

**Q:** What if my spouse has a lawyer?

**A:** Many people decide that they would rather represent themselves even if the other side has an attorney. Your limited scope attorney can prepare you for what to expect in court, advise you of your legal rights, and outline possible negotiation strategies for you. Your limited scope attorney can also try to negotiate a settlement even if you intend to represent yourself in court if the negotiations fail.

**Q:** What if the attorney does not want to do what I ask?

**A:** You and your attorney are working as a team, but it is your case. While the attorney has much more experience in legal matters than you do, the ultimate decision is always yours. If your attorney advises you that the course of action you want to take is not in your best interests, you should listen carefully to the reasons why she or he is recommending you do something different. You have the right to disregard your attorney's advice, but you have to be willing to accept the consequences of your decision.

**Q:** How do I find an attorney who is willing to help me represent myself?

**A:** The San Fernando Valley Bar Association Lawyer Referral & Information Service has a limited scope representation panel. These family law attorneys have had specialized training and are willing to offer this service. They have been prescreened by the Bar Association and carry liability insurance. Each attorney on our panel has been specifically recruited to meet the needs of the person who wants to undertake some form of self-representation.

**Q:** What other resources are available to help me represent myself?

**A:** There are many good resources such as the San Fernando Valley Bar Association website ([www.sfvba.org](http://www.sfvba.org)), the California Courts website ([www.courtinfo.ca.gov/selfhelp](http://www.courtinfo.ca.gov/selfhelp)) and the California Legal Services website ([www.lawhelpcalifornia.org](http://www.lawhelpcalifornia.org)). Many of these materials are available in both English and Spanish. Other resources are the Family Law Court facilitators found in most courts and the Self-Help Legal Access Centers. The San Fernando Valley Bar Association Lawyer Referral & Information Service can provide additional information about these resources.



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A s s o c i a t i o n  
*founded in 1926*

## Limited Scope Representation in Family Law Cases



A PROGRAM OF THE  
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Information Service**

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**Q: What is Limited Scope Representation?**

**A:** Limited Scope Representation (sometimes called unbundling) means that you and your attorney agree that you will perform some of the tasks associated with your family law case and the attorney will perform others. At the initial meeting with the limited scope representation attorney you and the attorney decide and put in writing the responsibility for performing the tasks involved in your case. These tasks can include gathering necessary information, drafting documents, filing court forms, negotiating with the other party, making court appearances, attending settlement conferences, contacting witnesses, and other necessary tasks.

**Q: What kinds of cases work best for limited scope representation?**

**A:** Limited scope representation works well in many family law matters. You should discuss your case with the limited scope attorney and then decide together if your case is a good limited scope representation case. You will discuss whether you can handle paperwork and review and understand financial issues that

may be complex. You will need to decide if you are good with follow-through and deadlines, and if you have the time commitment necessary to handle the tasks you have selected. Once you have had this discussion, you and the attorney can decide if you have a good case for limited scope representation.

**Q: What kinds of questions should I be asking?**

**A:** You should ask any question that you have. To represent yourself, even in only part of your case, you are going to have to know about procedures, the law and the benefits and risks in self-representation. Ask questions and avoid any unnecessary problems or surprises.

**Q: What is the benefit to me?**

**A:** Limited scope representation can save you money on legal fees and give you greater control of your case. Having the attorney perform the tasks that you cannot or do not want to do, while you perform the other tasks, saves you legal fees. Also, selecting the tasks you will undertake, while limiting the tasks that the attorney will perform, gives you more involvement in your case.

**Q: What are the trade-offs?**

**A:** Your attorney went to law school and probably has years of experience in family law. That means she or he will know things about the legal process that you do not know. There may be hidden complications in your case that you do not recognize because you do not have legal training. You will need to thoroughly discuss your legal matter with your attorney. This will help to protect you from undertaking tasks in your case that are too technical or complicated for you to handle. However, you will have the full responsibility for the outcome in the parts of the case you have chosen to handle yourself.

**Q: Will the Court let me do this?**

**A:** Yes. The courts cannot give legal advice. Therefore, the courts do encourage people to get as much legal assistance as they need to effectively protect their rights. People who represent themselves are more effective if they have had guidance on what information to present and how to present it to the court. When you represent yourself, the court may suggest that you hire an attorney if they think you need more help.

**Q: What happens if I later need more services from the attorney?**

**A:** New issues frequently come up in family law matters. You may find that you need more assistance from the attorney than you originally expected. You and your attorney can change the list of assigned tasks to show that you now want the attorney to handle a part of your case that you had originally thought you would handle.

**Q: What if I decide I want the attorney to handle the entire case?**

**A:** After working on your assigned task, you may decide that you would rather have the attorney take over the whole case. You can arrange with your attorney to do this. Remember to amend in writing your checklist of tasks.