

Consider this: Imagine you were driving through an unfamiliar city late at night.

Unexpectedly, your GPS stops  
working and you realize you  
have no idea how  
to get to your destination.

You try not to panic and you pull over to ask a well-intentioned stranger for directions.

The stranger says, “Sure! I know how to get there! It’s easy! You just need to go up the road a bit!”

Then make your first right.

Then your next  
Then make ~~left~~ your first right.

Take another

left. Then your next

Then make your first right.

Take another left. Then get on the highway. Then your next left. Then make your first right.

Take another left. Then get on the highway. Then your next left. Then make your first right.

Take the second exit.

Take another left. Then get on the highway. Then your next left. Then make your first right.

Take a right off the exit. Take the second exit. then go straight.

Take another left. Then get on the highway. Then your next

left. Then make your first right.

Go about 3 or 4

Take a right the miles or so...

off the exit second exit.

then go straight.

Take another left. Then get on the highway. Then your next

left. Then make your first right.

Go about 3 or 4

Take a right the miles or so...

off the exit. You'll see a

then go big hill...

straight.

Then get on the  
Take another highway.  
At the top of highway.  
left. Then your next  
that hill you'll  
Then make your first right.  
see a fast  
Go about 3 or 4  
food  
Take a right the miles or so...  
restaurant... You'll see a  
off the exit... second exit.  
then go big hill...  
straight.

But it's a  
Then get on the  
Take another  
I can't recall  
At the top of highway name of the  
sign!  
Then your next  
that hill you'll  
restaurant.  
Then make your first right.  
see a fast  
Go about 3 or 4  
food  
Take a right the miles or so...  
restaurant...  
off the exit... You'll see a  
second exit.  
then go  
big hill...  
straight.

But it's a  
Take a right  
At the top of  
sign!  
that hill you'll  
Then make  
see a fast  
food  
Take a right  
restaurant  
off the exit...  
then go  
straight.

Your destination  
Then get on the  
is across the  
highway name of the  
street from that  
restaurant.  
Go about 3 or 4  
miles or so...  
You'll see a  
big hill...

?

Now imagine your destination is a hospital because someone you love is having a medical emergency...

This story is a good representation of how an unrepresented litigant feels when given too much information from the many resources available to them. trying to maneuver through a contested divorce or custody matter.

Like the lost driver, an unrepresented litigant often gets too much information and not enough direction.

**ISSUE IN DISPUTE:**

*We cannot agree on where our children should live. I want them to live with me and she wants them to live with her.*

With regard to the above issue, what are you seeking?

*I think the children should live with me primarily and visit with her.*

Arguments to support what you are seeking:	Examples to support those arguments	Examples of proof you can use to support your arguments
<i>I have been their primary caregiver</i>	<i>-I quit my job after the birth of our first child and have not resumed working. -Our children have never been in daycare and with babysitters only on rare occasions. -I take children to all commitments (school, doctor, activities)</i>	<i>Employment records Tax records School records Witnesses</i>
<i>Our oldest child has special medical needs that I can best manage</i>	<i>-Our oldest son has asthma and severe allergies that require special medications and treatments. I have been trained to manage his illnesses and father has not.</i>	<i>Witnesses Doctors reports School records/Degrees Tax records</i>
<i>The other parent works long hours during the week and I don't want our children in daycare</i>	<i>-The other parent is in sales and the position requires travel frequently through the week. He also works long hours and is rarely home before the children's bedtime.</i>	<i>Employment records/Pay stubs Tax records Correspondence between parties (text/emails) Copies of job applications Proof of age Social Security Statements</i>

Topic of Dispute

Write the issue here:

[redacted] Father does not provide better

Symbol for this issue:

Care, better for child to live (more) with me

What is the best solution?

NOTE: Solutions relating to children must start with, "I believe it's best for our child(ren) if ..."

