

# CHAPTER THREE: FAMILY LAW

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# CHAPTER THREE: FAMILY LAW

## I. INTRODUCTION

On March 18, 2013, British Columbia's *Family Law Act* [*FLA*] came into force. The *FLA* is the culmination of many years of research and policy development and has transformed British Columbia family law dramatically.

The current Manual chapter deals primarily with the *FLA* rather than the previous *Family Relations Act* [*FRA*]. If you are starting a legal challenge in family law now or in the future, the *FLA* will apply to your case. However, if you made a claim for property division before the *FLA* came into force or if you are making a claim to enforce, set aside, or replace an agreement respecting property division made before the *FLA* came into force (March 18, 2013), then those claims will be decided under the *FRA*; all of your other claims (such as for parenting arrangements, child support, spousal support) will be dealt with under the *FLA*, or the *Divorce Act* (*DA*), if it applies.

If your case still involves the *FRA*, we encourage you to look at an older version of this Manual, as we will not deal with the *FRA* in this version.

## II. GOVERNING LEGISLATION AND RESOURCES

### A. Resources in Print

1. Continuing Legal Education Society of British Columbia, *Family Law Sourcebook for British Columbia* (Vancouver: Continuing Legal Education Society of British Columbia, 2019).
  - This loose-leaf sourcebook contains a thorough overview of all aspects of family law, with cites to the relevant authorities for each statement of law.
2. Continuing Legal Education Society of British Columbia, *Annotated Family Practice 2019 - 2020* [regular updates]. (Vancouver: Continuing Legal Education Society of British Columbia, 2008).
  - This is an essential resource for many family law lawyers and is updated each year.
3. Continuing Legal Education Society of British Columbia, *British Columbia Family Practice Manual*, 5th ed. [regular updates] (Vancouver: Continuing Legal Education Society of British Columbia, 2011).
  - Loose-leaf manual providing a solid how-to approach to common family law problems and processes.
4. Continuing Legal Education Society of British Columbia, *Desk Order Divorce—An Annotated Guide* (Vancouver: Continuing Legal Education Society of British Columbia, 2013).
  - Annotated guide to divorce, with regular updates.
5. John D. Gardner and A.K. Korde, *British Columbia Family Law: Annotated Legislation* (Markham: Lexis Nexis Butterworths, 1984-2008).
  - This loose-leaf guide contains annotated legislation and judicial consideration of statutes pertaining to family law. Remember, it will only contain amendments up to the date of publication.
6. The Honourable Madam Justice Carol Huddart and Trudi L Brown, QC, *British Columbia Family Law Practice, 2015 Edition + E-Book* (Markham: Lexis Nexis Butterworths, 1984-2008).
  - This loose-leaf guide contains annotated legislation and judicial consideration of statutes pertaining to family law. Remember, it will only contain amendments up to the date of publication.

### Library References:

1. Mary Jane Mossman, *Families and the Law in Canada: Cases and Commentary* (Toronto: Emond Montgomery Publications, 2004).
  - A good casebook, which provides an overview of new family law issues in Canada.
2. Julien D. Payne, *Payne on Divorce* (Scarborough: Carswell, 1996).
  - A very good Canadian text on family law.

## **B. Resources on the Internet**

### 1. Ministry of Justice – Family Law Legislation

Government website for the *Family Law Act*: <http://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/justice/about-bcs-justice-system/legislation-policy/legislation-updates/family-law-act>

Resources that are particularly relevant include:

- Table of Concordance (<http://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/justice/about-bcs-justice-system/legislation-policy/legislation-updates/family-law-act/table-of-concordance-bcs-justice-system/legislation-policy/legislation-updates/family-law-act/the-family-law-act-explained>) – allows for quick cross-referencing from the *FLA* sections to the *FLA* sections.
- Family Law Act Explained (<http://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/justice/about-bcs-justicesystem/legislation-policy/legislation-updates/family-law-act/the-family-law-act-explained>) – an excellent primer on the major changes behind the *FLA*, breaking down the purpose of each new section individually.
- Questions and Answers (<http://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/justice/about-bcs-justicesystem/legislation-policy/legislation-updates/family-law-act/family-law-act-questions-and-answers>) – perhaps the best and most concise introduction to the changes that can be found on this website.

### 2. BC Supreme Court Services

Website: [www.supremecourtsselfhelp.bc.ca](http://www.supremecourtsselfhelp.bc.ca)

- This service provides information to help users prepare the procedural aspects of a family or civil case. There is an office at 290 – 800 Hornby Street in Vancouver, but it does not handle phone, e-mail, or written inquiries. The staff cannot provide substantive advice on legal issues.

### 3. J.P. Boyd's BC Family Law Web Resource

Website: [http://wiki.clicklaw.bc.ca/index.php/JP\\_Boyd\\_on\\_Family\\_Law](http://wiki.clicklaw.bc.ca/index.php/JP_Boyd_on_Family_Law).

- This is an excellent site for those unfamiliar with family law rights and procedures, written in plain English. It is a good place to begin for those who have not had the benefit of a family law course.
- The Family Law Resource is one of the leading resources in BC, particularly for the *Family Law Act*.
- There is a link to forms for both matters in the Provincial Court and Supreme Court.

### 4. BC Family Maintenance Enforcement Program (FMEP)

Website: [www.fmep.gov.bc.ca](http://www.fmep.gov.bc.ca)

- Administered by the Ministry of Human Resources, this program helps families to enforce child support and spousal support orders from ex-partners. The program is administered through select BC Employment and Assistance centres.



5. **Legal Services Society Family Law in British Columbia**

Website: <https://familylaw.lss.bc.ca/>

- This site has general information on family law, including self-help materials, forms a client needs to file for an uncontested divorce, and step-by-step instructions for filling out the forms. It also houses web versions of Legal Services Society family law publications. *Living Together, Living Apart: Common-Law Relationships, Marriage, Separation and Divorce* is very useful: <http://www.lss.bc.ca/publications/pub.php?pub=347>

This publication is available in English, French, Simplified and Traditional Chinese, Punjabi, and Spanish.

6. **British Columbia Vital Statistics Agency**

Website: <http://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/life-events>

- The Vital Statistics Agency is a service provided by the provincial Ministry of Health Services. The web site includes information on birth and death registration and certificates. It also includes wills notice registration and searches, information on how to change your name, and information on marriage licences. Contact numbers are available for various services including adoption records information. Marriage certificates can also be ordered online.

7. **Ministry of Attorney General**

Website: <http://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/life-events/divorce/family-justice>

- This site provides general information about a number of issues of interest to BC couples who have separated or who are about to separate. It may also be useful for guardians and other family members, such as grandparents, who may be involved in making important decisions about the family and its future.

8. **Department of Justice Canada**

About Spousal Support/Spousal Support Advisory Guidelines: <http://www.justice.gc.ca/eng/fl-df/spousal-epoux/ssag-ldfpae.html>

About Child Support/Federal Child Support Guidelines, P.C. 1997-469: <http://www.justice.gc.ca/eng/rp-pr/fl-lf/child-enfant/guide/sbs-eng.pdf>

9. **Support Calculator**

Website: <http://www.mysupportcalculator.ca/>

- People can use this website to calculate how much child support and spousal support they have to pay under the guidelines.

10. **British Columbia Supreme Court**

Website: [www.courts.gov.bc.ca/supreme\\_court](http://www.courts.gov.bc.ca/supreme_court)

- Procedural guidelines for divorce proceedings can be found on this website.

11. **Divorce Registry of Canada**

Website: <http://www.justice.gc.ca/eng/fl-df/divorce/crdp-bead.html>

Telephone: (613) 957-4519

- The registry is relevant as you need to fill in and print out a form and file it with the Court when you are seeking a divorce. This is required so that the Divorce Registry can confirm that you have not already been divorced.

## 12. MOSAIC

Website: [www.mosaicbc.com](http://www.mosaicbc.com)

Telephone: (604) 254-0244

- Deals with issues that affect immigrants and refugees while settling into Canadian society. They also offer translation services.

## 13. Interjurisdictional Support Orders

Website: [www.isoforms.bc.ca](http://www.isoforms.bc.ca)

- Interjurisdictional Support Orders (ISOs) can be obtained from other Canadian provinces and territories and from reciprocating foreign countries by following the procedure set out in the *Interjurisdictional Support Orders Act*, SBC 2002, Chapter 29.

## 14. Children and Travel

Website: <http://travel.gc.ca/travelling/publications/travelling-with-children>

## 15. Ministry of Justice Dispute Resolution Office

Website: <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/justice/about-bcs-justice-system/mediation>

Phone (Lower Mainland): (604) 684-1300

Toll-Free (Rest of BC): 1-877-656-1300

- Develops and implements dispute resolution services and justice transformation projects with administrative tribunals, courts, government ministries and agencies and external organizations.

## 16. Collaborative Divorce

Website: <https://www.collaborativepractice.com/>

Website: [www.collaborativedivorcebc.org](http://www.collaborativedivorcebc.org) (Vancouver)

Website: <http://nocourt.net/> (Lower Mainland)

Website: [www.bccollaborativerostersociety.com](http://www.bccollaborativerostersociety.com)

- These sites provide information about Collaborative Divorce, an option for parties wishing to resolve disputes respectfully and without going to Court. Parties work out a negotiated settlement with the help of collaboratively trained professionals including (as needed) lawyers, divorce coaches, child specialists and financial specialists.

## 17. Clicklaw

Website: <http://www.clicklaw.bc.ca>

- Described as a “portal-project”, Clicklaw is a website aimed at enhancing access to justice in British Columbia by helping users to sort through the myriad of legal information and assistance that is available and find the most appropriate resources for a given situation.
- Visitors are directed to user-friendly resources designed for the public by contributor organizations (including the Community Legal Assistance Society and LSLAP).

## 18. The Law Society of British Columbia - Family Law Mediators

Website: [https://www.lawsociety.bc.ca/support-and-resources-for-lawyers/lawyers-insurance-fund/coverage/mediators-and-arbitrators-\(includes-family-dispute/](https://www.lawsociety.bc.ca/support-and-resources-for-lawyers/lawyers-insurance-fund/coverage/mediators-and-arbitrators-(includes-family-dispute/)

- The Law Society offers accreditation for those who wish to become family law mediators. Those who become accredited can help people reach a consensual settlement regarding issues relating to their marriage, cohabitation, separation or divorce.

## 19. BC Hear the Child Society

Website: <http://www.hearthechild.ca>

- This society provides a provincial roster of qualified child interviewers who work in the legal and mental health fields.

### *C. Resources by Telephone*

#### 1. Family Justice Centres

Family Justice Centres assist families going through a separation with issues of child custody and access, and spousal support as well as child support issues. Family justice counsellors provide dispute resolution services, and make referrals to legal aid, other legal services, and community resources for families facing separation.

**Note: The Family Justice Centres are not legal resources.**

Location	Telephone	Fax
Vancouver – Commercial Drive	(604) 660-6828	(604) 775-0679
Vancouver – Robson Square	(604) 660-2084	(604) 660-4177
Victoria	(250) 356-7012	(250) 356-6093
Nanaimo	(250) 741-5447	*
Abbotsford	(604) 851-7055	(604) 851-7056
Chilliwack	(604)-795-8257	(604) 795-8258
Langley	(604) 501-3100	(604) 532-3626
Surrey	(604) 501-3100	(604) 501-3112
Maple Ridge	(604) 927-2217	(604) 466-7343
Port Coquitlam	(604) 927-2217	(604) 927-2220
New Westminster	(604) 660-8636	(604) 660-2414
North Vancouver	(604) 981-0084	(604) 981-0035
Richmond	(604) 660-3511	(604) 660-3640

#### 2. Provincial Court Vancouver Registry

Family Court Registry: (604) 660-8989

#### 3. Provincial Court Vancouver Family Duty Counsel Service

Telephone: (604) 660-1508

- Duty counsel is also available in other cities, contact Legal Services Society for a current list
- Legal Services Society telephone: (604) 601-6000

#### 4. Supreme Court Vancouver Registry

Administration: (604) 660-2847  
Family Law Registry: (604) 660-2486  
Courthouse Library: (604) 660-2841  
Scheduling: (604) 660-2853

#### 5. Supreme Court New Westminster Registry

Civil Registry: (604) 660-0571  
Criminal Registry: (604) 660-8517  
Divorce: (604) 775-0671  
Courthouse Library: (604) 660-8577  
Family Law Duty Counsel: (604) 775-0628

### ***D. Relevant Legislation***

#### ***1. Divorce Act, RSC 1985, c 3 [DA]***

This is the federal legislation that provides for both divorce law and the determination of corollary relief (support, custody, and access). Support orders under the Act have effect throughout Canada. All actions under the *Divorce Act* are generally heard in BC Supreme Court. However, if the Attorney General has designated a Provincial Court registry as a Supreme Court Registry under s 4 of the *Provincial Court Act*, then that Provincial Court may decide interlocutory applications made under the *Divorce Act*.

**NOTE:** The *DA* does not provide for division of matrimonial assets. A person has to seek division of matrimonial assets under the *Family Law Act [FLA]*.

Amendments to the *DA* will come into effect on March 1, 2021. These amendments include:

- Increasing focus on the best interests of the child;
- Bringing definitions into alignment with the Family Law Act and focusing them on the relationship with the child. For instance, the amendments remove terms such as custody/custody order and add new terms such as parenting time/parenting order;
- New provisions defining family violence and compelling courts to consider family violence in divorce proceedings

#### ***2. Child, Family and Community Service Act, RSBC 1996, c 46 [CFCSA]***

This Act provides for official apprehension of children (under 19 in BC) who are believed to be in need of protection or care. A hearing must be held before a judge within seven days. The hearing does not lead to any temporary or permanent custody orders, except by consent. Separate hearings are held for temporarily custodial orders and continuing custodial orders.

#### ***3. Family Maintenance Enforcement Act, RSBC 1996, c 127 [FMEA]***

The enforcement of **child support and spousal support** orders is administered by the Family Maintenance Enforcement Program pursuant to the *FMEA*.

#### ***4. Family Relations Act, RSBC 1996, c 128 [FRA]***

The *FRA* has been replaced by the *FLA* and is no longer in force except for actions that commenced before the *FLA* came into effect on March 18, 2013, and only in respect of property and pension division. If your case still involves the *FRA*, please view an older version of this Manual.

## ***5. Family Law Act, SCB 2011, c 25 [FLA]***

The *FLA* came into force on March 18, 2013 and replaced the *Family Relations Act*. The *FLA* places the safety and best interests of the child first when families are going through separation and divorce. It also clarifies parental responsibilities and the division of assets if relationships break down, addresses family violence and encourages families to resolve their disputes out of Court.

Some of the main changes in the *FLA* include:

- Shifting focus to the safety and best interests of the child
- Moving from custody to guardianship and parenting arrangements
- Clarifying the law on family violence and its impact on family Court decisions
- Defining the responsibilities of guardians
- Expanding the toolbox to enforce family Court orders

Since March 18, 2013, the *FRA* no longer applies except only in dealing with the division of assets for proceedings which were filed before the *FLA* came into force. This includes cases that were commenced while the *FRA* was the relevant statute. Essentially, this means that child-related issues are determined by the *FLA*, while property division issues that commenced under the *FRA* will continue to be governed by the *FRA* unless the parties agree to transition their legal matter to be governed under the *FLA*. Sections 250-255 of the *FLA* allow parties to transition legal matters concerning care of and time with children, property division, pension benefits, and restraining orders from the *FRA* to the *FLA*. Property division for cases that were started after March 18, 2013 will be governed by the *FLA*, including actions commenced by common-law spouses before the *FLA* came into force, if the pleadings are amended to include division of property and debt under the *FLA*.

## ***6. Family Homes on Reserves and Matrimonial Interests or Rights Act, (SC 2013, c 20) [FHRMIRA]***

*FHRMIRA* came into force in 2013 and governs family law cases involving property located on Indian Reserves. *FHRMIRA* also incorporates the local laws of the First Nation where the Reserve is located.

Matters regarding the division of matrimonial interests or rights in property on Reserve may become complicated as some orders require consultation with the Band Council and with other Band Members, other than the spouses, who have an interest or right in the home. It is important to consult *FHRMIRA* as well as the Band's legislation and investigate all potential interests in the matrimonial home when dealing with these matters.

## ***7. British Columbia Supreme Court Family Rules, BC Reg. 168/2009***

Website: <http://canlii.ca/t/8mcr>

These are the procedural rules that govern family law cases brought in the Supreme Court. Refer to these rules for the specific procedural requirements when making family law applications.

## **8. British Columbia Provincial (Family) Court Rules, BC Reg. 417/98**

Website: <http://canlii.ca/t/85pb>

These are the procedural rules that govern family law cases brought in the Provincial Court. These rules have been amended, and the changes will come into force in May 2021.

### **E. Referrals**

#### **1. The Non-Legal Problem**

Many clients will have problems that are not strictly legal. If the client has a personal problem, refer the client to an appropriate social service agency in the lower mainland. The Red Book (<http://www.bc211.ca>) is a very useful resource for this purpose. Often, even when a client does have a legal problem, the legal remedy will not resolve all issues for that person. Be aware of this and try to get clients the help they need.

#### **2. The Legal Problem**

Care should be taken in making referrals. Someone has referred this person to you and the client does not want to be shoved further down the line. **Do not refer** unless you are sure that the agency handles such problems.

## **III. MARRIAGE**

### **A. Marriage**

Marriage creates a legal relationship between two people, giving each certain legal rights and obligations. A marriage must comply with certain legal requirements. Therefore, not all marriages are valid.

### **B. Legal Requirements and Barriers**

To be valid, a marriage must meet several legal requirements. Failure to meet these requirements may render the marriage void *ab initio* (void from the beginning). In other circumstances, such as sham marriages or marriage in which one party did not consent or did so under duress, the marriage may be voidable, meaning the marriage is valid until an order is made by the Court to annul the marriage.

#### **1. Sex**

In the past, spouses had to be of opposite genders. This has been found to be unconstitutional (see *Reference re Same Sex Marriage*, [2004] SCR 698, [2004], SCJ No 75), and same-sex couples can now marry in every province and territory with the passing of Bill C-38 in the House of Commons, and subsequent passing in the Senate. Bill C-38 received Royal Assent on July 20, 2005 becoming the *Civil Marriage Act*, SC 2005, c 33.

#### **2. Relatedness**

The federal *Marriage (Prohibited Degrees) Act*, 1990, c 46, bars marriage between lineal relatives, including half-siblings and adopted siblings.

#### **3. Marital Status**

Both spouses must be unmarried at the time of the marriage.

#### **4. Age**

Both spouses must be over the age of majority (19 in BC; see the *Age of Majority Act*, RSBC 1996, c7, s1). In BC, a minor between the ages of 16 and 19 can marry only with the consent of both of their parents (see the *Marriage Act*, RSBC 1996, c 282, s 28). A minor under the age of 16 can marry only if permission is granted in a Supreme Court order (s 29). However, a marriage is not automatically invalid if the requirements of s 28 and 29 have not been met at the time of marriage (s 30); the Court may preserve the marriage if it is in the interests of justice to do so (e.g., if parties have grown up and have lived as spouses for some time).

#### **5. Mental Capacity**

At the time of the ceremony, both parties must be capable of understanding the nature of the ceremony and the rights and responsibilities involved in marriage.

#### **6. Residency**

The *Civil Marriage Act*, SC 2005, c 33 was passed in 2014. With this new act, marriages performed in Canada between non-Canadian residents will be valid in Canada, regardless of the law in either spouse's country of residence. Additionally, Canadian courts will be able to grant divorces to non-resident spouses who were married in Canada, and who are unable to get divorced in their own state because that state does not recognize the validity of the marriage.

#### **7. Foreign Marriages**

The common-law rule is that the formalities of marriage – i.e. who can marry, who can perform weddings – are those of the law where the marriage took place, while the legal capacity of each party is governed by the law of the place where they live.

#### **8. Sham Marriages**

When parties marry solely for some purpose such as tax benefits or immigration status, the marriage may be voidable for lack of intent. However, the marriage may not be void for lack of intent alone, and courts may find the marriage valid and binding when the parties consented to the union (for example, see *Grenal v Kaur*, 2009 Carswell Ont 7511, 84 Imm LR (3d) 227 (Ont SCJ)). Sham marriages are uncommon.

#### **9. Customary Marriage**

The law recognizes traditional customary marriages of Aboriginal people in some circumstances where the marriage meets the criteria of English common law.

### **C. Common-Law Relationships**

#### **1. General**

Common-law spouses have certain rights/obligations conferred on them by various statutes and the common law. Each statute may give a slightly different definition of a common-law “spouse”. A general rule is that for most federal legislation it takes one year of living together in a “marriage-like relationship” to qualify as common law and for most provincial legislation it takes two years to qualify (See *Takacs v. Gallo* (1998), 157 D.L.R. (4<sup>th</sup>) 623 for a summary of the indicators to be considered when determining whether parties have lived in a “marriage-like relationship”; see *Mattenucci v Greenberg*, 2014 BCSC 1434; *Trudeau v Panter*, 2013 BCSC 706 that merely living together does not mean a relationship is marriage-like).

Under the *FLA*, a person will be considered a ‘spouse’ if they have lived in a marriage-like relationship and have a child together (for spousal support only), or if they have lived in a marriage-like relationship for a continuous period of 2 years (see *CAM. v MDQ*, 2014 BCPC 110 regarding the child exception to living together for two years). This period begins when the couple began to live together in a marriage-like relationship. Someone separating within two years of *FLA* coming into force is a spouse (*Meservy v Field*, 2013 BCSC 2378).

See **Appendix A: Glossary** at the end of this chapter for a brief list of definitions. For more extensive definitions, consult the current legislation.

Remember that a common-law relationship is **not** a legal marriage. Nevertheless, where legal rights and obligations are conferred on common-law spouses, the relationship is still valid even if one or both of the parties is currently married to someone else.

## ***2. Estate Considerations***

### ***a) Wills, Estates and Succession Act (which came into force March 31, 2014)***

Two persons of either gender are considered spouses under this act if they are either married to each other, or if they have lived in a marriage-like relationship for at least 2 years (s 2(1)(b)). They cease to be considered spouses if one or both partners terminates the relationship (s 2(2)(b)).

If two or more persons are entitled to a spousal share of an intestate estate (estate for which the deceased has not left a will), they may agree on how to portion the share. If they cannot agree, a court will determine how to portion the spousal share between them.

If two or more persons are eligible to apply to be given priority as a spouse in the division of an intestate estate, they may agree on who is to apply. If they cannot agree, the Court can make a decision.

### ***b) Canada Pension Plan Act, RSC 1985, c C-8***

Common-law spouses who have cohabited with a contributor for one year before the contributor's death may be able to claim death benefits. Forms can be obtained from a CPP office.

### ***c) Workers' Compensation Act, RSBC 1996, c 492***

A common law relationship is recognized after cohabitation for two years. If there is a child, one year is sufficient.

### ***d) Employment and Assistance Act, SBC 2002, c 40***

A common law relationship can arise from cohabitation as short as 3 months that is "consistent with a marriage-like relationship" (s 1.1(1)). Common-law relationships are dealt with as marriages, and as single-family units where there are children.

## ***D. Marriage and Cohabitation Agreements***

### ***1. General***

Marriage agreements, sometimes colloquially referred to as pre-nuptial agreements, are agreements drafted by a married couple or in contemplation of marriage that address how to resolve a family law dispute, if one should arise. Cohabitation agreements similarly govern family law disputes between unmarried couples who expect to live in a marriage-like relationship for at least 2 years. Agreements can address matters that may be the subject of a dispute in the future, the means of resolving a dispute, and the implementation of the agreement. Agreements cannot override dispute resolution procedures mandated by statute.

Those interested in drawing up marriage, cohabitation, or pre-nuptial contracts on their own can be directed to the self-help kit. However, contracts drawn up using self-help kits are often overturned in Court. Independent legal advice is extremely important in order to have enforceable marriage or cohabitation agreements, and persons wishing to rely on a cohabitation or marriage agreement are strongly encouraged to seek the advice of a lawyer.



## ***2. Legislation: Family Law Act [FLA]***

The new *FLA* attempts to increase the enforceability of marriage and cohabitation agreements, and to provide clearer guidelines for the circumstances under which they can be binding. Agreements will be binding on the parties whether or not a family dispute resolution professional has been consulted, and whether or not the agreement has been filed with a court. Agreements will be binding on children who are parents or spouses (Part 2, s 6).

Section 93(3) of the *FLA* also states that courts can set aside an agreement if:

- a) spouses fail to disclose significant property or debts, or other information relevant to the negotiation of the agreement;
- b) one spouse takes improper advantage of another's vulnerability;
- c) one spouse does not understand the nature or consequences of the agreement;
- d) other circumstances that would cause, under common law, all or part of the contract to be voidable.

The above concerns are often addressed by having the parties obtain independent legal advice.

Section 93(5) of the *FLA* states that the courts can also set aside an agreement if they find the agreement significantly unfair after considering these factors:

- (a) the length of time that has passed since the agreement was made;
- (b) the intention of the spouses, in making the agreement, to achieve certainty;
- (c) the degree to which the spouses relied on the terms of the agreement.

The *FLA* is drafted to make it harder for courts to set aside agreements on the basis of unfairness. The Court will only set aside an agreement made between spouses respecting the division of property and debt, if the division agreed to would be "substantially different" from the division that the Court would order and "significantly unfair" to one of the spouses (See *Thomson v Young*, [2014] CarswellBC 1287 (BCSC)).

