



COVID-19 FINDING A SOLICITOR

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It can be scary or worrying to think about taking legal action. Below are some questions that you might have about starting this process. For more information, see the **Scottish Women's Rights Centre's legal guide**, 'Getting Legal Representation'.

What kind of solicitor do I need?

If you are looking for a solicitor to help with the law around one of the following areas, it is likely that you will need one who specialises in family law:

- Separation or divorce
- Children, e.g. deciding residence (previously known as 'custody') and contact arrangements
- Stopping someone from approaching or contacting you ('protective orders')



How will I pay for this?

This is often the first question you will have, and there are three main options:

- Self-funding
- Legal aid (some or all of the legal costs are paid for you)
- Combination of self-funding and legal aid

It is good to think about this before choosing a solicitor, as not all solicitors can be paid through legal aid.

You are automatically eligible for legal aid if you receive, or are included in your partner's claim, for:

- Income Support
- Income based Jobseekers Allowance
- Income based Employment and Support Allowance
- Universal Credit

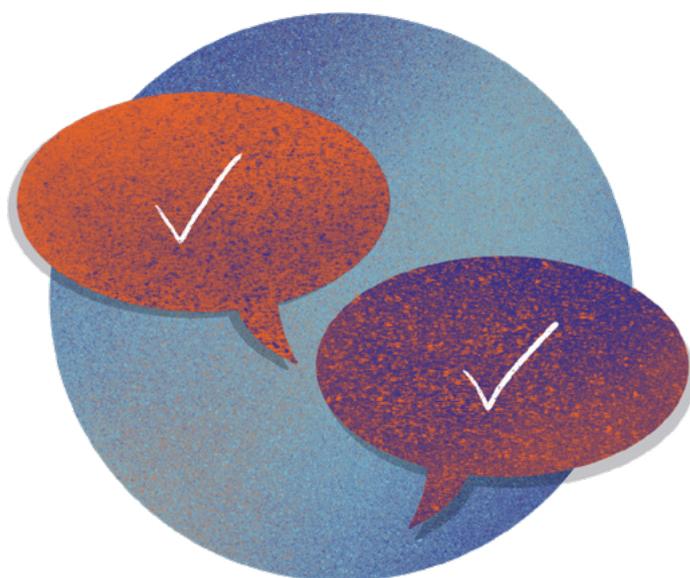
To check whether you are eligible for legal aid, you can use the Scottish Legal Aid Board website's **online calculator**.

How do I choose a solicitor?

- If you are getting support from a domestic abuse service (e.g. Women's Aid, FearFree), or a service such as Citizens' Advice, you could ask them whether they know of solicitors in the local area.
- Search on the **Family Law Association** website, which lets you look for solicitors by area, and by whether or not they offer legal aid.

It can be good to choose a few to contact, to see which one seems best matched to your needs. Some things to think about, or ask solicitors about, before deciding on one, could be:

- Is their initial meeting free of charge?
- What kind of impression do you get, talking to them/ their office? Do you feel comfortable talking to them?
- Would you prefer a solicitor of a certain gender, if possible?
- Have they dealt with similar cases before?



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Can I still meet a solicitor during the lockdown?

- Usually, your solicitor would want to meet in person. However, at the moment this is unlikely to happen, and solicitors are likely to make alternative contact arrangements e.g. using email, talking on the phone, or meeting online using something like Skype or Zoom.
- If you are self-funding, make sure you are clear about how much your solicitor charges for their time (bear in mind that charges include not only meetings/phone calls, but also emails).
- However you agree to communicate, it is important to think about what you want to say to your solicitor. It can be helpful to write down a list of key points beforehand, as it can be easy to forget these while you are talking.

Note: If you have experienced domestic abuse, and the legal action you are taking is because of this, it is important to tell your solicitor this. It should be relevant e.g. in decisions about child contact.

Where can I find out more?

Law Society of Scotland – the professional body for all solicitors in Scotland. Find out more about what solicitors can do for you, and look up specific solicitors.

Family Law Association – has more information about family law, including domestic abuse, and a search tool for finding a solicitor.

Scottish Women's Rights Centre – has a more detailed guide to choosing a solicitor (see above), and runs a free legal helpline for women who have experienced any kind of abuse.

- Helpline: **08088 010 789**
(Mon 2-5pm, Tues 6-8pm,
Weds 11am-2pm, Fri 10am-1pm)
- Email: www.scottishwomensrightscentre.org.uk/contact/





**Scotland's Domestic Abuse
& Forced Marriage Helpline**

0800 027 1234

www.sdafmh.org.uk

helpline@sdafmh.org.uk

