



Everyone testifying in a court case must promise to tell the truth. You can do this by swearing an oath on the Bible or another religious book or by making a solemn affirmation, which is a non-religious promise to tell the truth.

Swearing an oath

If you are a witness in BC, you may swear an oath on any religious book that makes you feel that you must tell the truth. BC courthouses have Bibles and may have other books of faith depending on the location.

If you wish to take an oath on a religious book other than the Bible you should speak to the lawyer or the party who will be calling you as a witness. They should find out whether the court registry has the desired book and if not, make arrangements to obtain it and bring it to court. You or your lawyer should tell the court registry at least two weeks before the trial if you wish to use something other than the Bible to take your oath. This allows the court clerk to prepare and get the trial judge's authorization.

[BC Evidence Act section 20 \(3\)](#)

Affirming

An affirmation is just as acceptable in court as an oath. A witness who does not wish to swear a religious oath may testify in Court after making a solemn affirmation ("I solemnly affirm that the evidence to be given by me shall be the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth") and their testimony will have the same effect as if it were taken under oath.

It is good practice for lawyers or the party to find out whether their witnesses wish to swear or affirm and let the court clerk know as the witness is being called to testify. If this is not done, the judge or court clerk will ask the witness whether they wish to swear an oath or affirm after they enter the witness box.

[Canada Evidence Act section 14](#)

[BC Evidence Act section 20\(4\)](#)

Promising to tell the truth

A child under the age of 14 does not take an oath or make an affirmation, they testify after making a simple promise to tell the truth.

[Canada Evidence Act section 16.1](#)

Perjury

Courts understand that witnesses will have a variety of religious traditions and non-religious beliefs. Whatever you may believe, it is important that when you swear an oath or affirm, you are making a commitment to tell the truth. A witness who does not tell the truth can be charged with perjury (a criminal offence) and if found guilty, they can be sentenced to jail for up to 14 years.

Oaths and alternatives

Available as a podcast.



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