

YOUR CHILD

IS A WITNESS



Information and advice if you are a parent, carer,
or a person accompanying a young witness to court

About this booklet

Witnesses come to court to answer questions about something that happened to them or about something they saw or heard. Some children cope well with being a witness but others can find it stressful. They may feel that they have done something wrong, and need your reassurance. This booklet describes some practical ways to help your child to feel more confident about going to court. It also includes advice on coping with your own feelings and concerns. The book is aimed mainly at those taking care of young witnesses called to court by the Crown Prosecution Service (the prosecution). It may also be useful to parents of witnesses called by the lawyer representing the defendant. If you are the parent of a defence witness, where this booklet suggests contacting the police, you should contact the defence lawyer instead. At the Crown Court, magistrates' or youth courts, the Witness Service can assist both prosecution and defence witnesses.

Use the notes page at the back of this booklet to write in the names, addresses and phone numbers of people who can help prepare your child for going to court.

Arrangements for supporting child witnesses vary in different parts of the country. The police will be able to give advice about the best person to talk to.

It is important that children tell the truth about what happened in court in their own words. When helping your child to prepare for court, please be careful not to rehearse or practise the child's evidence. The case is likely to be dropped if the child appears to have been 'coached'. The police can give you more advice about this.

Contents

Who can help?	4
For further information	5
How can I help?	6
Special Measures	9
Intermediaries	10
Should I go to court?	11
What will happen at the trial?	12
What will happen after the trial?	15
Compensation	16
Useful contacts	17
Available booklets	18
Notes	19

Who can help?

The person who asked your child to attend court should give you their name and phone number. They should tell you when they will contact you.

Young witnesses are entitled to see the courtroom before the trial and to get an explanation of what is expected when they come to court. You can ask the police about what help is available to prepare your child for court.

All Crown Court buildings, magistrates' courts and youth courts have a Witness Service with trained voluntary workers available to help all witnesses and their families. In addition, some areas and courts have special child witness supporters who act as a link between your child and the court and can help prepare your child for court. To find out more visit:

- www.citizensadvice.org.uk/ or call 0300 023 1231

In some areas there are local National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC) child witness support services or additional services provided by organisations such as Victims Support. To find out more visit:

- NSPCC website at www.nspcc.org.uk/ or call on 0808 800 5000, or call
- ChildLine on 0800 1111 or 0808 168 9111.
- Victim Support website at www.victimsupport.org.uk

Local victim services are also a useful source of help and advice to parents and carers. In cases involving young victims of child abuse, the services will normally be able to help (or put you in touch with someone who can help). However, they are not able to work directly with the child in cases where the defendant is a family member.

Local Authority Children and Young People's Services (formerly known as 'social services') may offer support to young witnesses where the defendant is a family member.

If someone is trying to frighten your child or tells your child not to give evidence, tell the police or the person who asked your child to attend court. They will be able to help you.

Further information and case studies can be found at www.youandco.org.uk

For further information

Other publications in the 'Young Witness' series are also available on the GOV.UK website. Many courts have their own booklets giving directions to the court and information about transport, parking and refreshment facilities. You will probably have been sent this information by the person who asked your child to be a witness. If not, you should ask them.

You should make sure you look at the Witness Charter and the Victims Code so that you know what your child is entitled to receive from the Criminal Justice System.

If you are worried that any part of the legal process may be harmful to your child, do not hesitate to ask questions and pass on information about their needs. You should do this as soon as possible. This guide tells you who to contact.

How can I help?

My child has been asked to be a witness. Is there anything I can say or do to help?

When a child has been a victim of a crime or witness to a crime, you can reassure him or her that:

- it is right to tell the police what has happened;
- a witness who tells the truth is not doing anything wrong;
- he or she is not to blame for what someone else may have done;
- witnesses do an important job but they are not responsible for what the court decides.

Some children have unrealistic fears about being punished – or even sent to prison – for having spoken about what happened

Reassure your child that the job of a witness is to tell the truth. A witness who tells the truth is not doing anything wrong and will not be punished.

Coping in court

Your child can ask the judge or magistrates for help at any time during the trial. Remind your child that it is OK to ask for a break, for example if he or she feels upset or needs to go to the toilet.

