



ALL IN THE FAMILY

Legal blog on all aspects of Family Law and Divorce in Massachusetts and Rhode Island

What Not to Wear: Probate and Family Court Edition

BY ROBIN M. LYNCH NARDONE • JUNE 29, 2026

If you watch the television show *What Not to Wear*, you probably remember the hosts helping people trade questionable fashion choices for attire that projected confidence, credibility, and professionalism. If you're headed to Probate and Family Court, you want to project those same qualities, so take a moment to consider what you are wearing.

While judges understand that people come from all walks of life and economic circumstances, your appearance still sends a message. Court is a formal legal proceeding, not a trip to the beach, the gym, a nightclub, or a weekend barbecue. The way you present yourself can influence how others perceive you and communicate the importance you place on your case.

THE "DO NOT WEAR" LIST

When appearing in court, leave the following at home:

- Beach attire
- Flip-flops
- Tank tops / half-shirts
- Athletic wear and gym clothes
- Shorts
- Clubbing attire
- Clothing with offensive language or graphics
- Ripped or excessively distressed clothing

- Jeans
- Baseball caps (unless worn for religious or medical reasons)
- Sneakers designed primarily for athletic activities

WHY IT MATTERS

Probate and Family Court judges are making important decisions about finances, parenting plans, support obligations, and other significant issues. While your clothing should not determine the outcome of your case, first impressions are real.

Showing up dressed appropriately demonstrates:

- Respect for the court
- Respect for the legal process
- Good judgment

If you are asking a judge to trust your decisions regarding children, finances, or compliance with court orders, you want every aspect of your presentation to reinforce your credibility.

WHAT SHOULD YOU WEAR?

Think “job interview” rather than “Saturday afternoon.”

Good options include:

- Slacks or khakis / dress pants
- Button down collared shirt / blouse
- Sweater
- Conservative dress
- Loafers, dress shoes, or clean casual shoes

While a suit and tie for men or pantsuit for women are both totally acceptable, you do not need to purchase a suit to be dressed properly for court. You simply need to look neat, clean, and respectful. Accessories such as jewelry, bags, and belts should also keep with the modest and professional theme.

THE BOTTOM LINE

When in doubt, dress one step more formally than you think is necessary. Your goal is simple: make sure the judge is focused on your testimony and your case—not distracted by your wardrobe. Court is not the place to make a fashion statement. It’s the place to make your legal argument.