

**COURTROOM DECORUM AND PROCEDURE FOR
SELF-REPRESENTED LITIGANTS IN
DOMESTIC RELATIONS SUPPORT CASES**

IF YOU CHOOSE TO REPRESENT YOURSELF IN LEGAL PROCEEDINGS, YOU ARE OBLIGATED AND BOUND TO FOLLOW THE LAWS AND PROCEDURES THAT APPLY TO YOUR CASE. IT IS STRONGLY SUGGESTED THAT YOU CONSULT WITH LEGAL COUNSEL. A LIST OF ATTORNEYS AVAILABLE TO CONSULT WITH YOU REGARDING CHILD CUSTODY, DIVORCE AND SUPPORT MATTERS IS AVAILABLE ON THE ADAMS COUNTY COURT OF COMMON PLEAS' SELF-HELP WEBPAGE AT <http://www.adamscountypa.gov> under the "Courts" link. Just as you would consult a medical specialist for a medical problem, you should consult a legal specialist for a legal problem – a lawyer. If you choose to represent yourself without the assistance of a lawyer, who has specialized training and education, you put yourself at a disadvantage.

GENERAL INFORMATION

*****Please visit the Pennsylvania Child Support Website at www.childsupport.state.pa.us for information and forms.**

When pleadings are filed, self-represented litigants **MUST** conform to the rules governing the construction, filing and service of that pleading, including notice to the opposing party. **Failure to properly serve the opposing party with notice of an action may result in a postponement or dismissal of your case.**

YOU MAY NOT SEEK LEGAL ADVICE FROM THE COURT OR COURT STAFF, INCLUDING MEMBERS OF THE PROTHONOTARY, CLERK OF COURT, DOMESTIC RELATIONS AND COURT ADMINISTRATION OFFICES. DO NOT CALL A JUDGE'S CHAMBERS TO ASK FOR ADVICE. These individuals are not permitted to give legal advice to you. Please consult the Pennsylvania Child Support Website at www.childsupport.state.pa.us for information and forms.

DO NOT WRITE LETTERS TO THE JUDGE. The Judge is not permitted to read letters from litigants. These are called "ex parte" communications and are strictly forbidden.

You **MUST** keep the Domestic Relations Section informed of your current contact information at all times, so that the important information about your case can be sent to you. The Court can hold you in contempt and punish you for failing to timely inform the Domestic Relations Section regarding a change in your contact information. You may contact the Domestic Relations Section by registering on the Pennsylvania Child Support website at www.childsupport.state.pa.us, by phone, email or letter at any time to inform them of your change of contact information or employment status.

**SUPPORT CONFERENCES AND SUPPORT (DE NOVO) HEARINGS –
FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS**

Where are proceedings held?

All support conferences are held in the Domestic Relations Section Office located at the Adams County Human Services Building, located at 525 Boyds School Road, Gettysburg, Pennsylvania. Support hearings (also known as a “hearing de novo”) are currently held at the Adams County Courthouse located at 111-117 Baltimore Street, Gettysburg, Pennsylvania. PLEASE READ YOUR COURT ORDER CAREFULLY SO THAT YOU KNOW WHERE YOUR PROCEEDING WILL BE HELD. FAILURE TO APPEAR ON TIME AT THE DESIGNATED LOCATION MAY RESULT IN AN ORDER BEING ENTERED WITHOUT YOU BEING PRESENT OR YOUR CASE BEING DISMISSED.

What is a support conference?

A support conference is an informal meeting between the parties and their lawyers, presided over by a specially trained court official called a “Conference Officer”. Please read your Court Order carefully and bring ALL documentation required to the support conference so that an accurate calculation of support can be made. You must also bring photo identification to the conference. The Conference Officer will review all of the relevant information that you bring along and use that information to calculate the support that is owed, consistent with the applicable Rules of Civil Procedure. A Court Order reflecting the amount of support will be generated at the Conference. If you have an agreement with the other party regarding the amount of support, please tell the Conference Officer at the beginning of the conference. The Conference Officer has many conferences scheduled each day, thus it is important that you cooperate with all requests of the Conference Officer so that the matter can be resolved efficiently and the next matter can begin on time. All parties and attorneys shall conduct themselves in a respectful and appropriate manner. Failure to do so will result in termination of the conference by the Conference Officer.