Listening and answering questions

Your child should listen carefully to each question and give the answer if he or she knows it. If your child does not understand the question or cannot remember the answer, he or she is entitled to tell the judge or magistrates. Your child will not get into

trouble for this. Please reassure them it is OK to ask for questions to be repeated.

Worrying what to say at school or to friends

You can discuss this with your child's teacher. Your child may find it helpful if the teacher realises that he or she is going through a difficult time, but discuss this with your child first.

This is a difficult situation for me – can I get any help?

Many parents and carers need support around this time. The police, Local Authority Children and Young People's Services, Witness Care Unit or child witness supporter will give you details of support schemes in your area.

Remember that feelings are catching

It can be difficult to hide your feelings all the time. But if your child sees that you are angry, upset or worried, the chances are that he or she will start feeling like this too. Reassure your child that you do not blame him or her.

My child has been behaving differently recently. Could it be related to going to court?

It is common for witnesses to feel nervous, but some children feel so worried that it affects their everyday behaviour. Please tell the police, a teacher, and a social worker or child witness supporter (if your child has one) if your child:

- is afraid or angry a lot of the time;
- feels guilty or responsible for the crime; becomes aggressive or unable to concentrate at home or at school;
- shows mixed feelings towards the defendant, such as being angry with them, but is also upset that the defendant may be punished. This can happen if the defendant is a family member or a close friend.

I'm worried about my child. Can they have counselling while waiting to go to court?

If your child is having problems, you can discuss with the police officer, a teacher, social worker or child witness supporter whether he or she might need some special help. Perhaps you want your child to have therapy or counselling. Your child's welfare is of primary importance, so it is up to you and your child to decide whether therapy is necessary. This is not a decision for the police or prosecutor. However, they must be told if the child is going to have therapy before the therapy starts.

Children's evidence is sometimes challenged on the basis that they have received therapy before the trial. Therapy that focuses on making the child feel more confident and on preventive work about staying safe is less likely to affect the criminal case compared to therapy that involves talking about details of the offence.

The prosecutor will advise whether a particular type of therapy may affect the criminal case. However, if you think it is in your child's best interests to go ahead with therapy, you are entitled to make that decision. If your child has therapy before the trial, the therapist cannot guarantee the child complete confidentiality. In certain circumstances, the therapist could be required to inform the court about sessions with the child. However, the court will usually impose reporting restrictions on the media. The therapist should also discuss this with you and your child before therapy starts. Local provisions for therapeutic assistance will vary.

Planning for going to court

If you are concerned about your child's welfare, speak to the person who asked your child to attend court. Many things can be done to help your child feel better about being a witness. There are people who can help.

How long will we have to wait before the trial?

It is official policy to give priority to cases involving child witnesses. Cases are dealt with as quickly as possible, but some take a long time to come to trial. Some Crown Court cases take about a year from the time the defendant is charged to the day the case is completed.

The trial date may be postponed for unavoidable reasons. If you are concerned about the delay or have questions about what is happening, you can ask the police or child witness supporter for information.

Before the trial

No one knows your child better than you do. It is important to give the police any information that might affect your child and their ability to give evidence. Do this as soon as possible. Don't put it off.

Tell the police or child witness supporter:

- about your child's worries and fears;
- your views, and those of your child, about how he or she can best give evidence. The final decision is up to the judge or magistrates, but any information you can give will be helpful;
- if your child is softly spoken or is likely to have a problem being heard in court;
- if your child takes regular medication which might be needed at court, for example an asthma inhaler;
- about the length of your child's attention span. Might your child need a break while giving evidence? If your child is young, would it be better to give evidence in the morning rather than the afternoon?;
- about any special words in your child's vocabulary, for example for parts of the body;
- if your child has particular needs. Ask the police or child witness supporter to make sure that everyone dealing with your child at court is aware of any learning disability or any other particular need;

- if there are dates to avoid in arranging the trial date (such as holidays that are already booked, school exams or religious holidays).

