

PARTICIPATING IN A VIRTUAL COURT APPEARANCE VIA SKYPE FOR BUSINESS

Judge Mendelson: Chief Judge Janet DiFiore insisted from the outset of the unprecedented COVID-19 crisis that the vital work of the courts must continue, and that the essential needs of the public must be met, regardless of the considerable challenges presented by the pandemic. Immediately, procedures, policies, and technologies were adjusted to ensure that the critical services provided by the criminal and civil justice systems remained safely available.

Hello, I'm Edwina Mendelson, Deputy Chief Administrative Judge for Justice Initiatives. I'd like to welcome you to this presentation, the first of several remote training programs to show attorneys, parents, youth, and child welfare agencies, how to best utilize technology platforms to communicate with their clients and participate in court hearings and conferences. Over the next 10 minutes or so, we will walk you through the basics of participating in a virtual proceeding, through the Skype for Business application.

In today's session, Robert Salkin, a systems analyst in our Division of Technology, will provide a broad overview of Skype for Business—what it is, how it works and how you can best utilize it for your needs. In future sessions, we will drill down and examine the ins and outs of virtual proceedings. This series is made possible through a generous grant from the Redlich Horwitz Foundation to support family-centered practices during the COVID-19 health crisis, and beyond. Thank you all for participating.

Robert Salkin: Thank you, Judge.

What's this all about?

Due to the coronavirus pandemic, in-person court appearances are currently limited. Certain court cases are proceeding with virtual court appearances. The Chief Administrative Judge ordered that video conferences scheduled by the court be held through Skype for Business only. Your participation requires an internet connected device, or a telephone, but it does *not* require a Skype for Business account, or a Skype for Business paid subscription.

How do I know if I need to appear remotely?

If you are a lawyer, the court will send you an invitation email for a virtual court appearance. If you are not sure whether you need to appear in person, or remotely, please check with the court clerk's office. If you have a case, your attorney, or the court will send you an invitation email so that you may participate by video, or by telephone. If you're not sure whether you need to come to court in person, please check with your attorney if you have one. If you do not have an attorney, please call the court clerk's office.

What do I need to appear remotely?

Any one of the following devices—a computer, Windows or Mac, a smartphone, Android, or iPhone, a tablet, Android, or iPad, an internet connection. If you do not have any of the above, you may call in with a regular telephone. Headphones work best, but built-in microphones and speakers are okay. A built-in or external camera is recommended, but not required.

You do not need to sign up for a Skype for Business account. If you're not able to participate online, you may call in by phone. If you need to call in, please let the court know as soon as possible through your lawyer. If you don't have a lawyer, call the clerk directly.

How do I know if I'll be able to connect?

A Skype for Business testing service is offered by the New York State Unified Court System that allows you to briefly experience a Skype for Business meeting. Staff can help with basic troubleshooting. At the time of this recording, in July of 2020, testing is available 8:30 AM to 3:30 PM weekdays, except court holidays. Email skypetest@nycourts.gov with your name, phone number, email address, and preferred testing date, to schedule an appointment as far in advance of your virtual court appearance as possible. Testing staff *cannot* answer any questions about your appearance or case.

What will I see when I join?

A screen that looks like this. Focus on the buttons at the bottom of the window. If you need to interact with any of the other controls, someone on Skype Test will assist you with that.

What buttons do I need to press?

You will be muted when you join. Press the microphone button before you speak and then press it again when you're done speaking. People in the meeting will be able to hear you unless you're muted. If you're calling in, use your phone's mute feature, if available.

If you have a camera, you should start your video upon joining. Press the camera button, and then press "Start My Video" on the video preview window. If you need to stop the video from being shared, press the camera icon again. *If your video has been started, people can see you, even if you're muted.*

What can I do if Skype isn't working properly?

If you're using a Mac computer, there may be a fixable microphone issue. See the link posted. If you're using an iPhone or iPad, the "Join Meeting" link may not work until you install the free Skype for Business app from the App Store. Try restarting the device. Try another device, if you have one, such as a smartphone tablet, computer, or headset, if you have audio issues. For lawyers working from home, remote desktop and VPN connections can cause audio or camera issues. Disconnect from those. Use the physical device to connect directly.

How should I present myself?

A virtual court appearance should be treated as if it were happening in person. Dress as you would for a court appearance, if possible. Speak in a manner that is respectful to the court. Do not speak over people or make noise when it would be inappropriate to do so in court. Find a place to sit with few distractions and little noise, if possible. Please mute yourself when you're not speaking. Individual courts may have their own rules and expectations.

How do I connect when it's time?

See the invitation email, which was sent to you either by your lawyer, or by the court. Click the "Join Meeting" link. If that doesn't work, try the Skype Web App link. Join as a guest and enter your full name, as well as your role in the matter. For example, Jane Doe, Attorney for Petitioner; John Roe, Attorney for the Child; Sam Moe, Parent.

Why is there just a black screen when I join?

If something called a “virtual lobby” is being used, you'll see a mostly black screen with a note mentioning that you're in a virtual lobby. The court will let you into the virtual court appearance when it's ready for you.

Can I speak with someone privately during the court appearance?

You won't be able to speak with your lawyer or client privately within a Skype for Business meeting with the court. You can make arrangements prior to the appearance to communicate with your attorney or client through some other means.

When should I disconnect and how?

Disconnect when the session is finished. Ask the clerk or judge, if you're not sure when the session is finished, or ask your lawyer, if you have one. To disconnect, press the red button with a picture that looks like a telephone receiver. If you disconnect by accident, return to the invitation email and click the “Join Meeting” link again. Remember that your video is off and you're muted, that it is on silent, when you join a meeting, even if you were just in the meeting.

How do I get more information?

Email skypetest@nycourts.gov for a brief Skype for Business testing session. Include your name, telephone number, email address, and where the invite should be sent, and the best date for you to do a Skype test. You may also visit the Virtual Court Portal for additional technical information, or NY CourtHelp for legal resources and court information.

We thank the following.