



THERE'S MORE TO ME



You might have a lot going on right now. And it might be pretty confusing.

This book has some stuff to help you understand what's going on. There's information about:

- things that could happen next
- people you might see or talk to
- ways to figure out what you're feeling and how to feel better

This graphic novel has stories about Alex, Jamal, Jesse, Amy, and Ari—teens who've been through some things. Some of their experiences will be different than what you go through, but some might help.

There are lots of ways to ask for help and support.

You can keep this. Write in it, read it, whatever. Hopefully it helps.

No matter what, you should know you're not alone.

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PART 1



Alex







Yeah. Mom said not to tell anyone.



She's embarrassed because our neighbors saw.



But I'm kind of scared. It feels weird to have the cops around our house, in our business. You know?

Yeah.



You know you can always talk to me about anything, though, right?



Yeah. I know.



I thought it would be over by now.

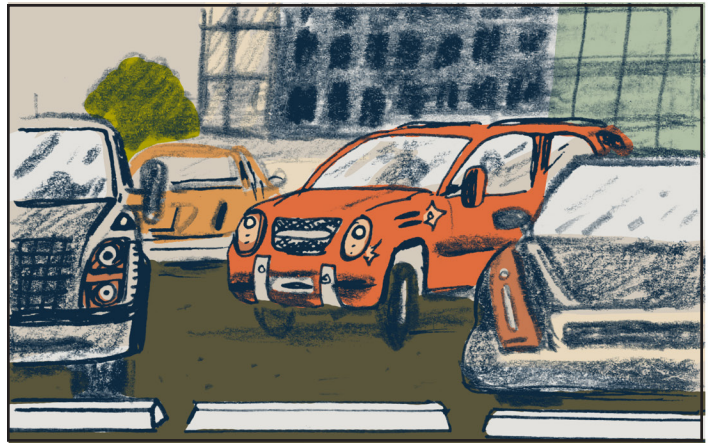


But tomorrow I have to go talk to some other people about it. My stomach hurts just thinking about it.

Ugh, that sucks.













Tia asked me other questions, too, about school and home...



...about Auntie Grace and her boyfriend...



...and about what happened the other night.



Tia was nice, but it was so awkward to talk about...



It's so embarrassing...



You've been through a lot, Alex. Do you want to take a break?

Okay.

I don't know if you want to try this, but there's this breathing exercise that a lot of the kids I work with find really helpful when they're feeling stressed or overwhelmed.

Want to give it a try?



TAKING A BREATH

Taking deep breaths can help you feel more calm.

You can do this anywhere. Try it the next time you're feeling stressed or overwhelmed.

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 breathe out slowly and let out all the air, feeling your stomach empty out.

Repeat this three times.



If it helps, you can try closing your eyes while you breathe, or put your hand on your stomach to feel the breaths go in and out.



I really did feel more calm.



Alex, do you have any questions for me about what's going on?



Yeah. Why does my family have to keep talking to the police? Why are there so many questions for all of us?



The police have to investigate what happened the other night. They'll talk to anyone who saw or heard anything.

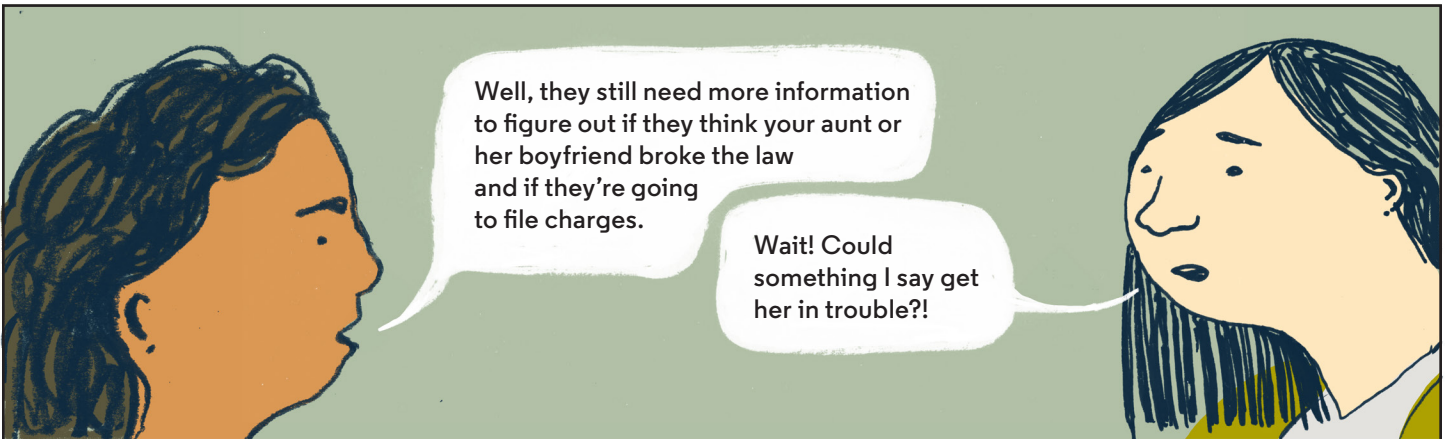
But they arrested my aunt and her boyfriend, and then they let them go. Isn't it done now?

They're trying to figure out what happened as part of their investigation.

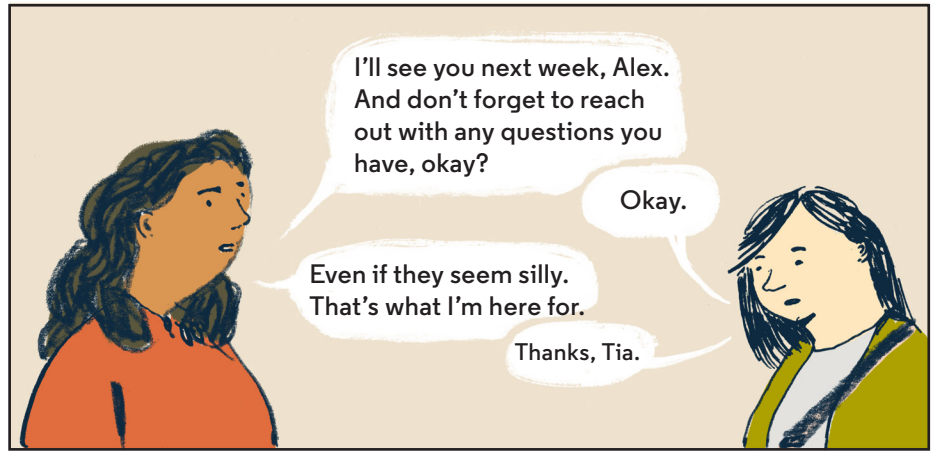


Well, they still need more information to figure out if they think your aunt or her boyfriend broke the law and if they're going to file charges.

Wait! Could something I say get her in trouble?!







WHAT'S GOING ON?

If someone might have broken a law or hurt another person, the police have to try to figure out what happened. It's called an investigation.

They'll talk to different people to find out more, and might ask you questions about what you know.

In Alex's story, the police started an investigation to find information about what happened with Alex's aunt and her boyfriend. Alex was both a witness because she saw what happened and a victim because she was hurt. She met different adults working on the case and answered questions about what happened.

If the police don't find enough evidence, then the case is closed. If the case ends, that doesn't mean it didn't happen, though.

If the police do find enough evidence, they may arrest the person (if they haven't already), and the case will continue.

Have you ever had to talk to the police? How did you feel about that?

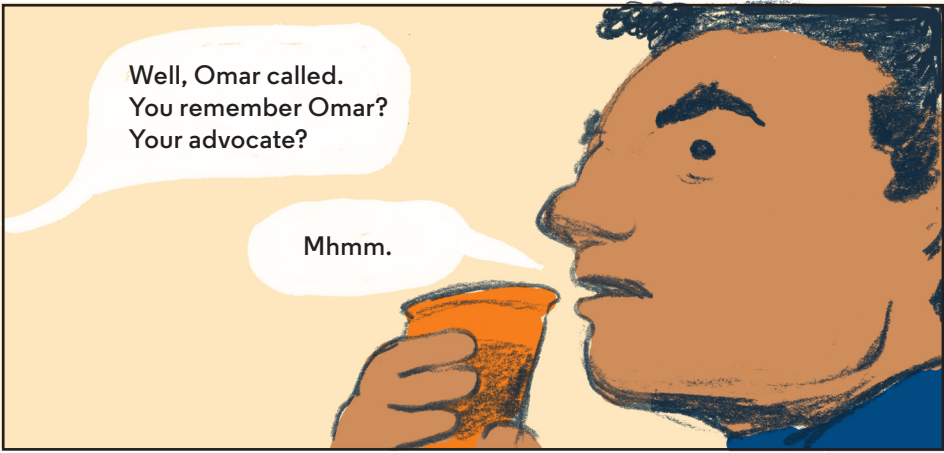
Alex talked to Tia and Mari about what happened. Who helps you when you're going through something hard?