Before the trial, the police or the child witness supporter can arrange for you and your child to look around an empty courtroom, although it may not be the one where the trial will be held. If your child is giving evidence using the TV link, then he or she is entitled to have a practice session on the equipment.

The police, child witness supporter or Witness Care Unit should tell you about:

- whether the prosecution or defence will apply to the court for your child to use a TV link or a screen, and the result of the application;
- arrangements to visit the court before the day of the trial;
- claiming travel expenses for the pre-trial visit to court and for the trial itself;
- arrangements to remind your child, before the trial, of what your child told the police;
- whether your child will be introduced to the lawyers and possibly the judge or magistrates before giving evidence (it is prosecution policy for the prosecutor to be introduced to the child beforehand);
- a suitable waiting area and other facilities at court;
- how to contact the Witness Service at the court; and
- arrangements to keep your child's waiting time at court to a minimum. (You can ask if your child can wait 'on standby' somewhere near the court building.)

Special Measures

If your child is anxious about seeing the defendant at court, or about the defendant watching while they give evidence, tell the police or the person who asked your child to go to court. There are different ways to help your child give evidence. These are called special measures. Almost all young people use one or more special measures while giving evidence.

The special measures are:

Giving evidence via a TV link – your child will give evidence away from the courtroom. A child who gives evidence by a TV link goes into another room usually in the court building (or sometimes away from the court building) with a supporter agreed by the court. Your child will sit in front of a TV. On top of the TV there is a camera which is connected to the court room. Your child will be seen on the TV link by the participants in court. Your child will be able to see the courtroom and the participants in the case.

It may be possible for your child to give evidence and be cross examined in advance of the main trial in front of the judge, lawyers and the defendant only. This evidence will be recorded and played at the trial so that your child may not need to attend court. This measure is only available in a few courts at the moment and will be provided in more courts in the future. The police and WCU will be able to advise you about this.

Screens in the courtroom – preventing your child from seeing the defendant while they are giving evidence. The defendant cannot see your child.

Evidence given in private – if the case involves a trafficking or a sex offence, or someone has been making your child feel worried or frightened about giving evidence then members of the public might not be allowed into the courtroom whilst your child gives evidence. This also applies if the court is satisfied that a person may seek to intimidate your child even if they have not already done so.

Removal of wigs and gowns – worn by lawyers and judges in the Crown Court.

Visually recorded evidence – where the police interview your child using a visual recording and it is played at trial as your child's main evidence. It is usually seen by everyone in the courtroom including the defendant. Your child is allowed to watch the recording again before the trial to help refresh his or her memory.

Use of an intermediary – Intermediaries help your child to communicate with the court. Intermediaries help your child understand the questions they are asked and can help the court understand what your child says when giving evidence. A fuller explanation of the role of an intermediary is set out on page 10.

Aids to communication – your child may use an aid, such as a sign and symbol board to assist them when communicating their answers.

It is very important that young witnesses are asked about which special measures they think will help them the most. Your child may want to give evidence by a TV link, or they may prefer to go into the court room with screens to prevent them seeing the defendant.

Tell the person who asked your child to come to court about your views about using special measures. This person can give you more details about how they work in practice. Ask this person if you have any questions. You have the right to ask for special measures. The court will decide which special measures can be used.

Witness supporter – If the judge or magistrates agree, your child can have someone in the room with him or her while they give evidence by TV link. This person is the witness supporter, and can be a friend or relative who has nothing to do with the trial, or someone appointed by the court. When deciding who the witness supporter should be, the judge or magistrates must consider the wishes of your child. Please be aware that the same person cannot support your child when providing their statement and giving their evidence at court.

If you think a supporter should be with your child while they are giving evidence you should discuss who this should be. It is up to the judge or magistrates to decide whether a supporter will be allowed, but it should be someone who is not a witness and who is not directly involved in the case.

Intermediaries

People at court often use difficult words. Questions may seem long or complicated and can be difficult to understand. An intermediary is someone who can help your child to understand what is said to them at court. They will also help the court understand what your child says.

You can ask for an intermediary to help your child if you are worried that:

- your child might not understand questions at court;
- it would be difficult for your child to say they do not understand;
- the court will not understand what your child says.

