

A survival guide to

---

# Civil mediation

---

## Introduction

This guide is for you if you live in England or Wales and are trying to sort out a civil legal problem that could be dealt with in the County Court (this includes small claims, fast-track claims and multi-track claims).

This could be a problem with a product or service that didn't work, such as:

- a tradesperson who didn't complete the agreed job
- breach of contract
- somebody owes you money and is refusing to pay.

Or maybe you have been discriminated against by a product or service, or you want compensation because you were injured in an accident that wasn't your fault.

You might be thinking of taking the issue to court, or you may have already started the process of doing that.

This guide explains:

- what mediation is,
- how mediation works,
- whether it might help you solve your problem more quickly, cheaply, and easily than going to court,
- how much it might cost you (or not – sometimes it is free!),
- how to find a good civil mediator,
- how to prepare to get the most out of mediation.



Mediation is only one way of trying to resolve a legal disagreement. Some people call this legal mediation. For more information on other kinds of dispute resolution (sometimes called alternative dispute resolution or ADR) like complaining, negotiating, using arbitration services, or complaining to an Ombudsman see [Sort out your legal problem before or instead of going to court](#). Mediation is also available and frequently used to solve disagreements with family members. See [Advicenow's guide to using mediation to resolve family matters](#) for more details.

Throughout this guide we have used 'the other side' to mean the person or organisation you have the dispute with. There could be one or several. The law calls the people or organisations involved in the disagreement 'parties', or in mediation they are often called 'the participants'.

## Contents

What is civil mediation?	5
When to start mediation	8
How much mediation costs	9
How does mediation work?	11
How to find a good mediator	12
How to prepare for mediation	13
What to do if you can't agree	15
What does it mean?	16
More help and advice	18

## What is most important to you – to solve the problem or to beat the other side?

Often when we feel we have been treated unfairly and the other side has not acted as we wanted or responded immediately, we want to go to court. It sometimes feels important that we are proved right and the other side is proved wrong and punished. This is usually because we are angry.

But going to court is a lot of work. Even if it seems a straightforward case there is a lot you have to understand and do. It can be like having an extra part-time job. There are strict time limits, usually lots of paperwork, and it can easily become very stressful. There is also no guarantee that the judge will agree that you are in the right. They may end up deciding the other side is right.

If you can think of the dispute not as a battle that you want to win, but as a problem that you need to solve, mediation might be a much better choice for you. It can be cheaper (or even free), and is usually much quicker than waiting for a court hearing.

Crucially, solving the problem by understanding each other's viewpoints and coming to an agreement can improve relationships rather than damage them further, which can be very important if your dispute is with someone you will still see and/or need help from in the future. For example, your neighbour, landlord, a friend or family member, or a business or trader you have an ongoing relationship with.

## Legal language

We try to avoid using legal or technical language. Where you do need to know it, we explain as we go along. There is also a section at the end called [What does it mean?](#) that includes explanations for the common jargon you may come across elsewhere during mediation.

## More help

This is just one of our resources to help you manage your civil dispute/problem.

You may also be interested in Advicenow's guides that help you decide [whether you should take someone to court](#), and how to [use other forms of alternative dispute resolution](#) before or instead of going to court, and, if you are thinking of going to court, [Advicenow's series about how you take a small claim or fast-track claim to court](#).

# What is civil mediation?

Mediation is where you use a trained mediator to help you reach an agreement with the 'other side' in your legal dispute. The mediator helps both sides to focus on the practical and legal issues that need to be sorted out.

For mediation to be successful, usually both sides have to be willing to listen to the other's point of view, and to work together to find a solution. Being willing to compromise a little is important too.

Mediation is very flexible. What it looks like and how it works can vary depending on the needs of the people involved.

Sometimes you meet with the mediator face-to-face, but increasingly mediation is offered over the phone or online via video call. In the mediation service offered free to people involved in a small claim, the mediation is limited to one hour and is by telephone, with the mediator speaking to each side separately.