WHY is this the best solution?	FACTS:	PROOF:
Arguments to support what you are seeking:	Examples to support those arguments:	Documents (records, receipts, etc.) or Witnesses that support the facts.
<p>father refuses to be involved w/ child's therapy.</p>	<p>I got him into therapy b/c of his behavior and am the only parent involved.</p>	<p>letter from [redacted] therapist. med. records [redacted]</p>
<p>father makes little effort/ involvement to enrich child (ie sports, clubs).</p>	<p>father doesn't have kids involved in anything</p>	<p>— text message</p>
<p>father does not assist w/ child's academic endeavors.</p>	<p>grandma ( [redacted] mpm) helps kids w/ homework &amp; reading.</p>	<p>— witness - mom</p>
<p>father has no financial income to provide for children</p>	<p>no job for 4yrs won't get job til step father retires</p>	<p>— witness - mom → text message</p>

Topic of Dispute

Write the issue here: I have primary caregiver role | I am fit

Symbol for this issue: \_\_\_\_\_ parent

What is the best solution?

NOTE: Solutions relating to children must start with, "I believe it's best for our child(ren) if ..."

WHY is this the best solution?

Arguments to support what you are seeking:

FACTS:

Examples to support those arguments:

PROOF:

Documents (records, receipts, etc.) or Witnesses that support the facts.

Examples of proof you can use to support your arguments:

Stable job	Worked for <del>as</del> <del>as</del> <del>as</del> almost 2 yrs.	paystubs
Suitable home environment	Same home for over 3 yrs w/ room for kids	letter from homeowner - paystubs - letter of change of address - photos
Primary caregiver for child's medical needs	<del>scribble</del> I, more than <del>scribble</del> take kids to all appt. & sch. them.	Medical records
<del>scribble</del> financially provide for children	School clothes, supplies, clothes, shoes, learning supplies during summer, etc.	receipts pictures

Write the issue here: Best for child to remain in my

Symbol for this issue: primary care

What is the best solution?

*NOTE: Solutions relating to children must start with, "I believe it's best for our child(ren) if ..."*

WHY is this the best solution? Arguments to support what you are seeking:	FACTS: Examples to support those arguments:	PROOF: Documents (records, receipts, etc.) or Witnesses that support the facts. Examples of proof you can use to support your arguments:
<p>I have had a primary role in <del>child's</del> care All of her life <sup>prior to her mother's death</sup></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• to drs appts since her birth</li> <li>• to her dental appts</li> <li>• to her orthodontic appts.</li> <li>• attended All of child's IEP meetings</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• letter from dr. (2017)</li> <li>• letter from <del>██████████</del> (2012)</li> </ul> <p><i>can use admissions</i></p>
<p>[child's]</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• spent summers and school breaks with <del>██████████</del> etc.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• child's testimony</li> <li>• witness   neighbors   <del>██████████</del></li> </ul>
<p>since <del>██████████</del> mother's death in March, 2017 <del>██████████</del> I have remained <del>██████████</del> primary caregiver</p>		
<p>I can provide a safe, stable, loving environment for her care.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• support her through school <del>(enrollment)</del></li> <li>• arranged for her counseling</li> <li>• confirmed her medical insurance</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• enrolled her</li> <li>• letter from <del>██████████</del></li> </ul>

Topic of Dispute

Write the issue here: Not best for child to live with father

Symbol for this issue: \_\_\_\_\_

What is the best solution?

NOTE: Solutions relating to children must start with, "I believe it's best for our child(ren) if ..."

WHY is this the best solution?	FACTS:	PROOF:
Arguments to support what you are seeking:	Examples to support those arguments:	Documents (records, receipts, etc.) or Witnesses that support the facts.  Examples of proof you can use to support your arguments:
<p>he has</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>not <sup>had</sup> an active role in her care.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- never attended an IEP</li> <li>- never attended dr appts</li> <li>- never attended orthod. appt.</li> <li>- never attended dentist appt.</li> </ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>History of violence against women <del>in her presence</del> in her presence</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>mother fled home from <sup>abuse</sup> <del>home</del> due to abuse</li> <li>faced charges of assault against <del>children</del> <sup>children</sup></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>HH records</li> <li>testimony officer statement prob. cause.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>history of drug use / trafficking / handguns</li> <li>convictions for same.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>4/6/6 - handgun charge</li> <li>4/2/9 cds. manuf/distrib.</li> <li>9/05 cds pamph.</li> <li>1/03 - assault</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>true test copy</li> <li>true test</li> <li>true test</li> <li>true test</li> </ul>

**To do before my next appointment:**

Return to: \_\_\_\_\_ on \_\_\_\_\_

Date      To Do:

Review Safety Plan resources at People's Law Library at  
[www.peoples-law.org](http://www.peoples-law.org).

