

**CAO Cv INSTRUCTION 4-1
GUIDELINES FOR COURTROOM BEHAVIOR**

- Dress neatly.
- Courthouses do not provide child-care. Ask someone to watch your children for you.
- Be on time for court. Allow extra time to find parking.
- Go to your assigned courtroom.
- You can't bring food or drinks into the courtroom. You must remove your hat and turn your cell phone **off** before entering the courtroom.
- Review your paperwork before court. Be familiar with your papers.
- Be polite and respectful. Always address the judge as "Your Honor". Do not interrupt. If something needs to be clarified, wait until it is your turn to speak, or ask to speak again.
- You may use written notes or an outline during court. Stick to the facts. Do not ramble when offering evidence to support your side of the story.
- Take your time when answering questions. Give the question as much thought as you need to understand it before you answer. You may be ordered to explain your answer.
- When the judge asks you questions, be direct. If you don't know an answer say so. Do not be afraid to admit that you do not know something.
- Be sincere. Do not be sarcastic or argue with the judge or other parties. Stay calm.
- If you are stating dates, times and places, etc. be exact. If you cannot be exact, make it clear you are only estimating.
- Speak clearly and distinctly, using words, phrases and terms you understand. Keep your hands away from your mouth and speak loudly enough so the judge can easily hear you.
- Stay polite after the ruling. If your case was contested, the judge may sign the order you've proposed or ask you to make changes. Ask the judge whether you or the other party will write the court order (the judge will not write the order). The judge must sign an order and it must be file stamped by the Court Clerk before it becomes effective. You may need to arrange a later time to come back to the court to have the judge sign the final papers.
- You may bring a friend for moral support. That person must remain silent.

Standard Procedure at Court

- When the judge calls your case, move forward to let the judge know you are in the courtroom. The judge will tell you where you can sit.
- A trial will proceed as follows:
 - The judge will ask you and the other party to make an opening statement. This should be a brief statement that tells the judge what you are asking for. The petitioner/plaintiff speaks first, then the respondent/defendant.
 - After opening statements, the person who filed the case (petitioner/plaintiff) calls his or her witnesses to testify. After each witness has testified, other parties may ask questions of the witness (cross-examination). The petitioner may ask questions on redirect. Other parties then put on his/her/their witnesses and the process is repeated. Very specific rules of evidence apply.

General information about the evidence rules can be found in “Represent Yourself in Court” available from Nolo Press.

- If your case is not contested, the judge may sign your proposed order without testimony or may require you to testify to the things in your Complaint or Petition. After you have testified, the judge may ask you questions before ruling.
- A contested hearing will proceed like a trial, but generally without opening statements. The judge will usually say “Please call your first witness” to indicate you should start your case. Remember, you can be your witness.