



HM Courts &
Tribunals Service



Going to court or a tribunal

February 2024

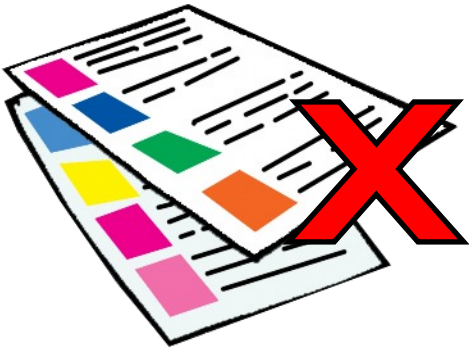


EasyRead version

Going to court or a tribunal



This EasyRead guide is about your rights when going to court or a tribunal.



There are also some links to more information, but these are not in EasyRead.

More information:



- If you have been told to go to court click here www.gov.uk/guidance/what-to-expect-coming-to-a-court-or-tribunal to find out what to take, how to get support and what should happen



- If you are going to say what you have seen, called a witness, or you are a victim click here www.gov.uk/going-to-court-victim-witness



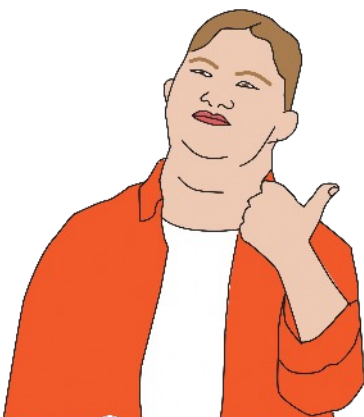
- If you have been asked to be on a jury click here www.gov.uk/jury-service This also has a video



- If you want to find out what we can do to support disabled people click here www.gov.uk/government/organisations/hm-courts-and-tribunals-service/about/equality-and-diversity



Our courts do have some complicated things happening that can be difficult to understand.



But they are seen as fair, open and independent, which helps make our country fair and just.



Unless there are special reasons, our courts are open to anyone to watch what is happening. So people can see justice happening. You can also watch some cases online now.

Types of courts and tribunals

1. Criminal



These are for people who might have broken the law and committed a crime.



They start in a lower court called a magistrates' court.

Serious cases then go to a Crown Court.

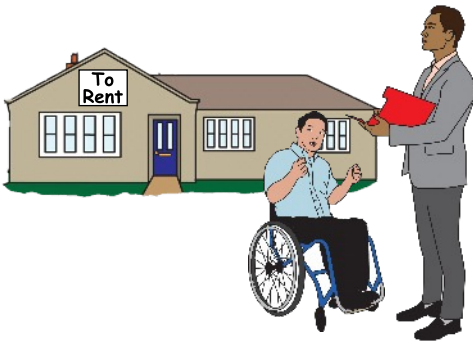


There are special youth courts for children between 10 and 17 years old which are normally private.

2. Civil

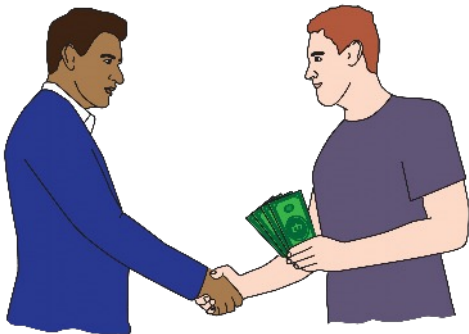


These are for arguments between people or organisations.



So they could be about:

- problems between landlords and tenants



- getting back money owed



- problems between companies



These are mostly in County Courts.



Other problems like:

- council tax



- child support



- stopping sexual harm



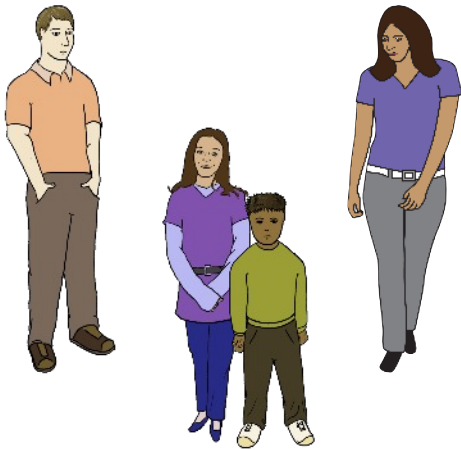
- stopping stalking



- appeals about some decisions made by councils



These are mostly in magistrates' courts.



3. Family Courts

These are usually for arguments about who should look after children, which are normally private.



They also deal with divorces cases.

