

Going to Court?

Tips to get you ready for your day in court

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Going to court can be a daunting task. Your day in court can be made easier if you know how to prepare, what you're supposed to do, and how it all works.

The following are some helpful tips that will assist you when preparing for court.

1. Get legal advice as soon as you can!

The court will be making decisions about your future, so make sure you get legal help.

2. Speak to someone experienced with the court

Another great way to get support and seek information is to speak with someone experienced in court matters. Since the court is a formal environment, they'll be able to give you an idea of ways to behave and things you should or should not say.

3. Get your papers ready

Gather all your papers you have been given about the case. You will need to bring them with you to court.

4. Be aware of the Court rules

Some of the basic court rules which you must adhere to include the following:

- Switch off your mobile phone before entering the courtroom
- Sit quietly in the courtroom
- Dress appropriately (smart casual)

- Take off your hat, cap or sunglasses
- Do not eat, drink, chew gum or smoke inside the courtroom
- Remember to bow when you enter in or leave the court
- The Magistrate or Judge is the person in charge in the courtroom, so remember to be polite
- If spoken to by the Magistrate or Judge, address them as 'your honour.'

5. Write down what happened

You should prepare a statement in your own words of everything that occurred relating to the case. Make sure you do this while the events are fresh in your mind. Think about the events and try to remember details such as dates, times, descriptions, actions and exact words used. This is a very important practical step you can take to prepare for your court appearance. Once you have made a written statement, read your statement again and familiarise yourself with it. Be prepared to speak loudly and clearly. Your role is to tell the truth as best as you can while you're in court, and as such you cannot be advised as to what to say.

6. Think about the items you take into court

Sheriff's officers in courts conduct security searches in order to protect public safety. Some of the things you won't be allowed to take into court are knives (any type), cameras (including mobiles and watches with cameras), scissors, spray cans, tools, studded belts, syringes, motorcycle helmets. In fact anything that could pose a risk to public safety will be taken away from you while you are in court and they will generally be returned to you when you leave the courthouse.

7. Check the court date

Courts can start at different times so check what time you will need to be there before the court date. Check your papers to see when your case starts or ring the Court Registry. Most courts start at 9:30am. Many have a Registrar sitting from 9:30am to handle adjournments. On the day of your court appearance, you should check in the newspaper or on the lists displayed in the Court entrance to see which courtroom your case is listed in. You should try to be at that Court at least 15 minutes before the scheduled starting time. It is very important you are not late, as the case may proceed and be determined in your absence. Be sure to allow time for transport. Be prepared to wait all day. Cases are heard as soon as possible, but if the court is busy, there are usually long delays, so pack some food and drink or a book to give you something to do.

8. Take someone with you

To reduce the stress, think of bringing a support person such as a friend or family member to attend with you.

9. Visit the court beforehand

Visit the court before your court date so you know what to expect. Cases are usually open to the public. You will get a better idea of how the court works by watching what happens in other cases.

Remember, if you are due to appear in court for any reason you should seek the advice of a lawyer. Not only can a lawyer provide you with experienced advice and assist you throughout the entire legal process, but a lawyer can help to ease any nerves and explain things more simply to you.

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