Going to court: a guide for Autistic adults in Ireland

A Thriving Autistic resource · thrivingautistic.org

This guide is for Autistic adults who have to go to court in Ireland.

- **Part 1.** A guide: your rights, how to get ready for court, and what to do on the day.
- **Part 2.** A court passport: a form about how you communicate and what helps you. You choose what to fill in.
- **Part 3.** Links and phone numbers.

This guide is information. It is not legal advice. A solicitor gives legal advice.

Part 1. The guide

Your rights

1. You can ask the court for changes that help you take part. The Courts Service has a policy on support for disabled court users.

2. You do not need medical evidence to ask the court office for help.

3. You choose whether to tell people you are Autistic. You choose who to tell.

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People in court can misunderstand Autistic people

Some people who work in courts may not know much about Autistic people. For example, a judge, a Garda (a police officer) or a solicitor (a lawyer). These people may misunderstand how you communicate. The National Disability Authority (NDA) warns about this in its guidance for people who work in courts.

You can show this table to your solicitor or to the court.

What people may see	What it can mean for an Autistic person
Little eye contact	I may listen better when I do not look at faces.
Few changes in my face or voice	My face and voice may not show what I feel. I may care a lot, even when my face does not show it.
Short or blunt answers	I may answer the exact question I was asked.
A long pause before I answer	I may need extra time to process information.
Not speaking, or using a tablet, cards or writing	I may use AAC to communicate. AAC means ways to communicate without speaking, for example an app, picture cards or writing.
Moving, rocking or tapping	Moving may help me stay calm.
Going quiet, or not able to speak	I may be overwhelmed. I may be having a shutdown.
Crying, shouting or swearing	I may be overwhelmed and having a meltdown. A meltdown is not a choice.
Saying "yes" to everything	When I am stressed, I may say "yes" without understanding the question.

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Before your court date: 6 steps

Step 1. Find out if you need a solicitor.

- A solicitor is a lawyer. A solicitor gives you legal advice and can speak for you in court.
- If you are accused of a crime and you cannot pay for a solicitor: you can ask the judge for **criminal legal aid** when you go to court. Criminal legal aid pays for a solicitor. The judge may ask you to fill in a form about your money. This form is called a "statement of means". The judge decides if you get criminal legal aid. If the judge says yes, the court gives you a solicitor.
- For other cases, for example family law: phone the **Legal Aid Board** on 066 947 1000. The Legal Aid Board will tell you if it can help with your case.
- Some people go to court without a solicitor, for example some witnesses. You can still use this guide.

Step 2. Decide what to tell your solicitor.

- You choose whether to tell your solicitor you are Autistic.
- You can tell your solicitor which changes would help you. Your solicitor can ask the court for those changes.
- You and your solicitor can agree how to explain your communication needs to the judge.

Step 3. Fill in the court passport.

- The court passport is Part 2 of this guide.
- You choose which parts to fill in. Someone can help you fill it in.
- If you have a solicitor, give your solicitor a copy.
- You do not need a letter from a psychologist or a doctor to get help in court.
- If you already have a letter from a psychologist or a doctor, you can give a copy to your solicitor.

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Step 4. Contact the court's accessibility officer.

- Every courthouse in Ireland has an accessibility officer. The accessibility officer helps arrange changes that make court easier for you.
- You can contact the accessibility officer yourself. You do not need a solicitor to do this.
- Find your courthouse's phone number and email at **courts.ie/offices**.
- Phone or email the court office. Ask for the accessibility officer.
- Contact the court office as early as you can.
- Tell the accessibility officer which changes you need. The section "Changes you can ask for" lists changes you can ask for.
- The judge decides about changes inside the courtroom.

Step 5. Ask for an advocate.

- The **National Advocacy Service** is free. It is for disabled adults in Ireland.
- An advocate helps you say what you want and need.
- Ask if an advocate can help with your case. Ask if an advocate can come to meetings or to court with you.
- Phone 0818 07 3000. Email info@advocacy.ie.

Step 6. Plan the day.

- Find out how to get to the courthouse. Find out how long the journey takes.
- Ask the court office if you can visit the courthouse before your court date.
- You can look around some Dublin courthouses online. The Courts Service has videos and virtual tours at courts.ie.
- Ask your solicitor or the court office what will happen, step by step.
- Agree where to meet your solicitor or your supporter on the day.