## The advantages of mediation

- 1 Because mediation is focused on solving the problem through discussion and listening, it sometimes reduces the conflict involved in the disagreement. This can be really useful if you might still see each other. Going to court often makes the conflict worse.
- 2 It is usually much quicker than going to court. It can take up to a year or more for your case to be heard by a judge. You can usually start mediation within a few weeks, and usually people are able to reach an agreement that day.
- 3 It can be much cheaper than going to court, even if you don't have a solicitor to help you. [Mediation offered by the court](#) to people involved in a small claim is free!
- 4 It is usually less stressful than learning about the law and doing all the things you need to do in a court case, particularly if you are doing it by yourself/without a solicitor.
- 5 You are more likely to actually receive the outcome (sum of money, apology, change of practice, etc) that was agreed to in mediation than you are to receive the outcome ordered by the court. That is because people usually keep to mediation agreements. They sometimes don't comply with court orders, which can mean you have to take another court claim to enforce the order the court made.
- 6 The discussions are private between you, 'the other side' and the mediator, and any agreement you reach is confidential.
- 7 Mediation allows for creative and flexible ways of solving the problem. This might involve one of you paying the other money, but equally you may agree for one side to apologise to the other, or change their process so that the same thing doesn't happen to someone else.
- 8 If you are already involved in a court case, offering to mediate can reduce the legal costs you may have to pay at the end of the case. Please read our guide to [legal costs in a small claim or fast-track case](#).

## What is civil mediation?



In other types of mediation, you usually meet with both the mediator and ‘the other side’ in your dispute at the same time. Sometimes you can meet with the mediator separately, and they go between the two sides to help you reach an agreement you are both happy with. See [How does mediation work](#) for more details.

The mediator helps you to consider different possible ways to solve the problem and supports you to discuss what might be a fair outcome for you both. They will not take sides or decide what is fair for you – they are there to help you reach an agreement that *you* think is fair.

Mediation works best when you are well prepared for it. See [How to prepare for mediation](#).

Mediation for a civil legal problem is usually voluntary, something both sides have chosen to do. This is important, as to come to an agreement, both sides usually have to want to resolve the problem. The Government has announced that mediation will be compulsory for people involved in a

small claims case, where the value of the claim is less than £10,000. This will come into force in May 2024 for claims made on paper or using Money Claim Online (MCOL). No date has yet been set for small claims started using Money Claims (OCMC).

If you come to an agreement using mediation, you can make the agreement ‘legally binding’ – this means that both sides must stick to it. If one doesn’t, the other side can take them to court. You can make your agreement legally binding by using a settlement agreement (or if the case is already progressing through the court system, you might use something called a [Part 36 offer or Tomlin Order](#)). Once the agreement is signed (or you have both verbally confirmed that you agree to it) it is legally enforceable. Mediated agreements are usually stuck to, which means that you do not have to take a separate legal action to ask the court to enforce it, as can happen with court orders.

If the other side has more power than you do, it might be better if you have someone on your side, such as a solicitor or a trusted friend, who can talk with them on your behalf. You can also have a supporter or legal representative in the mediation with you. Having said that, many mediators would argue that a good mediator will be able to manage a power imbalance. If this is something you are concerned about, discuss it with the mediator before you commit to using them.

**Remember** – you don’t have to come to an agreement. If the other side is not offering something you feel comfortable accepting, you can still go to court.

## Impact on time limits

Using mediation doesn't change the time limits for starting your legal case. Make sure you know when you need to have started your legal case by and don't miss it because you are focusing on mediation. Some time limits are long, such as 6 years to claim for a service or product you didn't receive. But others are much shorter. For example, the time limits for taking a claim of discrimination in the county court is 6 months. You can begin legal proceedings so as not to miss the time limit and still use mediation while your case is waiting for a judge to look at it. Find more detail on the [limitation period for small and fast-track claims](#).

## What is the difference between using a solicitor and a mediator?

A solicitor is a legal expert who will give you legal advice and prepare court documents for you. They also negotiate with the other side to reach an agreement. The solicitor represents only you – they are 'on your side'.

