

# STEPS TO JUSTICE

## Family Law Workshop

An OJEN guide demonstrating a CLEO public legal information resource.



ONTARIO JUSTICE EDUCATION NETWORK  
RÉSEAU ONTARIEN D'ÉDUCATION JURIDIQUE



**CLEO**

Community Legal Education Ontario  
Éducation juridique communautaire Ontario



## About this workshop guide

This workshop guide is a collaboration between the **Ontario Justice Education Network (OJEN)** and **Community Legal Education Ontario (CLEO)**. OJEN's Steps to Justice workshops introduce audiences to common legal problems and familiarize them with a specific area of law. Using hypothetical scenarios, workshop participants explore a legal topic by navigating the practical step-by-step information on CLEO's Steps to Justice website. They learn how to use the website to find legal information, including the forms, self-help guides and referral information for legal and social services which may be helpful in working through a future legal problem.

This workshop guide was written for use in Ontario high school classrooms, but can be used (or modified) for other audiences. For more information on how to use this workshop guide, please check out our short training video available on the OJEN website [ojen.ca/steps-to-justice-workshops-training-video](https://ojen.ca/steps-to-justice-workshops-training-video).

**OJEN** is a charitable, non-profit, public legal education organization. We develop innovative educational tools that introduce young people to the justice system, help them understand the law, and build their legal capability. We partner with schools and community organizations across Ontario to prepare young people to manage the legal problems that will arise in their lives. For more information on OJEN, please visit [ojen.ca](https://ojen.ca).

We gratefully acknowledge the support of law students who have contributed to this workshop guide through the Osgoode Public Interest Requirement (OPIR) at Osgoode Hall Law School and through placements with Pro Bono Students Canada (PBSC). We would also like to thank the high school students who provide us with their perspectives and feedback on this resource as OJEN summer interns through the Law in Action Within Schools (LAWS) Summer Job Program.

**Any legal information in this resource is intended for general educational purposes and should not form the basis of legal advice of any kind. Individuals seeking specific information about their legal problem should always consult a lawyer.**

For over 45 years, **CLEO** has developed clear, accurate, and practical legal rights education and information to help people understand and exercise their legal rights. We produce print and online resources, including the Steps to Justice website, the Family Law Guided Pathways, and CLEO Connect which has information and supports for community organizations. For more information on CLEO, please visit [cleo.on.ca](https://cleo.on.ca).

# STEPS TO JUSTICE FAMILY LAW OVERVIEW

Activity (minutes)	Content
<b>Warm-up (5)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Clarify differences between criminal and civil law.</li> <li>• Group quiz on family law (Slides 2-6).</li> <li>• Review the major areas covered by family law (Slide 7).</li> </ul>
<b>Hook (5)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Advance to Slide 8 and read the demonstration scenario out loud.</li> <li>• Encourage participants to identify potential legal issues in the scenario.</li> <li>• Switch to Slide 9. Explain that the Steps to Justice website is a tool that can help people understand what they need to do when they have legal problems like this one. The group will next use it to answer questions related to the scenario.</li> </ul>
<b>Introduce Steps to Justice (10)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Distribute the student handout, "Scenario 1: Demonstration."</li> <li>• Advance to Slide 10. Read the questions about the demonstration scenario out loud.</li> <li>• Pull up the Steps to Justice website on the display screen.</li> <li>• As a group, use the Steps to Justice to find answers to the questions about the demonstration scenario on the slide.</li> <li>• Use different searching options (sub-topics, front page keyword search, and header menu) and introduce the actual "steps" to follow. Use the presenter's notes on where to find the information included in this guide for support.</li> <li>• Ask if anyone has questions.</li> </ul>
<b>Group work (25)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Advance to Slide 11.</li> <li>• Divide participants into groups and cue them to pull up Steps to Justice on phones/computer and to start on "Family Law" legal topic.</li> <li>• Give each group a scenario worksheet (scenarios 2-5).</li> <li>• Each group needs at least one device with internet to complete their worksheet.</li> <li>• Circulate and support the groups as needed.</li> </ul>
<b>Discussion (15)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Each group has 3-5 minutes to explain their scenario and what they have learned through their investigation. Participants should refer to the completed worksheet for support.</li> <li>• Address questions and issues arising from their reporting.</li> </ul>
<b>Application (Optional)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Advance to the final slide.</li> <li>• Since the group has practiced using the S2J website, the presenter may introduce a more complex scenario.</li> <li>• Participants should comment on it reflecting what they have just learned.</li> <li>• As a group, use the website to answer the scenario questions.</li> <li>• Facilitator's notes are included in this guide to support discussion.</li> </ul>





