

Who keeps the ring after an engagement ends?

By Jennifer Pritchett, Associate Editor



The question of who gets to keep the ring when an engagement ends before marriage comes down to who broke it off, says Toronto civil litigator [Sarah O'Connor](#).

“If you accept a ring and then you break off the engagement, you should return the ring and if you’re the one proposing, make sure you actually intend to marry the person,” she tells [AdvocateDaily.com](#).

O'Connor, principal of [O'Connor Richardson Professional Corporation](#), says it's basic contract law — if you break the contract, the agreement to marry, you hold no claims to the offer of marriage, the ring.

“In order for a contract to be valid, one person offers something and the other person accepts something,” she says.

“Generally, a contract isn't binding without some sort of consideration, which is something of value that is given for a promise and is given in order to make the promise enforceable. In a marriage proposal, the ring is the consideration.”

O'Connor comments on the issue after a Nova Scotia small claims court adjudicator ruled a woman who broke up with her fiancé over a fight about wedding expenses can keep the engagement ring.

The dispute ended up in court after the woman's fiance sued her for the 3.25 carat diamond ring, worth an estimated \$19,000, reports [CBC](#).

The man and woman had planned to marry in 2016, but he postponed the nuptials amid arguments over the cost of the celebration, says the broadcaster — he wanted an inexpensive party and she preferred something more lavish, says the article.

Texts between the former couple, however, showed the woman wanted to elope and the man wanted a “party.”

The issue in the dispute came down to who ended the engagement; the would-be groom's decision to postpone the wedding was considered an indefinite delay to marry, which effectively ended the engagement, the court says.

It's not the first time such a dispute ended up in the courts.

In British Columbia, a 65-year-old man filed a lawsuit in 2014 to retrieve a Tiffany diamond ring that cost about \$228,000, reports [CBC](#). In that case, the man proposed to a university student who was more than 30 years his junior. He initially launched a legal action to get the ring back after she broke off the engagement, but then withdrew his lawsuit, says the story.

O'Connor says the engagement ring in any proposal is the offer of marriage.

“In the Nova Scotia case, the woman accepted that offer and her fiancé broke the contract, the agreement to marry, so she gets to keep the ring,” she says.