An intermediary may also be able to assist if your child has attention difficulties affecting communication, such as ADHD. If you would like an intermediary to help your child, tell the person who asked your child to be a witness. You must do this as soon as possible.

The magistrates or judge will decide whether your child can have help from an intermediary. If this is agreed, the intermediary will:

- meet your child before the trial;
- advise the court how best to communicate with your child;
- sit with your child while they give their evidence;
- help your child understand the questions they are being asked;
- help the people asking your child questions to understand their answers.

Should I go to court?

Am I entitled to be kept informed before the trial?

You are entitled to be kept informed about the progress of the case, but you may also have to make enquiries. The police, the Witness Care Unit or child witness supporter should tell you about:

- whether the defendant is in custody or on bail and if there are bail conditions not to contact your child or other witnesses;
- the date and location of the trial;
- any decision that the case will not go to trial, and the reason for this; and
- any decision to accept a guilty plea to a lesser charge. (However, it is up to the Crown Prosecution Service whether to accept such a plea.)

The Victims Code and the Witness Charter sets out what your child is entitled to.

If you are not a witness yourself

Before deciding whether or not to listen to your child's evidence, try to find out how your child feels about it. Some children are self-conscious and want to protect you from hearing the details of the offence. Others might be reassured if you are there while they give evidence, or if they know that you are waiting for them. It is a good idea to think about your own reactions to hearing the case. If you get upset in court, this could cause additional stress for your child. You might decide to go to court but to stay in the waiting room. Do not be afraid to get advice from the police or child witness supporter before making your decision.

If you do go to court with your child, you can ask a friend to go with you. Someone who is not too emotionally involved in the case may be best able to help you support your child. If you decide to go into the courtroom to watch the trial while your child is waiting to give evidence, you may not be allowed to rejoin your child until he or she has finished giving evidence. This is to avoid any suggestion that you have told your child about what has already been said in court.

If you are a witness

You cannot watch the trial before you give your evidence, so if your child is called first, you cannot be in court at the same time as him or her. If your child would prefer you to be in court while he or she gives evidence, tell the police or child witness supporter.

They will pass this information on to the prosecutor, who may be able to change the order of witnesses. If your child will give evidence first, bring someone with you that your child trusts. This person can wait with your child (or take your child home) while you give evidence.

If one of you has given evidence and the other has to wait until the following day, you will be warned not to discuss the evidence. One of you may even be asked to stay somewhere else overnight so that no one can suggest that you discussed the evidence. Talk to the police about whether this might be necessary in your case, so that you can make arrangements.

What will happen at the trial?

It can be hard to predict what will happen at the trial, as things may change at the last minute. But there are some arrangements for your child that can be made ahead of time.

Waiting

Court staff will do their best to make sure that your child does not see the defendant outside the courtroom. They may be able to arrange for the child to wait in a room away from the public area. The witnesses' waiting room is usually supervised by the Witness Service, which will do all it can to help child witnesses. It may be possible for your child to wait 'on standby' near the court. (You should ask the police or child witness supporter about the waiting arrangements beforehand.)

It is official policy to keep your child's waiting time at court to a maximum of not more than two hours. However, on the day of the trial, delays can occur and some children wait in the court building for quite a while before being called as a witness. It is a good idea to take something along for you both to do, as well as snacks and drinks. A supply of change is useful if there is a drinks machine. Younger children often like to bring a favourite toy or teddy. Older children may prefer to carry something special in their pocket – perhaps something of yours.

Ask the person who asked your child to go to court about arrangements for food and drinks at your court. You might want to bring books or games or music to keep the child occupied if there is a wait.

Observers

All courts (except youth courts) have public seating, so there may be people sitting at the back of the courtroom listening quietly to the witnesses. If the victim of a sexual offence is giving evidence, the prosecution sometimes asks the judge or magistrates to decide if the members of the public should leave the courtroom. It is up to the judge or magistrates to decide whether this will happen and also what reporting restrictions should be placed on the media.