4. Tribunals

These are for things like:

- asylum and immigration claims





- being unfairly sacked



- social security appeals



- tax



If you want to find out more about courts and tribunals and their history click here:

www.judiciary.uk/about-the-judiciary/our-justice-system/court-structure/

Before a court starts



If you are involved in a case, please tell a member of court staff when you come in.



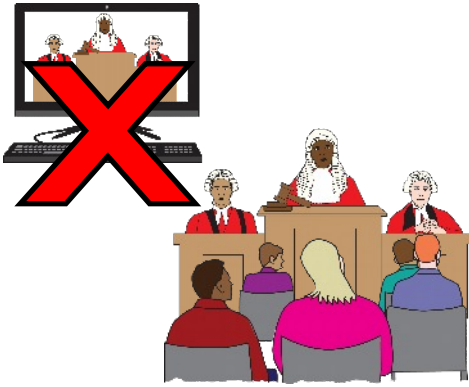
The judge or magistrate in charge decides if people can watch.



You can watch from seats for the public or sometimes ask to watch a video link.



You can find out more about a court here:
www.find-court-tribunal.service.gov.uk/



If a court or tribunal does not have the right technology or resources, or the judge has decided not to hold the case remotely, they might suggest watching the hearing in person instead.

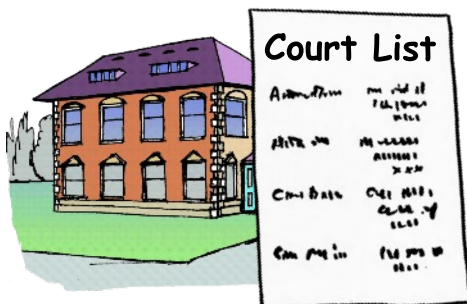


Please ask the court for any support or changes you need to help you understand what is happening.

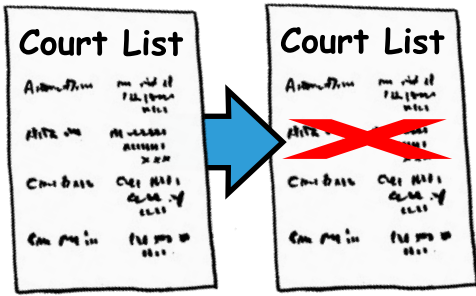


Court lists

These are lists of all the cases that are going to happen that day.



People can usually get one for free from the court.



Sometimes they do change, so please ask any of the court staff if you are unsure or have any questions.



You can also see lists here:
www.gov.uk/government/collections/hmcts-hearing-lists
or here
www.court-tribunal-hearings.service.gov.uk/



Security

Courts have to be safe places so you will have to go through checks.



Please look at the guide to what happens:
www.gov.uk/entering-court-or-tribunal-building

Watching a case



There are seats for the public. Staff will show you where to sit.



Watching online or by video

The judge will decide if a hearing can be seen online.



They will think about:

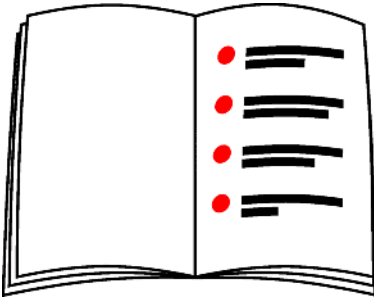
- is it useful for people to see what happens



- if that court can do it



- when it is needed for the trial



On the day of the hearing you want to watch you will need to follow the instructions sent by the court or tribunal.



This usually means clicking on the link the court has emailed you.



Not being allowed to see a case

Every court can decide not to allow people to watch when there is a good reason not to.



These are things like:

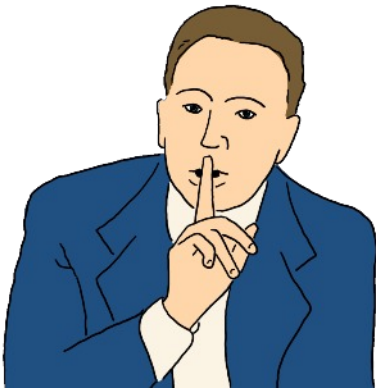
- stopping trouble in court



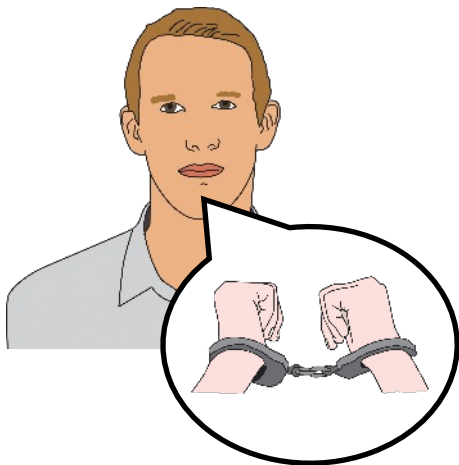
- helping people who are at risk



- helping people give their best evidence



You can go in and out of the court at most times but you must keep quiet.



