

**Know the Rules:
Just in Case You...**

***Personal Safety Tips for
Teens***

***Excerpted with permission from the National
Center for Missing and Exploited Children***

Know the Rules: Just in Case You...

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Foreword

Did You Know that...

- **teenagers 12-17, especially GIRLS, are the most victimized segment of the population in the United States?**¹ Everybody thinks it happens to little kids. Well, it doesn't. It happens to you and your friends and kids you know at school. Sometimes it happens and nobody finds out because no one talks about it. That's WRONG. If it happens to you, talk about it with an adult you trust.
- **adults who abduct and molest kids, mainly do so for two reasons?** Those reasons are for control and sex.

Here Are Some Facts

- Teenagers and girls are among the most frequent victims of sexual attacks.²
- Two-thirds of imprisoned sexual assault offenders reported that their victims were younger than the age of 18.³
- Sixty-one percent of all rape victims are younger than 18.⁴
- Thirty-two percent of all rape victims are 11-18 years of age.⁵
- The average victim of abduction and murder is an approximately 11-year-old girl who is described as a "low-risk," "normal" kid from a middle-class neighborhood with a stable family relationship who has initial contact with an abductor within a quarter of a mile of her home.⁶

What Are the Rules?

- **NEVER GO OUT ALONE.**
- **ALWAYS TELL AN ADULT WHERE YOU ARE.**
- **SAY NO IF YOU FEEL THREATENED.**

¹ *Bureau of Justice Statistics Sourcebook of Criminal Justice Statistics—1996*. Washington, D.C.: Office of Justice Programs, U.S. Department of Justice, pages 210-211.

² Ibid.

³ *Sex Offenses and Offenders*. Washington, D.C.: Bureau of Justice Statistics, Office of Justice Programs, U.S. Department of Justice, February 1997, page iii.

⁴ *Rape in America: A Report to the Nation*. Arlington, Virginia: National Victim Center, April 23, 1992, page 3.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Kenneth A. Hanfland, Robert D. Keppel, and Joseph G. Weis. *Case Management for Missing Children Homicide Investigation: Executive Summary*. Olympia, Washington: Office of the Attorney General State of Washington and U.S. Department of Justice's Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, May 1997, page 2.

This package was designed as a supplement to the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children's *Know the Rules* campaign. For additional resources, please contact

Crisis Numbers:

National Center for Missing and Exploited Children **1-800-THE-LOST
(1-800-843-5678)**

A 24-hour, toll-free hotline to report and/or receive sightings of missing and sexually exploited children (www.missingkids.com).

National Runaway Switchboard **1-800-621-4000**

A confidential, 24-hour, toll-free hotline that assists runaway and homeless youth in communications with their families and other service providers. The National Runaway Switchboard is supported through a grant from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' Family Youth Services Bureau.

Childhelp USA **1-800-4-A-CHILD**

A 24-hour, toll-free, confidential hotline offering information about the treatment and prevention of child abuse.

Materials and Information:

National Victim Center **1-800-FYI-CALL**

Provides information referrals and materials free of charge to victims of violent crime. Distributes safety information and maintains an extensive list of community resources assisting in the battle against victimization.

Girl Power **1-800-729-6686**

A public education campaign designed to encourage and empower adolescent girls to make the most of their lives. Many free products are available for girls to use or distribute in their communities (www.health.org/gpower).

Girls Incorporated **1-317-634-7546**

Organizes programs in thousands of communities nationwide to educate girls and develop their capacity to be self-sufficient and responsible citizens. Also serves as a vigorous advocate for girls, focusing on their special needs.

National Clearinghouse on Alcohol and Drug Information **1-800-729-6686
TDD 1-800-487-4889
Se Habla Español**

Provides the most current and comprehensive information about substance abuse prevention. They distribute the latest studies, surveys, videocassettes, and materials from government agencies and national substance abuse prevention programs (www.health.org).

