

# *The Morales Law Firm*

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## **Parent Guide to Finding a Criminal Defense Lawyer**

- 1. Do not use the Public Defender. Hire a private criminal defense attorney.** Public defenders are smart, honorable people who work hard for their clients. Unfortunately, they are always overworked and underpaid. Public Defender Offices were mandated by law to represent those people who do not have enough money to hire a private attorney. Therefore, public defenders are constantly juggling an enormous case load and work long hours. It is very difficult for them to give each case the amount of attention that a private criminal defense attorney is able to give.

If the family can afford an excellent private attorney, it is absolutely worth the cost. A criminal conviction, especially a felony, can haunt the defendant for the rest of their life. Hiring an experienced private criminal attorney will almost always benefit the person in jail.

- 2. Search for an attorney on the internet who has a professional looking website. Do not search for an attorney in the Yellow Pages.** Most excellent criminal attorneys will have a professional looking website. Because the yellow pages will tell you very little about an attorney, it's best not to waste your time here. A website will give you pages of information about the attorney, including their education, experience, and professional background.

You can also check the California State Bar website at [www.calbar.ca.gov](http://www.calbar.ca.gov) to make sure the attorney you are considering has a clean track record. Beware of an attorney who has been disciplined by the State Bar. You can also go to websites such as [www.avvo.com](http://www.avvo.com) and [www.martindale.com](http://www.martindale.com), to determine how the attorney is rated.

- 3. Hire an attorney who specializes in criminal defense.** When searching the web, first look for an attorney who specializes in criminal defense. If the attorney practices criminal defense, personal injury, and bankruptcy law, don't bother calling him or her. Criminal cases are serious and the law changes every day. You should hire someone who knows the nuances of criminal law and practices criminal defense on a daily basis.
- 4. Choose an attorney with at least ten years experience.** You want an attorney with at least ten years experience in criminal defense, the more experience the better. An attorney who has practiced at least ten years should have many jury trials under his/her belt and probably has developed a friendly and professional relationship with the judges and prosecutors. This isn't the time to hire a newer attorney who may charge a lower fee; let them gain their experience on someone else's case.
- 5. Avoid hiring a former prosecutor.** You want an attorney who has always been a criminal defense attorney. Some prosecutors quit the District Attorney's office and become defense attorneys because they get passed over for promotions or they don't get along with their boss. Others switch to the defense side to make more money. But can you really trust them to

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passionately and aggressively defend? How can they intellectually and emotionally switch from being a hardnosed prosecutor bent on sending people to prison and then miraculously transform themselves into an aggressive defense attorney? It isn't possible. Stick with a dedicated criminal defense attorney who has made a career of helping people stay out of jail and prison.

6. **Hire a trial attorney.** You want an attorney who goes to trial often. Trial attorneys are hands down the most respected attorneys in the courthouse. They are esteemed because they are knowledgeable about the law, they are fearless, they are persuasive speakers, they have the ability to think quickly and react well to curve balls, and they are very hard workers. Because of the respect they have earned, they get the best deals and best results for their clients.
7. **Find a certified specialist in criminal law.** An excellent way to find a top notch attorney is to go to the California State Bar website and look for a Certified Specialist in criminal law in the county where the defendant's case is being prosecuted.

Only the most well-trained and experienced criminal defense lawyers become Certified Specialists. A Certified Specialist has taken and passed a grueling written examination in criminal law, has demonstrated over the years a high level of experience in criminal law, and has taken a great number of advanced courses to stay on top of their profession and keep current with constantly changing developments in the law. Additionally, these attorneys must have received excellent reviews by Superior Court Judges and other attorneys who are very familiar with their work.

8. **Go for a big city attorney.** The best attorneys usually gravitate toward big cities. Generally speaking, attorneys that practice in big cities have handled a wider variety of criminal cases and have gone up against tougher opposition than those in rural or suburban settings. If there is a big city within driving distance of the county where the defendant is being prosecuted, it is worthwhile to speak to a Certified Specialist in that city.
9. **Narrow down your search.**
  - a) Look at biographical information, including whatever you can find on Web sites for the lawyers and their law firms. Do they appear to have expertise in the area of criminal law that you need? Do they have any information on their Web sites that is helpful to you? Do they belong to any reputable associations in the area of expertise that you need?
  - b) Use search engines to surf the Internet. Do searches under the name of each lawyer and his or her law firm. Can you find any articles; FAQ's or other informational pieces that the lawyer has done that give you a level of comfort?
  - c) Ask other people if they have heard of the lawyers and what they think about them.
  - d) Contact your state bar association or visit their Web site to find out if the lawyers are in good standing.

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- e) Check out the online archives of your local newspaper. Has there been any publicity about the lawyers or the cases that they have handled?
- f) Consider any special needs you have. For example, would you benefit from an attorney who speaks a language other than English?

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