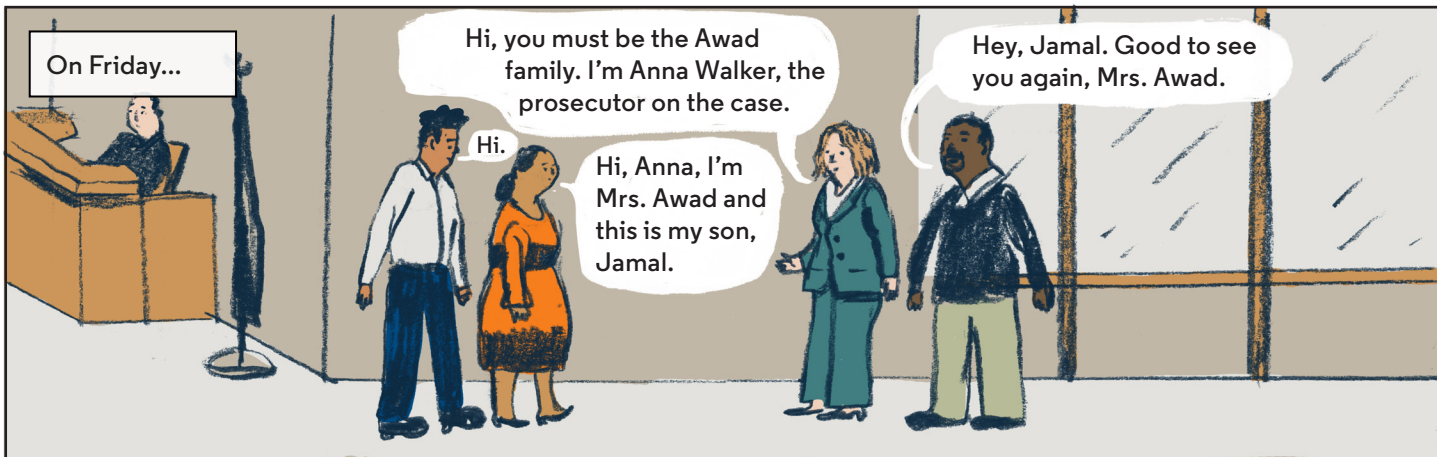
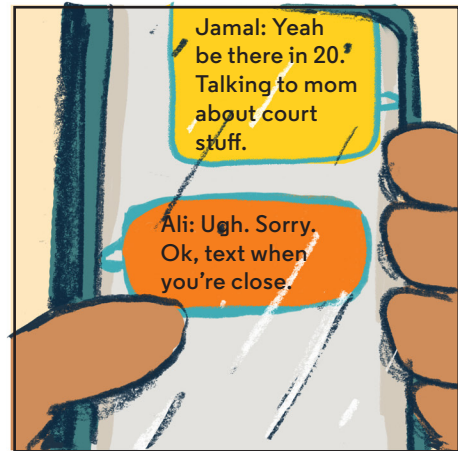
PART 2

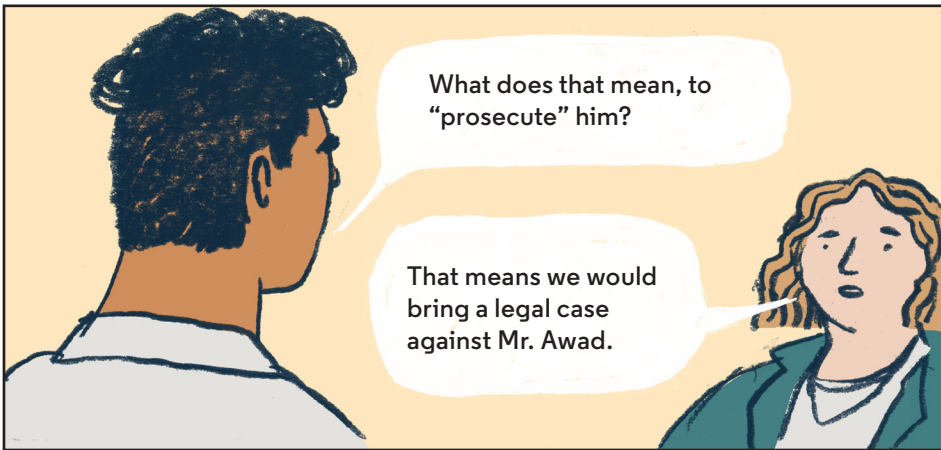


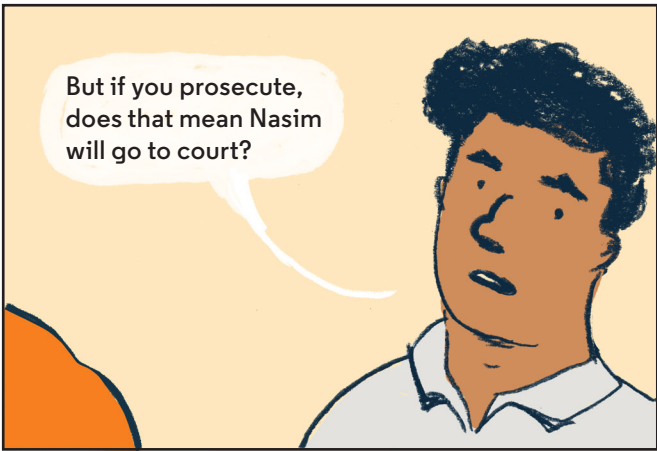
Jamal



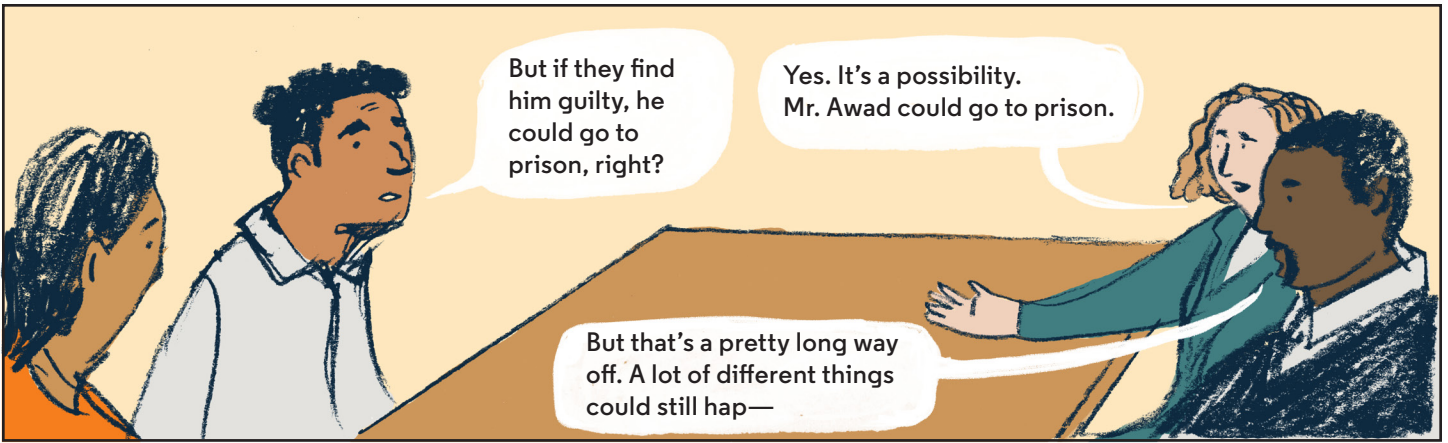












But if they find him guilty, he could go to prison, right?

Yes. It's a possibility. Mr. Awad could go to prison.

But that's a pretty long way off. A lot of different things could still hap—



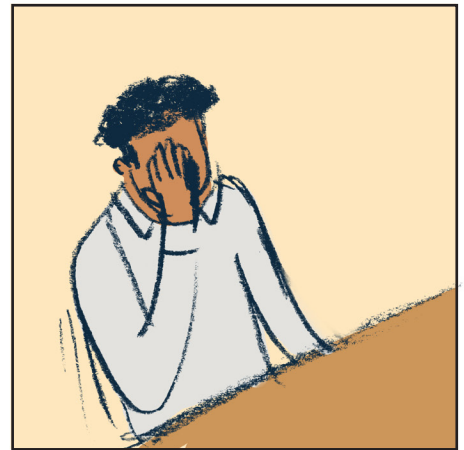
Could you stop calling him Mr. Awad?!

You're treating him like a stranger.

He's my brother!



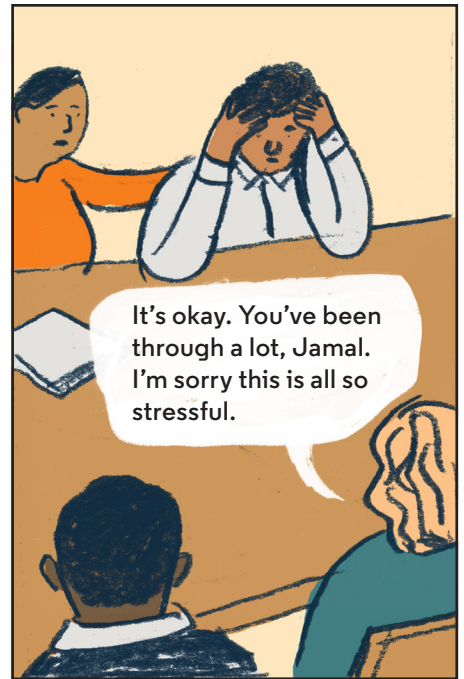
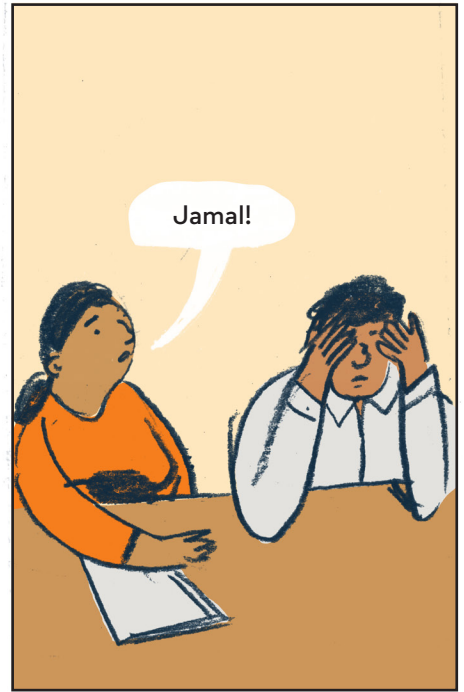
I'm sorry, Jamal. You're right. I'll call him Nasim going forward.



