



Guide: What to Do When Served with Family Law Paperwork

Being served with family law papers can feel overwhelming, but taking the right steps early can make a big difference. Here's a step-by-step guide based on advice from Beverly Allen, a Tacoma-based family law attorney with over 14 years of experience.

1. Identify and Review the Documents

- **Open and Read Everything:** Check what type of paperwork you've been served with.
- **Petition:** This document starts the legal case. Common petitions include:
 - *Petition for Dissolution* (divorce)
 - *Petition for Legal Separation*
 - *Petition to Establish a Parenting Plan*
- **Case Number:** Look in the top right corner. A valid case number means the document has been filed with the court.
- **Summons:** This document informs you about deadlines and where to send your response.

2. Locate Forms and Resources

- **Forms:** Responding often requires mandatory forms in Washington State.
 - *Where to Find Forms:*
 - **Pierce County Law Library:** Provides form packets.
 - **Washington Law Help:** Free resources for family law forms ([Washington Law Help website](#)).
 - **Washington State Courts:** A full list of forms is at courts.wa.gov/forms.

3. Complete Your Response

- **Match the Petition's Structure:** Your response should align with each part of the petition. For example, if Part 1 of the petition lists facts about the marriage, Part 1 of your response should address those facts.
- **Three Response Options:**
 - *Agree:* Check "agree" if the information is accurate.
 - *Disagree:* If you disagree with certain points (e.g., property division, child support), check "disagree" and explain briefly.
 - *Don't Know:* Check this if you're unsure about specific information.

4. File and Send Your Response

- **File Your Response with the Court:** For Pierce County, you can use the LINX system, an e-filing platform. [Pierce County LINX Help](#) provides resources on account setup and e-filing.
- **Serve the Petitioner:** Send a copy of your response to the petitioner (the person who filed the case).

5. Understanding Service Requirements

- **Proper Service:** Personal service is typically required, meaning someone other than the petitioner hands you the documents in person.
- **If Service is Improper:**
 - You can ask the court to require the petitioner to serve you correctly.
- **Other Service Types:**
 - *Service by Mail:* Only valid if the court has approved this method, typically allowing 60 days to respond.
 - *Service by Publication:* May be used as a last resort, generally giving you 90 days to respond.

6. Avoiding Default Judgments

- **Consequences of Not Responding:** Ignoring service does not stop the case from proceeding. If you don't respond:
 - The petitioner may ask the court to finalize without your input (default judgment).
 - Once involved in the case, you must receive notice of a motion for default, giving you a chance to respond.
- **Respond to Avoid Default:** Filing a response ensures you are part of the case and prevents a default judgment without your knowledge.

7. Consider Accepting Service

- **What It Means:** Accepting service means you acknowledge receiving the documents, but it does not mean you agree with the petition's requests.
- **Advantages of Accepting Service:**
 - Helps speed up the court process.
 - Can allow you to reach a resolution faster, especially if you plan to mediate or negotiate.

Final Tips

- **Resources:**
 - *Pierce County Law Library* and *Washington Law Help* are valuable resources for forms and guidance.
- **Contact Beverly Allen:** If you need further assistance, Beverly Allen, a family law attorney in Tacoma, is available to help you navigate these steps.

Contact Info:

- Phone: 253-778-6376
- Website: [Nexus Legal Counsel](#)

By following these steps, you can ensure your response is timely and complete, helping you stay involved in the process and safeguard your rights in the case.