

## Domestic Violence Remote Hearing Instruction Sheet for Litigants

The COVID-19 pandemic and social distancing requirements have required courts to be flexible and creative in continuing to carry out essential functions. The courts have adopted the use of technology in hearing cases remotely when they cannot take place in-person. Although there are some challenges to holding a hearing via technology, these hearings are essential to address important issues affecting children and families, to litigate and allow the court to make key decisions impacting safety and wellbeing of parties, and to ensure due process and access to justice for everyone. The following guide sets forth some best practices and other recommendations for remote or “virtual” hearings.

Please note that courts across the country are using several programs and platforms for video conferencing. This guide provides general guidance without regard to the specific platform being used. The court will contact you regarding the court date, time and type of platform that will be used for your specific hearing. Court staff will also give you instructions on uploading any evidence you may want the court to consider.

### Tips for All Hearing Participants

- Determine in advance what device you will use to access the hearing (i.e. computer, smart phone, tablet). Make sure your device’s camera and speakers are working properly. If possible, log in to the platform before a scheduled remote hearing to practice using it.
- Refer to the Judiciary Website ([nj.courts.gov](http://nj.courts.gov)) in the Self-Help section for instructions on participating in a remote court event.
- Wear solid colors that are easily viewed on camera, avoid patterns.
- Be aware others can see what’s behind you. Consider using a solid background instead of full camera view if that is an option on your platform. Pay attention to lighting—sitting in front of a window can make you look “washed out” or difficult to see.
- Minimize noises and distractions to the extent possible. When you are not speaking, mute your microphone. Turn your phone on silent and minimize or close other windows on your computer screen to avoid sounds and notifications (this may also help the program run more smoothly).
- Consider confidentiality limitations. If your communications are confidential, ensure that others in your home can’t hear you.
- Look at the camera when you are speaking. Position the camera at about eye level if possible.
- Speak slowly and clearly. Identify whenever you speak. There may be an audio lag, so pause before and after speaking to account for this.
- Be flexible but remember this is a court event. Things may go wrong with the technology, and all participants may need to be extra patient and forgiving. Treat an online hearing with the seriousness with which you would treat an in-person hearing.