



Office of the District Attorney
Joyce E Dudley Santa Barbara County District Attorney

Preparing for Court

- 1) **Dress.** It is helpful to make a good first impression by dressing neatly to show respect for the court. (Similarly, wearing hats or even chewing gum is generally not acceptable in court). You may also want to bring a sweater or dress warmly as many courtrooms are cool.
- 2) **Parking.** Parking can be difficult. Most street parking is limited and includes the risk of having your vehicle towed during certain hours. When driving to the courthouse in Santa Barbara, many people choose to park in the paid parking lot located across the street. In Santa Maria and Lompoc there is limited parking at the Courthouse itself. The District Attorney's office does not pay for parking.
- 3) **Sequestering.** Witnesses or potential witnesses will more than likely be sequestering from the courtroom, which means that they will not be allowed in the courtroom during any other witness testimony. This can be very frustrating for victims/survivors and witnesses, but it is a common practice and done to ensure that the witnesses' testimonies do not influence each other.
- 4) **Waiting.** The court process can be very long. Even if you were asked to be here for court first thing in the morning, it is possible that you will need to wait for a large part of the day for your turn to be in court. Bring a book, card, or anything to keep you occupied during your wait. Snacks are a good idea as well as toys for young children.
- 5) **Electronics.** Turn all cell phones off or to vibrate while in the courtroom. This is very important as many judges do not tolerate cell phones in the courtroom and *will* kick you out of the courtroom.

6) Who will be in the courtroom?

In the courtroom will be the following:

- a. Judge
- b. Bailiff
- c. Court Reporter
- d. Court Clerk
- e. Prosecuting Attorney (Deputy District Attorney)
- f. Defending Attorney (Public Defender or private defender)
- g. Defendant

In the courtroom may or may not be the following:

- a. Interpreters, if needed
- b. Police officers and Investigators involved in the case
- c. Any other witnesses
- d. Family/friends

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- e. *Know that a courtroom is a public place and unless specified otherwise by a judge, almost anyone can observe the proceedings.*

Your Testimony

During a preliminary hearing, evidence suppression hearing or trial, you may be questioned by the prosecuting attorney (D.D.A.) and the defending attorney. The following are some pointers on how to be a good witness.

- **Be truthful.** Never exaggerate or shade your testimony. Just tell the facts, simply and concisely, as you know them.
- **Focus.** Listen carefully to the question. If you do not understand a question, ask for clarification.
- **Do not guess.** Give definite answers whenever possible. If you do not know answers do not be afraid to say so. Do not stop to figure out whether your answer will help or hurt the case for either the prosecution or defense. Just answer the questions to the best of your knowledge.
- **Answer only the question asked.** Do not try to say everything at once or volunteer information that was not asked.
- **Explain your answer, if necessary.** If the answer cannot be answered truthfully and fully with a simple “yes” or “no” you have the right to ask the judge to permit you to explain your answer after first answering “yes” or “no”.
- **Be prepared.** Do not try to memorize what you are going to say; try to recall relevant facts.
- **If asked, “Have you talked to anyone about this case?”** Do not forget to mention your conversations with the prosecutor, defense attorney, or staff members such as paralegals, investigators, or victim advocates.
- **When an attorney objects to a question.** Do not lose your temper or become angry, as it may diminish the impact of your testimony.
- **Speak clearly and loudly.** Always face the person questioning you, and speak clearly enough to be heard by a jury. Do not simply nod for a “yes” or shake your head for a “no.”
- **Dress neatly and always show respect for the court.** For example, chewing gum or wearing a hat while on the stand will not be acceptable in court.
- **Be yourself.** The judge, jurors and attorneys are human and appreciate sincerity.