Just in Case You Are Thinking About Running Away

Running away can be a frightening experience — for both you and your parents. A runaway becomes vulnerable as soon as he or she leaves home — potentially falling victim to drugs, drinking, crime, sexual exploitation, pornography, and/or prostitution.

If you are thinking about running away, **DON'T**. First, identify people who can assist you. Talk about your problems and concerns with your parents, friends, teachers, a mental health professional, a clergy member, or other trusted adult. Don't hesitate to seek the assistance of a trained counselor or professional. To identify qualified professionals in your area contact the local Department of Social Services, Family Services, or other public or private agencies that help families. Also, members of the clergy, school personnel, or the law enforcement community can direct you to available services and resources. For more information on finding counselors see "Just in Case You Need Professional Help" on page 15.

Remember, there is a solution to every problem, and you need to keep asking until you get the help you need to safely resolve your situation.

Second, if you need to leave your home environment, seek out a safe haven in your community. In addition to local resources, you can contact the National Runaway Switchboard (NRS) at 1-800-621-4000 to identify runaway shelters and other services available to you.

If you have run away, NRS can help provide support services and even transportation home if you so desire.

Once home, try to resolve the problems that prompted you to leave in the first place. If you are unable to deal with family or personal problems effectively, seek the assistance of a trained counselor or professional.

Just in Case You Want to Better Protect Yourself from Rape and Assault

There isn't a perfect way to protect yourself against rape or assault, but the concepts noted below have worked for many people.

You Have the Right to Set Sexual Limits You may have different limits with different people, and your limits may change. It's a good idea to know what you want or don't want before you end up in the back seat of a car.

Communicate Those Limits Get those limits across to the other person. E.S.P. doesn't work.

Trust Your Feelings If you feel that you are being pressured into unwanted sex, you are right.

Pay Attention to Behavior That Doesn't Seem Right

- Someone sitting or standing too close who enjoys your discomfort.
- Power stares — looking through you or down at you.
- Someone who blocks your way.
- Someone speaking in a way or acting as if he or she knows you more intimately than is appropriate.
- Someone who grabs or pushes you to get his or her way.
- Someone who doesn't listen or disregards what you are saying, like "NO."

Be Assertive

- Get angry when someone does something to you that you don't want.
- Act immediately with some kind of negative response. (You may want to practice this by yourself or with friends.)
- Stand up for yourself—it's OK to be rude to someone who's sexually pressuring you, even if it hurts their feelings. After all, they aren't paying attention to your feelings.

Just in Case You Have Been Victimized

- If you have been physically or sexually injured, seek appropriate medical attention.
- Notify the police, sheriff's office, or other local law enforcement agency. Make sure they notify other appropriate agencies such as child protection, youth services, child abuse.
- Tell your parents and/or close friends. It will help to have the support of caring individuals during this difficult time.
- Consider the need for counseling or therapy. To ignore the incident, "sweep it under the rug," or act as if it didn't happen isn't going to help you deal with the exploitation. In deciding what counselors to use, look for someone who's experienced in cases of sexual victimization. Ask about the number of teenagers they have counseled.

For information on finding counselors see "Just in Case You Need Professional Help" on page 15.

Being overwhelmed with feelings and questions following a sexual assault is normal. It's difficult to figure out what to do and who to ask for help. The decisions to be made after a sexual assault are difficult ones. There are no right answers, but the most important consideration is you.⁷

⁷ Jennifer J. Fay and Billie Jo Flerchinger. *Top Secret: Sexual Assault Information For Teenagers Only*. Seattle, Washington: King County Sexual Assault Resource Center, 1988, page 27.

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Just in Case You Have a Friend Who Has Been Victimized

Your support as a friend can make a big difference to someone who has been sexually assaulted.

Let Your Friend Know That You Want to Listen It doesn't matter so much what you say, but more how you listen.

