



# PROFESSIONAL ASSISTANCE

How and When to Find a Great Attorney



!

If you believe that you or anyone else may have been seriously injured or have a medical or mental health emergency, immediately dial 911 or contact emergency services.





SAFE Support receives support from and recommends Karns & Karns, Personal Injury Attorneys; Cohen Law Partners, L.A. Bicycle Attorneys; and Pocrass & DeLosReyes, Attorneys at Law; but we encourage you to research additional firms and find one that meets your needs.

**Hiring an attorney is a big decision that requires you to trust someone, who might be a stranger, enough to put your financial future in their hands. At the same time, having a great attorney on your side is like having a big brother or big sister who relentlessly fights for you.**

To help your attorney be successful, you should take these steps before hiring an attorney:



Check out SAFE Support's Professional Assistance: When to Seek Legal Advice to know when the time is right to seek professional legal help.



Utilize the SAFE Support Post Collision Essentials series, which are available in the resource library on SAFE's website ([www.StreetsAreForEveryone.org/Library](http://www.StreetsAreForEveryone.org/Library)).

These documents will help ensure that you have everything you need to pursue your legal claims successfully.

**When you're ready to start the search for an attorney, we've provided the following suggestions for finding a great attorney that will give you the greatest possibility of success in your claim:**







1. Check out different law firms to find out who might be a good fit. A good place to start is the website for the California Bar Association, known as Cal Bar (<http://members.calbar.ca.gov/fal/LicenseeSearch/QuickSearch>). Cal Bar will tell you where a lawyer went to law school, how long they have been a licensed attorney and any history of discipline or punishment.

Online directories and review sites can also be helpful. Pay attention to repeated comments. You should also investigate whether the attorney or firm participates in professional associations or organizations, has won any awards, or has been recognized by their peers in lists like Super Lawyers (<https://www.superlawyers.com/>) or 40-under-40. All of these can be strong indicators of a good attorney.








2. Contact law firms and request a free consultation. You can contact as many as you would like; just confirm that each initial consultation is free.