But you will probably not be allowed in when:

- the charges are read out



- the jury is being sworn in



- people are taking oaths like promising to tell the truth



- the jury is saying what they have decided



- the judge passes a sentence



What happens in court

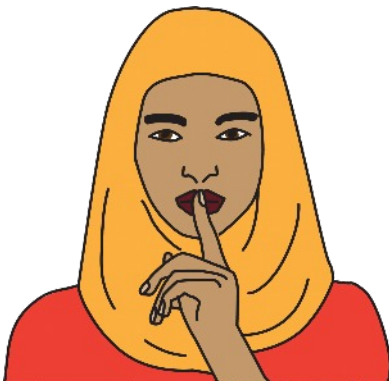
When the judge or magistrate is coming into court everyone will be asked to stand. They will say “all rise” or “stand please”.



If you cannot stand for some reason please tell the court usher before the hearing starts.



When they are in they will say when you can sit down.

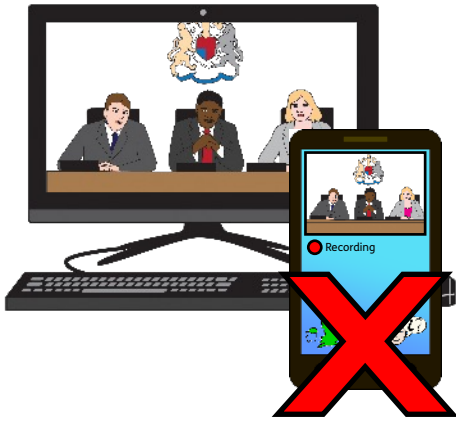


You must stay quiet.



Making any recordings

Recording anything in the whole court or tribunal building is against the law and could get you into serious trouble.



The same goes for people watching online.



This includes video, photographs or sound and especially if anything went onto social media.

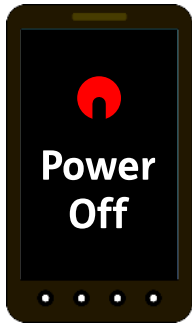


You could end up going to prison if you did this.

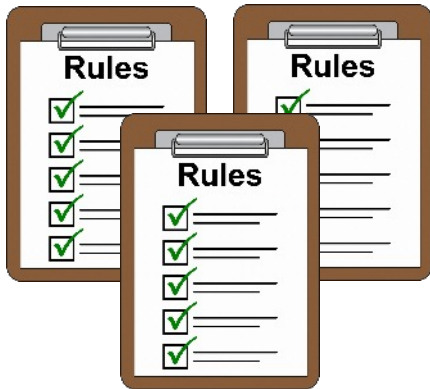
Devices such as mobiles and laptops



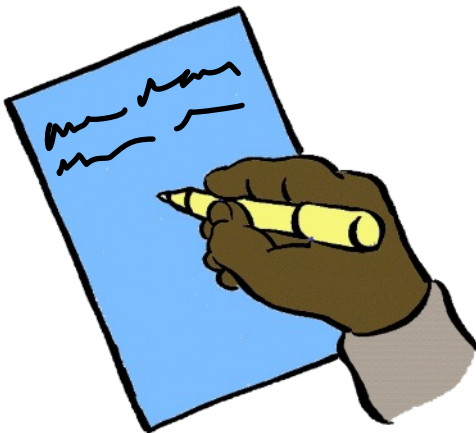
It is better not to take mobile phones or laptops into court.



If you do want to take one into court you must turn it off.



It is best to ask a member of staff on the door as there can be different rules for different courts.



Taking notes

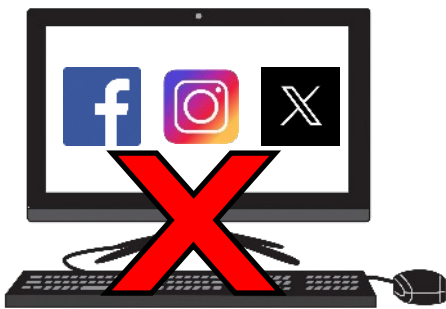
You can usually take notes unless anyone thinks they might be used for anything that breaks the law or the judge says you cannot.



