

ZOE'S STORY

a journey
through (&
beyond) the
legal
system

This book is about a young person named Zoe. She's experienced some things you might have been through, or are going through now.

In this book, Zoe shares her experiences with a support group about what it was like for her to get arrested and placed in detention, meet with a defense attorney and social worker, and go to juvenile court.

Some of Zoe's experiences might not look or sound like yours, but they might help you 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

Zoe's story is based on real people's lives. You'll hear from some of them at the end of the book.

Reading Zoe's story may bring up some feelings or memories. That's totally okay. It might be helpful to work through this book with an advocate or another adult you trust.

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

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



ZOE'S STORY

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PART ONE

**Zoe's Arrested and
Goes to Court**

PRESENT DAY, AT A SUPPORT GROUP...



Hey everyone, it's nice to see some familiar faces.

We'll start in 5 minutes.

I'm so glad you came today, Zoe. How are you feeling?



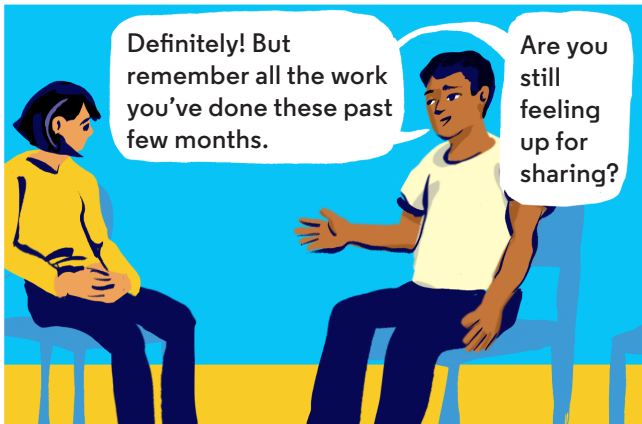
I'm alright. A little nervous.



That's totally natural. I was really nervous the first time I shared my story.



Yeah?

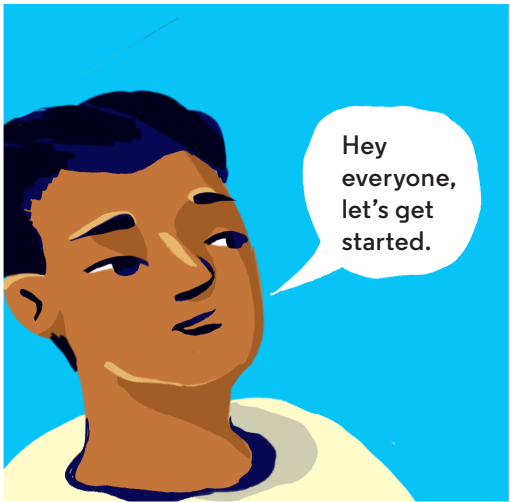


Definitely! But remember all the work you've done these past few months.

Are you still feeling up for sharing?



I think so... yeah.





They kept me in that night because court was closed...



JUST AFTER THE ARREST...



Your grandmother didn't pick up.

Do you have another family member we can call?



I told you she wouldn't!
And no!



Well, we left her a message. We'll try again tomorrow. You'll sleep here tonight.



I'm gonna be in so much trouble with Danny when I get out.

How am I gonna make up all that money?

...at least for now I can just rest. I'm so tired.

I thought I was doing okay. I had what I needed—a place to stay most of the time, food, you know. I was in and out of jail sometimes but nothing serious.



Then, like the other times... there were so many people asking the same questions. First, the probation officer...

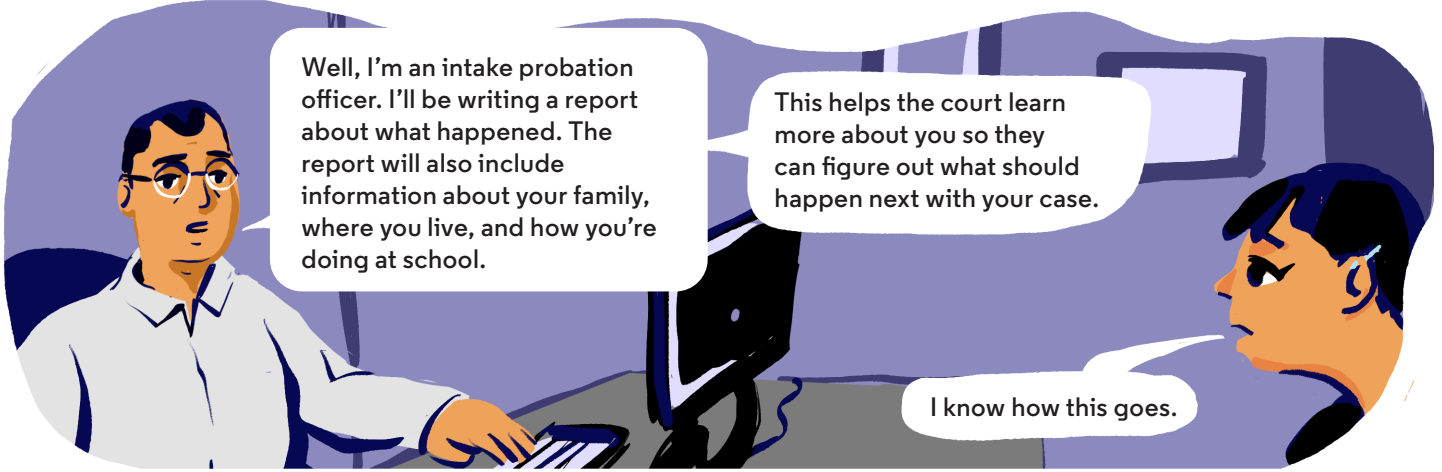
THE NEXT MORNING...



