

## Preparing your client for the hearing

By far the most important part of your job is preparing your client for the hearing. With the possible exception of medical evidence, it is your client's evidence given orally to the tribunal that will carry the greatest weight.

### Difficult questions

Under no circumstances would we ever suggest that you encourage your client to lie, exaggerate or deliberately mislead the tribunal by withholding relevant evidence. Equally, we would never suggest that you 'coach' your client by helping them to polish their answers to questions you expect them to be asked. You could get your client and yourself into deep trouble by trying to con a tribunal. At the very least, the tribunal are likely to spot a client whose evidence appears slick and flawless. They are entirely entitled to find that your client was not trustworthy and attach little or no weight to their evidence as a result.

On the other hand, it's absolutely reasonable to discuss with your client the kinds of questions you think the tribunal might ask and tell your client what conclusions the panel may come to as a result of their answers. For example:

*"The tribunal might ask you if you can cook for yourself. What will you tell them?"*

*"Well I manage, don't I? I haven't got any choice, nobody else is going to do it for me."*

You can then point out to your client that if this is the answer they give, the tribunal may well decide that they don't have any problems with preparing a cooked main meal. Which is fine, if that's correct. But if your client actually mostly just heats up cans of beans and suffers considerable pain if they try to peel potatoes then it will be much more accurate evidence if your client tells the tribunal so.

### Giving evidence at the hearing

Tell your client that they can call the tribunal Chair Sir or Ma'am if they wish, but few appellants do so and they will not appear rude if they don't.

When asked questions they should try to answer them accurately, but as briefly and concisely as possible. Not only will this help the tribunal get through their business, but it can also help prevent wing members going off at a tangent because your client has given more information than was needed.

If there is a long silence after their answer, tell your client that they should try to avoid filling it just out of politeness or nervousness: it's quite likely that the Chair is simply noting down what they've said before moving on. If they're unsure they can simply ask *"Sorry, is there something else?"* or words to that effect.

### What to wear

Clients do often ask what they should wear. As with the representative, dressing smartly demonstrates respect and 'respectability'. However, if in their claim they have said that they have to wear slip on shoes, elasticated waists or other clothing dictated by their condition then your client should either:

- wear that clothing, because the tribunal will definitely notice if they don't and are entitled to draw conclusions from it; or
- wear smart clothes but actually point out to the panel that this is not what they normally wear and explain any extra help required or discomfort involved.