



WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT GOING TO COURT

Article by Divorce Lawyers for Men™

Going to court can be intimidating. For most of us, the courthouse is an unknown world with language, procedures and expectations that are difficult to understand. The unknown leaves us uncomfortable and anxious. If you are a party to a legal proceeding, or even a witness, it may help you feel more at ease to follow some of these suggestions:

Take it seriously. Legal actions are serious business. You should prepare for your court appearance and testimony in a way that demonstrates that you are taking it seriously and being respectful of the institution.

Be prepared. Review all relevant material in advance so that you are prepared to answer all questions confidently.

Be on time! In fact, plan to arrive several minutes early to allow time for parking, passing through security, and finding the appropriate courtroom. Judges have tight schedules and very full calendars. They have no tolerance for tardiness.

Be aware of security requirements. Most all courthouses now have security systems in place, including metal detectors. NEVER bring a weapon of any type to court. Also be aware that items such as steel toed boots, belt buckles, and certain jewelry may not easily pass through security. It is usually best to avoid wearing such items on court days.

Make a good first impression. If you want to be effective and credible in court, you must look the part. Snap judgments may not be fair but it is a reality that people are judged on first impressions. Sometimes in court you are leaving the judge with nothing more than a first impression of who you are. Make sure that image is a good one.

Dress smartly and appropriately. Dress as if you are going to an important job interview, church service or funeral. Sloppy, dirty or inappropriate attire will work against you. Remove or cover piercings and tattoos. Spit out your gum or tooth pick, and don't smoke in front of the courthouse.

Dress for success. Men do not have to wear a suit but you should wear clean trousers, a clean, unwrinkled, button-down shirt, polo, or sweater. Shoes should be

clean and polished. A sports coat, sweater, and/or tie may be a good idea, depending on the type of proceeding. The more important the issue before the court, the more important it is to look your best. Work clothes, sports clothes, jeans, t-shirts, team jerseys, sweatshirts, baseball caps, and dirty or wrinkled clothing is not acceptable.

Be clean and well-groomed. Shampoo and style your hair, trim beards and mustaches. If your hair is hard to manage or keep out of your face, tie it back in some way. No one makes a good impression if they do not appear to be taking care of themselves.

Check in with your attorney. Check in with your attorney before the day you are supposed appear in court. Know where to go and what to expect. Follow the instructions of your attorney in where to sit. Be sure that they know that you have arrived and are in the courtroom. If your attorney is not in the courtroom, don't panic; they may be in another part of the courthouse. Wait patiently and minimize your contact with others in the room. Particularly if there any type of no-contact order in place, avoid being anywhere near the opposing party or their attorney. Avoid conflicts at all costs.

Be aware of your posture and body language. Be sure to stand up and sit up straight. If you slouch or drag your feet, you appear to be disinterested in what is happening. Also, look directly at the person you are speaking to; your body language will send the message that you are credible and sincere.

Allow your attorney to do their job. Speak to the court (judge or hearing officer) only when you are asked to do so. If you are asked to speak, do so clearly and loud enough to be heard throughout the courtroom. If you need to speak to your attorney while you are in court, do so in a whisper so that others cannot hear and without disrupting the proceeding.

Your demeanor and body language is very important. You are being watched and evaluated at all times. Keep your emotions in check. Never argue, shout, curse, insult, or call other people names. Always be mindful of your body language: Do not show extreme emotion, particularly when it is negative or hostile. Do not make faces, roll your eyes, make gestures, or emit sounds in response to comments made by others, especially not the judge. Feelings of sadness, being hurt, or stressed by the circumstances are natural but should not be exaggerated. Keep your emotions in check. If you are overwhelmed by your emotions, ask your attorney to ask for a short break in the proceeding.

Be respectful. Always be respectful of the court, including the judge, commissioner, court reporter, court clerk and bailiff. Use "Your Honor", "Sir" and "Ma'am" when addressing the judge or commissioner. Refer to the opposing attorney, and your own, by their last name. Do not speak to or approach the Judge or Bench without permission to do so. Never argue or speak over the judge. You lose credibility and risk a contempt of court charge.

Turn off electronics. Leave your cell phone at home or in the car. If you absolutely must carry it with you, be sure to turn it off or silence it before entering the court room. Do not use your phone for any purpose while you are in the courtroom.

No children. Legal proceedings are generally not a good place for children. Do not bring your children to court unless you have been specifically told to do so. If you are requested to bring your children, make sure they are clean, well-groomed and dressed neatly. Also be sure that they have eaten and have some idea of what will be expected of them in court. You will be judged by how your children look and behave in court.

Friends and family. It is best to come to court on your own. However, if your attorney approves of you bringing someone with you for moral support, limit it to one or two people. Then be sure that the person(s) with you are following all these rules and not undermining your case with a sloppy appearance or inappropriate behavior.

Be sober and alert. Do not use drugs or alcohol before coming to court. If you are very nervous and need to calm down, use light exercise, a walk, listening to music, meditation or some other productive form of relaxation. Do not risk becoming impaired.

You will be judged on your appearance and behavior in court; that is certain. It is up to you to present yourself in a way that portrays confidence, credibility and authenticity, as well as respect for the legal institution. Recognize this and do your best to present an image that will help you to attain your goals. Failure to recognize the importance of your image may well undermine your case and work against you being able to achieve your legal goals.

Plan and prepare in advance. Then look in the mirror and put yourself in the judge's shoes. What would you think of someone standing before you, looking like you do? If you are impressed, go forth and conquer. If not, fix the problem or turn to someone you trust and get their honest input. Remember, the look is the first step, but how you behave and present yourself in court can also make you or break you.

If you have questions, do not hesitate to contact your attorney to get the answers you need to make the best impression possible when you appear in court or any other legal proceeding.