And what if I don't want you to prosecute him? What if I don't want that?

I'm the victim, right? Do I have a say?

You do. I definitely want to hear what you and your mom want to happen. But, unfortunately, I can't promise that our decision will be what you want.



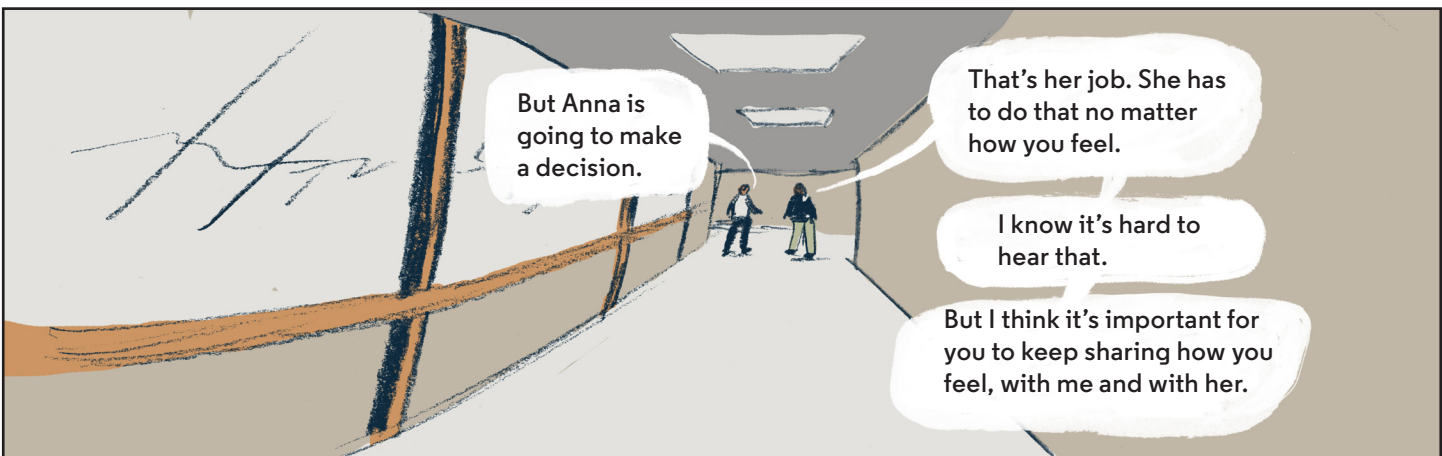
MOVING YOUR BODY

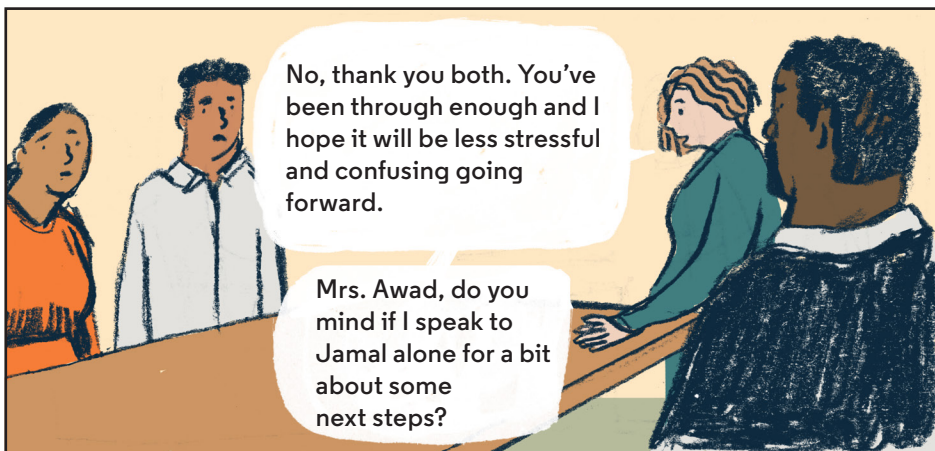
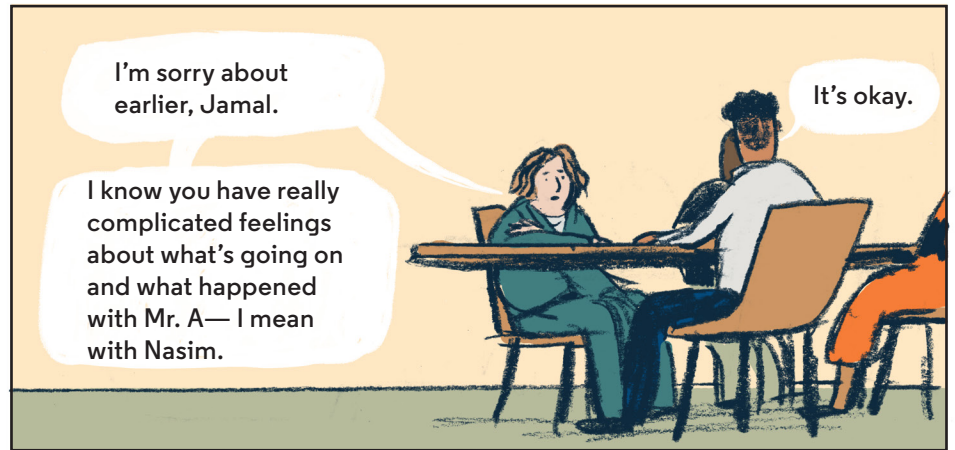
Moving your body can be a good way to relieve stress.

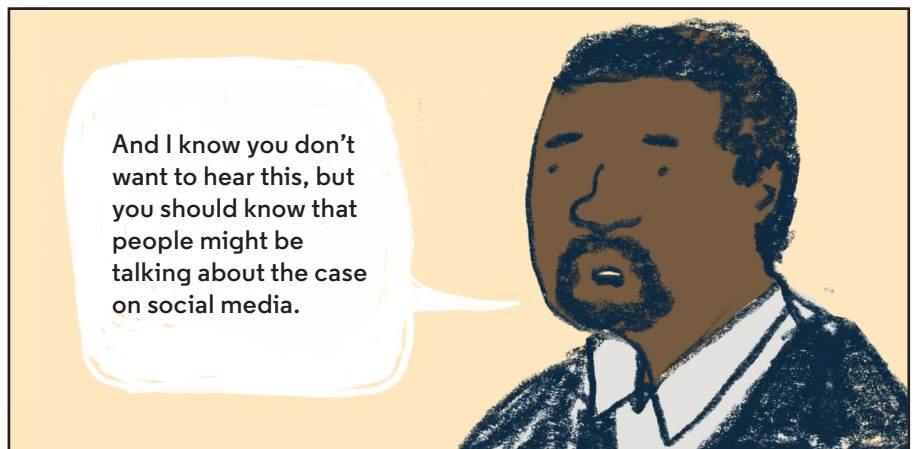
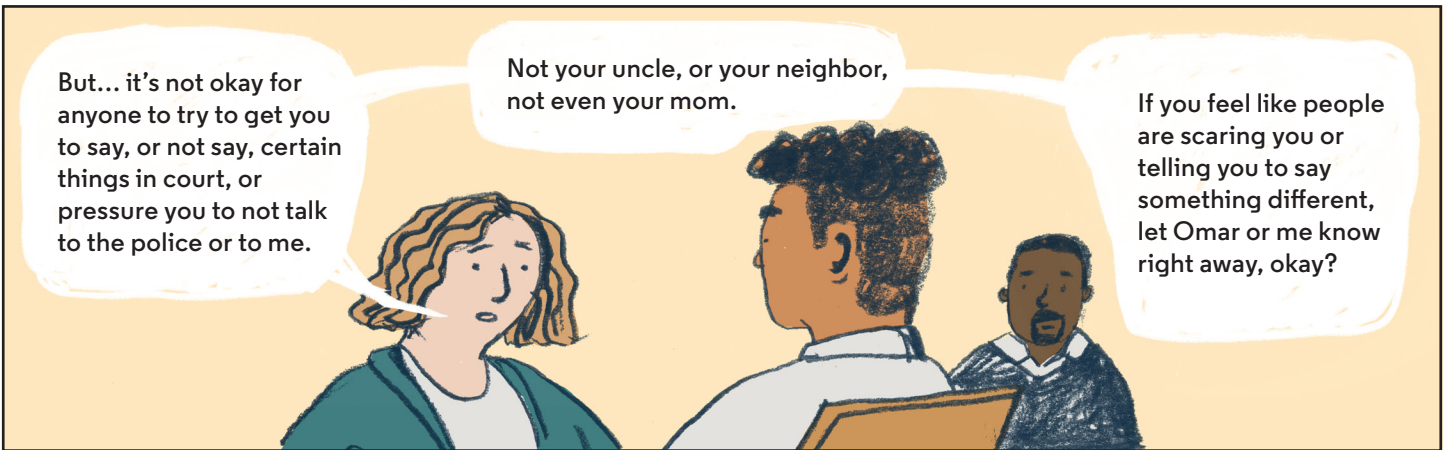
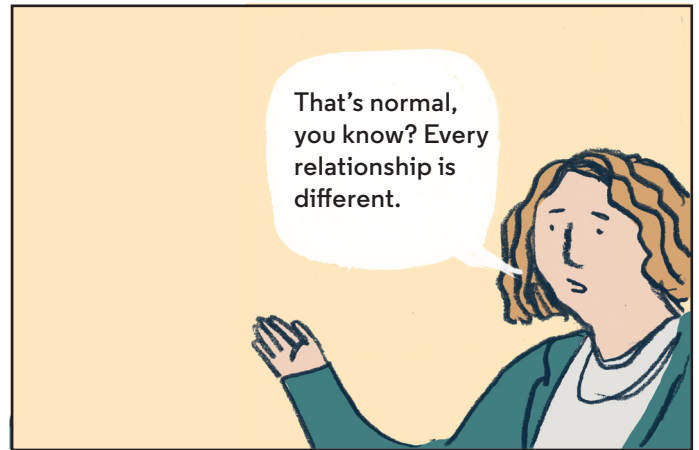
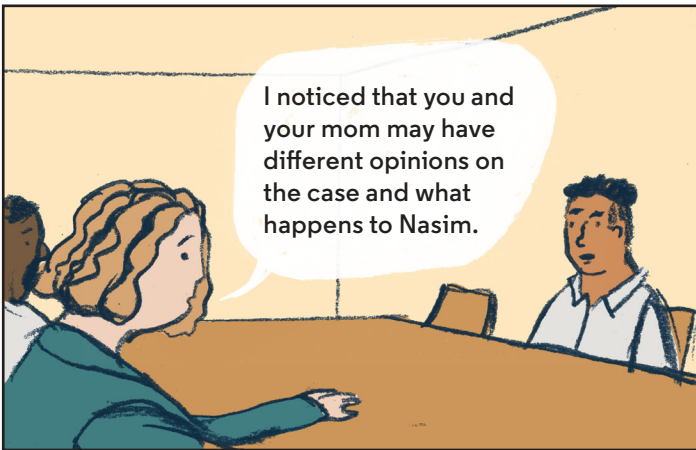
Omar and Jamal took a short walk.



