

Preparing a bundle for the Family Court.

A bundle is exactly that, a bundle of documents. Initially it meant firewood i.e. a bundle of firewood. We all know that paper comes from wood!

Please feel free to laugh at the comparison. It is a good idea to have a ring binder even at the first hearing, the FHDRA. This stands for First Hearing Dispute Resolution Appointment. The ring binder (bundle) should have a copy of the application, the Cafcass Safeguarding letter, plus the party's statements. Even then, you could easily have 40 pages to leaf through!

Technically it is the duty of the Applicant to prepare the bundle and also to file and serve upon all parties and the court. This varies depending on whether a party is legally represented or other factors. The Court usually decides.

When you have a final hearing, or a FOF (Finding of Fact Hearing) and are legally unrepresented, it is imperative that you have a copy of the bundle with you. The Court will work from the agreed bundle, e.g. Judge or legal adviser directs all to turn to for e.g. C4 paragraph 3 of the bundle. This is then the operating piece of work for the next few minutes. It is a good idea to have a selection of markers to underline or emphasise what you consider important.

You for example when cross examining will ask the court to turn to whatever page and paragraph you wish to work from, ditto when you are on the stand being cross examined. Most hearings are called 'direction's' hearings in the family court process. This means usually, no cross examination under oath. But, your bundle is your go-to, your 2nd mind as it were. It reduces confusion, gives you a working platform. It's just like building Lego, when you know how!

The following is from Page 18 under the Experienced Visitors Section of the londonfathers.com website:

Links from Life Cycles of an Application in the Family Courts – John Baker

How to Prepare the Bundle (File). Get a basic folder called a ring binder. Not a shopping bag, and please don't have documents in tight plastic folders, the time for condoms has passed! Pagination and Indexation. Sounds very simple, it is! Average bundle is presented in the following format: A 1- however many eg, 22. This would be the Application. A 23-(eg)25 would be the court order. A26-(eg)29 would be the 2nd court order. KEEP ORDERS IN DATE FORMAT! Any further hearings you would just add on the newer court orders, e.g. A 30-32

etc. Have a coloured marked divider between each section e.g. A/B/C. Have a printed index and page no (pagination) as your front page. Sometimes people also have a schedule of issues, e.g. dates of birth of the parties, children, outstanding issues etc. Make certain it is short, definitely no more than 2 pages well-spaced. The index/pagination typed clearly and less than 1 page. B section. B1- whatever! This is official reports, Cafcass safeguarding letter, Section 7 reports, Social worker reports if applicable. In date order and paginated properly, B1-5 maybe the safeguarding report, B6-20? Section 7 report? For each hearing just update the index and insert the extra documents as required or ordered. C section, usually statements from the parties, in date order, and please no endless post-it notes and scribbling everywhere. Same format, C1-5 mothers first statement, C6-10 your statement or whatever number of pages. Second statements same format. In the index also. D section. This is usually after the hearings have started and orders have been made, Police reports, Lab reports re drugs, alcohol etc. Same format D1-? D2-? D3- to whatever number per report. For each hearing (where this applies) update the index, pagination and the bundle. NB. Always, always have a spare bundle with you when in Court. This includes the index and pagination. Many times, a hearing has been effective because a party could provide an 'agreed' copy.

Vincent McGovern, John Baker.