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Changes you can ask for

Ask your solicitor or the accessibility officer for these changes. You may not get every change. You can still ask.

Before the day

- [ ] A visit to the courthouse
- [ ] A phone call before the day to explain what will happen
- [ ] A message as early as possible if the time or the room changes
- [ ] A time of day when the court is quieter

While you wait

- [ ] A quiet room to wait in
- [ ] Your supporter with you
- [ ] A way to know when your case is called, for example a staff member comes to get you

In the courtroom

- [ ] Breaks that are planned before the hearing starts
- [ ] An agreed signal to ask for a break, for example raising your hand
- [ ] Questions in plain words
- [ ] One question at a time
- [ ] Time to think before you answer
- [ ] Permission to use your AAC
- [ ] Permission to use ear defenders, headphones, sunglasses or a fidget object
- [ ] Permission to bring water or medication
- [ ] Your supporter in the courtroom. The judge decides if your supporter can stay.
- [ ] A written explanation of what the judge decided

If talking in court is hard for you: ask your solicitor about a **registered intermediary**. An intermediary helps a person communicate when they give evidence in court. The judge decides if you can have an intermediary.

If you need an interpreter: tell your solicitor or the court office before your court date.

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On the day

Bring these things

Papers

- [ ] Your court papers
- [ ] Photo ID, for example a passport, a driving licence or a Public Services Card
- [ ] A copy of your court passport
- [ ] Your solicitor's phone number

To communicate

- [ ] Your AAC, if you use AAC
- [ ] Your JAM Card, if you have one

AAC means ways to communicate without speaking, for example an app, picture cards or writing. If your AAC is on a tablet or phone, charge it fully before you go.

A JAM Card tells staff you need extra time. Courts Service offices know the JAM Card. You can get a JAM Card for free at **jamcard.org**. There is also a free JAM Card app for your phone.

For noise, light and calm

- [ ] Ear defenders, earplugs or noise-cancelling headphones
- [ ] Sunglasses or a cap
- [ ] A fidget object or a comfort object

For the wait

- [ ] Water, food and any medication. You cannot eat in the courtroom. You can eat while you wait.
- [ ] Something to do, for example a book, a puzzle book, or music on your phone with headphones
- [ ] A phone with a full battery, and a power bank if you have one

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Know this before you go

- You may wait a long time. Your case may start later than the time on your court papers.
- Some courthouses have a security check at the door. In a security check, staff check that you are not bringing in anything dangerous. Staff may keep some things until you leave. Ask the court office if your courthouse has a security check.
- Turn your phone off or to silent in the courtroom. You cannot record in the courtroom.
- If you feel overwhelmed, use your agreed signal, or show a card with the words from "Words you can say in court".
- If a change that was agreed is not there on the day, tell your solicitor or the court office.

Words you can say in court

You can say these words to the judge or to your solicitor. You can also write or print the words on a card and show the card.

> "I need a break."
>
> "I do not understand the question."
>
> "Please ask the question in different words."
>
> "I do not know."
>
> "I need more time to answer."

After court

- Ask your solicitor to explain what the judge decided.
- Ask your solicitor or the court office when you can get the decision in writing.
- Ask your solicitor what happens next, and when.
- Plan time to rest after court. For example, keep the rest of the day free.

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Contacts

National Advocacy Service (free advocacy for disabled adults): 0818 07 3000 · info@advocacy.ie

Legal Aid Board: 066 947 1000 · legalaidboard.ie

Find your courthouse and accessibility officer: courts.ie/offices

JAM Card (free card and phone app): jamcard.org

AsIAm Autism Information Line: 0818 234 234 · Monday to Thursday, 10am to 3pm · asiam.ie

Thriving Autistic (the organisation that made this guide): thrivingautistic.org

Neurodivergent Practitioners (a directory of neurodivergent practitioners, for example psychologists, therapists and advocates): neurodivergentpractitioners.org

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Part 2. Court passport

Fill in the parts you want to share. Someone can help you. If you have a solicitor, give your solicitor a copy. Your solicitor can share the passport with the court if you agree.