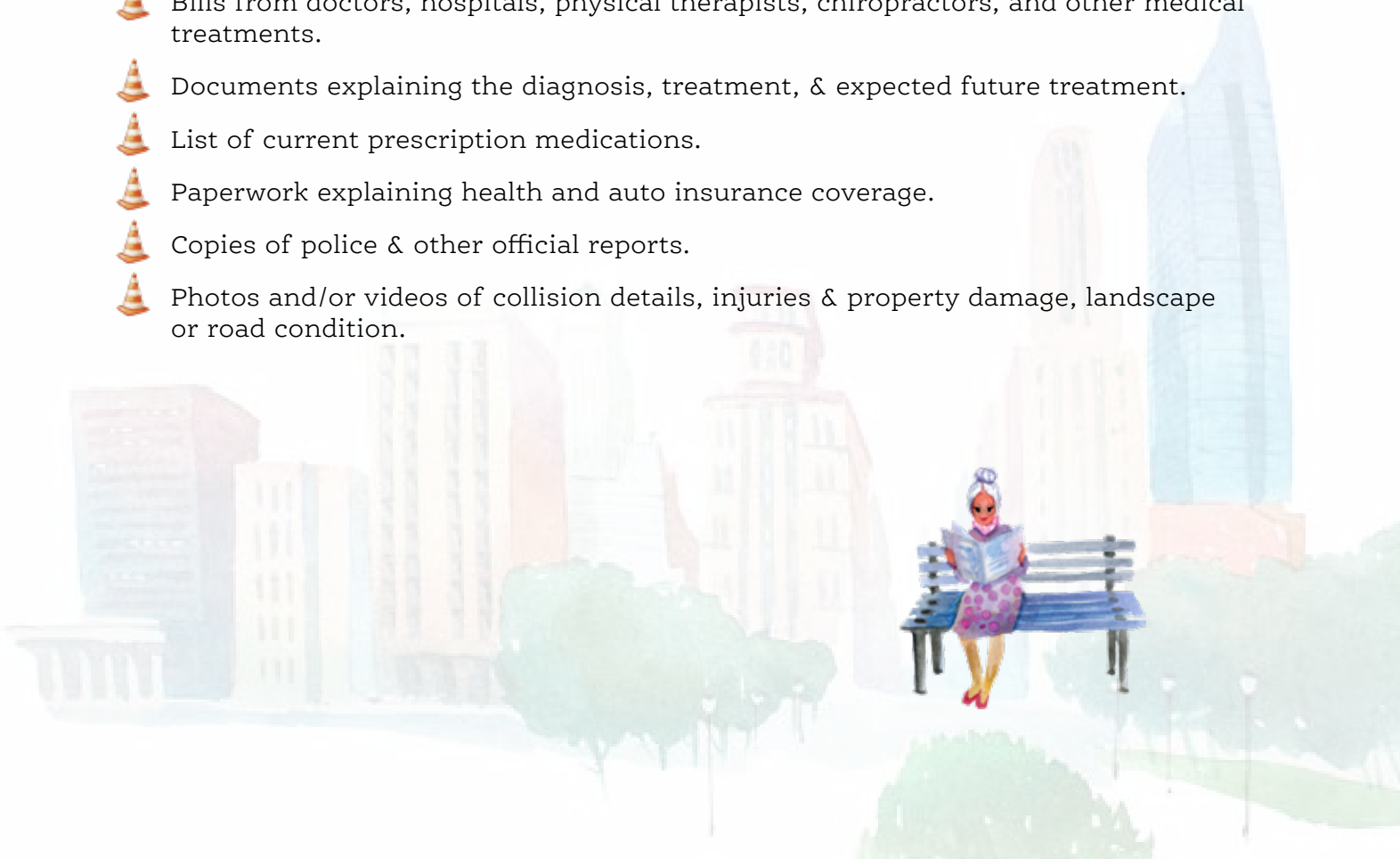


3. To save time and money, be prepared to answer these questions when meeting for the first time with an attorney:

-  What are your specific injuries, and how much pain are you feeling? Have you seen a doctor? What did the doctor say?
-  What insurance coverage do you have (auto, medical, property, renters, etc.)?
-  Have you spoken to your insurance company about this collision?
-  Who else have you talked to about the collision, and what did you tell them?
-  How has the incident affected you, your family, and your everyday tasks? See SAFE Support's Post Collision Essentials: Medical and Quality of Life Impact Journal for a step-by-step guide on tracking the impact of a collision.
-  What costs or expenses do you have because of the collision? See SAFE Support's Post Collision Essentials: Expense Tracker for more information on what expenses to track.






4. You could also bring with you:

-  Name, address, and dates of medical services and facilities, including hospitals, clinics, & ambulance services. SAFE Support's Post Collision Essentials: What to do at the Scene of a Collision is a great place to record this information.
-  Bills from doctors, hospitals, physical therapists, chiropractors, and other medical treatments.
-  Documents explaining the diagnosis, treatment, & expected future treatment.
-  List of current prescription medications.
-  Paperwork explaining health and auto insurance coverage.
-  Copies of police & other official reports.
-  Photos and/or videos of collision details, injuries & property damage, landscape or road condition.










5. Make sure to ask these important questions at the initial consultation:

-  Does the attorney or firm participate in professional associations or organizations? Have they won any awards or been recognized by their peers?
-  Where is the firm's office located? Have they worked on similar cases in your city or county?
-  How much time do you have to decide and file your lawsuit?
-  What are the law firm's expectations of you and your participation in the case?
-  How are fees counted and billed (hourly, contingency, service-fee schedule)? How does the firm expect to get paid? Are there any fees or terms that would change depending on the outcome of the case? Is an upfront payment required?





**IMPORTANT:** Most personal injury attorneys work on contingency. Contingency means that they do not get paid unless they help you win your case, reach a settlement, or collect a payout for you. In other words, they don't get paid unless you get paid. However, you should always ask an attorney whether they work on contingency or not and the agreement's limitations. For example, some attorneys require an up-front "retainer fee." Others work on contingency for all filings up until a trial but then charge additional fees or an hourly rate for the trial itself - potentially making a settlement offer much more appealing. Others will charge "service fees" for specific tasks such as deposing witnesses or responding to opposing counsel. No matter which attorney you work with, you should expect to pay between 1/4 and 1/3 of your total amount collected to your attorney.

6. During the consultation, ask which attorney would be assigned to your case, then ask if you can also schedule a time with them. The person you first speak with may not be the same person assigned to your case. Be sure to find out:

-  How many cases of your type has the attorney worked on in the past? What were the outcomes? Do they get referrals of this type from other attorneys?
-  How many cases go to trial, and what is their success rate?
-  How many other cases is the attorney handling right now? Can they be focused on your case?
-  How does the attorney resolve disagreements with clients?
-  Has the attorney been punished or disciplined by any legal, ethics, or educational committees or administrations in the past? Has a client sued them in the past?



7. After meeting your prospective attorney, reflect on your overall experiences:

-  Did they respond promptly to your inquiry?
-  Do they provide transparent information on their website?
-  Do you feel like a valued customer?
-  Did the attorney listen to your questions, take the time to answer them to your satisfaction, and treat you with respect?