## Facilitator's Package: Family Law

# TRUE OR FALSE

- 1. I got legally married to an Elvis impersonator in Las Vegas, but it doesn't count because I live in Canada. What happens in Vegas, stays in Vegas, right?**

**F** – Ontario recognizes marriages from outside of Ontario/Canada as long as the marriage was legal where it occurred.
- 2. My parents are getting a divorce. I want to live with my mom because she is a way better cook. Luckily, I am 10 years old so I can make that decision for myself.**

**F** – Generally a child cannot decide which parent they want to live with. However, as the child gets older (closer to the age of majority) they have more say about where and with whom they live.
- 3. My partner and I are splitting up. If we want our children to spend an equal time living with each of us, we should agree to have joint custody of them.**

**F** – Joint custody means both parents make decisions about important matters in their children's life, like religion, health care and education. Determining which parent children will live with and how much time they will spend with each parent is a separate issue.
- 4. I pay spousal support to my ex-husband. That means I send the cheques directly to his house.**

**T and F** – Usually, the person responsible for paying spousal support pays the support to the Family Responsibility Office (FRO). The FRO is a government agency responsible for enforcement of spousal and child support payment. The FRO then transfers the payment to the person who receives spousal support. Some people choose to make the payments privately, without involving the FRO. In these cases, though, it is best to pay by cheque so that there is a record of the payment.
- 5. My husband recommended we both go see Lyndsey the Lawyer to discuss our separation and divorce. Instead, I decided to go see Louis the Lawyer by myself because it's better for us to have our own separate lawyers.**

**T** – It is better to have separate lawyers. Separated partners have different rights and responsibilities in a divorce or separation and your lawyer should be working for your interests only.

# Facilitator's Package Scenarios



Start on the Steps to Justice question, "How do I apply for a divorce by myself?" under **Separation and Divorce**. Follow the steps from the landing page to answer the questions. The relevant steps are listed in brackets following the question.



## Scenario 1: Demonstration

I have decided that my marriage is over and I want a divorce. My husband travels a lot for work and he seems to think everything is fine, so I don't think he will agree to it. Can I apply for a divorce on my own? And if so, how?

Start on the Steps to Justice topic, "Separation and divorce" with the question, "How do I apply for a divorce by myself?"

- Do you and your partner need to agree to get a divorce? (*Landing page*)
- What other legal issues should you consider before applying for a divorce? (*Step 1*)
- What is the major difference between a "contested" and "uncontested" divorce? (*Landing page, Step 5*)
- How do you know which form to fill out when you apply to the court for a divorce? (*Step 2*)
- Which court has the power to make a divorce order? (*Step 3*)

### Discussion

A person can apply for a divorce on their own, but if the partner responds and disagrees with what the applicant is asking for this is called a "contested divorce" and the process becomes more complicated. It can also become complicated because of other legal issues that may accompany the divorce, such as custody of children and division of property. These issues also determine which form needs to be completed in order to apply for divorce – there is one form for a divorce only and a separate one for a divorce with other legal issues included. These forms must be filed at the Superior Court of Justice as it is the court empowered to issue a divorce order.