Taking the oath

If your child is 14 or over, he or she will almost always be required to give evidence on oath. If your child has a religion and wants to take an oath on a Holy Book, he or she should tell the usher before going into the courtroom. If your child is under 14, he or she will not be asked to take the oath but to tell the truth. Children who have no religion will be asked to say that they will tell the truth. If your child has any difficulty reading, the usher will say the words first and ask your child to repeat what they have said.

Visually recorded evidence

If the judge or magistrates decide to show the visual recording of your child's interview with the police and/or Local Authority Children and Young People's Services as part of their evidence, your child will not have to repeat what was on the visual recording. Your child should be given the opportunity to view the recording before going to court.

Cross examination

Children whose visually recorded interview is shown to the court will still have to answer questions from the lawyer or lawyers on the other side. If your child is a prosecution witness, this means answering questions from the defence. These questions are called 'cross-examination' and are intended to test what your child says happened. This will occur at the trial if the special measures (see pages 9 and 10) to pre-record the evidence has not been put in place.

If the visual recording is used as part of the evidence, the child usually watches it at the same time as the rest of the court, before questioning begins. If your child might have difficulty concentrating on the recording, please tell the person who asked your child to go to court. Children can have breaks while watching it. Some children do not watch their recording at the same time as the court – they are allowed to watch it earlier, in a less formal way.

The result of the case (the verdict)

After the jury, judge or magistrates have heard all the evidence, they have to decide what they think happened. (In the Crown Court, the jury decide whether the defendant is guilty. In a magistrates' court or youth court, a judge or magistrates are given this task.) Before they can find the defendant guilty they have to be sure that he or she committed the offence they are charged with. Another way of expressing this that you may be familiar with is that the prosecution have to prove the defendant's guilt 'beyond reasonable doubt'.

What will happen after the trial?

If they think that the defendant is not guilty, or if they are not sure that the defendant is guilty, they deliver a verdict of 'not guilty'. The defendant is then usually free to leave the court and bail conditions may no longer apply. In some cases, the jury are unable to reach a decision. Then the prosecution has to decide whether there should be another trial with a new jury at a later date.

Some trials last for several days, so the decision may not be reached on the day that your child gives evidence. Ask the police officer in charge of your child's case to let you know what was decided. If you want to know more quickly, you can call the court. The decision may be reported in the newspapers, but reporters cannot mention your child's name or anything that could lead to the child being identified.

The sentence

If the jury or magistrates reach a 'guilty' verdict, it is up to the judge or magistrates to decide the sentence. In a magistrates' court or youth court, the magistrates decide on the verdict and the sentence. Often the judge or magistrates put off this decision for about four weeks, in order to receive a probation officer's report about the defendant. If the prosecution has information about the effect of the offence on the victim, the probation officer will include this in the report.

After court, it is OK to plan something that your child will enjoy, but on the day many children are tired after giving evidence. Don't promise your child a special present or treat for 'doing well' at court. Being a witness is not about doing well or badly. You can praise your child for telling the court the truth about what happened.

Some children blame themselves for the court's decision, perhaps thinking they were not 'good enough' at giving evidence. A child giving evidence for the prosecution might feel that a 'not guilty' verdict means that the court thought he or she had lied. Reassure your child that telling the truth is what is important. Let the child know that he or she is in no way responsible for what the court decides. The court have to be sure of guilt before convicting and the court's decision may not have depended on whether they thought your child was telling the truth or not.

If the defendant is sent to prison

Prisoners are not allowed to get in touch with victims or victims' families without permission. You can call the National Offender Management Service Victim Helpline if your child has received unwelcome contact, including letters or telephone calls, from a prisoner. You can also tell the Helpline if you are anxious about the possible temporary release, parole or final release of a prisoner.

Feedback and complaints

The Helpline staff will pass on the details to the prison governor, who should then investigate and decide what action to take. The Helpline cannot pass information back to you, but it will confirm in writing that your concerns have been passed on to the governor, who may write later and tell you what action has been taken.

