, you only need to check which benefit you receive on the form. You don't need to fill out the part about your income or expenses.

If your household income is below a set amount, you will need to fill out information about your household income. You might need to look at copies of paystubs or other documents with your income, to fill out the forms.

If you can't afford the fee and your household's basic needs, you will need to fill out information about your income and expenses. You might need to look at things like paystubs, bills, and bank statements, to fill out the forms.

1

Fill out Request for Order form

Request for Order ([form FL-300](#))

Use this form to tell the court:

- What you want it to order
- Why it should order what you're asking for

For child support, use item 3 on page 3, and "Facts to Support" (item 10 on page 4).

What are examples of Facts to Support my Request (item 10)? ▾

The form says Petitioner and Respondent. Which am I? ▾

2

Fill out the Income and Expense Declaration

- *Income and Expense Declaration* ([form FL-150](#))

This form asks how much money you earn and how you spend your money.

- Attach proof of your income (like paystubs) from the past two months to the form.
- Do not attach a copy of your last year's taxes. Bring a copy (if you have one) to the hearing.

Informational and expectation setting

Property and debts in a divorce

Part of your divorce involves dividing your property and debts and getting a formal order from the court about these issues.

A judge has to approve how you'll divide your property and debts

Part of your divorce involves dividing your property and debts. Property is anything you can buy or sell or has value. For example, a house, car, or furniture. It's also things like a bank account, pension, 401k, or stocks.

Even if you divided everything informally when you separated, a judge still needs to make a formal order about these issues. This doesn't mean you have to go to court. A judge could formally approve an agreement you and your spouse write up. If you can't decide, a judge can decide for you at a hearing or trial.

⚠ Until you have a court order, any property or debt from your marriage still belongs to both of you. This is true no matter who is using it or who has it with them. The same is true of debts.

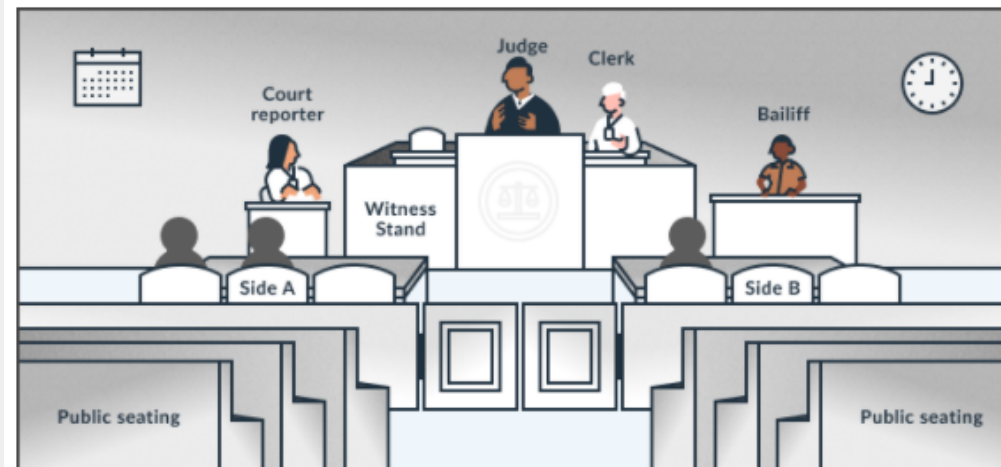
Be on time or early for court

The date, time and courthouse are written on the front of the SC-100 form.

Know in advance **which department** you need to go to and in **which courthouse**.

Leave enough time to:

- Find parking
- Walk to the courthouse
- Go through court security if there is any
- Find the courtroom and check in with the bailiff or the court attendant



How to respond to government child support request

1

Fill out two forms

- *Response to Governmental Notice of Motion or Order to Show Cause* ([form FL-685](#))
- *Income and Expense Declaration* ([form FL-150](#))

You only need to fill out an *Income and Expense Declaration* if the LCSA asked for child support.



If the forms you received from the LCSA ask the court to establish parentage, make sure you check the box in item 1 on your *Response* that says whether you do or do not admit (agree) you are the parent of the child or children listed.

2

Make copies of the Response and any other form

Make 3 copies of the *Response* and any other forms you filled out, along with any attachments.

3

File your Response with the court

To file your forms with the court:

- Give the original and the 3 copies to the court clerk



Was this helpful?



Chat Now

Tenet Ten - Discrimination

Guard against and, when necessary, repudiate any act of discrimination or bias based on race, religion, color, national origin, ancestry, physical or mental disability, mental condition, marital status, sex, age, sexual orientation, or other personal choices and characteristics

Tenet Ten - Discrimination

Each day court employees assist users of court services of many races, religions, national origins, languages, sexual orientations, and varieties of personal abilities and appearance. They may deal with accused felons, child abusers, participants in painful dissolutions, those grieving from an injury or loss of a loved one, or people experiencing any one of numerous kinds of human pain or dysfunction. **Court employees are expected to treat each other and each user of court services equally and with compassion.** Equal access to the court system and equal treatment for all are the cornerstones of the administration of justice. Court employees must expose and discourage discrimination wherever it exists.

People are watching (and listening)



People in the courtroom are watching -

body language

what's on your desk

your interactions with others

what you seem to be doing

Listening in –

particularly on zoom

OPEN ENDED QUESTIONS

“Could you give me a little more information about _____”

“Help me understand _____”

“Can you give me some specific details about that?”

“Why is this important?”

“What else do you want me to know?”



OVERALL

- ◆ Explain the process
- ◆ Be active
- ◆ Minimize barriers to appropriate interaction
- ◆ Model the behaviors you want to see
- ◆ Understand your decision fatigue point

People visit or contact the court

May be having one of the worst days of their lives

Probably don't understand the procedures they need

Stand to lose a lot if things don't go well

Are experiencing stress

Feel like the situation is out of their control

We can't fix it – but...

- ◆ We can do our best to make them feel:

- ◆ that the process was fair

- ◆ that they were valued as a person

- ◆ that they understand what happened

They're more likely to feel trust and confidence in the court **AND**
they're more likely to pay their child support



THANK
YOU and
QUESTIONS