8. If you decide to pursue a lawsuit, there are several steps your attorney will take you through, including “discovery.” Discovery may involve answering personal questions and providing proof of your claims. Use SAFE Support’s Post Collision Essentials: Medical and Quality of Life Impact Journal to document key information for the discovery step of a case.

Most cases do not go to trial but are resolved via mediation or arbitration and settlement in pre-trial negotiations. Unfortunately, even if you have a settlement or judgment against another person, be prepared that getting paid and collecting the debt can be difficult. Your attorney should help you with this since, in most cases, they won’t get paid till you do.

**MOST IMPORTANT! - Remember, trust your gut. Do you feel good about this attorney? Do you trust them? If not, they may not be the right fit for you or your case.**





## I'VE BEEN IN A COLLISION...WHAT NOW!?

### 9 STEPS TO GET BACK ON YOUR FEET - A SUMMARY

There are nine basic actions you should take after a collision to help you get back on your feet.



If you believe that you or anyone else may have been seriously injured or have a medical or mental health emergency, immediately dial 911 or contact emergency services.

#### 1. Document evidence and write down important information.



Write down witness names, contact info, and other important information using “Post Collision Essentials: What to do at the Scene of a Collision”.



Taking photos and gathering other evidence is a task that might make sense for family members and friends that want to help.

#### 2. DO NOT admit fault or give a recorded or written statement without seeking legal advice.



State law requires you to exchange insurance information at the scene of the collision. You are not required to share any other information or statements.



Don't sign any documents or let someone record your voice without talking to an attorney. These statements can be used against you later.



For further information on what to do, see SAFE Support's “Post Collision Essentials: What to do at the Scene of a Collision”.

#### 3. Seek medical care right away and follow your doctor's advice.



If you are hurt, waiting to see a doctor or ignoring their advice can hurt your insurance claim.

#### 4. File a police report.



State law requires filing a report if you are injured or if damages are more than \$500. But it's a good idea to file a report even if you think your damages are less than \$500.



If the collision occurs in the City of Los Angeles, you can use SAFE Support's “Post Collision Essentials: How to Fill Out an Online LAPD Traffic Collision Report” to help you.



## 5. Contact your insurance company and start an insurance claim.



Your insurance company can refuse to protect you if the collision isn't reported right away. You can find help with filing an insurance claim in SAFE Support's "Professional Assistance: How and When to File an Insurance Claim".



Ask your insurance agent about benefits that can help you while waiting to settle your claim. Benefits often include car repair, rental cars, wage loss, or medical bill coverage. Using these benefits shouldn't raise your insurance rates if the collision wasn't your fault.

## 6. Consult with an attorney.



The first call or meeting with an attorney is almost always free. Ask what assistance they can provide.



Collision victims with attorneys normally recover two to three times as much as people who try to deal with an insurance company on their own. Most attorneys only get paid if you do.



The SAFE Support documents "Professional Assistance: When to Seek Legal Advice" and "Professional Assistance: How to Find a Great Attorney" can help you with this.

## 7. Get help from SAFE Support.



Crashes are traumatic experiences. Get support from friends and family or professionals. SAFE Support is a family of survivors that offers a support community for you and your family.

## 8. Start an impact journal and keep records.



Take time to write down how a collision affects your day-to-day life. If you decide to make a claim against the other driver, you will need this information.



Use SAFE Support's "Post Collision Essentials: Medical and Quality of Life Impact Journal" and "Post Collision Essentials: Expense Tracker" to help capture important details.

## 9. Join our Movement for Safer Streets.



We are a family of people personally affected by collisions and are here to help you get back to a normal life. Healing can include holding drivers accountable and assisting in preventing further crashes. Visit [www.StreetsAreForEveryone.org/join-the-movement](http://www.StreetsAreForEveryone.org/join-the-movement) to learn more.



All documents referenced in this guide are available in the SAFE Support Resource Library at:  
[www.StreetsAreForEveryone.org/Library](http://www.StreetsAreForEveryone.org/Library).





# SAFE SUPPORT

Free support services for survivors of street collisions and their loved ones.

**You are not alone.**

*We are available to provide you with the following services:*

- Patient Advocacy
- Medical Issues
- Insurance Difficulties
- On-Line Police Reports
- Post-Collision Resource Guides
- Emotional Support
- Legal Referrals
- Navigating the Justice System
- Remembrance & Speaking Out
- Child & Family Grief Support

**Monday through Friday**

9 am—5 pm

*After-hours available upon request*

**(844) 204-7233**  
**[www.SAFE-Support.org](http://www.SAFE-Support.org)**

**StreetsAreForEveryone.org**

A 501(c)(3) non-profit organization

Tax Exempt #47-3036490

4470 W. Sunset Blvd, Suite 453  
Los Angeles, CA 90027