

Family Lawyer

Divorce, custody and adoption. You handle the worst week of somebody's life, over and over.

TYPICAL PAY

\$159,670

a year, full time

PAY RANGE

\$78k to \$352k

starting to experienced

TIME TO QUALIFY

7 to 8 years

after high school

DEMAND

Moderate

job outlook

LICENCE NEEDED

Yes

regulated job

WHERE YOU WORK

Small law firms, solo practice, legal aid, courthouses

How you get there

- 1 Bachelor's degree** 4 years
Any major. Psychology, social work, accounting or a second language all show up in this job more than you would guess.
- 2 LSAT (Law School Admission Test)** Junior year
The admission test every law school accredited by the American Bar Association accepts. Score plus grade average decides where you get in.
- 3 Law school** 3 years
Three years for a juris doctor degree. Take family law, evidence and trial advocacy, and get into the family law clinic if the school has one.
- 4 Bar exam and admission** About 6 months after graduating
Pass your state's bar exam and the ethics exam, then clear a character and fitness review before the state will license you.
- 5 First job** Ongoing
A small firm, legal aid or a court appointment list. Expect to be in a courtroom within weeks, which is the fastest real training in law.

Pros and cons

- + You are in a courtroom early instead of reading documents for five years
- + Small firms and solo practice mean you can run your own shop
- + Constant work: people separate in every economy
- You carry other people's worst moments home with you
- Clients in crisis are hard to manage and slow to pay
- Pay lags behind corporate law for the same seven years of school

Optional boosts

Custody and parenting time. High-asset divorce. Adoption. Protective orders and domestic violence.

Good to know

A family lawyer cannot take a cut of the divorce

Professional conduct rules bar a contingency fee in a divorce, meaning a lawyer may not take a percentage of the property or the support a client wins. The rule exists so nobody has a financial reason to talk a...

Most people in family court have no lawyer

In many states a majority of divorce and custody cases have at least one side representing themselves, usually because they cannot afford anyone. Judges and court clerks spend a large part of their day on it,...

Where these numbers come from

My Next Move: Lawyers (23-1011.00)
National Conference of Bar Examiners: exams
State Bar of California: admissions
Law School Admission Council

Numbers checked September 2026. Pay figures are typical full-time annual amounts in United States dollars, based on Bureau of Labor Statistics wage data and published pay scales. They vary by state, employer and experience. Tuition is for in-state students at public schools unless the card says otherwise. Sources, links and the click-through version: <https://career.help/us/careers/family-lawyer>



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