Understanding Juvenile Probation

Probation is one of several dispositions the Court may order after a youth has been adjudicated for an offense. It allows a youth to remain in the community while receiving supervision, services, and support focused on accountability, rehabilitation, family engagement, and community safety.

What Does Probation Mean?

While on probation, youth can continue many normal activities - such as living with family, attending school or work, spending time with friends, participating in sports, and taking part in community activities - as long as they follow the law and the conditions ordered by the Court.

The purpose of probation is not only to monitor behavior, but also to help youth build on their strengths, address needs, make responsible decisions, repair harm when appropriate, and successfully move forward.

What's Expected of Me?

Every youth on probation must follow the conditions of supervision established by the Court. These conditions are designed to support successful completion of probation and may include responsibilities such as:

- Attend school or participate in an approved educational, vocational, or work program.
- Live with a parent, guardian, or other Court-approved caregiver and follow reasonable household expectations.
- Meet with the probation officer as directed.
- Follow all laws and Court orders.
- Avoid people, places, or situations that may interfere with successful supervision when specifically directed by the Court.
- Keep the probation officer informed of changes in address or other important circumstances.

Depending on the individual case, the Court may also order additional conditions such as drug testing, community service, restitution, counseling, treatment, or other services and supports.

Youth are generally released from probation when they have met the Court-ordered requirements, demonstrated progress, and completed any required restitution or other obligations.

How Is a Youth Placed on Probation?

Some youth may be referred to diversion or other alternatives before a formal Court case is filed. In other cases, the Juvenile Officer may file a petition alleging that a youth committed an offense.

During the Court process, the youth is advised of their legal rights and has the opportunity to be represented by an attorney. If the allegations are admitted or sustained, the Court determines the appropriate disposition. Probation is one possible disposition.

Before disposition, a probation officer may gather information from the youth, family, school, victim, and other people or agencies who can help the Court understand the youth's circumstances, strengths, needs, and risks. The probation officer then prepares recommendations for the Court.

The Supervision/Success Plan

When probation is ordered, the youth has a Supervision/Success Plan that identifies expectations, goals, services, and supports. The plan should reflect the individual circumstances of the youth and provide a clear path toward successful completion of probation.

The plan is guided by four areas:

- **Community Safety:** identifying the level of supervision and structure needed to support the safety of the youth and the community.
- **Accountability:** helping the youth understand the impact of their actions, meet Court-ordered responsibilities, and repair harm when appropriate.
- **Rehabilitation:** building skills, addressing needs, and connecting the youth with services and opportunities that support positive change.
- **Family Engagement:** involving parents, caregivers, and other important supports in planning, problem-solving, and the youth's progress whenever possible.

Because each youth is different, the level of emphasis in these areas will vary. Conditions and services may also be adjusted as circumstances change, progress is made, or new needs are identified, consistent with Court authority and orders.

What Does a Probation Officer Do?

The probation officer works with the youth, family, Court, school, service providers, and community partners to support successful supervision. The officer's role may include:

- Maintaining regular contact with the youth and family.
- Monitoring compliance with Court-ordered conditions.
- Helping identify strengths, needs, goals, and barriers to success.
- Connecting the youth and family with appropriate services and community resources.
- Recognizing progress and reinforcing positive change.
- Responding to concerns and helping develop solutions when challenges arise.
- Providing the Court with accurate information and recommendations.

What Happens if There Are Concerns During Probation?

Concerns during probation can range from a missed appointment or school absence to a new alleged offense. The response depends on the seriousness and circumstances of the concern, the youth's overall progress, community safety considerations, and the requirements of the Court order.

When appropriate, the probation officer may work with the youth and family to identify what contributed to the problem and determine whether additional support, services, structure, or changes to the supervision plan are needed. More serious or repeated concerns may require additional Court action.

The goal is to respond in a way that promotes accountability, addresses the underlying concern, supports rehabilitation, involves the family whenever possible, and protects community safety.

Successful Completion of Probation

Successful probation is a shared process. Youth are expected to meet their responsibilities and work toward their goals, while probation officers, families, service providers, and community partners help provide the structure and support needed for success. Progress is reflected not only in compliance with Court orders, but also in stronger decision-making, increased skills, improved stability, and positive connections to family and community.