A mediator helps both sides to identify ways of solving the various issues in the disagreement. They are neutral and don't take sides. Mediators are experts in managing discussions and negotiations with people on different sides of a disagreement.

Mediators cannot advise you about whether the agreement you reach is what the court would consider fair or reasonable. But, they can give you general legal information on the typical levels of award in your kind of case.

Some mediators are also qualified solicitors but they can only play one role – solicitor or mediator – and not both at the same time.

# When to start civil mediation

## When to start mediation



You can start mediation as soon as it is clear that you might need help to resolve the problem. It can be helpful to do it sooner rather than later, before views harden and relationships sour.

You can mediate both before you start the process of taking the issue to court, or you can also try mediation after you have started the process at any time before the final hearing.

The court expects you to have tried to solve the problem informally before you start a court case. So you should have already tried to talk to ‘the other side’ about the problem and see if you can come to an agreement. If there is an informal process to use, like a grievance procedure or complaint process, you usually have to have tried that too.

In some processes, you are offered mediation just after you start taking the issue to court. If someone starts a [small claim](#) against you (that is generally a claim for a fixed sum of money of less than £10,000, there are different limits for personal injury or housing), you are automatically offered free mediation to help you reach an agreement through the court’s [Small Claims Mediation Service](#). This is up to one hour of free telephone mediation with the mediator going between you and the other side to see if they can help you find an agreement. If you agree to mediate, the person who started the case is notified and asked if they are also willing. In May 2024 the Government will make this process a compulsory part of going through the small claims court, beginning with claims made on paper or using Money Claim Online (MCOL).



# How much mediation costs

Some mediation is free. For example, if you are involved with a small claim, you will be offered free mediation from the Small Claims Mediation Service (see below for more detail).

You sometimes have to pay for neighbour mediation, but sometimes your local authority has a free service you can use. Other councils offer neighbour dispute mediation at a reduced cost. Check what help your council offers on their website, or phone the council and ask.

You usually have to pay for mediation for other types of disagreement. If you have a disagreement over breach of contract, intellectual property (trademarks, copyright etc), defamation, or personal injury, or a client who didn't pay their bill, you will both usually have to pay. The charge is usually the same for both (or all) sides in the dispute.

How much it will cost is usually based on:

- the value of the claim (just as court fees depend on the value of the claim), or
- how much time is needed for the mediation, or
- a combination of the two.

It's OK to phone or email around and compare prices. You will often have to explain a bit about your case as this will affect how much time you will need. The mediator should tell you in advance how their fees work and also make it very clear what you will need to pay and when.

Because it is hard to know in advance how long it will take to reach an agreement, this can make some people very nervous about paying by the hour.

Both sides are paying for the mediation so it is in everyone's interests to come to an agreement quickly where you can.

To make mediation affordable to individuals and small businesses, some mediators have signed up to the [Fixed Fee Mediation Scheme](#). These mediators offer a service based on the amount of money you are arguing over. Prices start at £90 for each side for a one-hour mediation of a claim of up to £5000, or £150 per side for a two-hour mediation. These will be held by telephone or video link. For higher-value claims, which might be held in person, more time is allocated and higher amounts are charged. Find out more, and [search for a fixed-fee mediator near you](#), on the [Civil Mediation Council's](#) website.

Expect your mediator to ask you to pay before the session.



How much mediation costs

## Is it cheaper to mediate first or start a small claim and use the free Small Claims Mediation Service?

Mediation can be better than going to court for reasons that are not to do with money – like helping make things more amicable, and having a say in the outcome. But for many of us, cost has to be an important factor.

Which process will be cheapest for you depends on whether you will be able to come to an agreement (which is hard to know in advance), the amount of money you are arguing over, the fees for the mediation service available, and what your additional court costs will be.

If you want to take someone to court you have to pay the court a fee to start your case (unless you are on a low income and are [entitled to help paying the court fee](#)). How much the court fee is depends on the value of your case. You will have paid this before you are offered an hour of free mediation from the Small Claims Mediation Service.

