

JAMIE'S STORY

a journey
through (& beyond)
the legal system

This book is about a young person named Jamie. They've experienced some things you might have been through or might be going through now.

Jamie is at a new group home and gets involved with some new people. Something happens, which leads to Jamie having to testify in court as a witness in a criminal case.

Some of Jamie's experiences might not look or sound like yours, but they might help you to understand what's going on with you, your family, your friends, and your situation.

This book includes information about:

- what could happen in your case,
- people you might see or talk to, and
- different ways to work through your feelings.

Jamie's story is based on real people's lives. You'll hear from some of them throughout the book. Reading Jamie's story might bring up some feelings or memories. This is completely understandable. It might be helpful to work through this book with an advocate or caseworker, or another adult you trust. And if you read any words or names of people that you don't understand, you can find their meanings in the 'What's Going On?' booklet.

You can keep this book. Write in it, read it, share it with someone else. You can take your time with it, or read it all in one go. Whatever works for you.

And please remember that there are a lot of people who can help and support you. You are not alone.



JAMIE'S STORY

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Jamie's Group Home Experience

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PART TWO

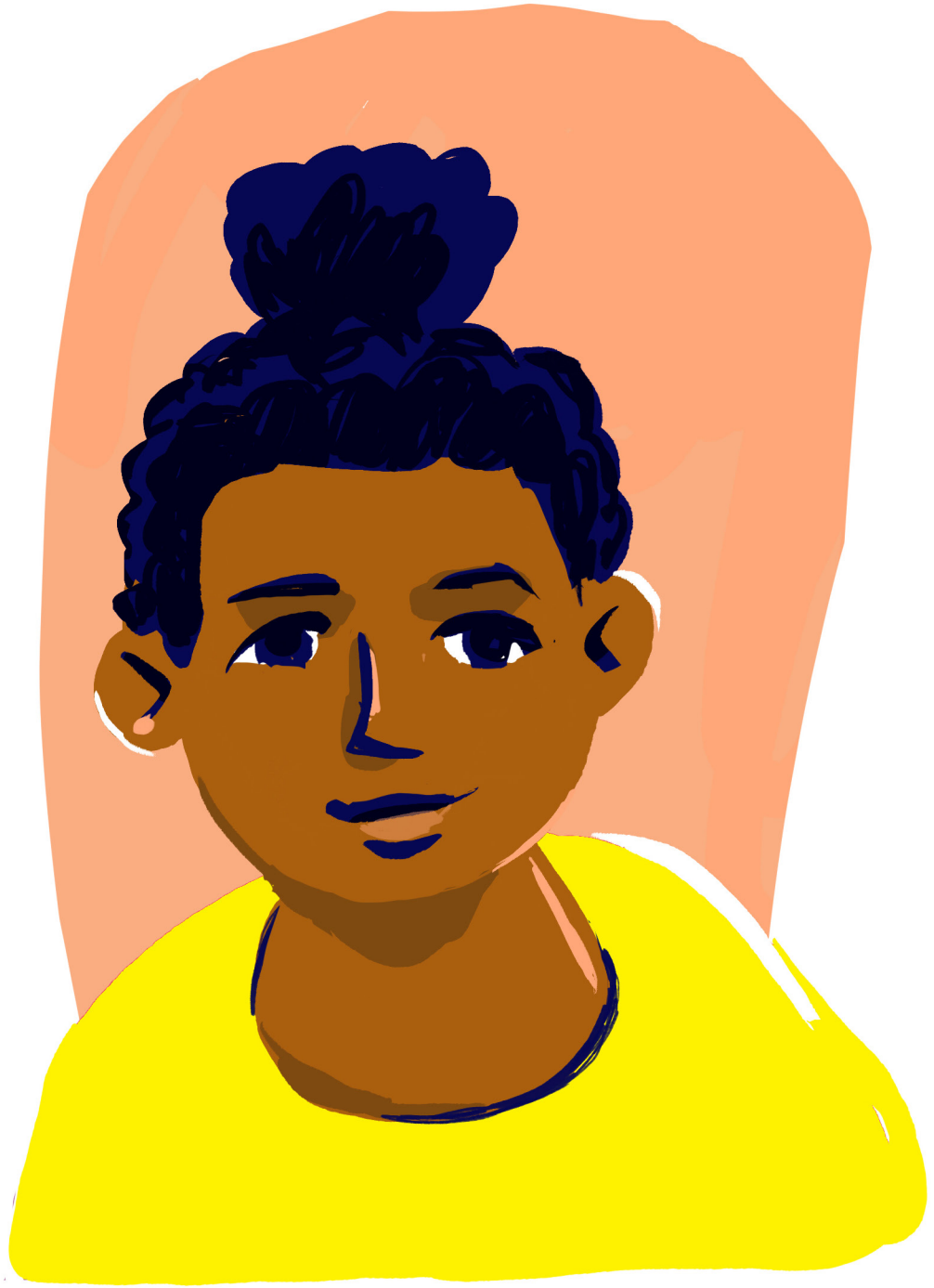
Jamie's Experience in Court

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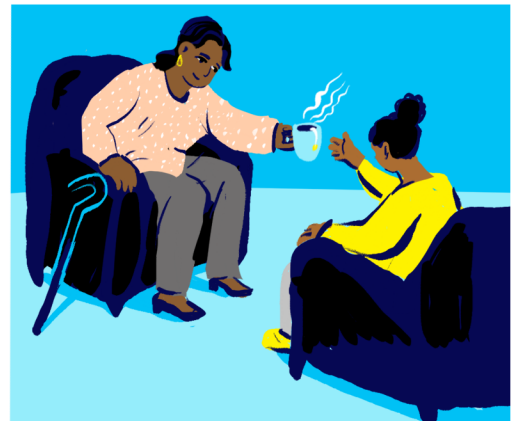
Jamie Reflects and Moves Forward

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PART ONE

**Jamie's Group Home
Experience**







Hey, do you want to watch, too?



...I don't know? Maybe?



Being in a new home sucks. The other group home wasn't great but at least I had people who had my back...now I don't have anyone.

When people in our past have hurt us, it can be hard to trust people again. It's normal to want to protect ourselves. We all take our own time to get comfortable.



I guess...



Remember when we first met a couple of months ago? You barely talked to me until I figured out we liked the same music.



Yeah, true. I loved hearing my family blast that stuff when I was younger. It was so fun.



It was different then...



If I hadn't started hanging out with Chris and his boys then none of this would have happened. If I just...ughh.

What are you feeling right now?



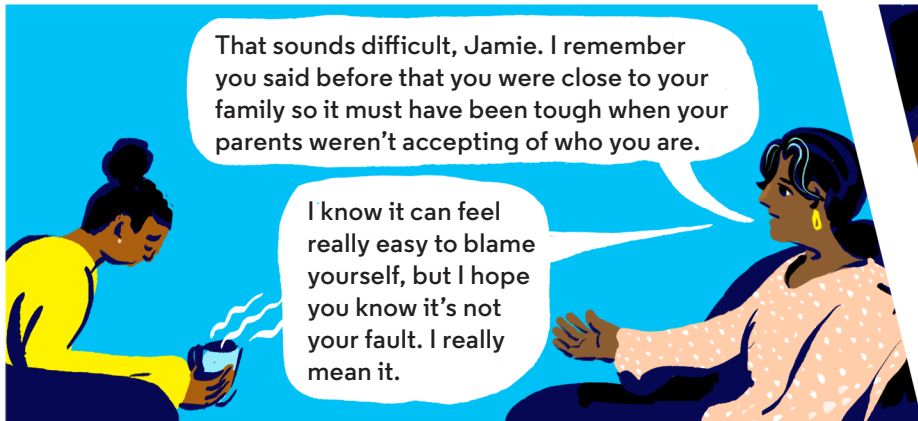
Sad, I guess. Thinking about stuff I regret.



