



Ministry  
of Justice

# Youth Justice Charter

What happens while I am in youth custody?





If the court decides to **remand** or **sentence** you to **custody**, you will be looked after by staff in the youth secure estate. If you are in custody on remand, you will stay in custody until you go back to court for your **trial** or for sentencing. If you are sentenced to custody, the court will tell you how long you need to stay there for.

You will stay at either:

- ✍ a young offender institution (YOI) – a larger site with multiple living units, and 30 to 60 children and young people staying in each unit
- ✍ a secure training centre (STC) – a site with multiple living units, with 4 to 8 children and young people staying in each unit
- ✍ a secure children's home (SCH) – a site with 5 to 20 children and young people staying in each home
- ✍ a secure school – a site with multiple living units, and up to 6 children and young people staying in each unit

You should tell your Youth Justice Service (YJS) **case manager**, **custody staff**, **social worker** or **personal advisor** if you are a **carer** or have any caring responsibilities before going into custody. They can make sure that the people you care for continue to get the help or support they need. The custody standards below explain how you should be treated while you are in custody.

These standards form part of the Youth Justice Charter. To find out more, search 'Youth Justice Charter'. You can also find out about what happens if you are stopped by the police, going to court, working with Youth Justice Services and leaving custody. There is also a youth justice journey map to show the different stages of the youth justice system.

If you need help understanding these standards, you can ask someone you trust to go through them with you. We have used some words that you might not understand. We have put these words in bold. We have explained what they mean at the end in a list called 'difficult words'.

Custody  
standard  
**1**

**I will be helped to understand why I am being placed in custody, for how long and where I will be staying.**

- ✍ Your YJS **case manager** and **lawyer** will explain what is happening before you leave the court building.
- ✍ The **Youth Custody Service** will decide where you stay, with advice from your YJS case manager.
- ✍ The decision will be based on where you live, your age, your sex, whether you've been in **custody** before, your safety, your health needs, your education needs, your wellbeing and what spaces are available.
- ✍ You, your parents, carers or your lawyer can **appeal** the decision if you don't agree with it. This means the decision will be looked at again.

Custody  
standard  
**2**

**I will know if and when I need to go back to court and custody staff will organise for me to get there.**

- ✍ If you are in **custody** on **remand**, the **judge** or **magistrates** will decide when you need to come back to court.
- ✍ Your YJS **case manager** will tell you the date of your court **hearing** as early as possible and will tell you if you can reapply for **bail** at any time.
- ✍ You will be able to speak to your **lawyer** about what is happening.
- ✍ **Custody staff** must get you to court on time. They will arrange for you to travel in a van from custody to the court.
- ✍ In some cases, you might be able to have your court hearing via video call, without leaving custody.

Custody  
standard  
**3**

**I will meet with the people who will support me while I am in custody, and they will make plans to support my education, health and wellbeing.**

- ✍ It is important that you feel familiar with your surroundings. You will be given information as soon as you arrive, and then receive a fuller induction within your first couple of weeks in **custody**. There are rules to keep you and others safe, and staff will explain these rules to you.
- ✍ You might stay on an induction unit during this time, which is a separate area to help new people settle in.
- ✍ You should have extra help with communication if you need it – for example, if English is not your first language or if you have a disability.
- ✍ You will have a health assessment and a nurse will ask about your health needs. They will use your answers to help make a care plan for you.
- ✍ You will meet regularly with a lead staff member who will support and care for you during your stay.
- ✍ Your YJS case manager, your **social worker** or **personal advisor** (if you have one) will keep in regular contact with you.
- ✍ You will be given support from other members of staff from different teams, such as health, **chaplaincy**, safeguarding or **substance misuse**. They will each explain what their role is.
- ✍ The people supporting you will understand your story and should find out about your life, any problems you face and the help you may need.
- ✍ At the end of your induction, you will be given information about your daily and weekly programme.

Custody  
standard

4

Planning for what happens when I leave custody  
will begin right at the start of my stay.

- Helping you to prepare for leaving **custody** is really important. This is sometimes called release or resettlement.
- While you are in custody, you will have a **resettlement worker**. They may also be called a **case manager**. They will meet you within 10 days of your arrival and will start planning for what happens when you leave custody.
- Your resettlement worker will work with you, your YJS case manager, your **social worker** or **personal advisor** (if you have one) to develop the plan. The plan will cover all of your needs to support your resettlement, including health needs, plans for education or employment, and where you will live after custody.