Come with me.



Morning, Zoe. My name is Luis. How are you?



Well, I'm an intake probation officer. I'll be writing a report about what happened. The report will also include information about your family, where you live, and how you're doing at school.

This helps the court learn more about you so they can figure out what should happen next with your case.

I know how this goes.



Let's start with your grandmother.

The officer who brought you in told me that he tried to call your grandmother.

Do you live with her?



When's the last time you spoke to her?

Are you living with someone else?



I know you probably don't want to talk to me. And you've clearly done this before but...

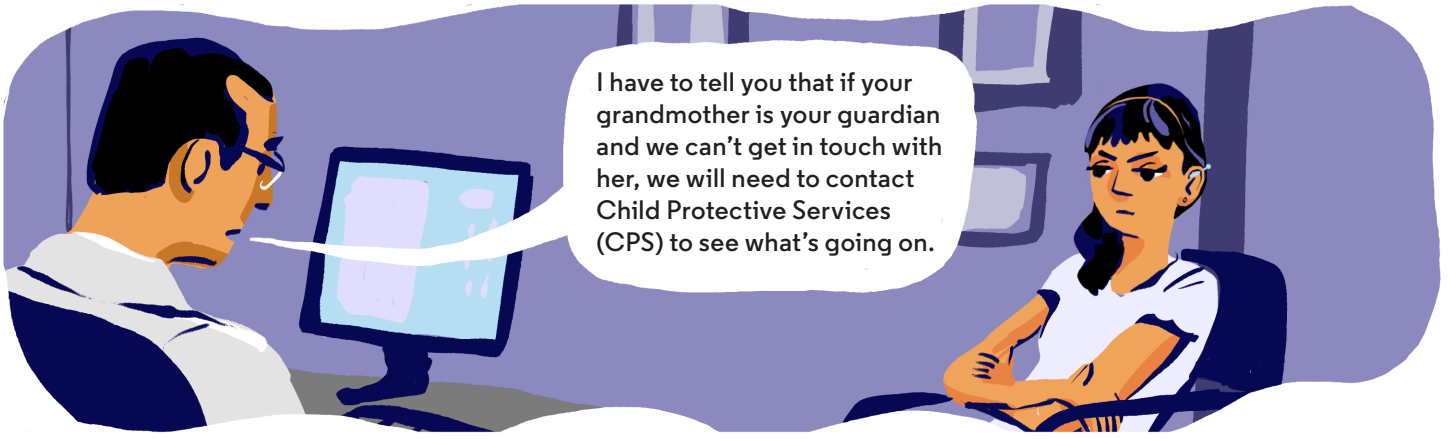


You're right. I don't want to talk to you.



Okay, you are welcome to wait and talk to your lawyer tomorrow then.