What else?



Mad. At my parents. When I told them who I really am they kicked me out, and I just followed anybody who wanted me around. Even if they used me, like Chris did.



That sounds difficult, Jamie. I remember you said before that you were close to your family so it must have been tough when your parents weren't accepting of who you are.

I know it can feel really easy to blame yourself, but I hope you know it's not your fault. I really mean it.



I know. It just... it doesn't feel like that sometimes.



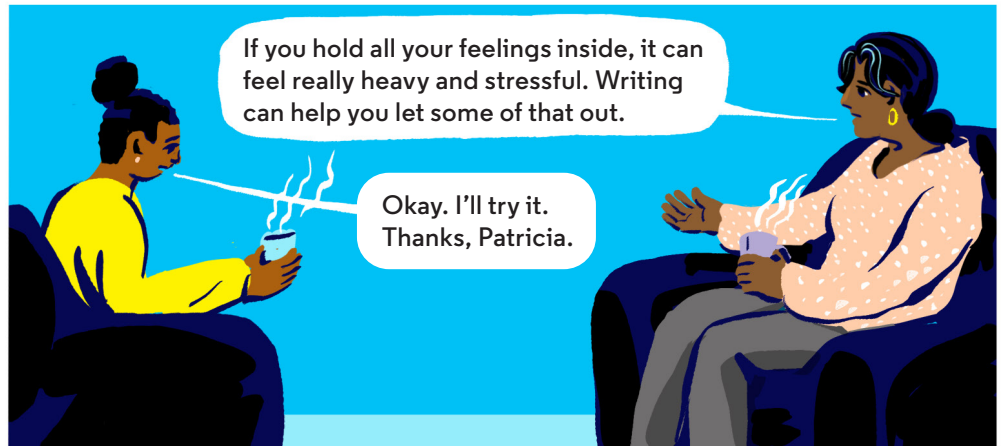
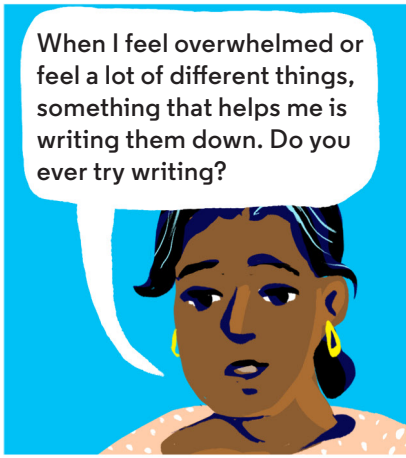
Leaving Chris and his friends took a lot of strength.

You did that. And who you are is valid. Please always remember that.



It's so nice finally talking with a therapist like Patricia who gets me. I'm glad I asked for a new one.

Yeah.



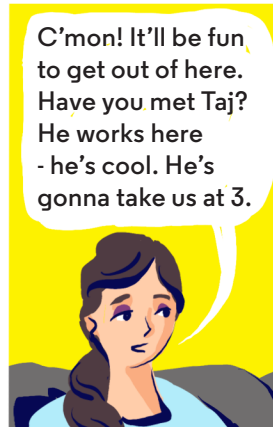
GETTING IT OUT

Writing or drawing can be a good way to get out your thoughts and feelings, and help you feel a little more in control when going through stressful or overwhelming situations. If there are things that are too hard to say out loud or there are too many things going through your mind, try writing them down, or just letting yourself draw what comes to mind. Set a timer for five or ten minutes, and just write or draw. If you keep a journal, you can write or draw there. You can even write a letter to yourself or someone else. You don't have to share what you write with anyone. Just getting it out can help you figure out how you feel, and how you want to express yourself.

If writing or drawing doesn't make you feel better, feel free to stop and switch to something that's more comforting. This could be coloring, deep breathing, imagining your favorite place—anything that helps you feel more relaxed!

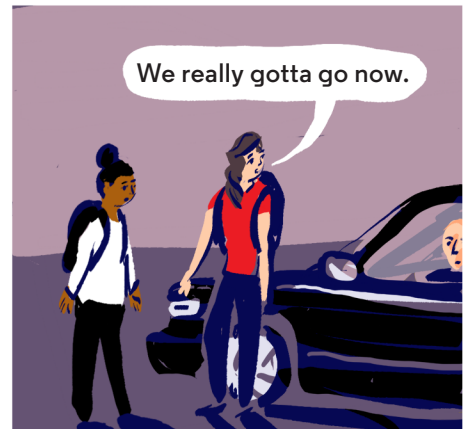




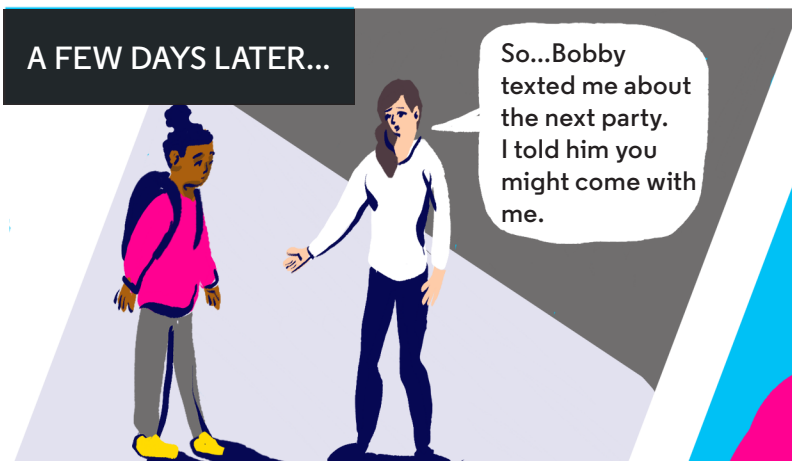
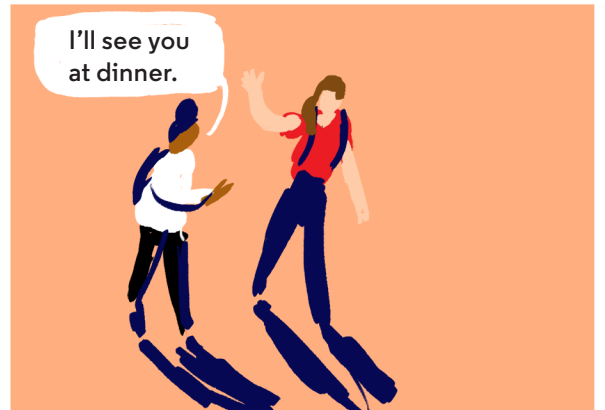


A FEW WEEKS LATER...















Yeah sorry, I've been busy.

So I heard you're going to that thing with Gigi next week.



What?



It's cool—I've gone with Gigi before. She texted me about it, too.



For real? What was it like?



It was okay—I try not to think about it too much. Do what I have to do, then go.

Yeah.

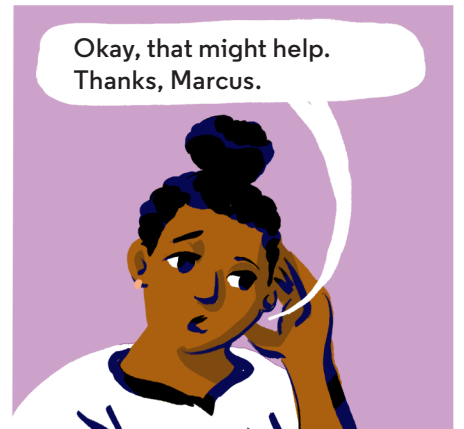


I'm not sure I wanna do this. I wanna help Gigi out but...