The test for setting aside an agreement is to first look at the formation of the agreement (s 93(3)) and then the effects of the agreement (s 93(5)). Section 93(4) states that a Court may refuse to set an agreement aside even if it was unfairly reached (*Asselin v Roy*, 2013 BCSC 1681).

Section 1 of the *FLA* provides a definition of "Written Agreement" as an agreement written and signed by all parties. Written agreements should also be witnessed by someone over the age of 19 to address potential evidentiary issues at a later date.

## ***3. Substance of Contract***

The main part of the agreement usually deals with the division of property and debt in the event of a relationship breakdown. The agreement may provide for management and/or ownership of family property during a marriage or cohabitation and/or when the relationship ends. The parties may also specify that neither party is responsible for debts of the other incurred either before or during the relationship.

While it was once against public policy to contract in anticipation of future separation, section 92 of the *FLA* explicitly anticipates such considerations in a marriage contract. Under the *FLA*, spouses can agree on how to divide family property, and what debts or items are eligible for division.

Section 93 of the *FLA* states that agreements respecting property division can be set aside for lack of procedural fairness, such as failure to disclose, where one party has taken advantage of the other, or where one spouse did not appreciate the consequences of the agreement.

According to section 93(4) and (5) of the *FLA*, the Court will only set aside an agreement on property under these sections "if the division agreed to would be 'substantially different' from the division that the Court would order and 'significantly unfair' to one of the spouses".

### ***a) Parenting Arrangements***

Parenting arrangements are generally never in cohabitation or marriage agreements.

Parenting arrangements are covered by section 44 of the *FLA*. Please note that an agreement for contact is not an agreement for “parenting arrangements” and will not be enforced under this section.

Agreements made about parenting are not binding unless made after separation or when parties are about to separate with the purpose of being effective upon separation (s 44(2)).

*FLA* section 44(3) holds that the written agreement may be given the force of a Court order if it is filed in a Supreme Court or Provincial Court registry. A Court must alter or set aside the terms of a parenting agreement if they are found not to be in the best interests of the child (s 44(4)), a concept discussed at length in this chapter.

Section 58 of the *FLA* outlines guidelines for agreements regarding contact with children. The *FLA* only emphasizes the importance of the best interests test, upgrading it from the “paramount” consideration to the “only” consideration.

For more information on Custody and Parenting, see **Section XI: Custody, Guardianship, and Access**.

### ***b) Child Support***

Per section 148 of the *FLA*, an agreement respecting child support is binding only if the agreement is made after separation, or when the parties are about to separate, for the purpose of being effective on separation. It would thus not be binding if it is in a marriage/cohabitation agreement.

Courts can override or vary any such terms that are inconsistent with *Federal Child Support Guidelines* (*Young v Young*, 2013 BCSC 1574) or with section 150 of the *FLA* [*Determining Child Support*]. Section 150 states that the amount of child support is to be determined by the *Federal Child Support Guidelines* (*Thibault v White*, 2014 BCSC 497). These guidelines have not been changed by the new *FLA* and old court decisions interpreting the guidelines continue to apply (*SML v RXR*, 2013 BCPC 123).

The primary objective is to ensure, so far as practicable, that the children will enjoy a reasonably consistent, and reasonably adequate, standard of living, unaffected, so far as is practicable, by changes in the relationships among their parents and step-parents (See *B (C) v B (M)*, [2014] CarswellBC 1212 (BCPC)). It is also important to note that any term purporting to exclude support obligations is likely to be found invalid on public policy grounds. The Court will seldom uphold an amount lower than the Guidelines, even if the parties agree on it, unless there is an appropriate reason to approve it, such as some other arrangement that directly benefits the child. It is important to note that the Court may refuse an application for a Divorce Order if the Court is not satisfied that appropriate arrangements have been made for the support of the parties’ children. See **Section X: Spousal and Child Support**.

### ***c) Spousal Support***

The law relating to contracting out of spousal support is complex. Clients should seek professional legal advice before entering into an agreement for spousal support. Under the *FLA*, spousal support agreements that are filed with a Court registry will be treated as an order of the Court (*FLA*, s 163), but can be set aside for lack of procedural fairness, such as failure to disclose, where one party has taken advantage of the other, or where one spouse did not appreciate the consequences of the agreement; they can also be set aside if the Court finds that the agreement is significantly unfair (see s 164 of the *FLA*). See **Section X: Spousal and Child Support**.

#### ***d) Void Conditions***

Marriage contracts sometimes incorporate terms that are not enforceable at law. For example, a clause stating, one spouse shall do all the cooking is a contract for personal services and is therefore not enforceable. A breach of such an agreement cannot be grounds for divorce.

**NOTE:** Consider whether a marriage agreement should contain a clause stating: “Anything held to be void/voidable will be severed from the agreement leaving the rest of the agreement intact”. This prevents the whole of a marriage agreement being voided by the inclusion of void conditions or clauses. See *Clarke v Clarke* (1991), 31 R.F.L. (3d) 383 (BCCA).

**NOTE:** Consider whether any agreement should contain a clause stating that the greater detail in the Agreement does not merge with any later Order. This ensures that if a Divorce Order is granted at a later date, the terms of the Agreement continue to apply unless expressly stated otherwise. This is more applicable to Separation Agreements.

## **IV. DIVORCE**

### ***A. Legislation***

The federal legislation governing divorces in Canada is the *DA*. The *DA* applies to legally married couples, including same-sex couples as long as residency requirements for one spouse are met. It does not apply to common-law couples or other unmarried couples. The provincial family law legislation in BC is the *FLA*, which applies to people in all relationships. The reason there are two statutes governing this area is the division of powers under sections 91 and 92 of the *Constitution Act*, 1867, which gives the federal government jurisdiction over “Marriage and Divorce” (s 91), while giving provincial governments jurisdiction over “The Solemnization of Marriage in the Province” and “Property and Civil Rights” (s 92).

### ***B. Jurisdiction***

#### ***1. Supreme Court***

The Supreme Court of British Columbia has jurisdiction over both the *DA* and the *FLA*. Because all divorce claims must be heard under the *DA*, the Supreme Court has exclusive jurisdiction over divorce claims. The Supreme Court has concurrent jurisdiction with Provincial Court over guardianship, parenting arrangements and support for children (including common-law couples) while division of property is under the exclusive jurisdiction of the Supreme Court. If a Supreme Court order for custody, access, or support is made under the *DA*, that order supersedes any existing *FLA* order. However, given the new *FLA* and change of terms under the provincial legislation (custody, guardianship and access to guardianship, parenting arrangements and contract), there is likely to be litigation regarding which act applies and when.

An uncontested divorce does not require a personal appearance in Supreme Court. Evidence can be submitted by affidavit with the application for the Divorce Order, called a “Desk Order Divorce”. In fact, parties are required to submit applications for Divorce by way of a “Desk Order” unless there is a reason to bring it on by way of application in Chambers.

Note that as of March 1, 2021, the term “custody” under the *DA* is repealed, and the term “parenting time” will be used in its place.

#### ***2. Provincial Court***

The Provincial Court only has jurisdiction to hear matters under the *FLA* and cannot hear any claim under the *DA*, including divorce applications. The Provincial Court can make orders or vary original Provincial Court orders relating to guardianship, parenting arrangements, contact, child support, and spousal support. The Court does **not** have jurisdiction to deal with claims for the division of property under the *FLA*.

## ***C. Requirements for a Divorce***

### ***1. Jurisdiction***

To obtain a divorce in a particular province, one of the parties to the claim must have been “ordinarily resident” in that province for at least one year immediately preceding the presentation of the Notice of Family Claim (*DA*, s 3(1)). A person can be “ordinarily resident” in a province and still travel or have casual or temporary residence outside the province.

*An Act to Amend the Civil Marriage Act* received Royal Assent and came into force on June 26, 2013. It allows non-resident couples married in Canada to divorce in Canada if they cannot get a divorce where they live.

There must not be another divorce proceeding involving the same parties in another jurisdiction. If two actions are pending and the proceeding filed first is not discontinued within 30 days after it is presented, the first Court will have exclusive jurisdiction (*DA* s 3(2)) to hear and determine the divorce proceeding. Parties must submit a clearance form, filled out online and printed, at the time of filing the Notice of Family Claim and Marriage Certificate.

Effective March 1, 2021, the updated s 3(2) will remove the 30-day limitation on discontinuing a first action.

### ***2. A Valid Marriage: Proof of Marriage***

Section 52(1) of the *Evidence Act*, RSBC 1996, c 124 states that if it is alleged in a civil proceeding that a ceremony of marriage took place in BC or another jurisdiction, either of the following can serve as evidence that the ceremony took place:

- a) the evidence of a person present at the ceremony (less common); or
- b) a document purporting to be the original or a certified copy of the certificate of marriage (the church certificate is not acceptable). Note: A certified copy is often not accepted by the Registry and all efforts should be made to obtain the original marriage certificate.

The simplest way is to use a certificate of marriage or registration of marriage. Only if the certificate or registration of marriage is not available should the evidence of a person present at the ceremony be used. An official translation of the marriage certificate and a translator’s affidavit must be provided if the marriage certificate is in any language other than English. French language marriage certificates must also be translated. The Court may require further proof that the marriage is valid if the documents evidencing the marriage appear questionable. Immigration and landing documents can be used as additional proof of marriage in these situations. In British Columbia, a party can order an original marriage certificate from Vital Statistics by filling out a request form, available at <https://ecos.vs.gov.bc.ca/>.

If a marriage certificate absolutely cannot be provided (e.g. the records cannot be obtained from the parties’ country of origin or were destroyed), and if there are no witnesses to the marriage available, a party to the divorce proceeding can attempt to prove their marriage by attesting to “cohabitation and reputation” in an affidavit. The Court will hear evidence of the couple’s “cohabitation and reputation” from the parties and witnesses. Where there are witnesses to the marriage available, a witness will be required to sign and swear an affidavit stating that: they were at the ceremony, it was conducted in accordance with the laws and religion of the country where the parties married, and to the best of their knowledge, the two parties were in fact married according to their law and traditions.

### ***3. Grounds for Divorce***

In accordance with s 8(1) of the *DA*, either or both spouses may apply for a divorce on the ground that there has been a breakdown of their marriage as evidenced by **separation for a year, adultery, or physical or mental cruelty** (see below). For the divorce action to succeed, the claimant must have valid grounds under s 8(2)(a) or 8(2)(b), and the respondent must be unable to raise a valid defence. Most divorces are based on separation rather than adultery or cruelty, in part because the accusing party must prove adultery and/or cruelty on the balance of probabilities. Where a claim for divorce based on adultery or cruelty has been filed for more than one year before the application for divorce is heard, the Court will usually grant the divorce on the ground of one-year separation.

Note the decision of *McPhail v McPhail*, 2001 BCCA 250, in which the Court found that, where both the grounds of cruelty and the grounds of a one-year separation for divorce exist, it would be appropriate for a trial judge to exercise their discretion to grant the divorce on the grounds of a one-year separation (no-fault) instead of on cruelty (fault). This was extended in *Aquilini v. Aquilini*, 2013 BCSC 217 to state that a one-year separation should be used as the grounds for divorce instead of adultery where both exist.

#### ***D. Divorces Based on Separation: s 8(2)(a)***

##### ***1. Separation One Year***

Under the *DA*, neither party needs to prove “fault” to get a divorce. Most divorces will proceed under s 8(2)(a), separation for a period of at least one year. **Although the pleadings starting the action can be filed immediately upon separation, the Divorce Order cannot be sought until one day after the parties have been separated for one year.**

The ground of separation requires recognition by **one** of the parties that the marriage is at an end. It is not necessary that the parties form a joint intention. It is also not necessary that the two parties live in separate homes, although they must live “separate and apart” and demonstrate their intention to separate. For example, the parties may move into separate bedrooms in the same home.

##### ***2. 90-Day Reconciliation Period***

Any number of reconciliation attempts may be made during the separation year without affecting the application for divorce. However, if:

- 1) the length of any reconciliation attempt exceeds 90 days, or
- 2) the aggregate total length of reconciliations exceeds 90 days,

then the time for calculating the one-year period of separation must start over again with the first day of calculation being the first day of separation after the 90+ day reconciliation ended (s 8(3)(b)(ii)).

##### ***3. Living Under the Same Roof***

Some couples may choose to continue to live under the same roof after they have decided to separate for financial reasons or for the sake of the children. Indications of separation include: they have separate bank accounts, separate bedrooms, cook their own meals, do their own laundry, etc. (i.e., if there is an obvious severance of the conjugal relationship), they can still be considered separated.

This is the case for the *DA*, though it should be noted that the Canada Revenue Agency (CRA) takes a different position when it comes to taxes and child benefit payments. The CRA does not recognize living separate and apart under the same roof for the purpose of tax benefits unless there is a separate suite in the home.

## ***E. Divorces Based on Cruelty or Adultery: Divorce Act, s 8(2)(b)***

Divorces based on separation require at least one year to pass before the divorce order can be granted. Divorce claims based on the ground of cruelty or adultery can result in an immediate divorce.

### ***1. Adultery: s 8(2)(b)(i)***

Adultery is voluntary sexual intercourse between a married person and a person other than their spouse. The meaning of “adultery” includes sexual acts outside the marriage with a person of the same sex (*SEP v DDP*, [2005] BCJ No 1971 (BCSC)). The standard of proof for adultery is the same as the civil standard: the Court must be satisfied on a balance of probabilities (see *Adolph v Adolph* (1964), 51 W.W.R. 42 (BCC.A)). Proof can come in the form of an affidavit from one or both of the adulterers.

The Court will require proof that the adulterous conduct was not forgiven by the innocent spouse (condonation) and that the conduct was not conspired towards for the purposes of obtaining the divorce (collusion and connivance, see below).

### ***2. Physical or Mental Cruelty: s 8(2)(b)(ii)***

The test for cruelty is subjective. The question asked in a cruelty case is whether the conduct is of such a kind as to render intolerable the continued cohabitation of the spouses. There is no objective standard in the sense that certain conduct will constitute cruelty in every case while other conduct will not. The respondent’s conduct may constitute cruelty even if there is no intent to be cruel. What has to be determined is the effect of the conduct on a particular person, rather than the nature of the acts committed (*Burr v Burr*, [1983] BCJ No 743).

If the spouses are still cohabiting, the Court will infer that the conduct was not intolerable unless the claimant had **no** means or opportunity for leaving (*Cridge v Cridge* (1974), 12 RFL 57, (BCSC)). Lack of income, children at home, and difficulty with the English language may qualify as reasons for continuing cohabitation.

Again, to make a case based on cruelty, there must be proof on the balance of probabilities. Things that could be entered as evidence in this area include medical evidence such as charts and doctors' statements.

## ***F. Why a Divorce Application May Be Rejected***

### ***1. Collusion***

Collusion is, simply put, both parties conspiring to obtain a divorce. A more expansive definition can be found in s 11(4) of the *DA*. Collusion is an **absolute bar** to a divorce on the grounds of cruelty or adultery.

### ***2. Condonation***

Condonation consists of forgiving a marital offence that would otherwise be a ground for divorce. There are three requirements: knowledge of the matrimonial offence by the claimant; forgiveness of the offence; and actual reinstatement of the relationship. A single attempt or a series of attempts at reconciliation totalling less than 90 days does **not** qualify as condonation.

Condonation is a **discretionary bar** to a divorce. If the matter is raised, the onus is on the claimant to disprove it.

### ***3. Connivance***

Connivance occurs when one spouse encourages the other to commit adultery or cruelty. There must be a “corrupt intention... to promote or encourage either initiation or the continuance..... or it may consist of a passive acquiescence...”. Keeping watch on the other spouse does not constitute passive acquiescence: *Maddock v Maddock*, [1958] OR 810 at 818, 16 DLR (2d) 325 (CA).

Connivance is a **discretionary bar** to a divorce, similar in effect to condonation.

#### ***4. Discretion of the Court***

In cases of condonation or connivance, the claim for divorce will be dismissed unless, in the Court's opinion, the public interest would be better served by granting the divorce.

The Court may also reject an application for divorce where: a divorce is pending in another jurisdiction; a marriage certificate or registration of marriage has not been provided; there are defects in the application materials; or there are defects in the form of draft order provided with the application. The Court registry is very particular about the content and form of both the applications materials and the draft order, which may result in the rejection of the application before it gets to a judge.

#### ***5. Divorce Will Not Be Granted Until Child Support Is Settled***

In a divorce proceeding, it is the duty of the Court to satisfy itself that "reasonable arrangements" have been made for the support of any children of the marriage, typically having regard to the Federal Child Support Guidelines. If such arrangements have not been made, s 11(1)(b) of the *DA* requires the Court to stay the granting of the divorce. When stepchildren are involved, the Court will determine child support requirements for a stepparent on a case-by-case basis. The definition of "child of the marriage" in s 2 of the *DA* is broad enough to include children for whom one spouse "stands in the place of a parent".

### ***G. Separation Agreements***

#### ***1. General – Family Law Act***

The *FLA* defines a written agreement as an agreement that is in writing and signed by all parties (s 1 *FLA*). A separation agreement is a legal contract that generally provides for a division of property and debt, the support of a dependent spouse, and for the support, guardianship and parenting arrangements of a child by a parent.

A separation agreement can deal with some or all of these issues. It can eliminate much of the emotional disturbance involved in courtroom proceedings and provide the parties with an arrangement to which they have both agreed, as opposed to a Court order, with which neither party may be happy. Part 2, Section 6 outlines that parties are able to make agreements to resolve disputes and respecting matters at issue in a family law dispute and subject to the *FLA*, the agreement is binding on the parties.

The overarching test for any agreements made regarding Part 4 of the *FLA* (guardianship, parenting arrangement contact) is the best interest of the child test in section 37 of the *FLA*.

A separation agreement between spouses can also deal with division of family property and family debt, as well as any assets excluded from division.

Section 85 of the *FLA* excludes the following from the division of family property:

- property acquired by a spouse before the relationship between the spouses began;
- inheritances to a spouse;
- gifts to a spouse from a third party;
- a settlement or an award of damages to a spouse as compensation for injury or loss, unless the settlement or award represents compensation for
  - loss to both spouses, or
  - lost income of a spouse;

- money paid or payable under an insurance policy, other than a policy respecting property, except any portion that represents compensation for
  - loss to both spouses, or
  - lost income of a spouse;
- property referred to in any of the paragraphs above that is held in trust for the benefit of a spouse;
- a spouse's beneficial interest in property held in a discretionary trust
  - to which the spouse did not contribute, and
  - that is settled by a person other than the spouse;
- property derived from property or the disposition of property referred to in any of the above paragraphs.

Each spouse must be aware of the potential influence of any agreement on future expectations, and the legal implications of the agreement on questions of ownership and title in family property. Each spouse should have independent legal advice, even in cases where the parties seem to be in agreement on the terms of a separation agreement. If a separation agreement has been signed and one party did not have independent legal advice this may go towards evidence of unfair contracting and it may be possible to overturn the contract.

It is possible that a separation agreement containing provisions for support may be regarded by the Court as evidence of liability on the part of the supporting spouse. While the agreement does not usurp the Court's jurisdiction in support, guardianship or parenting arrangements, the Court will consider the terms of the agreement when making the order. Whether the Court will uphold the terms of the agreement changes depending on the subject matter of the agreement. See sections of the *FLA* that apply to each subject matter. Note also that any orders respecting agreements are subject to s 214 of the *FLA*.

In addition to property settlements, guardianship or parenting arrangements, and support, the separation agreement may embrace any other matters the parties wish to include in it, and often includes estate provisions, releases, penalties for breach of the contract, etc. A separation agreement can be more flexible than a Court order. For example, a Court order cannot contain contingent terms, but a separation agreement can.

**NOTE:** Because of the complicated nature of separation agreements, clients who wish to make a separation agreement should be given family law referrals.

## ***H. Other Points to Note***

### ***1. Jurisdiction to Vary Proceedings***

Section 5(1) of the *DA* allows a Court in a province other than the Court of original jurisdiction (that is, the Court which originally made an order) to vary an order made under the *DA* if:

- one of the former spouses is ordinarily resident in the province at the commencement of the proceeding; or
- both former spouses accept the jurisdiction of the Court.

### ***2. Adjournment for Reconciliation under the DA***

Where at any stage in a divorce proceeding it appears to the Court from the nature of the case, the evidence, or the attitude of either or both spouses that there is a possibility of reconciliation of the spouses, s 10(2) of the *DA* allows the Court to adjourn proceedings to give the spouse an opportunity to reconcile. The Court can also, with the spouses' consent, nominate a marriage counsellor, or in special circumstances, some other suitable person to assist a reconciliation.



### ***3. Alteration of Effective Date of Divorce***

Under s 12 of the *DA*, a divorce takes effect on the 31st day after the day on which the judgment granting the divorce is rendered. The 31 days allow for the appeal period to expire. The Court may order that the divorce take effect before this if it is of the opinion there are special circumstances and the spouses agree that no appeal from the judgment will be taken. The impending birth of a child and remarriage are generally **not** considered compelling reasons to shorten the appeal period. However, one may file an appeal waiver to remarry sooner.

### ***4. Support Order After Divorce Has Been Granted***

Under s 15 of the current *DA*, for the purposes of child support, “spouse” means either of two persons a male or female who are married to each other (s 2(1)) and also includes “former spouse”. This means that a former spouse may be able to get a support order after the divorce has been granted.

The amended *DA* has repealed s 15 and updated the definition of “spouse” under s 2(1) to reflect the sections under which the meaning of “spouse” is inclusive of “former spouse.” This change will come into effect March 1, 2021.

### ***5. Mediation***

A form of mediation for separating couples is provided by the Family Justice Counsellors of the Ministry of Attorney General. It is intended to steer people out of the Court system. Similar to the small claims process, if the two parties come to an agreement through mediation they may choose to sign a binding contract after the process. Should either party choose not to sign, the agreement will not be binding. There are offices throughout BC, which can be located using the blue pages of the telephone book under BC Corrections Branch or Family Court: Probation and Family Court Services. The service is confidential and free. Family Justice Counsellors cannot deal with property and debt division.

There is also the Family Mediation Practicum Program which aims to provide affordable mediation services to participants while also offering practical training to new mediators (along with an experienced mentor mediator). See **Section I Part B: Resources on the Internet** above.

Parties may wish to retain a private family law mediator to assist them in mediating a resolution to their family law matter. They may contact the British Columbia Mediator Roster Society for names of family law mediators. See **Section I Part B: Resources on the Internet**. Not all family law mediators are listed on the roster, and there are many family lawyers who are specifically trained and accredited in family law mediation.

The new *FLA* favours out of Court resolution of issues, and even gives courts the authority to refer parties to counselling and mediation (s 224 *FLA*). It also formally recognizes the role of and duties of family dispute resolution professionals (Section 8), family justice counsellors (section 10), and parenting coordinators (Part 2, Division 3).

### ***6. Collaborative Divorce***

Another option for parties dealing with family law matters is the Collaborative Divorce Model. This offers an option for parties to resolve disputes respectfully and without going to Court. Parties work out a negotiated settlement with the help of collaboratively trained professionals including (as needed) lawyers, divorce coaches, child specialists and financial specialists. This allows the parties to negotiate a settlement without the threat of Court. If the parties are unable to resolve matters through the Collaborative process, the Collaborative professionals will not be involved in Court proceedings. See the websites listed in **Section 1.B: Resources on the Internet** above for more information.

## **7. Rule 7-1: Judicial Case Conferences**

In cases where relief other than a simple divorce is sought in the Supreme Court, Rule 7-1 of the *Supreme Court Family Rules* (British Columbia) requires that a judicial case conference (JCC) be held before a party to a contested family law proceeding delivers a notice of application or affidavit in support of an interlocutory application to the other party. There are exceptions to this rule. A party may file and serve a notice of application and supporting affidavits in any of the following applications even though a JCC has not yet been conducted:

- an application for an order under section 91 of the *FLA* restraining the disposition of any property at issue;
- an application for an order under section 32 or 39 of the *Family Homes on Reserves and Matrimonial Interests or Rights Act* (Canada) or a First Nation's law made under that Act with respect to an equivalent matter;
- an application for a consent order;
- an application without notice;
- an application to change, suspend or terminate a final order;
- an application to set aside or replace the whole or any part of an agreement;
- an application to change or set aside the determination of a parenting coordinator.

The purpose of a JCC is to help the parties come to an agreement on some or all of the matters at issue, to identify the issues that are in dispute and those that are not, to explore alternatives to litigation, to schedule disclosure, discoveries, and the exchange of documents, and to schedule interim applications and the trial date. JCCs may be heard by either judges or masters and are set for approximately an hour and a half. Parties can set more than one Judicial Case Conference.

## **8. Divorce Law and First Nations People**

Special concerns arise in cases involving First Nation People registered under the *Indian Act*, RSC 1985, c I-5. The *Indian Act* sets out guidelines for and definitions of Aboriginal people and defines who is eligible for “status”. Only “status” people are affected by the legislation under the *Indian Act*. One spouse’s treaty payment may be directed to the other “where the Ministry is satisfied he deserted his spouse or family without sufficient cause, conducted himself in such a manner as to justify the refusal of his spouse or family to live with him, or has been separated by imprisonment from his spouse and family” (*Indian Act*, s 68). As well, reserve land allocated by a certificate of possession cannot be dealt with in the same manner as a matrimonial home because the rules in the *FLA* do not apply to reserve land. However, in such cases, the Court may ask that the spouse in possession of the reserve land pay cash compensation to the other spouse (*George v George* (1997), 30 BCLR (3d) 107). Keep in mind that most provincial laws apply to Aboriginal people and reserve land unless they are in direct conflict with the *Indian Act*. Further, courts will almost always take the cultural identity of the children into consideration when making an order for custody; see e.g. *D.H. v H.M.*, [1999] SCJ No 22, and see *Van de Perre v Edwards*, [2001] SCJ No 60.

