

**FIRST HEARING PREPARATION TOOLKIT**  
**Private Family Proceedings (England & Wales)**  
*(For organisational guidance only – not legal advice)*

### What Is a First Hearing?

Your first hearing may be:

- FHDRA (Child Arrangements)
- First Directions Appointment (FDR) (Financial Remedy)
- Return Hearing (Non-Molestation)

The purpose is usually:

- Identify and narrow issues
- Consider safeguarding
- Explore agreement
- Decide next steps

It is not usually a full trial.

### Who Will Be There?

You may see:

- A Judge or Magistrates
- Legal adviser (in Magistrates' court)
- The other party
- Solicitors or barristers (if

instructed)

- CAFCASS officer (in children cases)

Hearings are typically in a private courtroom or chambers.

### What To Bring

- ✓ Court bundle (if provided)
- ✓ Your notes
- ✓ Key dates timeline
- ✓ Position statement
- ✓ Notepad and pen
- ✓ Calm, organised mindset

Dress smartly and arrive early.

### Courtroom Conduct

- ✓ Speak calmly
- ✓ Address the Judge as "Sir" or "Madam"
- ✓ Do not interrupt

- ✓ Take notes
- ✓ Answer clearly and directly

### Managing Expectations

At a first hearing, the court may:

- Make interim arrangements
- Order CAFCASS involvement
- Direct disclosure
- Set a timetable
- List further hearings

Not everything is decided on day one.

### Practical Emotional Preparation

- Expect waiting time
- Bring water/snacks
- Prepare for delay
- Focus on outcomes, not conflict
- Stay child-centred

Preparation reduces anxiety.

### Important Reminders

- The first hearing sets direction, it rarely finishes the case.
- Judges look for safe, workable outcomes, not conflict.
- Stay calm, respectful and child-focused (if applicable).
- Early orders are often temporary.
- Focus on what you can control – early preparation, organisation and composure are key.
- Keep it factual, not emotional.
- Craft a Position Statement.
- One hearing does not define the case.