No I get it, it's not just a little favor.

We can look out for each other at the party and go together, if you want?



Okay, that might help. Thanks, Marcus.



Am I really doing this again?

A FEW MONTHS LATER...



Hey, Steph, have you seen Gigi? I haven't seen her today.



Oh what? You didn't hear? The cops came to take her.



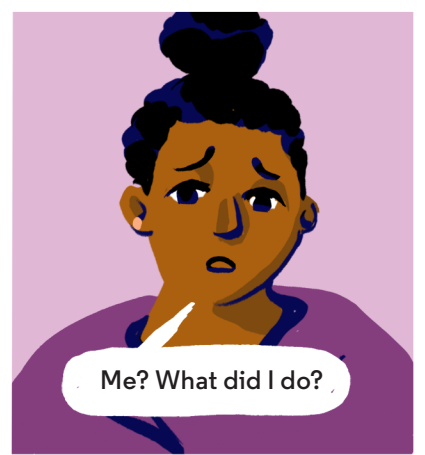
What?

Why?

When?

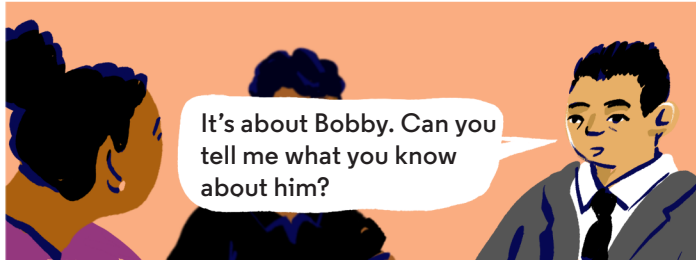


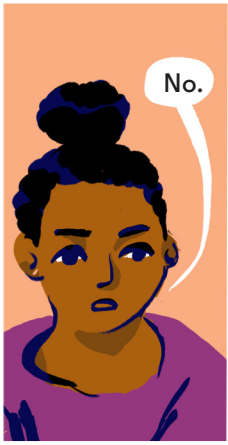
I dunno. I wasn't here. But I think Taj is looking for you.

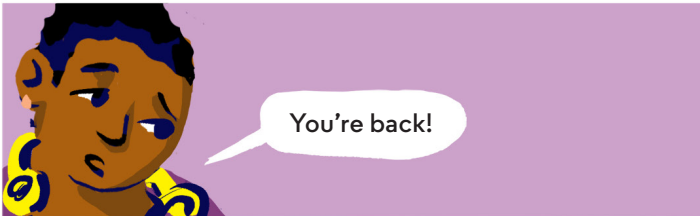












WHAT'S GOING ON?

If someone possibly broke a law or hurt another person, the police have to figure out what happened. To do that, they'll talk to different people and might ask you questions about what you know. This is called an investigation.

In Jamie's story, the police asked them to answer questions about Bobby. This means the police started an investigation to figure out what Bobby's been doing, and any harm he's caused others.

If the police don't find evidence that something illegal is happening, then they end the case. If the case ends, it doesn't mean that something didn't happen and someone didn't get hurt. If the police find evidence, they may arrest the person or people involved (if they haven't already), and the case will continue.

Taj stayed with Jamie when they were questioned by the police because Jamie is a minor (under 18 years old). You should always have an adult with you when you speak to the police. This can be a lawyer, social worker, or another adult you trust.

You might interact with people who may not fully understand you and your situation, and who might ask you questions or make comments that seem abrupt. This can all feel uncomfortable and upsetting.

If you can, please try to remember that different people have different roles, and that there are people who genuinely want to help and will take the time to get to know you.

For Jamie, that was their therapist, Patricia, and Taj, the support worker at the group home.

If you're uncomfortable, you can ask to work with or speak to someone else. It might not work out, but it's helpful to ask in case there are people who can better support you.

If you want, take some time to go through these questions with an advocate or another trusted adult and reflect on your own experiences.

- Have you ever had to talk to the police? If so, how did the interaction make you feel?
- How do you think Jamie felt after talking to the police? What could help them process how they're feeling?

You can ask questions if you don't understand what's going on. Some questions could be:

- What is your role in the case?
- What are the next steps after you've talked to me?

To learn more about your rights if you have to be part of a criminal case, check out the 'What's Going On?' booklet.

You just read about Jamie’s experience speaking with a police officer and moving through some hard feelings.

This book was created with the help of some people who’ve been through similar experiences. This is what they wanted to share with you:

“Advocate for yourself because your voice is powerful. If you ever feel uncomfortable, express that discomfort. Don’t just keep it in because you feel like these officials are telling you what you have to do.”

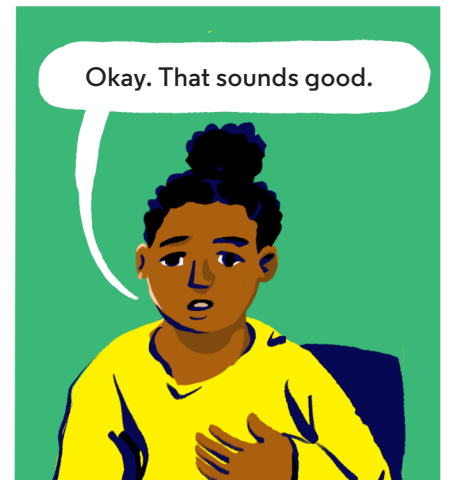
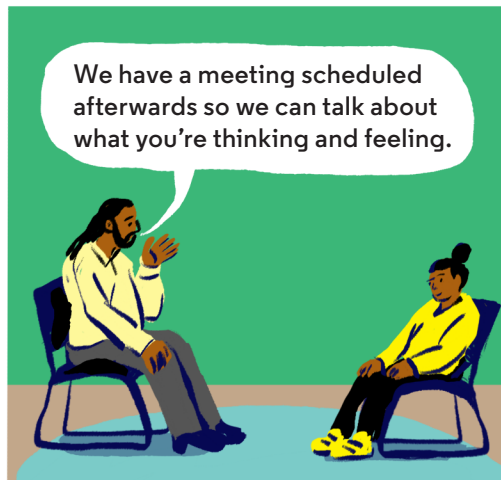
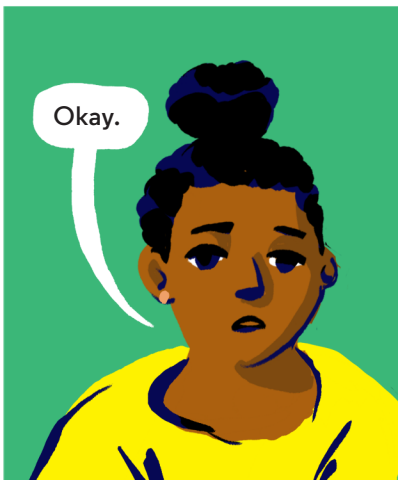
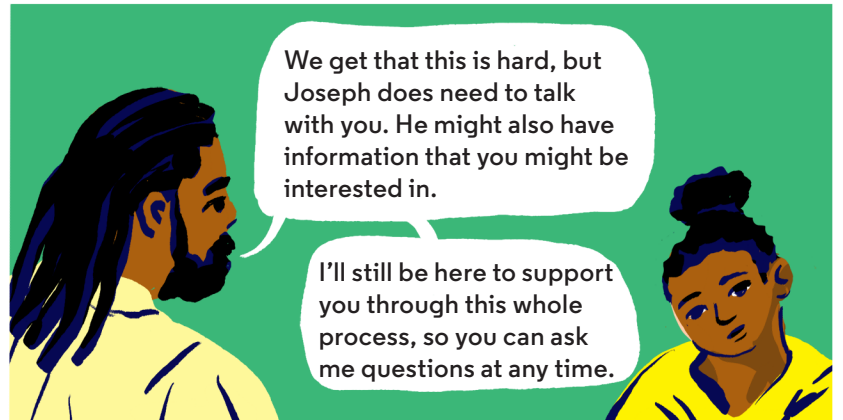
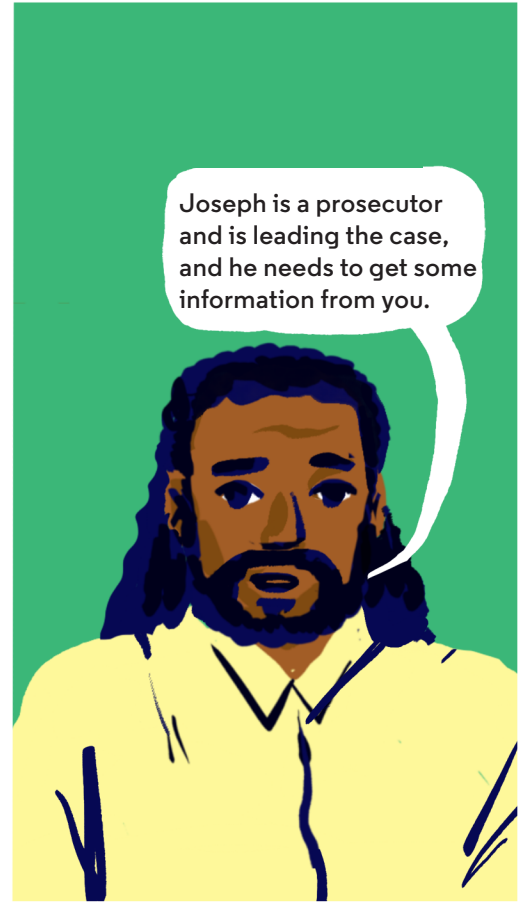
I was uncomfortable a lot of times, but I never said anything because I thought, ‘This person works with the government and the government is right,’ instead of saying, ‘Can I take a break?’ or ‘This is making me sad,’ or ‘I’m scared.’ Advocate for yourself and ask any questions you have.”

