

# HELPING CLIENTS WITH CIVIL LEGAL ISSUES

john  
howard  
society

Ontario

As a trusted intermediary, you have earned the trust you have built with your clients and you can act as a bridge to them accessing legal information and services to address their civil legal needs. Remember: unlike the criminal legal system, civil legal issues will usually require your client to actively participate in the legal process (e.g. meet a deadline, fill out a particular form, attend a meeting, etc.).



## HOW YOU CAN HELP

1. **Identify** the legal issue your client is having
2. **Provide** your client with basic legal information
3. **Help** your client find the right forms and documents
4. **Refer** your client to legal resources, advice or representation
5. **Go with** your client to court
6. **Go with** your client to meet their legal service provider
7. **Work with** your client's legal service provider to make sure help is tailored to their needs and circumstances

Only provide your client with legal information not legal advice:

- Point them towards **resources, advice or representation**
- Help them figure out the first steps to **solving the problem**
- Provide them with general information about their **rights and responsibilities**
- Do not try to interpret or apply the law to their specific situation and do not try to provide legal recommendations.

## HOW TO SPOT CIVIL LEGAL ISSUES

- Is the problem described a **big life event**? (e.g. being evicted, getting cut off from ODSP/OW, losing their job, separating from their partner, child custody issues, etc.)
- Does your client have **legal forms, letters or documents**?
- Are they describing something that sounds like a **legal problem**? (e.g. "my landlord told me to move out" or "my boss hasn't paid me for work I did")

## MAKING REFERRALS

When **referring** a client to a **legal service provider**, always make sure the provider is licensed, serves the area where your client lives, works in the area of law your client needs help with, speaks your client's language, and offers accessible services (if necessary). You should also make sure your client meets any **financial eligibility requirements**, if applicable.

### Referral Resources:

- Legal Aid Ontario Community Legal Clinics
- Legal Aid Ontario Specialty Clinics
- JusticeNet
- Other Legal Service Providers in Ontario

When you make a **referral**, it is helpful if you can give the legal service provider a broad indication of the specific civil legal issue(s) your client is facing. This will help make sure your client receives **prompt and appropriate assistance**.