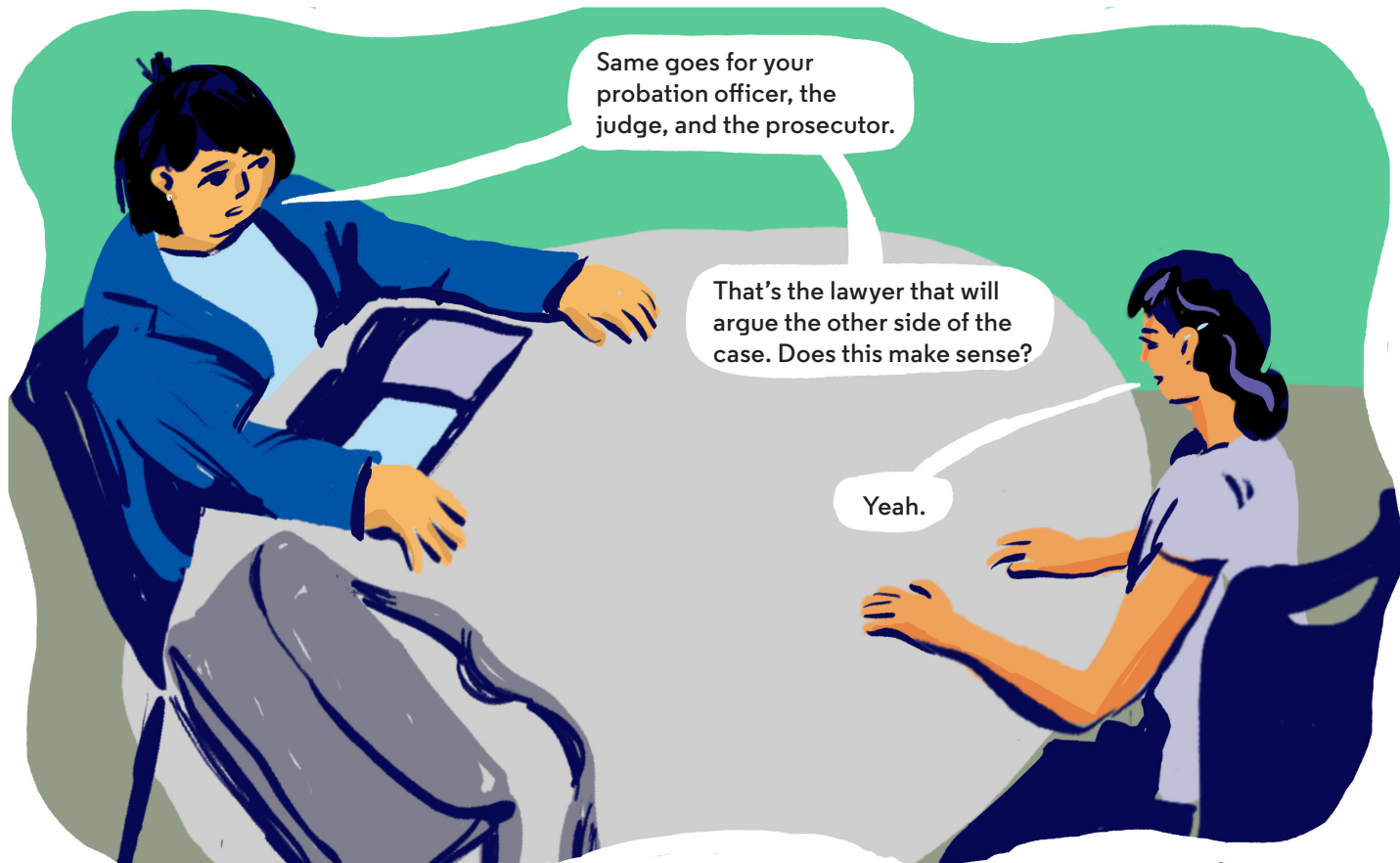
Great.











Same goes for your probation officer, the judge, and the prosecutor.

That's the lawyer that will argue the other side of the case. Does this make sense?

Yeah.



So, the more I know about what happened, the better I can help you. Okay?

Okay.



Do you have any questions for me before I talk about what's going to happen today?



Can you get me out of here? How long do I have to be here?



That depends on a few things like if you have somewhere to stay and what the judge thinks about your charges.



Unfortunately, Zoe, if there isn't somewhere for you to stay, the court will keep you here until we can find a place.



I can't stay here!

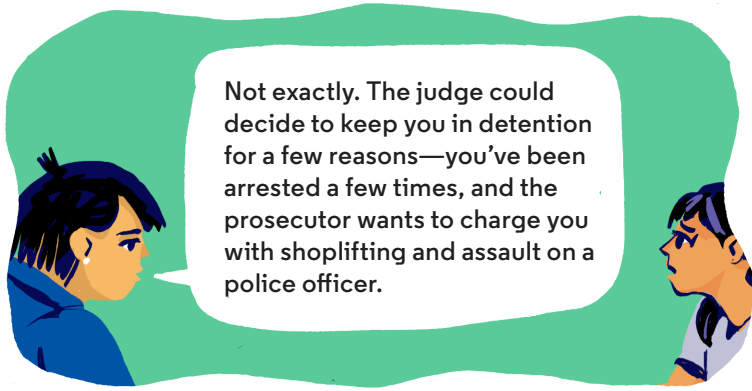


I know, Zoe.