To my solicitor: I am Autistic. This form explains how I communicate. It also says what helps me take part in court. The National Disability Authority has guidance for justice professionals on communicating with Autistic people (2025).

My name:

Courthouse:

Court date:

My supporter's name and phone number:

Documents I choose to share

- [ ] A letter from a psychologist or doctor
- [ ] A JAM Card
- [ ] Other: _____

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Court passport, continued

My name: _____

How I communicate

- I communicate by (for example speech, AAC, writing):

  _____

  _____

- I understand best when:

  _____

  _____

- Words or ways of talking that confuse me:

  _____

  _____

- When I am stressed, I communicate by:

  _____

  _____

- What I want you to know about my eye contact, face and voice:

  _____

  _____

- My eye contact, face and voice do not show if I am guilty. They may not show how much I care.

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Court passport, continued

My name: _____

When I am overwhelmed

- Early signs that I feel overwhelmed:

  _____

  _____

- What helps when I feel overwhelmed:

  _____

  _____

- What makes it worse when I feel overwhelmed:

  _____

  _____

- Things that help me stay calm, for example moving or headphones:

  _____

  _____

- Please talk to me first if any of these things are a problem in court.

Other access or safety needs I want the court to know about:

_____

_____

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Court passport, continued

My name: _____

Changes I am asking for

- [ ] A visit to the courthouse before the day
- [ ] A phone call before the day about times and steps
- [ ] A quiet room to wait in
- [ ] A way to know when my case is called
- [ ] My supporter with me while I wait
- [ ] My supporter in the courtroom
- [ ] Planned breaks
- [ ] An agreed signal to ask for a break. My signal: _____
- [ ] Questions in plain words
- [ ] One question at a time
- [ ] Time to think before I answer
- [ ] Permission to use my AAC
- [ ] Ear defenders, headphones, sunglasses or a fidget object
- [ ] An interpreter. My language: _____
- [ ] The decision in writing
- [ ] Other: _____

Anything else I want you to know:

_____

_____

_____

_____

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Part 3. Sources and links

Guidance

- National Disability Authority (2025). *Guidance for justice professionals on effectively communicating with autistic people.* https://nda.ie/publications/guidance-for-effectively-communicating-with-autistic-people
- Courts Service of Ireland. *Accessibility at court.* https://www.courts.ie/guides/accessibility-at-court
- Courts Service of Ireland. *What to do on the day.* https://www.courts.ie/guides/what-to-do-on-the-day
- Courts Service of Ireland. *Contact us* (includes the JAM Card). https://courts.ie/organisation-information/contact
- Department of Justice (2024). *Guidance for registered intermediaries* (page 2: a judge may appoint an intermediary for an accused person or a witness). https://www.courts.ie/organisation-information/registered-intermediaries-register
- University of Bath, Autism in Court project (2026). *Autism in court: Practical guidance for autistic court users.* For England and Wales. The law is different in Ireland, but the tips on preparing and coping are useful. It has an easy-read version. https://www.bath.ac.uk/guides/autism-in-court-practical-guidance-for-autistic-court-users/
- University of Bath, Autism in Court project (2026). *Autism in court: Practical guidance for autism-informed courts.* For England and Wales. https://www.bath.ac.uk/guides/autism-in-court-practical-guidance-for-autism-informed-courts/

Research

- Walker, T., Fitzgerald, E. V., Harriott, P. & Riby, D. M. (2026). Embedding neurodiversity-informed practices in the criminal justice system: a call for action. *Journal of Criminal Psychology.* https://doi.org/10.1108/JCP-05-2026-0065

Where to get help

- Thriving Autistic (the organisation that made this guide): https://thrivingautistic.org
- Find your courthouse: https://www.courts.ie/offices
- National Advocacy Service for People with Disabilities: https://www.advocacy.ie
- Legal Aid Board: https://www.legalaidboard.ie/our-legal-aid-service/
- Law Society of Ireland, criminal legal aid: https://www.lawsociety.ie/Public/Legal-guides/Legal-aid/Criminal-legal-aid
- AsIAm Autism Information Line: https://asiam.ie/who-we-are/infoline
- JAM Card (free card and app): https://www.jamcard.org
- Neurodivergent Practitioners (find a neurodivergent practitioner): https://neurodivergentpractitioners.org

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