

# What's Going On?



Your Rights and Who You'll Meet



Young people who have experienced trafficking often have to interact with the legal system in a variety of ways. They might be a defendant on a juvenile court case, a witness on a criminal court case, a dependent in a child welfare case, a non-United States citizen seeking immigration relief, or a combination of any of these. Whatever your situation, it can feel overwhelming and confusing having to interact with these systems.

This guide has information about the various people you might meet, the rights you have as you go to different courts, how trafficking is defined in the U.S., and the laws and services that might be helpful to you.

All the information here applies to you whether or not you have a visa or citizenship in the U.S. There's additional information for young people who come from another country and might need more support.

It can be helpful to go through this guide with your advocate or another adult supporting you with your case. They can answer questions and explain what might apply to your situation.





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# What is trafficking?

Human trafficking is when someone **exploits** and **profits** from another person by having them **perform labor** or engage in **commercial sex**. It's a crime under state, federal, and international law, and is defined under the Trafficking Victims Protection Act (TVPA).

**Exploit:** To take unfair advantage of someone.

**Profit:** Make money or get some type of benefit or advantage.

**Perform labor:** To do some type of work or service.

**Commercial sex:** Sex in exchange for something of value, like money, food, or a place to stay.

**Compelled:** To be obliged, influenced, or pressured to do something.

**Force:** Being made to do something against your will through things like beatings, sexual assault, or isolation.

**Fraud:** Being made false promises about what you'll be doing like the type of work, the work and living conditions, or the amount of pay that you'll receive.

**Coercion:** Being made to do something through control and intimidation like threatening to harm you or your family, or withholding your legal documents.

## Trafficking Victims Protection Act (TVPA)

This federal law not only defines sex and labor trafficking, but also outlines protections that might be available to those that have experienced trafficking, and makes trafficking a federal crime.

## Sex Trafficking

When a person is **compelled** to engage in commercial sex through the use of **force, fraud, or coercion**. But, if the person is under 18, there doesn't need to be any force, fraud, or coercion.

Whenever a young person under the age of 18 has sex in exchange for something that has value like money, food, or housing/rent, this is considered sex trafficking. It also means that it's illegal for anyone to buy sex from a young person, and it's illegal for someone to profit from a young person having sex with others. The young person doesn't need to have been forced, threatened, or tricked for the situation to be sex trafficking—the young person only needs to be under 18. If this happened to you, please remember that it is not your fault and that under federal law, you are a victim of sex trafficking.

## Labor Trafficking

When a person is **compelled to perform labor**, through the use of **force, fraud, or coercion**.

Whenever a person of any age has been made to work through things like physical or sexual violence; isolation from family, friends, or the community; threats of harm directed at a person, their family, or friends; being closely watched and controlled; withholding pay or legal documents, like a passport; or threatening to report someone to the police or immigration authorities, this is considered labor trafficking.

If you've been made to work in these ways or similar ways (sometimes also called forced labor) then please remember that it is not your fault and that under federal law, you may be a victim of labor trafficking.



## Debt Bondage or Peonage

There might be other situations where a person is forced to work to pay back money that they owe for things like food, rent, education, the costs of coming to the U.S., or even something that they're not aware of. And no matter how much the person works, the amount that is owed never gets smaller, and sometimes even gets bigger. This is sometimes called debt bondage or peonage. It's illegal in the U.S. and can also indicate labor trafficking.

Under the TVPA, a person doesn't need to have been taken from one state or country to another for the situation to be considered trafficking. It's also possible for someone to experience both labor trafficking and sex trafficking.

## Traffickers and Prosecution

Any person who exploits a young person to engage in commercial sex or forced labor is sometimes called a 'trafficker' or 'exploiter.' Traffickers can be anyone—family members, friends, boyfriends, girlfriends, intimate partners, acquaintances, and strangers. Because trafficking is a crime, the trafficker might be arrested, charged, and prosecuted in court.

## Protections

Under the TVPA, if a young person experiences trafficking, they're entitled to certain protections and supports—legal representation, medical care, and access to appropriate services (see **page 45** for more details). These protections apply whether or not you hold a visa or U.S. citizenship. A trafficker doesn't need to be charged or convicted of human trafficking for a young person to receive protections or services.

If you have more questions or want to learn more about trafficking, speak to your advocate or another trusted adult.