- Find time to be alone with him or her.
- Let him or her talk; don't interrupt.
- Show interest in what he or she says by sitting close, facing him or her, and looking at him or her.
- Nod your head occasionally to let him or her know that you are still with him or her and listening.
- You may feel nervous about stalls and silences. They are OK; just let them happen.
- If he or she needs help to continue talking, try repeating back the things he or she has said.

Believe Your Friend People rarely make up stories about sexual assault.

Let Your Friend Know That You Care This may be the first time that your friend has ever told anyone about the sexual assault. Give whatever expression of sympathy is comfortable. Some that have worked for other teens include

- "I said, 'It must have been tough (frightening).'"
- "I cried with her."
- "I reached out and touched her hand and put my arm around her shoulder. (I was hesitant to touch her at first because she was talking about touch as a bad experience, but it worked out.)"
- "I didn't know what to say, but then I remembered my friend was in trouble and found the right words."

Reassure Your Friend That He or She Isn't to Blame Blaming questions such as, "Why didn't you scream?" or "Were you hitchhiking?" aren't helpful. Instead you might say, "It's difficult to scream when you are frightened." or "Hitchhiking is risky, but you were asking for a ride, not a rape."

Let Your Friend Be In Control of Who Knows About the Sexual Assault Keep whatever she says between you and maybe a trusted adult such as a teacher or a mom. "I told two friends and asked them not to tell anyone. One friend didn't tell anyone, but my best friend told my classmates and rumors were spread around school. People treat me different — either like I did something wrong or they treat me special like I have a real problem. I don't feel like going to school anymore."

If Your Friend Is a Victim of Incest Being a friend means telling someone who can do something about it. You might tell a trusted adult such as a parent, teacher, or counselor. Trained people who work at rape crisis centers or counseling agencies for teens also

know what to do. Child Protective Services or the police can be called since incest is against the law.

Note: Take care of yourself too. Hearing about the sexual assault of a friend is upsetting. Sometimes people, as they are recovering from rape, reject those friends who were most helpful at their time of crisis. You may become the rejected friend, because you are a clear reminder of the rape your friend is trying to forget. Most likely if you give your friend time and space, he or she will return to the friendship.

Just in Case You Are Online

Whatever it's called, millions of people are now connecting their personal computers to telephone lines so that they can "go online." Traditionally, online services have been oriented towards adults, but that's changing. An increasing number of schools are going online and, in many homes, children are logging on to commercial services, private bulletin boards, and the Internet.

The Benefits of the Information Highway The vast array of services that you currently find online is constantly growing. Reference information such as news, weather, sports, movie and music reviews, and encyclopedias are readily available online. Users can conduct transactions such as shopping online. Millions of people communicate through electronic mail (E-mail) with family and friends around the world, and others use the public message boards to make new friends who share common interests. As an educational and entertainment tool users can learn about virtually any topic, take a college course, or play an endless number of computer games with other users or against the computer itself. User computing is enhanced by accessing online thousands of shareware and free public domain software titles.

Most people who use online services have mainly positive experiences. But, like any endeavor — traveling, cooking, or attending school — there are some risks. The online world, like the rest of society, is made up of a wide array of people. Most are decent and respectful, but some may be rude, obnoxious, insulting, or even mean and exploitative.

Teens get a lot of benefit from being online, but you can also be targets of crime and exploitation in this as in any other environment.

Putting the Issue in Perspective Although there have been some highly publicized cases of abuse involving computers, reported cases are relatively infrequent. Of course, like most crimes against teens, many cases go unreported, especially if a teen is engaged in an activity that he or she doesn't want to discuss with a parent. **The fact that crimes are being committed online, however, isn't a reason to avoid using these services.** To stop using them would be like forgoing attending college because students are sometimes victimized on campus. A better strategy is to learn how to be "street smart" in order to better safeguard yourself in any potentially dangerous situation.

