

The background of the entire page is a light teal color, decorated with scattered, hand-drawn style confetti. The confetti consists of various shapes: small solid dots, short horizontal dashes, plus signs, and wavy, curved lines. These elements are distributed across the page, creating a festive and textured backdrop for the text.

WHO'S THAT?

In Criminal Court

You'll probably see a lot of different people. This guide explains what their jobs are.

There's a section in the back where you can write down the names and numbers of important contacts.

There are also some tips on what to do if you have to go to court, and some information about your rights.



POLICE

A police officer's job is to enforce laws to protect public safety. When someone reports a crime, the police investigate it, which includes interviewing victims (people who were harmed) and witnesses (people who saw or heard or have information about the crime), to find out what happened. Sometimes they arrest people who they think may have broken the law. As part of their investigation, they might ask you questions about what you saw, heard, or experienced.

VICTIM ADVOCATE

The victim advocate's job is to help you. You can ask them all your questions about the case and what's happening, including things you're worried or confused about. They can also offer emotional support, information, help connecting with other services and planning for your safety.

They can also advocate for you with other adults involved in your case, which means they can stand up for you. If you have to go to court, they might come with you to provide support, if you want them to.

If you don't have a victim advocate and would like one, ask one of the adults involved in your case about how you can get one.



DEFENDANT

If the police arrest someone they believe broke the law, this person is called “the defendant” in the case because they have the chance to defend themselves in court. They are sometimes also called “the perpetrator.”

Who is the defendant in your case?



JUDGE

The judge is the person in charge of the courtroom. They listen to everyone in court, and make sure everyone follows the rules of the court. When there is a jury, the jury decides if the person is guilty or not guilty. When there is no jury, the judge decides. If someone is found guilty, the judge will decide on the “sentence,” or what that person has to do next.

JURY

The jury is made up of members of the community who listen to all of the information presented in court and decide if there is enough proof that a defendant committed the crimes they're charged with ("guilty") or not ("not guilty"). If you testify in court, they will listen to what you say to help them decide.





PROSECUTOR

Prosecutors (sometimes called “DAs” or “District Attorneys”) are lawyers who represent the community. If someone broke the rules or made other people unsafe, the prosecutor’s job is to make them stop so everyone is safer.

They decide whether to go through with (or “prosecute”) a case. They might ask you questions about your experience so they can understand what happened. If the case goes to court, they will try to convince the jury or judge that the defendant is guilty. If you’re asked to testify, they might ask you questions again in court so that the judge and jury can hear from you directly. Even though the prosecutor may be working on your case, they are not there to be your lawyer.



DEFENSE ATTORNEY

The defense attorney is the defendant's lawyer and works only for them. They will interview witnesses and represent the defendant in court. Their job is to help the defendant. In the US, every defendant has the right to a lawyer.



COURT OFFICER

The court officer makes sure everyone in the courthouse is safe. They may go to the courtroom with a witness to support them.



COURT REPORTER

The court reporter's job is to take notes on everything people say in the courtroom so there is a record of it.



INTERPRETER

If someone in court doesn't speak or understand English well, or is deaf or hard of hearing, the court provides interpreters to help them.

If you need an interpreter, ask your victim advocate or one of the adults in the case about how to get one.



PROBATION OFFICER

When someone is found guilty of a crime but not sent to prison, they are usually given rules they have to follow as part of their “probation.” The probation officer’s job is to meet with them regularly to make sure they are doing those things.



PAROLE OFFICER

When someone is released from prison, they may have to meet with a parole officer regularly, who makes sure they follow all the rules and do all the things the court told them to.

VICTIM

A victim is someone who was harmed by a crime.

WITNESS

A witness is someone who saw or heard the crime, or who has other information about what happened.



