



Ministry of
JUSTICE

Your child is a witness

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



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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.

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.

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 of them. 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. They can also act as child witness supporters. To find out more visit: www.victimsupport.org.uk/ or call 0845 303 0900.

- 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.victimsupport.org.uk or call **0845 303 0900**. In some areas there are local National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC) child witness support services. To find out more visit the NSPCC website at www.nspcc.org.uk or call on **0808 800 5000**, or call ChildLine on **0800 1111**.

- Local **Victim Support schemes** are also a useful source of help and advice to parents and carers. In cases involving young victims of child abuse, the scheme 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.

For further information



Other publications in the 'Young witness' series are also available free to parents and carers of child witnesses. For copies of the most appropriate booklets for your child, ask the person who gave you this booklet.

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.

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 booklet tells you who to contact.

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

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 must tell the judge or magistrates. Your child will not get into trouble for this. 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. Other children do not need to know.

Worrying about what he or she said before

Your child may be worried that he or she has not told the police everything, or has told different things to different people. Your child may feel scared or confused. If this happens, reassure your child, encourage him or her to tell the truth and let the police know.

I know my child is worried and is behaving differently, what should I do?



Should I find out what's the matter?

Encourage your child to talk to you about any worries. They may not be what you think. Listen to your child and take his or her concerns seriously. Keep to your child's regular routine as much as possible.

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.

To find out more about the court process, request a copy of the 'Going to Court – a step by step guide to being a witness' DVD. The DVD is age appropriate both for adults and for older, accompanied young people to watch.

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, 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:
- 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;
- becomes withdrawn, aggressive or unable to concentrate at home or school;
- starts to wet the bed, doesn't sleep properly, becomes afraid of the dark or loses their appetite; or
- shows any other anxieties relating to the crime or about going to court

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 everyone in court including the defendant.
- **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 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.
- **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.
- **Aids to communication** – your child may use an aid, such as a sign and symbol board to assist your child 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. The court will decide which special measures can be used.

Witness supporter – If the judge or magistrates agrees, 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 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 before the day of the trial.

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 the 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.

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

Pre-trial therapy

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. The therapist should discuss this with you and your child before therapy starts. Local provisions for therapeutic assistance will vary.

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).

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, 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 of the trial;
- any decision that the case will not go to trial, and the reason for this; and
- discussions with the defence about a guilty plea to a lesser charge. (However, it is up to the Crown Prosecution Service whether to accept such a plea.)

This is a difficult situation for me. Can I get any help?

Ask for help if you need it

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.

Is it better to tell my child about the court beforehand?

You and your child will feel more confident if you know what to expect, both before the case gets to court and at the trial itself. Local arrangements for child witness supporters vary, but the police should identify someone who knows about court procedures, who can help your child go through young witness material and answer questions. This person can help in passing on information about your child to the police, Crown Prosecution Service and court staff.

Speak to the person who asked your child to attend court if it would help your child to go into the building by a separate entrance or be accompanied by an official escort when using the main entrance.

If you or your child are nervous about seeing the defendant, and have not already done so, you should tell the police or the person who gave you this booklet before you go to court. You may be able to wait 'on standby' somewhere nearby, away from the court building, or you may be able to enter the court by a different entrance. If you are waiting at court, someone from the Witness Service or court staff should be able to show you a place where you can wait away from the public area.

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 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.)

Bringing a case to court



There are three main stages in criminal cases:

The police

A complaint is made to the police, identifying the child as a victim of, or witness to, a crime. A police officer (and sometimes a social worker) interviews the child. This interview may be visually recorded. The police also speak to any other witnesses. They interview the defendant about what the child and other witnesses have said. The police and Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) then decide whether they think the defendant should go to court.

The Crown Prosecution Service

The police inform the CPS about the case. They tell the prosecution what the child and parent(s) think about the child going to court to give evidence. The CPS then makes an independent decision on whether or not to go on with the prosecution. This decision is based on the information provided by the police. The CPS does not interview witnesses.

The CPS conducts the prosecution process. Its lawyers prosecute all cases in the magistrates' courts and youth courts, and some cases in the Crown Court. Often in the Crown Court, the CPS employs independent lawyers (usually barristers) to prosecute on its behalf.