Furthermore, for First Nation Peoples living on reserves, the *Family Homes on Reserves and Matrimonial Interests or Rights Act* (S.C. 2013, c. 20) applies and can affect the division of assets in the case of divorce or separation (see ss 43, 46).

## **9. Other Procedural Options**

There are many other procedural options available to parties in Family Law disputes. Section 8 of the *FLA* requires counsel and other Family Dispute Resolution Professionals to discuss the advisability of the various types of family dispute resolution, which include those listed above as well as the following:

- Family Law Arbitration. See [http://www.familylaw.lss.bc.ca/help/who\\_Arbitrators.php](http://www.familylaw.lss.bc.ca/help/who_Arbitrators.php) for more information
- Med/Arb, which is a combination of both Mediation and Arbitration.
- Judicial Settlement Conferences pursuant to Rule 7-2 of the *Supreme Court Family Rules*
- Family Case Conferences pursuant to Rule 7(1) of the *Provincial Court (Family) Rules*

- The Provincial Court (Family) Rules will be repealed in May 2021 and the new Provincial Court Family Rules will take effect. Once this occurs, Family Management Conferences will replace Family Case Conferences.

- The use of a Parenting Coordinator to address ongoing parenting and communication issues between the parties after an order or agreement has been reached for the parenting arrangement. For more information see <http://www.bcparentingcoordinators.com/>

## ***I. Availability of Divorce Services in BC***

### ***1. Legal Aid***

Legal Aid will provide extremely limited assistance to those who meet their income requirements. Clients must also have a risk or history of family violence, or a risk or history of child abduction, to be eligible for this service. Legal Aid will not assist with divorces.

### ***2. Lawyers***

All lawyers will expect an initial payment from their client. The amount of the initial retainer will vary depending on the lawyer's hourly rate and their estimation of the complexity of the case. The cost of a simple, uncontested divorce begins at approximately \$1,000 and up. Advise clients to use the Lawyer Referral Service (604) 687-3221 or 1-800-663-1919. The first half-hour will only cost \$25, with the lawyer charging their standard rate thereafter.

To minimize costs when retaining a lawyer, clients should be advised to:

- negotiate the cost of legal services in advance so they do not come as a surprise;
- collect all necessary documentation personally rather than paying the lawyer to do it;
- call the lawyer only when imparting necessary information (every phone call costs money);
- use Family Court and Supreme Court resources (such as Family Justice Counsellors) if appropriate;
- ask for regular or scheduled billing to monitor escalating legal costs;
- carefully read all correspondence sent by the lawyer; and
- treat the lawyer as a professional.

## **V. UNCONTESTED DIVORCES**

### ***A. Required Documents***

If the spouse is trying to do the divorce on their own, the following information details the basic documents that they will need. A person handling their own divorce is advised to get a copy of the documents and instructions from Self-Counsel Press.

### ***1. Marriage Certificate***

Any official, **government-issued** form of marriage certificate or registration of marriage can be accepted. Importantly, it **cannot** be a church-issued document, marriage license, or slip of paper attesting to the celebration of the marriage. In some areas of the world, it may be difficult to obtain an official government document. If the marriage certificate is in a language other than English, an official certified translation must be provided. Claimants who require translation can be referred to Mosaic Translations, which can be reached at (604) 254-0469, or to the Society of Translators and Interpreters of BC at (604) 684-2940. Marriage certificates in French must also be translated. Claimants who were married in Canada can request a copy of their marriage certificate for about \$27 (in BC) from the Department of Vital Statistics.

## ***2. Photograph of the Spouse***

Claimants must have a recognizable photograph of the spouse. The photograph is for service purposes and will not be returned immediately. The process server usually returns the photo with the affidavit of personal service. They should also provide information about how to locate the spouse (i.e. their address, their employer's address, the make and model of their vehicle)

## ***3. Copies of Any Court Orders or Separation Agreements***

These documents can be attached to the divorce affidavits as exhibits.

If the client or spouse had previously started a divorce action, they must provide a filed copy of the Notice of Discontinuance that authorized discontinuance of that action.

If a separation agreement is the only document signed between the parties that involves guardianship, parenting arrangements, and consent and support of the children (i.e. if there are no court orders), the agreement may be filed in either the Provincial or the Supreme Court and enforced as a court order. Section 44 of the *FLA* allows for written agreements respecting parenting arrangements, section 148 allows for written agreements respecting child support and section 163 allows for written agreements respecting spousal support. The separation agreement does not need to be filed in Court to obtain a divorce order. However, if there are children of the marriage, the agreement should be attached to the affidavit regarding child support as evidence of the parties' agreement.

### ***B. Joint or Sole Application***

For joint applications, in addition to the original Notice of Joint Family Claim, two additional copies will be required - the original is filed at the registry and the two copies as personal records. See **Section H: Service**, below, regarding sole applications.

A joint application is quicker, less expensive, and less complicated than a sole application because a Notice of Joint Family Claim need not be served (*Supreme Court Family Rules*, r. 2-2). However, if lawyers or a mediator is preparing the joint claim, the lawyer needs to advise each of the clients that:

- The lawyer is acting for both parties;
- No information received in connection with the matter from one client can be treated as confidential from the other client;
- If a conflict develops that cannot be resolved, the lawyer cannot continue to act for both of them and may have to withdraw completely; and

Both parties will need to seek out independent legal advice.

### ***C. Filling Out the Notice of Family Claim***

The Registry is extremely scrupulous, and documents containing inconsistencies or omissions will be rejected. This could cost the client valuable time. Clients should be advised to check and re-check every document, especially dates and the spelling of names.

Do not use abbreviations, even common abbreviations such as "n/a", "a.k.a.", and "BC". Answer every paragraph in full.

If at any time, one party is aware of errors in the supporting documents (such as the certified copy of registration of marriage), the pleadings must be amended to show the true facts as that party knows them. This is because the party requesting the divorce must swear an affidavit as to the correctness of the documents and the statements contained therein.

#### ***D. Style of Proceedings***

The style of proceedings should use the names of both parties as they appear on the certificate or registration of marriage. The previous surname on the marriage certificate is not an alias and you need not use “also known as” or add it to the style of proceedings. If the certificate shows a typographic error, you may wish to include in the style of proceedings the name the party presently uses and “also known as” (or “formerly known as,” as appropriate) the name on the certificate.

#### ***E. Backing Sheets***

The backing sheet is the last page of the entire document, placed backwards so the documents can be easily identified when folded. Orders filed at the Registry for entry require backing sheets. Some Registries may also require backing sheets on all documents filed.

#### ***F. Notice of Family Claim***

The Notice of Family Claim will include general information about the parties, the spousal relationship history, prior court proceedings and agreements, as well as what is being sought by the claimant. The appropriate schedules should be completed and attached to the Notice of Family Claim.

Follow the directions outlined on the forms carefully.

Under Part 2 of the Notice of Family Claim, when the parties began living in a marriage-like relationship is usually (though not always) when the parties first began cohabiting. Conversely, the date of separation is the date the parties stopped living in a marriage-like relationship, even though they may have continued to live together under the same roof. If the breakdown of the marriage is due to separation, the date of commencement of the separation should be noted.

Under Part 3 of the Notice of Family Claim, any separation agreement or financial agreements determining any matters related to the dissolution of the marriage, any orders from the Courts, and/or other proceedings in the Courts should be noted. Details such as the date of the agreement, the matters resolved, and whether or not the agreements are still in effect should be set out, but the more specific details of the agreements do not need to be set out.

If the claimant is only seeking a divorce and has settled all other corollary matters without the need for court orders, they need only fill out the Notice of Family Claim, Schedule 1 – Divorce, and, if applicable, Schedule 5 - Other Orders if they want an order changing their name under the *Name Act*.

The forms must include an address for service. This address must be within 30 km from the courthouse. It can include a fax number and/or an email address. The address must be kept up to date with the Court and opposing party.

#### ***1. Schedule 1: Divorce***

Place a check for each applicable box and fill in the form accordingly. Addresses must be accurate. Do not use post office boxes. A government-issued certificate of marriage or certificate of registration of marriage must be filed where the party intends to seek an uncontested divorce.

#### ***2. Schedule 2: Children***

Place a check for each applicable box and fill in the form accordingly. Under the *DA* and the *FLA*s 146, children who are over the age of majority but whose illness leaves them unable to leave the care of a parent or whose attendance of a post-secondary institution leaves them financially dependent on their parent may be considered a dependent child. **With the *FLA* now enacted, which Act you are seeking an order under (the *DA* or *FLA*) can have an impact on the parties’ rights. Before checking one box or the other where it specifies the Acts, seek legal advice from a lawyer.**

### ***3. Schedule 3: Spousal Support***

Place a check for each applicable box and fill in the form accordingly. A lawyer should be consulted for advice on entitlement to spousal support. **With the *FLA* now enacted, which Act you are seeking an order under (the *DA* or *FLA*) can have an impact on the parties' rights. Before checking one box or the other where it specifies the Acts, seek legal advice from a lawyer. The test for awarding spousal support is the same, however, there are different limitation dates for the two.**

### ***4. Schedule 4: Property***

Place a checkmark for each applicable box and fill in the form accordingly. If one of the parties wishes to obtain unequal division of family property and family debt, details and reasons should be set forth here. **Only a lawyer should deal with property issues.**

### ***5. Schedule 5: Other Orders***

Place a checkmark for each applicable box and fill in the form accordingly. If the claimant is seeking a name change, they should indicate the full current and new names here.

## ***G. Child Support Affidavits***

Whenever there are children of the marriage and the requisition for a Desk Order Divorce is ready to be submitted, a Child Support Affidavit must be filed. Even if the matter of guardianship, etc. is to remain in the jurisdiction of the lower court, a judge is still required to satisfy themselves that reasonable arrangements have been made for the care of the children, hence the requirement for financial information. It is imperative that all income of both the child support claimant and the respondent be listed on the affidavit.

## ***H. Service***

Personal service is only required if the client is making a sole application.

Claimants **must** have a third party, over the age of 18, serve their Notice of Family Claim. Clients who choose to use a professional service should provide the server with a photograph of the spouse. The server should be told to take down the spouse's driver's licence number. Taking these steps will ensure that the Court does not question the validity of the service.

**Note:** If the process server serves the Notice of Family Claim based on a photograph and does not or is not able to obtain the spouses' driver's license number, the client must swear an additional affidavit confirming the identity of their spouse in the photograph used.

If the respondent's address is not known, the claimant should write letters to friends and family members to try to locate him or her. The client might also want to consider hiring the services of a skip tracing agency. This takes extra time but will avoid the additional costs associated with a substitute service application.

In a substitute service application, the claimant must make an extra application to obtain permission to serve the respondent in a way other than that normally required by the *Supreme Court Family Rules*. The client may also incur the cost of publishing notices in a local newspaper and or the Gazette, which could cost anywhere between \$111 and \$315 depending on the order given. Other options include posting a copy of the substitution service order and the pleadings in the Court Registry, mailing them to the respondent's last known address by registered mail, serving an adult in the house where the respondent is believed to reside, or serving the respondent through e-mail, Facebook, or other online methods.

## ***I. Costs***

Claimants should always double-check the following court fees because they tend to change:

- Ordering a marriage certificate or registration of marriage: \$27 for couples married in BC. It can be ordered by mail or in person. Refer to <https://ecos.vs.gov.bc.ca/> for more information.
- Court fee to file the Notice of Family Claim for divorce: \$210 (\$200 for filing the Notice of Family Claim and \$10 for filing the registration of divorce)

- Fee for Serving the Notice of Family Claim on the respondent: varies depending upon where the respondent lives. The average fee is \$100. Process Server Fees for the Lower Mainland can run from \$69 plus \$20 for an affidavit, or \$70 to \$100 all inclusive. For other parts of BC or Canada, it can cost \$200 or more for all attempts.
- Notarization: between \$25 and \$50, if the affidavit is already completed.
- Final application fee: \$80 (for requisition for the Desk Order Divorce).
- Fee to apply for a certificate of divorce: \$40. (Note that there is no requirement to apply for a certificate of divorce. Once the Order for divorce has been made and is effective, the parties are divorced.)

**NOTE:** There is no fee to file a separation agreement in Provincial Court. There is a fee of \$90 to file a separation agreement in the Supreme Court.

### ***J. Approximate Length of Time for Divorces***

Simple divorces, with or without children, take approximately three to four months to complete, or one to two months in the case of joint applications. Substitute service divorces take longer, an additional one or two months depending on the terms of the order for substitute service. Please note that these time estimates do not account for delay caused if the Court rejects some portion of the material filed and it needs to be redone.

## **VI. SIMPLE DIVORCE PROCEDURE: STEP BY STEP**

The following are steps to help applicants through the process.

**NOTE:** If an individual is self-representing, they are responsible for purchasing the Self-Counsel Press divorce guide and forms. The instructions and steps for filling out the forms and filing them, etc. are included in the kit.

### ***A. Sole Application***

**Step 1:** Collect all necessary documents: i.e. the marriage certificate, copies of court orders or agreements regarding custody, access, and support of the children. (As of March 1, 2021, the term “parenting order” will replace “custody” in the D4.)

**Step 2:** The client fills in the Notice of Family Claim and relevant schedules.

**Step 3:** The client fills in the Registration of Divorce form, only available online.

**Step 4:** The client should then go to the nearest Supreme Court, and bring the original and three copies of the Notice of Family Claim, the original marriage certificate or the certified copy of the marriage registration, and \$210 in cash, debit, money order, or cheque, payable to the Minister of Finance.

**Step 5:** In the sole application process, the client must then arrange for the court-stamped Notice of Family Claim to be personally served on the respondent.

**Service by a friend:** The friend should know the respondent, but not be involved in the divorce in any way. When the friend serves the respondent, the friend should ask whether the respondent is Mr./Ms. X, and ask for identification. It would be helpful, although not mandatory, to give the friend a picture of the respondent. The friend will then have to swear an affidavit of personal service and say how they identified the spouse (*Supreme Court Family Rules*, R. 6-3).

**Service by a Process Server:** Process Servers are listed in the Yellow Pages. They require the home and business addresses of the respondent, the telephone numbers, and a photograph of the respondent. They will also need two copies of the Notice of Family Claim, one for the spouse, and one to staple to the affidavit of personal service. **Substitute Service:** Evidence of efforts to find the respondent will be required before an order for substitute service can be granted. Some methods of finding the respondent are:

- calling or writing to relatives (usually the most successful);
- advertising in a local newspaper;
- writing to the Superintendent of Motor Vehicles to see if any vehicles have been registered in their name. The client should ask whether any fees will be incurred before proceeding;
- asking the local police if they have any information on their whereabouts, although they are usually reluctant to help;
- using a credit bureau or collection agency;
- asking friends of the respondent about their current address; or
- searching on Google and social media sites such as Facebook.

**Step 6:** Once the time for the respondent to file a Response to Family Claim has expired, the spouse applying for the divorce must swear an affidavit. The affidavit will need to be sworn before a notary public, the registry staff (\$40), or a lawyer. The time limit for filing a Response to Family Claim or Counterclaim is 30 days or, in the case of a substitution service order, such time as the order provides for the filing of a Response to Family Claim or Counterclaim.

**Step 7:** If there are any children, a child support affidavit must be filled out and sworn before a notary public, the registry staff, or a lawyer.

**Step 8:** The claimant applies for the divorce order. This requires:

- a) a requisition in Form F35 requesting an order that the parties be divorced;
- b) a draft of the order sought;
- c) the original of the affidavit of service complete with all exhibits and any supplementary affidavits confirming the identification of the respondent;
- d) a certificate of the registrar in Form F36;
- e) a requisition requesting a search for any Response to Family Claim;
- f) an affidavit, sworn within 30 days of the date on which the application is made, in support of the application (Form F38). This affidavit must be sworn after the time for the respondent to file a Response to Family Claim has expired (no earlier than one year after the date of separation if the ground of divorce is that the spouses have lived separate and apart for one year). The affidavit must include proof of the allegations made regarding the breakdown of the marriage or (in the case where the only ground of divorce is that the spouses have lived one year separate and apart) a sworn statement that the facts in the Notice of Family Claim are true;
- g) a child support affidavit in Form F37, if there are children; and
- h) the filing fee.

When the divorce is based on adultery or cruelty, proof of the adulterous or cruel conduct must be filed in affidavit form. Proof of adultery might consist of the respondent admission to the adulterous conduct. Proof of cruelty will usually consist in the affidavits of third parties, or letters from treating physicians, psychologists or psychiatrists attached to an affidavit as exhibits.

**NOTE:** If a Response to Family Claim has been filed, the respondent has chosen to contest all or some of the relief sought and a lawyer's advice should be sought immediately.



**Step 9:** If the Court is prepared to make the order sought, the order will be available at the Court registry some time after the application is filed. Clients should simply call the registry to see whether their order is ready rather than attending in person. Clients will be required to show valid photo ID to pick up their divorce order.

**Step 10:** Thirty-one days after the divorce order has been granted (the date shown on the front of the divorce order), the client may apply to get a Certificate of Divorce by filing two copies of the requisition requesting a Certificate of Divorce. The fee is \$40. Note that it is not always necessary to obtain a Certificate of Divorce.

## ***B. Joint Application***

In the joint application process, most of the required documents are filed at once. All required affidavits except one of the supporting affidavits may be sworn ahead of time. At least one of the supporting affidavits **must** be sworn and filed after the other materials are filed.

**Step 1:** Complete Steps 1 to 3 above. Both parties will be required to sign the Notice of Joint Family Claim.

**Step 2:** Complete all of the documents listed in Step 8 above, **except** for: one affidavit in support of the divorce application; the affidavit of service, and the requisition asking the registrar to search for a Response to Family Claim and Counterclaim

**Step 3:** One or both parties attend Court to apply for the divorce order. This requires:

- a) a requisition in Form F35 requesting an order that the parties be divorced;
- b) a draft of the order sought;
- c) a certificate of the registrar in Form F36;
- d) one affidavit in support of the application, sworn after the Notice of Family Claim or Notice of Joint Family Claim has been filed which includes proof of the allegations made regarding the breakdown of the marriage;
- e) a child support affidavit in Form F37, if there are children; and
- f) the filing fee.

A second affidavit in support of the application must be sworn and filed after the Notice of Joint Family Claim has been filed. That affidavit can be sworn at the court registry immediately after the filing of the other materials.

**Step 4:** Complete Steps 9 and 10 as listed above under “***A. Sole Application***”.

## ***C. Special Problems***

### ***1. Serving Divorce Papers Outside Canada***

In circumstances where the respondent in a divorce action is living outside Canada and is willing to go to the Canadian Consulate office nearest to where they live in order to accept service, the Consul will serve the respondent at that office, for a fee. However, this form of service requires the respondent’s cooperation, as they must be willing to attend at the consular office personally when notified by its staff to do so.

To comply with the requirements of this form of service, the client must forward service documents to the Consulate:

1. a copy of the Notice of Family Claim;

2. a partially completed Affidavit of Service (Form F15);
3. Exhibit “A” to the Affidavit of Service (i.e. a copy of the Notice of Family Claim); OR
4. If the country in which the respondent lives is a contracting state under the Convention on the Service Abroad of Judicial and Extra Judicial Documents in Civil or Commercial Matters, the respondent can be served using Forms F12, F13, and F14. See the Supreme Court Family Rule 6-5 for more details.
5. The client may then serve the documents outside of Canada. The Department of Authentication of Documents will help serve the documents. Their mailing address is:

**Foreign Affairs and International Trade Canada**  
Legal Advisory Division (JLAC)  
125 Sussex Drive  
Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0G2

This office in Ottawa will in turn forward the documents to the appropriate consulate office. The charge will be billed to the client at the end and is usually \$50.

If the respondent is **not** willing to go to the consulate office to be served, the Department of External Affairs will **not** arrange service. In these cases, the client must determine if the court outside of Canada has jurisdiction to hear the family law case under section 10 of the *Court Jurisdiction and Proceedings Transfer Act [SBC 2003] c 28* or section 3 of the *DA*. If the court does have jurisdiction, then the client must find a friend or relative in that country who is willing to serve the respondent. Otherwise, the client must apply to the court for leave to serve the respondent outside BC under Rule 6-4 of the *Supreme Court Family Rules*.

## ***2. Foreign Language Marriage Certificates***

Foreign language marriage certificates must be accompanied by a certified English translation. Certificates in French must also be translated. MOSAIC Translations will translate marriage documents. The minimum charge for this service is \$35. It should be noted that foreign marriages might be considered valid if the evidence shows that the marriage is valid in the foreign country. The Society of Translators and Interpreters of BC also translates marriage certificates. They can be reached by telephone at (604) 684-2940.

## ***3. Amending a Document***

Under Rule 8-1 of the *Supreme Court Family Rules*, a party may amend their pleadings. A party may amend an originating process or a pleading issued or filed by the party at any time with leave of the Court, and, subject to Rules 8-2(7), 8-2(9) and 9-6(5):

- once without leave of the Court, at any time before delivery of the notice of trial or hearing;  
and
- at any time with the written consent of all the parties.

Unless the Court otherwise orders, where a party amends a document under 8-1(1), a new document, being a copy of the original document but amended and bearing the date of the original, shall be filed.

Unless the Court otherwise orders, service on a party of an amended originating process or pleading shall be required if the original has been served on that party and no Response to Family Claim has been filed.

Unless the Court otherwise orders, where a party amends a document under 8-1(1), the party shall deliver copies of the amended document to all the parties of record within seven days after its amendment and, where service is required under 8-1(4), the party shall serve copies on the persons required to be served as soon as reasonably possible and before taking any further step in the proceedings.

Where an amended Notice of Family Claim or Counterclaim is served on an opposing party, that opposing party may amend the Response to Family Claim or Response to Counterclaim, as applicable. The opposing party may only do so if they have already delivered a Response to Family Claim or a Response to Counterclaim. In addition, the following conditions apply to the opposing party's amendments:

- the opposing party must amend the Response to Family Claim to Response to Counterclaim only with respect to any matter raised by the amendments to the Notice of Family Claim or Counterclaim; and
- the period for filing and delivering an amended Response to Family Claim or a Response to Counterclaim to an amended Notice of Family Claim or amended Counterclaim is 14 days after the amended pleading is delivered. Where a party does not serve an amended Response as provided in 8-1(5), the party shall be deemed to rely upon their original Response.

#### ***D. Contested Actions***

If the claimant's action is contested, the client should retain a lawyer, or at least seek a lawyer's advice, before proceeding. However, there are some situations where it is possible for the respondent to file a Response to Family Claim without contesting the divorce application. For example, the respondent can file a Response to Family Claim regarding access to children without a contested action ensuing, but a support or custody issue would definitely result in a contested action, and a considerable wait for trial.

#### ***E. "Quick" Divorces***

If there are special circumstances such that the parties would both agree to a quick divorce, the respondent can waive the waiting period after service by filing a Response to Family Claim. Both parties would then sign a waiver of appeal. However, waiving the waiting period will only speed up the procedure by a few weeks as the waiting period for appeal is 31 days.

The Court might not advance the date of divorce merely because of an impending birth or marriage. The Court must be "of the opinion that by reason of special circumstances the divorce should take effect earlier," and the spouses must agree not to appeal the decision: *DA*, s 12(2). The courts have interpreted "special circumstances" very strictly, and grant a quick divorce in exceptional cases only, e.g. where the immigration status of the claimant's fiancée is in jeopardy. The courts tend not to consider pregnancy or ordinary remarriage to be "special circumstances."

## **VII. ALTERNATIVES TO DIVORCE**

### ***A. Annulment***

An annulment differs conceptually from a divorce because a divorce terminates a legal status, whereas an annulment is a declaration that the parties' marital status never properly existed. A declaration of nullity may be obtained for two types of marriages:

- void marriages, which are null and void *ab initio* (from the outset); and
- voidable marriages, which are valid until a court of competent jurisdiction grants a declaration of nullity (although such a declaration has the effect of invalidating the marriage from its beginning).

The difference between a void and voidable marriage is less important in matrimonial proceedings in British Columbia than it was when the *FRA* was in effect (see s 95(2) and part 5). The *FLA* ss 21-22 also do not make any distinction. For purposes other than the *FLA*, the distinction may still be relevant.

A marriage is void *ab initio* if:

- a) either of the parties was, at the time of the marriage, still married to another party;
- b) one of the parties did not consent to the marriage;
- c) the parties are related within the bonds of consanguinity (descent from a common ancestor); or

- d) the formal requirements imposed by provincial statute (such as the *BC Marriage Act*) are not fulfilled.

Misrepresentation is a ground for annulment only where the misrepresentation leads to a mistake about the identity of the other party or as to the nature of the marriage ceremony.

A voidable marriage is valid until one of the parties to it obtains a declaration of nullity. The declaration must be obtained during the parties' joint lives and is not available if the parties are already divorced. In Canada, a marriage may be voidable in the following circumstances:

- a) either party is impotent or otherwise unable to consummate the marriage (as opposed to unwilling to consummate the marriage, which may constitute cruelty but does not render the marriage voidable (see *Juretic v Ruiz*, 1999 BCCA 417); or
- b) a party is under 14 years of age.

These are common law rules.

**NOTE:** If a marriage is found to be void, this does not affect the property claims that a party might have. Pursuant to s 21 of the *FLA*, the matrimonial regime still applies in this situation.