Custody standard  
**5**

**I will have a comfortable place to sleep, somewhere I can wash and access to books in a library.**

- ✍ When you arrive, you will be given a tour to help you get to know your surroundings.
- ✍ You will have your own bedroom with a bed, bed sheets, heating and lighting.
- ✍ You will have regular access to a shower or bath. The shower may be in your bedroom or separate to your bedroom, but you will have a toilet and a sink in your room.
- ✍ You will be given things to keep yourself clean, such as shampoo for free. You can ask for things that suit your hair and skin.
- ✍ You can ask for a haircut if you want one.
- ✍ You can ask to use the library or to read books. Library access may be part of your education schedule.



Custody  
standard

6

**I will be able to spend time out of my room.**

- ✎ You will be able to spend time out of your room with other people. The amount of time may be different depending on where you are staying and your individual needs.
- ✎ Education and exercise will usually take place outside of your room, and there will also be shared areas where you can spend time with others.
- ✎ You will have access to a gym or an outside area to help you stay healthy. This could be part of your time out of your room or as part of your physical education playing sports.

Custody  
standard

7

**I will be given personal care items to look after myself and I will be given some money to buy additional items I need.**

- ✎ On your first night, you will be given stationery, writing materials, toiletries (including sanitary products if you need them), clean clothes and snacks. There are different rules about what clothing to wear depending on where you are staying, and these will be explained to you.
- ✎ If you run out of any supplies, you can ask for more.
- ✎ You will be given phone credit (if needed) and some money at the beginning of your stay so that you can buy additional items you may need.

Custody  
standard

8

I will know how often I can see or speak to family or friends while I am in custody.

It is important that you can stay in touch with family, friends and other people in your life (for example, your **social worker** or **personal advisor**) while you are in **custody**.

**Phone calls**

- Within two hours of your arrival, you will be allowed to call someone and tell them where you are if you couldn't call before you arrived. If you arrive late at night, you may be asked to wait until the following morning.
- Each site has its own rules about how many calls you can make or receive, and you will be told what these are during your **induction**. In some secure accommodation, there is a phone in your room that you can use to make these calls.
- You can also ask to receive a video call in some secure accommodation.





### Visits

- ✍ You will be allowed a visitor within three days of arriving in **custody**.
- ✍ If you are in custody after being **sentenced**, you will be allowed a visit at least once every two weeks, including one weekend visit every four weeks.
- ✍ If you are in custody on **remand**, you can have a visit three times each week in a young offender institution or one visit a week in a secure training centre. The number of visits in a secure children's home or a secure school may vary.
- ✍ These visits can be from your friends or family.
- ✍ In some cases, your family may be able to get financial support to visit you. A member of staff can tell you more about this when you arrive.
- ✍ Each visit will last at least one hour.
- ✍ Custody officers or key workers might stay with you during the visit.
- ✍ As part of the rules, sometimes visits may be different if there is a behaviour or a security issue that makes them a risk. You may have to have closed visits where you are not allowed physical contact with the person visiting. If you feel that this is unfair, you can appeal the decision by speaking to a member of staff or an independent **advocate**.

Custody  
standard

9

**Letters**

- ✍ You will be able to send at least one letter a week and will be given stationery and stamps for free. Each place has its own rules about how many letters you can send or receive, so ask a member of staff if you have any questions.
- ✍ In some places, **custody staff** are allowed to read letters you have written before sending them to check the content is appropriate. The law says that if they find the content inappropriate, they may decide not to send the letter.
- ✍ If you would like to send a letter to someone, but would like help writing the letter, you can ask a member of staff. They can also help you read any letters you receive.
- ✍ In some secure accommodation, you have access to a secure email service where you can also write to people.

