

Juvenile justice court (sometimes called delinquency court) is a court that decides if a child broke the law. The juvenile justice court helps to protect, guide, and rehabilitate children. And it helps keep the community safe.

This information sheet answers common questions that many parents have. It has three sections:

1. What Happens When Your Child Is Arrested
2. Your Child's Court Hearings and Orders
3. How to Keep Your Child's Juvenile Court Records Private

This form describes the juvenile justice court process. Some children who have contact with law enforcement or probation never need to go to court, even if it is believed that they broke the law.

1 What Happens When Your Child Is Arrested

This section is about:

- What to expect when your child is arrested,
- What your child's legal rights are,
- What the *notice to appear* and the *petition* are,
- What it means to transfer your child to adult court, and
- What a *probation officer* does.

My child was arrested. What happens next?

Your child might be brought home or allowed to go home with you.

You will be given or mailed a notice to appear that tells you the date, time, and place you and your child need to go to the probation department or juvenile court. You may want to talk to a qualified juvenile defense lawyer about your child's case. You can call your local public defender's office before your child goes to court. If your child has to go to court, the court will appoint a lawyer to represent your child at no cost to you if you do not hire a lawyer.

Warning! You and your child *must* go to the meeting listed on the notice to appear even if no one contacts you again. Sometimes the meeting will be at probation. Sometimes the notice will order you to go to the juvenile court.

Your child might NOT be sent home immediately after the arrest.

If that happens, the officer who arrested your child may:

- Let your child go later, without going to juvenile hall.
- Take your child to juvenile hall and keep them there. This is called *in-custody detention*. If this happens, the arresting officer *must* try to contact you immediately to tell you where your child is and that your child is in custody.



What are my child's legal rights after arrest?



Your child has the right to make at least **two phone calls** within **1 hour** of being arrested.

- One call must be a *completed* call to a parent, guardian, responsible relative, or employer.
- The other call must be a *completed* call to a lawyer.
- If your child is currently in court-ordered foster care, your child may also be allowed to call a foster parent or social worker.

What if the police want to question my child?

If your child is under 18, and in custody, your child must have a confidential consultation with an attorney. Your child cannot decide to answer questions or give up rights without first talking to a lawyer. This right to speak to an attorney cannot be given up. After that consultation, and before any officer asks your child about what happened, the officer must first tell your child about your child's *Miranda* rights:



- "You have the right to remain silent.
- Anything you say will be used against you in court.
- You have a right to have a lawyer with you during questioning.
- If you or your parents cannot afford a lawyer, one will be appointed for you."



Does my child need a lawyer?

If a petition is filed, your child has a right to an *effective* and *prepared* lawyer, who must have specific education and training in juvenile justice cases. The lawyer will be appointed at your child's first hearing unless you hire an attorney for your child.



Your child's lawyer represents only your child, not you, even if you are paying for that lawyer. Your child's lawyer is required to have a confidential relationship with your child. That means the lawyer cannot talk to you about your child's case unless the child agrees and allows it.

Do I need a lawyer for myself?

The court can order you to do things for your child and can order you to pay *restitution* to the *victim*. Some parents hire lawyers for legal advice about these issues.

NOTE: If you think you need your own lawyer and cannot afford to hire one, you can ask the court to appoint a lawyer for you. The court will decide whether to appoint you a lawyer. If it does, you might be ordered to pay back the cost of the lawyer if the court decides you can afford to pay that cost.

If my child is required to meet with probation, how can we get ready?

It's a good idea to get legal advice. A defense lawyer who specializes in juvenile justice cases can help you understand your child's rights and know what to expect. Try to find school records and other information that shows what you and your child are doing to get back on track.

At the meeting, the probation officer will talk with you and your child about the next steps in your child's case.

NOTE: At this meeting, the probation officer must tell you and your child about the *Miranda* rights. Any information you or your child share with the probation officer might be shared with the court or the prosecuting attorney (D.A.).

- If the alleged offense is not serious or it's the first time your child has been accused of breaking the law, the probation officer might just tell your child what they did was wrong (reprimand them) and let your child go.

- The probation officer might offer to let your child do a special *diversion program* instead of going to court. Each county has different rules and different programs. If you and your child agree to the program and your child does everything the program requires, the juvenile court does not need to get involved.
- If the offense is more serious, the probation officer might refer your child's case to the prosecuting attorney (D.A.). If the prosecutor decides to file charges, they will file a petition in juvenile court. That's what the rest of this form is about.