You can also do stuff like jump, jog, exercise, or even dance to get rid of extra energy and help your body calm down.















WRITING OR DRAWING IT OUT.

Writing or drawing can be a way to process your thoughts and feelings and get them out so you can feel calmer.

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. Or you can even write it as a letter. You don't have to share the letter with anyone. Just getting it all out can help you figure out how you feel.

Or you can write or draw in this space, if you want to.







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 or not they have enough evidence to continue the case. If they do, 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.

If a case continues, different things can happen.

Often the defendant and their lawyer will negotiate with the prosecutor. The defendant might plead guilty to certain charges and agree to a certain punishment. It's called a "plea bargain," or a "plea deal."

If they don't agree to do that, the case goes to trial.

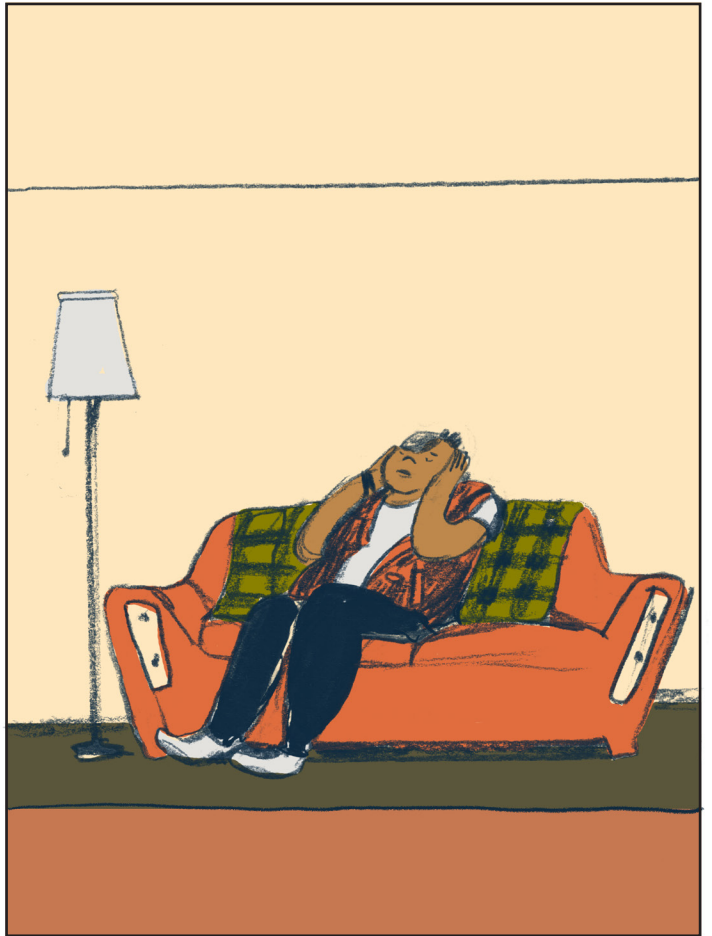
How would you feel if you were in Jamal's place?

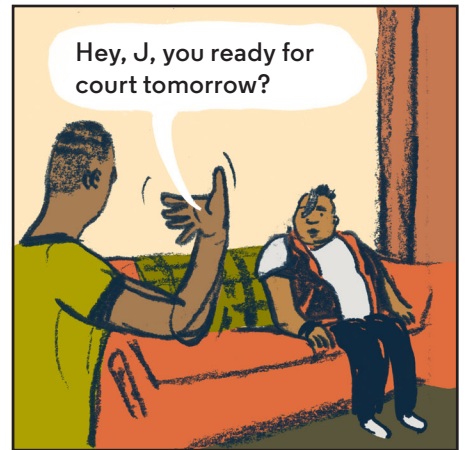
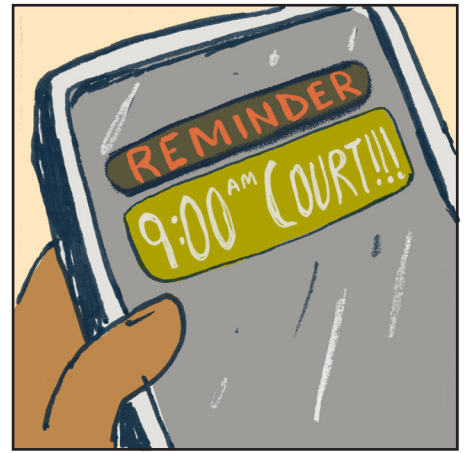
Omar taught Jamal some ways to cope when he was stressed and having trouble sleeping. What can you do when you feel stressed to help yourself feel better?

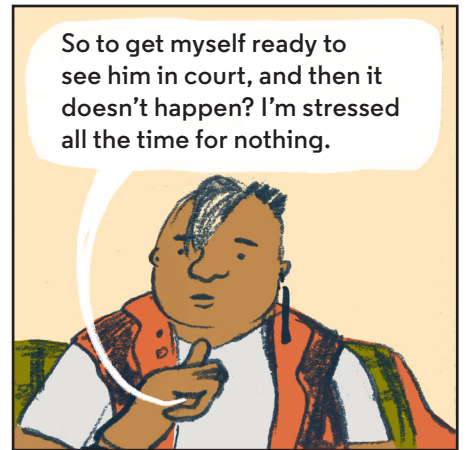
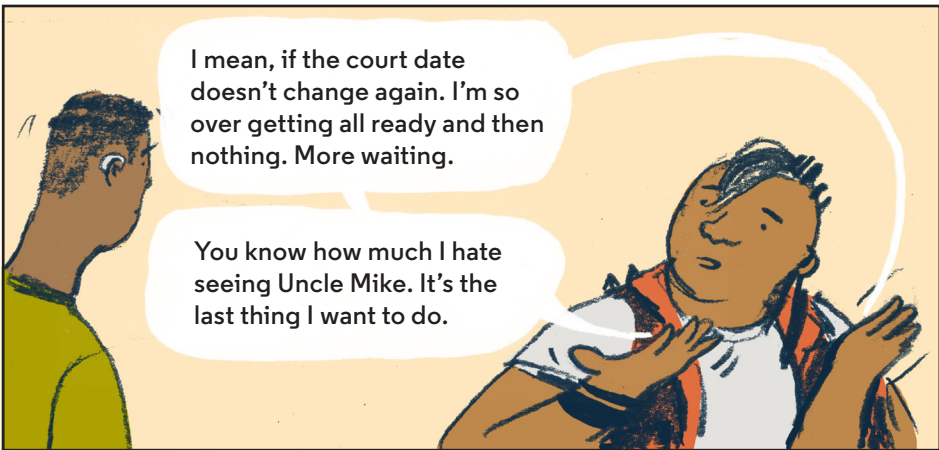
PART 3



