



UNIVERSITY OF
BATH

Autism in court: Easy read version – Practical Guidance for Autistic Court Users

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Information about this guide



This guide is for any autistic person who might have to go to Magistrates or Crown Court.



You do not have to read all of this guide.
You can ask for help with reading it, if you want.



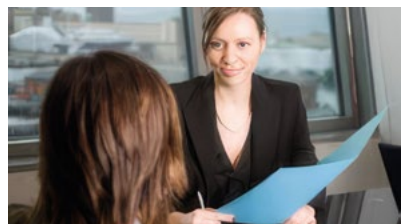
This guide is for **England and Wales**.



It will be most useful for people going to **criminal courts**. Magistrates and Crown Court are criminal courts where a judge decides if someone has broken the law.



The guide gives **general information to help you understand what might happen**.
It is **not legal advice**.



Always speak to a **solicitor or the person supporting you** about what you need to know.

1. Preparing to go to court

Court can feel stressful. Planning ahead can help you to feel calmer.



Get help as early as possible

1. Find a solicitor or advocacy group that understands autism. They can help you prepare for court. They can help you ask for changes that make court easier.
2. Organisations like Citizens Advice or Mind can give information and emotional support. You might also get support from your Mental Health Service or your GP.

Things that can help

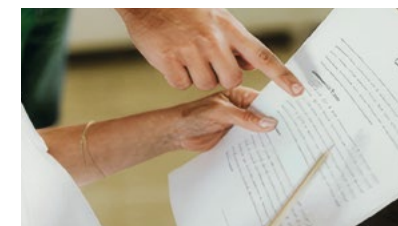
The law says you can ask for changes that help you take part in court. Some of these changes are called **reasonable adjustments**. These include:



A quiet waiting area.



Extra breaks.



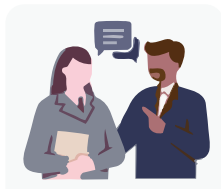
Information written down, including easy-read documents.



You may be able to bring a **trusted person** (family member, friend, or support worker).

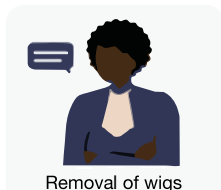
There are extra types of support called **special measures** for people who will find it very difficult to give evidence in court. These are available to some witnesses, and sometimes defendants. Ask the person who is supporting you if you think they will help.

These include:



Registered intermediary

An Intermediary. This is a trained person who helps witnesses and defendants to understand questions. They can also support them to give clear answers.



Removal of wigs

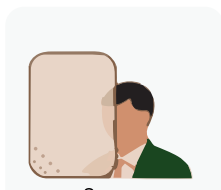
Removal of wigs and gowns

Lawyers and judges take off their wigs and gowns, and wear less formal clothes.



Live video link

Giving evidence using **live video link**. The witness or defendant gives evidence in another room, instead of being in the main court room. The witness can see the court on a computer screen.



Screens

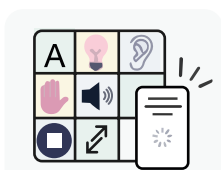
Answering questions **from behind a screen** in the court room. This means that the defendant cannot see the witness.



Clearing the gallery

Clearing the public gallery.

This means that people who are not part of the court case can be asked to leave the courtroom while the witness speaks.



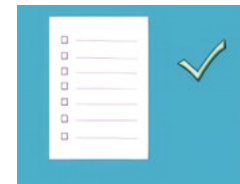
Communication aids

Giving evidence using **communication aids**, such as symbol boards or voice devices that help some people to communicate.

Think about what might help you stay calm.

Court can be noisy, bright, and crowded. This can be difficult for some autistic people.

You can:

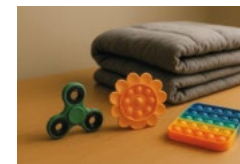


Write a list called **“What helps me”** and share it with your solicitor or the others supporting you before the hearing.



You might want to:

- Bring noise-cancelling headphones or ear defenders to wear in the waiting room. You may need to remove these when giving evidence.
- Bring comfort items such as a small fidget, stress ball or weighted item (if allowed).
- Use mindfulness apps or breathing exercises.
- Ask for lower lighting.
- Ask to visit the court on a different day, to see what it is like.
- Wear a sunflower lanyard, if you want to.