## Safe Harbor Laws

Safe Harbor laws create special rights and protections for young people under the age of 18 who have experienced sex trafficking in the U.S. Most states have Safe Harbor laws, but not all states do, and the laws are a little different in each state.

### **These laws usually have two parts:**

- In a Safe Harbor state, young people who have experienced sex trafficking should not get in trouble or be prosecuted for crimes related to the trafficking. Ask your lawyer about what this means for you.
- These laws give young people who have experienced sex trafficking better access to services like safe housing, financial support for food and other necessities, medical care, an advocate, and more. Ask your lawyer or social worker about how you can access these services.

Ask your lawyer, advocate, or case manager about Safe Harbor law in your state and what protections it might provide.

## Working as a Young Person

Many young people work in the U.S. There are federal and state laws that limit the type of jobs and number of hours a young person can work, depending on their age and the type of work.

Regardless of age or citizenship, you have many rights in the workplace. These include the right to be paid and keep your earnings, and the right to stop working, if you choose. Your

employer should provide you with a safe working environment and pay you at least the federal minimum wage (there can be exceptions to this).

It's important to understand your rights when it comes to working, and the labor laws in the state that you work. For more information, visit the Department of Labor's website for young workers: <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/whd/youthrules>



# What are the different courts?

Which court you might go to depending on your case

Depending on your home life and your experiences, you might be involved in more than one court case. This could mean more than one lawyer, more than one social worker, and many new people involved in your life.

Each person has a different job, and they might ask you the same questions. This can be frustrating. Sharing information about yourself can be difficult, especially if it's sensitive or you don't feel comfortable talking about certain things. It can be helpful to talk to your lawyer, advocate, or another adult you trust about how sharing or not sharing your information can impact your case.

There are different courts for different types of cases. Here are some you might experience:

**Juvenile or Delinquency Court:** If you were arrested and are under the age of 18, you may have to go through this court. You should have your own defense attorney here and you might also have a probation officer. Your rights as someone who has been arrested or charged with a crime apply in this court.

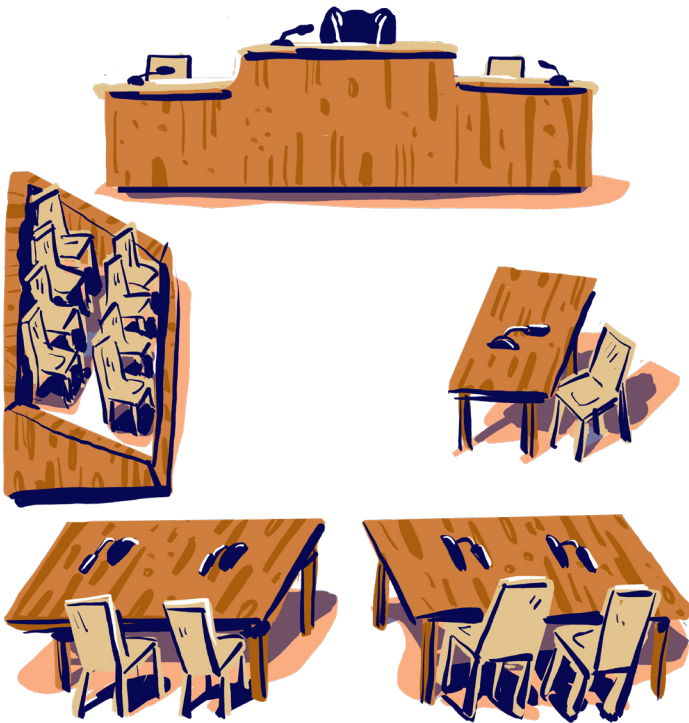
**Child Welfare or Dependency Court:** These courts deal with issues in your family or home life. If there's a concern that you can't stay with your family or caregivers because it's unsafe, you'll have a case in this court. Here, you might have your own attorney, sometimes called a 'guardian ad litem,' and a social worker.

**Criminal Court:** These courts are for adults (age 18 and up) who are suspected of committing a crime. While it doesn't happen very often, young people under the age of 18 can go through this court instead of juvenile court if they have been charged with certain types of crimes. You might also have to attend Criminal Court if you are a witness on a criminal case against an adult, in which case your rights as a victim or witness would apply.

