



6 tips for lawyers on Family Management Conferences

If people need to bring a family law dispute to BC Provincial Court, their first court appearance is a virtual family management conference. When lawyers attend these conferences with their clients, they can play a big role in making them effective.

A successful family management conference stabilizes a family's situation as much as possible and helps the parties prepare for an efficient, effective trial. After two years' experience conducting family management conferences, Provincial Court judges have these tips on how lawyers can help.

Preparing

1. Speak to your clients well before the family management conference (FMC), not just to take instructions but to educate them on what to expect at their conference.
 - Explain what the client can expect to happen, emphasizing that FMCs are not full hearings. Read, and have your client read [Family Management Conferences](#) and watch the video or listen to the podcast provided there.
 - Explain that even though FMCs are virtual, they are still court appearances and clients as well as lawyers should behave as if they were in a court room.
 - Ensure your clients are aware of the Court's expectations for behaviour at virtual appearances, set out in Notice [Notice 21 Remote Attendance in the Provincial Court](#).
2. Make sure that your clients are equipped, familiar with, and comfortable with the technology needed to attend FMCs virtually. Ensure they have an appropriate place from which to attend court remotely. See:
 - [Notice 21 Remote Attendance in the Provincial Court](#)
 - [Microsoft Teams Guide](#)
3. Once you have spoken to your client, speak to opposing counsel (or if appropriate, to a self-represented party) to try to identify the issues and see whether any can be resolved by agreement.
4. If your client is requesting interim or final orders for support, ensure that financial evidence is filed. Do the necessary calculations, send them to the other party, and file them before the conference.

5. If the parties haven't agreed on consent orders, note the witnesses you might call and the documents that might be needed for a full hearing.

At the conference

6. Put all your preparation into action at the FMC. In your opening remarks, clearly and succinctly:

- Identify the issues to be discussed in the limited time available at the FMC.
- Identify any consent matters so the judge can deal with them.
- Give the judge a time estimate for a hearing or trial if all issues are not resolved.

Remember

FMCs are not like Supreme Court Chambers' applications where issues may be decided on large stacks of affidavits. Instead, they are an enhanced first appearance where judges can make consent orders and determine the next steps for parties on issues they haven't agreed on.

The FMC judge can help the parties define disputed issues and make interim orders. If a hearing is needed, they may also make case management orders about timing and evidence to ensure the trial is conducted efficiently, in a manner consistent with the complexity of the case.

While all the legal issues may be resolved at a family management conference in some cases, they are primarily designed to stabilize a family's situation until major issues can be resolved by agreement or trial, and to help parties begin to prepare to resolve those issues.

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