



From Indecision to Resolution: Navigating Family Law and Child Protection Matters

October 22, 2025

Presenter: Vanassa Richards-Thompson, Family Law Lawyer, The Law Offices of Vanassa Richards-Thompson

www.onefamilylaw.ca

Land Acknowledgement

We acknowledge that this land is the traditional territory of many nations including the Huron-Wendat, Haudenosaunee, and the Mississaugas of the Credit. Today, the meeting place of Toronto is still home to many Indigenous people. We honour all the First Nation, Metis and Inuit people living on this land. We recognize the traditional territories on which our organization is located, and on which our programs and trainings take place.

Disclaimer

This webinar is for general information purposes only and is not legal advice. It is not intended to be used as legal advice for a specific legal problem.

METRAC: Action on Violence

METRAC: Action on Violence

- works to end violence against women, youth and children, Two Spirit, Trans, and Nonbinary people.
- a not-for-profit, community-based organization

METRAC's Community Justice Program

- provides accessible legal information and education for women and service providers
- focuses on law that affects women, from diverse backgrounds, especially those experiencing violence or abuse

FLEW, Family Law Education for Women in Ontario

- provides information on women's rights and options under Ontario family law
- in 14 languages (including ASL), accessible formats, online and in print

Presenter

Vanassa Richards-Thompson was born in Jamaica and immigrated to Canada in 2004. While previously a practicing lawyer in Jamaica, she re-qualified in Canada and was called to the Ontario Bar in 2009. Vanassa is a panel lawyer for the Office of the Children's Lawyer and passionately represents the most vulnerable members of the Society, including visible minorities, victims of domestic violence and at risk, children and youth.

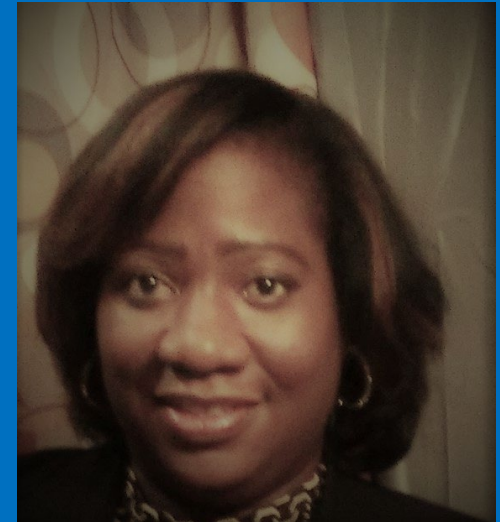
In 2021 Vanassa became the first-ever Black President in the Peel Law Association (PLA)'s then 75-year history and was returned as President for a second term, ending in 2023. In addition to her work with the PLA, Vanassa volunteers with community organizations such as the Knights Table, Regeneration Brampton, ResQ Youth International, The Dream Never Dies Foundation and is a Board Member of Acorn2Oak Youth Services in Mississauga.

Stemming from her love of children, Vanassa was a Youth Pastor at Faith Gospel Tabernacle Church in Brampton for several years and is currently the church's Sunday School Superintendent. She created and for several years led, a Reading Club in the community comprised primarily of children of Black and South Asian backgrounds to support a love for reading.

She has authored articles published in both the Jamaican and Canadian media and is a sought after inspirational/motivational speaker and poet. Her first book, ***Poetry Poised to Promote*** was published in May 2024 and is available on Amazon and has been given a 5-star rating. Vanassa was shortlisted as one of the top 75 Immigrants in Canada in 2024 and is the recipient of several awards from both legal and community organizations. In February 2023, Vanassa was appointed a Deputy Judge of the Superior Court of Justice, Central West Region.

When not doing "legal work", Vanassa is an avid walker, she enjoys travelling to historical places, reading, decorating, listening to gospel music and spending time with her husband and two "miracle" boys.