If the value of your case is below £3000 then it might be cheaper for you to make the application to the court and use the free mediation service to see if you can reach an agreement. If you are unable to reach an agreement you can continue with the court case (if your case goes all the way to trial you will have to pay a hearing fee and you will have other costs).

If you are claiming an amount between £3000 and £10,000 it might be cheaper for you to use a mediator who offers their services under Civil Mediation Council's [Fixed Fee Mediation Scheme](#) (see above). [Check the court fee](#) and compare it to the fee charged in the Fixed Fee Mediation Scheme. This option may also be better if you would like more choice over who your mediator is, or to have a longer, face-to-face appointment.

It is always a bit of a gamble as, if you choose to mediate and can't reach an agreement, you will have to pay the court fee on top of the amount you have paid for mediation. (If mediation is unsuccessful and then you go to court and win, you cannot get back the fee you paid for mediation.)

It is worth noting that the free mediation offered by the Small Claims Mediation Service will only give you up to an hour of telephone mediation, with the mediator going between you and the other side to see if they can help you find an agreement. You are not able to choose the mediator and you do not meet with the other side. In the Small Claims Mediation Service, just over half of cases reach an agreement. It may be that you are more likely to reach an agreement with the help of a mediator under the Fixed Fee Mediation Scheme.

If you want to have a face-to-face mediation with the other party, or if you think the mediation will require more than one hour, you might choose to pay for a mediation under the fixed-fee mediation scheme before starting your claim. You might also choose to do this if your claim involves specialist issues, for example, if you have experienced discrimination from someone providing goods and services like a shop, bank, or local authority. For cases like this, it is a good idea to have a mediator with specific expertise and knowledge, and a mediation that allows you to speak with the other party.

# How does mediation work?

To start with, you will meet the mediator by yourself (this might be online, over the phone, or in person).

Then they meet the other side for a private chat.

The mediator will explore with you both the areas you agree and disagree on.

You'll be able to tell the mediator about your situation and what is most important to you. The other side will do the same.

The mediator will explain the process and agree some basic rules.

You might then meet with the mediator and the other side together, or the mediator might go between you, dealing with each issue until you are able to reach an agreement. This could be face to face or online and might take one hour, or 2 or 3 hours, or it might take the whole day. The aim is to reach an agreement on the same day.



Everything you say to a mediator will be confidential and only shared with the other side if you give them permission to do so. Also, everything said in mediation is private and cannot be used in court later if you are unable to reach an agreement. This means you can speak freely without the worry that it could be used against you later.

The mediator will support you to write down what you have decided in detail for you both to sign. This is sometimes called a 'settlement agreement' or a 'memorandum of understanding'. Once the agreement is signed (or you have both verbally confirmed that you agree to it) it is 'legally binding' – that means you have to stick to it. If one of you doesn't stick to the agreement, the other side can take them to court.

You don't have to reach an agreement. If you have managed to agree some issues but not others, the mediator will record what has been agreed and what still needs to be sorted out. See [What to do if you can't agree](#) for information about what you might want to do next.

How does mediation work?

# How to find a good mediator

Anyone can call themselves a mediator, so it is important to choose someone you can be sure is well trained and experienced. You can start by choosing a mediator who is listed on one of the professional mediator organisations, which means they have been recognised as having been trained in mediation. Use the [search tool provided by the Civil Mediation Council](#) or the [College of Mediators](#) to find a mediator near you. (These search tools will provide details of individual mediators and larger mediation providers who can match you with an appropriate mediator on their panel, and they list the areas of expertise of the mediators). Or ask friends and colleagues (or your solicitor if you have one) for a recommendation.

If you are given a recommendation, it is a good idea to check the name on the Civil Mediation Council or College of Mediators websites so you know that the person is registered and either working towards being an accredited mediator or is accredited. (Not all good, trained mediators are registered with the Civil Mediation Council or the College of Mediators, but all mediators who are must follow a code of conduct to maintain good standards in their work. If you are interested to learn more about the standards, you can find the [code of conduct](#) on the Civil Mediation Council website or the [code of practice](#) on the College of Mediators website.) Choosing a mediator from one of these bodies also gives you reassurance that if you have a complaint about a mediator, there is a complaints procedure operated by the professional organisation.

