

Speak clearly and loudly. It is extremely important for the judge or jury to hear you. Speak Slowly. Do not nod or shake your head, but answer with a yes or no. Avoid slang or street language.



Do not guess. If you do not know the answer to a question, say so. If you cannot remember, say so.

Do not give your opinion. You need only tell what you

saw. You usually should not volunteer your opinion of the facts. The judge wants the facts. There are exceptions, of course: for example; are the children safe; did you feel threatened; could you be seen, etc. When you do give your opinion, support it with factual reasons for the opinion.

Stay calm and polite. Do not become angry even if you find the questions insulting to you. Never argue with the attorney or the judge. Sometimes, the story you are telling is very upsetting. Try to remain calm and controlled. It is important for the story to be told. Do not refuse to answer questions.

Try not to be nervous. You can tell your story. After that it is up to the judge or jury to make the decision.

Finally and most importantly, tell the truth. Even a little lie can make the judge or jury not believe you.

If you need legal assistance for a civil or family matter,

Contact:

Mid Penn Legal Services
213-A N. Front Street
Harrisburg, PA 17101
717-232-0581

Widener University
Harrisburg Civil Law Clinic
2300 Vartan Way, 2nd Floor
Harrisburg, PA 17110
717-541-0320

Dauphin County Lawyer Referral
717-232-7536

If you need legal assistance for a criminal matter,

Contact:

Dauphin County Public Defender's Office
717-780-6370

Based on materials created by Laura Robbins,
Esquire and Linda A. Lovett of Mid Penn Legal
Services.

Your Guide to:

GOING TO COURT

Making a Good Impression

How To Effectively Appear in
Court





Going to court can be a frightening experience. It is important to remember that the purpose of a hearing is to give the judge or the jury enough information to make a fair decision. There are

a few things you can do to help make a good first impression on the judge or the jury, possibly making proving your case easier.

Personal Appearance

Going to Court is a formal occasion. How you present yourself is important.

- You should be clean and neat.
- Dress conservatively.
- Men should wear dress pants and shirts, or sweater, if possible. A tie is not necessary, but definitely helps.
- Women should wear a nice dress, skirt, or dress pants. Do not wear short skirts—more than 2 inches above the knee. It is best to wear neutral colored pantyhose.
- Jeans are acceptable, **IF** they are clean and fairly new.
- Do not wear pants that fall below your underwear. Wear and use your belt.
- Shirts should be clean and fit properly. Do not wear shirts that show any part of your belly or excessive cleavage.
- Do not wear anything referring to sex, violence, cigarettes, drugs or alcohol or anything with cuss or other inappropriate words on it.
- Do not wear hooded sweatshirts, tank tops, pajamas, or shorts.

- Avoid heavy makeup.
- Do not wear a hat.
- Do not wear anything with holes or patches.
- Do not wear flip-flops or untied sneakers/shoes.



- It is better not to wear any facial piercings or show your tattoos. If your tattoo has any naked body parts, cuss or other inappropriate words, drug or alcohol references or violence, make sure it is covered.
- Your hair should be clean, combed and trimmed.
- For men, long hair should be tied back.
- Be sure your hands and fingernails are clean.
- Do not bathe yourself in perfume or cologne.
- Nail Polish—keep it simple.
- Jewelry—wear minimal amounts such as a watch and one ring, per hand.

Know Where To Go

Make sure you know where to go and when to be there. It is a good idea to get there a few minutes early. Be sure to allow time to find parking. Bring with you any paperwork pertaining to your case.

Personal Behavior

A hearing is a serious matter. You should act serious, but calm. Do not swear, laugh and talk in the courtroom or outside before the hearing. Also, although you may be upset and angry, do not raise your voice in the courtroom or anywhere in the courthouse.

Never chew gum or smoke in the courthouse. Avoid annoying behaviors, such as cracking your knuckles, biting your nails.

Always address the judge as “your honor” and the attorneys as “Sir” or “Ma’am.” Be polite and courteous to all court personnel.

The Hearing

Listen to all of the questions carefully. If you do not understand the question, say so. Answer only the question that was asked. However, if the question cannot be answered truthfully with a yes or no answer, you can ask the Judge to explain an answer.

If there is an “objection”, stop talking, wait for the judge to rule on the objection. If the objection is “sustained,” you may not answer the question. If it is “overruled,” you should answer the question. You can ask for the question to be repeated.