**Vanassa Richards-
Thompson,
Lawyer**



TOPICS TO BE COVERED

1. Parenting arrangements - Navigating Decision-making responsibility and parenting time
2. Parenting arrangements - Navigating divorce, child support, spousal support and property division
3. Telling your story
4. Putting Your Child Protection Plan together

NAVIGATING DECISION-MAKING AND PARENTING TIME

(A) Family Law Issues – Ontario Court of Justice

The big five:

(a) Decision-making (formerly “custody”)

(b) Parenting time (formerly “access”)

(c) Health/ Medical

(d) Education

(e) Extra-curricular Activities, including faith; and

• **Bonus Related: (f)** Travel, Passport and Document rights

WHAT IS DECISION-MAKING RESPONSIBILITY?

- **Decision-making responsibility** is the responsibility for making significant decisions about a child's life and well-being. For example:
 - the child's school
 - the child's religion
 - medical decisions
 - significant extra-curricular activities

WHAT IS DECISION-MAKING RESPONSIBILITY? (cont'd)

Decision-making responsibility is not the same as “parenting time.”

It does not determine:

- How much time each parent spends with the child
- How much child support is paid

WHAT IS DECISION-MAKING RESPONSIBILITY? (cont'd)

- A person with decision-making responsibility can let someone else be responsible for ordinary, daily decisions for the child such as:
 - When and what to feed the child
 - What the child's activities will be
 - How to look after a scraped knee
- People like a teacher, babysitter and other parent can be responsible for these ordinary decisions



TYPES OF DECISION-MAKING RESPONSIBILITY

- Sole decision-making responsibility
- Joint decision-making responsibility
- Shared or divided decision-making responsibility

Know which one is right for you

WHAT IS “PARENTING TIME”?

- **Parenting time is:**
 - The time that the child spends in the care of a parent or a person standing in the role of the parent
 - Determined separately from decision-making responsibility
 - May affect child support amounts
- A parent has the right to apply for parenting time with a child, even if the parents:
 - Separated
 - never married or lived together
 - didn't have an ongoing relationship

WHAT IS “PARENTING TIME”? (cont’d)

- Reasonable (Generous) parenting time
- Fixed parenting time
- Graduated
- Supervised parenting time
- No parenting time

CHILD SUPPORT

- Parents have a legal **duty** to support their children financially
- This duty continues even when parents separate or divorce
- If the child lives with you for most of the time, the other parent must help with the costs of raising the child.
- Children have the right to financial support from both of their parents
- The parent who pays child support is called the **payor**
- Child support amounts are focused on the needs of the child and based on the income of the payor, not on the payor's needs or spending habits

CHILD SUPPORT (cont'd)

- Child support covers the costs of things like:
 - Food
 - Clothing
 - Housing
 - School costs



CHILD SUPPORT (cont'd)

Questions to ask:

- Is child support payable?
- How much is payable?
- How will it be payable? and
- For how long will it be payable?

PREPARING YOUR APPLICATION

1) Start taking steps.

2) Document, document, document, write information, dates, details...

- Remember, if something happens and you have to leave the home, or you have to commence an action, you may not be able to take everything, or remember everything, so documenting is important

3) Take pictures of bank statements, make copies of passports, health cards and any other government documents

PREPARING YOUR AFFIDAVIT IN SUPPORT OF DECISION-MAKING AND PARENTING TIME

- Highlight your plans and goals for the child
- Include all social, educational, and religious needs
- Include those who will help to make your plan viable

PREPARING YOUR FINANCIAL STATEMENTS

Be flexible

- i. Write the relevant information down, BUT, If you can't get the passports, the social insurance cards or the health cards, bank statements, pay stubs, Notices of Assessment or Income Tax Returns; or
- ii. If you have your own phone – take pictures of them
- iii. Be honest – Have the evidence to support

SPECIAL CONSIDERATIONS - PARENT AND CHILD

(B) Family Law Issues – Superior Court of Justice

- Divorce, Child Support, Spousal Support & Property Division
- In the Family Court matters you will either be commencing an Application, or Responding using your Answer.
 - (i) Start by doing your research
 - (ii) Find a lawyer who “represents” you. Your values, your interests....You are interviewing lawyers – see if the lawyer is listening to you or just talking to you. See if the lawyer “hears” you and what is important to you.
 - (iii) Then ask the lawyers questions about process, about timelines, about interactions

TELLING YOUR STORY

- Write it down. You have lived it. You know it better than anyone else.
- Then give it to your lawyer who will put it into the forms and legalese.
- The lawyer is going to edit it. Canada has “no fault divorce” .
- Talk about the difficulties – Maybe Domestic Violence or Intimate Partner Violence.
- Refer to the present situation and remedy that you are seeking from the Court.