What Are the Risks? There are a few risks for teens who use online services. You are particularly at risk because you often use the computer unsupervised and because you are more likely than younger children to participate in online discussions regarding companionship, relationships, or sexual activity. Some risks are

- Exposure to inappropriate material. One risk is that you may be exposed to inappropriate material of a sexual or violent nature.
- Physical molestation. Another risk is that, while online, you might provide information or arrange an encounter that could risk your safety or the safety of other family members. In a few cases, pedophiles have used online services and bulletin boards to gain a teen's confidence and then arrange a face-to-face meeting.

- Harassment. A third risk is that you might encounter E-mail or bulletin board messages that are harassing, demeaning, or belligerent.

Rules for Online Safety

- I won't give out personal information such as my address, telephone number, parents' work address/telephone number, or the name and location of my school without my parents' permission.
- I will tell my parents right away if I come across any information that makes me feel uncomfortable.
- I will never agree to get together with someone I "meet" online without first checking with my parents. If my parents agree to the meeting, I will be sure that it's in a public place and bring my mother or father along.
- I will never send a person my picture or anything else without first checking with my parents.
- I won't respond to any messages that are mean or in any way make me feel uncomfortable. It isn't my fault if I get a message like that. If I do I will tell my parents right away so that they can contact the online service.
- I will talk with my parents so that we can set up rules for going online. We will decide upon the time of day that I can be online, the length of time I can be online, and appropriate areas for me to visit. I won't access other areas or break these rules without their permission.

Just in Case You Are Babysitting

Carefully screen the families for whom you babysit. Recommendations from friends and family help. If allowed in your state, check with law enforcement to see if anyone in the home has a criminal record or history of committing crimes against children.

Be sure to interview the family before agreeing to babysit. While at the interview, watch to see how the children and parents interact.

When Babysitting Arrive at least 15 minutes before the parents depart. Know exactly where the parents will be and how you can reach them. Write down the address and telephone number of your location. Be sure to ask for their list of emergency telephone numbers including the children's doctor; the police department; the fire department; an ambulance service; the poison control center; and a friend, neighbor, or relative who can be called on to assist in case the parents aren't reachable.

Carefully go over family rules and daily routines, paying special attention to eating and sleeping arrangements. Ask for a tour of the house. Identify where the first-aid equipment is located and all doors and possible exits. Also discuss, while the children are present, family rules regarding television, online computer use, snacks, bedtime, and playmates. Be sure to determine if the children are allowed to talk on the telephone or play with friends while you are there.

While the Parents Are Gone be sure to

- Lock all doors when the parents leave.
- Carefully watch the children while they are awake to ensure that they stay away from dangerous objects or chemicals and are protected from household accidents.
- Devote your full attention to babysitting. Don't invite anyone over while you are babysitting, nor leave the children alone in the house at any time.
- Stay awake once the children go to sleep and regularly check on them.
- Minimize the number of people who know that you are alone with the children. If the telephone rings, don't tell the caller that the parents are gone. Tell the caller that the parents are unavailable, and ask the caller to leave a message. Don't open the door to anyone unless the parents have given prior permission. Again, tell them that the parents are unavailable and ask to take a message.
- Watch the children carefully, especially when in a public place. Don't permit them to wander. If something seems suspicious when you return to the home such as a broken window or door, immediately call the police from another location.

Upon Leaving the Home Once the parents return to the home, tell them if anything unusual happened including any unexpected telephone calls or visits.

Be sure to make arrangements to have someone you trust escort you home, especially if you are relieved of your babysitting duties late at night.

Just in Case You Work With or Supervise Children

Child exploitation is a subject that we all hear and read about frequently. It's a term that encompasses mental, physical, and sexual victimization of children. While most teens who work with children in settings from babysitting to volunteer activities aren't trained to make judgments about whether a child has been a victim of any kind of exploitation, most states have strict laws regarding the reporting of suspected cases of child abuse.