Don't be afraid to phone/email around and compare prices. You need to ask:

- How experienced is the mediator?  
Is the mediator registered with a professional mediation organisation like the Civil Mediation Council or the College of Mediators?
- How many mediations do they do each year? (Try to choose an experienced mediator who does many sessions each year).
- How much will the mediation session cost each of you? What do those costs include?
- Are they insured? (All mediators registered with the Civil Mediation Council or the College of Mediators must be insured.)
- If there are any other additional fees (for example, for hiring a venue for in-person mediation)?
- How busy they are – are they likely to be able to see you in a convenient time frame?

If you are using the [Small Claims Mediation Service](#), you will be given a mediator employed by them (and a date and a time to mediate). You will not be able to choose the mediator.

If your local authority is paying for or subsidising the mediation (for example, because the mediation is about a dispute with your neighbours), the local authority will usually have a contract with a particular mediation provider who you must use.

If your problem is about a product or service that you bought, the person or organisation who sold it to you must give you the name and web address of an [approved mediator or organisation](#) that can help you resolve your disagreement in their business sector. (They must give you the service's details, but they do not have to agree to participate.) Whether you have to pay for the mediation depends on the provider that the trader has selected. Some may ask you to contribute a small amount like £10 or £25 – others are free.

How to find a good mediator

# How to prepare for mediation



It is important to prepare before you go for mediation. You can usually ask the mediator what they suggest you read and/or prepare before your appointment.

Think about what is most important to you – an apology, a commitment to change the way they work, or a particular sum of money?

Think about whether there are issues you would be prepared to compromise on. For example, mediation allows you to agree on things like how payments will be made, so consider if you might agree to shift on the amount of money you would accept (if you are the side bringing the claim) if it were paid promptly, or in cash – or to shift on the amount you would pay (if you are responding to a claim) if you could make the payment in instalments. And think in advance about other solutions you might be willing to agree to – such as replacement items, future services, donations to charity, policy changes, and training.

Having a good understanding of how the law would deal with the issue will mean you feel more confident going into the mediation process. More importantly, it will help you make your case well, which will help you come to a settlement that is fair.

If your case is about compensation, a breach of contract, money owed, or personal injury – read [Should I sue someone?](#), if you haven't already. It will help you understand how to value your claim, and what you will need to back up your argument (for example, how you can prove the contract was broken, or the accident was their fault, and how you can prove how much your expenses were).

If your case is about something else, make sure you understand your legal position. [Speak to a solicitor or adviser if you can](#). If you are unable to get expert advice, read as much as you can about what the law is and think about how it applies to your case. You will be able to [find quality information on most areas of the law on Advicenow](#).

Organise all your documents in a ring binder so you will quickly be able to find what you need.

Write clear notes of the main points of your case – what went wrong, why you feel it was the other side's fault, how much you think you are owed (or what you want instead of money) and why – so that you won't get flustered or forget something on the day and agree to something you shouldn't.

How to  
prepare for  
mediation

For larger disputes you might be asked to prepare a 'position statement' before the session. This is a more formal version of the notes mentioned above, that can be given to the mediator and the other side. It should include

- a brief outline of the problem – be as factual as you can
- a list of what happened and when (lawyers call this a chronology)
- if a court case about the issue has already been started, include details of the case – including any offers to settle
- a list the issues to be mediated and your views on each one
- an outline of how you would like the issue to be resolved – the outcome you want
- a list of key documents.

It is very important that you have the power to make an agreement during the negotiation. If someone else will be affected by the agreement and can't be there on the day, make sure you have discussed with them what you are aiming for, roughly what you should be willing to accept, and what you will do if you cannot get that.



# What to do if you can't agree



It is stressful and draining to try hard to reach an agreement but not succeed. If you feel you have got to this stage, try not to give up.