## Scenario 2

I am a great baker – my cakes are legendary! It must be genetic, because my adoptive mom is a disaster with a cookie sheet. I don't know who my birth parents are, but now that I'm 18 I would like to meet them and see if there are other bakers in my family. Can I contact them?

Start on the Steps to Justice topic, "Birth and Adoption" with the question, "I'm adopted. Can I find out about my birth parents?"

- What kinds of information can you get from the government about your birth parents?  
*(Landing page, Step 1)*
- What kind of information can you get from applying for post-adoption birth information? *(Step 2)*
- What is a disclosure veto? What can you do if your birth parents applied for one? *(Landing, Step 2, Step 3)*
- What happens if your birth parents filed a "no contact notice"? *(Step 2)*
- Why might birth parents want to limit the information their biological children can find? Do you think this is fair? *(Answers might vary – encourage students to think of the why these rules for adoption would have been created in the first place? Are there benefits to the child? The parents?)*

### Discussion

*A child can apply for information about their birth parents. Two types of information may be available from the government. The first is **non-identifying information**, which means general information about their adoption and the social and medical history of their birth parents, but not their names. The second is **identifying information**, which can provide the biological parents' names as well as specific details about a birth, such as date and location.*

*Not everyone who applies is successful. Birth parents can file disclosure vetoes, which limit the information available to an applicant, and non-contact notices, which legally prevent a child from contacting them. However, if an adopted person is very sick and needs information about their birth parents to treat or diagnose a severe illness, the person can apply for a "severe medical search" to gain genetic information.*



## Scenario 3

My partner and I have been living together for 10 years in a common law relationship. After all these years, we have decided that it's time to split up. My partner owns our house, so she has asked me to leave. But I have three cats that are used to living here, and I don't want to move out until I have found somewhere equally nice for us to live. Can my partner force me to move out? What can I do about it?

Start on the Steps to Justice topic, "Property and Debts – Common Law Partners" with the question, "We're not married. Who gets to stay in the house if we separate?"

- Do common law partners have different rights from married couples when splitting up a house regarding who will get to stay in the home? (*Landing page*)
- Would it make a difference if the person in this scenario was a legal tenant? (*Landing page*)
- What could this person do? (Hint: there are two options) (*Landing page, Steps 1 and 2*)
- Could they get a court order that would allow them to stay in the house? What factors will the court look for when considering the order? (*Step 3*)
- What would make it harder for the court to decide who gets to stay in the house? (*Landing page, Step 3*)

### Discussion

*Unlike married couples, with common-law couples only the legal owner generally will have a right to stay in the house after separation. Partners who are legal tenants also have this rights.*

*As a common-law partner, this person can try to make an arrangement with their ex to allow them to stay in the house under certain conditions make an agreement on who will stay in the house, but if they cannot agree and the legal owner wants to force the other out of the house, they have the right to do so.*

*A common-law partner can apply for a court order to allow them to stay, but these are only granted in limited circumstances. To make this determination, the court might need to consider issues like how amicable the separated partners are and the best interests of any children who are involved.*





## Scenario 4

I am no longer living with my partner. He treated me well at first, but then became abusive towards me and our children. Two months ago, I left with the kids and we now live with my sister. Ever since then, he keeps showing up at my house or trying to contact our children. It scares me and makes me worry for my children's safety. I have tried calling the police, but they said they can't do anything because his behaviour isn't criminal at this point. Is there anything I can do to keep him away from me?

Start on the Steps to Justice topic, "Partner Abuse" with the question, "How can I keep my abusive partner away from me after I leave?"

