

Tips for Testimony

There will be times when a school nurse will be required to testify in a child abuse or neglect case in court. Advance preparation can lead to enhanced performance and decreased anxiety. The following tips will help in preparing for providing testimony.

- Review the record and any written notes carefully prior to the court appearance. The defense attorney may focus on discrepancies between testimony and written records or documents that have been submitted to the court. Mentally list and review facts chronologically before going to court. Testimony must be provided from memory, although notes may be referred to. Rote memorization of testimony often creates a seeming lack of spontaneity and decreased credibility.
- Show respect to the court. Dress in business attire and appear neat and clean. Do not chew gum. Answer questions from the judge using “Your Honor” in the response.
- Tell the truth. Do not exaggerate or embellish testimony. These additions will most likely be exposed and can result in loss of credibility. Answer in a positive manner. Avoid use of qualifiers such as probably, maybe, I guess, or I think.
- Try to be objective. Attempt not to give the impression of taking sides. Do not articulate bias or dislike toward involved parties.
- Stay calm. Do not display anger. During cross examination, the defense attorney may attempt to discredit testimony or the witness by demonstrating inexperience, lack of qualifications, lack of knowledge about parenting, discipline, etc. Never argue with the attorney. Remember that the attorney is acting in the interest of the client.
- Speak slowly, loudly, and clearly.
- Do not volunteer information. Take time to answer questions, but answer only those questions asked. Request clarification when there is lack of understanding. If you don’t know the answer, say so; don’t guess.
- If a question requires a “yes” or “no” answer that might be misleading, ask for permission to explain. The court will give instructions on how to answer.