

SANTA BARBARA COUNTY SUPERIOR COURT
OFFICE OF THE FAMILY LAW FACILITATOR

FOR SELF-REPRESENTED LITIGANTS:

How Do I Prepare for My Hearing?

1. Read over your court documents. Be familiar with what is being requested and what responses have been made by the other party. Only the boxes checked on the forms will be discussed. Other issues will need to be discussed at a future court date.
2. Create an outline showing each request and the reasons for each request. Then add to the outline what responses have been made by the other party to each request and why.
3. Summarize your side's point of view showing why each request should or should not be granted.
4. If you get nervous in court, you can look at your outline and know what you need to tell the judge or commissioner.

What Do I Do on the Day of Court?

1. Dress nicely, as for an interview or a special occasion. Dress appropriately: men need to have a shirt on, no crop tops, no extremely short skirts, no low-cut blouses. Do not wear shirts that have offensive writing on the front or back. If you wear a hat, remove it in the courtroom.
2. Bring **all** your court papers, including any financial documents that the court may want to see. Bring your issue outline so that you can refer to this as you talk to the judicial officer.
3. Be early or on time for court. Know in advance which department you need to go to in the courthouse. When you go in the courtroom, check in with the bailiff (the officer in uniform) or the clerk.
4. If you are the one who requested the court hearing, you are allowed to speak to the judicial officer first. You will need to say **briefly** what you want and why. You can assume that the judicial officer has read your papers if you filed them well in advance of the hearing. Remember: the judicial officer does not want to

hear you take a lot of time. **Your goal is: (1) to identify the issues you want the court to address, (2) to tell the court what decision you want on each of those issues and (3) to explain why. Then stop talking.** Give the other side a chance to speak.

5. Listen carefully to what is being discussed in your case. **Do not interrupt the other party or the judicial officer.** Answer politely when spoken to by the judge or the other party. Address your answers to the judicial officer.

6. At the end of your hearing (which may take just a few minutes, depending on the complexity of the issues), the judicial officer will make an order or orders. If you have requested orders, make sure that the judge or commissioner in court makes an order regarding each item that is requested. **Do not rely on the judge or commissioner to remember all the orders you have requested. Look at your outline.** You may need to remind the court if something has been overlooked.

7. If you asked for the hearing, you may be responsible for writing the final order. Listen carefully to what the judge says. If you need to write an order, contact your Family Law Facilitator for assistance.