

Before You Call or File: Gather the Basics First

Use this checklist before a clinic visit, official call, filing question, or help request.

Start with the core basics

- Full names for the adults involved, and the children if they matter to the question.
- A safe phone number and email address for a callback.
- The county or court location involved, if known.
- The case number or docket number, if there is one.
- The next deadline, hearing date, or notice date.

Gather the papers that make the first call easier

- The most recent order, judgment, notice, or agency letter you have.
- Any papers you were told to bring or respond to.
- A short timeline of what happened and when.
- Names of any professionals already involved, such as a GAL, mediator, or caseworker.

If the pressure is safety, housing, or child support

- Safety: write down the immediate concern, whether any protection order exists, and a safe way to contact you back.
- Housing: keep the lease, eviction notice, utility notice, rent amount, or arrears amount together.
- Child support: keep the current order, payment summary, review notice, and any major life-change details together.

Best practice for the first outreach

- Put the papers in one folder.
- Put the dates in one short list.
- Write down three questions you need answered first.
- Start with a short factual timeline instead of a long emotional narrative.

Public information only - not legal advice.