If the other side is unwilling to come to an agreement that you think is fair, or is unwilling to compromise when you have, it is usually best not to make an agreement that you think is unfair just to get it over with.

It is actually quite common to receive an offer to settle soon after mediation, when everyone has had more time to think about it.

Often, even where you haven't been able to make an agreement, the mediation will have helped narrow down the points you disagree on, which can make your next steps simpler.

You may need to [get some advice from a solicitor or adviser](#) on what to do next, if you can afford to.

You could engage a solicitor to negotiate on your behalf. Or you could explore [another alternative dispute resolution process](#). Some alternatives, such as ombud services, will not take on a complaint that has already been to court.

It may be that you have no choice but to take the issue to court. Going to court is a lot of work, even more so if you have to represent yourself throughout the process. But sometimes there is no substitute for a judge making a decision about what is fair. Going to court can sometimes be the best (or only) way to get powerful people or organisations who have done the wrong thing, to do the right thing. For most types of case, you will be able to [find the quality legal information you need on Advicenow](#).

Remember that nothing that has been discussed or offered in mediation can be mentioned in the court case.

What to do if you cannot agree

# What does it mean?

**Arbitration** – this is process where you and the other side agree for an independent third party, the arbitrator, to make a legally binding decision about what you are unable to agree on.

**Authority to settle** – this is the term often used to mean the power or ability to make a legally binding agreement during the negotiation.

**Civil** – civil law means the law that regulates dealings between individuals, and individuals and businesses, like contracts and goods and services. This is different from, for example, criminal law, family law or public law, which relates to government agencies.

**Civil mediation** – this is term sometimes used to refer to mediation about civil law issues.

**Dispute resolution/alternative dispute resolution** – ways of resolving disagreements or disputes instead of a judge making a decision in court. Dispute resolution includes complaining, negotiating, using mediation or arbitration services, and complaining to an ombudsman/ombud service).

**Legally binding** – legally enforceable. If you sign a legally binding agreement, you must stick to it. If you don't, you can be taken to court to enforce it.

**Ombudsman/Ombud** – somebody who has been appointed to look into complaints about companies and organisations. Ombud is the gender neutral term. See [Advicenow's guide to using alternative dispute resolution](#) for more information.

**Other party/parties** – the other side (or sides) in the dispute.

**Participants** – all sides engaged in the mediation to try to resolve the dispute (you and the people you are in dispute with).

**Position statement** – a statement that outlines your position on the issues to be mediated. See [How to prepare for mediation](#).

**Settlement agreement** – the agreement that the participants and mediation service will usually write at the end of the mediation if you have come to an agreement. If both sides in the dispute confirm that they are happy with it, the settlement becomes enforceable by law.

**Without prejudice** – a legal phrase which means that what you say 'without prejudice' to try resolve the disagreement cannot be used in court. Everything said or offered in legal mediation is 'without prejudice'.

What does it mean?



# More help and advice

## How to find legal advice to help with mediation

If you are a member of a Trade Union you may have access to free or discounted legal services as part of your membership. Check your Union's website for details.

Check your motor, household contents and buildings insurance policies. You may find you have access to free legal advice on a range of subjects as part of your cover.

Use the [Law Society website](#) to find a solicitor near you who specialises in your area of law. Look up the details of several solicitors and then use their websites or call around to compare prices.

Another way to get legal advice is to speak to a barrister who is qualified to represent members of the public directly (without a solicitor being involved). There are limits on what a barrister can do outside of representation at court but it is often a cheaper option if you just want to get some advice rather than have a solicitor to negotiate on your behalf. The details of appropriately qualified barristers and an explanation of the way the system works can be found on the [Direct Access Portal](#) website which is run by the [Bar Council](#). Don't be afraid to phone around to compare prices.

## Free help

If you could afford to pay for advice, you are very unlikely to be able to get free help from the organisations below.

