Witness Service

The day of the trial

3 March 2026

Support on the day

The Witness Service is available to support you throughout the court process, including on the day of the trial.

You can still get support on the day of the trial if you have not been in touch with us before, or if you've changed your mind about wanting support. Speak to a member of security or court staff when you arrive at the court building and ask to speak to a Witness Service supporter.

A Witness Service supporter will be with you in a safe and secure witness waiting area, away from the court's general waiting area, before you give your evidence.

They can talk to you about the court process and can answer any questions you may have. **But they will not discuss your evidence or any details about the trial with you.**

A Witness Service supporter can act as the link between you and the court or Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) staff to keep you updated.

They will also be available to support you, if needed, once you've finished giving your evidence.



Image Description: Photo of a man in a blue jumper sat across a table from a woman with blonde hair. The man holds his chin in his hand, suggesting he is listening intently in a supportive manner.

Arriving at the court

Getting to the court

The letter you received asking you to give evidence at court will have the details of which court you will attend. If you're unsure, you can ask the Witness Care Unit or officer in the case (OIC) if you're a prosecution witness, or the defence lawyer if you're a defence witness.

You can find more information about the court, and directions to it, on the GOV.UK website.

Going through security

When you arrive at the court, you'll have to go through an airport-style security check. This may sound daunting, but it helps keep the court safe, and everyone who enters the building goes through it. If you need help or have any questions, the security officer will be there to help you.

The security officer may ask you to empty your pockets and place your belongings in a tray. You may be asked to take off your shoes, coat, gloves, belt or hat. They'll check any bag you've brought with you. Some courts have x-ray security scanners, which your belongings may be passed through.

You'll be asked to walk through an archway security detector. A security officer may use a handheld scanner to conduct a further search and, if necessary, they may do a manual person search.

Once they've finished their checks, you can tell the security officer you're a witness and ask them for the Witness Service.

You can bring non-alcoholic drinks with you. If any drinks are open, or are in a flask, bottle or cup, the security officer will ask you to take a sip to prove the contents are not harmful. This is called a 'sip test'.

There are some items you're **not allowed** to bring into court. For example, you cannot bring in any knives or weapons, any blades or other sharp items, glass, tools, alcohol, or any liquids that are not drinks or prescription medicine (including perfume). A full list of items you cannot bring to court can be found on the GOV.UK website.

The HM Courts and Tribunals Service have created a video on what to expect from a security check.

What to take with you

Although you'll be given a time to attend court, there may be delays. It's likely you will have to wait for a period of time before you're called into the courtroom to give your evidence.

You might want to consider bringing the following items:

- The letter you received asking you to attend court to give evidence.
- A book, e-book reader, magazine, phone or tablet to keep you occupied or distracted until it's time to give your evidence. (Consider bringing a charger with you for any electrical devices, and headphones if you plan to listen to music, an audiobook or podcast.)
- Refreshments, or money to buy refreshments from the canteen or vending machine if available (these are not available in every court).
- Any medication you need, with the pharmacy label showing your name and the date it was issued.

- A friend or family member to support you.

Being comfortable
Although there's no dress code for attending court, you may want to consider wearing layers in case you get too hot or cold in the court building.

Before you give evidence

The waiting area

Until it's time for you to give evidence in the courtroom, you'll be able to wait in a separate waiting area away from the court's general waiting area. The court staff or security officer can direct you when you arrive at the court.

This is sometimes called the witness suite or witness waiting area.

There may be other people in the witness waiting area who are giving evidence in the same trial as you or other trials in the court building.

It's very important not to discuss your case with any other witnesses. This includes when you're in the witness waiting area, during a lunch break or recess, or if you're part-way through giving evidence and are called back the following day.

Where possible, prosecution witnesses (and bereaved family members) will be able to sit separately from defence witnesses. If you have any concerns, you can speak to a Witness Service supporter.

Reviewing your statement

While you're waiting, you'll be able to read your witness statement. This is to refresh your memory on the evidence you gave to the police or to the defence legal team.

If you had a pre-recorded video witness statement and you haven't watched it before the start of the trial to refresh your memory, the officer in the case can arrange a viewing.

The usher should take your witness statement into the courtroom, and you may refer to it with the court's permission.

The magistrates, or the judge and jury, will not have seen or read your statement before you give evidence.

Meeting the CPS prosecutor or defence representative

Before you give your evidence, a member of the legal team will speak with you while you're waiting in the witness waiting area.

If you're a witness called by the prosecution:

- the CPS prosecutor or someone else from the prosecution team will speak with you to talk about the case.

If you're a witness called by the defence:

- the defence lawyer or someone from the defence team will come to speak with you.

They'll be dressed for court and may be wearing a wig and gown. They will explain what to expect, which may make you feel more at ease. They may also explain aspects of the case, but they will not tell you what to say or how to answer specific questions.

When it's time to give evidence

A court usher will collect you from the witness waiting area and show you to the courtroom when it's time for you to give evidence.

Once you're in the courtroom, they'll tell you where to stand. This is called the witness box.

The usher will then take your oath or affirmation. This process is called 'swearing in' and is when you promise to tell the truth while giving evidence in the trial. You can either swear the oath on the holy book of your faith, or you can make a non-religious affirmation.

Once you're sworn in, the lawyer will start to ask you questions based on your statement to help you tell your version of events. If you're a prosecution witness, the CPS prosecutor (the prosecution lawyer) will ask you questions, or if you're a defence witness, the defence lawyer will ask you questions.

If you're a vulnerable or an intimidated witness you may have had your Achieving Best Evidence (ABE) interview video recorded under a special measure – sometimes referred to as a section 27. If so, this will be played in court on the TV screens instead of you having to answer questions from the lawyer. However, you may still be cross-examined and re-examined in the courtroom by the lawyers, unless you've also had this video recorded under another special measure. This is sometimes called a 'Section 28 hearing'.

Cross-examination and re-examination

Once the lawyer who called you to give evidence has finished asking their questions, the other lawyer will then ask questions. This is called cross-examination.

These questions can be more challenging, as the opposing side want to test the credibility of your evidence or highlight any inconsistencies.

Re-examination is any follow-up questions the first lawyer asks after the cross-examination.

When you've finished giving evidence

Once you've given your evidence and been released by the judge or magistrates, your role as a witness has ended and you're free to leave court.

You can:

- Return to the witness waiting area to speak to a Witness Service supporter if you need to talk about what you've just experienced or need support.
- Leave the court building and go home. Giving evidence can take a lot of energy and effort and you may feel tired or drained afterwards. You can speak to the Witness Service supporter if you feel you need support.
- Watch the rest of the trial from the public gallery. You must be at least 14 years old to sit in the public gallery, although babies in arms are permitted. Do note, the defendant's family and friends may be present in the public gallery.

It's important not to talk to any other witnesses involved with the case about anything you said or heard in the courtroom, or the public gallery if you choose to watch further evidence being given. This also means not posting about the case on social media.