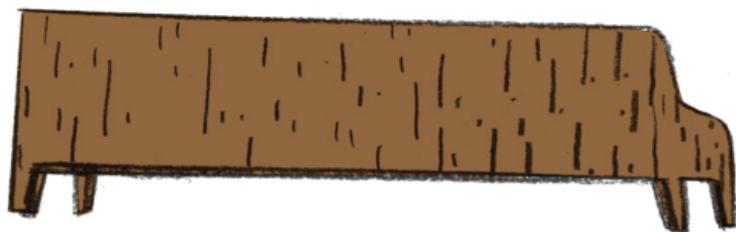
YOU

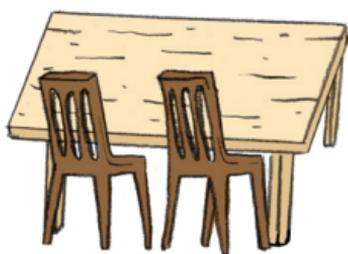
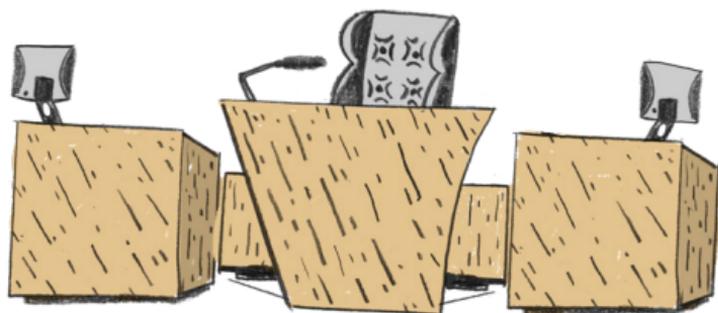
Your story is one piece of the puzzle. Your job is to show up, answer questions, and tell what you know and remember about what happened.

THE COURTROOM.

Many of these people work in the court.
At some point, you might have to go to court, too.

It can help to understand who will be there and where they will be sitting. Ask your advocate or one of the adults working with you on this case to show you using the drawing below.





COPING WITH COURT.

Going to court can be stressful, but there are things you can do to feel a little more in control. These tips come from other teens, who said these were the things that helped them most.

Getting ready.

- Try to get lots of sleep the night before.
- Eat something before you go to court. It will help you feel better and have the energy to get through the day.
- You don't have to dress up, but wear something nice if you can. Something that makes you feel good and helps you feel confident.
- You'll probably spend a lot of time waiting, so bring something to read, play, or do while you wait. Some teens suggest listening to music, reading, drawing, writing in a journal, or doing homework.
- If you have a special object that helps you feel calm, bring it with you. Some teens like things like a stress ball you can squeeze,

but others like more personal things like a special lucky charm.

Getting nervous.

If you feel nervous, try one of these things:

- Try to picture how you want the day to go, and how you will react if different things happen. It may sound silly, but picturing things can help you feel calmer.
 - Try taking deep breaths from your belly in and out a few times. It really helps!
 - Tighten your muscles and then relax them. Do this a few times.
 - If you can, take a walk, dance, run, jump or move your body to get rid of some of your extra energy. You can also try walking really fast for a few seconds, then taking a deep breath and walking really slowly for a few seconds, then going fast then slow, fast then slow a few more times.
 - If you have a special prayer or song that is important to you, try saying or singing it, either out loud, or in your head.
-

Getting support.

- Think about who you can talk to about how you're feeling and who can support you in court.
 - Is there an advocate, friend, or family member who can come to court? If so, you can look at them if and when you get nervous.
 - If you have a therapist, talk to them before and after court.
-

Getting through it.

It can feel good to do something nice when it's over, like watch a movie you love, eat a favorite meal, or just spend some time with a friend. Think of something to look forward to.

YOU HAVE RIGHTS!

Did you know that, if you're involved in a case going through criminal court anywhere in the United States, you have rights? Don't be afraid to ask for them.

You may have different rights, depending on your role in the case.

If you saw, heard, or know something about a crime that is part of the case, you are a witness. If you were harmed by a crime that is part of the case, you are a victim of the crime, and you are also a witness.

RIGHTS YOU HAVE EITHER WAY:

You have the right to be treated with respect.

You have the right to feel safe.

- Nobody has the right to scare you into saying (or not saying) something in court or to convince you not to call the police or go to court. It's against the law and there are consequences if someone does that.

- If this happens, or if anyone tries to talk to you about your case outside of court in a way that makes you uncomfortable, tell your advocate or the lawyers on the case right away.
- You have the right to protections to help you feel safe. Depending on your situation, they can include:
 - A police escort for when you go to court and when you go home
 - An “Order of Protection” that says the person accused of the crime can’t talk to you or go to your home or school
 - Things to make your home more safe, like changing locks
 - Help finding a safe place to live

DEPENDING ON WHERE YOU LIVE, YOU MAY HAVE EVEN MORE RIGHTS!

If you have questions, or your rights have been violated, talk to your advocate, the prosecutor, or one of the other adults working on your case right away.

VICTIMS' RIGHTS

If you are a victim, you have additional rights.

You have the right to...

1. ...have your voice heard and to say what happened to you.

This could include making a “victim impact statement” to let the people making decisions about the case know how what happened affected you.

2. ...understand what's happening and what the next steps are.

This includes knowing who is involved in your case and what kinds of help and resources you can get.

And it means you can ask as many questions as you want to until you understand.

3. ...understand what the people involved in your case are saying and doing.

If you want to speak in a different language, let your advocate know. You can ask for an interpreter or to have important documents translated into your language.

