

ETHICS CASES FOR SELF-HELP STAFF

1. Attorney was assisting litigants in a self-help center run by Legal Aid. One litigant told Attorney that her daughter had died and her grandson was living with his father and was being abused. She said that they were living in a complex with his other wives and children, and that the father was also abusing them. What can Attorney do about this?
2. I work in a courthouse self-help center. While a litigant is in my cubicle, the sheriff comes to the reception area and asks for the litigant in order to serve her. Do we have to disclose her presence in the center? Should we? What information do we give the litigant and the sheriff?
3. I generally work in a legal services office, but sometimes I fill in for staff at a self-help center. What issues does this present for me regarding conflicts, confidentiality, etc.?
4. I am providing information to a UD defendant in the self-help center. She tells me she paid the rent covered by the three-day notice. Then she tells me she really didn't pay the rent, but she never got the notice. Then she tells me that the landlord told her to disregard the notice. Can I continue to assist her? What else can I do?
5. You are assisting a litigant in a self-help center. The litigant does not tell you they have a pension. When doing the Income and Expense Declaration, the staff member notices the litigant has worked for the County for 22 years. Staff asks if he has a pension. Litigant says yes but he refuses to disclose the pension on the Schedule of Assets and Debts and Property Declaration. What does the staff member do?
6. Litigant lists a minor child on the Petition for the Dissolution of Marriage. The date of marriage was from 1/1/07 to 1/1/08. The child was born on May 1, 2008, after the date of separation. The litigant comes in to do her Default Judgment and tells the staff member that the minor child listed on the Petition is not the Respondent's/Husband's biological child. What does the staff member do? Do we continue assisting the litigant?
7. Husband seeks your assistance in the self-help center. You are assisting him with an Income and Expense Declaration. Number 4 on page 1 asks for an estimate of the other party's income. You just did the Income and

Expense for Wife. Can you tell Husband what to list on Number 4? Can you ask that they exchange the information?

8. A local attorney sends his secretary to the center to get assistance filling out divorce papers for one of his clients. He doesn't do family law, so he doesn't know how to fill out the forms. The secretary brings the client's information. Can we help her? What if the lawyer came in seeking help with his own divorce?

9. Self Help Centers are to assist everyone regardless of race, gender, religion, etc... You are working in a self-help center. The litigant refuses to talk to you, because she will only deal with a female, not a male. How do you handle the situation?

10. You are working in a self-help center. You meet a litigant. Romantic sparks fly. Can you pursue the romantic relationship while the litigant is using the Center for assistance?

11. You are the supervising attorney of a self-help center. Law Student comes to you and requests you to sign off on their hours. In fact, the student has not yet done one single hour but needs the hours to be signed off in order to get credit to graduate. Once the student graduates, s/he studies for the CA Bar Exam. The student promises to come back to the Center to complete the hours after the fact. [OR] In a more general sense, what if a student requests from the Attorney to sign off on hours they have yet to do? What should the attorney do?

12. A self-help staff member (non-lawyer) assisted with a Summary Disposition. Husband prepared forms and came alone to file. The staff member suspects he forged wife's signature because the entire form is in the same pen, and all the penmanship, including wife's signature looks as if written by one person. It was filled out in blue ink. He asked, "How am I supposed to prove that she got a copy of it?" What should the staff member do? How should the supervising attorney have acted and/or reacted?