What happens if my child is taken to juvenile hall after getting arrested?

The probation officer can decide to:

- Keep your child in custody, or
- Let your child go home with you.

If the probation officer lets your child go, the officer may still:

- Ask the D.A. to file a petition, and
- Set limits on what your child is allowed to do while at home.

If the probation officer does *not* let your child go, the officer must notify the public defender that your child is in custody within two hours. If the D.A. decides to file charges, a petition *must* be filed within 48 hours of the arrest. A detention hearing must be held the next day the court is in session. The courts are closed on Saturdays, Sundays, and holidays. You and your child *must* be given a copy of the petition.

How long can they keep my child in juvenile hall?

The judge will decide at the detention hearing. The judge may release your child or keep your child in juvenile hall until the next hearing or until the whole case is over.

Can I visit my child in juvenile hall?

Yes, but before you go, contact the juvenile hall or the probation officer to find out how to set up a visit.

What if the probation officer says a petition will be filed?

The petition states the things your child is accused of or charged with. It means your child's case will be sent to juvenile court. You have the right to receive a copy of the petition. If you have not received a copy of the petition, ask the probation officer or the court clerk for one.

The petition says your child did something against the law and asks the juvenile court to decide that what it says is true, but it does not prove anything.

Read the Petition Carefully! It is important to know what your child is accused of.

Are all petitions the same?

No. Each petition is tailored to the child and the alleged offense. There are two kinds of petitions:

A **601 Petition** is filed when a child has:

- Run away,
- Skipped school a lot,
- Violated a curfew, or
- Regularly disobeyed a parent or guardian.

These petitions are filed by the probation department at the juvenile court. If the court decides the charges are true, your child can become a “ward” of the court. That means the court will supervise your child, and your child must obey the court’s orders.

A **602 Petition** is for a charge that would be a *misdemeanor* (like shoplifting or simple assault) or *felony* (like stealing a car, selling drugs, rape, or murder) if an adult had done it.

These petitions are filed by the prosecuting attorney (D.A.). If the court decides the charges are true, the judge can:

- Order your child put on probation,
- Make your child a “ward” of the court, and
- Order your child placed out of your home or committed to (locked up in) a juvenile facility.

NOTE: If your family is involved with the child welfare system, talk with your lawyer about what your child’s arrest means for that case. Depending on everything that has happened, the court might decide that it’s best for your child to stay in the child welfare system, to be supervised in the juvenile justice system, or to be supervised and served in both systems.

Can my child’s case be moved to adult court?

In cases with felony charges, the prosecuting attorney (D.A.) can ask the juvenile court to transfer your child’s case to adult criminal court. If that happens, talk to your child’s lawyer right away. Adult criminal cases are handled very differently and there may be very serious consequences for your child.

Your child’s case can only be transferred to adult court if your child is 16 years old or older, charged with a felony, and the court finds that the juvenile system cannot rehabilitate your child.

What does the probation officer do?

Probation officers investigate children’s situations and backgrounds and write reports for the court. They also supervise children to see if they are doing what the court has ordered them to do.

Why does the probation officer write reports?

The probation officer writes reports to give the court information about your child. The reports give the judge a description of your child’s situation, including life at home and school, the current charges, and any previous arrests or petitions. It can also include:

- Statements from your child, you, your family, and other people who know your child well;
- A school report;
- A statement by the victim; and
- Recommendations about what the court should do if the judge finds that your child did what the petition says.

When does the judge see the reports?

The probation officer presents a report at the *detention hearing*, *disposition hearing*, and each *review hearing*. The judge uses the reports to help decide how to handle your child’s case.

2 Your Child's Court Hearings and Orders

If a petition is filed in your child's case, you and your child will have to go to juvenile court. Each time you go to court is called a "hearing." You may have to go to several court hearings. This section is about:

- What happens at the different court hearings,
- What happens after the hearings,
- What happens if your child becomes a ward of the court, and
- What your duties and responsibilities as a parent are.

Get Ready for Court

When is the first court hearing?

If your child is in custody, the first hearing, called the detention hearing, must take place on the court day immediately after the petition is filed. The probation officer or prosecuting attorney (D.A.) must tell you when and where the hearing will be. You will also get a copy of the petition. At this hearing, the court decides only whether your child can go home or needs to stay in custody until the next hearing.