### ***B. Judicial Separation***

The Court can no longer grant a judicial separation. Judicial separation was formerly used to sever the legal obligations and liabilities between a married couple without terminating the marriage, when a spouse's religion forbade divorce.

## **VIII. FAMILY VIOLENCE**

### ***A. Family Law Act***

Under the *FLA*, a court may issue a family law protection order against a family member in a dispute when there is a likelihood of family violence. Family violence is inclusive of physical, emotional, or psychological abuse. When children are involved, both direct and indirect exposure to violence meet the definition of family violence in s 1 of the *Act*.

Applications for a protection order can be made alongside applications for other family court orders or on their own. The involvement of the criminal justice system is not required. Applications can be made in both Provincial Court and Supreme Court.

There is no cost to apply for a protection order in BC Provincial Court. If you are seeking a divorce, you may apply for a protection order at the BC Supreme Court for a fee (\$80 for divorce proceedings that have begun, and \$200 if not). It is possible to obtain an order to waive fees at the Supreme Court. The Legal Services Society publication "For Your Protection" outlines the process and the forms required to seek a protection order. <https://familylaw.lss.bc.ca/publications/your-protection>

Before issuing a protection order, courts will consider the history of family violence, the nature of that violence, the present relationship between the at-risk family member and the violent family member, and circumstances which increase the risk of violence or the vulnerability of the at-risk family member (s 184(1)).

Protection orders may prohibit direct or indirect communication, attending locations frequently entered by the at-risk family member, and possessing a weapon (see s 18(3) for additional prohibitions). Unless the court establishes otherwise, an order will expire one year after the date it is issued.

### ***B. Divorce Act***

Effective March 1, 2021, the amended *Divorce Act* will include provisions for identifying family violence and assessing its relevance to family disputes. The following provisions will come into force on that date.

Family violence is conduct by one family member which causes another family member to fear for the safety of themselves or another person. The amended DA characterizes this as threatening or violent behaviour, or a pattern of coercive or controlling behaviour (see s 2(1) of the amended DA for the definition of family violence and a list of conduct which meets this definition). These behaviours need not be criminal offences, nor are they required to meet the threshold for proof in criminal law to qualify as family violence under the updated DA. If a child is exposed to direct or indirect violence, this is considered family violence and possibly child abuse.

Under the amended Divorce Act, family violence will be a factor under consideration in establishing parenting and contact arrangements for children (s 16(3)(j) of the amended DA). Courts may consider family violence grounds to modify or waive notice requirements for changes in residence (s 16.96(3)). Family violence will also be a factor in determining whether family dispute resolution would be inappropriate (s 7.7(2) of the amended DA).

## IX. ASSETS

### A. General

The FRA only applies to proceedings started prior to March 18, 2013 and to agreements made before the FLA came into force. Please view an older version of this manual if the FRA applies to your matter.

The division of property on marriage breakdown is dealt with in Part 5 of the FLA. When the FLA replaced the FRA, it significantly changed the property law regime in British Columbia and reduced judicial discretion. It is a simpler model designed to help parties achieve resolutions out of Court. It operates on the presumption that spouses are equally entitled to family property and equally responsible for family debt (s 81). It also provides that unmarried spouses (who have lived together in a marriage-like relationship for at least two years) may avail themselves of the property and liability provisions of the FLA in Parts 5 and 6.

### B. Legislation

#### 1. Divorce Act [DA]

The DA does not deal with property division.

#### 2. Family Law Act [FLA]

Section 81 of the FLA outlines that each spouse is entitled to an undivided, one-half interest of family property and is equally responsible for debt upon separation (*Stonehouse v Stonehouse*, 2014 BCSC 1057; *Joffres v Joffres*, 2014 BCSC 1778). However, the FLA substantially changes what is considered to be family property, essentially allowing spouses to keep property they bring into a relationship and share only in the increase in value of that property and the net value of new property obtained after cohabitation or marriage.

The FLA carves out a category of *excluded property* under section 85. Section 85 (1) of the FLA reads as follows:

The following is excluded from family property:

- (a) property acquired by a spouse before the relationship between the spouses began;
- (b) inheritances to a spouse;
- (b.1) gifts to a spouse from a third party;
- (c) a settlement or an award of damages to a spouse as compensation for injury or loss, unless the settlement or award represents compensation for
  - (i) loss to both spouses, or
  - (ii) lost income of a spouse;

- (d) money paid or payable under an insurance policy, other than a policy respecting property, except any portion that represents compensation for
  - (i) loss to both spouses, or
  - (ii) lost income of a spouse;
- (e) property referred to in any of paragraphs (a) to (d) that is held in trust for the benefit of a spouse;
- (f) a spouse's beneficial interest in property held in a discretionary trust
  - (i) to which the spouse did not contribute, and
  - (ii) that is settled by a person other than the spouse;
- (g) property derived from property or the disposition of property referred to in any of paragraphs (a) to (f).

Any increases in the value of the excluded property that occur during the relationship are considered family property and are not excluded from division. The spouse claiming that the property in question qualifies as *excluded property* is responsible for demonstrating that it fits the definition under s 85(1) (*Bressette v Henderson*, 2013 BCSC 1661).

This property division regime applies to all married spouses as well as all unmarried common-law spouses who have lived in a marriage-like relationship for at least two years. The date of separation will be the relevant date used to identify the pool of family property to be divided. However, it is the date of the hearing or agreement which determines the date of valuation of property. Spouses may choose to opt out of these property division rules but must make these different arrangements through an agreement.

Family property, is defined at s 84(1):

- (a) on the date the spouses separate,
  - (i) property that is owned by at least one spouse, or
  - (ii) a beneficial interest of at least one spouse in property;
- (b) after separation,
  - (i) property acquired by at least one spouse if the property is derived from property referred to in paragraph (a) (i) or from a beneficial interest referred to in paragraph (a) (ii), or from the disposition of either, or
  - (ii) a beneficial interest acquired by at least one spouse in property if the beneficial interest is derived from property referred to in paragraph (a) (i) or from a beneficial interest referred to in paragraph (a) (ii), or from the disposition of either.

### ***3. Supreme Court Family Rules [SCFR]***

The Supreme Court Family Rules contain a number of procedural provisions for dealing with property.

For example, Rule 12-1 allows for the detention, preservation, and recovery of property that is the subject matter of a family law case. Rule 12-4 allows for a pre-trial injunction. Rule 15-8 permits the Court to order a sale of property if it appears necessary and expedient that the property be sold. Where a dispute arises, an application can be made to the Supreme Court to settle the matter, but clients should be advised that a court action is costly and a negotiated settlement is generally to their advantage because courts have a wide discretion to distribute family property. For example, a court could order the sale of property at a time when the housing market is poor, resulting in a low sale price. Sometimes, a spouse should consider selling their interest in a property to the other spouse.

## ***C. Types of Assets***

### ***1. Family Property***

Under section 84 of the *FLA*, family property includes all real and personal property owned by one or both spouses at the date of separation unless the asset in question is excluded, in which case only the increase in the value of the asset during the relationship is divisible. It is no longer relevant whether an asset was ordinarily used for a family purpose in deciding if it is family property.

Pursuant to section 85 of the *FLA*, certain property is excluded from family property, including the following:

- Property acquired by a spouse before the relationship between the spouses began;
- Gifts (from a third party) or inheritances to one spouse, unless the gift or inheritance was transferred into the parties' joint names or the other spouse's sole name, in which case there is an argument that it was gifted to the other spouse and becomes family property;
- Most damage awards and insurance proceeds, except those intended to compensate both spouses and loss of income of one spouse;
- Some kinds of trust property;
  - o Under s 85(e), property that is described in s 85(a) to (d) and is held in trust for the benefit of a spouse
  - o A spouse's beneficial interest in property held in a discretionary trust to which the spouse did not contribute, and that is settled by a person other than the spouse are also excluded from family property under s 85(f)

Family property is presumptively divided equally unless it would be significantly unfair to do so (ss 81 and 95 of the *FLA*).

Family debt, which is new in the *FLA*, is divided equally, unless equal division would be significantly unfair to one spouse. The value of all property is calculated at either an agreed date, or at the date of a court hearing respecting the division of family property and family debt. Any increases in the value of the excluded property that occur during the relationship are considered family property and are not excluded from division.

### ***2. Savings***

Under the *FLA*, all money held by one spouse in a financial institution is considered family property and equally divisible, unless that spouse can prove that it is excluded property.

### ***3. Pensions and RRSPs***

Rights under an annuity, pension, home ownership, or registered retirement savings plan are considered family property, including each party's Canadian Pension Plan (CPP) credits.

The division of pensions is clarified in the *FLA*. Unless the pension is proven to be excluded property, it will be divisible. The presumption is equal division unless it would be significantly unfair based on the considerations in s 95 of the *FLA*. If a spouse is to receive benefits at a later date, they may become a limited member of the plan. If they cease to be a limited member then their share is transferred. A spouse can generally either choose to have a lump-sum payment of their share, to have a separate pension payment issued to them (s 115), or a hybrid of both (s 116). This decision may be made at any time (either before or after the pension commences) but the division will only occur after the pension has commenced (s 115).

If an agreement or order regarding the benefits of a pension provides that the benefits are not divisible or is silent on entitlement to benefits, a member and a spouse may agree to have benefits divided before the earliest of the following:

- 1) Benefits are divided under the original agreement or order,
- 2) The member or spouse dies, or
- 3) Benefits are terminated under the plan.

If an agreement or order provides that the member must pay the spouse a proportionate share of benefits under a plan where the member's pension commences and the member's pension has not commenced, the member and spouse may agree, by the spouse giving notice to Division 2 of Part 6 of the *FLA*, to divide the benefits in accordance with the Part, and unless the member and spouse agree otherwise, the original agreement or order must be administered in accordance with the regulations.

**NOTE:** BC is one of the few provinces that allow spouses to enter into a written agreement to waive the equalization of their pensionable credits under the CPP.

#### ***4. Real Property***

It is often necessary to take early steps to secure the title to real property when there is a separation. In fact, it is recommended for clients to file as soon as possible to avoid missing any limitation dates and preserve their claim. This is particularly so where property is registered in the name of only one spouse, and there is a risk of that party disposing of or encumbering the property, or where judgments are likely to be registered against one party's interest, which might prejudice the other party. Under section 91 of the *FLA* and Rules 12-1 and 12-4 of the *Supreme Court Family Rules*, one may request an automatic restraining order to prevent the sale or disposal of family property including real property. There are several ways of protecting a spouse's interest.

##### ***a) Certificates of Pending Litigation and Caveats***

Caveats and Certificates of Pending Litigation are warnings to potential purchasers and establish claim priority over the property from the day the Caveat or Certificate of Pending Litigation is filed. This document will defeat the presumption of claim priority given to the bona fide purchaser for value. Entitlement to a certificate of pending litigation is limited. See the *Land Title Act*, RSBC 1996, c250 and *Annotated Land Title Act* by Gregory and Gregory for the procedure and forms. Note that Caveats have an expiry date and are therefore a temporary measure to protect a party's interest.

##### ***b) Land (Spouse Protection) Act, RSBC 1996, c 246***

This Act applies where a party has elected not to commence legal proceedings but needs to protect their interest in real property. It provides an alternative to a Certificate of Pending Litigation for a married spouse (not common law) where the "property" was the "matrimonial home". The Act allows a charge to be placed on land that will prevent disposition of the property without the written consent of the applicant for the charge (refer to the *Land (Spouse Protection) Act* and the *Land Title Act* for the registration procedure). Note that this only applies while the parties are legally married. The charge may be struck out on the death of, or final divorce from, the applicant.

Registration of a charge by one spouse under the *Land (Spouse Protection) Act* prevents the other spouse from selling or encumbering their share but is not protection against a creditor who could obtain an order for sale of the house. So long as one is legally married to their spouse, one may file against the property without the other spouse's notice or consent, in order to prevent the transfer of the property.



### ***c) Registration of a Notice Under the Land Title Act***

A spouse who is a party to a cohabitation agreement, a marriage agreement, or a separation agreement may file a notice in the Land Title Office regarding any lands to which the agreement relates (*FLA* s 99). This applies to married spouses and common-law spouses who have lived in a marriage-like relationship for at least two years.

The information required in the notice includes the names and addresses of the spouses, the legal description of the land, and the provisions of the agreement relating to that land. The Registrar may then register this notice in the same manner as a charge on the land.

Once the notice is registered, there can be no subsequent registration of a lease, mortgage, transfer, etc., unless both spouses or former spouses sign a cancellation or postponement notice in the prescribed form. A spouse or former spouse may apply to the Supreme Court for an order to cancel or postpone a notice where the other party to the agreement cannot be found after reasonable search, unreasonably refuses to sign a cancellation or postponement, or is mentally incompetent.

The use of this notice also extends to mobile homes.

### ***d) Supreme Court Family Rules Rule 12-1 and 12-2 and section 91 of the Family Law Act***

Section 91 of the *FLA* and SCFR R 12-1 and 12-2 allow for temporary orders respecting the protection of property. On application by a party, the Supreme Court can:

- Make an order restraining the other party from disposing of any property at issue under Part 5 (property) or Part 6 (pension division);
- Make an order for the detention, custody, or preservation of any property that is the subject matter of a family law case or as to which a question may arise
- Make an order to allow the whole or part of the income of the property to be paid to a party who has an interest in it
- In the case of personal property, make an order that part of the personal property be delivered to or transferred to a party; and
- Make an order for a pre-trial injunction.

## ***5. Business Assets***

Business property is family property unless it is excluded property under the *FLA*.

### ***D. Use of Assets***

The Court can award one spouse exclusive use of assets pending further agreement between the parties or a Court order. This can include large assets such as a home and car; or smaller assets as may be required to operate a business, or for the departing spouse's television, computer, or books, for example.

### ***E. Unmarried Couples***

Under the *FLA*, unmarried couples who have lived in a marriage-like relationship for at least two years are treated the same way as married couples. Unless an action was started under the *FRA*, the *FLA* now applies (as long as the time limit has not expired) and may apply even if proceedings have already been commenced.

The courts will recognize an equitable interest of a common-law spouse in all the property and assets acquired by the couple through the joint efforts of the two spouses, although registered in the name of the other spouse (i.e. a constructive trust). The scope of constructive trusts was greatly expanded in *Peter v Beblow* (1993), 3 WWR 337, 77 BCLR (2d) 1, in which the Court found a constructive trust arising from the contributions made by homemaking and childcare services, which allowed for the retention of money that would otherwise be paid for such services to be used as mortgage payments. Claims in trust may be constructive (as follows), resulting (implied trusts), or

express. Constructive trusts are the most common type of trust claim, where the Court imposes a trust to remedy the unjust enrichment of one party at the deprivation of the other. However, there are limits, and a court will not interfere where the elements of constructive trust are not present. A causal connection must be found to exist between the contribution made and the property in question. Refer to a general text for a more comprehensive description of the elements of constructive trust. Because common law constructive trusts are relief granted by a court, spouses can make use of both the *FLA* requirements for equal division and common law constructive trust principles when seeking relief for unfair division of property.

## F. Interim Relief

The Court may make a number of orders for interim relief under Part 5, Division 3 of the *FLA*. This means that prior to a trial on all the issues in the proceeding, the Court may:

- Order an interim distribution of family property that is at issue to provide money to fund (s 89):
  - Family dispute resolution,
  - All or part of a proceeding under the *FLA*, or
  - Obtaining information or evidence in support of family dispute resolution or an application to a court
- Order temporary exclusive occupation and possession of the family residence by just one spouse (s 90)
- Order restraining a spouse from disposing of any property at issue under Part 5 (property division) or Part 6 (pension division) until or unless the other spouse establishes that a claim made under Part 5 or Part 6 will not be defeated or adversely affected by the disposal of property (s 91(1))
- Order the possession, delivery, safekeeping and preservation of property (s 91(2)(a))
- Prohibit one spouse from disposing of, transferring, converting, or exchanging into another form, property in which the application may have an interest, or vesting all or a portion of property in, or in trust for, the application (s 91(2)(b))

## G. Limitation Period

See **Section XV Part B: Limitation Dates** for the limitation periods for beginning property division proceedings for married spouses and common-law spouses.

# X. SPOUSAL AND CHILD SUPPORT

## A. General

Support is the financial support one person provides for another person (adult or child). This is meant to provide for that person's reasonable needs (i.e. food, clothing, shelter, education, and medical care). Spousal support is intended to pay for basic living expenses and is highly discretionary. In contrast, child support is an obligation acquired through parenthood; it is mandatory with firm guidelines. Child support always takes precedence over spousal support if a party's ability to provide financial support is limited.

An application for support may be made under the *FLA* or *DA*, but it is essential to look into the standards, limitations and other important differences between the Acts. The parties may also agree on the issue of support and incorporate their agreement into a written document (a separation agreement), which may have the legal status and force of a personal contract. An agreement is not completely determinative of the issue, however; the Court will make orders superseding the provisions of an agreement in order to bring the obligations of parties in line with the requirements of statute.

In making an order for spousal support, the Court will not look to the conduct (or misconduct) of the parties, but will consider the "condition, means and other circumstances of each" in making an order. Nevertheless, in *Leskum v Leskum*, [2006] SCJ No25 (SCC), the Court held that the **effect** of spousal misconduct on the other spouse's ability to achieve self-sufficiency should be taken into consideration. In some cases, the Court will refer the matter to the registrar who holds an independent inquiry into the spouses' assets, income liabilities, etc., and then recommends a "reasonable" support payment. This recommendation does not become an order until a judge confirms it. Arrangements for spousal support can be made as part of a separation agreement, granted at the time of a divorce or, if no order for support is made or it is denied at the time of divorce, within a reasonable time

thereafter. Under the *FLA*, the time limit is 2 years for both married and unmarried couples who have lived together in a marriage-like relationship for at least two years (s 198; *Mesery v Field*, 2013 BCSC 2378). The exception to this rule is if the couple have a child(ren) together (s 3(1); *CAM v MDQ*, 2014 BCPC 110).

Orders for child support are almost always fixed according to the schedule of support payments set out in the *Child Support Guidelines*, which are based on the payer's gross income and the number of children for whom support is being paid. There is an exception to the strict application of the Guidelines in cases where the parties share parenting time (i.e. where one parent has at least 40% of the time with the child(ren)). In those cases, there is not simply a payor spouse and a recipient, rather the support is typically calculated based on a set-off approach whereby each parent's support obligation is calculated and one is set-off against the other.

The Court will not grant a divorce if there are not reasonable arrangements made for child support (*DA*, s11). The level of child support is based on the income of the non-custodial parent and is set out in the Federal Child Support Guidelines.

Under the *FLA*, the most important changes are in wording. The following are some examples of new vocabulary from the *FRA* > *FLA*:

- Custody > Guardianship/Parenting Time
- Access > Parenting Time/Contact
- Maintenance > Support

## **B. Courts**

Both the Supreme Court and the Provincial Court have the powers to grant or vary support orders made under the *FLA*, but only the Supreme Court can grant or vary support orders made under the *DA*. Only the Supreme Court can grant interim relief under the *DA*, but the Provincial Court can grant interim relief under the *FLA*.

### **1. Provincial Court**

The Provincial (Family) Court is often the most accessible court to self-represented litigants. It can deal with applications for support made under the *FLA*, as well with variation of previous Provincial Court child or spousal support and arrears of child or spousal support orders. Applications can be made at certain Provincial (Family) Courts for a Supreme Court Hearing.

### **2. Supreme Court**

The Supreme Court can order interim relief under the *DA* or *FLA* or make an order for support upon the granting of a divorce order. If a Supreme Court order for support is made under the *DA*, that order ousts any provincial statutory jurisdiction in that matter. While obtaining interim relief from the Supreme Court is more expensive than obtaining a Provincial (Family) Court order, it can be faster if the application is urgent or if the party wishes to proceed *ex parte* (without notice to the other side).

## **C. Enforcement**

### **1. Family Maintenance Enforcement Act (RSBC 1996, c 127) [FMEA]**

This Act, passed in 1988, gives the provincial government extensive powers to collect support arrears including:

- a Notice of Attachment (s 17);
- 12-month garnishing orders (s 18);
- Attachment Orders (s 24); and
- Attachment of money owing by the Crown (s 25) including Income Tax refunds and Employment Insurance benefits directly from the Federal Crown.

The Federal Maintenance Enforcement Program can only enforce support orders if the payor is in its jurisdiction or sister jurisdictions that will assist in enforcing the order. For a complete list of sister jurisdictions see <https://www.fmep.gov.bc.ca/paying-or-receiving-maintenance/out-of-province-orders/other-jurisdictions/>. Any person who receives a support order or separation agreement that has been filed in court may voluntarily register with the program.

## ***2. Reciprocal Enforcement***

If properly filed in BC, a support order from another jurisdiction is enforceable under the *FMEA*. All other Canadian jurisdictions have similar legislation and will enforce BC orders on registration in their courts. Many foreign jurisdictions will also enforce BC orders; see the table of reciprocating states in the *Court Order Enforcement Act*, RSBC 1996, c 78.

## ***3. Variation of Orders***

Spousal support orders may be varied where there have been changes in the needs, means, capacities and economic circumstances of each party (*DA*, s 17(4.1), *FLA* s 167). The Court may also reduce the amount of support to a spouse where it finds that the spouse or former spouse “is not making reasonable efforts” to become self-sufficient. Note that for a variation application to be successful the applicant must demonstrate that there has been a “material change in circumstances” which means circumstances that, if known at the time of the agreement or Order, would have resulted in a different outcome.

There may also be a variation in child support levels provided there is a change in circumstances per the Child Support Guidelines, which include changes in the payor parent’s income (*DA*, s 17(4), *FLA* s 152). If the payor’s income has changed, a variation of the child support order is virtually automatic when one makes an application in court. Provincial Court orders made in other Canadian jurisdictions and in certain reciprocating foreign states may be varied under Division 2 of the *Interjurisdictional Support Orders Act*, SBC 2002, c 29. The Act creates a system where an application is made through the filing of prescribed documents and filed with the Reciprocals Office in British Columbia, which is responsible for transmitting the documents to the originating jurisdiction for adjudication.

Support orders made under the *DA* may only be varied through the provisions of sections 17, 18, and 19. In this process, someone seeking to change a support order made in another Canadian jurisdiction must apply to the courts of BC for a provisional order. The provisional order is sent to the originating jurisdiction for a second hearing to confirm the order. Unless the order is confirmed, the provisional order has no effect.

As of March 1, 2021, sections 17, 18, and 19 of the *DA* will be repealed or revised to include new language related to parenting, as well as new provisions for addressing variation, rescission, and suspension of orders (s 17), interjurisdictional proceedings (s 18), and proceedings between a province and another designated jurisdiction (s 19).

## ***4. Agreements***

The Court can enforce written agreements that provide for the payment of child or spousal support. A written agreement concerning support may be filed in the Provincial Court and in the Supreme Court. Once filed, the agreement has the effect of a court order for enforcement purposes.

## **D. Spousal Support**

The first thing that a spouse must determine regarding spousal support is whether or not they are entitled to receive it. After that, the amount and duration of spousal support can be determined. The fundamental question in determining spousal support is whether the objectives of spousal support under the Spousal Support Advisory Guidelines [SSAG] are met. The division of assets in the divorce will impact whether or not the spouse is entitled to spousal support and will be taken into account when the court decides how much spousal support to order. Although it should be noted that if a party is entitled to compensatory support arising from the relationship, the receipt of significant assets in the division of assets may not result in a loss of entitlement to support (See *Chutter v. Chutter*, 2009 BCCA 177).

### **1. Legislation**

#### **a) Divorce Act [DA]**

Section 15.2 of the *DA* creates an obligation to support a spouse. However, s 15.3(1) directs the Court to give priority to child support in any application for child and spousal support under the *DA*. The entire gross income (Guideline income) is used to calculate child support and then any Net Disposable Income that remains (as calculated based on the incomes of both parties and taking into account taxes and other charges) is apportioned between the parties based on the length of marriage. It may be that the result of the payment of child support reduces the Net Disposable Income to very little and, in those cases, child support takes priority over the sharing of the NDI and there would be little to no spousal support payable. There is no limitation date under the *DA*.

#### **b) Family Law Act [FLA]**

The *FLA* aligns support considerations with the *DA*, permits periodic reviews to allow for changing circumstances, and provides guidelines for when a deceased spouse's estate is obligated to continue payments. Considerations for posthumous support payments include the size of the estate and the need of the payee (s 171). Additionally, child support is to be prioritized over spousal support where a paying spouse has limited resources. (s 173). The *Spousal Support Advisory Guidelines* are not referred to in the Act and remain advisory, although Courts in British Columbia give them much deference.

#### **c) Spousal Support Advisory Guidelines**

The final version of the Spousal Support Advisory Guidelines (SSAG) was published in July 2008. The SSAG do not have the force of law and are not expected to become law.

The SSAG set out two basic mathematical formulae for determining the quantum and duration of spousal support when a person's entitlement to receive support is established: the "with children" formula when the parties have dependent children, and the "without children" formula when child support is not being paid. The "without children" formula is relatively simple. However, the "with children" formula cannot be completed without the assistance of a computer program (refer to <http://www.justice.gc.ca/eng/fl-df/spousal-epoux/ssag-ldfpae.html>).

While the SSAG have no regulatory effect and are merely "informal", and "advisory", they are nevertheless being used by the courts and the bar and the ranges provided by the SSAG are given strong consideration by the Court after the entitlement analysis is complete (see *Yemchuk v. Yemchuk*, 2005 BCCA 406 and *Redpath v. Redpath*, 2006 BCCA 338).