— Melanie T., Lived Experience Expert

PART TWO

**Jamie's Experience
in Court**





A FEW DAYS LATER...

Jamie, thanks for coming in to speak with me. My name is Joseph and I'm a prosecutor. I work for the government, and when the police think someone may have committed a crime, the case gets assigned to my office.

I know this is not where you want to be, but it's important that we talk, as this is a serious case. It's my job to review all the evidence, speak to everyone involved, and decide if our office will charge the person accused of a crime.

Am I in trouble?

No. But we think you can help us.

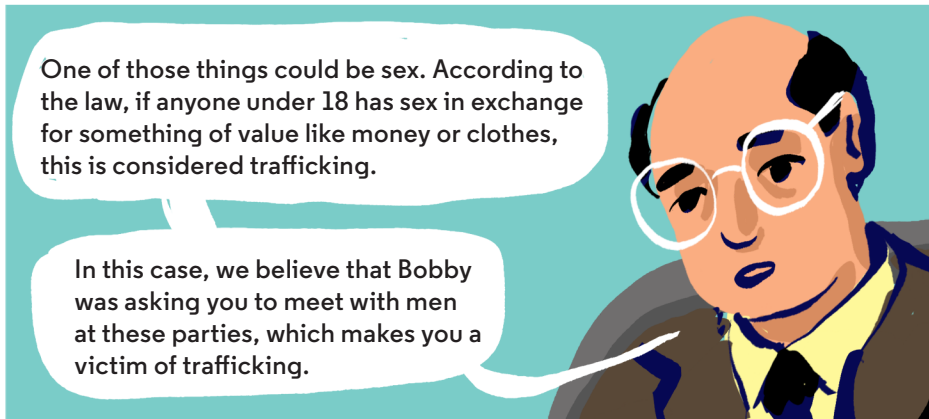
We're planning to move forward with a case against Bobby and charge him with human trafficking. Do you know what that is?

Human trafficking? What does that have to do with me?



I know that sounds like something that happens in the movies, but human trafficking is a crime that happens in real life.

Sometimes people have things we want or need— money, clothes, stuff like that— and those people say we have to do things to get them.

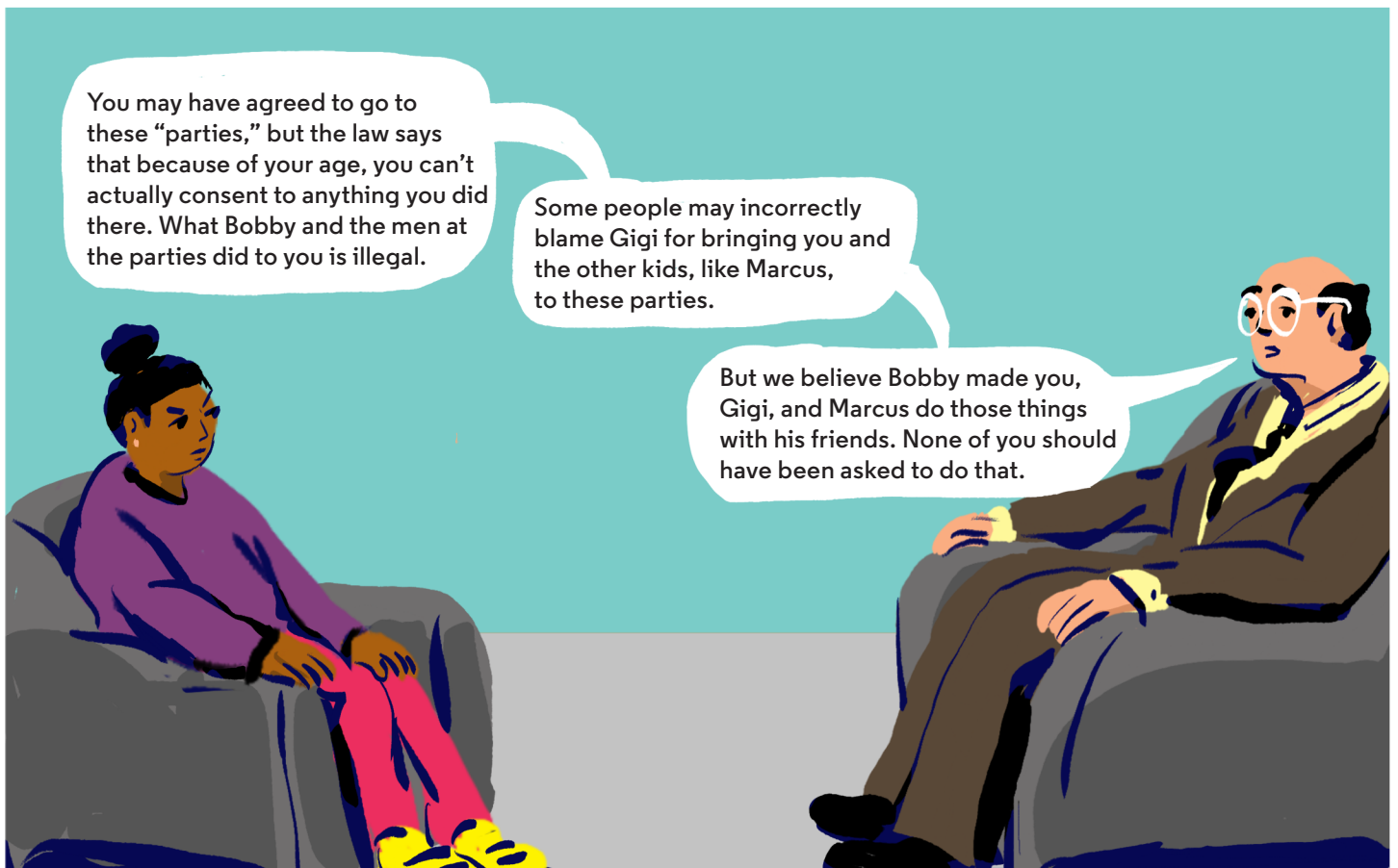


One of those things could be sex. According to the law, if anyone under 18 has sex in exchange for something of value like money or clothes, this is considered trafficking.