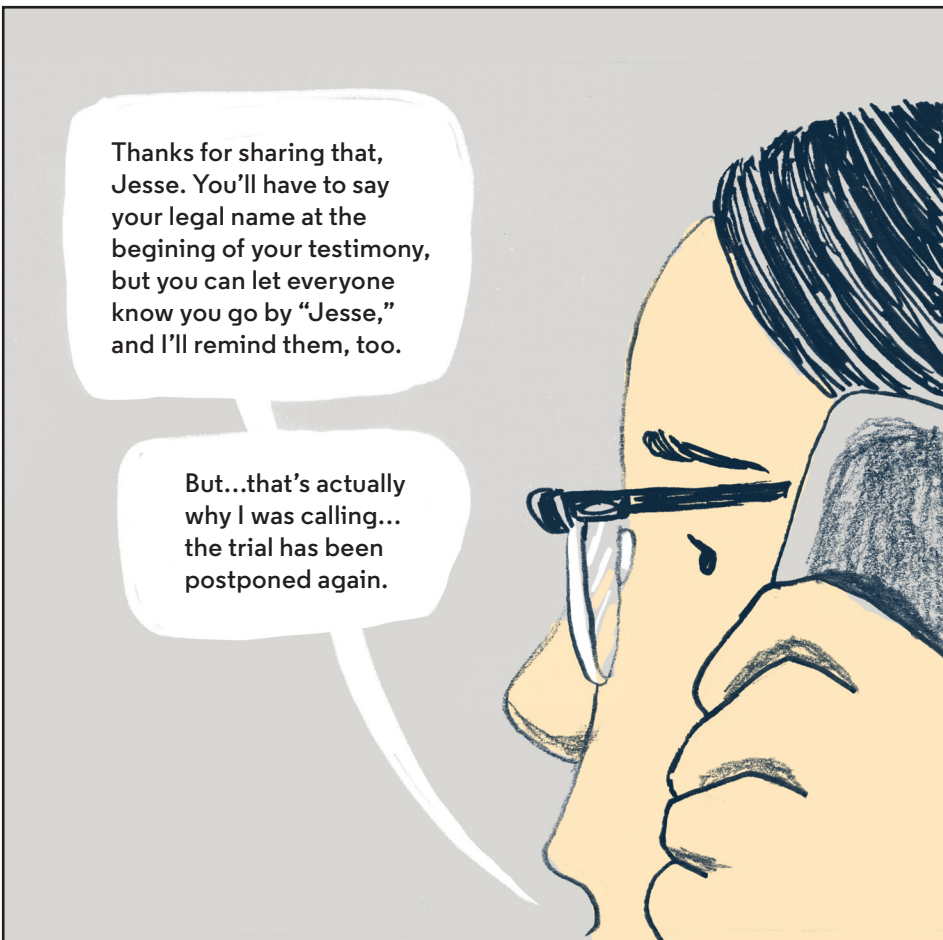
Jesse



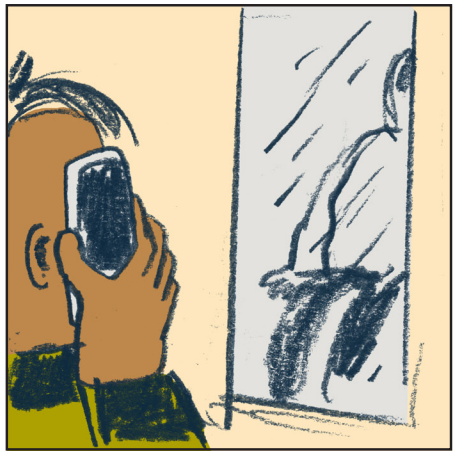
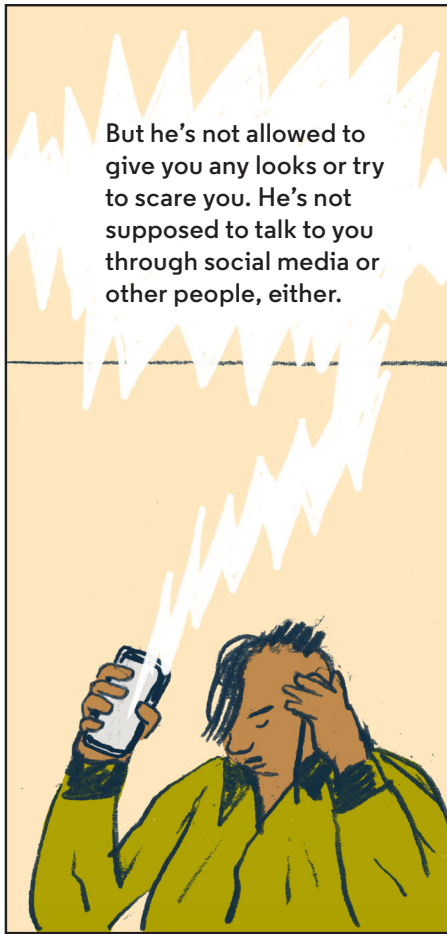
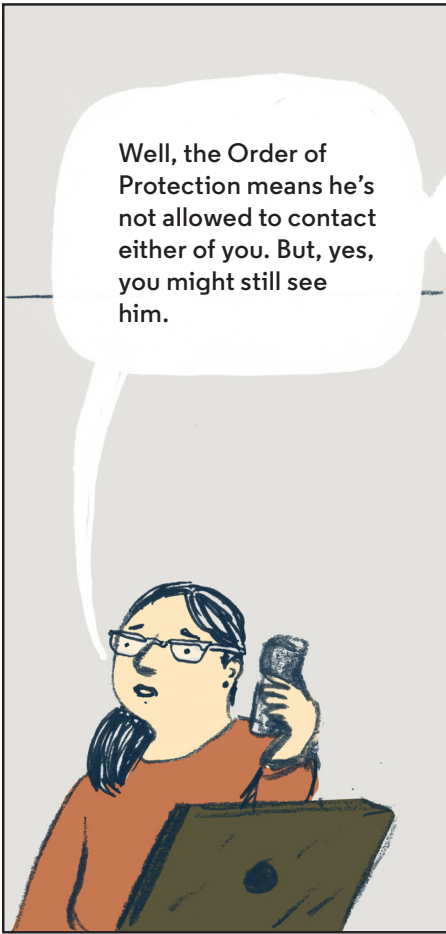


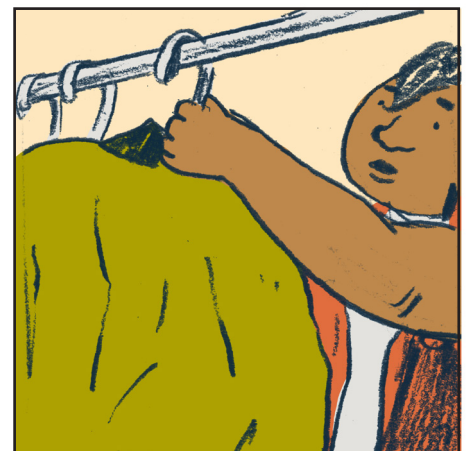
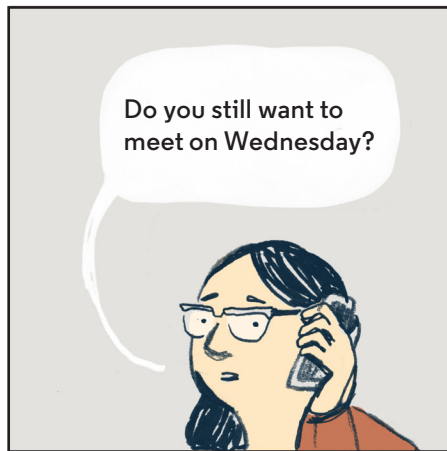












WHAT'S GOING ON?

Cases don't go to court 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.

Jesse was supposed to testify, but the trial date got delayed. Court processes are complicated and can take a long time. It's not uncommon for court dates to be rescheduled.

In some situations, accommodations can be made at court to help witnesses feel more comfortable when testifying. The court may also issue an Order of Protection like the one Jesse had, to make sure that witnesses are not harassed or intimidated by defendants.

How would you feel if your court case kept getting cancelled, like Jesse's?

Jesse and Liz talked about accommodations that can be made in court to help Jesse and Steven feel more comfortable. Is there anything you would need to feel more comfortable in court?