[RCJ Advice](#) are able to help people from anywhere in England and Wales who have a case about most civil areas – breach of contract, a consumer problem, debt, a dispute with your neighbour or landlord, a small claim about money and more. They are very busy so unfortunately they cannot help everyone. Ask for an appointment by completing the civil assessment form that you can download from [their website](#). Once you have emailed it to them, they will assess your advice needs and either make an appointment for you for the following week or give you details of who else can help you.

[Law Centres](#) offer free face-to-face legal advice to local residents, and some run a telephone advice line. [Find out if there is a law centre near you that can help you.](#)

[LawWorks](#) supports a network of over 280 free legal advice clinics that provide initial advice to individuals on various areas of law, including social welfare issues, employment, housing, and consumer disputes. Use their [search](#) to see if there is a clinic near you offering advice on the area of law you need help with. In order to use the time efficiently, please see [What to bring to your appointment at a LawWorks clinic \(PDF\)](#).

More help  
and advice

[Citizens Advice](#) can offer practical advice on lots of issues. Their [contact us](#) page allows you to search for your local Citizens Advice service, and provides details about their national helpline, and their chat and other services. Be aware that the national helpline is not free. Calls are charged at the same rate as calls to landlines.

If you have not found a service, see [Advicenow's Help Directory for more ways of finding free legal advice](#).

If you are thinking of going to court, [Advicenow's series about how you take or respond to a small claim or fast-track claim to court](#) will be very helpful.

You will also be able to [find quality information on most areas of the law on Advicenow](#).

## If you need to go to court

You may be able to get advice about your case from the above organisations. You may also be able to get further practical support or representation from:

[Support Through Court](#) supports people going through the court process without a lawyer. Volunteers offer a free and confidential service at some court buildings. You can look at their website to see if they have an office at your local court. The volunteers aim to help you manage your own case yourself. They cannot give legal advice or act on your behalf, but can offer practical help such as going to your hearing with you and supporting you with forms/online processes. They can also help you if your hearing is by video or phone, by talking you through the process and sometimes joining the hearing too. They run a free national helpline **03000 810 006**, open Monday to Friday 9.30am – 4.30pm. This is a good place to start for information on what they can do to help you.

[Advocate](#) is a charity that matches people who need free legal help with barristers who are willing to donate their time and expertise in deserving cases. They can help people from anywhere in England and Wales, with any legal issue as long as you are not eligible for legal aid, don't have legal expenses insurance, and don't have enough money to pay for legal help. [Find out more about how Advocate's service works and apply](#).

More help  
and advice

# Notes

The information in this guide applies to the law in England and Wales only.

The law is complicated. We have simplified things in this guide. Please don't rely on this guide as a complete statement of the law. We recommend you try and get advice from the sources we have suggested.

**advicenow.org.uk**  
Making sense of the law and your rights

If you would like this guide in another format  
please email [guides@lawforlife.org.uk](mailto:guides@lawforlife.org.uk)

This guide was written and produced by Advicenow in 2023, with funding from the Ministry of Justice.

This guide was updated thanks to funding from the Ministry of Justice.

Advicenow would like to thank all those who provided advice and feedback on this update, particularly editorial teams at Thomson Reuters who kindly peer reviewed this updated version.



Ministry  
of Justice

**Published by Law for Life – April 2024**

### Can you help us?

We hope you found this guide useful. Can you support this guide with a donation?  
To donate just go to [www.advicenow.org.uk/donate](http://www.advicenow.org.uk/donate).

We are always trying to improve our service. If you have any comments on what you like or don't like about this guide please go to [www.advicenow.org.uk/feedback](http://www.advicenow.org.uk/feedback).

**lawforlife** Advicenow is an independent, not for profit website providing helpful information on rights and legal issues ([www.advicenow.org.uk](http://www.advicenow.org.uk)).  
Foundation for Public Legal Education

Advicenow is part of Law for Life. Law for Life is a charity dedicated to ensuring that people have the knowledge, confidence and skills needed to deal with law-related issues.

Law for Life: the Foundation for Public Legal Education is a company limited by guarantee, registered in England & Wales no. 07695486. Charity no. 1143589. Registered office: 4th Floor, 18 St. Cross Street, London, EC1N 8UN.