In this case, we believe that Bobby was asking you to meet with men at these parties, which makes you a victim of trafficking.



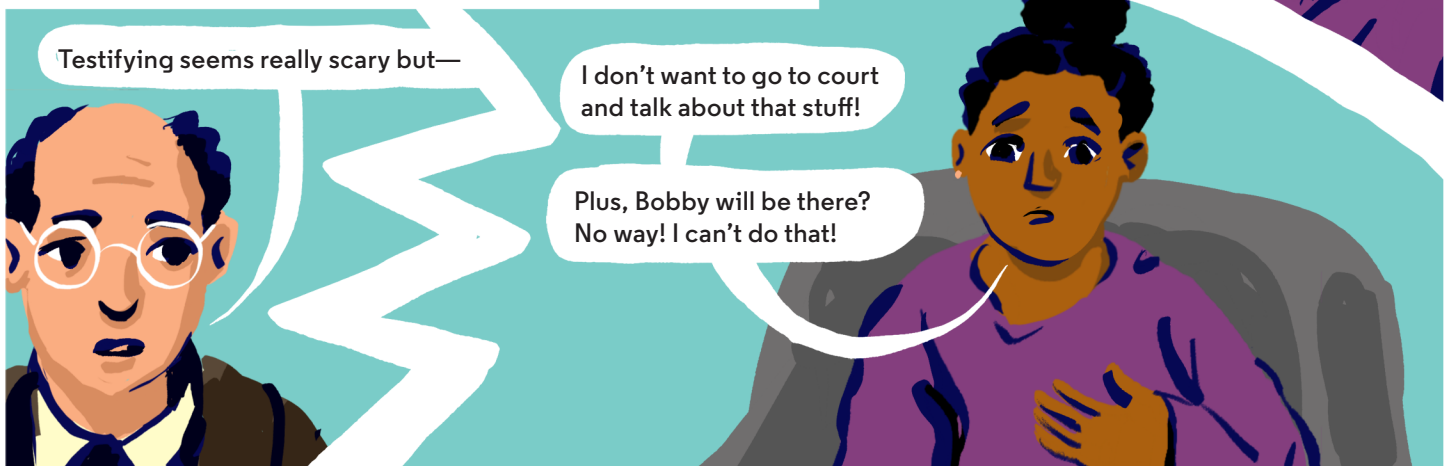
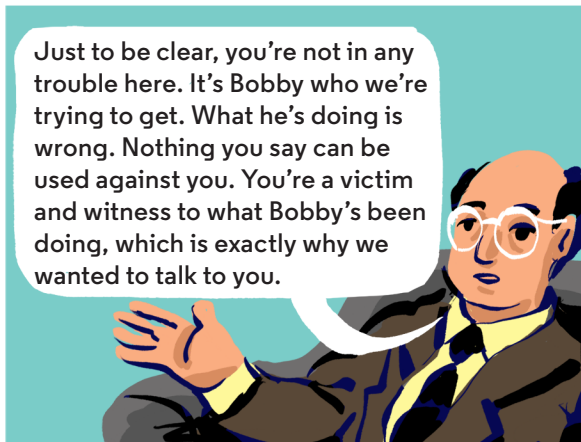
Victim? I'm not a victim. I did those things 'cause I wanted to.



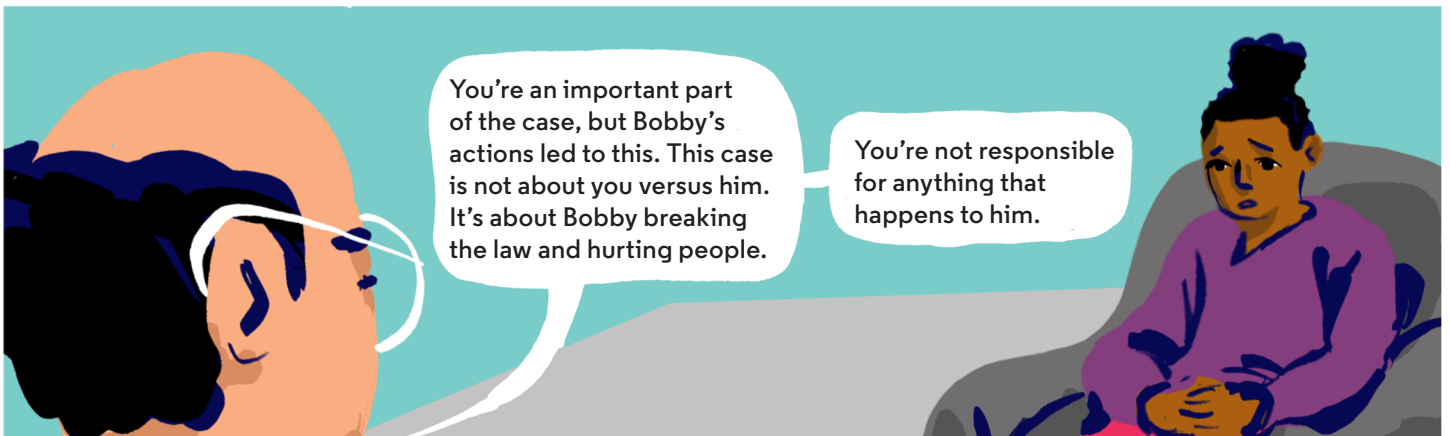
You may have agreed to go to these "parties," but the law says that because of your age, you can't actually consent to anything you did there. What Bobby and the men at the parties did to you is illegal.

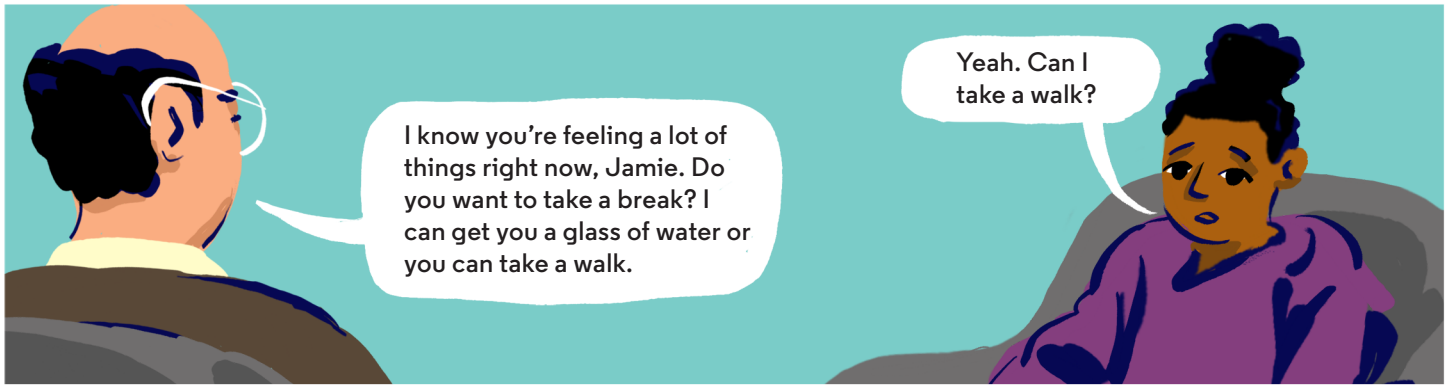
Some people may incorrectly blame Gigi for bringing you and the other kids, like Marcus, to these parties.

