

Daily Journal

MARCH 11, 2026

TOP FAMILY LAWYERS IN CALIFORNIA 2026



The annual list highlighting the top performing California attorneys handling divorce and custody matters.



COURTNEY L. SHEPARD

BURCH SHEPARD FAMILY LAW GROUP

NEWPORT BEACH

Courtney Shepard has built her practice around a conviction that the work carries weight beyond the courtroom. For her, the cases she handles — divorce, custody disputes, domestic violence proceedings — arrive at moments when clients have the most at stake.

“I was drawn to the practice of family law because it offers the opportunity to guide individuals and families through some of life’s most challenging and consequential transitions,” Shepard said. “Clients often seek counsel during periods marked by emotional strain and financial instability.”

That reality shapes how she approaches each matter. Shepard points to the ab-

sence of routine as one of the defining features of her practice. No two cases present the same facts, and each demands a strategy calibrated to the circumstances of the individuals involved. The variation, she says, keeps the work demanding in ways she finds meaningful.

One of the areas where Shepard has tracked the most consequential legal developments is the Domestic Violence Prevention Act. Courts, she notes, have extended their interpretation of abuse to include conduct that goes beyond physical harm.

“Over time, courts have broadened their understanding of what constitutes abuse, recognizing that domestic violence extends beyond physical harm to include coercive control, harassment and conduct that disturbs the peace of the other party,” Shepard said.

That evolution carries implications that reach into custody proceedings, where findings under the DVPA can trigger statutory presumptions affecting parental rights, she said. Shepard also flags the significance of newly enacted Family Code section 6309, which restricts discovery in domestic violence proceedings, requiring court permission before a party may conduct discovery and a showing of good cause. The statute, she says, offers protection to survivors while closing off discovery as a mechanism for harassment.

Two of Shepard’s cases illustrate the range of her practice. In one, she re-

presented a stay-at-home mother who had left the workforce for more than two decades to raise her children and support her spouse’s career. When the marriage ended, the opposing party withheld support and sought to move the litigation out of California. Shepard’s office acted to secure jurisdiction in California, and after motion practice, the court awarded the client substantial monthly spousal support retroactive to the date of filing. “In addition, the court awarded her tens of thousands of dollars in attorney’s fees, recognizing the financial disparity between the parties and the obstructive litigation conduct.” For her client, Shepard said, “this outcome meant stability, dignity and the ability to move forward.”

In a second matter, Shepard represented a father seeking sole custody of his daughter amid the mother’s escalating substance abuse and pending criminal charges. “Given the urgency of the situation, we immediately filed an emergency motion requesting sole legal and sole physical custody for the father.” The court granted the emergency request, and following a formal evidentiary hearing, Shepard secured permanent orders awarding the father sole legal and physical custody, giving him authority over decisions regarding the child’s health, education and welfare.

“My clients were understandably scared, overwhelmed and, at times, emotionally exhausted,” Shepard said. “Part of my role extended beyond legal advocacy.”