

# Get Ready for Court

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*Everybody* feels nervous before they go to court. Read these tips to be more prepared.

## **Get there early!**

You will need time to park and find your courtroom. The lines to go through security can be long sometimes. You should arrive about 30 to 45 minutes early. Remember that you will have to go through metal detectors so do not wear bulky clothes or clothes with lots of metal.

## **Find your courtroom.**

Go in and tell the clerk or officer you are present. Sit quietly until your name is called. Then go to the front of the courtroom.

## **Arrange for all-day childcare for your children.**

Many courtrooms do not allow children, and you may be in court longer than you expect.

## **Behave as if it were a job interview.**

Follow these rules, and if friends or relatives go to court with you, ask them to follow these rules, too:

- Do not wear shorts, flip-flops, sweat pants, tank tops, or anything flashy.
- No hats or scarves, unless it is part of your religious dress.
- Do not read, chew gum, or use your phone in the courtroom.

## **Stay calm and be polite.**

Do not interrupt anyone. Avoid angry gestures and facial expressions. Stand when the judge enters or exits the room.

## **The judge or other side may ask you questions.**

Let them finish the question before you start answering. When you speak to the judge, call him or her, "Your Honor." When you speak, you must:

- Tell the truth and don't exaggerate.
- Give complete answers.
- Speak slowly and speak loud enough so the judge can hear you.
- Say "Yes" or "No" out loud. It's not enough to nod or shake your head.
- Do not speak until it is your turn. If the judge interrupts you, stop speaking immediately.

## **Before You Go to Court**

### **Learn about the law for your kind of case *before* you go to court.**

You have to follow the same rules that lawyers follow. No one at court can help you. Ask the court clerk if your county has a law library or other self-help resources. You can also learn about the laws for your case, court rules, and find resources at these websites:

- [http://judicial.alabama.gov/library/rules\\_civ\\_procedure.cfm](http://judicial.alabama.gov/library/rules_civ_procedure.cfm)
- <http://alisondb.legislature.state.al.us/acas/codeofalabama/1975/coatoc.htm>
- <http://judicial.alabama.gov/library.cfm>

### **Try to go to court to watch other cases.**

That will help you understand some of the court rules, and what the judge may ask you. You'll also see where you will need to park and how much time it takes to get to your courtroom.

## **Ask for an interpreter, if you need one for your hearing.**

If you do not speak English well, the court can give you an interpreter. If you are hearing impaired, the court can give you a sign language interpreter. Talk to the court clerk as soon as possible. Do not wait until your court date to ask for an interpreter.

## **What do I say in court?**

Make a list of the things you want to say. If there are any witnesses in your case, also make a list of the questions you want to ask.

Practice saying them before you go to court. If you get nervous in court, you can read from your list.

## **Bring your court papers and proof that supports your case.**

Make 3 copies of your hearing notice, past orders, other court papers for your case and any proof for your case, for example:

- Any papers you have been served,
- Police or medical reports,
- Pay stubs, bills, or receipts,
- Estimates for repair, and
- Anything else, such as letters, notes, e-mails, and photos that support your case.

Also take pen and paper to take notes.

## **Can I bring a witness to court?**

If someone who knows about your case can help support your side, you can ask that person to go to court with you.

If that person does not want to go, you can ask the clerk to *order* them to go. This is called a subpoena. If you would like the clerk to subpoena a witness, you should tell her as soon as possible. If you wait until your court date, it will be too late.