If you suspect that a child you supervise in any capacity is a victim of physical or sexual exploitation, immediately report that to the person in charge. And, depending on the situation, that could be a parent, teacher, clergy member, scout leader, camp director, or nurse. Discuss your suspicions with the person in charge. In most states, persons with knowledge of suspected child abuse are required to report the case to a child protective services agency. In some states, failure to report carries criminal penalties, especially for child-care professionals such as teachers or nurses. Be sure to find out about the reporting requirements in your state.

Detecting Sexual Exploitation Some forms of abuse may not leave obvious physical evidence. There are, however, behavioral signs that may indicate victimization. This is especially true of children who have been sexually molested. You should be alert to these signs of sexual exploitation.

- Changes in behavior, extreme mood swings, withdrawal, fearfulness, and excessive crying.
- Nightmares, fear of going to bed, or other sleep disturbances such as bed-wetting.
- Acting out inappropriate sexual activity or showing an unusual interest in sexual matters.
- A sudden acting out of feelings or aggressive or rebellious behavior.
- Regression to infantile behavior.
- A fear of certain places, people, or activities, especially being alone with certain people. Children shouldn't be forced to give affection to an adult or teenager if they don't want to. A desire to avoid this may indicate a problem or may indicate that parents have cautioned the child against such behavior.
- Pain, itching, bleeding, fluid, or rawness in the private areas.

Please note, however, that some of these behaviors may have other explanations. For instance, a child who comes to camp is entering a strange environment and may experience homesickness or anxieties that can lead to behaviors similar to the signs of sexual exploitation. But don't simply discount any of these behaviors as homesickness. Immediately bring it to the attention of the camp director or camp nurse.

What to Do If a Child Discloses If a child in your care tells you that someone has molested him or her, you need to be prepared to help the child.

Don't

- Panic or overreact to the information disclosed by the child.
- Criticize the child or claim that the child misunderstood what happened.

Do

- Respect the child's privacy. Take the child to a place where you can't be overheard by others. It's important that you discuss the child's situation only with the person in charge of the child and the child protective services agency for your state. The situation shouldn't become a topic of conversation with others. At times it may seem hard to keep information confidential, but the victim will pay the price of any violation of his or her trust in you.
- Encourage the child to tell a trusted adult. Make sure that the child feels that he or she isn't to blame for what happened. Tell the child that no one should ask him or her to keep a secret — secrets are different from surprises like a birthday gift — and that it's okay to talk with appropriate adults about what happened. Try to avoid repeated interviews about the incident. This can be very stressful for the child.

Precautions Against Accusations of Sexual Exploitation Child exploitation is a serious criminal offense. As a teen with the responsibility of caring for children, you may be placed in sensitive situations, making you vulnerable to charges of child molestation. If you take these simple precautions, however, you needn't be afraid of groundless accusations.

- Have others present when you are supervising activities such as showering, changing into swimming suits, and dressing or undressing in any other situations.
- Respect the privacy of the child. Don't become intrusive or curious more than is necessary to monitor the health and safety of the child.
- Respect the child's wishes in regard to displays of affection. The child has the right to reject displays of affection if he or she feels uncomfortable about them. Remember, not every child comes from a background in which affection is openly displayed.
- Protect your own privacy. There will be a natural curiosity about boyfriends or girlfriends; personal relationships; and, with some older children, sexual activity. You should use common sense in discussing sensitive subjects with the children you supervise, and you shouldn't go into the details of your private life.

Remember, sexual exploitation shouldn't be confused with physical contacts that are true expressions of affection. A warm and healthy relationship can exist between teens and the children they supervise if you respect the child and place reasonable limits on your physical interaction.

Just in Case You Need Professional Help

If you were sexually exploited, a runaway, and/or abducted, you may greatly benefit from the help of a knowledgeable and experienced professional counselor.

The act of running away usually results from a combination of unresolved family problems and individual problems. Counseling can be helpful in identifying these issues, reducing the impact of the problems, and preventing future runaway incidents. Counseling should address all events that occurred during the runaway incident, as runaway teens are at high risk for substance abuse, sexual exploitation, and physical abuse.

