



AFTER THE SESSION

Usually the trial days are burdening and demanding. It is good to give yourself time to recover and also to talk to someone about your experience. If you need someone to listen to you, you can call, for example, Victim Support Finland's Helpline: 116 006.

All of Victim Support Finland's services are described at: riku.fi/en/services

RIKU PROVIDES HELP FOR CRIME VICTIMS, THEIR LOVED ONES AND WITNESSES IN CRIMINAL CASES, FREE-OF-CHARGE, AROUND THE COUNTRY.

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BEFORE THE TRIAL

The entry to the courthouse is mainly through security gates. There is an info point at the courthouse, where you can check the schedule and room numbers for the day's cases. The info on each room's cases can be found pinned on the wall beside the room doors as well.

The court case will proceed at its own pace, so be prepared to wait. The schedule is only a guideline. If you are not given permission to leave the court house, you must wait for your turn in the waiting area.

If you are a victim or a witness and you feel uncomfortable waiting with the opponent in the same room, you can ask for a separate waiting room.

Usually the start of a trial is told by announcing the name of the accused, after which all the people participating in the trial will go to the session room. You cannot leave the session room in the middle of the trial, you can ask for a break from the judge if needed. Make sure your phone is on silent mode before entering the session room.

The victims and witnesses called to the trial by the prosecutor can be compensated with a daily allowance for the trial day, paid by the state. The travelling expenses by the cheapest transport and the possible loss of income can also be compensated for. You can contact the registry at the courthouse to find out how the compensation is claimed and paid. The compensation paid by the state for coming to the trial is not the same as the compensation for damage that is demanded from the accused.

You can always ask the staff for help.



AS A VICTIM OR A WITNESS IN COURT – PRACTICAL TIPS

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THE PROSECUTOR, VICTIM AND THE DEFENDANT ARE ALL CALLED BY THE JOINT NAME LITIGANT.

THE PEOPLE ATTENDING THE TRIAL

- Chairperson i.e. the qualified judge
- Secretary
- The jurors, i.e., the lay judges take part in the trial sessions in certain types of crimes. Sometimes there might be several judges instead of jurors.
- The prosecutor
- The victim (plaintiff)
- The defendant, i.e., the accused
- The trial aide, i.e., the attorney or other lawyer
- The witness

There might be a support person, an interpreter and a trustee at the trial. The victim and the witnesses have the chance to get a support person for the trial process, for example, via Victim Support Finland. The trustee will be involved in cases in which the victim or the witness is a minor and their caretaker is not able to look out for them. An adult can be assigned a trustee as well.

A trial is usually public, so there might be an audience observing it. For the trial to be a closed session, it has to have this provision requested separately. The closed sessions will be decided on a case-by-case basis.

Sometimes the victim or the witness do not want to meet the accused. The District Court can decide that a screen could be set up in the session room to block the two parties from seeing one another, or that the accused would not be in the same room during the hearing.

THE ACTUAL TRIAL

The chairperson makes sure, at first, that everyone is present. If all the invited are not present, the case may still be processed. Many times the trial will have to be postponed to another day and everyone must be present. When the session is postponed, the present victims and witnesses have the right to compensation for their expenses.

After the presence is verified for the persons called to trial, the witnesses are removed from the session room to wait for their turn to testify. When it's their turn, it will be announced.

PRESENTING CLAIMS AND ANSWERING

At the beginning of the session, the prosecutor and the victim present their claims and give grounds for those claims. The accused will answer the claims stating whether the claims are correct.

In some cases, the accused can be asked to go through a psychiatric assessment. The court will decide on this. The trial will be suspended for the assessment. The case will be taken up again after a few months. The assessment is made to find out if the accused has understood the consequences of the actions, i.e., whether the accused was partially or wholly responsible at the time of committing the crime. A totally irresponsible person cannot be sentenced.

PRESENTING THE CASE

The parties involved present their side of the story and of the events. They also tell which written documents they will use as evidence, what they will want to prove with that evidence and which persons they want to hear and why.

The order in which things will be presented is always the same in the different phases of the trial: The prosecutor, the victim and the accused.

ARGUMENTATION

The written evidence will be gone through in the argumentation and also the possible witnesses will be heard. The victim and the accused have the right to pose questions to each

other and to the witnesses. If the parties involved have lawyers with them, the lawyers usually pose the questions for their clients. Typically the trials are recorded.

The witness and the victim have the obligation to tell the truth. It means that they have to tell the court everything that they know and remember of the events. The accused does not have that obligation as no one can be forced to testify against themselves.

CLOSING STATEMENTS

The parties involved can make closing statements based on the evidence and tell their own views about how the case should be solved. Usually the possible lawyers will handle the closing statements for all the parties involved.

VERDICT

At the end of the trial, the session room will be emptied and the court members will stay to decide on the possible guilt and consequences.

The verdict can be announced immediately after the trial or it can be given later in writing. The time of the verdict being announced will be specified at the end of the trial. In the case of a written verdict, it can be picked up from the registry of the District Court or it can be sent to the lawyer. In some courts, it can be sent home by letter or by e-mail upon request.

Alongside the verdict, the court will give instructions on the appeal process, i.e., what to do if the parties will want to appeal the decision to the Court of Appeal.

If you are unsatisfied with the verdict, you must notify the court within 7 days of the day it is announced. In practise, at the latest on the same weekday the following week, within office hours. You have 30 days to appeal the decision.

To appeal the Court of Appeal's decision to the Supreme Court, you will need a permission to appeal from the Supreme Court.