EvidenceCanvas

# FIRST STEPS WITHOUT A SOLICITOR
## FAMILY COURT · ENGLAND AND WALES

General information, not legal advice
Checked 14 October 2026
On-the-day items re-checked 23 October 2026

For parents going to the family court about child arrangements without a solicitor. Tick each line as you go. It goes with our video on how the family court works.

**Your court order comes first.** If an order in your case says something different from this checklist, follow the order. This is general information, not legal advice.

### 01 Safety first

- [ ] If I am not safe, I know the numbers: **999** in an emergency; National Domestic Abuse Helpline **0808 2000 247** (free, 24 hours); Samaritans **116 123**.

### 02 Before I apply

- [ ] I have used the gov.uk legal aid checker (gov.uk/legal-aid/check-legal-aid).
- [ ] I have checked Help with Fees before paying the £270 application fee (gov.uk/get-help-with-court-fees).
- [ ] I have attended a MIAM, or I know which exemption applies and will state it on the form.
- [ ] I have asked the mediator about the mediation voucher (up to £500 towards mediation sessions; not the MIAM).
- [ ] If I or a child has been harmed or is at risk of harm, I have completed Form C1A.

### 03 Know my route

- [ ] I have read my court's letters: standard route (Cafcass checks, safeguarding letter, FHDRA) or Child Focused Model (Child Impact Report).
- [ ] I have the date, time and format (in person, video or phone) of my next hearing.

### 04 My papers

- [ ] One folder for everything, paper and/or digital.
- [ ] File names start with the date, year first (2026-10-14 school email).
- [ ] A chronology started: date, what happened, where the proof is.
- [ ] Copies of everything sent and received, with proof of sending.
- [ ] Texts, WhatsApp messages, emails, recordings and photos kept safe, but not put in the bundle unless the court orders it.
- [ ] I do not post about my case online or share papers with anyone the rules do not allow.

### 05 Deadlines

- [ ] Every date in my court order is in my calendar.
- [ ] Position statement and other short documents: by 11am on the working day before the hearing, to the court and the other side, unless my order says otherwise.

### 06 On the day

- [ ] Arrive about 30 minutes before the time on my hearing letter (not much earlier), and allow for the bag check; remote hearing link tested the day before.
- [ ] Pen, paper, my papers and a copy of the bundle. Ready to wait: my case may not be first.
- [ ] Special measures (screens, separate waiting area, video link) requested in advance if I need them.
- [ ] McKenzie friend arranged, if I want one.

### 07 Free help

- [ ] Support Through Court 0300 081 0006 · Advicenow · RCJ Advice · LawWorks · Law Centres · FFRAP · Citizens Advice.

Sources: gov.uk (fees, Help with Fees, legal aid, child arrangements, what to expect coming to a court); Family Procedure Rules Part 3 and Part 3A; judiciary guide for litigants in person on court bundles (2 March 2026); Practice Guidance on McKenzie Friends (12 July 2010).

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