PRACTICAL WORKING GUIDE / ENGLAND AND WALES

Emergency Checklist - The First Seven Days

EvidenceCanvas

A calm, ordered response to family court papers

Jurisdiction: England and Wales

Reviewed: 21 September 2026

> This checklist helps you organise and understand papers you have received. It is general process information for England and Wales, not legal advice. It does not tell you what to do in your case, and it is not a substitute for advice from a regulated legal professional. Court papers and any court order always take priority over general guidance. If you need advice on urgent protective orders, contact a solicitor or Support Through Court straight away. In immediate danger, call 999.

How to use this checklist

Work through the seven days in order. You are not replying to anything yet - you are building an accurate picture and protecting deadlines. Most mistakes in week one come from doing everything at once, at night, in a panic.

Day 1 - Stabilise and find the dates

- ☐ Read the papers once, slowly, just to find **dates**. Put the pen down afterwards.
- ☐ Highlight or list: the **hearing date**, any date that says "**by**" or "**before**", and the date the papers were **served** on you.
- ☐ Put each date in your phone calendar **with a reminder at least three working days early**.
- ☐ Note **how** the papers were delivered (post, email, hand-delivered) and the date on the envelope or email.
- ☐ Find the **case number** (top of most forms, often formatted like `XX00XXXX`) and write it somewhere safe. Every later document you file or cite will need it.
- ☐ Check which **court** the case is at (name and address on the front page or letters).
- ☐ If the papers include an order made **without you being present** (for example a non-molestation order), read any section about applying to **vary or set it aside** - applications to set aside must generally be made within **7 days of service** under rule 18.11 of the Family Procedure Rules 2010. Note the deadline the same day and get advice on it.
- ☐ Do **not** discuss the papers with anyone tonight, and do **not** reply to the other party about them yet.

Day 2 - Identify what you have received

- ☐ Find the **form name or code** on each document. The code tells you the type of case:
  - **C100** - an application for a child arrangements order (who a child lives with or spends time with).
  - **C1 / C2** - application forms used in some children proceedings (C2 to start or join proceedings where special rules apply).
  - **FL401** - an application for a non-molestation order and/or an occupation order.
  - **FHDRA letter** - an appointment in an existing or new children case (First Hearing Dispute Resolution Appointment).
  - **Form A** - notice that a financial remedy application has been made.
- ☐ For each document, note on one page: *document name · what it asks for or says · any deadline attached*.
- ☐ If a form is served **with a court seal**, that means the court has issued it - it is a genuine court document, not just the other party's letter.
- ☐ Do not assume anything in the papers is true or untrue. Right now you are labelling, not judging.

Day 3 - Start one case file

- ☐ Create **one** folder - physical or digital - named for the case, and keep everything in it from today.
- ☐ Make these folders inside it (or use the Case File Starter structure):
  1. `01 - Court orders and applications`
  2. `02 - Statements and reports`
  3. `03 - Correspondence`
  4. `04 - Messages and screenshots`
  5. `05 - School medical police local-authority material`
  6. `06 - Photos audio and video`
  7. `07 - My instructions and working notes`
  8. `08 - Drafts`
  9. `09 - Filed or served copies and receipts`
- ☐ Put the served papers (or clean copies/scans) in folder 01. **Keep the originals untouched.**
- ☐ Scan or photograph every paper page as a backup. Do not edit the images.
- ☐ Start one **document inventory**: a single table, one row per item - `ID · Date · Source · What it is · Status`. Give every item a reference (EV-0001, EV-0002...). From now on, every document gets one home and one number.

Day 4 - Understand the claims, without answering them

- ☐ Read the papers a second time, with your inventory open.
- ☐ On plain paper, list each **claim or concern made about you or the children** in one neutral line each, in the claimant's own words where possible: *"Statement says: [X] on [date]."*
- ☐ Next to each, note the **source** it rests on, if stated (their statement, a text message, a police log).
- ☐ Next to each, note whether **you have a document that relates to it** - and add that document to your inventory if it is not already there.
- ☐ Write **nothing** that will be sent to anyone. This is a working map, not a response. Anything you write now, tired and under stress, can later become evidence if you send it.
- ☐ If a claim is factually wrong, write down what a document would need to show - not what you want to say.

Day 5 - Protect deadlines and check support

- ☐ Re-check every deadline you listed on Day 1 against the papers one more time. Deadlines can hide in:
  - the **order itself** (often on the front page and in the body);
  - the **covering letter** from the court;
  - the **last page** of an application form.
- ☐ Diarise: what must be **filed** (sent to the court), what must be **served** (sent to the other party), and by when - these can have different deadlines.
- ☐ If you intend to seek legal advice, book it now - even one fixed-fee hour this week is valuable. Sources of help:
  - **Support Through Court** (free helpline and in-court support): https://www.supportthroughcourt.org/
  - **GOV.UK - representing yourself in court**: https://www.gov.uk/represent-yourself-in-court
  - **Law Society - Find a Solicitor**: https://solicitors.lawsociety.org.uk/
  - **Family mediation (up to £500 voucher)**: https://www.gov.uk/find-family-mediation
- ☐ If you were served with a non-molestation order and the **7-day set-aside window** (rule 18.11) applies to you, make sure advice on that deadline happens this week, not after it.

Day 6 - Prepare, but do not send

- ☐ If a response or statement will be needed, start it as a **structured document**: heading block, numbered paragraphs, one fact per paragraph, each with its date and source.
- ☐ Keep every fact tied to a document: *"Statement of [name] dated [date], paragraph [n]"* or *"text message dated [date], screenshot EV-0007"*.
- ☐ Draft nothing final late at night. Sleep, then re-read.
- ☐ Check your folder structure is still clean: nothing important living in your camera roll, downloads folder or glovebox.

Day 7 - Week-one review

- ☐ Every date is in the calendar with reminders.
- ☐ You know what each document is and what it asks for.
- ☐ One folder holds everything; the inventory numbers every item.
- ☐ The claims are mapped - neutral wording, sources noted, no replies sent.
- ☐ Deadlines for filing and serving are diarised; any urgent advice (including any rule 18.11 window) has been booked or completed.
- ☐ You have told no one anything about the case that you would not be content for a judge to read.

Then stop. A calm, ordered week one beats a frantic weekend of messages you cannot unsay.

Keep going

- The **Case File Starter Kit** (free) expands the folder structure, inventory and file-naming rules used above.
- **EvidenceCanvas** is a preparation workspace: your documents, dates and chronology in one protected matter workspace, with drafts reviewed against sources by a human before anything is released. It does not file, serve, advise or guarantee outcomes.

> EvidenceCanvas is not a law firm and does not provide legal advice or representation. General process information for England and Wales, reviewed 21 September 2026; current rules, practice directions and any court order in your case take priority. Rule references: Family Procedure Rules 2010 rule 18.11 (applications to set aside without-notice orders); form codes as used on GOV.UK and HMCTS family forms. Verify deadlines against the papers in your own case.

Sources reviewed

- Family Procedure Rules 2010, Part 18 (rule 18.11 - set aside or vary an order made without notice): https://www.justice.gov.uk/courts/procedure-rules/family/parts/part_18
- GOV.UK - Applying for a court order / child arrangements overview: https://www.gov.uk/looking-after-children-divorce/apply-for-court-order
- GOV.UK - Representing yourself in court: https://www.gov.uk/represent-yourself-in-court
- Support Through Court: https://www.supportthroughcourt.org/