

# Preface

Welcome to the study of family law. This book is intended to provide you with a thorough working knowledge of this exciting area of the law. Along with its in-depth topical coverage, the book also addresses the important skills that a family law paralegal is likely to need in an active law office, such as client interviewing and legal drafting. However, in my view, it is not enough for a textbook simply to cover the topics and skills that a student will need in order to work effectively in a law office. Extending beyond that, a fundamental premise of this book is that paralegals are an integral part of the legal community and are entitled to a voice in the ongoing policy debates over contemporary efforts to reconfigure the legal contours of traditional family relationships. To help you enter into these discussions in an informed and engaged way, this book looks at both the historic understandings of the family and the critical legal issues facing us today regarding the future direction and definition of the family. This coverage will deepen your understanding of contemporary family law issues and enable you to think about emerging issues in a thoughtful way.

This book is divided into 13 chapters, each of which follows the same basic format. Most chapters begin with a brief historical overview of the subject matter of that chapter. By grounding your knowledge of the present in the past, you will have a more complete understanding of how the law has developed, which, in turn, will enhance your understanding of contemporary legal issues. In the text of each chapter, key terms are bolded. These terms are listed at the end of the chapter and defined in a glossary at the end of the book. At the end of the chapters, you will also find a chapter summary, review questions, discussion questions, assignments, and cases for analysis. The chapter summary provides you with a quick overview of what was covered in the chapter; it is not intended to be a substitute for the chapter content. To help orient yourself, you may find it helpful to read the summary before you read the chapter. The review questions follow the order of the chapter and are designed to help you determine how well you understood the chapter. They are a useful self-testing device. The discussion questions frame some of the more controversial and less settled aspects of the law discussed in the chapter. The assignments are designed to help you apply and further develop your understanding of the law. Last, each chapter (with the exception of Chapter 10) includes cases for analysis. These cases point to interesting and sometimes controversial aspects of the law. They are included to deepen your knowledge of the law, acquaint you with landmark decisions, and

help you to develop your analytical and critical reading skills.

In using this book, you should keep a few important points in mind. First, although every effort has been made to ensure that this book is current, the law is always changing, and that which is current today may be obsolete tomorrow based on a new court decision or statute. Second, this book is written for a national audience and is not geared to the law of any particular state. In the course of your studies, you may want to learn more about the law of your state. Third, although I hope that this book will continue to be a resource for you when you leave school, it should be clear from the above two points that when working on an actual case, this book should not be your primary source of legal information. No book can substitute for the legal research required to ensure a current and comprehensive understanding of the applicable law in your jurisdiction. Good luck, and I hope you enjoy your entry into this fascinating area of the law!

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