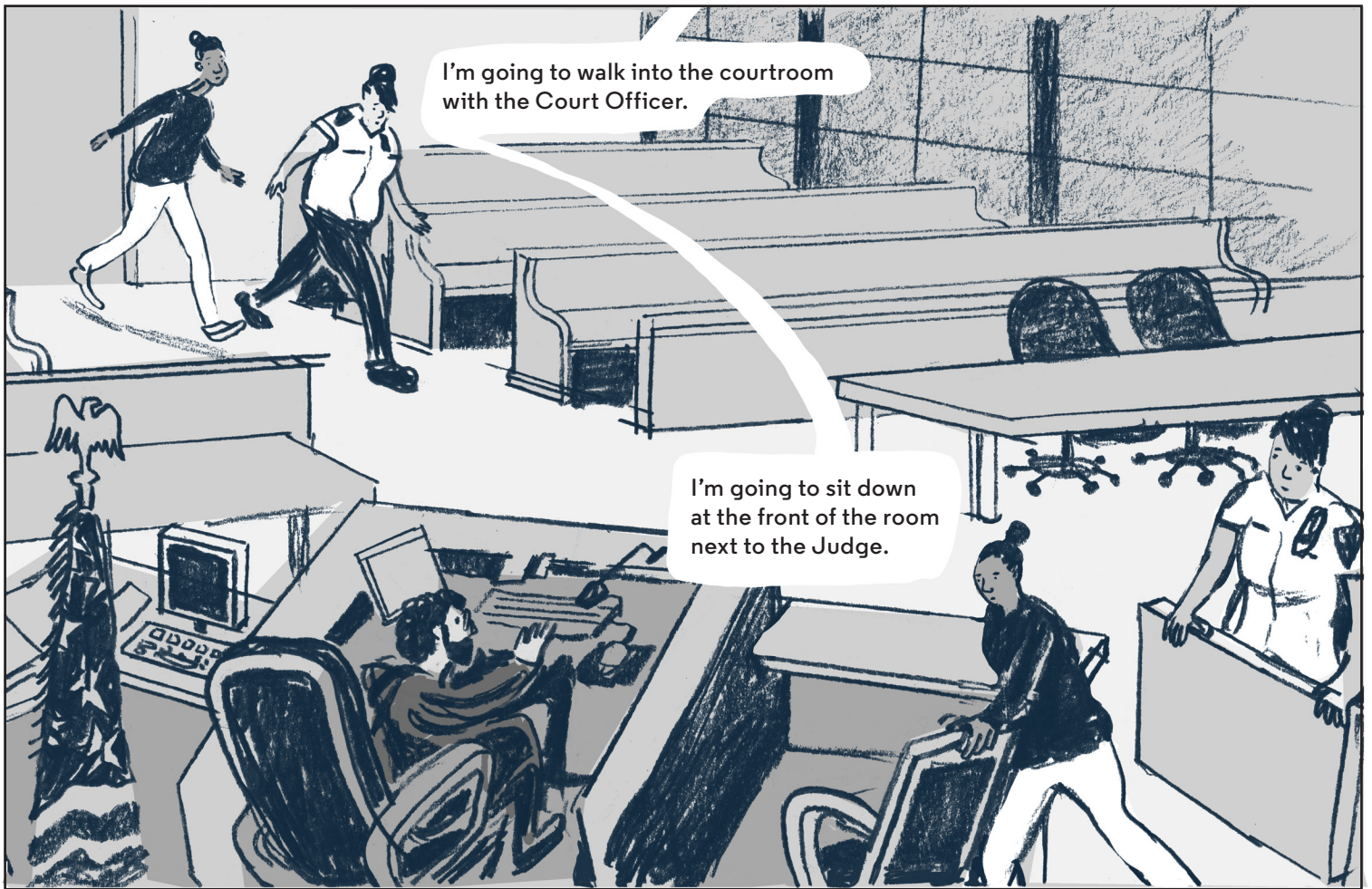
PART 4



Amy & Ari







I'm going to walk into the courtroom with the Court Officer.

I'm going to sit down at the front of the room next to the Judge.



And what happens if you have to use the bathroom?



I hold it in till I explode?



No!

I ask for a break.



She showed me how to do these things with my breathing that helped me calm down when I was stressed out.

Now, breath in from your stomach and hold your breath for three seconds...



She really helped me.



And then I went in to court.



I sat down and the lawyers asked me questions...

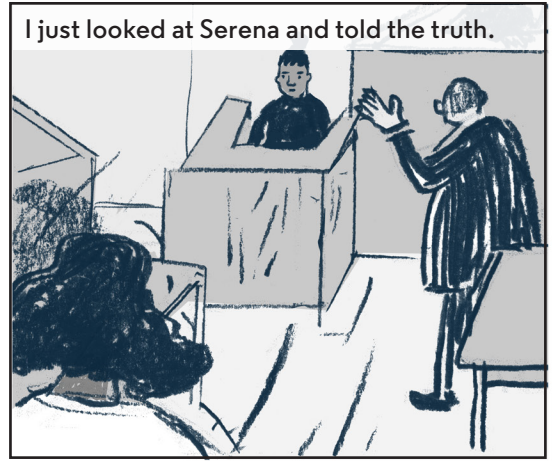


...first the prosecutor...



...and then his lawyer.

So you were home that night?



I just looked at Serena and told the truth.

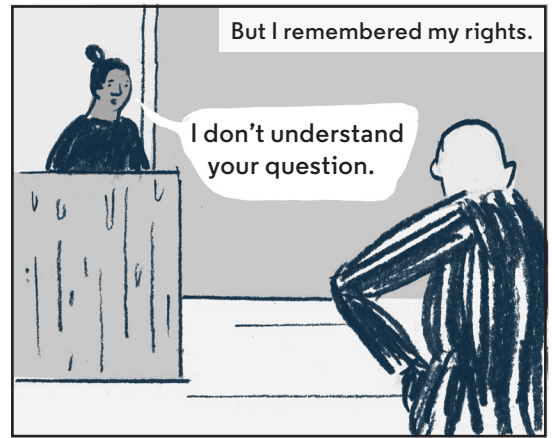


One time the other lawyer tried to confuse me or something.

So, are you saying he was there?



I was so scared. Like, what if I said the wrong thing? I felt sick...



But I remembered my rights.

I don't understand your question.



And then it was over.



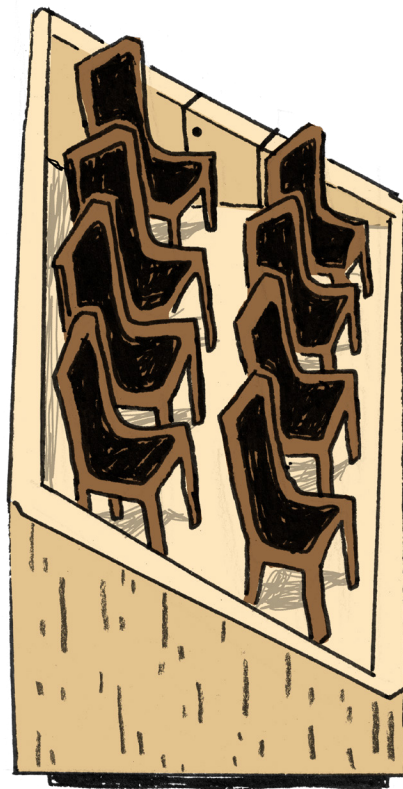
I left.

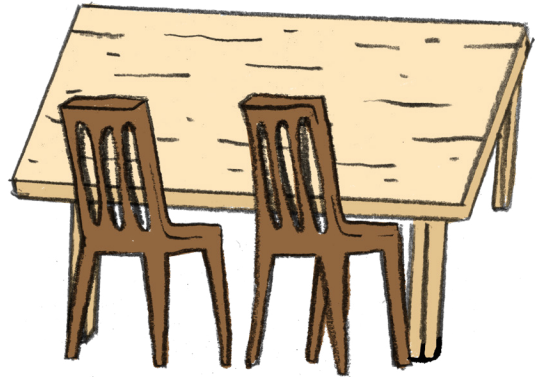
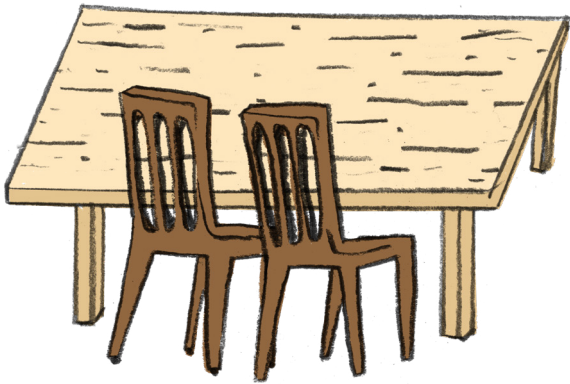
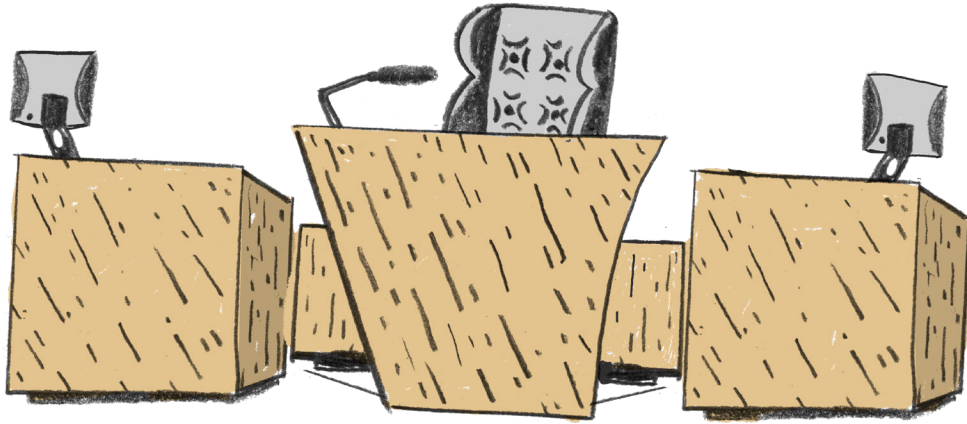


PICTURING COURT

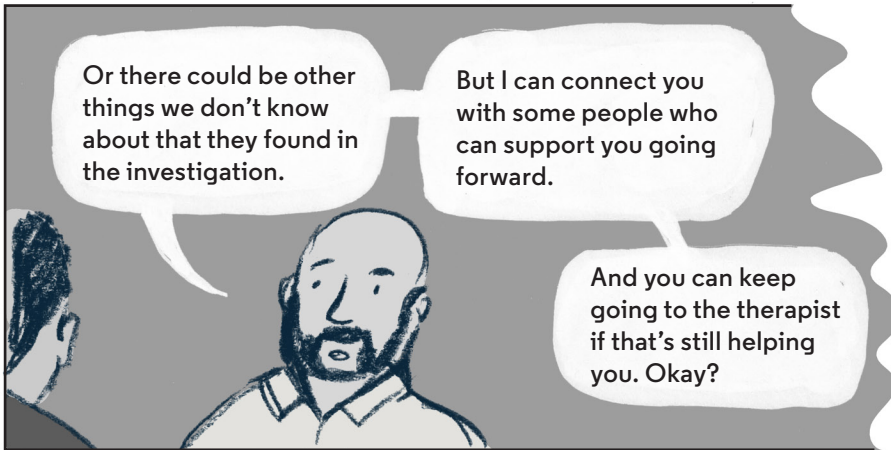
Serena took Amy to see the court room before she had to testify and told her who all the people in the room would be and where they would sit.