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Contact the domestic violence shelter in your area.

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Continue to gather evidence with calendar/journal

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Don't forget to preserve your evidence!

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Read the articles on custody; divorce; child support;  
domestic violence at [www.peoples-law.org](http://www.peoples-law.org).

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Don't forget to preserve your evidence!

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~~Read the articles on custody; divorce; child support;  
domestic violence at [www.peoples-law.org](http://www.peoples-law.org)~~

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~~File original complaint with clerk's office; ask them to date  
stamp copy then place in 'court papers' section of notebook~~

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~~Once you receive the WRIT OF SUMMONS from the court,  
arrange for service by the sheriff.~~

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~~RETURN TO CLINIC ASAP IF YOU HAVE DIFFICULTY  
WITH SERVICE!~~

---

Confirm that affidavit of service was filed by the sheriff

---

Download/request pro bono applications

---

Continue to update calendar/journal; preserve evidence

---

Wait the 30 days from date of service (or once you receive a  
response from the other side, if sooner) and return to clinic

---

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**To do before my next appointment:**

Return to: \_\_\_\_\_ on \_\_\_\_\_

Date To Do:

Submit pro bono applications/begin saving for attorney consults

File original answer to Counter Complaint with court. Date stamp a copy and place in "court papers" section of binder. Mail one copy of answer to opposing party's attorney.

Continue to document in journal/preserve evidence

\_\_\_\_\_

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Continue to document in journal/preserve evidence

Follow up on pro bono applications. Use the 'Who have you talked to' sheet to write down dates, names and details.

Find/visit a limited scope attorney to discuss case including strengths/weaknesses and settlement parameters

Begin mediation preparation (see Mediation section of notebook).

Review calendar/journal/evidence. Determine most compelling evidence and add to Topic in Dispute charts

Review articles on case preparation at [www.peoples-law.org](http://www.peoples-law.org)

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~~Review articles on case preparation at [www.peoples-law.org](http://www.peoples-law.org)~~

~~Complete standard interrogatories and notice of discovery. File notice of discovery. Make copy of entire package and send to opposing party attorney. Place copy of entire package in 'Discovery' section of your notebook.~~

~~Mark calendar for 30 days from date your mailed discovery. Return to clinic.~~

**To do before my next appointment:**

Return to: \_\_\_\_\_ on \_\_\_\_\_

Date To Do:

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Continue to gather evidence with calendar/journal

Don't forget to preserve your evidence!

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**To do before my next appointment:**

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Date To Do:

Complete the script for hearing. Place script and documents in "Prepare for Hearing" section of the notebook.

Make 3 copies of all evidence. Place in folder.

Review script. Read through it at least 20 times.

Arrange for time off work for hearing; transportation; day care (and a plan for unexpected emergencies such as a sick child!).

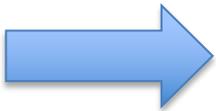
Review materials on trial format (see Family Law for People materials and [www.peoples-law.org](http://www.peoples-law.org)).

Arrive early to courthouse for hearing. Dress professionally. Confirm that you are in the correct courtroom (you can ask the courtroom clerk if the judge has yet to enter).

Return to clinic to discuss the court hearing and next steps

## Sample client consult timeline:

- Visit one: Discuss safety issues  
Narrow issues; complete Topic in Dispute Charts  
Set up calendar/journal  
Gather information/Resources  
Send with To-Do List
- Visit two: Plan of action  
Complete and file documents  
Update journal/calendar/topic in dispute  
Update To-Do List
- Visit three: Confirm completion of service of process; affidavit filed  
Update information  
Give pro bono resources  
Update To-Do List
- Visit four: Confirm whether an answer has been filed  
If no, file default  
  
If yes (and contested), submit pro bono applications  
Respond to counter-complaint
- Visit five: Provide information on first hearing  
Begin preparation for mediation  
Encourage consult for settlement parameters/strengths/weaknesses
- Visit six: Status of pro bono/low bono search  
Begin discovery  
Pendente lite hearing preparation
- Visit seven: Complete hearing script  
Copy evidence and place in script  
Review script and encourage client review  
Review trial format (see Family Law for People/[peoples-law.org](http://peoples-law.org))  
Discuss making arrangements for transportation, daycare,  
Discuss appropriate court attire, arriving early, checking in.



A Notebook litigant feels less