TELLING YOUR STORY (cont'd)

Use the **WHO / WHAT/ WHEN/ WHERE/ WHY** format.

- **Who** - You are this child's parent
- **What** - You are seeking sole or joint decision-making and these terms of parenting time
- **When** - You have been doing it since You want it to continue because
- **Where** – this is where you live and /This is where you want parenting time to take place and why
- **Why** - You think this is in the interest of the child because

The reasons will generally be a little bit different for each family but there will be common themes which run through every family situation

CHILD PROTECTION PROCEEDINGS

If you are dealing with a child protection proceeding:

- Usually responding to a Child Protection Application from a Children's Aid Society

First of all: What are you responding to?

Read the Application -

- See what is the issue that they need resolved
- Focus on the issue **Putting your child protection plan together**
- Request the Children Aid Society's help – They are there to assist you in addressing that protection concern
- Culturally appropriate or culturally sensitive resources and connections

COURT PROCEEDINGS – THINGS TO NOTE

Whether its family court or child protection matters

- **When Putting the Plan together focus on these steps to take to get the results you want**
- **Be proactive (before the action starts)**
- If it's a family law case and you start seeing signs, or realize that your relationship is heading in a problematic direction... and you will know; e.g. the arguments are getting worse, the demands getting greater, the behaviour that is escalating from arguments to threats...

COURT PROCEEDINGS – THINGS TO NOTE (cont'd)

- **Be vigilant – Get or ask for assistance**
 - i. If it is the Application that you are commencing or the Answer that you are preparing
 - ii. Your answers and any questions that you have for the lawyer should be reflective of your situation
 - iii. The same would apply if it's a child protection matter

COURT PROCEEDINGS – THINGS TO NOTE(cont'd)

- **Be teachable/reachable**

- i. Review the Children Aid Society's application carefully
- ii. Start working to address their concerns right away
- iii. Remember they are not your enemy
- iv. Get to know and work cooperatively with the worker
- v. Ask for and make use of the resources that they have available
- vi. Make it a team effort – call upon or include anyone that can help make your plan a success, sometimes that means someone from even the other parent's side of the family, your wider community, your faith group, church, temple, mosque.

COURT PROCEEDINGS – THINGS TO NOTE(cont'd)

What Not to Do – Avoid These Mistakes

- **Don't Lose Focus**

- i. Want to punish – lose focus. They may be a terrible spouse but they are still the child's parent and unless they have been abusive to the child, they will have a right to see them

- **Don't be unreasonable**

- i. Not every child visit should be at the supervised access centre. It can be at the nearest restaurant, maybe one that means something to you because you had to go there as a family. Maybe one that your child enjoys

COURT PROCEEDINGS – THINGS TO NOTE FOR CHILD PROTECTION MATTERS

What Not to Do – Avoid These Mistakes (cont'd)

- **Do not view the worker as your enemy.**
 - i. Remember the Children's Aid Society (CAS)/Society's job, their mandate under law is to protect. They see something that the child/ren need protecting from, so you try to address that "something".
 - ii. It may be non-attendance at school – address it
 - iii. They may say the house is dirty (health hazard) and suggest that you are a hoarder and the children aren't safe (hoarding is a mental health concern) – you're not hoarding because you're nasty or unclean, you're hoarding because you are struggling to cope with a breakup or an abusive relationship or a dramatic change in circumstances.