What if I don’t agree with the amount of support that is ordered?

If you do not agree with the amount of support that is ordered, or other aspects of the Court Order that is generated from the support conference, you have twenty (20) days from the date of the Order to file a Demand for Hearing De Novo. The “Demand for Hearing” form is located on the “forms and documents” link on the Domestic Relations Section webpage at which can be acquired at <http://www.adamscountypa.gov> by clicking on the “Courts” link, followed by the “Domestic Relation Section” link. In your Demand for Hearing, you must list the reason(s) that you believe the support order is inaccurate. The Demand for Hearing for all child, spousal or Alimony Pendente Lite (APL) support cases must be filed in the Domestic Relations Section

What happens at the Hearing De Novo?

The Hearing De Novo is a formal hearing before a Judge. The Judge sets aside 15-20 minutes to hear each case. If you think that your case will take longer than that, you must file a written

motion to specially set the case for a complex hearing. At the hearing, each party will be placed under oath and have the opportunity to present their case. The moving party presents his/her case first. The opposing party presents his/her case second. You must bring all of the information as directed the Court Order scheduling the matter, including updated income and expense information. If you choose to represent yourself, be aware that you are required to know the law, hearing procedure, and the rules of evidence. You are strongly advised to hire an attorney or at least consult with an attorney to assist you.

General Rules for the Hearing De Novo:

Only one person may speak at a time. Do not speak over the attorney, the witness, the other party, or the Judge. Do not interrupt the Judge when s/he is speaking. All hearings are recorded and there must be a clear record of what everyone is saying.

Always speak into the microphones so you can be heard.

Always stand when the Judge enters and exits the courtroom

Address your comments to the Judge, not to the other party.

Read your Court Order carefully - make sure you are at the correct place at the correct time! If you fail to appear on time, your request may be dismissed.

Courteous conduct to the Court, the Court staff, attorneys and other parties is expected at all times from everyone.

You must follow all directives of the Court staff.

No one may sit with you at counsel table except a licensed Pennsylvania attorney who is representing you.

Have all exhibits with you in the courtroom and pre-marked (for example, Plaintiff's exhibit 1, Defendant's exhibit 1, etc.). In addition to the original exhibit, you must bring a copy for the opposing party, one for the DRS Officer, one for yourself and an extra copy for the Judge. All exhibits which are admitted by the Court will be kept and made part of the record and will not be returned to you.

Bring a note pad and pen for writing down notes and questions.

If the parties wish to resolve the issue, please tell the Judge at the beginning of the proceeding.

If the moving party wishes to dismiss the action, please alert the Judge at the beginning of the proceeding.

Have all witnesses present whom you wish to call to testify on your behalf. Failure to do so may invite hearsay objections by the opposing party.

After one party's witness testifies, the opposing party may ask questions of that witness on cross-examination. Cross-examination consists of QUESTIONS ONLY. The party conducting the cross-examination may not provide more testimony during cross-examination.

Physical evidence (exhibits) must be offered to the court through the testimony of a party or witness. Failure to properly present physical evidence will likely result in the evidence not being considered by the Court. You are responsible for knowing the legal requirements for admission of physical evidence.

Either party may object during the testimony of a party or a party's witness. **IF THERE IS AN OBJECTION, ALL PARTIES MUST STOP TALKING AND ALLOW THE JUDGE TO MAKE A RULING ON THE OBJECTION.** The Court must make a clear record of what is being said and by whom. **DO NOT CONTINUE SPEAKING OR PRESENT ANOTHER QUESTION UNTIL THE JUDGE RULES ON THE OBJECTION OR OTHERWISE PERMITS YOU TO CONTINUE!** If you make an objection, you must state the basis for your objection.

- a. If the Judge says "sustained", the witness may NOT answer the question.
- b. If the Judge says "overruled", the witness may answer the question.

*This document is meant to be a general guide for the self-represented litigant and is not legal advice. It is not an exhaustive list. It is strongly suggested that litigants consider retaining or at least consulting with an attorney in family law cases for relevant legal advice. **A list of attorneys who can assist self-represented litigants is available on the court's self-help website at www.adamscountypa.gov under the "Courts" link.***

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