You would also not be allowed if it could cause a disturbance.



If you are not sure, please ask a member of staff.



Social media

You cannot post anything on social media during a case unless you have permission.

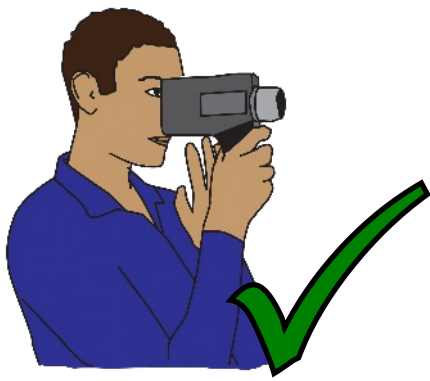


Sometimes the judge will say some things cannot be published at all, like the names of people.



Wi-Fi

There is free Wi-Fi in court buildings.



TV channels

Some people have permission to film judges saying what they have decided.



Only judges are filmed, no one else.



Getting information about what is happening in court

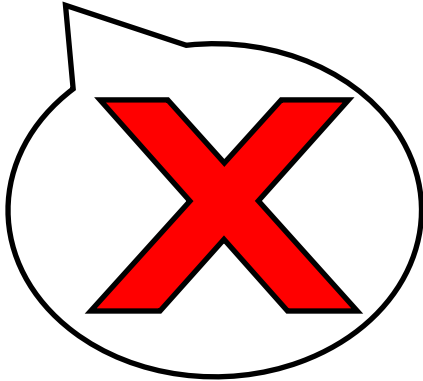
As well as watching cases as they happen, you can sometimes hear or read what happened in court.



If it was recorded, you can ask for permission to listen to it.



Sometimes you can ask for a written copy of what was said.



The court can say no or only let you have part of the case.



Magistrates' courts do not record their cases.



Ask if you have to pay for this. Click here for more information
www.gov.uk/apply-transcript-court-tribunal-hearing



Telling other people about a case

Sometimes, you are not allowed to talk about some cases.

These are called reporting restrictions.

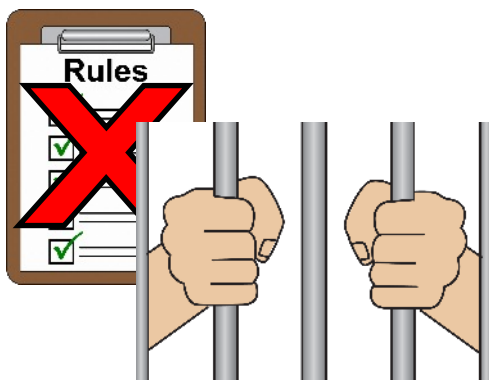


This means it is against the law and you could be sent to prison for contempt of court.

See www.gov.uk/contempt-of-court



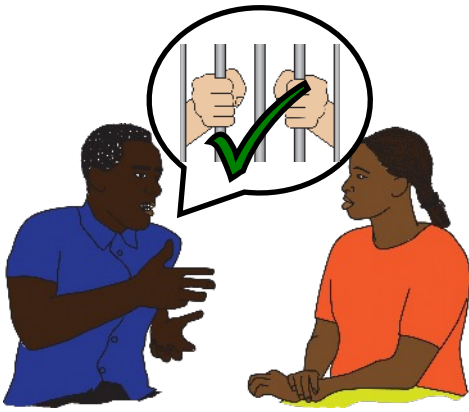
If you are not sure what you are allowed to talk about please ask a member of staff.



Breaking court rules

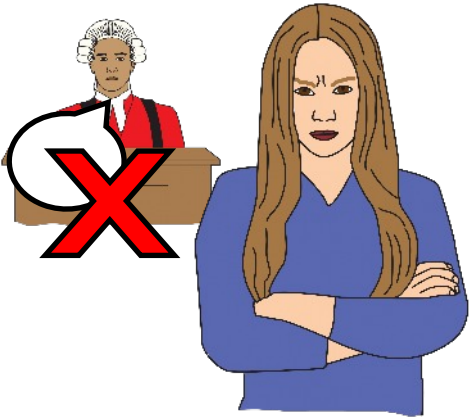
If you do break some of these rules you could be charged with contempt of court and fined or go to prison.

See www.gov.uk/contempt-of-court



This can happen if:

- someone tries to change what is being decided in court



- someone does not follow a court order



- someone take photos or shouts out in court



- someone does not answer the court's questions as a witness



- someone tells others about a case that is still going on, for example putting it on social media



Finding out about a case

If you want to know more about a case please ask the court.

Credits



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