



/guide

STOWE

**talks**

## Your questions answered

### **HOW TO: REPRESENT YOURSELF IN THE FAMILY COURT**

[Watch the supporting 'Represent yourself in the family court' video](#)

**T**his Stowe talks: How to guide explains how to manage representing yourself in the family court.

Going to the family court can be daunting, especially when you do not have legal representation.

This guide focuses on how to prepare for your hearing, what will happen during the hearing, and some tips on how to manage the hearing to make it less stressful.

It covers all types of family court hearings. If you are looking for specific information on financial and children's hearings, you'll find resources covering these topics at [www.stowefamilylaw.co.uk/support](http://www.stowefamilylaw.co.uk/support).

This guide does not cover the law, and it is strongly recommended that you seek legal advice from a family lawyer.

If you represent yourself at court, you are known as a "litigant in person". Hearings can be held virtually or in person, and the advice in this guide covers both.

#### **How do I make an application to the court?**

You can make an application to the court by finding the appropriate form you need from the government website and completing this as fully as possible. For example, a children matter can be started on a C100 form. There is usually the option to complete the form online or by post.

However, these forms can be complicated, so it is always best to seek legal advice before submitting an application.

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## How should I prepare for a court hearing?

Going to court is daunting, so it is good to make sure you are well-prepared to help reduce your anxiety and any unexpected issues along the way.

For example:

- Make sure you have all your documents organised and within easy reach or access on your device.
- Summarise your key points and what you want to achieve into one document, so you are clear in your thinking.
- Ensure you are appropriately dressed. No one expects a three-piece suit, but dress smartly.
- Plan your travel route and timings to help reduce stress on the day - even consider doing a trial run.
- Practice what you want to say - out loud to a family member or friend if possible.
- Organise any child care if needed, as you cannot bring your children with you.
- Arrange for a friend or family member to come with you. They cannot go into the hearing unless pre-approved by the court. However, they can sit outside and support you whilst you wait and afterwards.

## What do I need to do when I arrive at court?

It is important to arrive at the court building in plenty of time to pass through security and then locate the clerks desk to let them know you have arrived.

They will then inform you of which court room your case will be heard in.

## What do I need to do if the hearing is being held virtually?

A virtual hearing is just as important as an in-person hearing, and you should prepare for them in the same way.

On the day of the hearing, it is important that you are in a quiet and private location where you will not be overheard or interrupted. Make sure you choose the space well in advance of the hearing, and make arrangements for any child care if appropriate.

It is also important that you test the device you are using well in advance of the hearing to ensure it is compatible and working correctly. A test link can be found on the same email with the link for the hearing. Practising logging on will allow you to be confident that you can access the hearing smoothly.

On the day of the hearing, make sure you get your equipment set-up, and all your paperwork arranged and with you in good time, so you are logged on and ready to go.

## What is expected from me at the hearing?

You will be expected to speak to the court at the hearing and explain to the court what you are applying for and why.

If you are the applicant - the person who made the application, then you will speak first, and if you are the person responding to the application, then you will speak second.

The court may have some questions about your application, and it is important that these are carefully answered with a clear, factual response. And be honest at all times, if not, the court may sanction you.

Even if it is something you are worried about, it is best to get it into the open at the earliest opportunity, together with a detailed explanation. Family judges have seen and heard it all.

Emotions can run high during the hearing, but it is important that you remain calm at all times. Unpleasant words or outbursts will not impress the court. Instead, focus on being polite to everyone involved - whatever your true feelings. Do not interrupt the judge, however much you want to speak out. You will get your chance to talk.

Throughout the hearing, you must ensure that you understand what's happening and, in particular, any order the court makes. If you don't, it is fine to ask the court to explain and give you further clarification on what is happening.

## What happens after a hearing?

After the hearing, if there is a legal representative for the other party, they usually take the lead in preparing the court order.

This is a reflection of what has happened, along with a recording of all the directions the court decided and a timeline. They should then send this to you for your agreement.

If there are no legal representatives in the hearing, the court itself will deal with drawing up the order, and they will send you the final version.

If the case has not been settled, the court will set the date for the next hearing, and usually give you some actions to complete before.

## The importance of legal advice

It is important to speak to a family lawyer, as going to the family court can be complicated and difficult to manage.

A family lawyer will help you complete the application, prepare correctly, and ensure all the information you need is gathered together and easily accessible.

They can help you fully understand and engage with the court process at each stage, the complex language used, and complete any additional documents, such as statements, in certain timeframes.

Your lawyer will help you understand what is expected of you, so you can present your case well. This can help dial down the stress, so you can approach the hearings with the information and support you need to make well-informed decisions from a calm and measured place.

## Need more information?

Call our Client Care Team on **0330 838 7456** to speak with one of our specialist family lawyers or visit **[www.stowefamilylaw.co.uk](http://www.stowefamilylaw.co.uk)**

## Useful links

Full list of forms used to make applications to the family court - <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/family-law-forms>

C100: Apply for a child arrangements order

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/form-c100-application-under-the-children-act-1989-for-a-child-arrangements-prohibited-steps-specific-issue-section-8-order-or-to-vary-or-discharge>

Search for your local family court <https://www.gov.uk/find-court-tribunal>

## Additional support

Support Through Court is a charity dedicated to providing free, independent assistance to people facing proceedings without legal representation. <https://www.supportthroughcourt.org/>

For more Stowe talks: How to videos and further free resources, visit: [www.stowefamilylaw.co.uk/support](http://www.stowefamilylaw.co.uk/support)