

Your first 30 days in Family Court

For fathers in private children proceedings (child arrangements), England and Wales

How to use this. Tick items off as you go. Your court's notice of hearing and orders always come first. This checklist follows the standard process, the Child Arrangements Programme [PD12B](#). Some court areas use a different process, the Child Focused Model [PD36Z](#), with a Child Impact Report and a Decision Hearing instead of a first hearing in the usual form. Check whether your court is listed in [PD36Z](#) and read your notice of hearing. Sections 4 and 8 describe the standard process. Grey text marks advice from the book, and blue text marks the source for a point of procedure.

1. Start your record today

- ☐ Keep a **chronology** in date order, facts only. Write "12 April: contact cancelled by message at 10.15am", not "she is stopping me again". (Ch 5)
- ☐ Keep **one master folder** for court papers, messages and letters. Save new papers the day they arrive. Keep originals and one backup. (Ch 5)
- ☐ Log every call with a professional: date, time, length, who, what was asked. Send a short email afterwards confirming what was said. (Ch 5)
- ☐ Keep a simple **contact record**: what was arranged, what happened, and any reason given. (Ch 5)

2. Contact has stopped and no papers have arrived

- ☐ An applicant must normally attend a **MIAM** (mediation information and assessment meeting) before applying, unless an exemption applies. [PD12B 5.3, 8.1](#) Only an authorised family mediator can hold one. [PD12B 5.5](#)
- ☐ The application is made on **form C100**. [PD12B 8.2](#) **Form C1A** is the supplemental form for telling the court about harm or risk of harm, or for responding to allegations made by the other party. [PD12B 8.7, 14.10](#); [Form C1A](#)
- ☐ If a court order already exists and is not being followed, the court has **enforcement powers**. [PD12B 21.5–21.6](#) Your contemporaneous contact record may be important evidence, but the court decides what weight to give it alongside the messages, orders and other evidence.

3. When court papers arrive

- ☐ Note the case number, court, hearing date and time, and the date you received the papers.
- ☐ Return the acknowledgement **form C7** (and C1A if you are raising safety concerns or responding to allegations) within **14 days** of receiving the application, unless the court set a shorter time. [PD12B 8.11](#)
- ☐ Check whether you must file **form FM5**, your views on non-court dispute resolution. Where it applies, file it with the court and send it to the other party at least 7 days before the first hearing held on notice to all parties, or by the date the court sets. [PD3A 10B–10C](#); [FPR 3.3\(1A\)](#) Some guidance says 7 *working* days, so use the longer period. It does not apply if a domestic abuse MIAM exemption was claimed or form C1A has been filed.
- ☐ Respondents are expected to attend a MIAM too. [PD12B 5.3](#)
- ☐ Do **not** file evidence before the first hearing unless the court has directed it. [PD12B 17.1](#)
- ☐ Read the application line by line. For each allegation, note who says it, when, and what evidence is offered. (Ch 2, 17)

4. The Cafcass safeguarding call (standard process)

- ☐ Cafcass checks with the police and the local authority and, if it can, phones each parent. Under the practice direction the pre-hearing enquiries are **confined to safety and risk**, and the letter usually also records the child's current living and contact arrangements. It is not a full welfare assessment. [PD12B 13.2–13.4](#)
- ☐ Take the call somewhere private. It usually lasts about 30 minutes, so allow up to 45. [Cafcass](#) Answer factually, with dates. Say if you do not know. Note the call in your log. (Ch 5)
- ☐ Cafcass reports to the court in a **safeguarding letter** at least 3 working days before the hearing. [PD12B 13.7](#) The court should tell the parties what it says, unless that risks harm. [PD12B 14.13](#) The letter is confidential: do not share it. [Cafcass](#) Read it at once and list any factual errors. (Ch 10)

5. Messages and emails

- ☐ Write for the person who may read it later. One issue per message, dates, a clear question. (Ch 6)
- ☐ **Facts, not labels**. Describe what happened. Do not diagnose or guess motives. (Ch 6)
- ☐ Keep the child in the message. No threats. If you are angry, wait before sending. (Ch 6)
- ☐ Never send messages through your child. Agree one main channel and save copies. (Ch 6)

My key dates

Case number	
Court	
Papers received	
C7 due (14 days)	
FM5 due (if required)	
Cafcass call	
Safeguarding letter received	
First hearing (date, time)	
Next hearing	
Next deadline	

6. Allegations: know the status

- ☐ An **allegation** is a claim that someone has done something wrong. [PD12B Annex 1](#) It is not a finding.
- ☐ If allegations are disputed and could affect the decision, the court considers at the first hearing whether a **fact-finding hearing** is needed. [PD12B 14.13](#); [PD12J 16–20](#)
- ☐ For each allegation write: who said it, when, the evidence, and whether it is admitted, disputed or decided by a court. Add your response in one line. (Ch 2)
- ☐ When a report says "history of" or "concerns were raised", ask what it rests on and whether the source or your denial has dropped out. (Ch 17)