If your child is not in custody, the first hearing, often called the initial hearing or "arraignment," must take place no more than 30 days after the petition is filed. In addition to the notice described earlier, you and your child will get a copy of the petition at least 10 days before the date of this hearing.

How will I find out about other court hearings?

If your child is in custody, both you and your child will get notice at least 5 days before the hearing. Someone will deliver it personally or by certified mail.

If your child is not in custody, both you and your child will get notice of each court hearing at least 10 days before the date of the hearing. Someone will deliver it personally, by first-class mail, or, if you agree, electronically.

Can I go to my child's court hearings?

Yes. In fact, the law says you *must* go. The judge decides what is best for your child. Depending on the charges, if you can show that your child will listen to you and follow your rules, and that you will hold your child accountable and be supportive at home, the judge may let your child go home with you.

How many times will we have to go to court?

You and your child will probably need go to court several times. There will be different kinds of hearings where the court makes different decisions. *See page 8 for a table of different hearing types.*

Do we have the right to an interpreter?

Both you and your child have a right to an interpreter if needed. Ask for one if you do not speak English well and don't understand everything being said in court.

Can I speak at the court hearings?

Yes. You may speak when:

- The judge asks you questions,
- You are called as a witness, or
- The judge gives you permission.

Who else speaks at the court hearings?

Your child's lawyer will speak for your child. The prosecuting attorney (D.A.) will speak for the government. The probation officer may speak for the probation department.

Can the victim go to the hearings?

Yes. A crime victim has a right to go to and speak at any court hearing about the effect the crime had on them. The victim and the victim's parents (if the victim is under 18) will get notice of the hearing. Do not talk to the victim unless your lawyer tells you to.

What is a jurisdiction hearing?

The jurisdiction hearing or "trial" is when the judge decides if your child actually did what it says in the petition. Before a jurisdiction hearing the judge may set a pre-jurisdiction hearing to decide if your child's case can be resolved without a contested jurisdiction hearing.

Here's what to expect:

- The judge will ask your child to *admit* or *deny* the charges listed in the petition.
- Your child's lawyer will consider the evidence and the possible outcomes, and then advise your child what to do.
- If your child *admits* some or all of the charges, your child gives up the right to a trial. The judge will decide that the petition is true.
- If your child *denies* the charges, there will be a trial (called a *contested hearing*). The court may hold the trial on another day to give your child's lawyer time to get ready.

What happens at the “trial”?

At the trial, the prosecuting attorney (D.A.) will call witnesses and present evidence to prove the charges. Then your child’s lawyer may call witnesses and present evidence in your child’s defense. The judge will consider all the evidence and decide if the charges are true “beyond a reasonable doubt.”

If there is not enough proof to decide the charges are true, the judge will dismiss individual charges or the entire case. If your child is in custody and the entire case is dismissed, your child will be let go. If this happens, skip ahead to section 3 of this form.

If the judge decides some or all of the charges are true, there will be a *disposition hearing*. That’s when the judge will say what your child will need to do and where your child will live. Sometimes this hearing is right after the jurisdiction hearing, but usually it is 2–4 weeks later.

If your child is in custody, the judge can order your child to stay in custody or be released until the disposition hearing.

If you live in a different county, the court can transfer the case to your local court for the disposition hearing.

What happens at the disposition hearing?

The judge will decide what orders to make to protect and rehabilitate your child and to protect the community.

The judge might order your child to:

- Live at home and obey informal probation rules for up to six months.
- Live at home, be supervised by a probation officer, and obey rules set by the judge.
- Live at a relative’s home, a foster family home, a private group home, or a residential treatment program; be supervised by a probation officer; and obey rules set by the judge.
- Spend time in a county camp, home, ranch, juvenile hall, or secure youth treatment facility (in custody) and on probation.

The judge may also order *you*, the parent, to get counseling or parent training or do other activities.

What if the judge puts my child on probation?

If your child is put on probation, the probation officer will supervise and work with your child to make sure that your child follows:

- The law,
- The court’s orders, and
- All the rules of probation.

The probation officer will also encourage your child to do well in school and participate in job training, counseling, and community programs.

How often will the probation officer see my child?

Each case is different. The probation officer will meet regularly with your child during their case.

What if the judge makes my child a ward of the court?

The juvenile law uses special language. Children who have committed offenses may become wards of the court, but are not “convicted.” If your child becomes a ward of the court, that means the court is in charge of some of your child’s care and conduct. The court does this to protect your child and the community.