If you have cases in both the juvenile and child welfare courts, you're in a special category sometimes called **cross-over or dual-status youth**. This means you have cases in both courts. Some states have special rules and services for cross-over youth.

One of these rules is called **one court, one judge**. Instead of having two lawyers and two judges, you have one judge and one lawyer that work on your cases, which makes the court process simpler and can feel less frustrating. Not all states have this option, but you can talk to your lawyer to see if this applies to you.

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](#).





# What are my rights?

How should I expect  
to be treated?

When going through the legal system, remember that you have many rights. Your rights come from the U.S. Constitution and from laws that are made by the federal and state governments. These rights apply to different situations. For example, you have rights if you saw or were harmed by any type of crime. You also have rights if you have been arrested for a crime.

These rights apply to everyone in the U.S., regardless of where you were born or your citizenship or visa status.

You might have different rights depending on **(1)** your role in the case, **(2)** the state you live in, and **(3)** what type of court your case is in. The words below are used throughout this guide. They are legal words you might hear when people are talking about your court case, and might mean something different than when used in everyday conversation.

**Defendant or Respondent:** When used in criminal or juvenile court cases, these words describe someone accused of committing a crime. Typically, if the accused person is an adult, they're referred to as a *defendant*. If the accused person is a child under the age of 18, courts use the term *respondent*.

**Witness:** If you saw, heard, or have information about a crime or a defendant, you're a witness. Witnesses can be called to testify in court, where they'll tell the court what they know and remember about what happened.

**Victim:** While not everyone who has been harmed identifies as a victim, in legal words, a victim is someone who was harmed by a crime, or who's had something done to them that's a crime. If you're a victim, you're also a witness.



# If you're a victim of a crime, you have the right to:

## ...be treated with fairness, dignity and respect.

This means that all your rights should be considered when going through the legal system, and you should be treated fairly and respectfully by all people working in the system. This includes not being discriminated against because of what happened to you, or for anything else such as your race, religion, gender identity, or sexual orientation.

## ...feel safe and be protected from harm.

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 feel uncomfortable, tell your advocate or another adult working on your case right away.

For more information on specific protections that you might be able to ask for, see **page 50**.

## ...have your voice, needs and wishes heard by the system.

This includes talking with a police officer, prosecutor, advocate or therapist as much as you want about what happened, how you feel, and what you would like to happen with the case.

This can also include making a **victim impact statement**. This is a written or verbal statement about how the crime has affected your mental health, physical health, and financial situation, and what consequences you would like to see for the defendant. A victim impact statement is made during the defendant's sentencing hearing.

## ...privacy.

To keep you safe, certain things like your name, address, and contact information will not be made public. Other information you share is protected and cannot be shared with anyone else without your permission. However, some things that you would like to keep private might not be kept private. You can always ask your advocate, the prosecutor, or other people working on your case about what information will be shared, with whom, and why.

Each person who works on your case has different rules about what kind of information they can share about you with other people. If you have any questions about your privacy, you can ask things like:

**“What are you going to do with my information?”**

**“Who is going to find out what I tell you?”**

**“What if [my mom] asks what I said to you?  
Can you tell her?”**

**“Who is going to see what’s in my phone if I give it to you?”**

**“Is the defendant going to see these photos?”**

To learn more about the information each person can share and what they keep private, go to “Who will I meet?” on **page 27**.

### ...understand what's going on with your case and what's next.

This includes knowing who is involved in your case, what kinds of help and resources you can get, and whether there are any updates with your case. You can ask your advocate or the prosecutor about these.

### ...understand what the people you meet are saying and doing.

If anyone working on your case is talking about something that you don't understand, don't be afraid to ask questions or ask them to keep explaining things until you do understand. An advocate or another trusted adult can be a great resource to ask any questions you might have and learn more about the court process.

**If you speak another language**, you should be provided with an interpreter who speaks the language that you're most comfortable with. If you have not been provided with an interpreter, tell an adult working on your case right away.

**If you have a disability** that makes it difficult to express yourself or understand what people are saying, support should be put in place to help you. For more information, see the section about disabilities on the next page.

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

While you have to go to any hearing or proceeding that you've been asked to attend as a victim/witness, or that relates to a case where you're a defendant, you don't have to go to other hearings that are part of the defendant's court case. But if you want to go, you can.