- What does Steps to Justice suggest this person could do to help protect their own and their children's safety? (*Landing Page*)
- What options from the court are available in this situation? (*Landing Page*)
- If the police are called, who decides whether any charges should be laid? (*Step 1*)
- When do you think a peace bond would be more appropriate than a restraining order? When would a restraining order be more appropriate? (*Steps 2 and 3*)
- Who can apply for a peace bond? (*Step 3*)

### Discussion

*Steps to Justice suggests that changing contact information and daily routines can help limit contact with an abusive partner. It is also a good idea to make a safety plan a well – this is a detailed plan for how an abused person (and any children) can protect their physical safety in an abusive situation. Sometimes victims of abuse are reluctant to call police because the police can lay criminal charges and make arrests even if the victim does not want their abuser charged or arrested.*

*Courts can help by issuing restraining orders and peace bonds. These are both options for a person who would like to keep an abusive partner away from them. Restraining orders last for a longer time and can be faster to get if you have already started a family court proceeding, but they are usually only available to someone who has been married to or lived with the abuser or has custody of a child. If none of these conditions apply, a peace bond is still available and anyone can apply for one in criminal court.*



## Scenario 5

It has always been my daughter's dream to go to Paris. I am going to France for work next month and I want to bring her along with me for her 13<sup>th</sup> birthday. Her father and I are divorced, but we have joint custody of her. Is she allowed to travel with me?

Start on the Steps to Justice topic, "Child Custody, Access and Parenting" and the question, "Can I travel with my child after I separate or divorce?"

- What does this person need to tell their ex-husband about their travel plans? (*Step 1*)
- What important information could be in a parenting plan, separation agreement or court order that might affect this situation? (*Landing Page, Step 1*)
- What is a travel consent letter? Why is it good to have one? (*Step 2*)
- What would be required for an adult to bring a child under the age of 18 from Canada into the United States? (*From Step 4, follow the link to the Government of Canada website to see what each country requires*)
- Why do you think a border guard might stop a single parent and child travelling across a border? (*Answers will vary*)

### Discussion

*Although travel consent letters aren't always required, it is a best practice in order to avoid delays or the possibility of being denied entry to countries. Parents should communicate their travel plans and ask for a consent letter far in advance of their travel date. Divorced parents should also pay close attention to any specific requirements in separation agreements, parenting plans, or court orders and ensure they follow those rules.*



## Display: *Large Group Practice* Scenario 6

My husband and I have been married for five years. My husband bought us a house in our first year of marriage and we have lived there ever since. It is my dream home. It has a light-filled studio for me (I'm an artist) and a perfect room for a cozy little nursery. All I could think about was raising a family there.

We are a same-sex couple, so over the last year we had been looking into the process of adoption. I did most of the research because my schedule is more flexible. My husband is a computer programmer and he works non-stop. We had talked a lot about whether we should do a public or a private adoption, but we didn't make a decision.

About six months ago, our relationship changed dramatically and we decided that we should split up. We agreed to apply for a divorce order together. Since then, my husband keeps talking about how much money he will have after the divorce, since he can sell the house and he won't have to support me.

After my divorce I would still like to adopt a child, but I'm worried that the divorce will affect that process. I would also like to stay in the house, because I love it so much and I still want to have my family there, but my husband is the legal owner. I am worried about my financial situation as well; for the past five years, he earned most of our family's income. Should I be worried? What should I do?



## Scenario 6: Focus Questions

*Students can draw from their learning to identify potential legal issues and questions to investigate. There are a several big issues to be addressed: adoption; division of the matrimonial home; and spousal support. The facilitator should encourage the students to consider how these issues are interrelated and how they might affect each other.*

**Start from the topic “Birth & Adoption”. Consider questions like:**

- *How does a person adopt in Ontario?*
- *What different kinds of adoption can happen in Ontario?*
- *Does financial security play a role in evaluating someone who wants to adopt a child?*

**Start from the topic “Property and debts – married couples”. Consider questions like:**

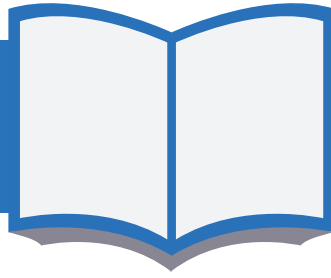
- *What are the rights of a married couple to the matrimonial home after separation? Is there a difference after divorce?*
- *Does legal ownership of the house matter in these rights?*

**Start from the topic “spousal support”. Consider questions like:**

- *Can I get spousal support?*
- *How much spousal support must be paid?*

## Participant Handouts

# Scenarios



## Scenario 1 Worksheet: Demonstration

I have decided that my marriage is over and I want a divorce. My husband travels a lot for work and he seems to think everything is fine, so I don't think he will agree to it. Can I apply for a divorce on my own? And if so, how?

