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Preparing for Court

1. **Dress.** It is helpful to make a good 1st impression by dressing neatly to show respect for the court. (Similarly, wearing hats or even chewing gum is generally not acceptable in court.) You may also want to bring a sweater or dress warmly as many courts are cool.
2. **Parking.** Parking can be difficult. Most street parking is limited, may require you to pay parking meters, and includes the risk of having your vehicle towed during certain hours. When driving to the Hall of Justice at 850 Bryant Street, many people chose to park in the paid parking lots located across the street, which can be expensive and is not paid for by the District Attorney's Office.
3. **Sequestering.** Witnesses or potential witness will more than likely be sequestered from the courtroom, which means that they will not be allowed in the courtroom during any other witness testimony. This can be very frustrating for victims/survivors and witnesses, but it is a common practice and done to insure that witnesses' testimonies do not influence each other.
4. **Waiting.** The court process can be long. Even if you were asked to be here for court first thing in the morning, it is possible that you may need to wait for a large part of the day for your turn to be in court. Bring a book, cards, work or anything else that will occupy you while you wait. Snacks are a good idea as well as toys for young children.
5. **Electronics.** Turn all pagers or cell phones on vibrate or off completely while in the courtroom. This is very important as many Judges do not tolerate pagers and cell phones in the courtroom and *will* kick you out of the courtroom.
6. **Who will be in the courtroom?**

In the courtroom *will be* following

- a. Judge
- b. Bailiff
- c. Court Reporter
- d. Court Clerk
- e. Prosecuting attorney (Assistant District Attorney)
- f. Defending attorney (Public Defender or private attorney)
- g. Defendant

In the courtroom *may or may not be* the following

- a. Interpreters if their services are needed
- b. Police Officers & Police Investigators involved in the case
- c. Any other witnesses
- d. Family/friends
- e. *Know that the courtroom is a public place unless specified otherwise by the judge, which means that almost anyone can observe the proceedings.*

Your Testimony

During a preliminary hearing, evidence suppression hearing or trial, you may be questioned by the prosecuting attorney (A.D.A.) and the defending attorney. The following are some pointers on how to be a good witness:

- Be truthful. Never exaggerate or shade your testimony. Just tell the facts, simply and concisely, as you know them.
- Focus. Listen carefully to the questions. If you do not understand a question, ask that it be repeated or explained.
- Do not guess. Give definite answers whenever possible. If you do not know an answer, do not be afraid to say so. Do not stop to figure out whether your answers will help or hurt your testimony for either the prosecution or the defense. Just answer questions to the best of your knowledge.
- Answer only the question asked. Do not try to say everything at once or volunteer information that is not requested.
- Explain your answer, if necessary. If a question cannot be answered truthfully and full with a “yes” or “no,” you have the right to ask the judge to permit you to explain after first answering “yes” or “no.”
- Be prepared. Do not try to memorize what you are going to say; try to recall relevant facts.
- If asked, “Have you talked to anyone about the case?” → Do not forget your conversations with prosecutor, defense attorney, or staff members such as a paralegals, investigators or victim advocates.
- When an attorney objects to a questions → Do not answer the question until the judge rules on the objection and instructs you to answer the question. If the judge the objection has merit, the objection will be “sustained.” If the judge does not believe the objection has merit, the objection will be “over ruled.” If you are confused, ask the judge for direction.
- Remain calm & courteous. Do not lose your temper or become angry, as it may diminish the impact of your testimony.
- Speak clearly and loudly. Always face the person questioning you, and speak clearly enough to be heard by a jury. Do not simply nod for a “yes” or shake your head for a “no.”
- Dress neatly and always show respect for the court. For example, wearing hats or chewing gum is generally not acceptable in court.
- Be yourself. The judge, jurors and attorneys are human also and appreciate sincerity.