If you have a disability or something is making it hard to understand what's going on, tell

your advocate right away. You have the right to an interpreter to help you understand what people are saying in court and other meetings. See the section about disabilities on the next page for more information.

4. ...get updates about your case.

Ask your advocate and the lawyers for any updates on what's happening in court and about any decisions that are made.

5. ...go to all court hearings and proceedings, if you want to.

Cases can take a long time and you don't have to go to every hearing. But if you want to go, you can.

6. ...privacy.

This means that in most cases, the court can't share your personal information like your name and address.

And it means you don't have to talk to anyone outside the court system about what happened if you don't want to.

5. ...apply for money to cover costs related to what happened.

Costs that can be covered include (but aren't limited to) things like counseling, medical

bills and insurance co-pays for treatment, relocation expenses, funeral expenses, and lost wages from missing work.

You have to meet some requirements to qualify, so talk to your advocate or the prosecutor about applying.

If you're approved, you'll have to show receipts to get reimbursed. You won't get the money up front.

8. ...a speedy trial.

The court process has a lot of steps and what counts as "speedy" might be slower than you think. The whole process can take a year or longer.

9. ...have any of your stuff that's taken for the case be returned to you.

If your things are taken as evidence, it might take longer to get back.

DEPENDING ON WHERE YOU LIVE, YOU MAY HAVE EVEN MORE RIGHTS!

If you have questions, or your rights have been violated, talk to your advocate, the prosecutor, or one of the other adults working on your case right away.

If you have a disability...

You ALWAYS have the right to understand what's going on with your case and what the people working on it are saying and doing. You also always have the right to express what happened and how you feel. This means you can get support so people can understand you.

You should always be able to get to (and around) the court or any other place you have to go for a meeting.

Let the people working on your case – like your advocate, caseworkers, lawyers, and judge – know about your disability and what you need help with right away. Your advocate may need to make a separate request for assistance at each court date and meeting, so don't be afraid to keep asking!

You can ask for help to address your needs. You have this right under the law, and you can say you need “reasonable accommodations.”

Examples include (but aren't limited to):

- A sign language interpreter (for non-American sign language, ask for a Certified Deaf Interpreter, also called CDI)

- An interpreter who can type everything that's being said for you (called Communication Access Real Time or CART services)
- A transliterator to make sure people around you understand what you have to say
- Different kinds of aids like hearing devices, captioned videos, and visual aids
- Wheelchair access or accessibility for any kind of physical disability

There are many more accommodations you can ask for that aren't on this list! Talk to your advocate to find the right ones for you. And don't be afraid to ask.

If your parent or guardian has a disability, they have the right to request reasonable accommodations, too.

WHO'S WHO?

If you want, you can keep track of the people working on your case here.

POLICE OFFICER

Name:

Contact info:

PROSECUTOR:

Name:

Contact Info:

VICTIM ADVOCATE:

Name:

Contact Info:

JUDGE:

Name:

Contact Info:

SOCIAL WORKER/THERAPIST:

Name:

Contact Info:

OTHER:

Name:

Contact Info:

The Center for Court Innovation's Child Witness Materials Project is a collaborative effort between the Center for Court Innovation and the Center for Urban Pedagogy, and is supported by cooperative agreement #2016-VF-GX-K011, awarded by the U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Office for Victims of Crime. The opinions, findings, and conclusions or recommendations expressed in this document are those of the contributors and do not necessarily represent the official position or policies of the U.S. Department of Justice.

The Center for Court Innovation works to create a more effective and humane justice system by performing original research and helping launch reforms around the world.

www.courtinnovation.org

The Center for Urban Pedagogy is a nonprofit organization that uses the power of design and art to increase meaningful civic engagement, in partnership with historically marginalized communities.

www.welcometoCUP.org

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The Office for Victims of Crime is committed to enhancing the Nation's capacity to assist crime victims and to providing leadership in changing attitudes, policies, and practices to promote justice and healing for all victims of crime.

www.ovc.ojp.gov

The Office of Justice Programs is a federal agency that provides federal leadership, grants, training, technical assistance, and other resources to improve the Nation's capacity to prevent and reduce crime, assist victims, and enhance the rule of law by strengthening the criminal and juvenile justice systems. Its six program offices—the Bureau of Justice Assistance, the Bureau of Justice Statistics, the National Institute of Justice, the Office for Victims of Crime, the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, and the Office of Sex Offender Sentencing, Monitoring, Apprehending, Registering, and Tracking—support state and local crime-fighting efforts, fund thousands of victim service programs, help communities manage sex offenders, address the needs of youth in the system and children in danger, and provide vital research and data.



Office for Victims of Crime
OVC