I'm going to do what I can but between finding a place and the judge's decision, there's a chance you'll stay here for a few days.



A few days? Don't we just have to go to court today and then I get out?



Not exactly. The judge could decide to keep you in detention for a few reasons—you've been arrested a few times, and the prosecutor wants to charge you with shoplifting and assault on a police officer.



What?! But that's never happened before!



I'm sorry, Zoe.

But these charges mean the judge has new things to think about.



Also, if the judge thinks you won't come to your next court date, because of your history and charges, she might keep you here to make sure you show up.



I was so mad! I mean, I got what she was saying but I had no idea this would change things so much.



Like, before I just had to do community service or was on probation for a few months.

We'll know more soon. Would you like to know what's going to happen today?



I guess.

Today we're going to something called an "arraignment." That's when the judge hears your case, says what you're being charged for, and schedules your next hearing.

Another hearing?



Yeah, I know. We might have a few.



So I'm staying here for the next few days?

Most likely, but we'll know more soon.



A few days! Danny would be mad if I was away for one day...

I didn't want to think about what he'd do when he saw me.



I feel that, Zoe. Things got real bad for me too if I missed a day of work...

They knew I was too scared to say anything cause I'm not from here.

I know this is a lot. But we have a few minutes before we go. Can I ask a few more questions?

Okay.



I want to talk about what the police said you did. We call these "allegations."

The police report says you tried to shoplift a few hundred dollars worth of clothes, and when you were caught, you resisted and hit a police officer.



I'd like to hear from you. Can you tell me what happened?



I was like, yeah I guess that's what happened.

I stole a bunch of clothes but...Danny was always yelling at me about what to wear and how to look.

At the time, I didn't know what else to do.





TAKE A BREATH

It may seem obvious but taking deep breaths can help you feel calmer. You can do this anywhere. Try it the next time you feel stressed or overwhelmed. If you like it, repeat this three times.



Slowly take a big breath in, counting 1-2-3 as you fill your stomach with air.



Then hold your breath while you count 1-2.



Then, slowly count 1-2-3-4-5 as you breathe out and you feel your stomach empty out.

LATER, AT THE ARRAIGNMENT...



Zoe, based on the number of prior arrests, your lack of family support, and the assault of a police officer, I believe there's a risk that if released, you might reoffend or not come to court.



You will remain in the court's custody until your next hearing in 3 days. Do you understand?

Yes, your honor.



What?



How do you feel?



I can't stay here! I have to get back to my boyfriend!





You know, your lawyer actually sounds kind of okay...



My last lawyer was so busy. Every time we met they didn't remember my case. I had to ask for a different one.



I had lawyers who didn't even try to understand what was going on.



Wow. That sucks. I'm sorry that happened. I guess you're right...