What if the judge orders my child placed in foster care?

If the judge orders suitable out-of-home or foster placement, the probation officer may place your child in:

- An adult relative’s home,
- An approved foster family home,
- A licensed private group home, or
- A residential treatment program.

What if the court sends my child to a secure county facility?

Most wards of the court who need secure confinement are sent to county facilities, like a ranch, camp, or juvenile hall, where they can be close to their families and local rehabilitative services. Ask the probation department about your child’s program and how you can visit, stay in touch, and help your child’s rehabilitation.

Some of these secure confinement programs may be for an extended period of time and may be located in another county. They are called secure youth treatment facilities and can hold your child until age 25 or up to two years from the date your child was sent to the secure youth treatment facility, if that is later.

If my child's case was moved to adult court, can my child be sent to adult prison?

Yes, but between the ages of 16 and 18, your child must stay at a juvenile facility even if sentenced to adult prison.

Important! If your child's case gets moved to adult court, talk to your child's lawyer right away.

Do I have to pay for what my child did?

The court may order you to pay fines or penalties.

If the court decides that the victim is entitled to restitution, you and your child are equally responsible for paying the victim back. *Restitution* is money that pays the victim to make up for the damage or harm your child caused.

Restitution can pay the victim back for:

- Stolen or damaged property,
- Medical expenses, and
- Lost wages.

If restitution is not completely paid when your child's case is closed, it will become a *civil judgment*, which can affect your credit score.

Do I have to pay fees for services my child receives from the court or county?

No. You do not have to pay fees or pay back the cost of services, support, or an attorney *given to your child* by the county or court as part of this case.

What are my responsibilities as a parent?

Your parental duties do not end when the court gets involved. Your child may need you now more than ever.

If the judge decides the charges in the petition are true, you may be ordered to do things to:

- Help make up for harm your child caused, and
- Keep your child out of trouble in the future.

The court may order you to:

- Take classes,
- Go to counseling, or
- Do other activities that will help you and your child.

Can I be part of my child's case after my child turns 18?

When your child becomes a legal adult you will need to have your child's permission to be actively involved in their case. You will still receive notice of hearings but it will be up to your child to invite you to meetings with probation or other service providers.

What if my child is in foster care or in custody?

Wherever your child goes, stay in touch as much as you can, however you can. Visit your child as often as you can. Support your child's programs and activities.

Encourage your child to obey the court's orders and not to leave the placement without permission.

Find out what is happening in your child's life so that you can get ready for your child to return home. Learn how to make a protective and supportive environment for your child's return to school or work. Develop plans to hold your child accountable for their actions.

Where can I find parenting resources?

Contact your child's probation officer. Ask for referrals to community organizations, such as parents' groups or counseling services, that can help you. Your school district and local hospital or mental health department may also have useful programs.

If you have any questions that have not been answered, you may want to contact a lawyer for help.

3 How to Keep Your Child's Juvenile Court Records Private

Will anyone be able to look at my child's juvenile records?

Maybe. Although most juvenile court records are confidential, the law sometimes allows government officials to look at them.

However, in many cases the court will "seal" your child's juvenile records. Once the records are sealed, the law treats the arrest and court case as if they never happened. That means your child can truthfully say that your child does not have a criminal or juvenile record.

Exception: If your child wants to join the military, get a federal security clearance, or become a law enforcement officer your child may need to disclose information about the juvenile record. Your child's lawyer can provide advice about that.

How can I seal my child's juvenile records?

It depends on your child's situation.

Sealing at dismissal. If the juvenile court dismisses your child's case without making your child a ward of the court, the court must seal your child's records.

If the court does make your child a ward and later dismisses the case because your child has satisfactorily completed probation, the court will also seal your child's records and send your child copies of the sealing order and form JV-596-INFO, *Sealing of Records for Satisfactory Completion of Probation*.

If your child completes a probation diversion program, the probation department will seal those records and give notice to your child.

Sealing on request. If your child does *not* satisfactorily complete probation or the probation diversion program, the court may *not* dismiss the case and your child's records will not be automatically sealed. Your child can either:

- Ask the court to review the probation department's decision and order the records sealed, or
- Ask the court later to seal the records. (See form [JV-595-INFO](#), *How to Ask the Court to Seal Your Records*, for more information.)

If your child is made a ward for an offense listed in Welfare and Institutions Code section 707(b), your child can ask the court to seal the records at age 18.

