

Your Family Court hearing

When?

Your court letter or most recent Court Order will tell you the time and date. Usually they ask you to arrive one hour before. This is to give time for interviews or negotiations before the hearing starts.

Where?

- The Norwich Court is at Bishopsgate, Norwich, NR3 1UP. The nearest car park is behind the Adam and Eve pub, just after the court building. Make sure you pay for plenty of parking as hearings can run late and you don't want to be worried about a parking ticket.
- Check your paperwork to see whether your hearing is at the Magistrates Court or the County Court (different entrances).
- You will have to go through an airport-style security check at the door. Leave anything unsuitable at home.
- Ask the security guards or an usher where to find the Family waiting area.
- Make sure you tell an usher that you have arrived.

What to wear?

There are no rules but you may want to dress smartly; most Court staff and lawyers wear suits.

Who should come with you?

It is reassuring to have friends or family to give you a lift to court and meet you afterwards, but we usually find it's best if you leave them at the door so that you can focus on preparing for your case.

Don't bring children to court. The only exception to this is if you have a very small baby. In this case, ask a friend to come and look after the baby in the waiting area whilst the hearing takes place.

Preparation

Before you come to Court think about what you want to say. Having some notes will help you on the day if you are feeling nervous. Keep it relevant and fairly brief, and focus on what's best for the child/ren. Be clear about what you are asking the Court to do and why.

In the waiting area

If you are worried about seeing your ex in the waiting area, you can request to sit somewhere separately – ask the usher about this. Cafcass (Children and Families Court Advisory Service) may wish to speak to you before your hearing, and/or the other person's solicitor may ask to talk with you to find out your views.

In court

You may be in front of Magistrates or a District Judge (you can call them Sir or Madam). There may also be a legal adviser, and a Cafcass officer, as well as your ex and their lawyer if they have one. You all sit around a big table. Your lawyer or Family Court Supporter will sit next to you.

The Applicant will be asked to put their side of things first, followed by the Respondent. Do not interrupt in Court; each person gets their turn to speak.

What happens next?

A Family Court case usually involves several hearings so you will probably be asked to come back at a later date. Contact with your child may or may not be allowed in the mean time.

You should receive a written Order (either on the day or in the post) telling you what the court decided, what you need to do, and when the next hearing will be. This is important – read it and keep it safe!

Please remember, you should not talk to your children about your family court case.

Please contact us if you would like this guide in another language.

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