

THE LOW-INCOME CLIENT

The low-income client may have particular problems due to lack of funds. It is important to recognize these problems as the attorney representing a low-income client.

1. A low-income client may not have transportation, a telephone, or be able to make arrangements for childcare. If having a child in your office will be very difficult for you please let the client know at the beginning. When the client does not have a phone, you may need to set up a regular time for the client to call the office to enable you to reach the client on short notice. Try to identify potential problems and set up your guidelines from the beginning. It may be necessary to assist the client by having telephone numbers available regarding services and assistance to meet the basic needs of daily life such as Social Services for assistance with Temporary Assistance to Needy Families, Public Assistance, Food Stamps, Housing Authority, and the Child Support Enforcement Unit.

2. A low-income client may be unassertive or feel a lack of self-esteem. You may need to apply interview techniques to help the client express the view of the problem and to help the client participate in the decision process. If you suspect that abuse is an issue you may want to consider a referral to a domestic abuse crisis center for counseling.

3. It is not uncommon to have a client that is willing to give up property or support rights in exchange for avoiding a challenge of parenting responsibility. Try to be sensitive to the needs of the client to understand the process and the rights the client may be entitled to while addressing the fears associated with the loss of parenting responsibility.

4. This is usually a very stressful time for the client. They may be anxious and impatient with you and with the process and may not have many skills to productively communicate those frustrations. You may want to refer the client to a local mental health center for the purpose of helping them deal with the current stress in their lives.

5. Your client may not be literate and is too embarrassed to admit it. Try to check to make sure that your client is able to read and understand the documents that are prepared on the client's behalf. Clients may not understand the legal process but want to be treated with respect and dignity. They often feel very sensitive to the fact that they are a non-paying client.

6. It may be helpful to provide the client with an inexpensive file folder and suggest that the client keep all copies of documents sent to him or her in the file folder; this often avoids having the client come in later to ask for additional copies or at least make it clear why you may charge for additional copies.