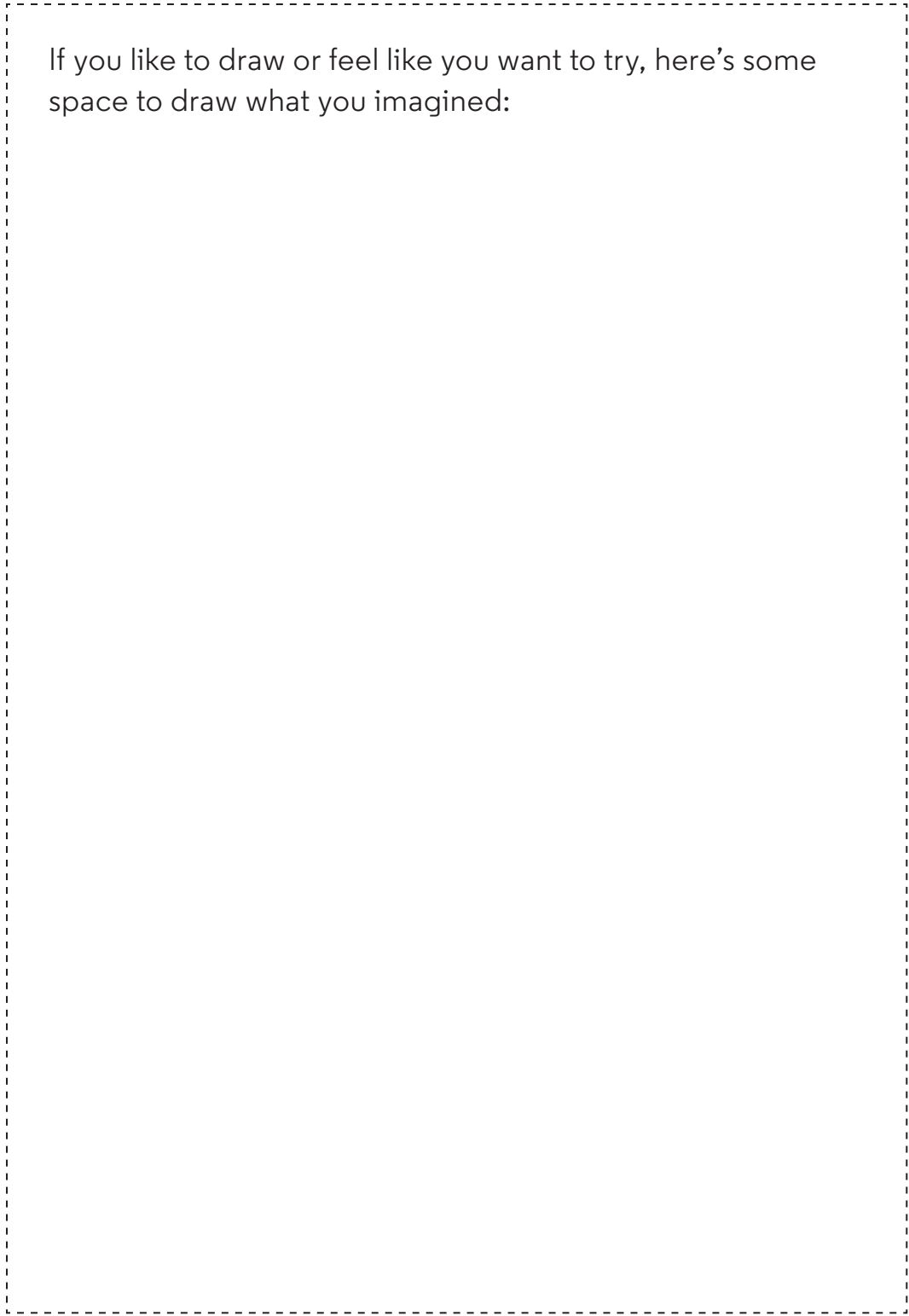
Thank you for sharing, Zoe. And to everyone for listening. Let's take a quick break.

MAKING SOME SPACE

Zoe has a lot of different feelings in the story, including feeling stressed and worried. When you're feeling that way, this activity can help you relax by focusing your mind on your breath and your senses.

1. Sit somewhere comfortable—in a chair, on the floor, on a couch. Wherever you feel relaxed.
2. Put your hands on your legs or knees. If it feels good, close your eyes, too. Then, take one deep breath in, and one deep breath out. Repeat that three times.
3. Then, think about a place you really love, where you feel safe:
 - What do you see?
 - What do you hear?
 - What can you touch and smell?
 - What's under your feet?
 - What do you see going on around you?
4. Next, think about what you like doing in that place. Imagine yourself doing that.
5. Take a couple of minutes to enjoy what you're thinking about.
6. Take two more deep breaths, in and out. If your eyes are closed, slowly open your eyes.

If you like to draw or feel like you want to try, here's some space to draw what you imagined:



WHAT'S GOING ON?

When a young person is arrested, different things can happen. The young person could be:

- Sent home to their parents or guardians while they wait for their next court date.
- Kept in detention until after their first time going to court. This happens when the court isn't open when a young person is arrested.
- Kept in detention for their entire case.

If a young person doesn't have family or a guardian OR if the court thinks they won't come back for their next court date, the court can decide to keep a young person in detention.

Zoe is kept in detention for a few reasons:

1. She is arrested when the court isn't open.
2. The police can't get in touch with her grandmother so there's no one to come get her.
3. She has been arrested a few times before and the court doesn't think she will come back.

Zoe's given a lawyer by the court. If your family can't afford to hire a lawyer, the court will give you one. Lawyers have something called attorney-client privilege. That means that your lawyer can't tell anyone what you told them without asking you for permission first. That includes your family, your friends, and anyone involved in your case.

If you want, take some time to go through these questions with an advocate or trusted adult and reflect on moments when you've shared some of your experiences with others.

- Have you ever had to share a difficult experience about something that happened to you? What did you share? How did it feel to talk about what happened to you?
- What questions would you have about sharing that experience with a lawyer like Alicia?

What can you do?