The court

Cases can be heard in the magistrates' courts, youth courts or the Crown Court. In cases to be tried at the Crown Court, initial hearings are held in the magistrates' courts but these do not need witnesses.

Should I go to court?

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 can 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 minimum. 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.

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.

Taking the oath

If your child is 14 or over, he or she must 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 the child's interview with the police and/or Local Authority Children and Young People's Services as part of the evidence, your child does not have to repeat what was on the visual recording. Your child should have been given the opportunity to view their evidence before going to court.

Cross examination

Children whose visual recording is shown to the court still have to answer questions from lawyer 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. Children can be upset if they are not expecting their evidence to be challenged in this way. It is helpful if you explain about the purpose of these questions. All your child has to do is tell the truth.

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.



A supporter to accompany your child while giving evidence

It may be possible to have a supporter who knows the young witness accompany your child whilst they give evidence. This could be the person who has helped your child prepare for going to court, or an adult friend or family member who has not been involved in any way with the case. It is important to tell the person who asked your child to go to court who it is that your child would like to be with them while they give their evidence. However, it is for the Judge or Magistrates to decide if they will allow this.

Screens in the courtroom

Sometimes a young witness might go into the courtroom to give evidence and use a screen so that the child does not need to see the defendant.

A screen will be placed between the child and the defendant to block the child's view. The judge or magistrates have the final decision on whether a screen can be used.

The result of the case (the verdict)

After the jury or magistrates have heard all the evidence, they have to decide what they think happened. (In the magistrates' court or youth court, this is the job of the magistrates.) Before they can find the defendant guilty they have to be sure 'beyond reasonable doubt'.

If they think that the defendant is not guilty, or if they are not sure, 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 or magistrates are unable to reach a decision. Then the prosecution has to decide whether there should be another trial with a new jury or magistrates 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.



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 puts off this decision for about three 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.

What will happen after the trial?



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.

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: <http://lcjb.cjsonline.gov.uk/area12/library/Witness%20Charter.pdf>

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:

www.direct.gov.uk/en/CrimeJusticeAndTheLaw/TheJudicialsystem/DG_066863

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:

www.direct.gov.uk/prod_consum_dg/groups/dg_digitalassets/@dg/@en/documents/digitalasset/dg_073647.pdf

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.

The Helpline staff will pass on the details to the prison governor, who will 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 **08457 585112** 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.

Where the defendant is sentenced to one year or more for a sexual or other violent offence, 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. If you wish, you may also make known your views when decisions are made about the defendant's eventual release. In carrying out this work, Probation Officers often work closely with Victim Support, other victims' organisations and any social worker who may be in touch with you.

Compensation



The Criminal Injuries Compensation Scheme makes 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

Tay House
300 Bath Street
Glasgow G2 4LN

Alternatively you can call CICA on 0800 358 3601 for help and advice on eligibility and to make a telephone application.

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

Useful contacts

ChildLine

Telephone: 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
Telephone: 0808 802 0008
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
Telephone: 080 880 2 8686
Email: voice@voiceuk.org.uk
www.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

Weston House
42 Curtain Road
London EC2A 3NH
Telephone: 0808 800 5000

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
Cardiff: 029 2026 7000
Leeds: 0113 229 2200
Leicester: 0116 276 9999
London: 0207 825 2500
Taunton: 01823 346350

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.

Telephone: 0808 800 5000

Textphone: 0800 056 0566

Rape crisis centres

Can offer counselling for children who have been raped or sexually abused. Look in your phone book for details of your local centre.

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. Look in your phone book for details of Victim Support schemes in your area, or call the Victim Supportline on 0845 30 30 900.

The Witness Service

Victim Support runs the Witness Service at each Crown, magistrates' and youth court, staffed by a paid co-ordinator and trained voluntary workers. The Witness Service produces a leaflet, Going to Court, which gives more information about the service provided. The leaflet is available from court, or from Victim Support headquarters (telephone: 020 7735 9166).

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, while 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.

Witness Care Units

Every area has a Witness Care Unit which acts as a single point of contact for prosecution witnesses. 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.

Produced by the Ministry of Justice,
based on the original Young Witness Packs published by the NSPCC.
May 2011