Your court room might look different than Amy's, but you can use the drawing below to familiarize yourself with who will be where if you have to go to court.









PLANNING YOUR COURT DAY

Serena showed Amy different things she could do to feel less nervous, and some things she could do to get ready for court.

Serena also encouraged Amy to make a plan for her day at court. If you have to testify, you can use this page to plan for your day in court. It can help you feel calmer and more confident.

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, but wear something a little nicer than usual if you can. Wear something that makes you feel good.
- You'll probably spend a lot of time waiting, so bring something to read, play, or do while you wait.
- If you have a special object that helps you feel calm, bring it with you.

Getting nervous

If you feel nervous, try one of these things:

- Try to picture how you want to react if different things happen. It may sound silly, but picturing things can help you feel calmer.
- Try taking deep breaths in and out a few times. It really helps!
- Tighten your muscles and 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 to court? 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, you can use the list above to help you make your own plan for your day in court.

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:

WHAT'S GOING ON?

Amy had to testify, or go to court to talk about what happened. If your case goes to trial, you might have to testify, too. If that happens, the prosecutor and your advocate can help you to understand what it will be like and get ready.

Ari's case, on the other hand, didn't go to trial. The prosecutor decided not to pursue the case. If that happens, it doesn't mean that the person accused of the crime didn't do it, or that people don't believe you. You can still ask for support from your advocate.

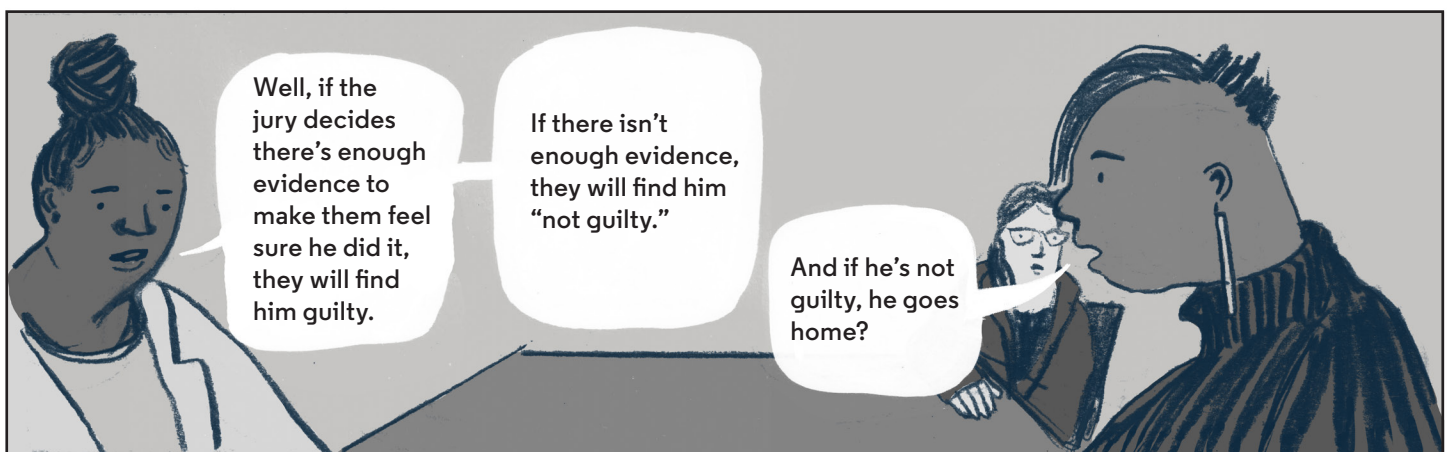
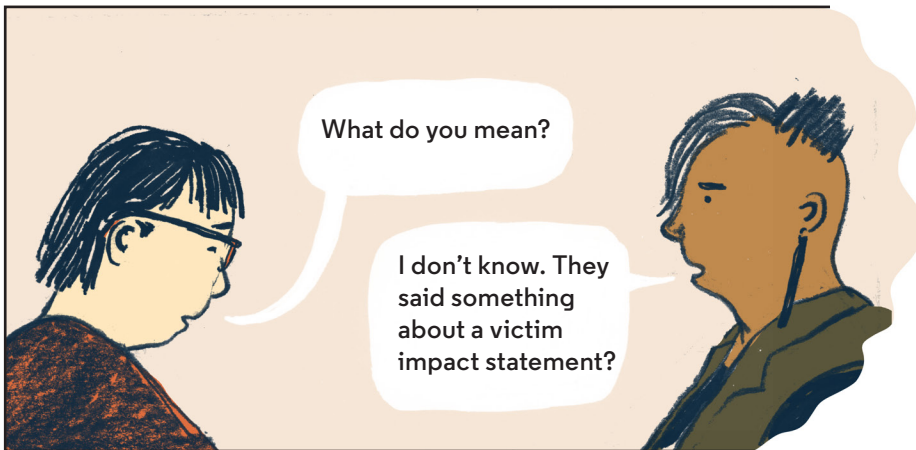
How would you feel if you had to testify?

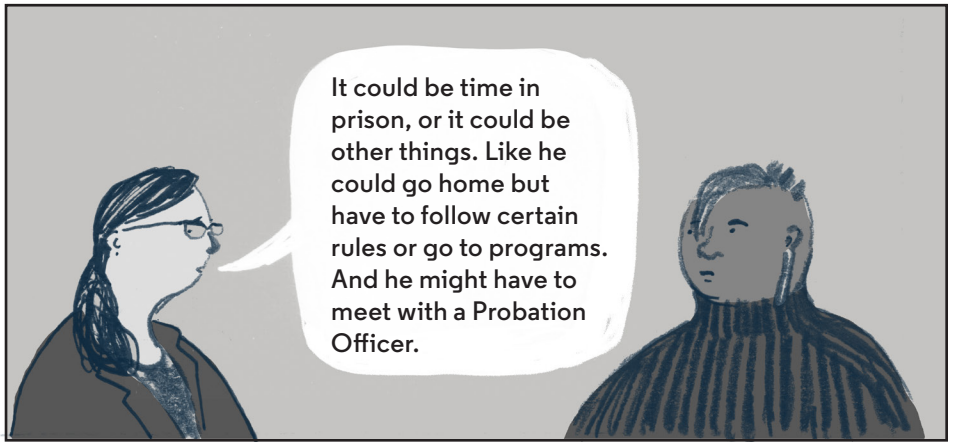
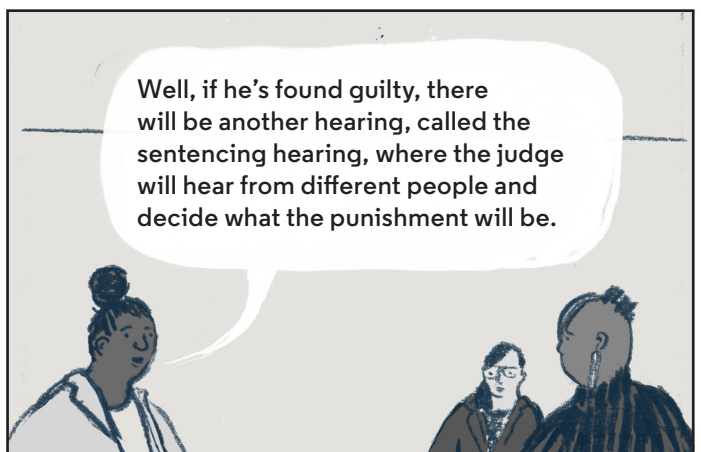
How would you feel if your case didn't go to trial, like Ari's?