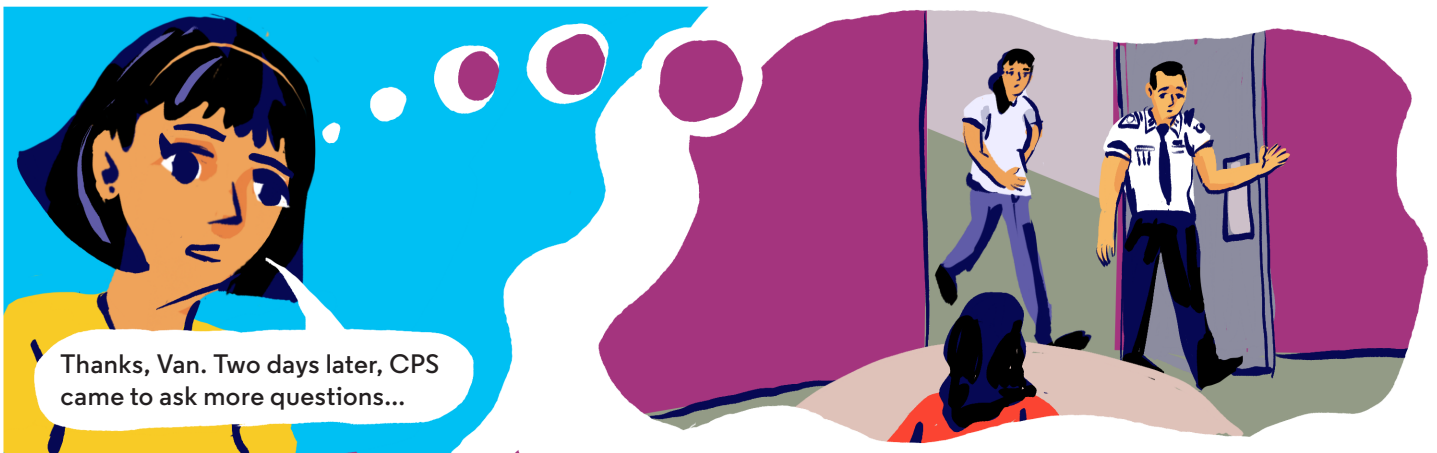
- If you're arrested, it's helpful to ask your lawyer what rights you have, what's going on with your case, and any other questions you might have.
- Using coping skills like the meditation activity, breathing techniques, or listening to music can also help when you feel overwhelmed or frustrated.

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.

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.

PART TWO

**Zoe Talks with
a Social Worker**







Yeah, okay.



I know you've been in detention for two nights. How are you doing?



I'm not sleeping great.



It's my role to make sure you're taken care of.

Can I get you something to help?

An extra blanket?



No problem. I'll ask them when we finish up here.



Can I ask you some questions?

Okay.



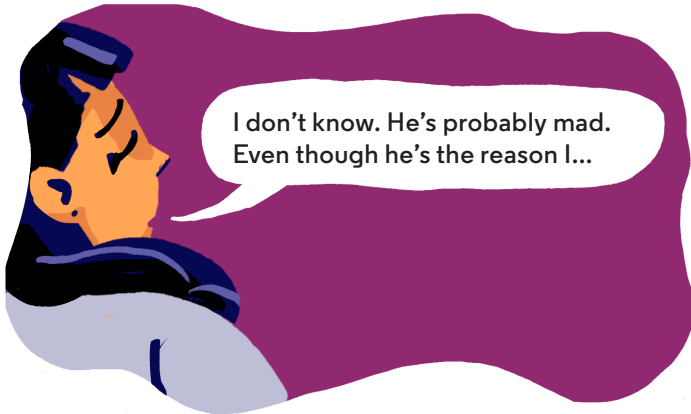
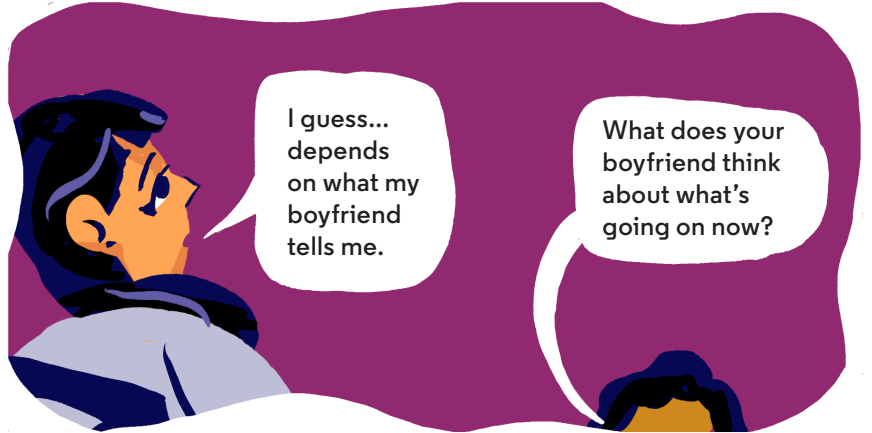
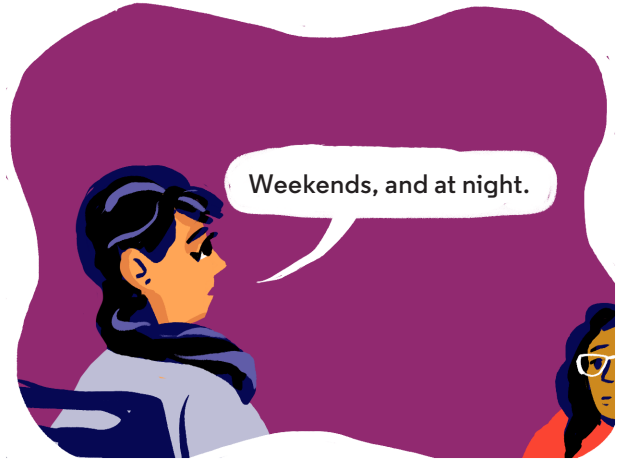
We've had a hard time getting a hold of your grandma. What's it like living with her?