The Helpline number is **0300 060 6699** and the line is open between 9am and 4pm, Mondays to Fridays. An answering machine operates outside these hours. All calls are charged at local rates. Alternatively, email victims.helpline@noms.gsi.gov.uk

Where the defendant is sentenced to one year or more for a sexual or other violent offence, or detained under a hospital order, a Probation Officer will get in touch with you within two months of the sentence and, if you wish, when release is being considered. The purpose is to give you information about the prison system and the length of the prisoner's sentence and any developments in the sentence, if you wish, you may also make known your views when decisions are made about the defendant's eventual release conditions. In carrying out this work, Probation Officers often work closely with organisations supporting victims of crime including Citizens Advice, Victim Support, and other victims' organisations and any social worker who may be in touch with you.

Your feedback can help improve services for other young witnesses. If procedures for your child were handled well, please make this known. You can get information about the level of service you can expect from the Criminal Justice System from the Witness Charter. Information about this is available from the justice pages of GOV.UK.

If your child was a victim of crime, you can find out about the level of service your child should expect from the Criminal Justice System from the Code of Practice for Victims of Crime. The police, the courts and the Crown Prosecution Service must follow the Code of Practice by law. You can find more information about the Code of Practice from the justice pages of GOV.UK.

If you wish to make a complaint, the Code of Practice for Victims of Crime and the Witness Charter contain advice about complaints concerning any agency within the criminal justice system. Information about this is available from the justice pages of GOV.UK.

Compensation

The Criminal Injuries Compensation Scheme

deals with applications for payments to those who have suffered a qualifying injury as a result of a sexual or violent crime. You may be eligible to make a claim for financial compensation on your child's behalf through the Criminal Injuries Compensation Authority.

You can find more information in 'Criminal Injuries Compensation Scheme 2008 – A Guide' which is available on the CICA web site (www.cica.gov.uk). Claim forms can also be obtained from:

Criminal Injuries Compensation Authority
Alexander Bain House
Atlantic Quay
15 York Street
Glasgow G2 8JQ

Phone: 0300 003 3601

If you need help in completing the claim form, you can also ask a local victim support schemes or local Child Witness Support Scheme.

Useful contacts

ChildLine

Freepost 1111
London E1 6BR
Phone: 0800 1111
www.childline.org.uk

Operates a free, 24-hour helpline for children who need counselling, advice or help with any kind of problem.

Children's Legal Centre

University of Essex
Wivenhoe Park
Colchester
Essex CO4 3SQ
www.childrenslegalcentre.com
Email: clc@essex.ac.uk

Offers advice by telephone, letter or email on matters of law and policy affecting children in England and Wales.

VOICE UK

Rooms 100–106
Kelvin House
RTC Business Centre
London Rd
Derby DE2Y 8UP
www.voiceuk.org.uk/
Email: voice@voiceuk.org.uk

Provides advice and support for people with learning disabilities who go to court, and for their families and carers. Produces publications designed to support witnesses with learning disabilities.

Citizens Advice Bureau

Can put you in touch with useful local and national organisations. Look in your phone book for the address of your nearest branch.

NSPCC

The National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC) has local projects supporting child witnesses in some areas in England, Wales and Northern Ireland.

To find out if there is a project in your area, contact your nearest divisional NSPCC office.
Belfast: 02890 351135
Leicester: 0116 276 9999
London: 0207 825 2500

The NSPCC also operates the NSPCC Child Protection Helpline, a free, 24-hour service which provides counselling, information and advice to anyone concerned about a child

at risk of abuse. The Helpline can also respond to child witness enquiries.

Phone: 0808 800 5000

Textphone: 0800 056 0566

Rape crisis centres

Can offer counselling for children who have been raped or sexually abused.

Phone: 0808 8029999

www.rapecrisis.org.uk

Local Authority Children and Young People's Services

Formerly known as 'social services', they offer a variety of help and support. For details of your local social services department, look in your phone book under the name of your local authority.

Victim Support schemes

Offer a variety of help and support, including help with applications to the Criminal Injuries Compensation Authority. Please visit www.victimsinformation.service.org.uk, or call the Victim Supportline on 0845 30 30 900.

