

YOU WANT TO REPRESENT YOURSELF: WHAT ARE YOUR RESPONSIBILITIES?

IF YOU REPRESENT YOURSELF, the court will say that you are **Pro Se**. *Pro Se* means that you will be representing yourself without a lawyer. If you are representing yourself you **MUST** learn about the Divorce Process and the Forms you need to fill out and file with the court. The court offers *Pro Se* Education classes for people who are representing themselves. The court also has helpful information you can get from the staff.

- You will not be expected to act like a lawyer but you must understand the basics about divorce laws, court procedures, and what forms you need to fill out. Ask the court staff about the *pro se* education courses and workshops they offer. Talk to friends who have been through a divorce or parentage case. The court has sample forms for your use, or you may go to www.vermontjudiciary.org, where there are sample forms that you may fill in and print out. You can also find information and forms at www.vtlawhelp.org.
- If you have decided to represent yourself you **must fill out and file an appearance form** (Form #831) with the Family Court. You can get this form from the court or from the court's website at www.vermontjudiciary.org. The form has a place for your name, address and phone number so that the court and other party know where to reach you. If you change your address or telephone number, you must notify the court and the other party of the change in writing.
- Whenever you send anything to the court you **must send a copy to your spouse or the other parent if it is a parentage case**. If the other party has a lawyer, you must send the copy to the lawyer. Be sure to use your case's docket number on anything you send to the court.

The court will probably require both parties to provide financial information. **You must provide complete financial information when you are asked**. If you try to hide income or property, the court will not trust you and you could be prosecuted for a crime.

The only time you may talk to the judge or magistrate is in a court hearing. The judge or magistrate are neutral and may not talk to parties about their case except in court.

You may not try to talk to the judge or magistrate when the other party is not present. Spouses in a divorce are often hurting, both emotionally and financially. Things may be said which feel upsetting because they seem to be unfair or untrue. Always try to keep your emotions under control. Do not vent your frustrations on the court staff and do not interrupt your spouse or his or her lawyer, or the judge or magistrate, when they are speaking in court. You will get an opportunity to speak when it is your turn. **Behaving in a calm and courteous manner will help you in the end.**

You must know the facts of your case and be able to present them to the judge or magistrate. The judge or magistrate will know little or nothing about you, your spouse, your children, or your concerns when the case begins. You need to know what is important to you and what information you want the judge to know. Do not waste your court time on matters that do not help the judge or magistrate to decide your case. Listen carefully to what is said. Make sure your presentation is relevant and to the point.

Take advantage of the information available at the court, on the web, and at your local library.

·Be sure to familiarize yourself with all the information available to you.

You can learn more from www.vtlawhelp.org.

**You can obtain helpful information, as well as court forms at:
www.VermontJudiciary.org.**