### **2. Principles of Spousal Support**

#### **a) General**

There are three bases for entitlement to spousal support: (1) Compensatory (to compensate one spouse who was economically disadvantaged as a result of the role that spouse took on during the relationship) (*Moge v Moge*, [1992] 3 S.C.R. 813); (2) Non-compensatory (need based) (*Bracklow v Bracklow*, [1999] 1 S.C.R. 420); and (3) Contractual (i.e. if there was a marriage or cohabitation agreement setting out terms for support) (*Miglin v Miglin*, 2003 SCC 24). Once a party has met the requirement of demonstrating entitlement, you move to the calculation of quantum. When determining quantum of support one factor

to be considered is whether the needs of the recipient spouse have been met by the division of assets however if support is compensation based then even if the recipient receives significant assets that is not a basis to reduce support (See *Chutter v Chutter*, [2009] CarswellBC 1028 (BCCA)). Typically, the way this is addressed is to determine what income a party can reasonably earn from the assets received on division and to take that into account in calculating the quantum of support.

***b) Factors Considered:***

Section 15.2(6) of the *DA* and section 161 of the *FLA* directs courts to consider the following objectives in determining entitlement to spousal support:

- To recognize any economic advantages or disadvantages to the spouses arising from the relationship between the spouses or the breakdown of that relationship;
- to apportion between the spouses any financial consequences arising from the care of their child, beyond the duty to provide support for the child;
- to relieve any economic hardship of the spouses arising from the care of the child, beyond the duty to provide support for the child; and
- as far as practicable, to promote the economic self-sufficiency of each spouse within a reasonable period of time.

Section 15.2(4) of the *Divorce Act* and section 162 of the *FLA* directs courts to consider the same factors in determining the amount and duration of spousal support, namely, the conditions, means, needs and other circumstances of each spouse, including:

- the length of time the spouses cohabited;
- the functions performed by each spouse during cohabitation; and
- any order, agreement, or arrangement relating to support of either spouse.

### ***3. Issues Related to Spousal Support***

***a) Employment and Income Assistance and Spousal Support***

People can opt into this program so that the FMEP can continue to assist in collecting the support, but people can keep their support rather than having it deducted from other government assistance they are receiving, if any.

***b) Taxes and Spousal Support***

Spousal support is treated by the recipient as taxable income. The spouse who pays support is entitled to deduct the amount from income tax. The spouse who receives support is required to declare it as income, in contrast to child support which has no income tax consequences. Lump payments of support are not taxable. There are free online child support and spousal support calculators on the Internet (e.g. child support: <http://www.justice.gc.ca/eng/fl-df/child-enfant/cst-orpe.html> spousal support: <http://www.mysupportcalculator.ca/Calculator.aspx>, <http://www.justice.gc.ca/eng/fl-df/spousal-epoux/ssag-ldfpae.html>). It is essential that support payments be identified as such in court orders and separation agreements if the payor is to be able to claim a deduction. As a rule, oral or informal agreements are not sufficient to establish the status of payments as spousal support. Parties are permitted to enter into retroactive agreements which set out the amount paid and received in prior years for the purposes of claiming income tax relief. However, any such agreement must be entered into before the end of the calendar year immediately following the year in question (i.e. if payments were made in 2012, a retroactive agreement would need to be entered into before December 31, 2013).

Other tax issues can arise if payments are made through a corporate account or if the payor has a lower tax burden than usual (i.e. aboriginal spouses or U.S. residents).

## ***4. Limitation Period***

See Section XV for the limitation periods for bringing claims for spousal support for both married spouses and common-law spouses.

### ***E. Child Support***

#### ***1. Definition of “Child”***

The definition of “child” varies slightly between the *Divorce Act* (s 2) and the *Family Law Act*.

Under the *Divorce Act*, the definition of “child” is someone who is under the age of majority (19 years in B.C.) **and** who has not withdrawn from the parent’s charge, or who is at or over the age of majority but unable, by reason of illness, disability or other cause, to withdraw from parental charge or to obtain necessities of life.

Therefore, under the *Divorce Act*, there may not be an obligation to pay child support to a child under 19, if the child has already withdrawn from the parent's charge.

Under the *Family Law Act*, the definition of “child” is a person who is under 19 years of age or a person who is 19 years of age or older and unable, because of illness, disability or another reason, to obtain the necessities of life or withdraw from the charge of their parents or guardians.

#### ***2. General***

Child support is intended to be used to pay most of a child’s day-to-day expenses. The amount of child support payable is determined under the *Federal Child Support Guidelines*, which set support levels based on the payor’s income and the number of children to be supported and the parenting arrangements in place. Several web sites, including J.P. Boyd’s helpful site (see p3-2), offer online child support calculators (see **Section I Part B: Resources on the Internet**, above). If the paying parent lives in B.C., child support is determined by the B.C. Child Support Tables; the appropriate table is for the province where the paying parent lives, not where the child lives.

The Court may also provide for “special or extraordinary” expenses in a Child Support Order (see s 7 of the *Federal Child Support Guidelines*), in addition to the basic child support order, requiring payment for other expenses such as child care, health-related expenses (e.g. orthodontic treatment, hearing aids, prescription drugs, speech therapy, contact lenses and professional counselling), expenses for child care in order to maintain employment (see *Bially v Bially* (1997), 28 RFL (4th) 418 (Sask. QB)), extraordinary educational expenses for primary and secondary education, expenses for post-secondary education, and expenses for extracurricular activities.

Expenses for extracurricular activities must be reasonable having regard to the parents’ means, but need not be restricted to a special talent of the child. “Extraordinary” is also determined by what would be extraordinary in a household with a similar income; it depends on the lifestyle of the family.

#### ***3. Legislation***

##### ***a) Divorce Act [DA]***

The *Divorce Act* provides for support orders as a corollary to divorce under s 15.1, with the discretion to extend support for a child who is over the age of majority and is unable, by reason of illness, disability or other cause, to withdraw from their charge. If the majority-age child is otherwise unable to obtain the necessities of life – for example, if the child is a university student – support orders may also be extended (s 2(1)).

An order for child support made under the *DA* has effect throughout Canada (s 14). Under s 17(1) of the *DA*, any court of competent jurisdiction, as defined by s 5, can vary, rescind, or suspend an order.

Children born within the marriage and adopted children are treated equally under the *DA*. However, some controversy remains as to whether a stepchild, for whom the respondent stood *in loco parentis* (in place of the parent), qualifies for support under the *DA*. Child support will be assessed in light of the biological parents' support obligation.

### ***b) Family Law Act [FLA]***

Under section 147 of the *FLA*, each parent and guardian of a child has a duty to provide support for the child unless the child is a spouse or is under 19 years of age and has voluntarily withdrawn from their parents' or guardians' charge, except if the child withdrew because of family violence or because the child's circumstances were considered intolerable. For example, a child who has been incarcerated for more than one year is considered to have voluntarily withdrawn (*MA v FA*, 2013 BCSC 1077). If the child was removed from the family by the state (*DZM v SM*, 2014 BCPC 198) or refuses to visit, this is not considered voluntary withdrawal (*Henderson v Bal*, 2014 BCSC 1347). However, if this child returns to their parents' or guardians' charge, their duty to provide support to the child resumes. Additionally, section 147 of the *FLA* also states that a child's stepparent does not have a duty to provide support for the child unless the stepparent contributed to the support of the child for at least one year and a proceeding for an order under this part is started within one year after the date the stepparent last contributed to the support of the child. Qualifying step-parents have a duty to provide child support (*CLP v ND*, 2014 BCPC 154). A step-parent may also be ordered to provide support if the parents are not able to provide the child with consistent and reasonable standards of living (*CB v MB*, 2014 BCPC 75).

If parentage is at issue, section 151 of the *FLA* states that the Court may make an order respecting the child's parentage in accordance to s 31 of the *FLA* or make an order under s 33(2) of the *FLA*.

### ***c) Child Support Guidelines***

The *Federal Child Support Guidelines* are federal regulations that determine the amount of child support owing and vary from province to province. The guidelines establish how much child support must be paid based on the payor's income and the number of children for whom support is to be paid. For more information refer to the resources listed at the end of the chapter.

### ***d) Other Legislation***

Section 215 of the *Criminal Code* places a legal duty on parents to provide their children with the necessities of life until they reach the age of 16, unless the child is able to provide the necessities of life independently.

## ***4. Limitation Period***

See Section XV for the limitation periods regarding child support claims.

## ***5. Interjurisdictional Support Orders***

Parents living in different provinces or countries can apply for or enforce support orders without needing to travel to the other jurisdiction. Under the *Interjurisdictional Support Orders Act*, SBC 2002, c 29, many jurisdictions have agreed to recognize family support (maintenance) orders and agreements made elsewhere. British Columbia has reciprocal agreements with all Canadian provinces and territories and with several foreign countries.

For a list of all reciprocating jurisdictions, see the Schedule in the *Interjurisdictional Support Orders Regulations*, BC Reg 15/2003 at [www.bclaws.ca/EPLibraries/bclaws\\_new/document/ID/freeside/10\\_15\\_2003](http://www.bclaws.ca/EPLibraries/bclaws_new/document/ID/freeside/10_15_2003).

Appeals of decisions made under this Act must be made within 90 days of the ruling (s 36(5)) but, despite this, the Court to which an appeal is made may extend the appeal period before or after the appeal period has expired (s 36(6)). The website [www.isoforms.bc.ca](http://www.isoforms.bc.ca) provides a questionnaire under the heading "forms select" to determine which application forms are required for a client's specific situation. Forms can be



accessed online or be mailed to you Guides. to filling out the forms can be found at <https://www.isoforms.bc.ca/forms-guides/>. Completed forms can be submitted to:

**Reciprocals Office**  
Vancouver Main Office Boxes  
P.O. Box 2074  
Vancouver, B.C. V6B 3S3

In BC, Family Justice Counsellors have the ability to track the status of Interjurisdictional Support Order (ISO) applications. If an applicant has questions on the status of their ISO application, they can talk to a Family Justice Counsellor at their local Family Justice Centre. To find the nearest Centre, call Enquiry B.C. at (604) 660-2421 between 8:00 a.m. and 5:00 p.m., Monday to Friday, and ask the operator to transfer you to a Family Justice Centre.

## **XI. CUSTODY, GUARDIANSHIP, AND ACCESS**

### **A. General**

Disputes over custody of minor children are often the most difficult issues to resolve during the breakdown of a marriage or other relationship. Custody decisions can always be changed; however, courts rarely make such changes. Thus, the decision about who gets interim custody is particularly important. Children usually stay with the parent who has provided primary care in the past and who can spend the most time with them. Sometimes, courts will order joint custody on an interim basis so that neither parent's position is prejudiced.

The best interest of the child is the **only** consideration in determining custody and access and parenting arrangements.

In addition to custody, courts can also make decisions regarding guardianship of minor children. Guardianship gives a parent or other person "a full and active" role in determining the course of a child's life and upbringing (see e.g. *Charlton v Charlton*, [1980] BCJ No 22). There is considerable overlap between the two, but it is useful to note that while having custody usually includes having guardianship, the reverse is often not true. This distinction is impacted somewhat by the *FLA* as the term "Guardianship" subsumes all the rights and responsibilities of a parent and there is no longer reference to "Custody".

The case law on custody and guardianship has developed to the point where there is a presumption in favour of joint custody (defined on pg. 51) or both parents being guardians (although there is no legislative presumption). A parent seeking sole custody will generally have to show that there is a serious defect in the other person's parenting skills, that the other person is geographically distant, or that the parents are utterly unable to communicate without fighting before the Court will consider granting such an application, and in the last case, the Court may explore other options such as Parenting Coordination or parcelling out decision making and responsibilities to address the communication issue instead of granting sole custody to one parent.

### **B. Legislation**

#### **1. Divorce Act**

The *DA* only speaks of access and custody. Under s 16, the Supreme Court may make an order for custody. This order will supersede any existing *FLA* orders, which cover custody, access, and guardianship, and can be registered for enforcement with any other Superior Provincial Court in Canada. The Supreme Court can also grant interim custody before a divorce action is heard.

The *DA* applies only to married couples. Under the Act, the person making the application for custody must have been "habitually resident" in the province for at least one year prior.

As of March 1, 2021, s 16 of the *DA* will be repealed and replaced. Under the new provisions of s 16, the court will only consider the best interests of the child in the course of making a parenting order or a

contact order, and when allocating parenting time. The new subsections 16(2-6) outline the factors under consideration when “best interest of the child” is assessed. The updated section 16(4) outlines the role of family violence in assessing the best interests of the child (see Section VIII: Family Violence).

Additionally, the amendments to the *DA* will result in changes to the terms of guardianship:

- Replacing of the terms “custody” and “custody order” with “parenting time” and “parenting order”.
- Using the term “contact order” to characterize time spent with someone other than a spouse, including grandparents.
- Adding the term “decision-making responsibility” to define a non-exhaustive list of areas of significant weight and how decisions about those areas must be made (with the “best interests of the child” in mind).

The aim of these changes is to emphasize the “best interests of the child” by focusing on relationships with children.

## ***2. Family Law Act***

Among a plethora of changes to the general family law in BC, the Act makes the following changes to the law surrounding guardianship:

- Replace the terms “custody” and “access” with “guardianship”, “parenting time”, and “contact”.
- Define “guardianship” through a list of “parental responsibilities” that can be allocated to allow for more customized parenting arrangements.
- Provide that parents retain responsibility for their children upon separation if they have lived together with the child after the child’s birth. (Note: this does not mean that the law presumes an automatic 50-50 split of parental responsibilities or parenting time.) If they have not, the parent with whom the child lives is the guardian.

Under the *FLA*, the terms custody and access are no longer used – only guardianship will be considered. Additionally, the “best interests of the child” is no longer the paramount consideration under the *FLA*; it is the **only** consideration.

## ***C. Courts***

### ***1. Supreme Court***

The Supreme Court has jurisdiction to deal with all matters relating to custody, guardianship and access to children, pursuant to the *DA*, the *FLA*, and the *CFCSA*. The Court almost never deals with the *CFCSA* unless there is the matter of adoption to be considered. The Supreme Court also has jurisdiction over orders restraining contact or entry to the matrimonial home.

The Supreme Court has *parens patriae* jurisdiction over all children in the province. In operation, this can allow the Court to transcend the statutory letter of the law in drafting orders that best represent the best interests of the child.

A written agreement about custody or guardianship may be given the force of a court order under section 44 of the *FLA*.

An order made under the *DA* can be registered for enforcement in any other province’s Supreme Court registry.

## ***2. Provincial Court***

The Provincial Court has jurisdiction to deal with all matters relating to custody, guardianship and access to children, and the *CFCSA*. This includes restraining orders but does not include orders restraining entry to the matrimonial home. A written agreement about custody or guardianship may be given the force of a court order, or s 44 of the *FLA*, if it is filed in court.

### ***D. Custody***

Proceedings regarding parenting arrangements or contact that have been started, but not determined, before the *Family Law Act* is in force, do not need special transition sections. Section 4 of the *Interpretation Act* provides a default rule that the Act will be used upon it becoming effective, so cases started under the *Family Relations Act* will be determined under the *Family Law Act*. In the absence of a court order or a written agreement, custody of a child remains with the person with whom the child usually resides. One must bear in mind that the Act does not touch on day-to-day life until it is invoked, usually by filing a lawsuit or by making an application.

### ***1. Factors in Awarding Custody***

The factors that the Court must consider in determining the “best interests of the child” are set out in, s 37 of the *FLA*:

- (a) the child's health and emotional well-being;
- (b) the child's views, unless it would be inappropriate to consider them;
- (c) the nature and strength of the relationships between the child and significant persons in the child's life;
- (d) the history of the child's care;
- (e) the child's need for stability, given the child's age and stage of development;
- (f) the ability of each person who is a guardian or seeks guardianship of the child, or who has or seeks parental responsibilities, parenting time or contact with the child, to exercise their responsibilities;
- (g) the impact of any family violence on the child's safety, security or well-being, whether the family violence is directed toward the child or another family member;
- (h) whether the actions of a person responsible for family violence indicate that the person may be impaired in their ability to care for the child and meet the child's needs;
- (i) the appropriateness of an arrangement that would require the child's guardians to cooperate on issues affecting the child, including whether requiring cooperation would increase any risks to the safety, security or well-being of the child or other family members;
- (j) any civil or criminal proceeding relevant to the child's safety, security or well-being.

and at s 16(8-10) of the *DA*:

- (8) In making an order under this section, the court shall take into consideration only the best interests of the child of the marriage as determined by reference to the condition, means, needs and other circumstances of the child.
- (9) In making an order under this section, the court shall not take into consideration the past conduct of any person unless the conduct is relevant to the ability of that person to act as a parent of a child.
- (10) In making an order under this section, the court shall give effect to the principle that a child of the marriage should have as much contact with each spouse as is consistent with the best interests of the child and, for that purpose, shall take into consideration the willingness of the person for whom custody is sought to facilitate such contact.

As of March 1, 2021, s 16(8-10) of the *DA* will be repealed. The relevant replacements are s 16(1, 5-6):

- (1) The term “parenting time” will replace “custody” in the *DA*.)
- (5) In determining what is in the best interests of the child, the court shall not take into consideration the past conduct of any person unless the conduct is relevant to the exercise of their parenting time, decision-making responsibility or contact with the child under a contact order.
- (6) In allocating parenting time, the court shall give effect to the principle that a child should have as much time with each spouse as is consistent with the best interests of the child.

These factors should not be viewed like a checklist. Rather, the discretionary, contextual, and complex nature of custody cases makes it more appropriate for the factors to be viewed holistically. Similarly, these factors do not necessarily form an exhaustive list of the factors to be considered. The best interest argument is often expansive, considering a range of factors illuminated at both the statutory and common-law level.

The Court will generally consider the child’s health and emotional well-being, their education and training and the love, affection and similar ties that exist between the child and other persons such as relatives and family friends. If appropriate, the views of the child will be considered. For a custody order relating to a teenager to be practical, it must reasonably conform to the wishes of the child (*O’Connell v McIndoe* (1998), 42 R.F.L. (4th) 77 (BCCA), *Alexander v Alexander* (1988), 15 R.F.L. (3d) 363 (BCCA)).

Other factors have emerged through the common law, including a preference that siblings remain together and a willingness to look into the character, personality and moral fitness of each parent. However, there is no presumption against the separation of siblings (*P (AH) v P (AC)*, 1999 BCCA 203). The welfare of the child is not determined solely on the basis of material advantages or physical comfort, but also considers psychological, spiritual, and emotional factors (*King v Lon*, (1985), 44 R.F.L. (2d) 113 (SCC)). The Court will take into account the personality, character, stability, and conduct of a parent, if appropriate (*Bell v Kirk* (1986), 3 R.F.L. (3d) 377 (BCCA)).

Agreements between parties regarding custody do not oust the Court’s jurisdiction. An agreement is important, but only one of several factors to be taken into consideration when determining the best interests of the child. The degree of bonding between child and parent is also taken into consideration. The biological link does not outweigh other considerations, but when all other factors are equal, the custody of the child is best served with the biological parents (*L (A) v K (D)*, 2000 BCCA 455; *H (CR) v H. (BA)*, 2005 BCCA 277).

Race and aboriginal heritage are relevant considerations, but neither is determinative of custody alone. The importance of race differs in adoption cases, where it may be given more weight because the Court is making a decision about the child’s exposure to their race or culture (*Van de Perre v Edwards*, 2001 SCC 60). Aboriginal heritage is to be weighed along with other factors in a determination of a child’s best interests (*H (D) v M (H)*, [1997] BCJ No 2144 (QL) (SC)).

Clients may wish to vary a custody order. The threshold for a variation of a custody or access order is a material change in the circumstances affecting the child. There is no legal presumption in favour of the custodial parent, although that parent’s views are entitled to respect. The focus is on the best interests of the child, not the interests and rights of the parents (*Gordon v Goertz*, [1996] 2 SCR 27).

Section 211 of the *FLA* allows the Court to order an assessment by a psychologist of each party’s parenting abilities and relationship with the child. These reports are particularly important where the dispute over custody is bitter and unlikely to settle. An assessment provides the Court with an independent and neutral expert opinion. Where expert evidence would assist the Court, the Court can order an *FLA* Section 211 report (*Gupta v Gupta*, 2001 BCSC 649).

## ***2. Types of Custody Orders***

**NOTE:** “Custody” is a term that only appears in the *DA* and so only applies to claims that are proceeding in Supreme Court under the *DA*. As of March 1, 2021, “custody” will be replaced with “parenting order” under the *DA*.

### ***a) Interim Orders***

An interim order is a temporary order made once the proceedings have commenced but before the final order is pronounced. Courts will usually make interim custody orders while an action in divorce is underway, with an eye to the child’s immediate best interests. Courts tend to favour stability, so an interim order is likely to favour the party with custody at the time of the marriage breakdown. This presumption toward stability can give an interim order substantial weight in determining a final custody order.

### ***b) Sole Custody***

Sole custody, in which one parent provides the primary residence and is mostly responsible for day-to-day care, can be granted in cases where the parents request such an arrangement, where they live far apart, or where relations between the parties are so poor as to preclude cooperation.

**NOTE:** The concept of “full custody” does not exist. A parent using this term is most likely referring to sole custody.

### ***c) Joint Custody***

In joint custody, both parents have custody of the child. While the child may reside primarily with one parent, the parents cooperate in raising the child, acting as both joint custodians and guardians of the child. In British Columbia, there is a presumption toward joint custody.

### ***d) Shared Custody***

“Shared custody” is a term used by the Federal Child Support Guidelines, but not by either the *DA* or the *FLA*. Shared custody is a form of joint custody in which the child spends an almost equal time with each parent. Typically, the child would be switching homes on a frequent basis, such as every few days or once a week. This usually requires that the parents live near one another and have good communication skill. It also requires that the child is able to adapt to living in two homes. Any agreement for shared custody will affect child support.

### ***e) Split Custody***

“Split custody” is a term used by the Federal Child Support Guidelines, and not by either the *DA* or the *FLA*. On rare occasions, courts will order siblings to live with separate parents. This is usually a drastic solution, ordered only after an *FLA* section 211 report (a court-ordered report respecting the needs of a child, the views of a child, and the ability and willingness of one of the parents to satisfy the needs of a child) is submitted to the Court. A split custody order will affect child support.

## ***3. Other Custody Issues***

### ***a) Consent Orders***

Where there is agreement on the terms of support or custody provisions, but no written agreement, a consent order may be made by the Court under s 219 of the *FLA* if the written consent of the party against whom the order is to be enforced has been obtained. The order can extend only to the terms consented to.

## ***b) Enforcement of Custody Orders***

Where a custody order is in force, the Court may make an order prohibiting interference with a child. The Court may further order sureties and/or documents from the person against whom the order is made and require that person to report to the Court for a period of time (*FLA*, s 183).

Under the *FLA*, police officer enforcement clauses can only be granted when there has been a breach of an order (s 231).

A child abducted and taken elsewhere within the province will be returned to their rightful custodian. Abduction is an offence under the *FLA*, s 188 that carries a possibility of criminal proceedings (*Criminal Code*, RSC 1985, c C-46, ss 280-281). The *Criminal Code* makes it an offence for a non-custodial parent to abduct a child. Where a custody order is in effect, abduction amounts to contempt of Court.

## ***c) Parental Mobility (Under the FLA, this is referred to as Relocation which has separate considerations from that of Mobility under the DA)***

Relocation is defined and explained under Division 6 of the *FLA*. It considers relocation of a child that can reasonably be expected to have a significant impact on the child's relationship with his/her guardian(s) or other adults with which the child has a significant relationship (s 65). The guardian intending to relocate with the child must provide 60-day written notice to all other guardians and persons having contact with the child (s 66). The notice must include the date of the relocation, and the name of the proposed location. Exemptions to these requirements can be granted by the Court if they are satisfied that the notice cannot be given without incurring a risk of family violence by another guardian or a person having contact with the child or there is no ongoing relationship between the child and the other guardian or the person having contact with the child (s 66(2)).

The child's other guardian(s) can object to the relocation within 30 days of receiving the notice. If an objection is made, the guardian requesting the relocation must satisfy the court that (s 69(4)(a)):

- (i) the proposed relocation is made in good faith, and
- (ii) the relocating guardian has proposed reasonable and workable arrangements to preserve the relationship between the child and the child's other guardians, persons who are entitled to contact with the child, and other persons who have a significant role in the child's life

When considering the good faith requirement, the Court must consider (s 69(6)):

- (a) the reasons for the proposed relocation;
- (b) whether the proposed relocation is likely to enhance the general quality of life of the child and, if applicable, of the relocating guardian, including increasing emotional well-being or financial or educational opportunities;
- (c) whether notice was given under section 66 [notice of relocation];
- (d) any restrictions on relocation contained in a written agreement or an order.

Issues of parental mobility may arise in conjunction with custody issues. That is, one parent may wish to relocate away from another parent with whom they share custody. In *Gordon v Goertz*, [1996] 5 WWR 457 (SCC), the Supreme Court of Canada set out the basic principles for the *DA*. Once the parent applying for the change meets a threshold requirement of demonstrating a material change in the circumstances affecting the child, the Court is required to begin a fresh inquiry into what is in the best interests of the child. Factors to be considered include: the

desirability of maximizing contact between the child and both parents, the disruption to the child, and the child's views.