CHILD PROTECTION PROCEEDINGS (cont'd)

What Not to Do – Avoid These Mistakes (cont'd)

- **Don't engage in self-sabotaging behaviour**
 - i. Sometimes criminal charges result in an abusive partner being removed from the home
 - ii. Sometimes you are requesting help, some counselling, some therapy, some resources.
 - iii. Sometimes the interaction with the Children's Aid Society is as a result of lack the resources, connections and/or family and other supports to take care of yourself and the children.
 - iv. Sometimes there is removal of the child
- **Never sign an agreement without reviewing with a lawyer, or while under duress but if you do...**

Inaction is your worst enemy

FAMILY LAW RESOURCES

- **Legal Aid Ontario** www.legalaid.on.ca/en/getting/default.asp
 - Free telephone interpretation services for languages other than English & French
 - Toll-free: 1-800-668-8258; TTY: 1-866-641-8867
- **Ontario Women's Justice Network (OWJN)** www.owjn.org
- **FLEW (Family Law Education for Women)** www.onefamilylaw.ca/en/resources/
- **FODF (Femmes Ontariennes et Droit de la Familles)** www.undroitdefamille.ca/
- **Family Court Support Workers**
 - Check local community agency or call Toll-free:1-888-579-2888 or 416-314-2447
 - <https://www.ontario.ca/page/family-court-support-workers>

FAMILY LAW RESOURCES (cont'd)

- **Mandatory Information Program (MIP)**
https://www.ontariocourts.ca/scj/family/court-services/#Mandatory_Information_Programs_MIPs
- **Family Law Information Centres (FLICs)** <https://www.ontario.ca/page/family-law-information-centres>
- **Steps to Justice** <https://stepstojustice.ca/>
- **Family Responsibility Office**, Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services
 - Toll-free: 1-888-815-2757

FAMILY VIOLENCE AND ABUSE RESOURCES

For information, if your partner is abusive or violent:

Assaulted Women's Helpline www.awhl.org

- 24 hours/7 days; multiple languages
- Toll-free: 1-866-863-0511; TTY: 1-866-863-7868

- **Ontario Coalition of Rape Crisis Centres** <http://www.sexualassaultsupport.ca/>
- **Network of Sexual Assault/Domestic Violence Treatment Centres**
www.sadvtreatmentcentres.ca
- **Victim Services Directory** <https://www.justice.gc.ca/eng/cj-jp/victims-victimes/vsd-rsv/index.html>

FAMILY VIOLENCE AND ABUSE RESOURCES (cont'd)

Barbra Schlifer Legal Clinic

- Toronto: 416-323-9149
- Free counselling, referral, legal and interpreter services to survivors of violence (Family, Criminal and Immigration law)

<https://www.schliferclinic.com/>

Luke's Place - Virtual Legal Clinic

- Free legal advice for women who are subjected to intimate partner violence
- Tel: 1-866-516-3116

<https://lukesplace.ca/>

• Domestic Violence – Legal Aid

- Free 2-hour emergency meeting with a lawyer
- Offered through some shelters and community legal clinics
- Toll-free: 1-800-668-8258; TTY: 1-866-641-8867

<https://www.legalaid.on.ca/services/domestic-abuse/>

GENERAL RESOURCES

Law Society of Ontario Referral Service

- Online: <https://lsrs.lso.ca/lsrs/welcome> (English or French)
- **Crisis line:** 416-947-5255 or Toll free: 1-855-947-5255

JusticeNet

- Reduced fee lawyers for low-income people not eligible for Legal Aid
- <https://www.justicenet.ca/>

Community legal clinics

- Toll-free 1-800-668-8258
- <https://www.legalaid.on.ca/legal-clinics/>

GENERAL RESOURCES (cont'd)

The Family Justice Centre – Virtual Legal Clinic

- 647-952-3354 (Check the website for the current intake hours)
- <https://www.probonostudents.ca/family-justice-centre>

Ontario Legal information Centre

- Free 30-minute meeting with a lawyer (legal information and referral services)
- Meetings by phone at 1-844-343-7462 or 613-842-7462
- Video conferencing available upon request
- <https://legalinfocentre.ca/>

Ministry of the Attorney General

- Toll free: 1-800-518-7901
- TTY: 1-877-425-0575
- <https://www.ontario.ca/page/ministry-attorney-general>

METRAC



158 Spadina Rd

Toronto, ON, Canada

(416) 392-3135

info@metrac.org | www.metrac.org

***This information is accurate as of
October 22, 2025***

Funded by:

