

Family Law



What is Family Law?

Family lawyers assist clients with all aspects of the law that relates to domestic relationships. Family law encompasses processes of marriage, divorce, wills, custody disputes, prenuptial agreements, adoption and guardianship, alimony, annulments, surrogacy, and paternity. Family lawyers may also handle cases of domestic violence, child abuse, child neglect, and juvenile delinquency ([Babb et al](#)). Primarily, family lawyers assist with legal questions related to establishing, maintaining, and terminating or reorganizing family relationships ([Katz](#)).

Family lawyers should be familiar with many other types of law that frequently intersect with family law cases, including tort law, contract law, property law, tax law, immigration law, welfare law, bankruptcy law, and housing law ([Hasday](#)). Family lawyers frequently work on contracts and out of court mediation, but also occasionally handle litigation. Some family lawyers specialize in divorce, domestic violence, or adoption, but most family lawyers handle a wide variety of cases ([Babb et al](#)).

Family lawyers primarily deal with state laws, as federal law rarely interferes in domestic relationships. Exceptions include a few Supreme Court cases, such as *Roe v. Wade* which limited governmental regulation of abortions, *Loving v. Virginia*, which struck down state laws that banned interracial marriages, and *Obergefell v. Hodges* which requires all states to grant marriage licenses to same sex couples. State family law regulations vary widely. For example, some states follow the common law principle of dividing property between parties in a divorce based on who each piece of property legally belongs to, but some states follow the community property principle which views all property acquired during a marriage the joint property of the couple ([Smith](#)).

Family law has changed significantly in the last seventy years as child protective services have become a crucial part of the American social infrastructure and as the ways Americans understand individual rights has changed ([Katz](#)). Because family law directly impacts how family relationships are defined, family law impacts how Americans understand gender, race, class, age, and sexual orientation ([Hasday](#)).

Where Do Family Lawyers Work?

Private Sector

Firm that specializes in family law or has a family law division

Nonprofit Legal Service Organizations—[National Women’s Law Center](#), [Kids in Need of Defense](#)

Public Sector

Public Defender’s Office—[Western District of Tennessee](#)

District Attorney’s Office—[Shelby County](#)

Family Law Resources



What Classes Should I Take?

ADR-Mediation
Contracts I, II
Decedents' Estates
Divorce Law Practicum
Estate Planning and Transfer Taxation
Family Law
Family Law Seminar
Immigration Law
Mediation Clinic

Resume Boosters for Family Law

[Become a certified mediator](#)

Volunteer as a [Victim-Witness Ambassador with the Shelby County DA](#) if you are interested in working with domestic violence or child abuse cases

Intern or extern with a firm that handles family law cases

Professional Associations

American Bar Association

All University of Memphis law students have free membership to the [American Bar Association](#). Their website provides routinely updated information and interest-specific career advice. Join different sections to find out what they offer. [Check out the Family Law Section](#).

[American Academy of Matrimonial Lawyers](#)

The American Academy of Matrimonial Lawyers provides CLE seminars and networking events for its members.

Family Law Links

["Everything You Need to Know About Becoming a Family Law Attorney"](#)

This article from the New England School of Law-Boston outlines the career path of family lawyers.

["Arbitration as a Tool for Family Law Dispute Resolution"](#)

This article connects arbitration to family law by examining the 2016 Uniform Family Arbitration Act. American Bar Association, June 7, 2017.