

HelpYourself

What does a paralegal do?

Some people think that when they go through divorce, they'll deal exclusively with a lawyer, and have carte blanche in contacting him or her throughout the process. But divorce simply doesn't work that way!

The reality of divorce, as a legal process, is that there are a number of routine elements in divorce that can be more than capably handled by a legal team, and then there are certain unpredictable, out of the ordinary, difficult elements that require a lawyer's training and expertise.

If you think of a team caring for a patient in a hospital, the lawyer in a divorce case functions much like the doctor does. A doctor oversees the case, makes decisions, and ultimately bears responsibility for the patient's care. But nurses do much of the hands-on care, playing an important role in diagnosing what the patient needs, communicating that to the doctor, and then providing the care the doctor determines is best. So, in this analogy, think of the paralegals in the nurses' role.

The paralegal provides several different kinds of support in a divorce case. First and foremost, the paralegal makes sure that documentation that the lawyer needs is in order. In the initial stages of a divorce, the lawyer needs to get a full sense of the divorcing couple's finances, and the paralegal takes responsibility for that.

Even though a paralegal's time costs a client less than a lawyer's time, it can still get expensive when a paralegal has to repeatedly call or email a client requesting documents — so clients can definitely help themselves out with the divorce's total price tag by doing their homework assignments.

A paralegal also prepares motions on a client's behalf as part of the team headed up by your lawyer. Assuming that the divorce is a routine one, they'll generally follow a set pattern that paralegals know well. But, as we all know,

no two divorces are identical, and your paralegal will modify documents as needed and go with whatever flow is created by the client and the lawyer.

While there will be times that it will be most appropriate for you to consult with your lawyer, there will be times where you're better off — in cost to you and in getting your questions answered — talking to your paralegal. When in doubt as to who on your legal team you should consult with, we recommend talking to your paralegal first. If it's a matter requiring your lawyer, your paralegal will be able to determine that and help the two of you connect.

Paralegals keep a legal team functioning when a lawyer needs to be in court, is consulting with a client, or is otherwise occupied. At the Law Office of Lisa Vance, we're extremely proud of our paralegal team — they're well-trained and well qualified to handle both the routine and the unusual facets of a divorce. And they do what great paralegals should ultimately do — they make our excellent lawyers even better.