I told her my mom left us and that my grandma takes care of me now. My mom was in the game. Her boyfriend was so mean to us.











WHAT'S GOING ON?

After a court decides that someone can't stay with their family or guardian, Child Protective Services (CPS) comes into the picture. They work for the government and try to make sure that young people are safe and taken care of. A worker from CPS comes to speak to a young person about their home, family, friends and school.

In Zoe's story, CPS meets with her because no one can get in touch with Zoe's grandmother. After talking with Zoe, the CPS worker also learns that Zoe and her grandmother don't really get along. That's why Zoe stays with Danny, the person she calls her boyfriend.

If the CPS worker thinks that Zoe's grandmother isn't able to take care of her, the court will need to find someone to take care of Zoe. That starts a different process in something called family court. Family court is where legal problems involving children and their parents get figured out.

A CPS worker has different rules about confidentiality, or what they can share with other people. They can tell other people if they believe a young person wants to hurt themselves or someone else, or if they think a young person is maybe being hurt by someone else.

In Zoe's story, her CPS worker asked for permission to tell her lawyer about Danny and that the two of them make money together. Sometimes, if someone you talk to thinks what you told

them will help your case, they will ask to share that information with the right person.

Zoe has to talk about some difficult situations going on in her life. If you want, take some time to go through these questions with an advocate or trusted adult and reflect on moments when you've shared a family experience with others.

- Have you ever had to share a difficult experience about how your parents or someone you cared about treated you? How did it feel?
- What questions would you have about sharing that experience with a CPS worker like Jade?

What can you do?

- If you're confused about the information your CPS worker can share, ask them what information they will share and who they will share it with.
- Ask your CPS worker any questions you have about your case, or about any support you need with housing, mental health, or school.

PART THREE

**Zoe's Lawyer Shares
News About the Case**







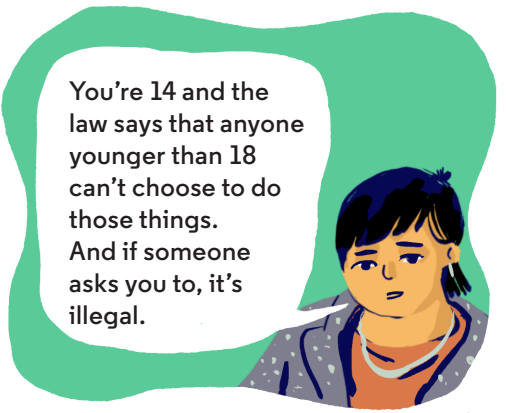


Zoe, I know this is a lot to hear. We can get you support.

I wanted to talk to you about this right away because if this is what's happening, I can talk to the prosecutor about other options.



But what if I chose to do those things?



You're 14 and the law says that anyone younger than 18 can't choose to do those things. And if someone asks you to, it's illegal.



I think letting the prosecutor know this will help your case.

Do I have your permission to share what you've told me?



Will you tell my boyfriend?

What's going to happen to him?

No! You can't say anything!



I won't tell him, but I can't promise what the prosecutor will do. I will tell them what you do or don't want to do, though.



Okay. You can tell them.





PRESENT DAY,
BACK AT THE
SUPPORT GROUP





Thank you for sharing, Zoe.

Thanks for sharing, Zoe!

Thanks, everyone.

That's why we're all here. To get support and figure out how to find something else—something better. We're all survivors and have the power to keep moving forward.

WHAT'S GOING ON?

Zoe told her lawyer about some difficult things that have happened between her and Danny. What was going on with Danny changed Zoe's case. It meant Zoe had new options that her lawyer could ask the court to think about.

