



LEGAL INFORMATION & LEGAL ADVICE

Guidelines for BC public library workers

The distinction between legal information and legal advice is not crystal clear. As library workers dealing with legal information, we're often asked for answers to specific questions or advice about what to do. These types of questions can cause a lot of discomfort – after all, we're not legally trained! This handout provides some guidelines to follow to help you navigate these questions.

For more information, including tips on setting boundaries, check out our online Legal Information & Legal Advice guide:

www.courthouselibrary.ca/lawmatters/legalinfo

What library workers can provide:

Always remember to let your patron know what you can do for them; after all, library workers can do so much! We can:

- Find reliable information, help navigate websites, provide access to computers, printers, and quiet working spaces.
- Refer patrons to more specialized legal research support at Courthouse Libraries BC.
- Help find useful free or low-cost legal support services through tools like Clicklaw.

Guidelines for Legal Reference Work

Guideline #1: Find concrete resources

When a patron comes to you with a question, always point them towards a concrete resource – either in print or online – for them to consult. Good places to start include:

- Clicklaw
- Clicklaw Wikibooks
- People's Law School
- Family Law in BC

Remember, as information professionals, our goal is to point our patrons in the right direction and *find* information, not know it.

Guideline #2: Use your search expertise

Use your search expertise and explain what you are doing as you go. Share the search results, explain the strategy you used to find them, and invite your patron to come back with follow up questions.

Guidelines #3: Point to legal glossaries & dictionaries

If a patron asks you for help in understanding legal terms, court processes, or court rules remember Guideline #1: Concrete resources! There are a range of online and print legal glossaries, dictionaries, and resources explaining court rules and procedures you can refer them to.

Guideline #4: Offer practical help and technical support with court forms

If a patron is seeking help with court forms, you can offer practical help to locate, troubleshoot, and use the forms, and help if they are having mobility or accessibility issues. You can also direct them to resources created to inform users how to fill the forms out - many of them available online!

Guideline #5: Refer to free, low-cost or community based legal support services

If a patron continues to ask for more help in understanding or applying the information, that indicates a need for more specialized legal support services. Offer to help find someone better suited to provide more advanced services or legal advice. A few quick options:

- Lawyer Referral Service (free, no income restrictions)
- Access ProBono (free, income restrictions)
- Unbundled Legal Services (negotiable/lower cost)

Guideline #6: Use legal directories and remain neutral

If you are asked to recommend a lawyer or organization, remain neutral and point towards online directories, such as the Canadian Bar Association of BC's Find-A-Lawyer tool.