*One v One*. 2000 BCSC 1584, also a *DA* case, identifies the following list of factors to be considered in determining whether a proposed move is in a child's best interests:

1. the parenting capabilities of and the child's relationship with parents and their new partners;
2. employment, security and prospects of the parents and, where appropriate, their partners;
3. access to and support of extended family;
4. the difficulty of exercising the proposed access and the quality of the proposed access if the move is allowed;
5. the effect of the move on the child's academic situation;
6. the psychological and emotional well-being of the child;
7. the disruption of the child's existing social and community support and routine;
8. the desirability of the proposed new family unit for the child;
9. the relative parenting capabilities of either parent and the respective ability to discharge parenting responsibilities;
10. the child's relationship with both parents;
11. the separation of siblings;
12. the retraining or educational opportunities for the moving parent.

## ***E. Access***

"Access" is the term used under the *DA*. As of March 1, 2021, the term "access" will be removed from the *DA*, and the term "contact order" will be used to describe arrangements for non-guardians. Under the *FLA*, the terms are "parenting time" for guardians, or "contact" for non-guardians.

Proceedings regarding parenting arrangements or contact that have been started, but not determined, before the *Family Law Act* came into force (March 18, 2013), do not need special transition sections. Section 4 of the *Interpretation Act* provides a default rule that the Act will be used upon it becoming effective, so cases started under the *Family Relations Act* will be determined under the *Family Law Act*.

Unless a parent poses a risk to the safety or well-being of the child, they will usually be allowed access or visiting rights. Courts can make an order for access and may view a custodial parent who denies access as acting against the best interests of the child.

**NOTE:** It is important to note that access is a distinct and separate issue from child support. Denial of access is not grounds to withhold support; nor is a failure to pay support grounds for withholding access.

### ***1. Factors Considered in Making an Access Order***

The overriding principle remains the best interests of the child. The courts will not be bound by the wishes of the child, although the child's views can be a powerful factor. When the *FLA* came into force, it introduced an overarching consideration "to ensure the greatest possible protection of the child's physical, psychological, and emotional safety." It can be argued that this consideration is functionally in place already, however. The courts will look into several factors in making access orders. These include:

- The age of the child: older children will be allowed longer visits, but courts will also consider the wishes of children over 12 who may not wish to see the non-custodial parent;
- Distance between homes: if the distances are great, courts may order longer stays;

- Conduct of the non-custodial parent: access can be denied for reasons such as alcoholism, abuse, past attempts to abduct the child, or attempts to alienate the child from the custodial parent;
- Health of the non-custodial parent: if health problems limit the non-custodial parent's ability to care for the child, access may be limited;

## ***2. Types of Access Orders***

### ***a) Interim Orders***

After making an interim custody order, a court will often grant access on an interim basis. Usually, such an order will favour the status quo, so as to minimize disruption for the child.

### ***b) Specified and Unspecified Access***

Specified orders set out the times and places at which the non-custodial parent must have access to the child. Specified orders are generally preferred. Unspecified access is less common and is ordered when the parents are willing to accommodate one another.

### ***c) Conditional Access***

Courts may impose requirements, such as not smoking or using drugs or alcohol in the presence of the child. If the parent fails to meet the condition, access may be denied.

### ***d) Supervised Access***

Courts may order visits to be supervised by a designated third party if there are concerns about abuse, abduction, mental and physical handicaps or attempts to alienate the child from the custodial parent. It is up to the custodial parent to demonstrate that access should be supervised.

**NOTE:** There are no filing fees nor does a person need legal representation in Provincial Court, making it a more accessible option for many clients.

## ***3. Extra-provincial Custody and Access Orders***

Under the *FLA*, the Court may exercise its jurisdiction to make custody and access orders if one of the following conditions is met:

1. The child was "habitually resident" in BC (s 74(2)(a)).
2. If the child is not habitually resident in B.C., the Court must at the commencement of the application order be satisfied that (s 74(2)(b)):
  - i. the child is physically present in British Columbia when the application is filed,
  - ii. substantial evidence concerning the best interests of the child is available in British Columbia,
  - iii. no application for an extraprovincial order is pending before an extraprovincial tribunal in a place where the child is habitually resident,
  - iv. no extraprovincial order has been recognized by a court in British Columbia,
  - v. the child has a real and substantial connection with British Columbia, and
  - vi. on the balance of convenience, it is appropriate for jurisdiction to be exercised in British Columbia;
3. The child is physically present in British Columbia and the court is satisfied that the child would suffer serious harm if the child were to (s 74(2)(c)):
  - i. remain with, or be returned to, the child's guardian, or
  - ii. be removed from British Columbia.



B.C. courts are required to enforce extra-provincial orders (s 75) with certain exceptions (s 76). Such exceptions include situations where the child would suffer serious harm if they were returned to the guardian or leaving British Columbia (s 76(1)(a)).

If one spouse is not in BC, the only BC Court that the BC-residing spouse can proceed in is the BC Supreme Court, because the Provincial Court has no jurisdiction outside of the province.

## **F. Guardianship**

Guardianship may be the most important aspect of any legal arrangements concerning the care and control of the children. Guardianship encompasses the whole bundle of rights and obligations involved in parenting a child, including making decisions about the child's school, moral instruction, religion, health care, dental care, extracurricular activities, etc.

When they are still together, both parents are presumed to be guardians, pursuant to a statutory presumption set out in section 39 of the *FLA*, playing a "full and active role" in the upbringing of the child (see e.g. *Charlton v Charlton*). Upon marital breakdown, this can change either by agreement or by order of the Court.

Under the *FLA*, guardianship is primarily governed by sections 39, 41, and 42.

Parents can also appoint a guardian in a will. If the parents are both dead or have abandoned the child, the Public Guardian and Trustee becomes the child's guardian.

While a child's parents are living together and after the child's parents separate, each parent of the child is presumed to be the child's guardian (s 39). However, an agreement may be made to provide that a parent is not the child's guardian after the parents separate or when the parents are about to separate.

Section 39 of the *FLA* also provides for three other scenarios under which a parent is presumed to be a guardian. A parent who has never resided with a child is not the child's guardian unless:

- 1) there is an agreement made under section 30 of the *FLA*,
- 2) the parent and all of the child's guardians make an agreement providing that the parent is also a guardian, or
- 3) the parent regularly cares for the child.

Additionally, a person does not become a child's guardian by reason only of marriage or a marriage-like relationship.

A person who is not a parent or a parent who is not a guardian may become a guardian of the child by court order, pursuant to section 50 of the *FLA*. The person applying to court for a guardianship order must demonstrate why it would be in the best interests of the child and provide notice to all of the child's guardians and adults with whom the child resides (s. 51). If the child is over 12, the child's written consent is also required. The evidentiary requirements to obtain such an order are set out under the *Supreme Court Family Rules* Rule 15-2.1 and the *Provincial Court (Family) Rules* Rule 18.1. The applicant must provide:

1. An affidavit setting out the following information:
  - a. the nature and length of the applicant's relationship with the child,
  - b. the child's living arrangements,
  - c. a detailed plan for how the applicant going to care for the child,
  - d. information about any other children in the applicant's care,
  - e. information about any incidents of family violence that may affect the child, and
  - f. information about any family or child protection court proceedings the applicant has been involved in;
2. A Ministry of Children and Family Development records check;
3. A Protection Order Registry records check; and
4. A criminal record check.

Effective May 2021, the repealed Provincial Court (Family) Rules will be replaced by the new Provincial Court Family Rules. The Guardianship Affidavit (Form 5) is included in the new Rules and requires identical information to what is stated above (see Rules 26, 51, and 172).

If an application is made for guardianship of a treaty First Nation's child, the child's First Nation's government must be served notice of the application and has standing in the proceeding (ss. 208 and 209).

At the time of birth, the two parents of a child are presumed to be its biological parents unless the child was born as a result of assisted reproduction (section 26, *FLA*). Assisted reproduction has, at present, always included the use of one or more of donated eggs, donated sperm, and the cooperation of a woman who is willing to carry the baby to term. Section 24 of the *FLA* clarifies that a donor of eggs or sperm is not the parent of a child on the basis of their biological contribution alone – donors cannot be made to pay child support unless there is some other connection to the child which justifies holding that the person is a parent under the *FLA*. If a donor wishes to be regarded as a parent, written agreements can be drafted and signed before the child's birth which would substantiate their parental claim under the *FLA*. Unlike donors, surrogates are presumed to be a parent of the child under the *FLA* since they are the birth parent. However, this presumption can be overcome by the intended parents and the surrogate signing a written agreement before the child is conceived which states that the surrogate will not be a parent to that child. Without such an agreement, the surrogate and sperm-providing parent would be the presumed parents.

Section 41 of the *FLA* lists out the parental responsibilities with respect to a child:

- a) making day-to-day decisions affecting the child and having day-to-day care, control and supervision of the child;
- b) making decisions respecting where the child will reside;
- c) making decisions respecting with whom the child will live and associate;
- d) making decisions respecting the child's education and participation in extracurricular activities, including the nature, extent and location;
- e) making decisions respecting the child's cultural, linguistic, religious and spiritual upbringing and heritage, including, if the child is an aboriginal child, the child's aboriginal identity;
- f) subject to section 17 of the *Infants Act*, giving, refusing or withdrawing consent to medical, dental and other health-related treatments for the child;
- g) applying for a passport, licence, permit, benefit, privilege or other thing for the child;
- h) giving, refusing or withdrawing consent for the child, if consent is required;
- i) receiving and responding to any notice that a parent or guardian is entitled or required by law to receive;
- j) requesting and receiving health, education or other information respecting the child from third parties;
  - (i) subject to any applicable provincial legislation,
  - (ii) starting, defending, compromising or settling any proceeding relating to the child, and
- k) identifying, advancing and protecting the child's legal and financial interests;
- l) exercising any other responsibilities reasonably necessary to nurture the child's development.

Section 42 of the *FLA* defines parenting time as time that a child is with a guardian. During this parenting time, a guardian may exercise the parental responsibility of making day-to-day decisions affecting the child and having day-to-day care, control and supervision of the child.

Additionally, Division 6 of Part 4 of the new *FLA* states that if you are a child's guardian and you want to relocate with the child, you must give any other person who can contact the child 60 days' notice which includes both the date of the relocation and the name of the proposed location. The Court may grant an exemption to give notice if it is satisfied that notice cannot be given without incurring a risk of family violence by another guardian or a person having contact with the child or there is no ongoing relationship between the child and the other guardian or the person having contact with the child. Once notice is given, a child's guardians and persons having contact with the child must use their best efforts to resolve any issues relating to the proposed relocation. The proposed relocation may occur unless another guardian of the child files an application to prohibit the relocation within 30 days of receiving notice. The Court will make its decision based on s 37 of the *FLA* considering what would be in the best interests of the child.

### ***1. Terminating Guardianship***

Sole guardianship and joint guardianship are not terms used in the *FLA*. The parents or a court may decide that one parent should be the only guardian of the child. This terminates the presumption of guardianship for the other parent. The parents may terminate one parent's guardianship via written agreement (s. 39). The court can terminate one parent's guardianship pursuant to section 51 of the *FLA*. This is an extreme step, taken only when one parent has been shown to be either uninterested in or incapable of proper parenting.

### ***2. Both Parents are Guardians***

Under the *FLA*, the standard guardianship agreement, wherein both parents are or remain guardians, is structured such that parental responsibilities and parenting time are specified in the agreement, with specific provisions which govern the allocation of parenting responsibilities. If no such provisions are included, then each party may exercise all parental responsibilities in consultation with the other guardians (*FLA* section 40(2)).

The following are standard elements typically included in guardianship agreements:

- a) Both parents equally have all of the parental responsibilities of guardians [with any exceptions listed].
- b) A guardian, after becoming aware of important information relating to the child not known to the other guardian(s), must immediately notify the other guardian(s) about that information.
- c) Subject to other clauses in the agreement, both guardians must consult about any important decisions that must be made and try to reach agreement concerning these important decisions.
- d) During parenting time, a guardian may exercise the parental responsibility of making day-to-day decisions affecting the child provided that the guardian must advise the other parent of any matters of a significant nature affecting the child.
- e) Optionally, the agreement may specify that if one guardian dies, the remaining guardian will assume all parenting responsibilities.

Also, agreements will typically include a dispute resolution clause which governs the situation where the guardians cannot reach agreement over one of their shared responsibilities. The options include:

- a) one parent has the final word; however, the other party can apply to court if they disagree with the deciding parent. In particularly high-conflict cases, giving one parent decision-making authority may be the only solution (*Friedlander v Claman*, 2015 BCSC 2409);
- b) the parties go to mediation, wherein the mediator will have the final word if the parties cannot agree;
- c) the parties go to a parenting coordinator who has decision-making authority;
- d) other collaborative law processes; or
- e) the parties can resolve the matter in court.

## ***G. Parenting Responsibilities and Parenting Time***

### ***1. Family Law Act***

According to section 42 of the *FLA*, parenting time refers to the amount of time that a child spends under the care of a guardian, as determined by an order or agreement. When the child is under their care, guardians assume responsibility for day-to-day care and decision-making for the child (please see section 41 of the *FLA* for a range of parenting responsibilities). Parenting time and responsibilities may not be allocated equally amongst guardians, and guardians may or may not be required to consult with one another depending on the terms of the order or agreement.

Decisions as to parenting time and responsibilities are determined according to the best interests of the child only. Section 40 of the *FLA* notes that the equal division of parenting time and parenting responsibilities is not presumed to be in the best interests of the child, nor should it be presumed that it is inherently better to make decisions separately or jointly. Guardians should not expect that they are entitled to equal sharing of parenting time or parenting responsibility. The best interests of the child are determined by weighing the following non-exhaustive list of considerations set out in section 37(2) of the *FLA*:

- (a) the child's health and emotional well-being;
- (b) the child's views, unless it would be inappropriate to consider them;
- (c) the nature and strength of the relationships between the child and significant persons in the child's life;
- (d) the history of the child's care;
- (e) the child's need for stability, given the child's age and stage of development;
- (f) the ability of each person who is a guardian or seeks guardianship of the child, or who has or seeks parental responsibilities, parenting time or contact with the child, to exercise his or her responsibilities;
- (g) the impact of any family violence on the child's safety, security or well-being, whether the family violence is directed toward the child or another family member;
- (h) whether the actions of a person responsible for family violence indicate that the person may be impaired in his or her ability to care for the child and meet the child's needs;
- (i) the appropriateness of an arrangement that would require the child's guardians to cooperate on issues affecting the child, including whether requiring cooperation would increase any risks to the safety, security or well-being of the child or other family members;
- (j) any civil or criminal proceeding relevant to the child's safety, security or well-being.

A person's conduct is considered only where their conduct stands to impact any of the above considerations regarding the best interests of the child.

### ***2. Divorce Act***

Under the current *DA*, the term "custody" is used to refer to matters concerning the care, upbringing, and other relevant details pertaining to a child (s 2); custody is designated by what is referred to as an order for custody under the current *DA*. The provisions of section 16 of the *DA* give a brief overview of how an order for custody is decided and issued, including who may apply for an order, who may issue an order, and several of the court's considerations when issuing such orders.

As of March 1, 2021, updates to the *DA* mean that the term "custody" will be replaced by "parenting time" and "parenting responsibilities" to emphasize the importance of the needs of the child rather than on the child as a possession of a parent. Similarly, "order for custody" will be replaced by "parenting order." Section 16(1) through 16(10) will be repealed and replaced with a new section entitled "Best Interests of the Child". This section will include more expansive provisions which focus on determining parenting time and responsibilities based on the best interests of the child. The new section 16(3) will provide guidance as to the factors to be considered, including:

- (a) the child’s needs, given the child’s age and stage of development, such as the child’s need for stability;
- (b) the nature and strength of the child’s relationship with each spouse, each of the child’s siblings and grandparents and any other person who plays an important role in the child’s life;
- (c) each spouse’s willingness to support the development and maintenance of the child’s relationship with the other spouse;
- (d) the history of care of the child;
- (e) the child’s views and preferences, giving due weight to the child’s age and maturity, unless they cannot be ascertained;
- (f) the child’s cultural, linguistic, religious and spiritual upbringing and heritage, including Indigenous upbringing and heritage;
- (g) any plans for the child’s care;
- (h) the ability and willingness of each person in respect of whom the order would apply to care for and meet the needs of the child;
- (i) the ability and willingness of each person in respect of whom the order would apply to communicate and cooperate, in particular with one another, on matters affecting the child;
- (j) any family violence and its impact on, among other things,
  - i. the ability and willingness of any person who engaged in the family violence to care for and meet the needs of the child, and
  - ii. the appropriateness of making an order that would require persons in respect of whom the order would apply to cooperate on issues affecting the child; and
- (k) any civil or criminal proceeding, order, condition, or measure that is relevant to the safety, security and well-being of the child.

The updated *DA* will also set out the required contents of a parenting order (16.1(4)). A parenting order will allocate parenting time—and, correspondingly day-to-day decision-making responsibilities—and may include a schedule and permitted means of communication between a child and a person with parenting responsibilities. Parenting orders submitted by the parties must be mutually agreed to when submitted, though a court may modify according to the best interests of the child.

## XII. CHILDREN AND THE LAW

### A. *Relevant Ages*

#### 1. *Age of Majority*

The *Age of Majority Act*, RSBC 1996, c 7, s 1 states that the age of majority in B.C. is **19** years. Section 1 also applies to private documents, such as wills. A person’s age is determined by the provisions set forth in s 25(8) of the *Interpretation Act*, RSBC 1996, c 238.

#### 2. *Other Relevant Ages*

##### a) *Sexual Consent*

As of 1890, the age of consent for sexual activity was set at 14 years. Recently, the age of consent in Canada has been changed from 14 to **16 years** (Tackling Violent Crime Act, Bill C2, An Act to amend the Criminal Code and to make consequential amendments to other Acts, 39th Parliament, 2nd Session, October 2007, effective May 1st, 2008). However, if the sexual activity involves exploitative activity, such as prostitution, pornography or where there is a relationship of trust, authority or dependency, the age of consent is 18 years.

Section 150.1(3) of the *Criminal Code* provides what is often referred to as a “close in age” or “peer group” exception: a 12 or 13-year-old can consent to engage in sexual activity with another person who is less than two years older and with whom there is no relationship of trust, authority or

dependency. A 14 or 15-year-old can consent to engage in sexual activity with a partner who is less than five years older with whom there is no relationship of trust, authority or dependency. An exception is also available for pre-existing marriages and equivalent relationships.

### ***b) Marriage***

Both parties to the marriage must be at least 19 years old. However, the *Marriage Act*, RSBC 1996, c 282, provides that individuals between the ages of 16 and 19 may marry without the consent of anyone if they are a widower or widow (s 28(1)), and that other persons between the ages of 16 and 19 may marry **if they have the consent of:**

- a) both parents or of the parent having sole guardianship, or the surviving parent (s 28(1)(a));
- b) a lawfully appointed guardian of that person (s 28(1)(b));
- c) the Public Guardian or the Supreme Court if both parents are dead and there is no lawfully appointed guardian (s 28(1)(c)); or
- d) a judge of the Supreme Court where the person whose consent is required cannot be located, or where their consent is unreasonably withheld (s 28(2)).

No person under the age of 16 can marry unless the marriage is shown to a Supreme Court judge to be expedient and in the interest of the parties (s 29). If the parent or guardian “unreasonably or from undue motives refuses or withholds consent to the marriage,” a minor may apply to court for a declaration to allow the marriage (s 28(2)).

Section 28(6) provides that a marriage of a minor must not be solemnized, and a license must not be issued, unless a birth certificate or other satisfactory proof of age has been produced to the issuer of marriage licenses or to the religious representative.

However, s 30 provides that failure to comply with ss 28 or 29 will not invalidate a marriage that has taken place. In other words, if someone manages to get married at 15 and obtains a valid marriage license, the marriage is valid.

## **B. Child Abduction**

### ***1. Criminal Code***

Sections 280 to 285 of the *Criminal Code* deal with the offences of abduction. Section 282(1) provides that:

Everyone who, being the parent, guardian or person having the lawful care or charge of a person under the age of 14 years, takes, entices away, conceals, detains, receives or harbours that person in contravention to the custody provisions of a custody order in relation to that person made by a court anywhere in Canada with intent to deprive a parent or guardian, or any other person who has the lawful care or charge of that person of the possession of that person is guilty of an indictable offence (maximum 10 years imprisonment)... or an offence punishable on summary conviction.

Section 283 creates a similar offence for circumstances in which there is no custody order.

**NOTE:** One should be especially careful when giving advice in custody disputes to avoid inadvertently giving advice that may lead to the commission of these offences. If there is evidence that a parent may abduct a child, or if there is evidence that visits are very “disturbing and harmful”, access may be denied. See *Re Sharp* (1962), 36 DLR (2d) 328 (BCCA).

### ***2. Child Abduction Convention***

The *Hague Convention on the Civil Aspects of International Child Abduction* enables a person whose custody rights have been violated to apply to a “Central Authority” (each party to the convention must create such a body) for the voluntary return of the child, or to apply for a court order. Keep in mind that not every country is a signatory to the *Hague Convention*. Applications can be made either in the person’s jurisdiction or in the jurisdiction to which the child has been abducted.

Each Central Authority has several tasks:

1. to discover the whereabouts of the child;
2. to take precautions to prevent harm to the child;
3. to encourage voluntary return of the child or some other agreeable arrangement;
4. to facilitate administrative processes; and
5. to arrange for legal advice where necessary.

It appears that the Convention applies where the parents are formally separated and the child has been in the sole custody of one parent.

Finally, it should be noted that the Central Authority does not decide the merits of any custody order. It is merely an enforcement agency.

A federal coordinator of the Department of Justice deals with abductions to France, Switzerland, Portugal and Canada. The contact number is (613) 995-6426.

If the child has been taken to another jurisdiction, contact the Department of External Affairs, 125 Sussex Drive Ottawa, K1A 0G2. Attention: J.L.A. The contact number is (613) 995-8807.

A further resource in the case of abductions and violations of custody orders is the office of the Child Youth and Family Advocate, 600-595 Howe Street, Vancouver, BC. The contact number is (604) 775-3203.

### **C. Discipline**

The *Criminal Code* (s 43) allows a parent, a person standing in the place of a parent, or a schoolteacher to discipline a child, by way of correction, provided that only reasonable force is used. However, section 76(3) of the *School Act*, RSBC 1996, c 412 requires that teachers ensure the discipline is similar to that of a kind, firm, and judicious parent, and must not include the use of corporal punishment.

The Supreme Court of Canada examined s 43 in *Canadian Foundation for Children, Youth and the Law v. Canada*, [2004] SCC 4, 16 C.R. (6th) 203. The Court held that section 43 does not violate the constitutional rights of children. The discipline must be “by way of correction” meaning “only sober, reasoned uses of force that address the actual behaviour of the child and are designed to restrain, control or express some symbolic disapproval of their behaviour” (para 24). Furthermore, the Court provided a comprehensive definition of “reasonable force”:

Generally, section 43 exempts from criminal sanction only minor corrective force of a transitory and trifling nature. On the basis of current expert consensus, it does not apply to corporal punishment of children under two or teenagers. Degrading, inhuman or harmful conduct is not protected. Discipline by the use of objects or blows or slaps to the head is unreasonable. Teachers may reasonably apply force to remove a child from a classroom or secure compliance with instructions, but not merely as corporal punishment. Coupled with the requirement that the conduct be corrective, which rules out conduct stemming from the caregiver's frustration, loss of temper or abusive personality, a consistent picture emerges of the area covered.

### **D. Child Protection**

Under the *Child, Family and Community Service Act* [CFCSA], a Director or member of the municipal or provincial police forces can apprehend any child under the age of 19 years when the child is believed to be in need of protection or care. Section 6 lists conditions justifying temporary protective custody under this Act.

Within seven days after the child's removal, a Director must attend Supreme or Provincial Court for a presentation hearing. The Director must, if possible, inform the child, if 12 years of age or over, and each parent of the time, date, and place of the hearing. If the situation warrants it, a hearing may result in temporary (or permanent) custody of the child being given to the Director or some other agency.

## ***1. Principles***

The *CFCSA* codifies child protection remedies available in B.C. It also gives specific rights to children in care under the Act (section 70). The *Representative for Children and Youth Act*, SBC 2006, c 29 s 6 provides that it is the responsibility of the Representative to:

- support, assist, inform and advise children and their families respecting designated services;
- monitor, review, audit and conduct research on the provision of a designated service by a public body or director for the purpose of making recommendations to improve the effectiveness and responsiveness of that service, and comment publicly on any of these functions
- review, investigate and report on the critical injuries and deaths of children as set out in Part 4

The guiding principles in section 2 of the *CFCSA* provide that:

1. children are entitled to be protected from abuse, neglect, harm, or threat of harm;
2. the family is the preferred environment for the care and upbringing of children and the responsibility for the protection of children rests primarily with the parents;
3. if, with available support services, a family can provide a safe and nurturing environment for a child, support services should be provided;
4. the child's views should be considered when decisions relating to that child are made;
5. kinship ties to extended family should be maintained;
6. the cultural identity of Aboriginal children should be preserved; and
7. decisions relating to children should be made and implemented in a timely manner.

*B.C. Children and Youth Review: An Independent Review of B.C.'s Child Protection System* (April 7, 2006) recommends a number of changes to the sections discussed in this chapter, including the appointment of a Representative for Children and Youth. The full report can be viewed online at <http://cwrp.ca/sites/default/files/publications/en/BC-HuguesReviewReport.pdf>.

## ***2. Best Interests of the Child***

Section 4 of the [*CFCSA* defines “best interests of the child” somewhat differently than does the *FLA*. Factors that must be considered under the *CFCSA* include:

1. the child's safety;
2. the child's physical and emotional needs and level of development;
3. continuity in child care;
4. the quality of relationships with parents;
5. the child's cultural, racial, linguistic and religious heritage;
6. the child's views; and
7. the effect on the child of any delays in making a decision.