If a judge has reason to think that something illegal has happened to a young person, they have to look at that person's case differently. This is because before, that young person was being accused of committing a crime, but now something bad is actually happening to them. In situations like this, adults are responsible for protecting young people. Information like this can be why a judge decides on less punishment or no punishment at all. This is true for young people who come from other countries, too.

Sometimes sharing information like this can start another case in criminal court. This is where adults, people over the age of 18, go when they have been accused of committing a crime. If the prosecutor thinks that a young person's experience is an important part of a criminal case, they might be asked to share their experience. This is called testifying.

Testifying can be hard. Sometimes it means a young person has to talk about people they love or people they want to protect. It's complicated, but lawyers and social workers are there for support.

When talking about Danny, Zoe felt confused and sad when Alicia told her he was doing something illegal. If you want, take some time to go through these questions with an advocate or trusted

adult and reflect on your own experiences.

- Have you ever felt hurt by someone you cared about and confused about what to do? What kind of support would have helped you?
- Who could help you process what has happened and how to move forward?

What can you do?

- Talk with a trusted adult, advocate, or friend about the best ways for you to feel supported. That could mean receiving counseling, talking through how you are feeling with someone you trust, or doing something you enjoy.
- If you feel unsafe for any reason, talk with your lawyer or social worker about creating a safety plan and putting in safety measures.

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 happen to them that's a crime.

In this story, Zoe is, in legal terms, a victim of trafficking. The term "victim" is used in court and other legal settings. But you get to choose what words you use to describe yourself.

ASK FOR SUPPORT

Zoe mentioned that her lawyer and social worker helped her find support. Support can mean a lot of different things:

- someone to talk to about your experience
- a place to live
- appointments with doctors
- clothes
- getting support with school
- learning new skills to get a job
- support to learn how to take care of yourself
- help with immigration or visa issues
- meeting other young people with similar experiences

Zoe was able to join a support group, led by a survivor, with other young people who'd been through similar things. If you feel like you need any support or resources, ask your advocate or another adult working with you.

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 Zoe’s experience with sex trafficking and being arrested.

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

This book was made with the help of people who’ve been through similar experiences. On the next page are messages they wanted to share with you.

“The first couple of facilities I was in, everybody knew me to be very quiet and kind of weird because I didn’t talk to anybody. I found somebody that was kind of weird like me and didn’t speak either. We connected and have been friends ever since. You don’t have to go into these places and look for friends, but if you can **find somebody that makes you feel comfortable** enough, it makes your process a lot easier and you don’t feel alone.”

— Melanie T., Lived Experience Expert

“I know it’s tough, but anything in life worth having is tough. Sometimes you have to go through things to get to where you want to be. I became what I needed as a child. I became an advocate. **I became this person full of love, hope, and joy.** I didn’t have that as a youth. I became the safe person that I deserve to have. I became a safe person for my daughters. I became a wife, which I never thought I would become. I became a good friend. I became everything that I needed, and you can, too.”

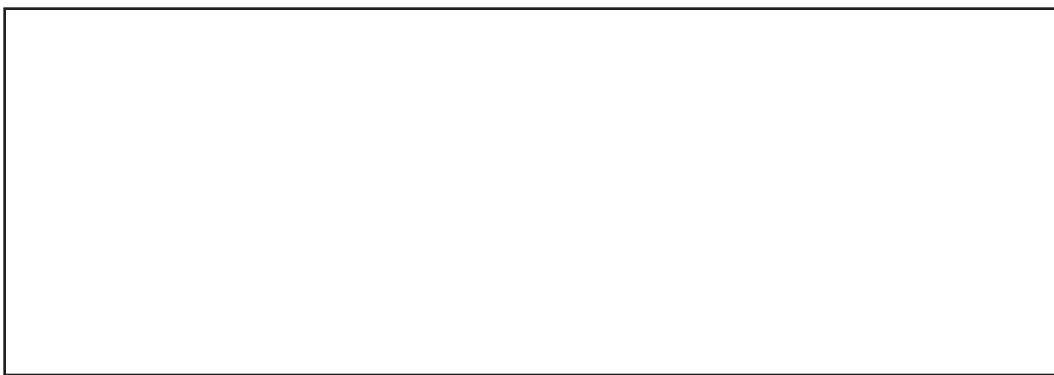
— Person with Lived Experience

TAKING CARE OF ME

Like Zoe did throughout her story, it can be good to “check in” with yourself to see how you’re feeling. When you’re upset or stressed, doing 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 do or make something
- Make an art project or cook something
- Let yourself cry, scream, or talk about your frustration
- Say kind, supportive things to yourself
- Keep a special item in your pocket like a stone, seashell, necklace, or a piece of fabric, and run your fingers over it

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.

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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.

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



Office for Victims of Crime
OVC

