Elder law attorneys help seniors and caregivers

Elder law is a specialized legal area that's focused on seniors and their families.

Elder law attorneys often concentrate on issues like figuring out how to pay for long-term care, Medicaid spend down, drafting Powers of Attorney, or estate planning.

Having important legal documents in place allows you to provide the best care for your older adult, both now and toward the end of life.

That's why it's so important to find an expert lawyer you can trust.

We explain how to find an elder law attorney and share 5 tips for choosing one that's reputable and experienced.

2 ways to find an elder law attorney

1. Get a referral from someone you know
Getting a referral from family or a friend is a great way to find a lawyer. If they have a lawyer they're happy with and would work with again, that's a good sign.

It's best to get a referral from someone whose legal needs were similar to yours. But even if you need an elder care lawyer and your cousin worked with an excellent civil attorney, that referral is still useful.

Good lawyers know other good lawyers and will probably be able to refer you to a colleague they respect.

Similarly, financial advisors, accountants, and fiduciaries (someone legally appointed to manage money) are professionals who often work with elder law attorneys. If you know and trust one of these professionals, ask them for a referral.

2. Check the National Academy of of Elder Law Attorneys
The National Academy of of Elder Law Attorneys (NAELA) is the professional organization for attorneys who specialize in elder law and special needs planning.

Their website includes an attorney finder to help you locate elder law attorneys in your area.

5 tips for choosing a good elder law attorney

After getting referrals, you'll still need to choose an attorney.

Don't make up your mind about hiring a lawyer until you've met them, discussed your needs, and checked their credentials.

1. Meet for an initial consultation (possibly free)
An in-person meeting helps you get a feel for how they work and if their style works for you.

If you summarize your needs in advance, many lawyers will be willing to meet for 15 to 30 minutes at no charge. If there is a fee for a consultation, find out how much it will be.

If you meet with a few lawyers and present the same situation to each, you can also compare what they've said. That helps you confirm whether their advice is legitimate and helps you think of questions to ask about any differences in advice.

2. Find out how much experience they've had with issues similar to yours
Look for a lawyer with experience handling matters similar to yours.

Experience comes with years in practice *and* with how many of those types of situations they've dealt with.

For example, if you need help with a Power of Attorney, long-term care planning, or estate planning, ask them to describe their experience with those matters.

3. Evaluate their customer service
Working with someone who is professional and responsive is important.

After speaking with a lawyer, ask yourself:

- Are they polite and professional?
- Do they return your calls in a timely manner?
- Do they take time to explain things to make sure you understand what you're getting in to?
- Do they follow through with what they said they'll do?

4. Take plenty of notes
To help you remember what each lawyer said and how you felt about them, take notes during and after each meeting.

Later, you can review your notes to help you make the final decision.

5. Check their credentials
Check the State Bar Association website for your state.

Look up the attorney's name or Bar number to make sure they're actively licensed to practice law in your state. This will also show if they've ever been publicly disciplined.