

## Attending Court

### ***Logistical:***

The Polk County Juvenile Justice Center is located at 222 – 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue, Des Moines Iowa.

Parking can sometimes be a challenge, so please allow a little extra time to find a spot. Normally you will want to be in the building **15 minutes before your hearing**. You may park on the street near the building, which is typically metered parking. Go [here](#) to find parking maps and also information about a parking SmartCard.

You will enter the courthouse on the East entrance. You will also need to pass through security, so think carefully about what you are wearing. Shoes or belts with a lot of metal can set off the metal detectors, sometimes requiring the security personnel to “wand” you, delaying entrance. Place your bags and any other large items, such as notebooks, on the conveyer belt. Unless they are in the bag going through the scanner, you will need to place keys and your cell phone in the basket, as well as any change or other small items you may have in your pocket. Walk straight through the security scanner.

Weapons are not allowed in the courthouse. Keep in mind that this includes box knives and pocketknives. Umbrellas are typically not an issue.

The juvenile law courtrooms are on the second floor. Ladies, if you are wearing a skirt, you will likely want to take the elevator, as opposed to the stairs (which unfortunately were not designed to prevent “viewing” from the ground floor). There are restrooms on each floor, including a family restroom. The second floor also has conference rooms where you may meet with me (or others) privately, and plenty of seating.

Wait outside the courtroom until your hearing is called, or until I instruct you to go in. Different judges have different preferences regarding when people enter the courtroom, so it’s easiest if you just meet me outside the courtroom, and we can go in together.

### ***Before, During and After the Hearing***

Wear your poker face. Stay calm, and do not let others “push your buttons.” Besides the judge, there will be a number of people in the courtroom. This may include:

- DHS
- CASA
- FSRP Worker
- County Attorney
- Mom’s Attorney
- Dad’s Attorney
- *Guardian ad Litem* (Child’s attorney)
- Mom, Dad, Child, Foster parent(s)

- Other interested parties
- People you may want to bring for support, such as a sponsor, parent, or friend. Please check with me first, however; some hearings do not allow “witnesses” to be in the courtroom until after they have testified, so it’s best if we talk about it first.

Some judges will sit on the “bench,” while others may stand. Some judges will wear their robe, while others may not. Those sitting at counsel table usually include:

- The County Attorney (and DHS)
- Mom’s Attorney (and Mom)
- Dad’s Attorney (and Dad)
- The *Guardian ad litem*

Everyone else will sit in the chairs at the back of the courtroom. If you are in Polk County, the hearings will be in open court. Some other counties do most of the work in the judge’s chambers (office), and you may or may not go back with your attorney.

Please remember to turn off your cell phone. Judges do *not* like cell phones ringing—or even vibrating—in their courtroom during a hearing.

Suits are not required, but dress neatly and appropriately for court. The court’s dress code requires that you remove your cap in the courtroom. Shorts, tank tops, or T-shirts with inappropriate sayings are not permitted. Avoid wearing jeans if possible; if you must wear jeans, make sure they are clean and not riding too low. Remember, you are trying to make a good impression on the judge, and like it or not, appearance often plays a role in that.

Stand when the judge enters. S/he will tell you when to sit. You will stand again when the judge steps down from the bench.

If you are testifying in court, make sure you speak clearly. There is a microphone at the witness stand, so you should not have to speak loudly. Additionally, your answers must be verbal, because the court reporter cannot take down a head nod or shake. Finally, your answers must be yes or no, not Uh, huh, or Unh uh. The judge will tell you when you may step down from the witness stand.

If you need to speak to me while you are sitting at council table, please be aware that the microphones are very sensitive. Turn away from the mic, or even move back if it’s something you don’t want others to hear.

When the hearing is over, I will meet with you briefly to explain any orders the judge has issued, and to answer any questions you may have. You will also receive a copy of your order, or it will be posted on EDMS, if you have access to that system.

I will update your task list following the hearing, and will send it to you via email or regular USPS mail if you do not have email.