### **...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. Most states have laws that protect against what is called unreasonable delays. This means that the court needs to think about how the length of the trial and any delays could affect the people involved, and they need to have a trial as soon as possible.

### **...have your belongings returned to you.**

If your things are taken as evidence, it might take longer to get them back. If you have a lawyer or advocate, talk to them about how and when you can have your belongings returned to you. The prosecutor’s office (sometimes called the District Attorney’s Office) and the police might also be able to help with this.

### **...apply for money to cover costs related to what happened—this is called victim compensation.**

This includes things like counseling, medical bills, and moving expenses. You might have to meet certain requirements to qualify, so it’s helpful to talk with your advocate about applying. If you’re approved, you might have to provide receipts to get reimbursed because it’s unlikely you will get money up front.

### **Victims of crime can sometimes sue the person who hurt them and anyone else who might be responsible for what happened.**

This is a different process than the criminal legal system, but if you’re interested, you can ask your advocate for information about connecting with a lawyer to talk about filing a civil lawsuit. Check out this site to understand more about Civil Justice for Victims of Crime: <https://victimbar.org/what-is-civil-justice/>

# Young People with Disabilities

No matter what your situation is, you always have the right to express what happened and how you feel, and you should always be able to get to (and around) the courtroom or any other location related to your case. Your advocate can help with all of this, and there are many arrangements that can be put in place.

## **Some examples include:**

- A sign language interpreter
- An interpreter who can type everything that's being said to you (called Communication Access Real Time or CART services)
- Different kinds of aids like hearing devices, captioned videos and visual aids
- Wheelchair access or other types of accessibility supports

Your advocate might need to make a separate request for assistance at each court date and meeting, so don't be afraid to remind them. If your parent or guardian has a disability, they also have the right to necessary arrangements to meet their needs.

# If you've been arrested or charged with a crime, you have the right to...

## **...counsel, which means that you will be given a lawyer to represent you in court.**

Your lawyer should provide you with adequate representation and represent you to the best of their ability. They can speak on your behalf in court, answer any legal questions you have, and connect you with other supportive adults like an advocate or social worker. If you haven't been given a lawyer, you have the right to ask for one.

## **...understand the charges that are being brought against you.**

Your lawyer will be able to explain the charges brought against you in more detail.

## **...remain silent.**

When you're arrested, no one can legally force you to say anything you don't want to—especially if it's related to why you were arrested. Waiting for your lawyer to be in the room when you have conversations about your arrest is the best way to make sure you're not sharing information that could be used against you. Your lawyer can also tell you if cooperating with the police or the prosecutor's office will actually help your case, rather than not saying anything.

## **... a fair trial.**

This not only includes the right to a lawyer, but also the right to a trial without unreasonable delays and the right to question witnesses. Your lawyer can call witnesses on your behalf and question any witnesses called against you.



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.



## Can I clear my record?

If you've been convicted of a crime, it might be possible to have certain convictions **sealed** (hidden from the public), **expunged** (hidden or deleted), or **vacated** (cleared or canceled). Most states offer some of these options, called **criminal record relief**, and many states have special laws that specifically deal with crimes connected with human trafficking.

Some of these laws allow you to clear arrest records or records of **juvenile adjudications**. A juvenile adjudication is the court's decision to find a minor guilty of the crime they were charged with. These things are important because your criminal record can create issues at school and affect your ability to get certain jobs, vote, access affordable or safe housing, receive immigration relief, or earn scholarships.

If you've been arrested or charged with a crime connected to your trafficking experience, talk to your lawyer to see if you qualify for some type of criminal record relief.





# What if I'm not from the U.S.?

If you're under the age of 18 and were born in another country and/or do not have legal permanent residency in the U.S., and have experienced any type of trafficking, you have similar rights and protections as U.S. citizens who are victims of crime. People might refer to you as a foreign national minor. All the information in this guide still applies to you.

However, you might have additional needs because of your immigration situation—get connected with an immigration attorney and caseworker. An immigration attorney can help you and your family learn about the different paths that are available to you, and can answer any questions about your immigration status. They might also be able to help you apply for a visa or residency in the U.S.; reconnect with your family members (**reunification**); or voluntarily return to your home country (**repatriation**).

There are several visa options for young people from different countries who are the victim of a crime, like trafficking. Some of these options can apply to family members, too.