Section 4(2) mandates that, in assessing the best interests of Aboriginal children, the importance of preserving the child's cultural identity must be considered.

The *CFCSA* definition of when a child needs protection includes the following (s 13):

1. situations where there is a risk of physical or sexual abuse, harm, or exploitation;
2. emotional harm by a parent's conduct;



3. deprivation of necessary health care;
4. situations where the parent is unable or unwilling to care for the child and has not made adequate provision for the child's care; and
5. where the child has been abandoned and adequate provision has not been made for the child's care.

See s 13 for a complete enumeration of circumstances where children need protection.

### ***3. Duty to Report Need for Protection***

The CFCSA (s 14(1)) requires that someone who believes a child is being or is likely to be physically harmed, sexually abused, or exploited to report the matter to the Ministry of Children and Family Development. The Helpline for Children (3101234) provides 24-hour access to social workers in case of an emergency.

Reports to the Ministry are anonymous. No action lies against a person making a report unless it is made maliciously or without reasonable grounds. Failure to report cases of abuse or exploitation constitutes an offence (s 14(3)), even when the information was confidential or privileged, **except** for when the information was obtained through a solicitor-client relationship (s 14(2)). The Director under the *CFCSA* must assess the information reported (s 16). Case law has demonstrated that the duty of the director to act is actually broader than the legislated duty: see *BS v British Columbia (Director of Children, Family, and Community Services)*, [1998] 8 WWR 1 (BCCA).

### ***4. Removal***

Under the *Child, Family and Community Service Act* [CFCSA], the Ministry for Children and Families has different options to deal with an unattended child (s 25), or a lost or runaway child (s 26). Pursuant to these sections, the Ministry can take the child for up to 72 hours without formally removing the child from their parents. Furthermore, the Ministry can take a child away to provide essential health care without legally removing the child, provided that the Ministry first obtains a court order under s 29 of the *CFCSA*. In situations where there are reasonable grounds to believe that the child's health or safety is in immediate danger, a police officer may take charge of the child (s 27).

### ***5. Removal Procedure***

Under the *CFCSA*, Directors are appointed to enforce the Act. A Director may, without a court order, remove a child if there are reasonable grounds to believe that the child needs protection and that the child's health or safety is in immediate danger, or no other less disruptive measure that is available is adequate to protect the child (s 30). When removing a child, a Director must make all reasonable efforts to notify each parent of the child's removal (s 31). Practically speaking, the Director delegates their duty to social workers who then carry out the removal procedure.

### ***6. Presentation Hearing***

The Director must attend a presentation hearing within seven days of the removal (*CFCSA*, s 34) and present a written report that includes:

1. the circumstances of the removal;
2. information about less disruptive measures considered before removal; and
3. an interim plan of care for the child, including, in the case of an Aboriginal child, the steps to be taken to preserve the child's aboriginal identity (s 35).

A child who is removed under the *CFCSA* is put under the care of the Director until the Court makes an interim order about the child, the child is returned, or until the Court makes a custody or supervision order (s 32). A presentation hearing is a summary hearing and must be concluded as soon as possible (normally within 30 days) (s 33.3).

If the parents consent to the interim removal, an order will be made that the child remain in the custody of the Director pending a protection hearing (see below). If the parent(s) disagree with the removal, a presentation hearing will be scheduled as soon as possible (s 33.3) to determine where the child should live pending the full protection hearing. The presentation hearing may proceed by way of affidavits or *viva voce* evidence. At the conclusion of the presentation hearing, the child may stay in the custody of the Director, may be returned to their parent(s) or may be returned to their parent(s) under supervision (s 35(2)). It is important to note that the notice of the presentation hearing need not be formally served, and informal notice is adequate.

## ***7. Protection Hearing***

A protection hearing must start within 45 days after the conclusion of the presentation hearing (*CFCSA*, s 37(2)). The purpose of the protection hearing is to determine whether the child needs protection (s 40(1)). The Director must return the child to the parent(s) as soon as possible if it is determined that the child does not need protection (s 40(2)). A child can be returned and still be under minimum supervision of the Director or returned without supervision. If the child is returned without supervision, the proceedings are at an end (s 37(1)).

## ***8. Orders***

Section 41 of the *CFCSA* outlines orders that can be made at a protection hearing:

1. an order to return the child to the custody of the parents while being under the Director's supervision for a period of up to six months;
2. an order that the child be placed in the custody of a person other than the parent (e.g. a relative) with the consent of that other person and under the Director's supervision for a specified period of time;
3. an order that the child remain or be placed in the custody of the Director for a specified period of time; or
4. an order that the child be placed in the continuing (permanent) custody of the Director. Continuing (permanent) orders should be made under s 49.
  - a) The parents may consent to or oppose the order. If the parents oppose the order, a Rule 2 case conference is scheduled as soon as possible and a judge will attempt to resolve any issues in dispute (see *Provincial Court (Child, Family and Community Service Act) Rules*, BC Reg 533/95 for a complete description). If the matter is not settled at the case conference, a date is scheduled to determine whether the child needs protection.
  - b) The content of supervision orders is outlined in the *CFCSA*, section 41.1. Terms and conditions that may be attached to a supervision order include:
    5. services for the child's parent(s);
    6. day-care or respite care;
    7. the Director's right to visit the child; and
    8. the Director's duty to remove the child if the person with custody does not comply with the order.

Section 43 outlines the time limits for temporary custody orders and s 47 outlines the rights and responsibilities of a Director who has custody of a child either under an interim or temporary custody order. These rights and responsibilities include:

1. consenting to health care for the child;
2. making decisions about the child's education and religious upbringing; and

3. exercising any other rights to carry out any other responsibilities as guardian of the child, except consent to adoption.

Temporary orders can be extended under section 44.

When a continuing custody order is made, the Director becomes the sole guardian of the person of the child and the natural parents' legal rights to the child are extinguished. The Director may then consent to the child's adoption. The Public Guardian becomes the sole guardian of the estate of the child. The order, however, does not affect the child's rights with respect to inheritance or succession of property (s 50(1)). In certain cases, the Director can seek a last-chance order of up to six months (s 49(7)).

Parents can apply to set aside both temporary and continuing (permanent) orders under s 54. They are also entitled to full disclosure under s 64. Temporary custody orders may also be extended where a permanent transfer of custody is planned under s 54.01. For more information, see *British Columbia (Director of Family and Child Services) v K(TL)*, [1996] BCJ No. 2554 (Prov Ct FD) (QL).

## **9. Access and Consent Orders**

Section 55 of the *Child, Family and Community Service Act* [CFCSA] allows parents, or other persons, to apply for an access order at the time of, or after, an interim or temporary custody order is made. Section 56 provides for applications for access by parents or other persons after a continuing custody order is made. This entitles parents to apply for access visits during any apprehension, whether interim or permanent, if the Director opposes access.

Consent orders under the *CFCSA* may be an advisable option for parents. A consent order is outlined in s 60, which provides that the Court may make any custody or supervision order without a finding of fact that their child actually needed protection and without an admission of any of the grounds alleged by the Director for removing the child (ss 60(4) and (5)).

A consent order requires the written consent of:

- a) the Director;
- b) the child, if 12 years of age or older;
- c) each parent of the child; and
- d) any person with whom the Director may be placing the child in temporary custody.

Children 12 years of age or older must be given notice of the hearings, report copies, etc.

## **10. Rights of Children in Care of the Director**

Section 70 of the *Child, Family and Community Service Act* [CFCSA] sets out the rights to which children are entitled while in care of the Director. Children in care have the right to be fed, clothed, and nurtured according to community standards; be informed about plans regarding their care; be consulted with respect to decisions affecting them; reasonable privacy and possession of their personal belongings; be free from corporal punishment; and receive medical and dental care when required. For a complete list of enumerated rights, see s 70.

## **11. Priority in Placing Children with a Relative**

When deciding where to place a child, the Director must consider the child's best interests (s 71(1)). The Director must give priority to placing the child with a relative before considering a foster parent, unless that is inconsistent with the child's best interests (s 71(2)).

Children under protection can be placed in the custody of extended family or other concerned parties (s 8). This is known as a "kith and kin" agreement. The Director may also refer the matter to a family conference co-ordinator to allow the family to reach an agreement on a 'plan of care' that serves the best interests of the child (ss 20, 21).

Until March 31, 2010, a relative caring for a child residing in their home may have been eligible to receive monthly Child in the Home of a Relative (“CIHR”) benefits from the Ministry of Social Development (previously the Ministry of Employment and Income Assistance). As of April 1, 2010, these benefits are no longer available to new applicants. In the absence of the CIHR benefits, relatives looking after a child in their home may be eligible for the child tax benefit, the B.C. family bonus, the universal child care benefit, and/or the child disability benefit. For more information, see: <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/governments/policies-for-government/bcea-policy-and-procedure-manual/eligibility/child-in-home-of-relative..> An alternative (but not a substitute) for relatives to consider is the Extended Family Program benefits available through the Ministry of Children and Family Development (see <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/family-social-supports/fostering/temporary-permanent-care-options/placement-with-a-person-other-than-the-parent>). These benefits are intended to be temporary and the relative is not eligible if they have a guardianship order. The application for benefits must be initiated by the child’s parent.

## ***12. Priority in Placing Aboriginal Children with an Aboriginal Family***

The Director must give priority to placing an Aboriginal child with the child’s extended family within the child’s Aboriginal community or with another Aboriginal family (s 71(3)). Section 39(1) mandates notification of the band. See also ss 2(f), 3(b) and (c), and 4(2) of the *CFCSA*. If a child is of mixed heritage, the Ministry will generally treat the child as an Aboriginal child and notify the band accordingly. Certain additional considerations are provided throughout the Act for an Aboriginal, Nisga’a or treaty First Nations child.

## ***E. Child Leaving Home or Parent Giving Up Custody of a Child***

Children may leave home before the age of majority, or alternatively, parents may voluntarily give up legal custody of their children. Please note that “emancipation” (a legal mechanism by which a person may be legally separated from their parents before the age of majority) is not a legal remedy for children in B.C. as it is in some parts of the United States.

### ***1. Rights of the Child***

Children may leave home as soon as they are able to support themselves. The following considerations should be kept in mind:

- a) under the *School Act*, a child must attend school until age 16 (s 3(1)(b)). It would be extremely difficult for the child to go to school and maintain a job to support themselves sufficiently at a younger age than this;
- b) a child under 15 needs written permission from their parent or guardian prior to working (*Employment Standards Act*, RSBC 1996, c113, s 9(1)). Additionally, a child under 12 needs the written permission of the Director of Employment Standards prior to working (s 9(2));
- c) pursuant to s 26(1) of the *Child, Family and Community Service Act* [CFCSA], a Director may take charge of a child for a period of up to 72 hours if it appears that the child is lost or has run away. If the person responsible for the child is not located by the end of the 72-hour period, the Director no longer has charge of the child (s 26(5)). (Note that “child” is defined in the CFCSA as a person under the age of 19 years and includes a youth.); and
- d) a child under 19 may qualify for social assistance if they do not live with a parent or guardian, and if the ministry is convinced that no parental support is being provided.

### ***2. Giving Up Custody of a Child***

There are two basic ways that a parent can voluntarily give up legal custody of a child. This is done by transferring the rights that the parent possessed through one of the following mechanisms:

- a) by the parent(s) consenting to the adoption of the child by other persons (*Adoption Act*, RSBC 1996, c 5, s 13(1)); or

- b) by a written agreement between the parent and the Director of Child, Family and Community Service where the parent transfers their rights to the Director (ss 23)

## ***F. Child Benefits***

### ***1. Child Disability Benefit***

The Child Disability Benefit (CDB) is a non-taxable supplement to the Canada Child Tax Benefit (CCTB) and Children's Special Allowance. To receive the CDB, a child must be eligible to receive the CCTB and must also qualify for the Disability Tax Credit (DTC). Not all children with disabilities qualify. For more information about eligibility visit the Canada Revenue Agency website at [www.cra-arc.gc.ca/bnfts/dsblty-eng.html](http://www.cra-arc.gc.ca/bnfts/dsblty-eng.html) or call 1-800-387-1193.

The CDB provides up to \$2,730 per year, per child who qualifies for the disability amount, for low- and modest-income families caring for children under the age of 18 who have a severe and prolonged mental or physical impairment.

### ***2. Canada Child Benefit***

In July 2016, the Government replaced the Universal Childcare Benefit (UCCB) and the Canadian Child Tax Benefit (CCTB) with the Canada Child Benefit (CCB), a benefit paid monthly to help eligible families provide child care for their children under 18 years of age. The CCB provides families up to \$6,400 annually for a child less than 6 years of age, and up to \$5,400 annually for a child aged 6 to 17. The CCB benefit is reduced based on the family's income and the number of children. When the family's income exceeds \$30,000 or there is more than one child in a family whose income exceeds \$30,000, the CCB starts being reduced, and, eventually, the CCB benefit reaches \$0. The CCB benefit is tax free. One must apply for CCB through Canada Revenue Agency.

For more information on eligibility, the application process, the calculation of the amount of the benefit based on number of children and household income, and access to an online application, visit the Canada Revenue Agency website at <http://www.cra-arc.gc.ca/bnfts/ccb/menu-eng.html> or call 1-800-387-1193.

## **XIII. ADOPTION**

### ***A. Legislation***

#### ***1. Adoption Act, RSBC 1996, c 5***

The *Adoption Act* governs adoptions in BC. The Act provides for the licensing of adoption agencies. These agencies, in addition to the Director of Adoption, have exclusive authority for facilitating adoptions, matching birth families with adoptive parents, adoption planning, pre-placement assessment, placement services, and post-placement counselling and assessments for non-relative adoptions in BC.

The *Adoption Act* enables any adult person to apply to adopt a child or to adopt another adult person. Under ss 5 and 29, one or two adults may apply to adopt a child. This allows unmarried couples, including same-sex couples, to apply to adopt.

The *Adoption Act* says that a child may be placed for adoption by the Director of Child, Family and Community Service; an adoption agency; a parent or guardian of a child by direct placement; or a parent or guardian of a child, if the child is placed with a relative of the child. A direct placement means the placing of a child by a parent or other guardian with one or 2 adults who are not a relative of the child. According to section 37(c), biological parents may also apply to adopt with a third party.

Section 37 of the *Adoption Act* states the effect of the adoption order. For all purposes, an adopted child becomes the child of the adopting parent(s) and the biological parents cease to have any parental rights or obligations with respect to the child.

Two legal exceptions under the Act are:

- a) an adopted First Nations child does not lose status, rights, privileges, disabilities, and limitations acquired under the *Indian Act* and other Acts (s 37(7)); and
- b) adoption adds a prohibited degree of consanguinity for the purpose of marriage or laws relating to incest (s 37(4)).

The adopted person takes the given names specified in the adoption order and the surname of the adopting parents, unless the court orders otherwise at the request of the applicant (s 36).

Furthermore, openness agreements are recognized by statute (s 59) and may be entered into by the adoptive parents, the birth parents, and others with a relationship to the child, after consents to adoption have been signed.

An adoption effected under the law of a jurisdiction other than BC is valid in BC as though it had been made under BC's adoption legislation (s 47).

Part 4 of the *Adoption Act* deals with interprovincial and intercountry adoptions. Before a person brings a child into the province for adoption they must obtain the approval of a director or an adoption agency (s 48(1)). Part 4 Division 2 deals with intercountry adoption of children from countries that are signatories to the Hague Convention on Intercountry Adoption. To complete an adoption from a foreign country, whether that country is a "Hague Country" or not, a person needs the approval of the British Columbia Central Authority.

Under the *Adoption Act*, ss 63(1) and 64(1), birth records may be disclosed to both birth parents and adult adoptees. The Reunion Registry facilitates reunions and disclosure of records. The Act provides for filing of non-disclosure vetoes and no-contact vetoes (ss 65 and 66).

## ***B. Procedure***

### ***1. Consent***

Section 13(1) of the *Adoption Act* states that no adoption order may be made without the written consent of:

- the child, if 12 years of age or over; children aged between 7 and 11 must be interviewed to ascertain whether they understand the meaning of adoption, and their views on the proposed name changes and a report must be filed with the court;
- the child's parents. The birthing parent cannot sign consents until the child is at least 10 days old (s 14). The consent of the other biological parent, who is not presumed to be the child's biological parent under s. 26 of the Family Law Act, is not required unless the biological parent acknowledges they are a parent and they are named as a parent by the child's birthing parent;
- the child's guardians;
- where a child is a permanent ward of the Director of Child, Family, and Community Service, the Director, as guardian, must consent (s 13(5)).

The court may dispense with the need for consent from some of these parties. Parental consent may be dispensed with if it is in the best interest of the child or if the person has abandoned or deserted the child, cannot be found, is incapable of giving consent, has persistently neglected or refused to contribute to support for which they are liable, or is a person whose consent ought, in all the circumstances of the case, to be dispensed with (s 17). The consent of a child over 12 years of age can only be dispensed with if the child is not capable of giving informed consent (s 17(2)).

A person's consent must be in the form of an affidavit sworn in front of a notary or a lawyer. Each affidavit must state that the effect of the consent and of adoption was fully explained to the person consenting, and that they signed the consent freely and voluntarily.

How and when a person can revoke their consent is set out below in section 6.

## ***2. Notifying the Director of Adoption***

Within 14 days after receiving a child into their home for the purposes of adoption, the prospective adoptive parents must notify, in writing the Director of Adoptions or an adoption agency (s 12).

A person wishing to apply to adopt must notify the Director of Adoption in writing of their intention (s 31) at least 30 days before filing the application unless:

- the child has been placed in a licensed adoption agency;
- the child is related to the applicant by blood; or
- the applicant is the child's stepparent.

The Director of Adoption then makes an inquiry and files a report with the court before the hearing date. At least 30 days before the date fixed for the hearing of the application or an application to dispense with consent, the applicant must give a copy of the application with a notice of the date of hearing to the Director or licensed adoption agency.

The court may dispense with the times needed for the notices where the Director's report shows good cause that the waiting period is not necessary to protect the interests of all parties (s 6(9)).

In cases of "direct placement", potential adoptive parents must notify either the Director of Adoption or an adoption agency as soon as possible before the child is received in their home, and then in writing within 14 days after the child is received. Prior notice is required to allow the adoption agency or the Director of Adoption to receive or provide information to and from the birth and adoptive parents. Such information may include providing alternatives to the birth parents, doing a pre-placement assessment of the adoptive parents, counselling adoptive children if necessary, and ensuring that children over 12 have given informed consent.

Under s 33, a post-placement assessment must be made by either the Director of Adoption or an adoption agency, providing a recommendation on whether the adoption should be made or not, or whether insufficient information is available to make the determination.

## ***3. Adoption by the Child's Blood Relatives or Stepparents***

The Director of Adoption does not need to be notified or make a report where one adult may apply to the court to become a parent of a child jointly with another parent, nor where a blood relative of a child applies to adopt the child.

In the case of stepparent and blood relative adoptions, the application may not be made until the child has lived with, and been in the custody of, the applicant for at least six months prior to the application, except by order of the court. The court may still order a report from the Director. Where a report from the Director is not necessary, the material filed in support of the application should inform the court:

- in whose care the child has been since birth;
- whether the parents have consented or proper reasons for the omission of such consent;
- how long the applicants have been married;
- the ages and occupations of the applicants;

- whether either of the applicants have any other children living with them;
- that the applicants are able to bring up, maintain and educate the child; and
- any unusual circumstances relevant to the application.

#### ***4. Where all Parties Have Consented to Adoption***

If all of the necessary consents have been obtained, no notice need to be given and the application is made under Rule 17-1(24) of the *BC Supreme Court Family Rules*. The real application is thus the Requisition made to the registry and all other documents can be “the material on which the application is founded”.

#### ***5. Where Consent is Not Obtained***

Subject to circumstances where s 42 of the *Adoption Act* apply, an application under s 11 of the *Adoption Act* dispensing with notice of a proposed adoption to a birth parent and an application under s 17 of the *Adoption Act* dispensing with consent to an adoption may be included in an application for an order for adoption under Supreme Court Family Rule 17-1(26). See Family Practice Direction 1: Adoption Applications (online at [www.courts.gov.bc.ca/supreme\\_court/practice\\_and\\_procedure/family\\_practice\\_directions.aspx](http://www.courts.gov.bc.ca/supreme_court/practice_and_procedure/family_practice_directions.aspx)).

#### ***6. Revocation of Consent***

Fraud, undue influence, and duress may invalidate consent. In the absence of such defect with the agreement, the court may only revoke consent if it is in the best interests of the child.

Consent may be revoked in writing before the child is placed (s 18). The birth parent may revoke their consent within 30 days of the child’s birth regardless of the child’s placement. The child may revoke consent at any time before the order is made (s 20). After the child has been placed, subject to the above, consent may be revoked only by court order and only if it would be in the best interests of the child. The application for revocation of consent must be made before the granting of the adoption order (s 22).

A person who consents to an adoption may revoke their consent prior to the child being placed if the revocation is in writing and received by the director or agency before placement.

#### ***7. Checklist for Filing an Adoption***

The necessary documents for an adoption application can be found on the BC Supreme Court website at [http://www.courts.gov.bc.ca/supreme\\_court/self-represented\\_litigants/info\\_packages.aspx](http://www.courts.gov.bc.ca/supreme_court/self-represented_litigants/info_packages.aspx). The applicant should include:

- the petitioners’ affidavit;
- Petition to the Court (Form F73);
- affidavit of parent’s consent to adoption;
- paternity affidavit of birth parent if no other parent is named;
- birth parent expense affidavit, sworn by the adoptive parents;
- requisition to have adoption heard in chambers, if necessary;
- Notice of Hearing of petition (Form F75), if necessary;
- Requisition re: Desk Order for Adoption, if the adoption is uncontested and the necessary consents have been obtained; and
- Desk Order for Adoption (no hearing necessary); and/or order after hearing in chambers.



## XIV. NAME CHANGES

### A. *Legislation: Name Act, RSBC 1996, c 328*

The instructions for changing a surname are outlined in the *Name Act*. It can be skipped if the change occurs during the marriage ceremony or divorce. The procedures for changing a first name are much less formal and are not set out in legal rules (see **Section XIV Part C: Changing a First Name**, below). The Department of Vital Statistics provides a name change package complete with forms and instructions. They can be reached in Vancouver at (604) 660-2937.

Note the Court decision in *Trociuk v British Columbia (Attorney General)*, [2003] 1 SCR 835 which declared ss 3(1)(b) and 3(6)(b) of the British Columbia *Vital Statistics Act* unconstitutional. These sections prevented a father from having the registration of the child's surname altered, violating their rights under s 15(1) of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

### B. *Changing a Surname*

#### 1. *General*

Any person may apply to change their own name.

##### a) *At the Time of Marriage*

At the time of marriage, a person may elect to:

- retain the surname they had immediately before marriage;
- use the surname they had at birth; or
- use the surname of their spouse by marriage.

##### b) *A Parent with Custody of an Unmarried Child*

A parent with custody may change the surname of their child. They must submit written consent of:

- the child if the child has attained the age of 12 years;
- the all other parents having guardianship and other guardians of the child; and
- the applicant's spouse if the application is to change the child's surname to that of the applicant's spouse.

A parent with custody of an unmarried child may allow that child to informally use any surname they want, and that child may be registered in grade one under that name. No consent from the other parent is necessary in this case. A parent may apply to change a minor child's name legally. It is also possible to apply for a change of name if the other parent:

- a) is deceased or mentally disordered;
- b) cannot after reasonable, diligent and adequate search be located; or
- c) is, in the option of the registrar general, unreasonably withholding their consent.

##### c) *A Widowed Person*

A widowed person may apply to change their surname. The applicant must submit a death certificate, or if the death occurred in British Columbia they may state date and place of death and name of spouse.

##### d) *A Divorced Person*

A divorced person may, upon divorce, go by the name listed on their birth certificate.

## ***2. Eligibility***

To be eligible to change their name under the *Name Act*, a person must:

- be an adult; or if a minor, must be a parent having custody of their children; **and:**
- have been domiciled in British Columbia for at least 3 months or have resided in British Columbia for at least 3 months immediately before the date of the application (s 4(1)).

## ***3. Procedure***

**NOTE:** A change of name application can be included in the Notice of Family Claim and attached Schedule 5: Other Orders filed in divorce proceedings to avoid the procedure described below.

### ***a) When the Applicant Has Already Assumed the Name***

Sometimes the name to be legally adopted is one that has already been informally assumed. The assumed name should be indicated when preparing the application form. For example: "...change my name from John Doe, known as Henry Smith, to Henry Smith".

### ***b) Publishing Notices of Intention***

A person who wishes to legally change their name is no longer required to publish a notice of intention.

### ***c) Making the Application***

When making an application for a change in their surname or given name, or both the surname and given name, the applicant must insert their name in full in the notice of application for a change of name.

Application for a legal change of name must be accompanied by:

- i. the birth certificate, landed immigrant identification card or Canadian citizenship certificate of the applicant, and others included in the application;
- ii. a marriage certificate where the change affects the name of a married man or woman (not required for persons married in British Columbia);
- iii. any required consents, as above;
- iv. proof of custody from applicants who have been divorced, respecting any children included in the application who were born prior to the divorce;
- v. the statutory fee of \$137, and \$27 for each additional individual; and
- vi. proof of death from widowed applicants respecting any children included in the application.

**NOTE:** Information can be obtained from the Division of Vital Statistics (Vancouver telephone: (604) 660-2937; website: <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/life-events>) regarding other related procedures such as a bride's election of surname at marriage, and changes of name resulting from adoption, legitimisation of birth, dissolution of marriage, or due to improper registration of the birth originally.

