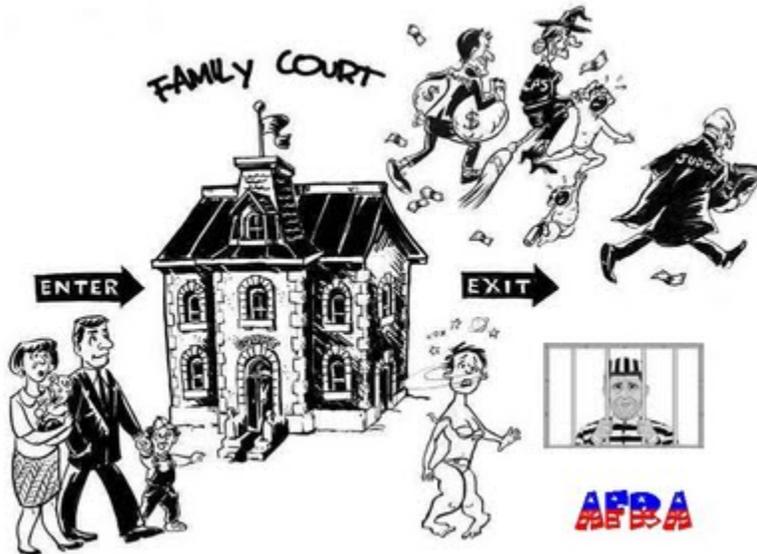


Going to Court? Ten Do's!

Kelly Chang Rickert, Attorney at Law
* *Certified Family Law Specialist*
California State Bar Board of Legal Specialization
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Before we start, let me share a secret with you. Attorneys like me LOVE LOVE LOVE the courtroom! Some of us thrive on the thrill of getting into our Armani suits, lugging our LV briefcases straight through security, through the elevators up to that beautifully organized courtroom. It's soooo deliciously exciting to hob-nob with our cohorts and respected judicial officers. **I LOVE IT!!!** Everyone loves it, and TV continues to prey on our passion for the courtroom by putting out hit after hit: Law and Order, The Practice, and Ally McBeal...

But here is another secret: it's *GENERALLY* not in anybody's best interests but the paid attorneys to go to court.

In one word, here is why: TIME. Attorneys bill by the 6-minute increment. If someone says X, and the other immediately says, "Yes!", that takes no time and everyone is happy and attorney only gets paid 10 minutes. (Well, typically more, because we have the burden of preparing lots of paperwork...but you get my point.)

However, in a divorce case, it's not ever "Yes, OK!" So there is the back and forth, back and forth - and **EVENTUALLY**, you both get to Yes. (hours later).

Even more frequently, you don't ever get to Yes...and so you end up in the courthouse next to your attorney in the Armani suit and LV briefcase who didn't explain

what happens. (many, many hours later)

Below are some tips for surviving your first court appearance.

DO'S

1. Do appear timely. If your appointment is 8:30 am...don't show up at 8:35 am. Be there at 8:15 am. Arrange for childcare months in advance. Make sure you have reliable transportation. Get adequate rest and nourishment. (I always make sure I have my cup of coffee in the morning before court.)

2. Do dress for success. Gentlemen, no hats, jeans, shorts, or T-Shirts. Ladies, no hats, jeans, shorts, low-cut anything. NO open-toe shoes. Remember, you are in a court of LAW. Respect that.

3. Do bring all of your paperwork, in an organized manner. If it's a custody case, bring a calendar of events. Trust me, if you already have a semi-faulty memory like mine, being in the spotlight of the courtroom won't help you. You will need refreshers. If it's a support case, bring all of your bank statements, organized chronologically. If you have time, prepare an Excel spreadsheet summarizing payments, etc. Make sure you bring copies of the documents filed by your attorney and the opposing counsel. Bring all receipts.

4. Do remind yourself of the purpose of the hearing. Is the hearing an OSC for spousal support? Remember, the goal is to obtain spousal support based on proper documentation of both sides income. If the hearing is specifically for support, do NOT bring up irrelevant issues not previously discussed in the paperwork. WHY are we in court? Remember the purpose and stick to it.

5. Do speak clearly and look at the Judge when he/she speaks to you. The Judge may want to speak to YOU, not your attorney. Though you have hired an attorney, YOU are still your best representative. If your attorney fails to mention facts, specifically request that before the hearing is over, he or she pause and ask you if everything is covered. Most Judges will allow a brief meet-and-confer session with counsel before concluding.

6. Do remember to summarize. One of my favorite Judges had this sign in his courtroom, "Brevity is next to Godliness". True that!!! Judges are people. Judges are people with limited time slots. Just look at the daily calendar. Most judges have at least twenty (20) matters to rule on. This means you need to tell your attorney to kick some butt on PAPERWORK...because most Judges have already made the decision based on paperwork. There are people with amazing oratory skills, but you will have VERY limited time to impress the Judge, as he/she has other matters that day.

7. Do prepare yourself for alternative solutions. Yes, you should aim to get all

your requests granted. But make sure you also have secondary solutions in case the Judge denies your first request. In my experience, Judges want what's fair to both sides. So be prepared to make an offer of compromise if your first solution isn't granted. Be detailed in your requests, i.e. - instead of saying, "I want full custody"....say, "I believe it is in the children's best interests to spend weekdays with me, and weekends with the mother." Instead of saying, "I cannot live on anything less than \$5000 a month, say, "I have properly submitted an Income and Expense declaration, and my expenses are approximately \$5000 a month. I have always stayed home with the children so I do not have an earning potential right now, although I am sincerely looking for a job. Respondent earns approximately \$12,000 a month as submitted, and has no other expenses."

8. Do let your inner light shine. In Sunday School, I sang this song, "This little light of mine, I'm gonna let it shine!" Believe that you are a good person, and be reasonable to the other side. Don't call it, "MY child", but "our child"...don't be accusatory or speak inflammatory words. Contrary to popular belief, the courtroom is not where you want to insult people. Remember your goal. Remember you ALWAYS catch more flies with honey than vinegar.

9. Do work with your attorney. On that day, your attorney is your voice. Remember, you made the choice in the beginning to work with him/her. Don't start doubting your decision on the date of court. If you trust him/her, then you trust they have your best interests in mind. Trust and rely on them that day to represent you.

10. Do respect the Judge, and everyone in the courtroom. The Judge is always "Your Honor". All of his/her Orders are to be received with a "Thank you, Your Honor."