Here are some of the different immigration pathways that you can discuss with your immigration attorney:

- Special Immigrant Juvenile Status (SIJS) visa
- Asylum visa
- Refugee visa
- U visa
- T visa
- Continued Presence (CP)
- Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA)
- Temporary Protection Status (TPS)

Some of these immigration pathways, such as the T visa, create avenues to later apply for permanent residency. Permanent residency means you're allowed to live and work in the U.S. forever. To get permanent residency, you need a Permanent Residency Card, which is often called a 'Green Card.'

## Benefits and Programs for Foreign National Minors

While waiting for your immigration situation to be resolved, you might be able to get an eligibility or interim letter from the Office on Trafficking in Persons (OTIP). This will allow you to access some benefits and programs. To learn more, talk to an adult working with you and you can check out this website on Eligibility Letters for Foreign National Minors: <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/otip/victim-assistance/child-eligibility-letters>

You might also be eligible for other services through the Trafficking Victim Assistance Program (TVAP). Help could include case management, safe housing, emergency necessities like food or clothes, and access to a doctor or health care provider. There are caseworkers who work with young people from different countries and can help you find services.



You don't have to talk to or cooperate with law enforcement to receive services like the ones listed above. Talk to your immigration attorney or another adult working with you to learn more.

If you don't have a parent or guardian in the U.S., you might be entitled to other protections and might be eligible for the Unaccompanied Refugee Minors Program, which is a federally-funded foster care program. This program includes support for necessities like housing and food, English language learning and education, and other services. Check with the adults working with you to see if you qualify for this program.

If you don't have an immigration attorney or caseworker, you can get connected with one through the National Human Trafficking Hotline Referral Directory:

- Visit: <https://humantraffickinghotline.org/training-resources/referral-directory>
- Call: **1-888-373-7888 (TTY: 711)**
- Text: **BEFREE** or **HELP** to **233733**

And remember, you always have the right to ask for an interpreter to better help you understand someone that's working with you or what's happening in court. Interpretation services are also available through the Trafficking Hotline.



# Who will I meet?

The people you might  
work with and why

Here are some explanations of the roles of different people that you might see and meet when going through the legal system.

You have the right to ask them as many questions as you like, including what they'll do with your information.

You also have the right to not answer their questions if you don't feel comfortable.

It's helpful to talk with your lawyer or advocate about how sharing or not sharing your information might impact your case.



## BAILIFF or COURT OFFICER

The court officer makes sure everyone in the courthouse is safe. They call everyone into the courtroom when the judge is ready. They wear uniforms and might carry guns.



## CASE WORKER or CASE MANAGER

Caseworkers work in different places including child welfare agencies and community organizations. Their job is to coordinate care and assistance for their clients. They often do initial assessment interviews, called **intakes**, to get a better understanding of their client's needs. Then they connect them with different services.

If you are referred to a caseworker, they might make a **case plan** with you, which lists things that you need and things that the two of you will work on together.





## COURT CLERK or ASSISTANT

The court clerk or court assistant helps the judge with the court orders, case information, and schedules. They deal with the papers and documents from the lawyers, judges, and other people in the court. They might also assist witnesses with providing their oath to tell the truth.



## COURT REPORTER

The court reporter's job is to take notes on everything people say in the courtroom, so there's a record of it. They might ask the witnesses to speak slowly and clearly so that they can accurately record everything that's being said.



## DEFENSE ATTORNEY

This person works for the defendant and it's their job to defend them against criminal charges. They will interview witnesses and represent the defendant in court. Every defendant has the right to their own attorney, even if they can't afford one. Public defenders are defense attorneys who represent people that can't afford a private lawyer.

Depending on your situation, different defense attorneys might be involved. If you're arrested, you'll have your own attorney to represent you. The relationship you have with your defense attorney is **privileged**—they can't share anything you tell them with anyone else, unless they have your permission.

If you're the victim or witness on a criminal case, the defendant will have their own defense attorney. When you testify, the prosecutor asks you questions. The defense attorney is then given the opportunity to ask you questions or **cross-examine** you. This can be an intense experience because the defense attorney's job is to defend their client against the charges by making the judge or jury question the prosecutor's case.



## FAMILY or 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 are worried or confused about. They can offer emotional support, information, connect you with other services, and help plan for your safety.