Other helpful changes

Sometimes courts can also:

- Move seats so you feel more comfortable.
- Reduce bright lights or loud noises where possible.
- Give you extra time to listen and answer questions.
- Use plain English and avoid using difficult words.
- Tell you about mental health services, advocacy, and autism support networks before and after court.

2. Telling the court you are autistic

You can tell any court staff that you are autistic.
You do not have to if you do not want to.

Do I have to tell the court I am autistic?

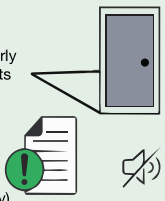
- No. You do not have to tell the court if you do not want to
- But if you tell the court, it can help them understand your needs



Why tell the court?

They can make changes so you can take part fairly
These changes are called reasonable adjustments

- ✓ Extra breaks
- ✓ A quiet space
- ✓ Written information
- ✓ Communication support (like an intermediary)



Benefits of telling the court

- ✓ Helps them understand your needs
- ✓ Makes it easier to get adjustments
- ✓ Supports clear communication

When to tell the court:

- Before your hearing to give more time to arrange adjustments
- At the start of the hearing you can still ask for help

Why tell the court?

If the people in court know, they can then make changes to help you. See Section 1 for more information.

What you can say:

“I am autistic.”

“These things help me...” (list them).

“These things make it harder...” (list them).

3. What to expect in court

There are many types of court.
Some buildings look modern and others look older.

Here are a few photos of different types of courts:



Who are the different people in a court room?

When you go into a courtroom, you will see different people. They all have different roles.

Role	What they do
Judge	Makes sure that everything is fair and that everyone follows the law.
Magistrate	Make decisions about what should happen, with help from a legal adviser.
Defendant	The person accused of a crime.
Witness	A person who tells the court about what they saw or what they know has happened. This includes victims of crime.
Jury	12 people who decide together if someone is guilty or not.
Prosecution barrister	Asks questions and also gives information to the Judge / Magistrate / Jury. They are trying to prove that the defendant is actually guilty.
Defence barrister	Asks questions and also gives information to the Judge / Magistrate / Jury for the person who is accused of a crime. They are trying to prove that the defendant is actually not guilty.
Solicitor	Gives advice to people at court.
Court clerk / legal adviser	Helps the judge or magistrates with rules and paperwork.
Usher	Shows people where to sit and where to go in the court room.

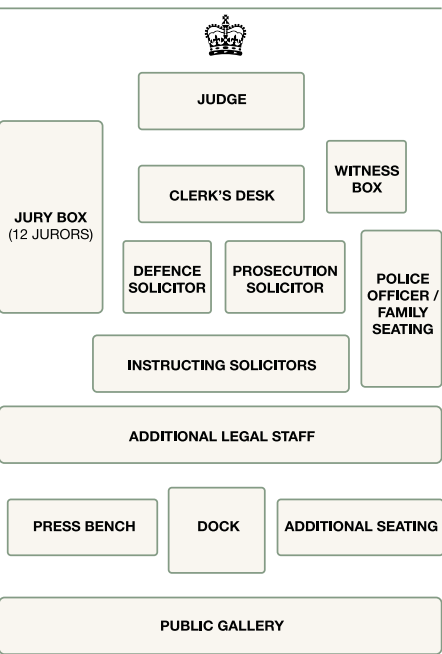
Court Name	What it does
Magistrates' Court	- Less serious criminal cases. - Usually no jury.
Crown Court	- More serious criminal cases. - There is a judge and often a jury.
County Court	Deals with private disagreements about things like money or property. This sort of law is called "civil law".
High Court	- Deals with more complicated private disagreements / civil law. - It also deals with "appeals". An "appeal" is where very experienced judges look at what happened in a court. They decide if it was fair and if the rules were followed properly.
Court of Appeal	Looks again at decisions from Crown Court and High Court.
Family Court	Deals with family issues like divorce or child arrangements.
Tribunal	Special topics like benefits, immigration, employment or education.

How the room is set out

Courtrooms are arranged in a specific way. Knowing where people sit can help you feel less worried. Here are examples of how Crown Courts can be arranged.