## ***C. Changing a First Name***

### ***1. Eligibility***

Anyone may change their first name. However, minors should be advised that they must obtain the written consent of their parents to do so.

## ***2. Procedure***

The client does not need to go through the application procedures necessary for changing a surname. The client can start using another first name at any time.

All identification – including credit cards, driver’s license, social insurance card, school records (where applicable), health care cards, bank accounts, and birth certificates – should be changed to the first name being used. This can be done by contacting the relevant organizations and filling out a Change of Name Form. Usually, the client’s former first name will become a middle name instead.

# **XV. COURT PROCEDURES**

## ***A. Limitation Dates***

### ***1. Child Support***

There is no limitation period for making a claim to child support, provided the child is still a “child” within the meaning of the *FLA* or the *DA*, as applicable, at the time of the originating application (*de Rooy v. Bergstrom*, 2010 BCCA 5; *Crepnjak v. Crepnjak*, 2011 BCCA 177). The general rule of thumb is that the Court will not order child support retroactive to more than three years from the date of the application (*DBS v SRG*, 2006 SCC 37).

Under the *Limitations Act*, there is no limitation date for claims on arrears of child support payments payable under a judgment or an agreement filed with the court under s 148(2) or 163(3) of the *FLA*.

### ***2. Spousal Support***

#### ***2(a). Married Spouses***

##### ***Divorce Act***

Spousal support can be claimed under the *Divorce Act* in a divorce proceeding or in a proceeding for corollary relief alone (ss 4 and 15.2). There is no limitation period within which married spouses or divorced spouses must bring a spousal support application. A claim for spousal support can be brought before or after an order for divorce. However, the longer a party waits, the less likely they will succeed in a claim for spousal support.

##### ***Family Law Act***

Under s 198(3) of the *FLA*, a claim for spousal support must be brought no later than 2 years after the judgment granting a **divorce** or an order declaring the marriage to be a **nullity**. The two-year time limit does not apply to a review of spousal support under s 168 and 169 of the *FLA*.

The running of time limits is suspended during any period in which persons are engaged in family dispute resolution with a family dispute resolution professional or a prescribed process.

Under s 198(3), a married spouse may make an application to set aside an order or agreement for spousal support no later than 2 years after the spouse first discovered, or reasonably ought to have discovered, the grounds for making the application.

Under the *Limitations Act*, there is no limitation date for claims on arrears of spousal support payments payable under a judgment or an agreement filed with the court under s 148(2) or 163(3) of the *FLA*.

## ***2(b). Common-Law Spouses***

### ***Divorce Act***

The *Divorce Act* does not apply to common-law spouses.

### ***Family Law Act***

Under s 198(3) of the *FLA*, a claim for spousal support must be brought no later than 2 years after the date of **separation**. The two-year time limit does not apply to a review of spousal support under s 168 and 169 of the *FLA*.

The running of time limits is suspended during any period in which persons are engaged in family dispute resolution with a family dispute resolution professional or a prescribed process.

Under s 198(3), a spouse living in a marriage-like relationship may make an application to set aside an order or agreement for spousal support no later than 2 years after the spouse first discovered, or reasonably ought to have discovered, the grounds for making the application.

Under the *Limitations Act*, there is no limitation date for claims on arrears of spousal support payments payable under a judgment or an agreement filed with the court under s 148(2) or 163(3) of the *FLA*.

## ***3. Division of Property, Debt, and Pension***

### ***3(a). Married Spouses***

Under section 198(3) of the *FLA*, a married spouse may begin a proceeding to divide property, debt, or a pension no later than 2 years after a judgment granting a **divorce** or an order declaring the marriage to be a **nullity**. The limitation period may be suspended if the spouses were engaged in family dispute resolution with a family dispute resolution professional or a prescribed process.

A spouse may make an application to set aside an order or agreement for property division no later than 2 years after the spouse first discovered, or reasonably ought to have discovered, the grounds for making the application.

Once a distribution scheme for family property is set, either by the Court or by agreement, it is always enforceable subject to the relevant case law.

### ***3(b). Common-Law Spouses***

Spouses living in a marriage-like relationship may begin a proceeding to divide property, debt, or a pension no later than 2 years after the date of **separation** (s 198(3)). The limitation period may be suspended spouses if the spouses were engaged in family dispute resolution with a family dispute resolution professional or a prescribed process.

A spouse living in a marriage-like relationship may make an application to set aside an order or agreement for property division no later than 2 years after the spouse first discovered, or reasonably ought to have discovered, the grounds for making the application.

Once a distribution scheme for family property is set, either by the Court or by agreement, it is always enforceable subject to the relevant case law.

## ***B. Supreme Court***

The Supreme Court is the only court that hears actions under the *DA*. Under the *FLA*, the Supreme Court has both statutory and inherent jurisdiction to decide all support, division of property, custody, and access matters. Therefore, all *FLA* issues can be incorporated into a divorce action.

All Supreme Court procedures in family law proceedings are governed by the *Supreme Court Family Rules* effective July 1, 2010. (The *Supreme Court Family Rules* replace the former *Rules of Court* in respect of family law matters). Unless a client is familiar with these rules and able to strictly adhere to the formal procedures, this person should appear in Supreme Court with representation.

Actions are started when a claimant files a Notice of Family Claim or a Petition to Court. Matters may be decided through interlocutory applications or by trial. Interlocutory applications are hearings held in chambers. No witnesses are called. Instead, all evidence is taken from sworn affidavits. If the judge or master is satisfied with the credibility and substance of the evidence presented, then an interim order can be granted. A final order may be obtained at trial or by way of a summary trial on affidavit evidence if there are no serious issues of credibility.

### ***C. Small Claims Court***

Clients can enforce agreements concerning the division of assets between persons in a common-law relationship and between those in other relationships in Small Claims Court. See **Chapter 22: Small Claims Procedure** for more details. Also, one may be able to make a trust claim in Small Claims Court.

### ***D. Provincial (Family) Court***

#### ***1. Jurisdiction***

Provincial (Family) Court has jurisdiction under the *FLA* over matters of custody, access, support and guardianship, subject to the jurisdiction of the superior courts and the federal government. The *FLA* provides greater powers for the enforcement of Orders which are available to the Provincial Court. Provincial (Family) Court has jurisdiction over the enforcement of support orders whether made in Supreme Court or Provincial (Family) Court (*Butler v Butler* (1981), 27 BCLR 268 (BCCA)) and has original jurisdiction to make support orders and to vary or rescind its own orders. Provincial (Family) Court can also make, vary, rescind, or enforce its own custody/access orders, but does not have the power to make orders regarding occupancy of the family home (*Polglase v Polglase* [1979] BCJ No 58 (QL)). Where the Supreme Court has made an order respecting custody, access, support, or child support, Provincial (Family) Court will be unable to vary that order, although the Court can enforce the order.

The Provincial Court offers free counselling and mediation services to family members considering separation or divorce. The Family Justice Counsellors (who may also be probation officers) will try to help the parties reach agreement on contentious matters.

#### ***2. Contacting Provincial (Family) Court***

Clients should phone Provincial Court (and ask for the Family Court Division) in advance to arrange an interview. An Intake Officer will speak with the client, and if the problem is something the Provincial Court deals with, the client will be assigned to a Counsellor and an appointment will be arranged.

For a list of Family Courts in the Lower Mainland, see **Chapter 22: Referrals**.

#### ***3. Family Justice Counsellors***

**Family Justice Counsellors are not lawyers and do not necessarily know what the client's rights and obligations are. Clients should seek legal advice before signing any agreement.**

The Family Justice Counselling Service helps people seeking remedies for their family problems through the Court or through counselling and mediation services. The aim of the counsellors is not reconciliation. Where a couple indicates a willingness to restore the marriage, they will be referred to a marriage counsellor. There are also clerks who help clients understand and implement child support guidelines.

Counselling is non-adversarial. The counsellors are impartial third parties who will assist both spouses in coming to an out-of-court settlement, although the counsellors are not of uniform quality and expertise. After gathering minimal information, the Counsellor will normally send a letter to the other spouse to advise them of the situation and try to set up a meeting with the first spouse and the counsellor. All information received from a spouse is private and confidential and will not be given out except with the express permission of that person, or as required by law.

Counsellors attempt to avoid court disputes by obtaining a Consent Order. If this is not possible, pertinent details regarding custody and support will be obtained, and forms will be prepared for court.

The counsellors will:

- provide information regarding the court processes, available options, and current legislation;
- offer conciliation and mediation services;
- investigate the matters under dispute;
- help with court applications and general preparation for court; and
- screen for family violence situations and direct parties to the appropriate services.

The client can choose to avoid the counselling service and appear in court directly. The counsellor to whom the client has been assigned will still offer assistance with the application forms, etc. The Family Justice Counsellors can be reached at (604) 660-6828 (Vancouver) or (604) 660-8636 (Burnaby).

Family Justice Counsellors deal exclusively with issues of children and support. In limited circumstances, and for clients with assets or debt less than \$25,000, a Family Justice Counsellor can mediate an agreement.

#### ***4. Provincial (Family) Court Proceedings***

##### ***a) Application to Obtain an Order***

- a. Most proceedings in Provincial Court are commenced by filing an Application to Obtain an Order (Form 1). The application commences an action in Provincial Court and requests a specific remedy. The application can be filed at either the court registry or in a family justice registry. For procedure see *Provincial Court (Family) Rules* (see Rule 2).

As of May 2021, Form 1 will be known as a Notice to Resolve a Family Law Matter under the new Provincial Court Family Rules.

- b. The application must be filed with the registry and must be personally served on the respondent by someone other than the applicant unless the judge orders otherwise. The following documents must be served with the filed copy of the application when it is served on the respondent:
  - i. a blank reply form (Form 3) (as of May 2021, Form 6 will be used under the new Provincial Court Family Rules);
  - ii. a blank financial statement form (Form 4), if the applicant is seeking an order for child and/or spousal support or a variation of child and/or spousal support; and
  - iii. a filed copy of the applicant's financial statement and applicable documentation under Rule 4 (2), if applicable (As of May 2021, the applicable rule will be Rule 3 under the new Provincial Court Family Rules).

##### ***b) Reply***

- a. The respondent must file a reply within 30 days of being served with a copy of the application, otherwise, a default judgment may be sought in favour of the applicant. If the respondent disagrees with the remedy sought, they should be advised to obtain legal counsel to dispute the applicant's claim.

- b. The respondent must:
- i. complete a reply in Form 3, following the instructions on the form (as of May 2021, Form 6 will be used under the new Provincial Court Family Rules);
  - ii. file that reply, together with three copies of it, in the registry where the application was filed; and
  - iii. if applicable, file the original and three copies of the respondent's financial statement and applicable documentation referred to in Rule 4 (2)(b) (as of May 2021, the applicable rule will be Rule 3 under the new Provincial Court Family Rules).
- c. In the reply, the respondent may:
- i. consent to one or more of the orders in the application;
  - ii. disagree with anything claimed in the application, stating the reasons for the disagreement;
  - iii. counterclaim for a variety of relief, including but not limited to guardianship, allocation of parenting responsibilities, parenting time, child support, spousal support, or a protection order under the *FLA*; and/or
  - iv. apply to the Court for an order to change existing orders or agreements.

### ***c) Family Justice Registries***

Family Justice Registries are designated by Rule 1 of the *Provincial Court (Family) Rules*. Under the definitions in the Rules, "family justice registry" means the Vancouver (Robson Square), Surrey, Kelowna, or Nanaimo registry. Under Rule 5, at these registries, the parties will be obliged to comply with additional requirements before the application is heard (unless the parties fall into the exception outlined in Rule 5(2)). Both parties will meet with a Family Justice Counsellor. If a settlement cannot be reached with the assistance of the counsellors, the matter will be referred to court.

For more information, see the website: <http://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/life-events/divorce/family-justice/who-can-help/family-justice-counsellors>.

Once the new Provincial Court Family Rules come into effect in May 2021, the Family Justice Registries will be designated under Part 6, Rule 87. Rule 90 addresses exceptions to family justice registry requirements.

### ***d) Parenting After Separation Program***

- a. Pursuant to Rule 21 of the *Provincial Court (Family) Rules*, parties who file at a "designated registry" must also attend a Parenting After Separation Program if there is a dispute over issues respecting children. These include the following registries: Abbotsford, Chilliwack, Kamloops, Kelowna, Nanaimo, New Westminster, North Vancouver, Port Coquitlam, Prince George, Richmond, Surrey, Vancouver (Robson Square) and Victoria.

Under the new Provincial Court Family Rules which come into force in May 2021, this requirement will be pursuant to Rule 94.

- b. The program is a free three-hour session and open to all parents and others (for example, grandparents) where custody, guardianship, access, and support issues are involved. For more information, see <http://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/life-events/divorce/family-justice/who-can-help/pas>.

### ***e) First Appearance***

If the application is filed with the court registry, the clerk must serve the parties with notice of the time and place they are to attend court for a first appearance to fix a date for the hearing of the application. Note that this notice is titled “Trial Notice” although the matter is set for a fix-date hearing.

### ***f) Pre-Trial Conferences***

The parties may be ordered to hold a pre-trial conference during which the judge may rule on any issues not requiring evidence, make an order, discuss the procedure that will be followed at trial, order that certain evidence be produced, or arrange for disclosure of one party’s evidence to the other.

As of May 2021, the Provincial Court (Family) Rules will be repealed and the new Provincial Court Family Rules will be in effect (excepting Division 5 of Part 9, which will come into force in May 2022). Once the new Rules apply, pre-trial conferences will be replaced by trial preparation conferences.

If a trial preparation conference is to be held, each party must file and serve a trial readiness statement in Form 22 either 7 days before the conference is scheduled (Rule 110). If no trial preparation conference is scheduled, then the statement must be submitted a minimum of 30 days prior to the first date of trial.

During this conference, a judge will determine whether a trial will be held and in what manner. Rule 112 provides a fulsome list of matters the judge may give direction about, including evidentiary requirements, how the views of a child will be heard, and whether family violence is at issue.

### ***g) Family Case Conference***

A judge may order a family case conference, or one may be requested. The conference is informal and off the record. The meeting is between the relevant parties and a judge and is intended to reach a settlement. Note that the judge has the authority to make orders whether or not the parties agree to the order. Rule 7 of the Provincial Court (Family) Rules governs Family Case Conferences.

As of May 2021, the rule under the new Provincial Court Family Rules will be Rule 36.

### ***h) Witnesses***

- a. Witnesses are summoned to the Court by subpoena. However, a subpoena is not necessary if the witness is prepared to appear in court voluntarily. If a subpoenaed witness does not appear in court, a warrant may be issued for their arrest. To require the attendance of a witness, a party must complete a subpoena in Form 15 and serve a copy of the subpoena on the witness personally at least seven days before the date the witness is required to appear.

As of May 2021, Form 23 will replace Form 15 under the new Provincial Court Family Rules.

- b. In Provincial (Family) Court, the person who subpoenas the witness is responsible for that witness’ reasonable estimated travel expenses.

### ***i) Affidavit Evidence***

At trial, evidence may be given orally or by sworn affidavit. Evidence may be given by affidavit at a trial or hearing only if permission is granted by a judge (Rule 13), either on application brought by notice of motion under Rule 12 or under Rule 8(4)(g). This evidence must be in Form 17.

As of May 2021, Rules 145, 112 will replace the above rules under the new Provincial Court Family Rules, and Form 45 will be used in place of Form 17.



### ***j) Notices of Motion***

Three copies of a notice of motion (Rule 12) must be filed in the court registry and one copy must be served on the other parties at least seven days before the date for hearing the notice of motion in court when a party wishes:

- i. an interim order to be made (*FLA* s216);
- ii. to file documents in another registry;
- iii. to have a pre-trial conference;
- iv. to cancel a subpoena;
- v. for an order to produce documents;
- vi. for an order requiring that paternity tests be taken;
- vii. to use another method of service (no notice required);
- viii. to settle the terms of an order;
- ix. to extend a time limit;
- x. to change or cancel an *ex parte* order;
- xi. to have a file transferred;
- xii. to have disclosure; or
- xiii. to obtain directions on procedures not in the *Provincial (Family) Court Rules*.

**NOTE:** Different Provincial Court Registries have different procedures regarding evidence at interim hearings. Some allow Affidavits and others require leave to produce and file an Affidavit and prefer viva voce (spoken) evidence. Be sure to check the procedure at the Registry in question before filing materials.

As of May 2021, Rule 118 will replace Rule 12 under the new Provincial Court Family Rules.

### ***k) Trial***

A Provincial (Family) Court trial is an adversarial proceeding. Clients are there to give the judge enough facts so that they can make a decision about the application. However, the judge often gets involved in the presentation of evidence, especially where one party is not represented by counsel.

### ***l) Procedure for Enforcement of Custody Orders***

An Application Form (Form 21) and copy of the custody order must be filed in the registry.

As of May 2021, Form 29 will replace Form 21 under the new Provincial Court Family Rules.

### ***m) Procedure for Enforcement of Support Orders***

The most effective and simplest method of enforcing Support Orders is to register with the Family Maintenance Enforcement Program. For more information call or write the Enrolment Office, Box 5789, Victoria, BC, V8R 6S8; telephone: (250) 356-8889, toll-free: 1-800-663-7616.

### ***n) Orders***

- a. Orders come into effect on the day that they are made unless the judge orders otherwise. If the party in whose favour the order is made is unrepresented, a clerk must prepare the order. Otherwise, the favoured party's lawyer will prepare the order.

- b. If there is a dispute about the terms of an order, a party may apply to a judge to have the dispute settled. Once an order is signed and approved, it must be given to the court registry to be signed by the judge and filed with the Court. Otherwise, the order is not enforceable. At any time, a judge may correct a clerical error in an order.

***o) Compliance with Provincial Court (Family) Rules***

If any of the *Provincial Court (Family) Rules* (British Columbia) are not complied with, the judge may disregard the incorrect procedure or order, order the hearing or trial to continue as if the respondent were absent, or give any direction they think is fair. Please check the Cumulative Regulation Bulletin 2019 for any non-consolidated amendments to this regulation that may be in effect. As of May 2021, these rules will be replaced with the new Provincial Court Family Rules; please review the updated rules to ensure that you are in compliance.

## **APPENDIX A: GLOSSARY**

### **ALTERNATE SERVICE (also known as SUBSTITUTIONAL SERVICE)**

When an applicant, for a good reason, cannot serve the respondent personally because that person cannot be found or is evading service, the Court may make an order providing for service in some other way (i.e. by letter, advertisement, e-mail, Facebook message, other online methods, or service on a relative).

### **ANNULMENT**

A judicial pronouncement declaring a marriage invalid. Although it is commonly thought that an annulment has the same effect as if the marriage never took place, it is still possible to divide property under Part 5 of the *Family Relations Act* if proceedings began prior to March 18, 2013.

### **APPLICANT/CLAIMANT**

A person seeking a court order. In Provincial Court, the parties are called the applicant and the respondent, but they are the claimant and the respondent under the *Family Law Act*, *Family Relations Act* and the *Divorce Act*.

### **CHILD**

Under the *Divorce Act*: a “child of the marriage’ is a child of two spouses or former spouses who.....is under the age of majority and who has not withdrawn from their charge or is the age of majority or over and under their charge but unable, by reason of illness, disability or other cause, to withdraw from their charge or to obtain the necessaries of life”.

Under the *Family Law Act*: “a person who is under 19 years of age or a person who is 19 years of age or older and unable, because of illness, disability or another reason, to obtain the necessaries of life or withdraw from the charge of their parents or guardians.

Under the *Adoption Act*: “an unmarried person under the age of 19 years”.

### **CUSTODY**

Under the *Divorce Act*: “care, upbringing and any other incident of custody.” As of March 1, 2021, this term will be replaced with “parenting time”.

### **DECLARATORY JUDGMENT**

A judgment given by the Court in the form of a declaration.

### **DEPENDANT**

Anyone who relies on another to support him or her.

### **FILING**

As in filing pleadings, affidavits, property and financial statements, etc. in court. A document is filed at the court registry and forms part of the court record.

## **GUARDIANSHIP**

Involves the right to be consulted on matters relating to the child's upbringing, such as religion, education, extracurricular activities, social environment, etc. The Family Law Act states that a person cannot become a child's guardian by agreement except if the person is the child's parent or as provided under the *FLA*, *Adoption Act* or Child, Family and Community Service Act. Please note that the definition of guardianship varies between the *FLA* and the *Divorce Act*.

## **INTERIM ORDER**

An order that is granted prior to the making of a final order. The order is good until a further order of the Court or agreement between the parties is made. The final order will not automatically be the same as the interim order. An interim order to determine custody and asset management while the matter is still in dispute is common in many divorce proceedings.

## **INTERIM EX PARTE ORDER**

A temporary order made when one party is not present by reason of lack of notice. This order is usually only granted in an emergency, such as the kidnapping of a child.

## **IN LOCO PARENTIS**

Where someone who is not the biological parent of a child steps in and takes over all the duties and responsibilities of a parent for that child. This commonly includes stepparents.

## **NOTICE OF FAMILY CLAIM**

Documents that must be filed to commence most formal proceedings in the Supreme Court, for divorce and corollary relief.

## **PETITIONER/CLAIMANT**

The person who presents a petition to start an action in a court or legislature. There is no longer any such thing as a divorce petition, a Writ of Summons or Statement of Claim. Now there is a specialized Notice of Family Claim and, in particular cases such as adoptions, a Petition to Court.

## **RESPONDENT**

A person against whom a court order is sought. In Provincial Court, the parties are called the applicant and the respondent, but they are called the claimant and the respondent under the *Supreme Court Family Rules* and the *Divorce Act*.

## **SERVICE**

The act of delivering a document such as a Notice of Family Claim to a person is known as personal service. There is a distinction between personal service and ordinary service in the *Supreme Court Family Rules*; see Part 6 for details. In the Provincial Court (Family) Rules, see Rule 3. Certain documents must be served via personal service, such as originating pleadings including a Notice of Family Claim, an application to change, suspend, or terminate an existing final order, an application to set aside or replace the whole or part of an agreement filed under the *Supreme Court Family Rules* Rule 2-1(2), an application for an order for contempt, etc. See Rule 6-3(1) for a full list of documents that must be served by way of personal service.

## **SERVICE EX JURIS**

When the person to be served is outside the province.

## SPOUSE

*Family Law Act*: 3(1): a person is a spouse for the purposes of this Act if the person (a) is married to another person, or (b) has lived with another person in a marriage-like relationship, and: (i) has done so for a continuous period of at least 2 years, (ii) except in Parts 5 [*Property Division*] and 6 [*Pension Division*], has a child with the other person.

*Divorce Act*: “either of two persons who are married to each other”. Effective March 1, 2021, the definition will be amended under this act to include former spouses under certain subsections of the act (see s 2(1)).

*Supreme Court Family Rules*: either a legally married spouse or “a man or woman not married to each other, who lived together as married spouses for a period of not less than two years” and who made an application under the Act within one year of separation. Same-sex partners are now viewed as common-law spouses provided the marriage-like relationship lasts for at least two years and the application for relief is commenced within one year of separation. The definition of “stepparent” includes a same-sex partner who also qualifies as a same-sex spouse.

*Wills, Estates and Succession Act*: under s 2, two persons are spouses of each other for the purposes of this Act if they were both alive immediately before the date of death of one of the persons and (a) they were married to each other, or (b) they had lived with each other in a marriage-like relationship for at least 2 years. Two persons cease being spouses of each other for the purposes of this Act if, (a) in the case of a marriage, an event occurs that causes an interest in family property, as defined in Part 5 [*Property Division*] of the *Family Law Act*, to arise, or (b) in the case of a marriage-like relationship, one or both persons terminate the relationship.

In British Columbia, the common law definition of a spouse evolves alongside the definition of a “marriage-like relationship”. The following are considerations from *Richardson Estate (Re)*, 2014 BCSC 2162 which arose as guiding questions in the determination of whether a couple is engaged in a marriage-like relationship, though the approach of the courts has been to treat these as considerations in a holistic determination of marriage-like relationships rather than a comprehensive checklist:

- (1) Shelter:
  - a. Did the parties live under the same roof?
  - b. What were the sleeping arrangements?
  - c. Did anyone else occupy or share the available accommodation?
- (2) Sexual and Personal Behaviour:
  - a. Did the parties have sexual relations? If not, why not?
  - b. Did they maintain an attitude of fidelity to each other?
  - c. What were their feelings towards each other?
  - d. Did they communicate on a personal level?
  - e. Did they eat their meals together?
  - f. What, if anything, did they do to assist each other with problems or during illness?
  - g. Did they buy gifts for each other on special occasions?
- (3) Services: what was the conduct and habit of the parties in relation to
  - a. Preparation of meals,
  - b. Washing and mending clothes,
  - c. Shopping,
  - d. Household maintenance,
  - e. Any other domestic services?
- (4) Social:
  - a. Did they participate together or separately in neighbourhood and community activities?
  - b. What was the relationship and conduct of each of them towards members of their respective families and how did such families behave towards the parties?
- (5) Societal:
  - a. What was the attitude and conduct of the community towards each of them and as a couple?
- (6) Support (economic):
  - a. What were the financial arrangements between the parties regarding the provision of or contribution towards the necessities of life (food, clothing, shelter, recreation, etc.)?
  - b. What were the arrangements concerning the acquisition and ownership of property?

- c. Was there any special financial arrangement between them which both agreed would be determinant of their overall relationship?
- (7) Children:
  - a. What was the attitude and conduct of the parties concerning children?