

Attachment A
NOTICE TO ALL PARTIES INVOLVED IN FAMILY COURT

The following are the policies of the Family Law Division of the Charlotte County Circuit Court. Read them carefully. All parties are expected to know and obey these policies.

COURTROOM CONDUCT AND BEHAVIOR

All courtroom proceedings shall be conducted with dignity, decorum, courtesy and civility. You may be escorted out of the courtroom if you cannot conduct yourself in accordance with these policies.

1. **BY ORDER OF THE CHIEF JUDGE:** THE USE OF CELLULAR TELEPHONES AND PAGERS IS PROHIBITED IN THE COURTROOM. ALL CELLULAR TELEPHONES AND PAGERS MUST BE TURNED OFF PRIOR TO ENTERING THE COURTROOM AND REMAIN OFF WHILE IN THE COURTROOM. FAILURE TO COMPLY WITH THIS ORDER MAY RESULT IN THE SEIZURE OF THE TELEPHONE AND/OR A CHARGE OF CONTEMPT OF COURT.

NO VIDEO OR AUDIO RECORDING IS ALLOWED AT ANY TIME.

2. **Dress appropriately.** Non-business attire such as shorts, tank tops, halter tops, undershirts, and caps or hats should not be worn to court. Judges have the authority to ban persons dressed inappropriately from participating in the proceedings.

3. **Speaking.** A court proceeding is not a free-for-all where one can say whatever one wants whenever one feels like it. Parties do not speak unless they are directed by the Judge or a lawyer to speak and then they should speak only to the Judge or lawyer. Parties are always addressing their comments to the court, NOT the other party. Interruptions, sarcasm, insults, and unresponsiveness answers will not be tolerated and probably won't help your position.

- **DO NOT** argue with or threaten anyone, especially the Judge.
- **DO NOT** use derogatory or disrespectful verbal language.

- **DO NOT** display derogatory or disrespectful non-verbal signs or expressions.
- **THE JUDGE HAS THE AUTHORITY TO HOLD ANYONE IN CONTEMPT OF COURT OR TO EXPEL ANYONE FROM THE COURTROOM WHO INTERFERES WITH COURT PROCEEDINGS.**

4. **Disruptive Behaviors.** While it is understood that parties may be upset or emotional when they come to court, they are expected to keep their anger and behavior under control.

5. **Children in Court.** CHILDREN ARE *NOT* TO BE BROUGHT TO COURT WITHOUT PRIOR COURT APPROVAL.

6. **Children as witnesses.** Unless permission has been obtained from the Judge *in advance*, a child *will not be allowed to testify* and should not be brought to the courthouse.

7. **Parties should not bring their children to the courthouse at all.**

APPEARING IN COURT WITHOUT AN ATTORNEY

8. You may choose to represent yourself in family court proceedings. A self-represented litigant is not entitled to special treatment or privileges, and must follow the same rules of procedure and ethical regulations that govern practicing attorneys. Ignorance of the rules, procedures, statutes, and case law is not a defense or an excuse.

9. The Court must treat a Pro Se party much the same way it treats a lawyer. Pro Se litigants are not expected to be as skilled and knowledgeable as lawyers, but they are subject to the same rules and regulations as a party who has an attorney. Judges are forbidden by law to act as lawyers for unrepresented parties. It is also unethical for Judges to give them special treatment nor can Judges give legal advice. The Judge's Assistant is part of the office of the Circuit Court Judge and is forbidden from doing anything the Judge cannot do.

CONTACT WITH THE JUDGE'S OFFICE

10. A self-represented party is authorized to contact the Judge's office by telephone or e-mail on matters related to scheduling only. There is no other **authorized purpose** to contact the Judge's office. You may not visit the judge's office nor is it permissible for you to speak to the Judge directly outside of the courtroom. It is not the duty of the Judicial Assistant to listen to parties complain. Judicial Assistants are strictly prohibited from giving legal advice.

- **Judicial Assistants have been instructed to terminate the call should a litigant become abusive on the telephone. Thereafter all communication between that party and the Judicial Assistant shall be via e-mail.**
- **All requests to speak to the Judge on the telephone or to have a private conference *WILL BE REFUSED*.**
- **Letters written to the Judge will be filed in the court file and copies will be distributed to all parties. The Judge will not respond, however.**

11. RESOURCES:

Self-Help Services: A "Self-Help" program for self-represented litigants is administered by the Administrative Office of the Courts. At the Charlotte County Justice Center (second floor), assistance is limited to written information and Notary services. Pre-printed packets of forms for Petitioners and Respondents may be purchased from the Clerk of Courts. **EMPLOYEES IN THESE OFFICES ARE NOT PERMITTED TO PROVIDE LEGAL ADVICE.** They do not act as your legal advisor, nor your clerical support staff. A self-service Law Library is located on the ground floor of the Charlotte County Justice Center.

Florida State Courts Self-Help Website: Among other information, family law forms may be downloaded and printed for use in

dissolution, paternity, child support, name change, and grandparent visitation cases. The forms are up-to-date, in ready to use format, with all amendments incorporated. All forms are provided free of charge by the Florida Supreme Court at www.flcourts.org. In the middle of the home page is a tab titled SELF-HELP. Family Law Forms is the very first link under that title.

Florida Bar Lawyer Referral Service: The Florida Bar Lawyer Referral Service (LRS), provides referrals to attorneys who will conduct an initial one-half hour office consultation for a fee. Interested Parties may call this toll-free number from anywhere in Florida: 1-800-342-8011. An on-line referral is also available at: www.floridabar.org.