Even sealed records can be viewed by the prosecuting attorney (D.A.) in some cases.

Can my child's juvenile court record be used against them as an adult?

Under the three-strikes law, some serious or violent felonies committed by a child at age 16 or 17 can be counted as strikes and used against the child in the future.

Will my child's right as an adult to possess a firearm be restricted?

If your child is made a ward of the court for certain offenses, your child is not allowed to have a firearm until reaching age 30. The Department of Justice can look at your child's sealed records to prevent your child from buying a firearm.

Court Hearings in Juvenile Justice Court

You and your child may have to go to court several times. Each time you go is called a “hearing.” Depending on your case, there may be different kinds of hearings where the judge makes different decisions. Here are some of them. Each time you have to go to court, you and your child (if 8 or older) will get a notice. The notice will tell you the date, time, and place to go.

Kind of hearing	What happens at this hearing
Detention	The judge will decide if your child can go home or must stay in custody until the next hearing.
Transfer to criminal court	The juvenile court judge will decide if the case of a child who is 16 or older should be transferred to adult criminal court. Children under 16 cannot have their cases transferred to adult court. This hearing usually happens for very serious or violent charges and only if the prosecuting attorney (D.A.) asks for the transfer.
Pre-jurisdiction (pretrial or settlement conference)	<p>The judge, lawyers, and probation officer try to resolve the case without having a trial. The D.A. may make an “offer” to reduce or dismiss some of the charges. The judge will ask your child to <i>admit</i> or <i>deny</i> the charges listed in the petition. Your child’s lawyer will consider the evidence and possible outcomes, and then advise your child what to do. Whether to admit a charge is your child’s decision.</p> <p>If your child admits the charges, your child will give up the right to a trial. The judge will decide that the petition is true.</p> <p>If your child denies the charges, there will be a trial, usually a week or two later.</p>
Jurisdiction (trial)	<p>At the trial, the prosecuting attorney will present evidence to prove the charges. Then your child’s lawyer will decide whether to present evidence in your child’s defense. The law does not require a defense to be presented. The judge will consider all the evidence and decide if the charges are true “beyond a reasonable doubt.”</p> <p>– <i>If there is not enough proof to decide the charges are true</i>, the judge will dismiss the case. If your child is in custody, your child will be let go.</p> <p>– <i>If the judge decides the charges are true</i>, there will be a disposition hearing.</p>
Disposition	This happens <i>only</i> if the judge decides that one or more charges in the petition are true. The judge then decides what orders to make for your child. This hearing is sometimes right after the jurisdiction hearing but is often postponed for another day.
Hearing on motions	The court decides legal questions that affect the case.
Review hearings	This hearing provides a way for the court to check how your child is doing on probation or in placement. If your child is placed in foster care or in a secure youth treatment facility, the court must hold a review hearing at least once every six months.

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Civil judgment: A court order requiring a person to pay money to another person.

Detention hearing: The first court hearing after an arrest if the child is detained in custody.

Felony: An action that would be a serious crime if committed by an adult.

In-custody detention: Keeping a person in a secure place and not letting them go free or go home.

Juvenile delinquency: See *juvenile justice*, below.

Juvenile justice: The legal system designed to guide, rehabilitate, and protect children who break the law, and to keep the community safe. Also known as “juvenile delinquency.”

Miranda: The U.S. Supreme Court case that requires law enforcement to tell persons detained in custody their rights before asking them questions.

Misdemeanor: An action that would be a less serious crime if committed by an adult.

Notice to appear: A paper telling you and your child to meet with a probation officer or go to juvenile court at a specific time and place.

Notice of hearing: A paper telling you the date, time, and place of a court hearing, and what will happen there.

Petition: A paper filed with the court that says your child did something against the law.

601 petition: A petition filed by the probation officer that accuses your child of something that’s against the law for a child to do, for example, skipping school or breaking curfew.

602 petition: A petition filed by the prosecuting attorney that accuses your child of doing something that would be a crime if an adult did it.

Probation officer: A law enforcement officer who advises the court about the orders the child needs to protect and rehabilitate the child, and supervises the child as ordered by the court.

Restitution: Money owed to the victim of an act to make up for the damage or harm done.

Terms or terms and conditions of probation: Court orders that tell a person on probation what they must and must not do.

Ward: A child whom the court has decided to supervise because the child did something against the law.