

Going to Court

A Young Person's Guide to the Youth Court

A youth court is a special type of magistrates' court for people aged between 10 and 17 years old. It has either three magistrates or a district judge, and there isn't a jury.

Youth courts are slightly different from adult courts, for example, members of the public are not allowed into the court (unless they get permission), you are called by your first name and there are restrictions on what the press can report in newspapers or other media.

For serious crimes, such as murder or rape, the case will start in a youth court but will be passed to a crown court.

If a young person doesn't attend court, a warrant can be issued for their arrest. This means that the police will arrest you and hold you in the police station until a court can deal with your case. At weekends this could mean being held overnight.

On the day of your court hearing

It is best to get to Court half an hour before the time you have been given.

When you arrive, tell the usher that you are there. Usually they wear a black gown.

If you are under 16 years old your parent or guardian must come with you. If you are 16/17 years old parents/guardians do not have to attend, unless ordered by the court, but it is advisable to have them with you.

Courts are very formal. If you want to make good impression in court the following points may be helpful:

- Try to be neat and tidy in your dress and appearance.
- Don't put your hands in your pockets, it is best to keep them by your side
- Don't eat or chew gum in court.

Seeing a Solicitor:

Consider getting a solicitor to speak for you in court. You may qualify for free legal

Your parents or friends may suggest one or you can see the Duty Solicitor at Court. Don't be shy about contacting a solicitor; it is their job to deal with cases like yours. Make sure that you show the solicitor any charge / summons papers.

Your solicitor can help you to decide whether you should plead guilty or not guilty to an offence in court.

Pleading guilty or not guilty

If you deny (plead not guilty) your case will be moved (adjourned) to another day for a trial where magistrates will hear evidence about the case and decide whether they think you are guilty or not.

If you admit (plead guilty) or are found guilty at a trial you may be sentenced on the day or the magistrates can ask to have your case put off for a few weeks for a pre-sentence report to be written.

Pre-Sentence Reports:

These are prepared by a worker from the Youth Justice Service and will give the Magistrates information about you and what happened.

When talking to the person writing the report, remember that anything that is relevant can be included in the report. Don't forget to mention the good things about yourself.

When you come before the Court to be sentenced you and your parent / guardian will be given a copy of the report. You should read it very carefully. A Youth Justice Service worker will be at court and will help you if you have difficulties reading.

If you feel any part of the report is wrong or unfair, speak to the Youth Justice Service worker at Court and to your solicitor.

The Decision:

If you are found guilty or if you plead guilty the Crown Prosecutor will tell the magistrates about the offence(s) and whether you have had any other court orders or cautions before. If you disagree with anything they read out you should tell your solicitor.

Your solicitor will then speak for you, giving the Magistrates any reasons or explanations concerning your behaviour. Any reports available will also be read.

The magistrates will then retire (leave the courtroom) to reach a decision. They will take into account the seriousness of the offence, any previous offences, your general behaviour and the likelihood of your offending again. When they return you should stand up and remain standing whilst they give their decision.

Sentencing:

There are a number of ways you can be dealt with. Ask your solicitor, or a Youth Justice Service worker to discuss likely sentences with you. There is further information about these sentences on this webpage.