7. What not to do

- ☐ Do not post court papers or information from the case online, and do not tell people what is in court documents or what was said in hearings. Sharing information that identifies your child as involved in proceedings with the public is a **criminal offence** while the case is ongoing, and other sharing without permission can be **contempt of court**. [GOV.UK sharing guidance](#); [FPR 12.73](#)
- ☐ You **may** share information in confidence where it is necessary to get support or advice with the case, for mediation, or to make a complaint. Someone who receives it only to help you cannot pass it on. [FPR 12.75](#) Check any order in your case, and ask your solicitor or the court before sharing in any other situation.
- ☐ Do not record calls, handovers or your child secretly. The Family Justice Council guidance urges caution, says recording a child rarely promotes their welfare, and has a section for parents without a lawyer. [FJC guidance 2025](#) Get advice before relying on any recording. (Ch 5)

8. The first hearing (FHDRA, standard process)

- ☐ It is usually in **week 5** after the application is issued, at the latest week 6, with at least 14 days' notice where practicable. [PD12B 14.1–14.2](#)
- ☐ Parties must attend unless the court directs otherwise. [PD12B 14.4](#) You may bring a **McKenzie Friend** for support and note-taking. [PD12B 14.5](#)
- ☐ It is **not a trial**. It helps the parties understand the issues and try to agree. The court considers safeguarding, allegations, interim arrangements and reports. What is said is **not privileged** and can be referred to later. [PD12B 14.8–14.9](#), [14.13](#)
- ☐ Bring: the latest order or notice, the application and response, the safeguarding letter, your position statement if any, your chronology, and a short note of what you want the court to do. (Ch 10)
- ☐ Know the answer to: *what decision is the court being asked to make today?* (Ch 10)
- ☐ Do not agree to a proposal in the corridor you do not understand. Ask whether it is temporary or final, when it is reviewed, and whether it becomes an order. (Ch 10)
- ☐ Before you leave, know what was decided, every deadline, who must do what, and the **date, time and place of the next hearing**. [PD12B 14.13](#) When the written order arrives, check it against your notes and put every deadline in your calendar. (Ch 10)

9. Questions for your solicitor

- ☐ What is the next hearing for, and what orders could realistically be made?
- ☐ What are we asking the court to do, and what are the risks?
- ☐ Is a fact-finding hearing likely, and why?
- ☐ What must I file, and by when?
- ☐ Which tasks can I do myself to keep costs down, and what will each stage cost?

10. Free help

- ☐ **Support Through Court** (formerly the Personal Support Unit): free support for people without a lawyer. It does not give legal advice. [supportthroughcourt.org](#)
- ☐ **Advicenow** guide to sorting out arrangements for your children. **Cafcass** guide for separating parents. **Family Mediation Council**: find a mediator. [gov.uk/check-legal-aid](#): legal aid may cover a MIAM and mediation if you are eligible. [PD12B 2.2](#), [2.8](#)

Contact record

Facts only: what was arranged, what happened, and any reason given. Copy this page if you need more rows. (Ch 5)

Date	Arranged / what happened	Reason given

Sources

PD12B Practice Direction 12B, Child Arrangements Programme (paragraph numbers as cited). **PD12J** Practice Direction 12J, Child Arrangements and Contact Orders: Domestic Abuse and Harm. **PD3A** Practice Direction 3A, MIAMs and Non-Court Dispute Resolution (paras 10B–10C, as amended from 29 April 2024), with FPR Part 3 (r 3.3(1A), r 3.8) and PD5A (form FM5). All at [justice.gov.uk/courts/procedure-rules/family](#)

PD36Z Practice Direction 36Z, Pilot Scheme: Private Law Reform: Investigative Approach, with the annexed **PD12B (Pilot)** (the Child Focused Model). Court locations are listed in paras 1.4 to 1.4F; it applies to applications filed by 31 March 2027. [justice.gov.uk/courts/procedure-rules/family](#)

GOV.UK sharing guidance HMCTS, Sharing information outside of court in family proceedings ([gov.uk/guidance/sharing-information-outside-of-court-in-family-proceedings](#)).

FPR 12.73, 12.75 Family Procedure Rules 2010 ([legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2010/2955](#)); Practice Direction 12G; Children Act 1989 s 97; Administration of Justice Act 1960 s 12.

Form C1A Supplemental information when making or responding to allegations of harm and domestic violence ([gov.uk](#)). **Cafcass** Welcome to Cafcass ([cafcass.gov.uk/welcome-to-cafcass](#)).

FJC guidance 2025 Family Justice Council, Covert recordings in Family Law proceedings concerning children (May 2025), [judiciary.uk](#).

Sources checked 20 September 2026. Procedure changes, so check that each source is current before relying on it. This checklist gives general information and is not legal advice. It cannot be applied to a particular case without advice. Where it differs from your court's orders, follow the court.