



Going to court and presenting your case without the help of a lawyer can be overwhelming. Many self-represented individuals find that having a trusted friend or family member with them to provide emotional support, take notes and organize documents can be a big help.

Support person

A support person is someone who sits beside a self-represented litigant (a person who does not have a lawyer) at the front of the courtroom to quietly help them during their trial. A support person is sometimes called a courtroom companion or a McKenzie friend, referring to the name of an English court case that dealt with support persons.

When a support person can attend court

Unless a judge decides otherwise, a support person can sit with you at any family proceeding, except for family case conferences and family settlement conferences.

These conferences are usually private meetings to discuss possible settlement. Judges do not usually allow support people to attend them. However, a judge may allow a support person to sit with you in a conference if you ask permission.

What a support person can do

A support person may help you in court by:

- Taking notes
- Organizing documents
- Making quiet suggestions
- Providing emotional support
- Doing any other task approved by the judge

What a support person cannot do

A support person cannot speak to the judge or speak on your behalf, except in exceptional circumstances and only with the judge's permission.

How to introduce your support person at trial

When your case is called, walk to the front of the courtroom. The judge will likely ask you to identify yourself. Give your name and tell the judge you have a support person with you who you would like to sit next to you during the trial. Give the support person's name and say whether they are a friend or family member. You can tell the judge the support person understands the Court's Notice about using a support person. You can add that they know they cannot speak aloud during the trial, and will remain calm.

The judge may ask the other party if they have any objection. If they object, listen to their reasons. When you reply, you can explain why you want a support person to sit next to you.

Who can be a support person

A support person can be anyone, including a friend or relative, except someone who:

- Might be a witness in the hearing or trial
- Is paid by the litigant for their services as a support person

You will want your support person to be someone you can trust with private information that may be shared in court. A person who has helped you prepare for court may be a good support person because they are already familiar with your case.

You may wish to let the other side know in advance that you intend to bring a support person, and refer them to the Court's *Notice 11*.

The best kind of support person is someone who will help you stay focused on the judge, the court procedure, the evidence and the issues in your trial.

When a judge might refuse to permit a support person

In some cases a support person's behaviour may be distracting or disruptive. A judge may refuse to allow a support person to sit with a litigant if their presence is disruptive to the proceedings or would otherwise be unfair to an opposing party.

If a support person is not allowed or no longer allowed to attend, the litigant may ask the judge for a break during the court appearance to speak with their support person in private, outside the room.

Having a non-lawyer represent you in court

The Court's practice direction, *GEN 05* provides information about how certain people who are not lawyers can request to appear in court to represent clients in certain circumstances. However, the judge can still prohibit them from representing clients in court if it would be inconsistent with the proper administration of justice. Having a non-lawyer represent you in court is different from having a support person sit beside you in court and offer the kinds of help described above.

[*Gen 05 Non-Lawyers Appearing for Clients in Court*](#)

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