Start on the Steps to Justice topic, "Separation and divorce" with the question, "How do I apply for a divorce by myself?"

- Do you and your partner need to agree to get a divorce?
- What other legal issues should you consider before applying for a divorce?
- What is the major difference between a "contested" and "uncontested" divorce?
- How do you know which form to fill out when you apply to the court for a divorce?
- Which court has the power to make a divorce order?



## Scenario 2 Worksheet

I am a great baker – my cakes are legendary! It must be genetic, because my adoptive mom is a disaster with a cookie sheet. I don't know who my birth parents are, but now that I'm 18 I would like to meet them and see if there are other bakers in my family. Can I contact them?

Start on the Steps to Justice topic, "Birth and Adoption" with the question, "I'm adopted. Can I find out about my birth parents?"

- What kinds of information can you get from the government about your birth parents?
- What kind of information can you get from applying for post-adoption birth information?
- What is a disclosure veto? What can you do if your birth parents applied for one?
- What happens if your birth parents filed a "no contact notice"?
- Why might birth parents want to limit the information their biological children can find? Do you think this is fair?



## Scenario 3 Worksheet

My partner and I have been living together for 10 years in a common law relationship. After all these years, we have decided that it's time to split up. My partner owns our house, so she has asked me to leave. But I have three cats that are used to living here, and I don't want to move out until I have found somewhere equally nice for us to live. Can my partner force me to move out? What can I do about it?

Start on the Steps to Justice topic, "Property and Debts – Common Law Partners" with the question "We're not married. Who gets to stay in the house if we separate?"

- Do common law partners have different rights from married couples when splitting up a house?
- Would it make a difference if the person in this scenario was a legal tenant?
- What could this person do? (Hint: there are two options)
- Could they get a court order that would allow them to stay in the house? What factors will the court look for when considering the order?
- What would make it harder for the court to decide who gets to stay in the house?



## Scenario 4 Worksheet

I am no longer living with my partner. He treated me well at first, but then became abusive towards me and our children. Two months ago, I left with the kids and we now live with my sister. Ever since then, he keeps showing up at my house or trying to contact our children. It scares me and makes me worry for my children's safety. I have tried calling the police, but they said they can't do anything because his behaviour isn't criminal at this point. Is there anything I can do to keep him away from me?

Start on the Steps to Justice topic, "Partner Abuse" with the question, "How can I keep my abusive partner away from me after I leave?"

- What does Steps to Justice suggest this person could do to help protect their own and their children's safety?
- What options from the court are available in this situation?
- If the police are called, who decides whether any charges should be laid?
- When do you think a peace bond would be more appropriate than a restraining order? When would a restraining order be more appropriate?
- Who can apply for a peace bond?





## Scenario 5 Worksheet

It has always been my daughter's dream to go to Paris. I am going to France for work next month and I want to bring her along with me for her 13<sup>th</sup> birthday. Her father and I are divorced, but we have joint custody of her. Is she allowed to travel with me?

Start on the Steps to Justice topic, "Child Custody, Access and Parenting" and the question, "Moving or Travelling – Can I travel with my child after I separate or divorce?"

- What does this person need to tell their ex-husband about their travel plans?
- What important information could be in a parenting plan, separation agreement or court order that might affect this situation?
- What is a travel consent letter? Why is it good to have one?
- What would be required for an adult to bring a child under the age of 18 from Canada into the United States?
- Why do you think a border guard might stop a single parent and child travelling across a border?