When you have been sexually exploited, see a therapist as soon as possible after the incident. Therapy can help you understand that you aren't to blame and can help you cope with the often overwhelming feelings of guilt and shame that some victims have. While physical evidence of sexual abuse is often lacking, you should still be examined by a physician to make sure that you haven't been physically injured during the incident.

If you were abducted by a noncustodial parent or family member, reunification counseling may need to address your feelings of separation or loss from the abductor parent. Your custodial parent may find it difficult to talk with you about such feelings, in light of any anxiety or anger that he or she may have toward the abductor. Counseling can make it easier to discuss and work through such reactions.

If you were the victim of a nonfamily abduction, reunification counseling should begin with an evaluation of the impact of the event upon both you and your family as well as an assessment of your family's coping skills. While family counseling fosters the communication essential to rebuilding family life, individual counseling for you may be necessary to address fears and traumatic experiences that you may be reluctant to express in a family setting.

Where Do I Find a Therapist or Physician? Many communities have special programs for treating child-sexual exploitation or have therapists and physicians with experience in this treatment area. As services to families of missing children represent a relatively new field, however, it may be difficult to find therapists with this specialized training in your community. You may find reputable therapists through the below-noted organizations in your community.

- Nonprofit service providers serving families of missing or exploited children.
- Local psychological or psychiatric association referral services.
- University departments of psychology or psychiatry.
- Child abuse hotlines.
- Child protective services agencies.
- Rape crisis or sexual assault centers.
- Family court services or court-appointed special advocates (CASA) programs.
- Crime victims assistance programs in the police department or prosecutor's office.

Be sure to seek a therapist or physician who has knowledge of the legal issues involved in child-sexual exploitation and/or abduction including laws about reporting sexual victimization and procedures used by the police and protective services for evidence collection and expertise testimony in your state.

What to Look for in a Therapist In order to be helpful to you, a therapist needs to have training and experience in dealing with child-sexual exploitation and abuse or issues related to family reunification.

- Your therapist should have an advanced degree in a recognized mental health specialty such as psychiatry, psychology, social work, counseling, or psychiatric nursing. Make sure that your therapist is licensed to practice as a therapist in your state.
- If you have run away or been abducted, your therapist should have specific knowledge about the consequences to a teen and his or her family following a disappearance, legal issues surrounding child search, and recovery and family reunification. Therapists with proper degrees and credentials who lack this specific knowledge may be useful if they are willing to seek educational materials on these topics.
- If you have been sexually exploited or abused, your therapist should have special training in child-sexual abuse and exploitation, know how it affects children and adults, understand how to place responsibility on the exploiter, and have a treatment plan.

What to Look for in a Physician When seeking medical assistance, your physician should have

- Board certification in a relevant medical specialty such as family practice or obstetrics/gynecology. Board certification means that the doctor has had specific training and experience in that area of medicine after medical school and then passed an examination in that specialty.
- Particular experience in conducting medical evaluations of teens for sexual exploitation. Teen sexual exploitation cases may involve complex issues regarding diagnosis, evidence collection, and treatment for sexually transmitted diseases.

Dealing With Your Therapist or Physician When you have located a therapist or physician, you should ask about his or her experience and training in dealing with your particular problem. If you aren't satisfied, seek another professional. Even if you pay a reduced fee or receive services at no cost, you have the right to have a therapist or physician with the proper training and experience. You may wish to express a preference for a male or female therapist or physician.

Discuss your situation openly, completely, and honestly. Trust your feelings. You should feel comfortable with the therapist or physician, even if the examination or assessment process creates feelings of guilt or shame. If you aren't comfortable with your therapist or physician, openly discuss this discomfort with your therapist or physician. If this discussion doesn't produce positive change, seek another therapist or physician.

Provide a complete history so that the professional can properly assess and treat you. Try to cooperate as fully as possible. Ask questions if you don't understand what's happening.