But we believe Bobby made you, Gigi, and Marcus do those things with his friends. None of you should have been asked to do that.

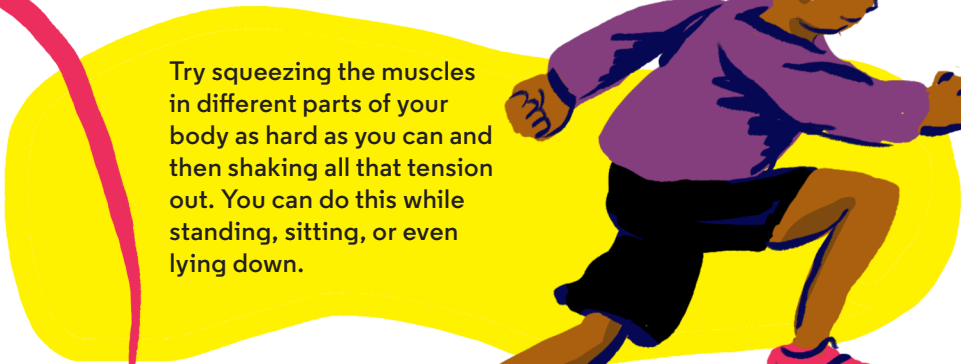








Moving your body can be a good way to relieve stress.



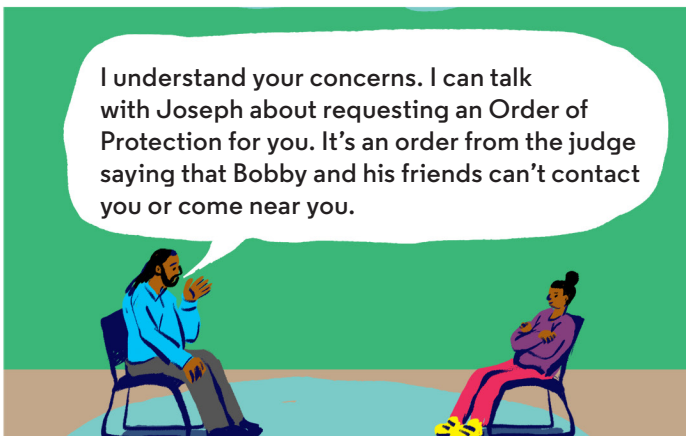
Try squeezing the muscles in different parts of your body as hard as you can and then shaking all that tension out. You can do this while standing, sitting, or even lying down.

You can also walk, jump, jog, exercise, play sports, or dance to get rid of energy and help your body feel calm.

MOVE YOUR BODY



LATER THAT DAY...





No. You still might see him around the neighborhood, but he's not allowed to give you any looks or try to scare you.

To increase your safety, we may discuss moving you to a new home and school.

Bobby can't talk to you on social media, either. If he or anyone starts talking about your case, don't engage with it. I can also show you some social media privacy settings you can turn on.



If Bobby does any of that, it's a violation of the Order. You should call the police and let us know, too.



Okay. And what about Gigi?

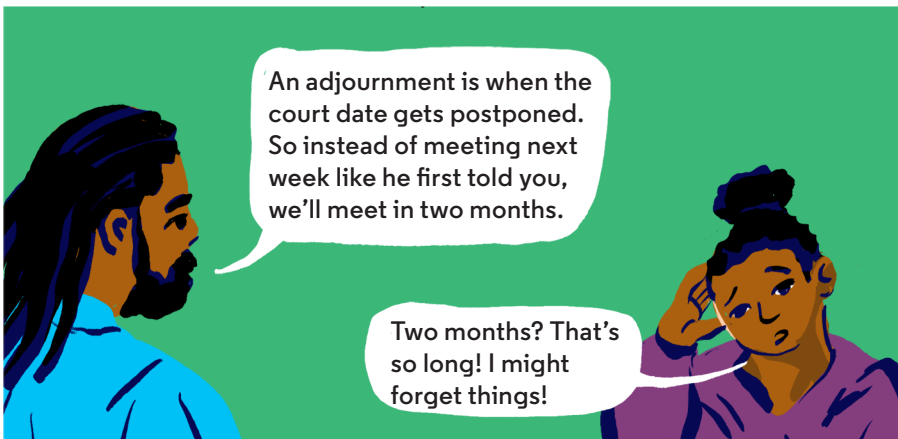


I believe she won't be getting charged with anything but has been instructed to start a program. As for you, if things change later on, we can talk about what you want to do, or other things to help you feel safe.

Does knowing all of that change anything? Or make it a little better?



Maybe? What does an adjournment mean? Joseph mentioned that but I didn't know what it meant.



An adjournment is when the court date gets postponed. So instead of meeting next week like he first told you, we'll meet in two months.

Two months? That's so long! I might forget things!



I know, unfortunately there can be delays. If you don't remember something, that's ok. You only need to say what you know.



WHAT'S GOING ON?

After a police investigation, the case goes to the prosecutor. The prosecutor is a lawyer who works for the government. They investigate the case more. Then, they figure out whether there is enough evidence to continue the case. If there is, they will bring charges against the person and the case will continue. If they don't, the case will be closed. But even if the case is closed, it doesn't mean the crime didn't happen.

You may also meet with other adults in the prosecutor's office, like Kareem, Jamie's victim advocate. Victim advocates can answer any questions you have about the case and connect you to any services or other people that can help you.

If a case continues, different things can happen. Often the defendant and their lawyer will talk and agree on something with the prosecutor. The defendant might plead guilty to certain charges and agree to a certain punishment. This is called a "plea bargain." If they don't agree to do that, the case goes to trial.

If a case goes to trial, you may be asked to testify. If that happens, the prosecutor and your advocate can help you understand what it will be like and get ready. In some situations, special plans called accommodations can be made at court to help victims and witnesses feel more comfortable when testifying. The prosecutor asking for a closed court is one of these accommodations.

The court may also issue an Order of Protection to make sure that victims and witnesses are not harassed or intimidated by

defendants or other people involved in the case. You can also talk to the prosecutor or victim advocate about other things they can do to help you feel safer at court and in the community, like changing where you live or go to school.

If you want, take some time to go through these questions with an advocate or another trusted adult and reflect on any experiences you've had with court, or feelings about going to court.

- How would you feel if you were in Jamie's place? What questions do you have about your case? Is there anything you would need to feel more comfortable or safer in court?
- When Jamie felt stressed, they did a couple different things to feel better, like taking a walk and listening to music. What can you do when you feel stressed, to help yourself feel better?

Victim? Survivor?

Some people don't like the term "victim" and may prefer to be called a "survivor," something else, or nothing at all. It's up to you. Under the law, a victim is someone who has had something done to them that's a crime. In this story, Jamie is, in legal terms, a victim of trafficking. The term "victim" is used in court and other legal settings, along with other terms like "victim-witness," which means someone who saw and was harmed by a crime. But you get to choose what words you use to describe yourself.

PART THREE

**Jamie Reflects and
Moves Forward**



COURTROOM EXERCISE



Kareem took Jamie to see the court room before they had to testify and told them who all the people in the room would be and where they would sit.

