

THE JUVENILE JUSTICE PROCESS



A person who is 10-17 years old and breaks the law goes into the Pennsylvania Juvenile Justice System. This person is also called a “juvenile”. There are many differences between the Juvenile Justice System and the Adult Criminal Justice System. This document shows the Juvenile Justice Process in PA.*

Arrest/Referral: If a juvenile breaks the law in the community, they will be arrested. If a person who is a juvenile breaks the law in school, the school will send a “referral” or report to the juvenile justice system.

Juvenile Intake: After the arrest or referral from the school, the juvenile will have an intake meeting with a probation officer. At the intake interview, there are four things that can happen:

1. *Dismissal:* The court will dismiss the charge and no further action is taken.
2. *Informal Adjustment/Diversion:* This means that the juvenile is not sent to the formal juvenile court process. This is also called being “diverted”. They might go to child welfare or a different community resource. Making an “informal adjustment” means that the juvenile will go on informal probation. There will be no permanent record of the informal probation.
3. *Delinquency Petition:* After the filing of a Delinquency Petition and before an adjudication order (a court order that determines a juvenile has committed a delinquent act), the court may let a juvenile stay at home with rules to follow. This is called a Consent Decree.
4. *Detention:* The juvenile may have to stay in a detention center because they might not show up for court or if they might hurt someone or themselves.

Detention Hearing: If a juvenile is put in a detention center, they will have a detention hearing within two days. This is to see if they still need to be in detention.

Adjudication Hearing: At the adjudication hearing, a judge will decide if a juvenile should be adjudicated delinquent or if the charge should be “dismissed” or go away. An adjudicated delinquent means the juvenile is found guilty of a delinquent act and needs of treatment, rehabilitation or supervision.

Disposition Hearing: If a juvenile is adjudicated delinquent, there will be a hearing with a judge. This will decide what happens next:

1. *Probation:* The judge might say that the juvenile has to go on probation. Probation is a set of rules that the juvenile has to follow. The juvenile will get a probation officer and rules that they have to follow.
2. *Fines or Restitution:* The judge might decide that the juvenile has to pay something called “fines or restitution”. This is money that has to be paid to the victim of the crime because of damage done to them or their property.
3. *Community Service:* The judge might say the juvenile has to do community service. Community service is unpaid work hours that must be done while on probation or instead of probation. The juvenile might have to do community service as part of their probation.
4. *Placement:* The judge might say that the juvenile has to live somewhere other than their home. This might be in a residential facility for juveniles who broke the law. Every six months there are Review Hearings to see if placement is still needed or if the juvenile can go home and be on probation.

* This guide does not take the place of advice from a lawyer.