



Best Practices for Legal Reference

How do I know it's a Legal Question?

- ▶ Listen to the words they use to describe the situation
 - ▶ Fair/rights/allowed or permitted
 - ▶ Is it allowed for my landlord to enter my apartment when I'm not there?
 - ▶ It's not fair that my ex isn't paying support.
 - ▶ My mom is disabled and can't drive. Does my brother have a right to use her car?
- ▶ Does the situation include a conflict of some kind, that may need a resolution?
- ▶ Did the situation arise from a law-related process?

Interpersonal Dynamics

- ▶ Emotions impact the interaction for both the patron and the provider.
- ▶ Focus on CAN rather than CANNOT - use positive language.
- ▶ Set and respect limits.
- ▶ Develop and practice scripted language.

Information not Advice

The difference is...

- ▶ Are you *broadening* or *narrowing*
- ▶ Who has the power?
- ▶ Rephrase - look for the information nugget
- ▶ Trust your instincts

***When in doubt - ask a colleague**

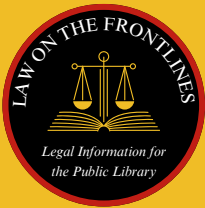
Rely on your strengths

- ▶ Help find information
- ▶ Demonstrate how to use resources
- ▶ Educate about the content and structure
- ▶ Suggest other sources of information
- ▶ Direct to other providers

Ask for more information

- ▶ Where is this happening?
- ▶ What are you trying to accomplish?
- ▶ What have you looked at so far?
- ▶ Who have you talked to?
- ▶ Where did you hear about...?
- ▶ Are you in court or aiming to be in court? Do you know which one?
- ▶ Do you have paperwork I could take a look at?*

**use caution as we cannot help patrons fill out paperwork, or verify their paperwork is correct, however we may be able to decipher the law topic from paperwork.*



Best Practices for Legal Reference

Determine the Need

- Information
- Law
- Legal Assistance
- Services
- Forms

Helpful Resources to Start with

- [People's Law Library of Maryland \(PLL\)](#)
- [Maryland Court Help](#)
- [Nolo](#), Legal Articles
- Cornell Legal Information Institute's [Wex](#)
- What can you access already?
 - Your library catalog or database collection
 - Partner libraries

Sorting Out Referrals



Where can I send them for more?

- [PLL Legal Services Directory](#) and [Clinic Calendar](#)
- Local Resources - [county law library](#)
- [Maryland Court Help Centers](#)
- Government Agencies

Best Practices

- Rephrase the question
- Gather details (who, what, when, where, other)
- Identify the type of need (info, law text, legal assistance, govt. service forms)
- Identify the broad topic & terms
- Locate descriptive sources (about the law - secondary sources)
- Find applicable law if needed (primary source)
- Find referrals

This sheet is provided for informational purposes only and is not a substitute for legal advice. It is intended to complement and enhance your understanding of the subject matter covered during training sessions.