Discuss the fees for examination, and find out what's covered by any health insurance benefits that you may have. Ask for a written statement that explains the basis

for charges. Your police department or prosecutor's office can tell you if your state has a crime victims assistance program that will pay for the necessary counseling and medical treatment.

Note: All medical professionals and therapists have a code of ethics they must follow. It's **always** wrong for any professional to be abusive or act in a sexual way with a client. If you believe that your therapist or physician is acting inappropriately or isn't keeping you informed about the assessment and treatment, discuss your concerns openly. If this discussion doesn't produce positive change, talk to his or her supervisor or contact a professional or medical association for more help. Don't stay in a therapy situation that makes you uncomfortable.

Just in Case You Are Testifying in Court

Testifying in court, while difficult and trying for many adults, may be a highly traumatic experience for a teen victim of abduction or sexual exploitation. Repeated questioning, lengthy delays, testifying in front of the accused, and other legal requirements may be intimidating and can increase your anxiety and sense of helplessness. While victims need to work through their trauma and eventually put bad memories behind them, the legal system demands that they need to recount their victimization and hold the memory of the event fresh in their minds for a time. Not all teens suffer such trauma, however, and many victims have benefited from new procedures that enhance their participation in the legal process. Many witnesses derive great satisfaction from helping to bring the facts of the case to light and ensuring that justice is done.

The Courtroom Process To **testify** in court means to answer questions under oath. An oath is simply a promise to tell the truth. There are a number of cases in which you may be asked to testify in court. You may have been physically abused or neglected or involved in a custody or visitation dispute if your parents are going through a separation or divorce. You may have been a victim of sexual abuse or exploitation (child pornography or prostitution) or another kind of crime such as physical assault or robbery. You may have been injured and involved in a civil suit for damages. Or, you may have been the victim of a parental or family abduction. You may also have to testify in court if you were simply a witness to a crime or accident.

Depending on the kind of offense and the state laws, you will testify in criminal court, civil court, or family court. Common names for family court include juvenile and domestic relations court. Matters of child abuse and neglect are usually handled in juvenile court; divorce and custody cases are generally heard in domestic relations court. Many cases of child-sexual abuse or exploitation, however, are also heard in criminal court.

When criminal charges are filed and the person accused of the crime, the defendant, doesn't plead guilty, a criminal trial is held. The case will be heard either by a judge alone or by a judge and jury, a group of citizens appointed to hear the case. In a jury trial, the jurors will listen to the evidence and decide the outcome. Also present in the courtroom will be the bailiff, who's a kind of police officer for the court; a court reporter to record what's said, and a court clerk to administer the oath. Furthermore, the judge will allow spectators and newspaper, radio, and/or television reporters, but usually not other witnesses, in the courtroom while you testify. In certain cases, the judge may ban spectators and reporters from the courtroom if your testimony is on a sensitive or embarrassing subject.

Each side will have its own attorney present to ask witnesses and the victim(s) questions and argue the case. The prosecutor will try to prove beyond a reasonable doubt that the person accused of the crime broke the law. The defense attorney acts on behalf of the defendant. They will both question the victim(s) and witnesses. The defense attorney will attempt to show that the victim's version of the events that took place aren't true or that the victim is an unreliable witness. As a victim you may have to tell the facts of the case in detail to each attorney and should expect to be questioned closely.

The judge can play an important role in helping a victim or witness testify. For example, the judge can provide alternative seating, shorten the length of time you are required to testify, and control the defense attorney's use of cross-examination to prevent harassment.

The family court process differs from the criminal court process in several important ways. While a criminal trial generally involves a jury, the family court trial doesn't. Family court generally has a more relaxed and private atmosphere. Testimony in family court may be presented in the judge's office or chambers. There are only a few people present during testimony in family court including the child witness, support persons, the judge, the court reporter, and the attorneys for both sides.

