THE #FKLM FAMILY BLUEPRINT

Questions to Bring to a Legal Appointment

Legal & Policy Literacy · Family & Caregiver Questions

Make a short, free consultation count.

IN THIS GUIDE

- Lead with the decision, not the history
- Questions worth asking in almost any legal appointment
- Taking notes that hold up later
- What a consultation typically will not do
- Try it: a real example
- Scripts you can use
- Your checklist

A free guide from My Fairy GodParents — for youth impacted by parental incarceration, justice-impacted youth, and the caregivers and families who support them.
myfairygodparents.org/resources/family-blueprint

Print, write on it, and share it with the people helping your family.

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> *Make a short, free consultation count.*

THE DIFFERENCE THIS MAKES

A free or low-cost legal consultation is usually short — often thirty minutes or less — and families who arrive without a plan tend to spend most of that time explaining their whole history rather than getting an answer to the question that actually matters right now.

Attorneys and legal aid staff are trained to work efficiently from a clear question. A family that says "I need to know whether I can enroll my grandson in school without his mother's signature" gets further in five minutes than one that opens with everything that has happened over the past two years.

This lesson is a preparation tool: a set of questions worth bringing to any legal appointment, and a way of organizing your own situation beforehand so the appointment produces something usable. It does not tell you what an attorney will say, and it is not a substitute for the consultation itself.

LEAD WITH THE DECISION, NOT THE HISTORY

Before the appointment, write one sentence describing the decision you currently cannot make: enroll a child in school, authorize a medical procedure, respond to a caseworker, appeal a benefit denial, understand a custody filing. Say that sentence first.

Background matters, but it matters in service of answering that question, not as a complete narrative. If the attorney needs more history, they will ask for it — most are good at pulling exactly the detail they need once they know what you are trying to accomplish.

If you are not sure what the actual decision is, that is itself worth saying: "I'm not sure what I'm allowed to do here, and I want to understand my options" is a legitimate and common way to open a consultation.

QUESTIONS WORTH ASKING IN ALMOST ANY LEGAL APPOINTMENT

What is this process called in my state, and roughly how long does it typically take? Knowing the name of the process lets you research it further and describe it accurately to schools, clinics, or agencies afterward.

What will it cost, including filing fees, and can any of those fees be waived based on income? Cost is often the reason families delay a process they are otherwise entitled to pursue, and fee waivers are more common

than many families assume.

What documents do I need to bring or prepare for the next step? Getting a concrete list before you leave prevents a second round of phone tag to find out what was missing.

What happens if I do nothing? This question often reveals whether a matter is genuinely urgent or can be handled at a more manageable pace, and it is one families frequently forget to ask.

+ TAKING NOTES THAT HOLD UP LATER

Write down the name of the person you spoke with and the date, even in a brief phone consultation. If you need to follow up or the matter is later handled by someone else at the same organization, this detail speeds everything up.

Note anything described as a deadline exactly as stated, including the date and what triggers it, rather than paraphrasing from memory afterward. Deadlines are the detail most commonly misremembered under stress.

If the attorney gives you a next step, write it down as an action with a date attached — "file form X by [date]" rather than "they said I should do something about the form." A vague note is nearly as unhelpful as no note.

+ WHAT A CONSULTATION TYPICALLY WILL NOT DO

A short consultation usually will not resolve your entire situation in one sitting, especially if it touches multiple issues — custody, benefits, and school enrollment, for instance, may each need their own answer. Expect it to answer the specific question you brought, and treat additional issues as separate appointments.

It also generally will not predict a guaranteed outcome. An attorney can explain a process, likely timelines, and typical considerations, but a responsible attorney will not promise a specific result, because outcomes depend on facts, evidence, and decisions made by a judge or agency.

If a consultation raises more questions than it answers, that is a normal outcome, not a failed appointment. Write down the new questions and bring them to the next contact, whether that is a follow-up call or a second consultation.

+ SIX QUESTIONS ON ONE PAGE

A caregiver preparing for a free legal aid consultation about her nephew's school enrollment wrote one page beforehand: the one decision she needed to make, three questions from this lesson, and a short timeline of what had happened so far with dates.

The thirty-minute appointment covered all of it. The attorney told her the name of the process her state used for caregiver school authorization, roughly how long it took, that there was no filing fee for that particular form, and what documents to bring to the district registrar.

She left with a dated action item — file a specific affidavit by a specific date — instead of a general sense that someone had listened. She said the difference from a prior, unprepared call to a different office was

almost entirely in how she had walked in.

+ WORDS YOU CAN USE

Opening a consultation

Say this first, before background.

"The decision I need help with is [one sentence]. I have some background if it's useful, but I wanted to start with what I'm actually trying to accomplish."

Asking about cost and waivers

During the consultation.

"What would this process cost, including any filing fees? Is there a fee waiver available, and how would I apply for one?"

Asking what happens with inaction

Near the end of the consultation, to gauge urgency.

"If I don't do anything right now, what happens? I want to understand whether this is urgent or something I can plan for over the next few weeks."

Closing the appointment

Before you hang up or leave.

"Can I confirm the next step: I will [action] by [date]. Is there anything else I should bring or do before then, and who should I contact if I have follow-up questions?"

+ PREPARE FOR A LEGAL APPOINTMENT

- [ ] Write one sentence naming the decision you need help with.
- [ ] Write a short, dated timeline of relevant events beforehand.
- [ ] Gather existing documents related to the issue in one folder.
- [ ] Prepare the core questions: process name, timeline, cost, required documents, and what happens if you do nothing.
- [ ] Write down the name of the person you speak with and the date.
- [ ] Record any deadline exactly as stated, including what triggers it.
- [ ] Leave with one specific next action and a date attached to it.

☐ Note any new questions that came up, to bring to the next contact.

+ REFLECT AND WRITE

What is the one decision I most need help with right now, in one sentence?

Do I have my documents and a written timeline ready before I call?

What would I do differently after a consultation that answered fewer questions than I hoped?

Who is the one person, in my household or family, I should update after this appointment?

+ YOUR NEXT STEP

Write your six questions on one page before your appointment.

+ WHERE THIS COMES FROM

Written by My Fairy GodParents — reviewed August 2026.
Official reference: USA.gov — Legal Aid — linked for the official rules and forms, which MFGP does not set.
https://www.usa.gov/legal-aid
This is general information and practice guidance — not legal advice, mental-health treatment, or a statement of any court, agency, or facility's rules. Policies differ by state, county, facility, school, and program, so always confirm details with the office involved.
For decisions with legal, medical, financial, or clinical consequences, work with a licensed professional or the organizations listed with each resource.
The information provided through The #FKLM Family Blueprint is for general educational purposes and is not legal advice. Laws and policies differ by jurisdiction and may change. Families needing advice about their individual circumstances should consult an appropriately qualified attorney or legal-services organization.

You do not have to do this alone.

More free guides, scripts, and checklists:
myfairygodparents.org/resources/family-blueprint