



Attending court

Courts can be confusing and scary places. It is important you understand what is going on, and have support from others.

If someone in your family is arrested and must attend court you may decide to go along to support them. Some court cases can go for a long time and it may feel as though life is in limbo until a decision is finally made.

You may have to travel to get to the court and take time off work. This can be difficult and some people may use up any leave owing if there are many court dates to attend. It can be helpful to speak privately to your employer if you feel they would be understanding about you taking time off.

Should I take the children?

Some people hope that taking children to court may help a defendant get a better outcome if they are shown to have family support. However there are a few things to consider.

Days at court are usually long and those attending are expected to sit still and keep quiet. This can be very difficult for younger children. If you do decide to take them it can be a good idea to take a friend or family member who can take them outside if need be.

Older children may find it helpful to understand more about what has led to someone's arrest by attending court. However there may be evidence that is distressing to hear or that you are not expecting to be revealed. There may be more to the case than you knew yourself.

Some high profile cases will attract media attention and you may have to face cameras as you arrive and leave. If someone has been accused of a crime involving a victim it could be that their family and friends are in attendance too. The general public are allowed to watch proceedings in the High Court and District Court.

If your family member is in custody you generally will not be able to visit them in the court cells. You and the children may find it very difficult to see your family member but not be able to have contact with them. Their lawyer may be able to give them a message for you.

"Before I attended Dad's trial, I went to a counsellor. She took me to the court house and explained what was going to happen, and showed me around. I found this very helpful."

"I was shocked that there was no contact allowed. There were no goodbyes."

Preparing for Court

Some people find it helpful to visit the court before the court date so they know what to expect. This can help answer questions such as: *Is there parking? Will I have to go through a metal detector? How do I find out what courtroom to go into?* You can then prepare children about what to expect by talking about it beforehand.



Pillars
Ka Pou Whakahou





Attending court

Courts can be confusing and scary places. It is important you understand what is going on, and have support from others.

Although you may be told to arrive early for court you could find yourself waiting most the day before the court case is heard. You may wish to take your own food along to avoid being out of the building when the case you are attending is called.

If English is your second language it can be tempting to use the children to act as your interpreter. Though convenient this is not generally advised. The language used in court can be very technical and it can be a challenge to get the right meaning across. It also places a huge emotional burden on children. Contact the Court Clerk at the court you are attending to see what support may be available.

If your family member has been remanded into custody you may be able to take clothes for them to wear in court. Check with the prison if this is possible as it may help to make a good impression.

Dealing with stress

Attending court to support a family member can be very draining, emotionally and physically. It is a good idea to take a friend with you for support. You may also need someone to drive you to and from court or care for the children while you attend.

If your family member is found guilty it can be a really good idea to take a support person with you on sentencing day. You may have been told that they will not go to prison or only go for a short time. If this is not the case it can come as a huge shock. This can be made even harder if you are not allowed the chance to say goodbye before your family member is taken away. It can be a good idea to have a friend with you to support you and drive you home.

Some courts will have volunteers who can assist you and offer emotional support.

Who can help?

Pillars - Pillars has a range of services including a free and confidential helpline for anyone who is affected by the imprisonment of a close family member or friend. Phone 0508 PILLARS (0508 7 45 527) www.pillars.org.nz

Justus - A website for young people and families who know someone in prison. www.justus.org.nz

Salvation Army - Court Officers can explain court procedures and decisions and direct you to the right courtroom. Phone (09) 639 1135 www.salvationarmy.org.nz

Department of Corrections - The website provides information for friends and families of people in prison, visit www.corrections.govt.nz



Pillars
Ka Pou Whakahou