CROWN COURT LAYOUT – EXAMPLE



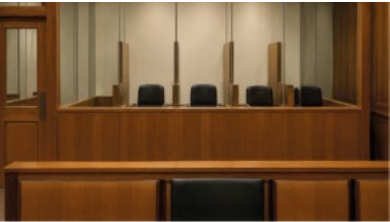
In most English and Welsh courts:



The **judge** sits at the front on a raised bench.



Solicitors sit in the middle of the room.



If you are a **defendant**, you may sit in a place called the "dock". A dock is an area which is usually at the back of a court. The dock might be behind glass.



Witnesses speak from an area called the "witness box".



In Crown and Criminal Courts, the **jury** sits to one side.



The **public gallery** is for family or supporters.

4. Court rules

Courts have rules about behaviour. These rules help the hearing run smoothly. Here is what you need to know:

- Wear smart and tidy clothes.
- Turn off your phone.
- Stand when the judge enters (if you can).
- Speak clearly and politely.
- **Remember** that everyone makes mistakes sometimes. Court staff and the people supporting you can help you if you are unsure what to do.

What to expect when giving evidence

“Giving evidence” means answering questions in court. When giving evidence, people usually will sit or stand in the witness box. Sometimes people can use **Video Link or a Screen**, but this needs to be arranged with the court (see Section 1).

Here is what to expect:

- Be ready to **wait for your turn to give evidence**. Things in court can run late. So make sure you bring enough food and drink.
- Also be aware **that plans might change at the last minute**. Court staff try their best to stop this happening, but sometimes it cannot be helped.
- When you start to give evidence, you will be asked to read an **“oath”**. The oath is a promise to tell the truth.
- You will then answer questions.
- Say if you **do not understand, do not know or do not remember an answer**. That is ok. Also say if you need the question asked in **a different way**.
- You can always **ask for breaks** if you need them.
- The judge will tell you when the questioning has finished and it is time to go home.

Tip: After court, give yourself time to rest. Going to court can be tiring. Do something familiar and calming, like a hobby or quiet time.

5. Court Language

Court staff can sometimes use difficult words that you might not have heard before. These words can be confusing.

What you can do

- Say if you do not understand. It is part of the court staffs’ job to make sure that everyone understands what is being said.
- Ask people to explain in plain English.
- Ask for written list of common words, if that helps.
- Ask for easy-read documents.

Here are some examples of “court language”, with what the words mean:

- **Judgment / decision:** The court’s final answer in your court case.
- **Verdict:** The final decision about if someone is guilty or not guilty.
- **Sentence:** The punishment after a guilty verdict.
- **Order:** A rule from the court telling someone to do or not do something.
- **Precedent:** A rule from an older court case that other courts should follow.
- **Appeal:** Asking a higher court to look at a decision again.
- **Bail:** Rules you must follow to stay out of jail before trial.

6. Understanding court decisions and outcomes

Court staff can sometimes use difficult words that you might not have heard before. These words can be confusing.

6. Understanding court decisions and outcomes

After your hearing, the court will make a decision about your court case.

Court decisions can be confusing. It is OK to ask for help to understand what the court has said. You can:

- Ask your solicitor to explain the decision in plain English.
- Ask for a clear explanation in writing.
- Ask questions if you are not sure.
- If you want to appeal, ask what has to happen next.
- Always get legal advice before you make a big decision.

7. Your rights in court

You have the right to be treated fairly and with respect.

If you feel treated unfairly:

- Tell your solicitor or court staff
- You can make a complaint to the **Judicial Conduct Investigations Office**

8. Helpful resources and contacts



HM Courts & Tribunals Service

HMCTS (His Majesty’s Courts and Tribunals Service) has short videos on what to expect in court.

HMCTS (gov.uk) has videos on what to expect:

[Preparing to Come to Court - Crown Court](#)

[Preparing to Come to Court - Magistrates](#)



Mind – www.mind.org.uk



Samaritans – Call 116 123 (free, 24/7)



Shout – Text SHOUT to 85258



National Autistic Society – www.autism.org.uk

Further guidance

The National Autistic Society:
Guide for police officers and staff

tinyurl.com/fjary9r

Ministry of Justice: Achieving Best Evidence
in Criminal Proceedings

tinyurl.com/v8bum8hr



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