Many states appoint a special attorney or citizen advocate, called a *guardian ad litem*, to ensure proper protection of the child in family court. The *guardian ad litem* represents only the child and serves in addition to the attorneys representing both sides. The family court may use a specially trained volunteer who isn't an attorney, often called a court-appointed special advocate (CASA), instead of a *guardian ad litem*.

Preparing to Testify Remember that you will have a better case against an offender if you are considered to be a reliable witness — that is, tell the truth in a clear, thorough, and comprehensible manner. If you can't testify, and there's no other evidence available, defense attorneys know that the case usually can't be proved. Below is a list of suggestions that may help you prepare to testify.

- **Don't** go over your testimony before the courtroom appearance. The defense attorney may ask, "Did someone tell you to say that?" Then, someone may be thought to have coached you and influenced your testimony. Try not to discuss the facts of the case with anyone other than with law enforcement prior to the trial phase and the prosecutor once the case reaches the trial phase. If the attorney for the defense seeks to question you before trial, consult with the prosecutor, your *guardian ad litem*, a victim/witness advocate, your CASA, and/or your own attorney.
- Your anxiety about testifying in court will be lessened if you know what to expect from the courtroom process. The prosecutor, victim/witness advocate, or a counselor will be familiar with local practices and should provide you with accurate information.
- You can learn strategies to reduce anxiety before or while testifying. These can include relaxation exercises, mentally rehearsing the testimony, and/or thinking about a favorite activity or peaceful place. Again, a therapist or victim/witness advocate can help with ideas.
- If you are the victim of sexual abuse or exploitation, you may be especially afraid or embarrassed about telling the facts of your case in court. Know that disclosing the victimization was the right action to take.
- Know that the most important thing to do in court is to tell the truth.
- Remind yourself that you are telling the truth, and, no matter what the defense attorney and defendant say, your belief in yourself won't change and the feelings of the people who believe in you won't change because of what they say.
- If you should become confused by a question or don't know the answer to any question posed, feel free to say so. No one expects you to remember **all** the details or to know **all** the answers.

Dealing with Legal Professionals During the legal process, you and your support network need to monitor the legal professionals' handling of the case to ensure that your needs are met. Follow the guidelines noted below in dealing with legal professionals.

- If the attorney doesn't have experience in dealing with teen witnesses, ask if he or she will consult with one who has this experience.
- In your meetings with the lawyers before the court appearance, try to arrange a tour of the courtroom to help you prepare. Inform the prosecutor or district attorney of planned events that might interfere with testimony such as a school field trip, vacation, or birthday. If you have a special way of showing fear or distress, tell the prosecutor.
- Discuss any special measures that may be taken to alleviate your anxiety while on the witness stand. The prosecutor may speak to the judge to request permission for you to testify in the judge's chambers or allow you to use testimonial aids such as drawings or anatomically detailed dolls.

Your Appearance in Court Before you appear in court, find out who will be able to be present with you. Ask if your parents/guardians, a support person such as a victim/witness advocate, other relatives, and/or friends may be in court when you testify.

On the day of the courtroom trial, have a good breakfast or lunch depending on the time of day you are scheduled to testify, and try to relax as much as you can. You should dress neatly and comfortably. Since there may be long periods of waiting and unforeseen delays, bring a book, a quiet electronic game, snack food, or any other item that will help you pass the time. You shouldn't discuss the case with anyone while waiting, but think carefully about the testimony you will give.

After the Courtroom Testimony After the testimony is over you may not know the outcome of the trial or it may not be resolved in your favor. Nevertheless, know that telling what happened was the right action to take.

You may have some stress-related sleep problems, worries, or feelings of insecurity for a day or two. You should consider professional counseling to help you deal with any long-lasting trauma of the victimization as well as the entire judicial process.

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The National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC) is the national clearinghouse and resource center funded under Cooperative Agreement #95-MC-CX-K001 from the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, Office of Justice Programs, U.S. Department of Justice. Points of view or opinions in this work are those of NCMEC and do not necessarily represent the official position or policies of the U.S. Department of Justice.