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

A family advocate has the same job as the victim advocate except their job is to help both you and your family members. Some family and victim advocates are allowed to share your information with the prosecutor or others working on your case, but some aren't. One way to find out who they can share your information with is to ask.



## IMMIGRATION ATTORNEY

An immigration attorney is another type of lawyer that works specifically on immigration issues. They can help you with trying to get legal immigration status in the U.S. or with returning to your home country through what's called **voluntary repatriation**.



## INTERPRETER

If someone has difficulty speaking or understanding English, or is deaf or hard of hearing, the court provides an interpreter for them. The interpreter communicates what each person is saying, and helps everyone understand one another. If you need an interpreter and haven't been provided one, speak to your victim advocate or one of the adults working on your case.



## JUDGE

The judge is in charge of the courtroom. They listen to everyone in court and make sure everyone follows the rules. When there is a jury trial, the jury decides if the defendant is guilty or not guilty. When there is no jury, the judge decides.

If someone is found guilty, the judge usually decides on the **sentence**, which is the punishment the court gives the defendant. A defendant's sentence could be probation, going to a program, paying a fine, or going to jail for a certain period of time.



## 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.

It's important to remember that if the jury decides the defendant is 'not guilty,' it doesn't mean that they didn't believe you. It means that they didn't think there was enough evidence to prove that the person is guilty. Your testimony is just one piece of a big, complicated puzzle.





## POLICE OFFICER

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 and witnesses to find out what happened. Sometimes they arrest people who they think might have broken the law. As part of their investigation, they might ask you questions about what you saw, heard, or experienced. Depending on the circumstances, the information you give to the police could be used in ways you aren't comfortable with or could be used in a case against you.

If you've been arrested for a crime or are unsure of what information to provide the police, you can ask to wait for your lawyer to be present before speaking to them.



## PROBATION OFFICER

When someone is found guilty of a crime but is not sent to jail, they are usually given rules they must 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.

If you have a case in juvenile court, you might meet different types of probation officers. Some probation officers are involved at the beginning to help the court make decisions about the case. They might be called intake probation officers. Later in the court process, if the court finds you guilty, you might have another probation officer who will work with you for a longer period to supervise you and make sure you are following court orders.



## PROSECUTOR

Prosecutors are called different things depending on where you are. You might hear them called a:

- District Attorney (or DA, ADA, or DDA)
- State Attorney (or ASA)
- Commonwealth Attorney Solicitor
- City Attorney
- Prosecuting Attorney
- County Attorney
- U.S. Attorney (or AUSA)

Prosecutors represent the community and their job includes making decisions to charge someone with a crime, conducting investigations, negotiating guilty pleas, and taking cases to trial.

One of the most important things they need to do is talk to the people involved in a criminal case. If you are a victim or witness, they will want to ask you questions about your experience and what you want to see happen.

If the case goes to trial, they will try to convince the jury or judge that the defendant is guilty. If you're asked to testify, they will ask you questions in the courtroom so that the judge and jury can hear from you directly. Even though the prosecutor might be working on your case, they are not your lawyer and might not always do what you want them to do.

Because the prosecutor is not your lawyer, there might be certain circumstances where they can share the information you tell them with others. Remember that it's always okay to ask the prosecutor what information they will share, who they will share it with, and why.



## SOCIAL WORKER

Social workers help children, young people, adults, and families with difficult things that are going on in their lives. Some social workers are similar to caseworkers. They can work in child welfare agencies such as Child Protective Services, where they talk with young people and families to understand what's going on and what services need to be put in place to help. Some social workers work with lawyers, like public defenders, and attend court hearings and advocate for young people in court. And some social workers work as therapists, providing counseling support to young people.

Most social workers aren't allowed to share your information with anyone unless you are at risk of harming yourself or others, or they think there is a possibility of child abuse and/or neglect by a parent or caregiver. But there are types of social workers who can share more of what you tell them, depending on what organization they work for.

For example, if you are involved in a case as a victim or witness, a social worker from the prosecutor's office might assist you and they might be allowed to share your information with the prosecutor if it relates to the case. A good way to find out who they're allowed to share your information with is to ask.

# YOU

Your job might change depending on the situation. Sometimes it's about sharing your experience, if you feel comfortable doing so. Sometimes it's talking to an adult you trust about how you're feeling or answering questions about what happened.

