

Witness Service.

Young witnesses

Information for parents, carers and guardians of children and young people going to court



witnessservice.org.uk

Introduction

If you're a parent, carer or guardian of a child or young person who has been called to give evidence in court, you may feel unsure about how best to support them. This is completely understandable.

Some young witnesses cope well with going to court, while others may feel anxious or worried about saying the "wrong" thing.

This leaflet explains what support is available to help you feel more prepared to guide them through the process. Support routes include the Witness Service, the police, the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) and the courts.

Children and young people as witnesses in court

Witnesses under 18 are classed as **vulnerable witnesses** and special measures can be requested to help them give evidence comfortably. These may include pre-recorded interviews, giving evidence via a video link, or using screens in court so they cannot see the defendant.

The courts and court staff want to make sure your child can focus on giving their best evidence. Each case has a Witness Care Officer – a member of police staff who is part of the Witness Care Unit (WCU). The WCU manages the care of victims and witnesses attending court.

You may also be assigned a Family Liaison Officer (FLO) – a police officer who works with families of victims of crimes like fatal accidents, murder or manslaughter. An FLO can give you information about the investigation and updates on the case.

The Witness Service

The Witness Service provides support before, during and after the trial. Once referred to the Witness Service, you'll be assigned a Witness Service supporter to help you through the process. You can make your own referral on the Witness Service website if you've not been referred by the police or Witness Care Unit:

witnessservice.org.uk

If your child lives in, or will be giving evidence at a court in London, you can contact the London Victim and Witness Service:

londonvws.org.uk

The Witness Service can provide support in a number of ways:

Preparing for court

The Witness Service can arrange in-person or virtual pre trial visits so you can see what the courtroom looks like, who's who, where everyone sits, and how the child you support will give evidence.

Our website offers helpful resources, including an interactive courtroom and videos for both younger and older children explaining what to expect at court. Visit the following link to explore these resources: witnessservice.org.uk/support/young-witnesses

Requesting special measures

Special measures may be granted by the court and should be requested in advance via your Witness Care Officer or FLO. They include:

- Pre-recorded witness statements – children and young people sometimes record their evidence at a police station before a trial. This video is played in court.

- If this is the case, they may also have their cross-examination video recorded (sometimes called a 'Section 28' hearing). This is also played on the TV screens in court during the trial.
- Live link video – your child may be able to give evidence from a separate room in the court or another building. Their video would appear on screen in court, but they would only see the person asking them questions.
- Screens or curtains around the witness box so they do not have to see the defendant.
- Removal of gowns and wigs – judges and barristers may do this to make the courtroom less daunting for young witnesses.
- Aids to communication including visual-aid boards, eye-gaze software, dolls, or body-outline drawings.

Attending court

Things to consider if your child is attending court in-person:

- You may be able to use a different court entrance to avoid seeing the defendant or others in the case – check with your Witness Care Officer or Witness Service supporter.
- You'll be able to wait together in a waiting area before they are called to give evidence.
- A lawyer may come and talk with you and your child before they give evidence.
- When it's time to give evidence, an usher will collect them and take them to the courtroom or live link room.
- A Witness Service supporter will accompany your child as they give their evidence.
- Witness Service supporters can answer any questions you have, but they cannot discuss specific details of the case.

If your child is especially anxious about giving evidence, please speak to your Witness Care Officer or Witness Service supporter for advice on how to help them give their best evidence.

Practical tips for the day in court

If your child needs to attend court on a specific day, it helps to know what to bring and what to expect. Here are some tips for managing the day:

- **Transport and travel** – the court’s address details are on the letter asking your child to give evidence. To give yourself enough time to arrive, you may want to check for parking or transport routes in advance.
- **Food and drink** – not all courts have vending machines so you may wish to bring snacks and a drink with you.
- **Waiting for long periods of time before your child gives evidence** – you may wish to bring a book, games console, mobile phone, and any chargers or headphones.
- **Expenses for attending court** – you may have extra costs such as childcare, parking, refreshments, or loss of earnings. You can claim expenses if you’re a parent, carer or guardian of a witness aged under 18, or a ‘person with permission to claim’, because you’re helping a witness to attend court.

Let your Witness Care Officer know if you cannot afford to travel to court. It’s important to be honest about your situation.

After giving evidence

The Witness Service can help you after your child has given evidence. You'll be taken to a waiting area where your child can talk about their experience with a Witness Service supporter. The Witness Service can also refer your child to suitable services or organisations for further support.

If your child is a prosecution witness, you'll usually be informed of the trial outcome by the officer in the case or the Witness Care Unit. If they're a defence witness, you can ask the defence lawyer.

As a parent, carer or guardian you're not expected to have all the answers. If you need support or information, speak to the police officer in charge of your case, your Witness Care Officer, Family Liaison Officer, or any other supporter you're in touch with.

Useful links

Witness Service

Information for parents, guardians and carers:
witnessservice.org.uk/support/young-witnesses/information-for-parents-guardians-and-carers

Victim Support

My Support Space guide – supporting your child if they're going to court to give evidence:
mysupportspace.org.uk

Children and young people going to court:
victimsupport.org.uk/you-co/going-to-court

Gov.uk

Young witness booklet for 5 to 11-year-olds – information about what a witness does, what a courtroom looks like and who can help them:
gov.uk/government/publications/young-witness-booklet-for-5-to-11-year-olds

Young witness booklet for 12 to 17-year-olds – information on what it means to be a witness, how to give evidence and the help they can get:
gov.uk/government/publications/young-witness-booklet-for-12-to-17-year-olds

The Witness Service

The Witness Service helps people feel **informed**, **supported** and **more confident** when giving evidence in court.

We provide **free, independent** support for both prosecution and defence witnesses in every criminal court in England and Wales.

We also support bereaved family members and friends, and family members of witnesses who are attending court.

The Witness Service does not support professional or expert witnesses.

For information and support, contact us by:

- calling the Referral and Information Centre:
0300 332 1000 (English)
0300 330 1180 (Cymraeg/Welsh)
- using BSL: 020 3830 2112 (New Divert)
or 0300 330 2123
- online: witnessservice.org.uk

To find out how you can volunteer with the Witness Service, visit

witnessservice.org.uk/about/volunteer

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