

CHILDREN FIRST

Safeguarders
Panel Team

Top 10 Tips for Appearing in Court



By Barbara Black

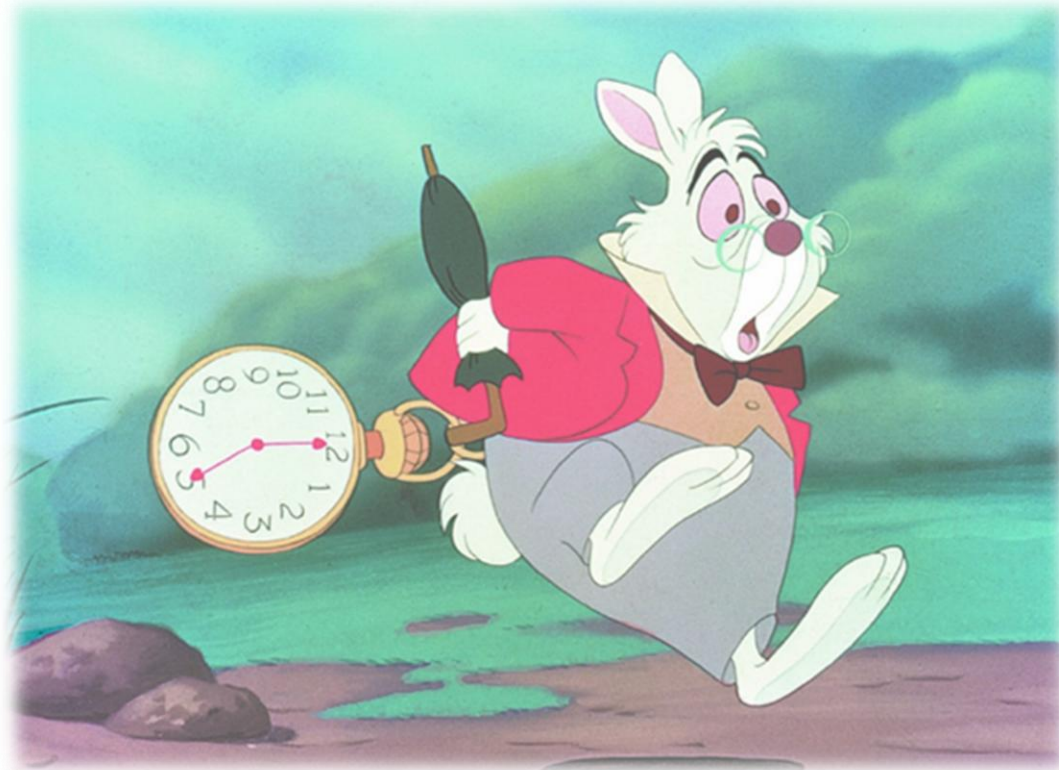
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Hello everyone – and thank you for being here!

If you're attending court for the first time, it can be intimidating. The building, the language, and the process are all unfamiliar.

Today, I am going to take you through 10 simple, practical tips to help you feel more confident and prepared!

“I’m late, I’m late for a very important date!”



- Which Court?
- Where will I park?
- Can I run to Tesco at lunchtime?
- Try to arrive at least 20 to 30 minutes early.
- This gives you time to find your court room, speak to the clerk, and settle your nerves.
- Court timings!

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Let me in!!

- Children's proceedings have closed courts! The door is locked, no amount of banging on it will let you in!
- Once you have spoken to the Clerk, hang around outside, wait to hear your case be called.
- How are you getting in here? Is it main door or side entrance?
- If asked to sit in a waiting room, keep going and checking when the case is calling, don't sit there for hours to discover the case has been dealt with and everyone is away!



Muscle in!

- Try and see the family / carers / young person before the case calls.
- Introduce yourself to the agents involved.
- Check their plan for the hearing – do they want it discharged / continued or to go ahead?
- Have as much discussion as possible before it calls!
- Get included in appropriate discussions and decisions!



