



WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT **TRIBAL COURT ETIQUETTE**

TIMELINESS

Be sure to arrive at the courthouse a few minutes before your hearing is supposed to start. There may be other hearings going on involving lots of people and it may take longer to get signed in and make sure you get to your courtroom on time. Give yourself plenty of time to get there, taking into account unexpected traffic delays from accidents, weather, or car trouble. If you are relying on someone else to take you to court, be sure you check with them a day or two before to make sure they are still available to take you, and have backup transportation arranged in case they unexpectedly can't make it. If something happens on the day of your hearing and you are going to be a little late, be sure to call the court to let the Clerk know so that information can be provided to the judge. If you have an emergency or some other unexpected reason why you won't be able to go to court that day (such as illness or a medical appointment), be sure to call, email or fax the court as soon as you know about it to ask to reschedule your hearing.

ATTIRE

Wear appropriate clothing to your hearing. Be sure to observe any dress code that may be established. If you are not sure whether there is a dress code, check the court website or call the court to find out before you go there. Wear clean clothing in good condition. Do not wear anything that could be viewed as gang-related attire, and avoid shirts, tops, jackets or sweatshirts that show inappropriate words or images. If you are

in doubt, take an extra plain, long-sleeve button down shirt to cover up with. Always remove your hat or cap and sunglasses before you enter the courtroom.

PREPARATION

Make sure you are prepared for your hearing before you get to the courthouse. Have any documents or other items that you want the judge to see as evidence with you. Bring a copy of all of the court papers you have received or filed in the case with you for reference. The judge should have explained the purpose of the hearing previously, so be prepared to address those things that the judge said would be addressed. If you were given a deadline to file or submit anything to the court, be sure you complied by the due date. If you are represented by a legal practitioner, be sure you arrive early enough to meet with them before the hearing is scheduled to start so that you don't delay the proceeding. The court's daily schedule typically has many other hearings set and you don't want to be the cause of delay for yours or anyone else's hearing.

CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

Many tribal courts have very small buildings and do not have a separate playroom for smaller children, and they seldom provide childcare at the court. Unless the court has told you to bring your child for a hearing, whenever possible make arrangements for someone else to care for your child while you are at court. If you must bring your child, let the court staff know so the judge can approve having your child in the courtroom



before your hearing, and be sure your child can behave appropriately while court is in session. Again, due to the size of many tribal courts, you should generally avoid bringing relatives or friends into the courthouse with you unless they will be called as witnesses in your hearing, or ask them to wait outside (weather and other conditions permitting).

CELL PHONES

Depending on individual court policies, cell phones may not be permitted in the courtrooms. If there is not a sign posted or you are not given instructions, just be sure your phone is set to vibrate or silent before entering the courtroom so you don't disrupt court proceedings. Many courts realize that people rely on the calendar app on their phones for important appointments and their contacts app for addresses and phone numbers, so it can be beneficial for people to bring their cell phones into court so they can put in the date and time of any future hearings set during the proceeding.

Keep in mind that taking or making calls, texting, using social media, taking pictures in the courtroom, or making audio or video recordings while you are in the courtroom is prohibited. If you do, you may risk having your phone taken away since such activities can breach confidentiality and subject you to contempt of court proceedings.

DEMEANOR AND RESPECT

When speaking directly to the court, remember to address the judge as "Judge (last name)" or "Your Honor." It is disrespectful to simply say "Judge" or to call them by their first name or a nickname. Be prepared to stand up when the Court Clerk or Bailiff says "All rise" as the judge enters the courtroom, and don't sit down until told to by the judge. This behavior is consistent with the respect to be shown to the institution of the judiciary and the judge's official position as a judicial officer.

Even though you may be angry, frustrated, disgusted, or scared when you come to court, make sure you treat the proceedings and all of the participants with respect. Try to maintain your composure the best as you can. Avoid yelling and making unwarranted gestures or using inappropriate body language. The judge is mostly concerned with what you have to say in court rather than how emphatically you can say it or seeing a display of your emotions. Be respectful of others and don't call

the opposing party, their witnesses, their attorney, or anyone else, names. It's disrespectful and it doesn't really help the judge resolve your case. You may also be held in contempt of court, or your case could be dismissed or judgment entered against you as a result of inappropriate behavior.

Chewing gum and food items are typically prohibited in the courtroom. Check with court staff whether water or other beverages are permissible. Of course, guns, non-folding knives, tools, or anything else that could be used as a weapon are prohibited inside a courthouse, along with drugs, cigarette lighters or anything else that might be considered contraband. If you are unsure about an item, call ahead to find out so you can leave that article at home or in your car.

If you follow these simple, common sense rules, you should have a much easier experience at the courthouse and any inconvenience will be minimized.

CHECKLIST FOR COURT ETIQUETTE

- Be prepared and on-time for court hearings.
- Dress appropriately and follow any court dress code.
- Limit the number of children and family members who come with you.
- Be respectful to the judge, court staff, and other hearing participants.

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