Remember that what happened to you is not your fault. It's okay to take your time, ask questions, and speak up if you need anything.

These are only some of the people you might meet when going through the legal system.

While it can feel overwhelming, you can ask all the questions you have and advocate for yourself when you aren't receiving what you need.

A trusted adult can also support you. They could be one of the people in the roles on the previous page or a family member, teacher, coach, or group home worker that you feel comfortable talking to.

Not everyone feels like they have someone they can trust, but there are adults ready to offer their support and build a relationship with you, when you're ready.



# What supports are available?

The people and places that can  
support you along the way



Going through the legal system can be overwhelming and confusing. Having people to support you, answer questions, and help you advocate for yourself can make the process less stressful.

In addition to the support you are already receiving, here are some other places that offer support:

- If you need help right away, call the National Human Trafficking Hotline at **1-888-373-7888** or text **“BeFree” to 233733** (24 hours/7 days a week, multiple languages available).
- The National Human Trafficking Hotline Referral Directory can help you find local organizations that can provide you with an advocate and/or help getting medical care, counseling, school, shelter/housing, and other things you might need. <https://humantraffickinghotline.org/training-resources/referral-directory>
- The VictimConnect Resource Center, funded by the Office for Victims of Crime, can provide information on your rights and different options of services that are available. Call or Text **1-855-484-2846** or visit <https://victimconnect.org> (available Mon-Fri, 9am to 5pm ET. Multiple languages available).
- State and federal law enforcement agencies and prosecutor’s offices usually have victim advocacy programs. If you’re involved with a criminal case as a victim or witness, the prosecutor can arrange for you to have an advocate.
- Many communities also have victim advocacy programs that are not affiliated with law enforcement agencies or prosecutor’s offices. The National Human Trafficking Hotline is a good place to contact to find a program, but you can also ask your attorney, social worker, or other trusted adult for a referral. You don’t have to talk about your trafficking experience or cooperate with law enforcement to use community-based services.

If you feel uncomfortable with any of your service providers or if you feel like your needs aren't being addressed, you have the right to ask for what you need. Requests can be as simple as a change of clothes for court, and can also include asking to change service providers or staff.

## Addressing Safety Concerns

If you have any concerns about your safety, let your advocate, lawyer or another trusted adult know right away. **If you're in immediate danger, call 911.** There are also protections you can ask for, such as:

- A police escort for when you go to court or 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 feel safer, like changing the locks.
- Help with finding a safer place to live.

### Witness Intimidation

When you're a witness in a criminal case and someone interferes with your cooperation with the case, it's a crime called witness tampering or witness intimidation. This includes threats to hurt you, your friends, or your family; offering you something of value, like money or gifts, if you don't testify; posting photos or comments on social media about you and your involvement with the case; or pressuring you to lie. If this is happening to you, contact your advocate or the prosecutor right away.

## Testifying

Testifying can feel especially overwhelming, but there are protections available throughout the court process that can address some of your safety concerns.

- If you don't feel safe testifying in person or in the courtroom, ask the prosecutor or your advocate if there are other ways to testify. In some states and under certain circumstances, you can testify through a camera (this is called closed-circuit television) or have your testimony video-taped before the trial.
- Your advocate, the prosecutor, or another adult working on the case might be able to arrange a police escort for you, ask the judge to close the courtroom to visitors or restrict who can enter, or take you in and out of the courthouse through a different entrance.
- Consider creating a safety plan with an advocate or trusted adult before you testify. This is a practical plan that talks about what you can do to prepare for and prevent situations that might be unsafe, and resources and people you can go to if you need help. You can write your safety plan down or talk over the different steps with someone you trust. You can make a safety plan that's just for testifying, and you can also make a long-term safety plan for your day-to-day life.

For more tips to help with going to court and testifying, check out the 'Coping with Court' section in this [material](#).

This guide was created to help make your experience with the legal system less overwhelming and confusing. We hope it's been of some help.

Please try to remember that this situation is not your fault, and you have rights and access to resources that can help increase your safety and provide you with things you need.

If you're still confused about your rights or who you'll meet throughout your case, you can review this guide again.

If you have any questions about anything you read and how it applies to you, reach out to your advocate or another trusted adult for support.





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](http://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](http://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](http://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.



