

GOING to COURT

For child witnesses under the age of 10

A witness is someone who knows something important.

You told your parents and probably the police about something that happened to you or about something you saw.

The people at court want to know what happened or what you saw. You can help them too, if you tell them what you know.

Telling the people at court about what happened is called 'being a witness'.

A Witness has not done anything wrong. When you are a witness, you are doing an important job.

Why Do People Go to Court?

People go to court if the Police think that someone has broken the law.

Laws are important rules which are made to protect people. They tell us not to steal and not to hurt people. When someone does not follow these rules, it is called breaking the law.

It is wrong to break the law. A person who breaks the law can have consequences such as having someone from the court work with him.

At court, people decide if someone has broken the law. You can help the people at court by telling them about something that happened or something you saw.

That is why being a witness is such an important job.

What happens in court?

First the court asks the attorney for the juvenile (defendant) charged with the offense if he did something wrong. If the attorney says that the juvenile admits (Yes, I did it) you don't have to be a witness.

If the attorney says that the juvenile denies (No, I didn't do it), there will be a trial and the court needs you to be a witness. What you say at the court will help the judge to decide if the defendant broke the law.

The attorney for the juvenile officer (prosecutor) and the attorney for the juvenile (defense lawyer) will ask you questions.

The judge will listen very carefully to what everyone says. Then the judge decides if the juvenile has, or has not, broken the law.

The job of the witness in court

Your job in court is to:

Listen carefully to the questions you are asked.

Make sure you understand what each question means before you give your answer. If you don't understand the question it's OK to say: I don't understand.

Even if the same question is asked again in a different way, and you still don't understand it, don't worry. You can still say: I'm sorry, but I still don't understand.

Sometimes a question may seem very long with different parts to it. If this happens, just say: Please ask me the question one part at a time.

Answer the questions

Don't rush your answer. Take your time and think carefully before you answer.

When giving your answer speak clearly and a little bit louder than usual. The people in court need to hear you.

If you don't know the answer to a question, don't worry. Just say: I don't know, or, I can't remember.

There may be some things you find difficult to talk about. You can use any words you want to at court - even if you think the words are rude or naughty. And you can tell the court a secret, as long as it is true.

Nobody should tell you what to say. The judge and jury want to hear what happened in your own words.

Remember that the judge will not be angry at anything you say. You have not done anything wrong.

Tell the truth

The most important part of your job is to tell the truth.

When you give your answer, remember to tell everything that happened.

Don't tell something that didn't happen. That would be telling a lie. It is wrong to tell a lie.

Some of the questions will be about something the defendant did or said. These may be things only you and the defendant know about. Remember, the judge was not there, so he needs you to tell them what happened.

Some questions will be difficult. The people asking the questions want to know what you can remember. They also need to make sure that you are telling the truth.