Is this seat taken?

- Where will I sit?
- Lawyers sit around the main central table when the case calls and usually in referral courts with their client beside them.
- When your case calls, sit at the main table unless told otherwise.



Hello my name is...

- “My Lord” or “My Lady”
- Stand when speaking, be respectful and avoid interrupting.
- If you make a mistake, don’t worry, apologise and move on!



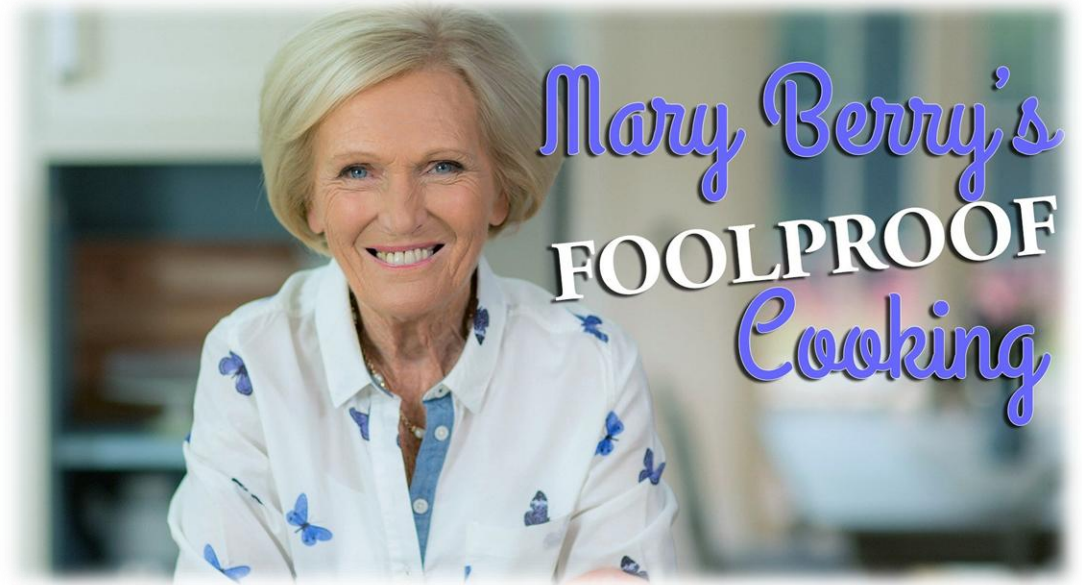
Mirror Mirror on the wall

- Just ask...
- If you don't understand something, ask!
- Need more time or not seen something being referred to, ask for copies or clarification!



Foolproof tips for... Court!

- Be organised!
- Bring all of your documents, along with any notes.
- Keep them all together and easy to access.
- If calling for Proof: What does the Clerk have and do you have the same? Ask the Bar officer to check for you.
- Scope out nearest toilet, court café and waiting room in relation to where you are.



Don't be benched

- When it is your turn to speak, take your time!
- Speak clearly and use your own words. You don't need legal language.
- If you don't understand a question – ask for it to be repeated.
- Don't agree? Say why!!



The courts are used to dealing with non-legally qualified people and other professionals not used to appearing in Court.

Sheriffs, especially in specialised Courts understand the role of a safeguarder and in my experience are courteous, helpful and understanding, as are most Solicitors, Clerks and Bar Officers!

You don't need to be perfect!

If you are prepared, respectful and willing to ask questions, you will handle it far better than you think.

Court gets easier! We all start somewhere.

Common Questions

- What if I arrive late?
- Go straight to the Clerk and explain. Your case still may be heard but always aim to arrive early.

- What should I wear?
- Smart. You don't need formal attire but avoid very casual clothing.

- What if I forget what I want to say?
- Bring notes and take your time! It's okay to pause.

- What if I don't get a proper note of what happened?
- Ask the Reporter before leaving.

- Do I have to speak?
- Usually yes, but it might be pretty short if the hearing is getting continued.



Thank you for your attention.