



## **What to expect at the Family Court**

Going to the Family Court after a separation or change in family situation can be stressful. Talking to your lawyer or a Kaiārahi (Family Court Navigator) first may help.

Find information about how you can get in touch with a Kaiārahi on the back page.

# Preparing for court

Things to check before going to court

- Arrange childcare**

The court does not provide childcare, so you'll need to organise this.

- Let the court know if you need an interpreter**

If you need an interpreter, including for te reo Māori and New Zealand Sign Language, you'll need to let the court know. Court staff can help with this.

- You can bring a support person**

Your support person can wait with you in public spaces, but if you want them in the courtroom you'll need to ask the judge. Your lawyer or court staff can help with this.

- Accessible entrances and technology in courtrooms**

The court has accessible entrances, hearing assisted technology and alternative seating in courtrooms. Let the Court know if you need accessibility support so they can make the right arrangements.

- Security officers to keep everyone safe**

Security officers are at court to keep everyone safe. If you need security support, let the Court know as soon as you arrive. You can also talk to your lawyer or court staff.

# Arriving at court

When you get to court, you may go through a security check. This means you'll go through a metal detector and your personal items may be checked by security staff. Anything that's a risk to safety or security may be taken, and returned when you leave.

Signs in the court building will show you where to go. If you need help, you can ask at the front counter or talk to court staff.

# Who will be in the courtroom

In the courtroom there will be the judge, the registrar (supports the judge), the other person or people involved in the parenting disagreement, lawyers, support people and you. In some cases, interpreters, social workers, psychologists, lawyer for child and media may also be in the courtroom.



## **What happens in the courtroom**

The Family Court is closed to the public. This means only those involved in the conference or hearing, or those who have received permission from the judge, may attend.

You'll usually be going to either a conference or a hearing at the Court.

### **The judge will help work out the disagreement**

At a case conference, everyone involved in the parenting disagreement will meet with the judge and lawyers to talk about next steps.

At a settlement conference, the judge will help everyone involved work out the parenting disagreement.

### **The judge will make the decision**

A hearing is more formal. The judge will look at evidence, for example affidavits, or hear from witnesses, to make a decision about the parenting disagreement.

The judge will let you know when it's your turn to speak. If you have a lawyer, they'll speak on your behalf unless you're giving evidence.

It's important you understand what's going on. You can ask questions in court, but you need to talk to your lawyer or ask the judge when it's your turn to speak.

## **The judge will explain what happens next**

When your conference or hearing ends, the judge will explain what will happen next. This might mean coming back to court on another day.

## **You can get legal advice at any time**

It may be helpful to talk to a lawyer when you're working through a separation or change in family situation. If you're not sure where to start, visit your local Community Law Centre or [communitylaw.org.nz](http://communitylaw.org.nz)

## **You have the right to feel safe**

You can get help if you or someone else feels unsafe:

- If you or someone else is in immediate danger call 111
- Visit [justice.govt.nz/family-violence](http://justice.govt.nz/family-violence)
- Visit [areyouok.org.nz](http://areyouok.org.nz)
- Freephone 'Are You OK' on 0800 456 450

## **Where to get support**

### **In your community**

Kaiārahi (Family Court Navigators), Family Court Co-ordinators and court staff can guide you when sorting out parenting arrangements but cannot give you legal advice. Kaiārahi can also connect you with community support services in your area.

Contact:

- Visit your local court
- Email [kaiarahi@justice.govt.nz](mailto:kaiarahi@justice.govt.nz)
- Freephone the Ministry of Justice on 0800 224 733

## **Organisations to help you**

### **Citizens Advice Bureau**

They help you understand your rights and fill out forms.

- Freephone 0800 367 222
- Visit [cab.org.nz](http://cab.org.nz)

### **Community Law Centre**

They offer free, confidential one-on-one legal help for people across Aotearoa New Zealand/

- Visit [communitylaw.org.nz](http://communitylaw.org.nz)

### **Family Services Directory**

They have a list of support services that help whānau (family and friends) across Aotearoa New Zealand. These services range from housing to counselling.

- Freephone 0800 211 211
- Visit [familyservices.govt.nz/directory/](http://familyservices.govt.nz/directory/)

### **CCS Disability Action**

They provide information and support to people with disabilities and their whānau (family and friends)

- Freephone 0800 227 200
- Email [info@ccsDisabilityAction.org.nz](mailto:info@ccsDisabilityAction.org.nz)

## **Counselling**

For professional support for mental health, or other personal issues, contact:

- Need to Talk – Freephone or text 1737 or visit [1737.org.nz](http://1737.org.nz)
- Lifeline – Freephone 0800 543 354 or text 4357
- Skylight – Freephone 0800 299 100 or visit [skylight.org.nz](http://skylight.org.nz)

## **For children and young people**

- What's Up – Freephone 0800 942 8787
- Youthline – Freephone 0800 376 633 or text 234

## **If you feel unsafe**

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- Freephone 'Are You OK' on 0800 456 450