



Has your child been charged with a crime?

On these pages, a child is someone who is under the age of 18.

A child who has been charged with a crime needs advice from a lawyer who is an expert in criminal law. It is best if the lawyer has experience with youth criminal law. If you cannot afford to pay for a lawyer for your child, Legal Aid Ontario may pay.

Your child should get a lawyer even if the child is not guilty or tells you it is not a serious case. This is because what happens next can be serious.

The police have a duty to let you know if your child is arrested, charged with a crime, or must go to court. It is a good idea to be informed and involved with your child's case. You should go to the police station and to court with your child, if possible.

Will my child have to go to court?

If your child is charged, they will usually have to go to criminal court at least once. After that, there may be ways to deal with the case without going to court.

If the court decides to punish your child, the punishment may not have to be jail. Your child should talk to their lawyer to find out what else is possible.

The law is less harsh for children who are charged with crimes than for adults. But for the most serious crimes, children may get the same punishment as adults.

What can I expect from my child's lawyer?

The lawyer works for your child, even if you are paying. So the lawyer will speak to your child and make decisions with your child.

You can ask the lawyer to let you know how the case is going. You can also ask questions. But the lawyer is not allowed to share information with you unless your child says the lawyer can.

Can my child keep on going to school?

Usually, a child who is involved in a criminal matter still has the right to go to school. Sometimes the court will say the child cannot go to a specific school until the case is over. You can send your child to another school if this happens.

In some situations, the school can suspend or expel your child, even for something that did not happen at school. There are steps you can take to try to keep your child in school. Some community agencies and legal clinics can help you to find out about this.

Will the charges be a problem for my child in the future?

When your child is charged with a crime, the police and the court can keep track of it in files called "records".

These police and court records can cause problems for your child for a long time. At the age of 18, your child will be considered an adult. But people may still be able to see your child's records from before that.

Your child's records can, for example, make it hard to get a job or travel to other countries. The records may affect your child's immigration status. In some cases, your child's records may even affect your family's immigration status.

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What if I am asked to pay the costs of what my child did?

If your child is under the age of 18 when they damage, destroy, or steal what belongs to someone else, the owner may try to make you pay back the cost. You do not have to pay unless a court orders you to. If you get any papers telling you to pay, show them to a lawyer or legal clinic right away.

If the owner starts a court case against you, it will be in a civil court, not a criminal court. There are time limits to defend yourself or the court can order you to pay the money. So get legal help right away. •

On these pages, we give only general information. You should get legal advice about your own situation.

How to get help

211 Ontario is an information and referral hotline that gives help in many languages. They take calls 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. They can tell you:

- where to get legal help, and
- how to contact a settlement agency or community agency for other kinds of help.

If there is no 211 service in your area, contact a local library or a community legal clinic.

To contact 211 Ontario:

- ☎ Phone..... **211**
- ☎ TTY..... **1-888-340-1001**
- 💻 **211Ontario.ca**

For more help:

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Visit **www.cleo.on.ca** to download these pages and other legal information.