Your courtroom might look different than Jamie's, but you can use this drawing to familiarize yourself with who will be sitting where if you have to go to court. Ask your advocate or another adult working with you to help you fill this out.

I was glad I got to see it beforehand. But when I walked in with the court officer, I got even more nervous. It felt like I was going on stage.



We weren't able to get a closed courtroom like I wanted. But the court staff did use the right pronouns, which made me feel better.



It was okay when Joseph was talking to me but...



...when Bobby's lawyer did, I got really nervous. He asked lots of questions that were abrupt and confusing. My face got really hot and I could feel myself talking faster.



So I looked at Kareem and remembered his advice that all I can do is say what I know and remember about what happened. That helped.



When we were getting ready to go to court, Kareem said to bring something in my pocket that would help me feel calmer. I thought that was silly at first, but it was nice to feel my grandma's necklace in my pocket when I was talking.



He told me to plan something fun to do after, so I would have something to look forward to. I watched my favorite movie.



It was all a blur. But then it was done. I was happy to see Kareem afterwards and relieved it was over.



PLANNING FOR COURT

Kareem showed Jamie different things they could do to feel less nervous, and some things they could do to get ready for court. Going to court and testifying can feel scary and overwhelming, and it's normal to have many different feelings about it. But having a plan can help you feel calmer and a little more in control.

Getting Ready

- Try to get lots of sleep the night before.
- Try to eat something before you go to court. It will help you feel better and have the energy to get through it.
- You don't have to dress up. Wear something a little nicer than usual, if you can, something that makes you feel good.
- Bring something to read, play with, or do while you wait.
- If you have a special object, like a stress ball or lucky charm that helps you feel calm, you can bring it with you.

Getting Nervous

If you feel nervous, try one of these things:

- Picture how you want to react if different things happen. It may sound silly, but picturing things can help you feel calmer.
- Take deep breaths in and out a few times. It really helps!
- Tighten your muscles, then relax them. Do this a few times.
- If you can, take a walk 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 can help you work out how you're feeling and who can help you in court.
- Is there an advocate, friend, or family member who can come with you? If so, you can look at them if you get nervous.

Getting Through It

It can feel good to do something you like when it's over, like watch a movie, eat a favorite meal, or spend time with a friend. Think of something you can look forward to. If you want, use this list to make your own plan:

Things I will do to get ready...

If I get nervous, I will...

I will talk about how I feel with...

After, I will do something like...



Joseph and Kareem said now we wait to find out what the next steps are. What does that mean? I've been waiting this whole time.



No Taj today?



No...I'm at a new group home now, remember?



Another person in and out of my life...



Jamie, I want to apologize to you about the last time we met...



...I didn't think to let the court know your pronouns until you asked. That's my mistake.



Oh...thanks for saying that.

Of course.



So, have they made a decision yet?



I'm hoping they will soon.



You and Kareem keep saying that!

I know. I wish I could say more. Do you want to go over the possible outcomes again?



Guilty, not guilty right?



Well, the jury will decide whether there's enough evidence to make them feel sure he did it.



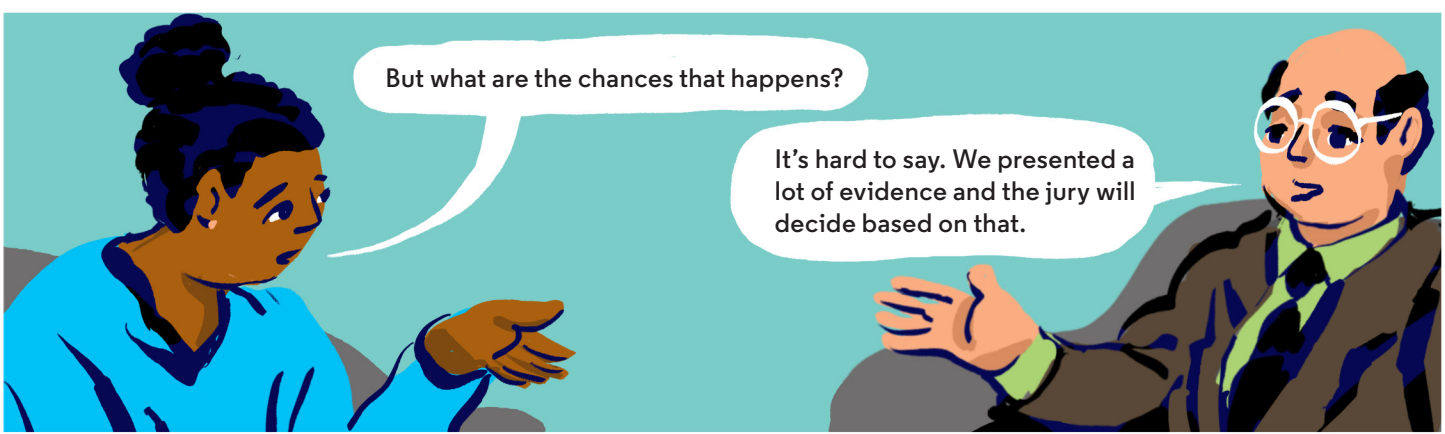
If there isn't enough evidence, they'll find him not guilty.



So, if it's not guilty... he's free?



Yes. But if he's found not guilty, it doesn't mean that it didn't happen, okay? Kareem and I both believe you. I want you to know that.



But what are the chances that happens?

It's hard to say. We presented a lot of evidence and the jury will decide based on that.

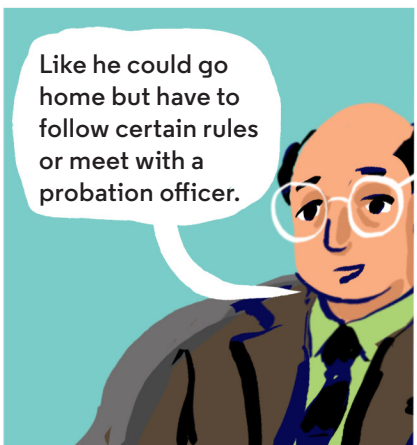


If that happens, we can talk with Kareem about things that can help you feel safer and what support might be helpful.

If he's found guilty, there will be another hearing, called the sentencing hearing, where the judge will hear from different people and decide what the punishment will be.



It could be time in prison, or it could be other things.



Like he could go home but have to follow certain rules or meet with a probation officer.



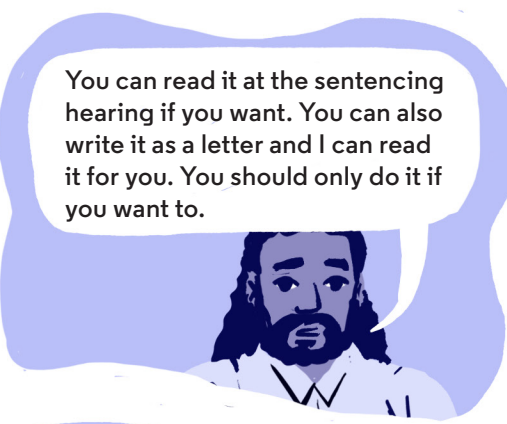
Is this when the victim impact statement happens? Kareem told me about that.



There's something called a victim impact statement. It's where you can tell the judge how this affected you and what you think the punishment should be.



So if I want to share my thoughts, I have to go to court again?



You can read it at the sentencing hearing if you want. You can also write it as a letter and I can read it for you. You should only do it if you want to.



And then things will finally be over?

That should be the end of it. How does that make you feel?