The Witness Service

Citizens Advice runs the Witness Service at each Crown, magistrates' and youth court, staffed by a paid co-ordinator and trained voluntary workers. For more information, please visit www.citizensadvice.org.uk

The Witness Liaison Officer

Each court has a named member of staff who, as the Court Witness Liaison Officer, is instrumental in ensuring the consistent and appropriate care of witnesses, including young witnesses, whilst they are at court. The role varies from court to court according to local arrangements made with the Witness Service and Witness Care Unit, and could include:

- familiarisation visits to the court before the trial;
- answering questions about court procedures and facilities;
- demonstrating TV link equipment before the trial in appropriate cases;
- minimising the child's waiting time at court;
- arranging for the child to arrive at and depart from a

side entrance of the court, if local conditions permit;

- separate waiting areas for young witnesses; and
- providing a local information leaflet for those supporting child witnesses.

The Witness Liaison Officer usually works closely with the Witness Service. The Witness Liaison Officer will be put in touch with you by the police.

Witness Care Units

Every area has a Witness Care Unit which acts as a single point of contact for prosecution witnesses. (Sometimes police child protection units continue to deal directly with young witnesses and their families instead of the Witness Care Unit). The Witness Care Officers in these units are responsible for carrying out detailed needs assessments for witnesses and for maintaining a local contact directory of organisations that can provide support. They are also responsible for liaising with the court and Witness Service. The Witness Care Unit will be put in touch with you by the police.

Glossary

Acquittal

A formal direction or finding that the accused is not guilty of a criminal charge.

Adjournment

The temporary stopping of a hearing of a case ordered by the court.

Bail

The release of a suspect from custody until his or her next appearance at the court, sometimes this is subject to restrictions like security being given or regularly reporting to a police station.

Barrister

These are the lawyers who talk to the judge or magistrates.

Charge

A formal accusation against a person(s) by the state.

**CPS
(Crown Prosecution Service)**

The CPS is responsible for prosecuting criminal cases investigated by the police in England and Wales.

Crown Court

A court where criminal proceedings are heard before a judge and a jury.

Entitlement

Services that are provided to the victims of criminal conduct from the relevant service provider.

Magistrates' court

A court where cases are heard by magistrates' or district judges.

Needs Assessment

An evaluation carried out by service providers to determine the kind of support that someone may need following a crime.

Offence

Any Crime punishable in a Crown Court, Magistrates' Court or by an out of court disposal.

Offender

The person who committed the crime.

Out of Court Disposals

Alternatives to prosecutions such as giving the offender a caution, usually for low level crime where a prosecution would not be in the public interest.

Police Bail

Where the Police let a suspect out of the police station but they will have to return to the police station or a court on another day.

Prosecutor

The lawyer who presents the case against the suspect(s).

Sentence

The punishment given to a suspect found guilty.

Suspect

Someone who the police believe may have committed a crime.

Trial

The court process that decides whether someone who is accused of a crime is guilty.

Victims' Services

Organisations providing emotional and practical support to the victims of crime.

Witness Care Units

Units set up across England and Wales to provide information and support to victims and witnesses in cases progressing through the criminal justice system.

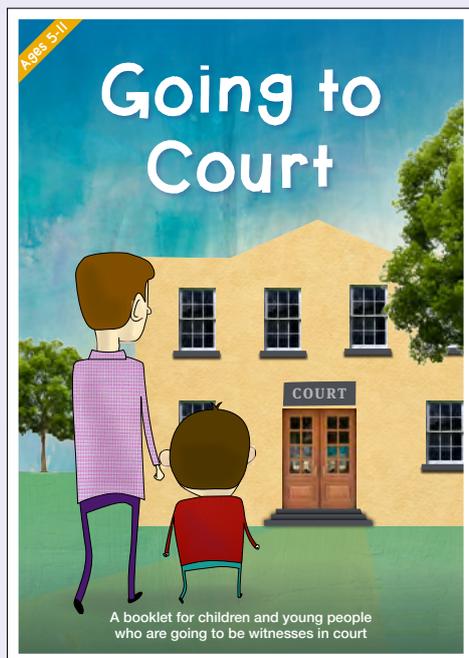
Witness Statement

A written or video account by a witness of facts or details of a crime or an incident.

Available booklets

Going to Court

A booklet for children and young people who are going to be witnesses in court (Ages 5–11)



Going to Court and being a witness

A booklet for young witnesses (Ages 12–17)

