



Family Courtroom Etiquette Guide (High Court and Below)

A Practical Guide for Self-Representing
Parents

Prepared by Finley James Family Court Assistance
www.finleyjames.online



Why Courtroom Etiquette Matters

Proper behaviour in court not only shows respect for the judicial process but can also affect how your credibility and conduct are perceived by the judge. Whether you are self-representing or using a legal representative, adhering to courtroom norms is critical.

1. Arrival & Preparation

- Arrive Early: At least 30 minutes before your hearing.
- Bring:
 - All required documents (applications, responses, CAFCASS letters, position statements).
 - Court notices and photo ID.
 - Pen and paper (or discreet digital note-taking device).
- Security Screening: You will undergo checks similar to airport security.
- Waiting Areas: If you're uncomfortable sharing space with the other party, notify court staff immediately. A separate waiting area can be requested.

2. How to Address the Court

- High Court Judge: "My Lord", "My Lady", "Your Lordship", "Your Ladyship"
- Circuit or District Judge: "Judge", "Sir", or "Madam"
- Magistrates: "Sir" or "Madam"
- When in doubt, err on the side of formality.

3. Speaking in Court

- Speak only when invited by the judge or when it is your turn.
- Do not interrupt the judge, the other party, or their legal representative.
- Keep your language formal and factual.
- Avoid blaming or emotionally charged comments—stick to child-focused facts and proposals.
- If something is unclear, you may respectfully ask for clarification at the appropriate moment, not mid-sentence or while another person is speaking.

4. Dress Code

- Dress in smart, respectful clothing. This communicates that you take the proceedings seriously.
- Avoid casual attire like jeans, trainers, or slogans on clothing.





5. General Behaviour

- Remain calm and maintain a respectful posture and tone.
- Do not speak out of turn or react visibly (e.g., sighing, eye-rolling) to statements made by the other party.
- Mobile phones must be switched off or silenced.
- Do not eat, drink (except water), or chew gum in court.

6. Note-Taking & Court Orders

- Bring a notepad or device (if permitted) to record:
 - Judge's comments, directions, and decisions
 - Deadlines or orders issued
 - Next hearing dates
- If anything is unclear, wait for your opportunity to ask for clarification.

7. Use of a McKenzie Friend

- You may be accompanied by a McKenzie Friend
- Inform the court in advance and be ready to explain:
 - Their identity and role.
 - Why you require their support.
- The court may refuse permission if the person is deemed inappropriate.
- A McKenzie Friend cannot address the court unless expressly allowed by the judge.

8. Special Considerations for the High Court

- Expect a more formal tone and stricter procedural standards.
- Familiarise yourself with appeal documentation rules if appearing on appeal (e.g. skeleton arguments, grounds of appeal).
- Be aware of judicial expectations around punctuality, document structure, and tone.
- Demonstrating understanding of case law or referencing the Welfare Checklist may help strengthen your position.



9. After the Hearing

- The judge may give:
 - Oral directions or judgments
 - Case management orders
 - Instructions to provide further evidence or attend mediation.
- Write down everything as the official transcript may not be immediately available.
- Follow up promptly on deadlines or court directions.

10. Final Reminders

- Stay child-focused at all times. The court's primary concern is the child's welfare, not parental grievances.
- Respect everyone present, even if you disagree with them.
- Keep court documents secure and do not discuss the case publicly, particularly on social media.