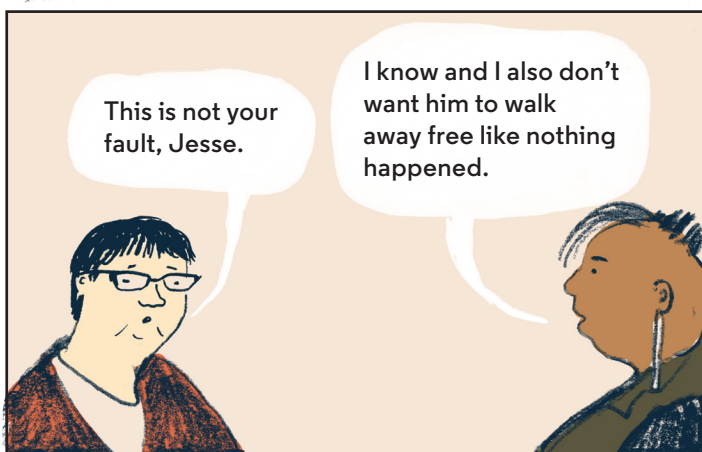
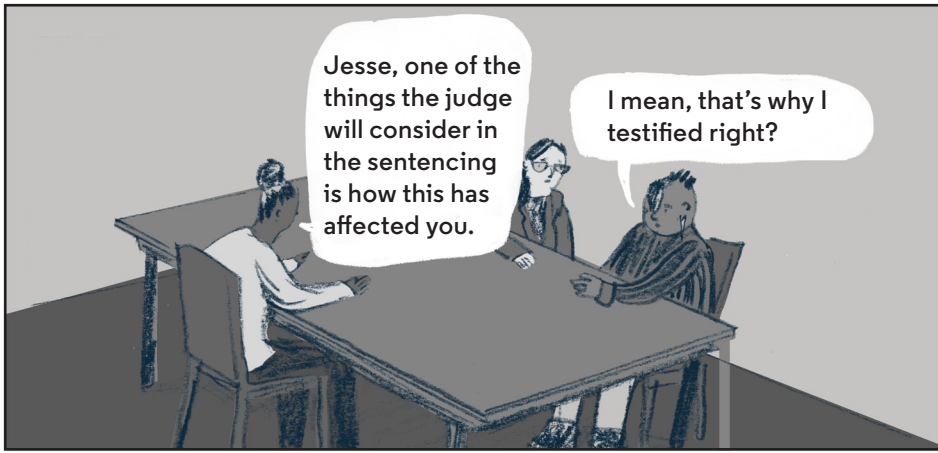
PART 5

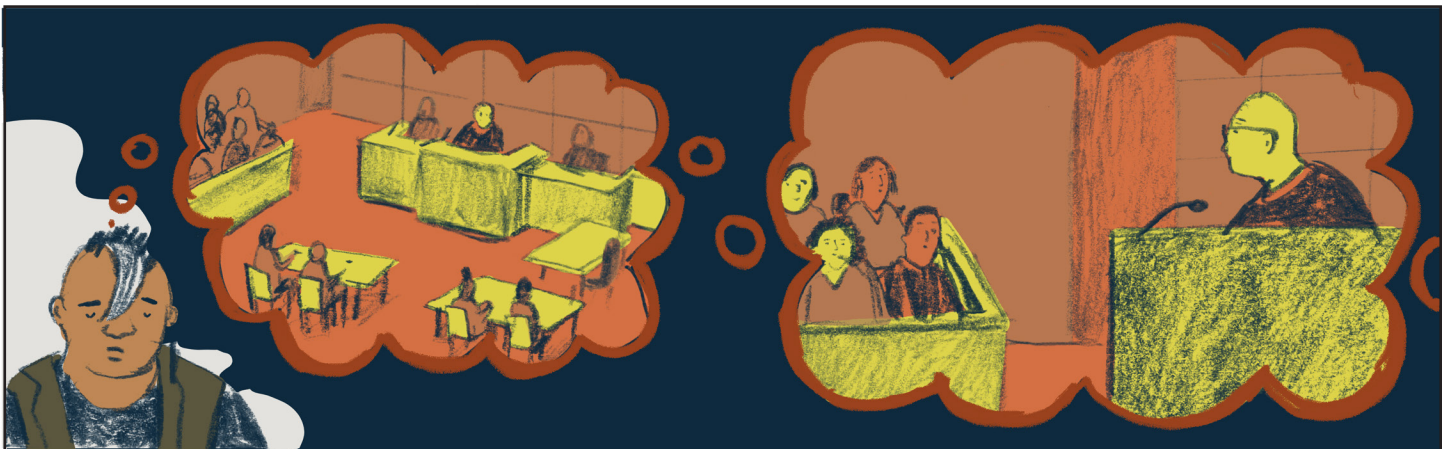
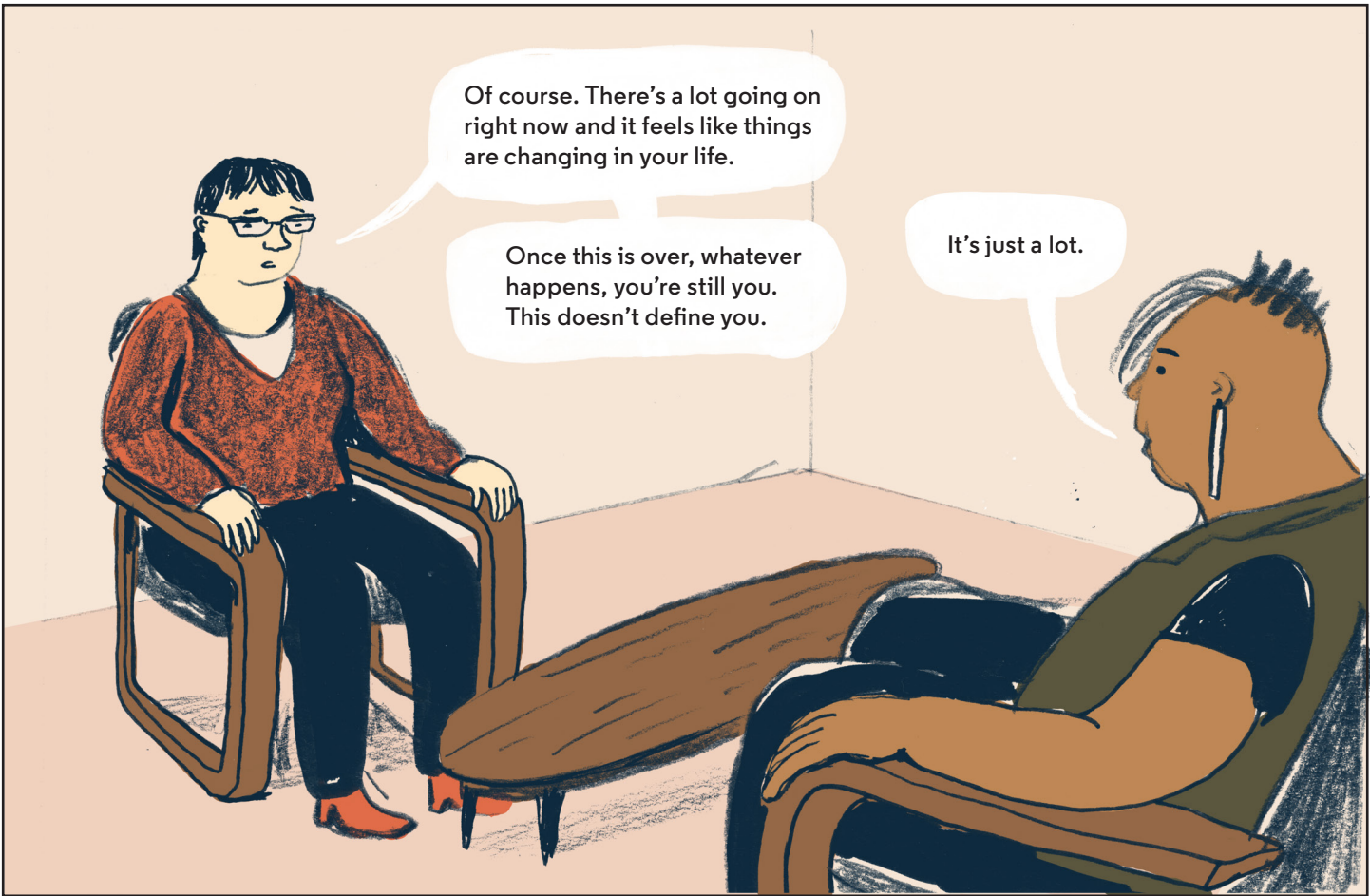


Jesse (Again)







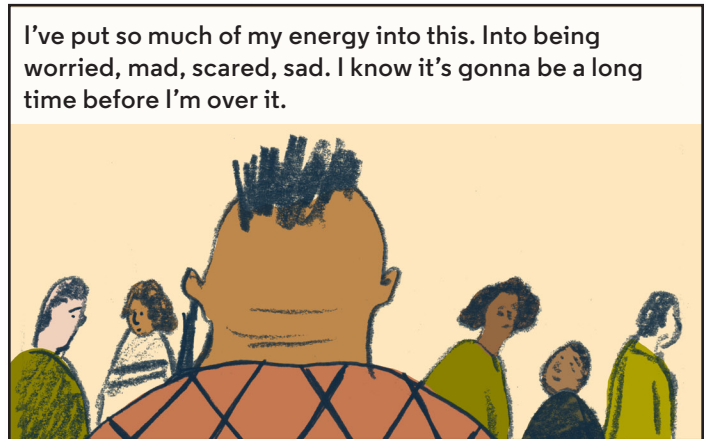


We find the defendant....

Guilty

Not guilty







...I'm Jesse



...I'm Alex



...I'm Jamal



...I'm Ari



...I'm Amy

CIRCLE OF SUPPORT

Alex, Jamal, Jesse, Amy, and Ari had people in their lives who supported them. Their friends, family members, advocates, therapists, and others helped them in different ways.

It can be helpful to remind yourself of the people in your life who you can ask for help.

Who is in your circle of support?



FRIENDS

FAMILY

YOU

AFTERWORD

You might have mixed feelings about what's happening. 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 others in your circle of support.

The Center for Court Innovation’s Child Witness Materials Project is a collaborative effort between the Center for Court Innovation and the Center for Urban Pedagogy, and is supported by cooperative agreement #2016-VF-GX-K011, 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.

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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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Illustration: Ryan Hartley-Smith

Design: Anabelle Pang

The Center for Court Innovation is grateful to the project partners and stakeholders; and the children, caregivers, and justice system practitioners all over the country who contributed to the development of this product.

NCJ 300650

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

