



UK Family Law Glossary

A Comprehensive A–Z Guide for Self-
Representing Parents

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A

Acknowledgement of Service – Confirmation that court papers have been received.

Adjournment – Postponing a court hearing to a later date.

Affidavit – A written statement confirmed by oath.

Applicant – The person who starts the court process.

Appeal – Applying to a higher court to change a decision.

B

Barrister – A lawyer who can represent you in higher courts.

Best Interests of the Child – The most important consideration in children's cases.

Brief – A summary of a case prepared for legal representatives.

Bundle – A file containing all case documents.

Breach of Order – Failure to follow the court's instructions.

C

CAFCASS – Advises the court on what is best for children in family cases.

Child Arrangements Order – Determines with whom a child lives or spends time.

Contact – Time a child spends with a non-resident parent.

Consent Order – A court order reflecting an agreement between parties.

Contempt of Court – Disobeying or showing disrespect for the court.

D

Directions Hearing – A hearing to decide next steps in a case.

Dispute Resolution Appointment – Aimed at resolving disputes before final hearing.

Disclosure – The sharing of relevant documents between parties.

Domestic Abuse – Includes physical, emotional, and financial harm.

Draft Order – A proposed version of a court order.

E

Ex Parte – An urgent application made without the other party present.

Expert Witness – A qualified professional providing independent opinion.

Evidence – Information presented to support your case.

Emergency Protection Order – Provides temporary protection for a child at risk.

Enforcement Order – Used to enforce a breached court order.

F

Fact-Finding Hearing – A hearing to determine whether allegations are true.

Family Court – The court that deals with family-related legal issues.

Final Hearing – Where a judge makes a final decision in the case.

Form C100 – Used to apply for a Child Arrangements Order.

Form E – A financial disclosure form used in family finance cases.

G

Guardian – A CAFCASS officer who represents the child's best interests.

Grounds for Divorce – Legal reasons required to apply for divorce.

Gagging Order – A court order that prevents discussion of the case.

General Directions Order – Court instructions for progressing the case.

Good Practice Guidance – Non-binding recommendations by legal bodies.

H

Hearing – A court session where a judge considers the case.

Habitual Residence – Where a person normally lives, relevant in jurisdiction.

Harassment – Unwanted behaviour causing alarm or distress.

Help with Fees – A government scheme for court fee assistance.

High Court – A senior court for complex or urgent cases.

I

Injunction – A court order preventing someone from doing something.

Interim Order – Temporary court order before the final decision.

Independent Social Worker – Provides independent assessments to the court.

Indirect Contact – Contact through letters, video calls, or emails.

In Camera – Private hearing closed to the public.

J

Judge – The person who decides the outcome of a case.

Judgment – The final decision or ruling by a court.

Joint Residence – Where a child lives with both parents.

Jurisdiction – The legal authority to hear a case.

Judicial Review – A review of a public authority's decision.

K

Kinship Care – When a child is cared for by relatives.

Known Facts – Facts agreed or previously proven in a case.

Key Worker Letter – Used to confirm employment for support purposes.

Keeping Children Safe – Refers to safeguarding guidelines.

Knowledge of Proceedings – Being officially aware that legal action is underway.

L

Litigant in Person – Someone who represents themselves in court.

Leave to Apply – Permission to make a court application.

Legal Aid – Public funding to help with legal costs.

Letter Before Action – Warning sent before issuing court proceedings.

Lodging Documents – Submitting paperwork to the court.

M

McKenzie Friend – Supports a self-represented party in court.

Mediation – Helps parties reach an agreement outside of court.

Maintenance – Financial support paid for a child or ex-partner.

MIAM – A meeting about mediation before applying to court.

Molestation – Abusive behaviour that may lead to a protective order.

N

Non-Molestation Order – Protects against threats or abuse.

Notice of Hearing – Informs parties of the court date and time.

No Order Principle – The court avoids unnecessary orders.

Notice to Show Cause – Requires a party to justify their actions.

Non-Resident Parent – Parent with whom the child does not primarily live.

O

Occupation Order – Decides who can live in the family home.

Order – A legally binding decision of the court.

Oral Evidence – Spoken evidence given during a hearing.

On Notice – An application where the other party is informed.

Outcome Statement – Summary of a judge's decision.

P

Parental Responsibility – Legal duties and rights for a child.

Prohibited Steps Order – Prevents specific actions involving a child.

Position Statement – Written summary of a party's view.

Private Law – Disputes between individuals.

Public Law – Cases involving local authority intervention.

Q

Qualified Legal Representative – Appointed in cases involving allegations.

Queen's Bench Division – A division of the High Court.

Quashing Order – Cancels a previous decision.

Questioning Witnesses – The act of cross-examining in court.

Quiet Enjoyment – Legal right to live peacefully in one's home.

R

Residence – Where a child lives.

Respondent – The person responding to a court application.

Review Hearing – A check-in to monitor case progress.

Return Date – Follow-up hearing after an emergency application.

Rehearing – A repeat of a case or issue.

S

Safeguarding – Protecting children from harm.

Section 7 Report – CAFCASS or local authority report.

Special Guardianship Order – Gives a carer parental responsibility.

Statement of Issues – The matters the court must decide.

Skeleton Argument – Outline of key legal arguments.

T

Trial – Final hearing where evidence is presented.

Threshold Criteria – Legal test for local authority intervention.

Transcript – Written record of a court hearing.

Time with Child – Arrangements for non-resident parent contact.

Third Party Disclosure – Documents from someone not directly involved.

U

Undertaking – A promise to the court to do or not do something.

Unreasonable Behaviour – A ground for divorce.

Unrepresented Party – Someone without legal representation.

Urgent Application – A fast-tracked court request.

Unlawful Removal – Taking a child without consent or authority.

V

Variation Order – Changes an existing court order.

Voluntary Agreement – Agreed terms without going to court.

Vexatious Litigant – A person who frequently misuses the court.

Visitation Rights – Old term for child contact.

Verbal Agreement – Spoken, not legally binding, agreement.

W

Welfare Checklist – Factors considered for a child's best interests.

Without Notice Hearing – Emergency hearing without informing the other side.

Witness Statement – Written statement of evidence.

Ward of Court – A child under court protection.

Working Together – Guidance on safeguarding children.

X

X-Ray Evidence – Used in age assessments.

X Case – An anonymised child case.

Cross-Examination – Questioning of the other party's witness.

Excluded Evidence – Evidence not allowed in court.

Exhibit X – Label for confidential evidence.

Y

Young Person – Usually aged 16–18.

Youth Court – Criminal court for under 18s.

Youth Offending Team – Supports young people in trouble.

Youth Justice Board – Government body overseeing youth justice.

Your Honour – Formal address for a judge.

Z

Zone of Contact – Arrangement about where contact occurs.

Zero Tolerance – Strict stance on domestic abuse.

Z Schedule – Used in legal documentation.

Z-Listing – Anonymised listing for sensitive hearings.

Z Child – Term in anonymised court proceedings.