



Domestic Violence Criminal Cases: What to Expect in Court (Advocate)

Participation in the criminal justice system can be scary for victims of domestic violence. Knowing about the court and trial process ahead of time may help victims feel more comfortable and supported when their case goes to court.

What happens in court? (Watch 00:34 – 01:10)

- Watch *What happens in court?* together.
- Pause and review the following concepts with the victim to check their understanding:
 - Review the different types of hearings that happen in court.
 - Ask them if they understand what a subpoena is and what to do if they receive one.
 - Remind them that their case may go to trial, result in a plea, or the prosecutor may choose not to prosecute the case.
 - Ask them if they have any questions.
- If they ask for resources, you can direct them to the following:
 - Maryland Judiciary Case Search: <http://casesearch.courts.state.md.us/casesearch/>
 - Maryland State's Attorney's Offices: <https://www.mdsaa.org/maryland-states-attorneys>

Who is in the courtroom? (Watch 01:10 – 02:11)

- Watch *Who is in the courtroom?* together.
- Pause and review the following concepts with the victim to check their understanding:
 - Review the roles of the offender, judge, defense attorney, state's attorney, and jury.
 - Remind them that if they are called as a witness, they do not have to look at the offender unless they are asked to identify them.
 - Remind them that friends or family who are not involved in the case may sit in the gallery for support. Ask if they would like this support and who might be available to provide it.
 - Ask them if they have any questions.



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What is my role during the hearing? (Watch 02:11 – 02:37)

- Watch *What is my role during the hearing?* together.
- Pause and review the following concepts with the victim to check their understanding:
 - Remind them that their role is to tell the truth.
 - Remind them that they can ask for clarity if they don't understand the question or simply respond, "I don't understand."
 - Remind them that if they don't know the answer or don't remember the answer, they can say "I don't know" or "I don't remember."
 - Remind them that they can ask for a bathroom break or any type of break at any time.
 - Review what happens when there is a rule of witnesses. Remind them that as a victim of a crime, they have the right to stay in the courtroom, but they should discuss this with the prosecutor before court.
 - Remind them that phones are allowed in the courtroom, but should be turned off or in silent mode, and should not be taken out or used in the courtroom. If they have evidence on their phone, they should provide it to the prosecutor before court.
 - Remind them that there is a no outside food or drink policy for the district court.
 - Ask them if they have any questions.

What support will be in place during my hearing? (Watch 02:37 – 02:56)

- Watch *What support will be in place during my hearing?* together.
- Pause and review the following concepts with the victim to check their understanding:
 - Review the role of the victim witness coordinator. Ask them if they would like to work with a victim witness coordinator.
 - Remind them that they are expected to arrive 30 minutes before their scheduled time, and it may take them an additional 30-45 minutes to find parking and get through security.
 - For criminal cases, they should ask the prosecutor about arrival time and where to wait before the hearing. They may be able to wait in a location other than the courtroom to avoid seeing the abuser before the hearing.

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- Remind them that a support dog may be able to sit with them as they wait to testify.
- Explain that they should receive services and information. If they do not, remind them to contact their local Family Justice Center, local intimate partner violence program, or the Maryland Crime Victims' Resource Center (MCVRC).
- Ask them if they have any questions.
- If they ask for resources, you can direct them to the following:
 - Victim Witness Coordinators:
<https://www.marylandattorneygeneral.gov/Pages/VictimServ/default.aspx>
 - Maryland Crime Victims' Resource Center (MCVCR):
<https://www.mdcrimevictims.org/>
 - Maryland Legal Aid: <https://www.mdlab.org/>
 - Maryland Court Help:
<https://www.courts.state.md.us/legalhelp/findinglegalhelp>

What are potential outcomes and follow-up? (Watch 02:56 – 04:15)

- Watch *What are potential outcomes and follow-up?* together.
- Pause and review the following concepts with the victim to check their understanding:
 - Review what a victim impact statement is. Ask if they would like to provide one.
 - Review the potential outcomes of the trial together.
 - Review potential conditions of probation and explain what they mean.
 - Remind them that if the defendant is found not guilty, if the case is not prosecuted, and/or if the defendant is released into the community following a guilty verdict, they can work with a victim advocate or victim witness coordinator to make a plan for their safety.
 - Additionally, ask if they would like to safety plan now. If so, discuss available protective measures in case of a negative result in court. This can include seeking emergency shelter, safety planning for children, etc.
 - Ask them if they have any questions.
- If they ask for resources, you can direct them to the following:
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Online Resources

Maryland Court Help:

<https://www.courts.state.md.us/legalhelp/findinglegalhelp>

Maryland Crime Victims' Resource Center (MCVRC):

<https://www.mdcrimevictims.org/>

Maryland Judiciary Case Search:

<http://casesearch.courts.state.md.us/casesearch/>

Maryland Legal Aid:

<https://www.mdlab.org/>

Maryland State's Attorneys' Association:

<https://www.mdsaa.org/maryland-states-attorneys>

Victim Witness Coordinators:

<https://www.marylandattorneygeneral.gov/Pages/VictimServ/default.aspx>

House of Ruth Maryland Hotline: 410-889-RUTH (7884) | www.hruth.org
National Domestic Violence Hotline: 1-800-799-7233 | www.thehotline.org