



Ministry
of Justice

The Victims' Code: u18s

Young victims of crime: Understanding the support you should get



If you're a victim of crime, support and information is available to help you get through it.

The Victims' Code is a Government document that tells you what support and information victims of crime in England and Wales should get from criminal justice agencies. These are organisations like the police and the courts. The Victims' Code has a special section for people who are under 18 because they should get extra support.

Telling the police about the crime

You can tell the police about a crime by phone, online or by going to the police station. The police should give you information so you know what happens after you've told them about the crime and what support you should get next.

Unless you say you don't want this, the police will give your contact details to a charity that gives help to victims. Someone from the charity will get in touch with you to offer their help or support.

You can have an adult stay with you while the police ask you questions about what happened. This could be your parent or family friend but they need to be over 18 years old.

You may be asked to make something called a witness statement. This is when you say what happened when the crime took place like what time it was and where you were. The police will ask you if you also want to make a Victim Personal Statement (VPS). This is when you say how the crime has made you feel and how it has changed things for you. The VPS lets you tell the judge and others in the court room how you feel about what happened to you.

You don't have to make a VPS if you don't want to, but if you do choose to make one, it can be made at any time before the case goes to court. Once you have made a VPS and signed it, you can't take it back or change it but you can write another one to give more information to the police and courts.

You will be asked if you would like to read your VPS out in court if the suspect is found guilty. You do not have to do this if you don't want to and can ask for somebody else to read it out for you instead. If you don't want your VPS to be read out in court at all, the court will still look at it before they decide what punishment to give to the suspect.



Knowing what's happening

The police should get in touch with you or your parents to let you know how they are looking into the crime and whether anyone has been arrested or charged for the crime.

You can tell the police how often you want to hear from them about the investigation and how you would like to be contacted.

ZAHRA

Zahra, 15, who was sexually abused, told the police about what had happened.

"I had a great police officer, who explained what was happening and why, which meant that the whole time I knew what was going on."

Going to court

If your case does not go to court, you should be told why not.

If there is a trial, you may be asked to be a witness in court, this means you will have to speak in court to tell them what happened.

If you are a witness at court, you should be told about what this means for you and should be kept up to date with what's happening. This includes:

- information about where and when the court hearings will take place
- whether the suspect has been allowed to go home until the court date or is being held in prison

Also:

- you may be able to visit the court before the day of the trial if you want
- someone from the Witness Care Unit should contact you before you go to court to answer all your questions about going to court and to help you until the case is finished

You can watch a video about being a witness at www.gov.uk/going-to-court-victim-witness

ZAHRA

"I went to the court a week before the trial and it was so helpful. I met the court usher who would actually be with me on the day which took away some of the stress of meeting some random person on the actual day."



Being a witness

If you go to court as a young witness in a trial you may be able to use "special measures" to help make it easier for you to tell the court about the crime. Special measures are things like:

- having a screen around the witness box so that you don't have to see the suspect or their family when you are answering questions
- being able to give evidence by live video-link so you don't have to be in the same room as where the trial is taking place
- the judge and lawyers remove their wigs and gowns to make you more comfortable
- having someone, called an intermediary, be with you in court to help you understand the questions you are being asked

You can also ask people who work at the court if you can wait in an area away from the suspect and their friends and family.

ZAHRA

"The usher showed me the court room and video link room which made me less worried and less nervous. The barrister was really nice, they asked if I wanted them all to wear wigs or not and they let me choose, which was really important as it made me feel like I had some control over what was happening. The barrister even showed me how he looked without his wig and talked to me about what he was going to say and do."



The judgment

If the suspect is found guilty, you will be told what the sentence (their punishment) means.

Sometimes the suspect is allowed to appeal the sentence. This is when they ask for the judge's decision to be changed or for the sentence to be reduced. If this happens, you should be told where and when the court will listen to the appeal.

ZAHRA

"The offender was found guilty and went to prison, but it took one month before he was sentenced. The sentence was confusing to me but my witness care officer was great at explaining what it meant."



After the trial

If you've been a victim of a sexual or violent crime, and the suspect is sent to prison for more than 12 months, you will be able to join the Victim Contact Scheme. Victims on this scheme can get updates on what happens to the suspect after they go to prison and can give their thoughts on any rules the suspect must follow when they come out of prison. If you are under 18, your parent or guardian can decide to use this service to get updates and to pass on your views.



ZAHRA

"Before the offender came out of prison my probation Victim Liaison Officer came to see me to talk to me about the rules for the prisoner's release and explained that he would need to report to the probation service regularly. We also drew a map showing places where I would not want him to go, based on where I live and where I often go. My Victim Liaison Officer explained that if these were agreed to, he would not be able to go into those areas.

It was good as the Victim Liaison Officer didn't just tell me what they were doing, they let me be a part of it and helped me make decisions which were really helpful."



Restorative Justice

As a victim you may be able to take part in Restorative Justice. This is when you have contact with the offender so that both of you can find a way forward and build a more positive future. It gives you a chance to tell them how the crime has affected you so they can understand the impact of their crime. The offender is also able to say why they did the crime and say sorry if they want to. Both you and the offender need to agree to this before it happens. You do not have to take part in Restorative Justice but you will be given lots of support if you decide to write to or meet the offender.

GARY

Gary, 15, attended a Restorative Justice meeting with the offender who had mugged him:

"At first it felt strange to be so close to the offender. The officer who was there was a big help. Each person had a chance to speak. My family and I talked about how we were affected and so did the guy who mugged me. As he explained what happened and why- basically it was down to drugs, drugs, drugs - our anger went away. We all signed an agreement at the end, which included suggestions and changes that would improve the life of the offender and (hopefully) stop him committing more crimes in future.

I am glad we attended the conference. The great thing about it was that the offender got to hear what it was like for me and was very sorry. We too got to see into his life and understood better what had driven him to crime."



Not happy with the support?

If you feel you are not getting the support the Victims' Code says you should, you can complain to the organisation which you don't think has supported you properly (for example the police or the Crown Prosecution Service). Every organisation has a complaints process to help you do this. Your complaint should be handled quickly and you should get a reply from them within ten working days.

If you are still unhappy with their reply, you can complain via your Member of Parliament to someone called the Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman (www.ombudsman.org.uk) whose job is to make sure that organisations give the help they should to victims.

If you are a victim of a violent crime, you might be able to get some money, called financial compensation. The Criminal Injuries Compensation Authority arranges these payments. Your parent or guardian can apply for compensation on your behalf – visit www.gov.uk/claim-compensation-criminal-injury for more information.

If you need this leaflet in an alternative format, for example in large print, please call **+44 (0)203 334 3555** or email general.queries@justice.gsi.gov.uk.

Watch Lucy's story on **YouTube** <http://www.youtube.com/user/MinistryofJusticeUK>
or read the full Victims' Code on:

www.gov.uk