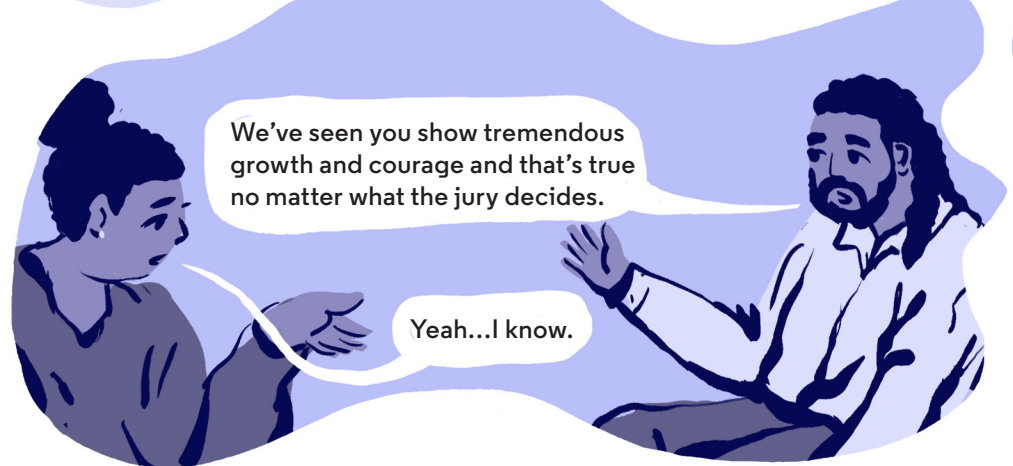
I don't know! I'm glad it's going to be over, but what happens to me next? I thought I left the game and then I got back in it. I can't escape.



Remember, Jamie, this is something that happened to you, but it doesn't define you or who you are as a person. It's not your fault.



You left that situation and you can leave this one, too.



We've seen you show tremendous growth and courage and that's true no matter what the jury decides.

Yeah...I know.



Exactly.



We're here to support you. If you ever want to talk further, you can reach out to one of us.

I'll reach out when I have any updates.



I'm so glad Gigi didn't end up getting in trouble, but I haven't spoken to her in so long. Is Gigi upset at me? And I don't know how Marcus is doing either...should I reach out?



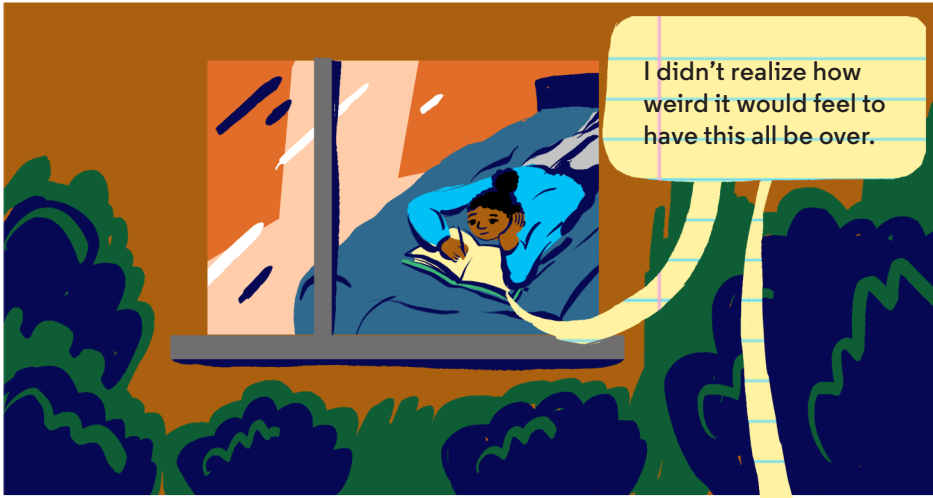
Did the jury believe me? What if they say he's not guilty? What Bobby did was wrong and he was using us...

Why do I feel so bad? Probably because I got back into something I didn't want to.

How long will it take till I hear from Joseph?



When will I stop thinking about this?



This year has been a lot and it'll take some time before I trust people and for things to start to feel alright again.

But I've learned a lot of things recently, and the support group and my therapist Patricia have been helping me to look at things differently.

I finally feel more comfortable with where I'm staying. And I know that I'm strong and I can do this.

What happened to me does not define me. I'm a survivor, and I will get through this.



WHAT'S GOING ON?

Cases don't go to trial right away. There are lots of steps between the police investigation and when a trial starts, and it can seem like nothing is going on for a long time. Court processes are very complicated and court dates get rescheduled a lot. Jamie was supposed to testify, but the trial date got delayed several times.

In Jamie's case, they had an Order of Protection to keep Bobby away from them. As part of that, Jamie moved to a different home and school. That also meant Gigi and Jamie couldn't live or go to school together anymore.

You might have mixed feelings about the case ending. That's normal. Even when the case is over, it doesn't mean you'll stop thinking or having feelings about what happened. But nothing that happened is your fault. And you're not alone. This experience doesn't have to define your whole life. Keep talking with your advocate or therapist, with supportive friends or family members, and with other people you trust. They may be able to connect you with resources that may help you.

These resources can be things like counseling, housing, medical care, clothing and basic necessities, educational help, job training, help moving into adulthood, mentoring, help with immigration or visa issues, and even connecting you to a support group with other people who have had similar experiences.

To learn more about other support you can get, check out the *'What's Going On?'* booklet.

For more information on the child welfare system check out these [materials](#). And, for more information on the criminal legal system check out these [materials](#).

You just read about Jamie's experience with sex trafficking and testifying in court.

There are difficult feelings that come with sharing your experiences, going to court, and trying to move on. We thank you for your time and energy reading this book, and hope it helps you.

This book was made with the help of people who've been through some similar lived experiences. On the next two pages are messages they wanted to share with you.

“You are a brave person. **You’re a hero.** You are the Batman. You are the Black Panther. You are a hero because you’re standing in front of that person that did all these horrible things to you to say that what they did was wrong.”

— *Evelyn C., Survivor and Anti-Trafficking Activist*

“This may be the worst nightmare you are living. Nobody is going to experience the same fear and pain that you’re feeling but trust me, this nightmare is going to end. And you don’t need to change. You are worthy just for being here. You are more than worthy, thank you for being who you are.

And if the world seems that they don’t understand you, I see you, I hear you, and I am here to support you. And I know that it’s extremely hard to express that pain and that adults have used that pain to cause you more pain. I know how hard it is to open up. Take your time, and breathe.

This feels like a nightmare but you are not alone, this will come to an end because you deserve to be loved, respected, to be cared for, and to be happy. Always remember you are powerful, **you have the power.**”

— *Cristian E., Survivor and Advocate*

TAKING CARE OF ME

Like Jamie did throughout their story, it can be good to “check in” with yourself and see how you’re feeling. When you’re upset or overwhelmed, doing some of these activities can help you feel better.

- Read, watch, or listen to something you like
- Get together with friends, in person or online
- Exercise or play a sport
- Get a drink (water, juice, tea, or hot chocolate)
- Spend time outside
- Massage your hands with lotion that smells good
- Think of a happy memory or a peaceful place
- Help someone make something
- Do an art project or cook something
- Let yourself cry, scream, or talk about your frustration
- Say kind, supportive things to yourself

What other activities make you feel good? Is there someone you can ask about other kinds of helpful activities? Write them here.

The Center for Court Innovation’s Child Witness Materials Project is a collaborative effort between the Center for Court Innovation, the Center for Urban Pedagogy, and Alternate History Comics. It is supported by cooperative agreement # 2018-V3-GX-K069, 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

Alternate History Comics is a multiple award-winning publishing company that creates original graphic novels and cultural comic collections.

<http://ahcomics.com>

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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.



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