

# Helping clients with legal questions



CLEO (Community Legal Education Ontario / Éducation juridique communautaire Ontario)

Many people turn to public and community organizations with questions about a variety of issues. And many of these questions involve the law.

When a client asks you a question about the law, should you answer? How detailed should your response be? You can always point clients to reliable legal information, like CLEO and the Steps to Justice website.

Otherwise, how full your response will be depends on your answer to this question:

## Do I have the knowledge and experience to give an accurate answer?

Many community workers develop **knowledge** and **experience** based on the issues and questions that clients repeatedly bring to them. You might regularly help women with safety planning or help tenants fill out Landlord and Tenant Board forms. Or you may not be comfortable doing these things.

Either way, it's important to know where to find up-to-date information about the law that you can share with clients.

## Before you offer help

When a client asks you a question that involves the law, think about your experience and the support within your workplace. Ask yourself:

- Is this something that my organization specializes in?
- Is it part of my job to give this type of help?
- Have I recently received training on the issue?
- Do I have experience giving help in this area?

If you answer “Yes” to these questions, you’re ready to help your client.

### Reliable legal information

CLEO  
[cleo.on.ca](http://cleo.on.ca)

Steps to Justice  
[stepstojustice.ca](http://stepstojustice.ca)



## What you need to know

Even when you're comfortable helping a client, make sure that:

- you have easy access to colleagues, in or outside your organization, who you can talk to when you're not sure what's the best help to give.
- you're aware of "red flags". Is the situation more complex than what you usually help with? Can you talk with someone who has expertise in that area of law? Build on your experience.

Look for more training opportunities and mentorship. Learn to identify what you can help with and what's beyond your knowledge and experience.

- you're familiar with people and places in your community that you can connect your client with when they need more help. Keep building and expanding these networks.

### Webinars and tools for community workers

CLEO Connect  
[cleoconnect.ca](https://cleoconnect.ca)

### Help filling out forms

Guided pathways  
[stepstojustice.ca/GP](https://stepstojustice.ca/GP)

### Free legal help

Community legal clinics  
[legalaid.on.ca/legal-clinics](https://legalaid.on.ca/legal-clinics)

## Keep in mind

It's always important that you:

- let your client know that you're not a lawyer or paralegal
- don't tell your client what they should do or what will happen
- don't accept a fee or donation for providing help

### Legal information and legal advice

In Ontario, there are certain services that only a licensed lawyer or paralegal can provide. The rules are not entirely clear. And there's no clear line between legal information, which anyone can give, and legal advice, which only a licensed legal professional can give. If you're concerned that a client's question is beyond your knowledge and experience, it's best to refer them to free or affordable legal services.

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