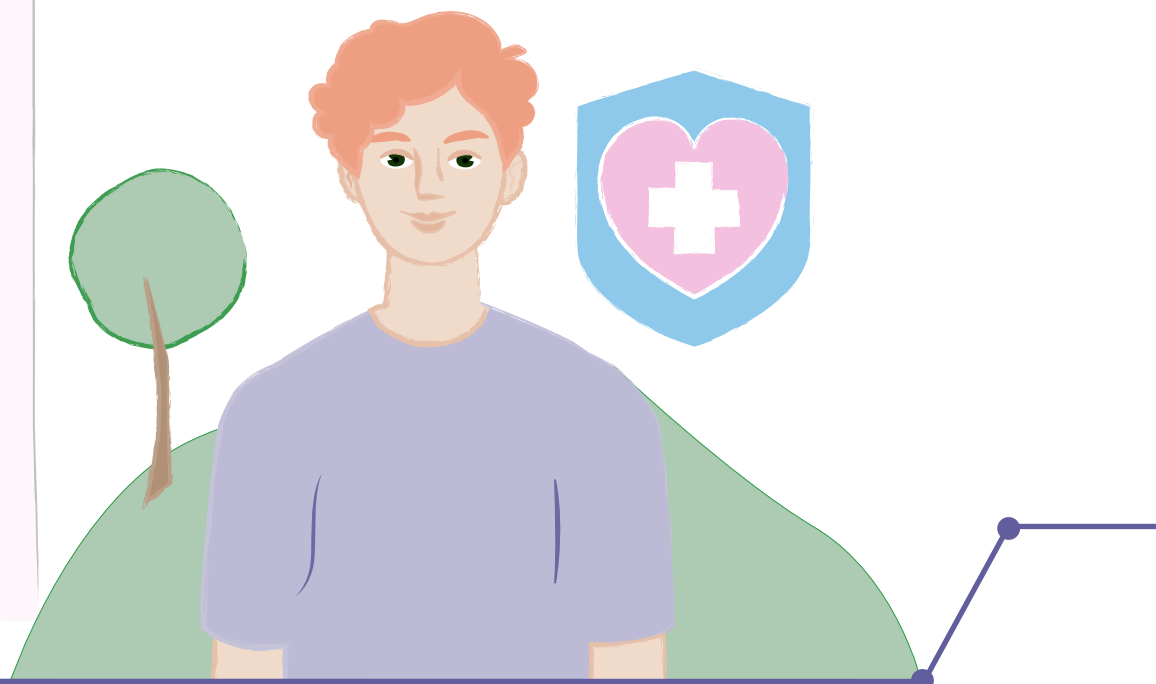
**I will be provided with healthy food and drink during my stay in custody.**

- ✍ You will receive food and drink that is good for your health and in line with your religious beliefs.
- ✍ In some **secure accommodation** you can buy additional food and drink using an ordering system called 'canteen'. Money to buy things can be sent to you in different ways. This will all be explained to you as part of your induction.

Custody  
standard  
**10**

**I will receive health care so that  
I can stay fit and healthy.**

- ✍ A health team will care for your mental and physical health while you are in **custody**.
- ✍ If you need specialist support for additional needs (for example, if you are neurodivergent), this will be arranged for you.
- ✍ You will be asked about any medication you take. You will be offered any immunisations and vaccinations that you have missed and help with dental, hearing and eye care.
- ✍ Smoking and vaping are not allowed while you are in custody. You can get support to stop smoking.
- ✍ You are not allowed to have any alcohol while you are in custody. You can get support to stop drinking alcohol.
- ✍ Keeping you safe is everyone's priority. If there are concerns about your safety or mental health, it might mean you are moved to stay somewhere different or have someone watching you closely.



Custody  
standard  
**11**

**I will be able to get independent advice and support while I am in custody.**

- It is important that you are able to voice your opinions or concerns, and get the advice and support you need.
- An **advocate** is someone who doesn't work for the custody service and can give you information, advice and support. They can help you to raise concerns if you are unhappy about something, if you think you have been treated unfairly, or if you want to make a complaint about your experience in **custody**.
- You will be given information on how to contact an advocate and can request an advocate at any time. You can ask **custody staff** for this information.
- You also have the right to free legal advice from a **lawyer** while you are in custody. If you have not kept in touch with a lawyer, an advocate can help you contact one.

Custody  
standard  
**12**

**My religious beliefs and practices will be respected while I am in custody.**

- Secure accommodation** can differ, but in many you have the right to meet with the **chaplain** if you want to. They can help you practise your faith and beliefs. They can also support you if you're feeling sad, even if you are not religious.
- You can spend time worshiping or meditating in a dedicated space outside your room. This will be supervised.
- You can ask if you need to worship or meditate at specific times of the day so your timetable can allow for this.
- You will be able to celebrate religious holidays. If you need special religious items, like clothes or headwear, they will be provided.
- You can talk to the chaplaincy team or visiting chaplain before you leave **custody** if you want to.

Custody  
standard  
**13**

**I will have access to education and learning opportunities which will help prepare me for life after custody.**

- ✍ You should have access to at least 15 hours of education or training every week while you are in **custody**.
- ✍ Your learning will usually include maths, English, IT, life skills, and opportunities for personal and social development.
- ✍ Your education programme will include physical wellbeing and exercise. You will have an exercise class at least once a week and there will be other activities outside of school hours on evenings or weekends.
- ✍ All your learning will be adjusted to meet any additional needs you may have.



Custody  
standard

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The priority of all the people looking after me is to keep me and those around me safe.

- Staff will check on you regularly to make sure you are safe and that you have settled in. They will only wake you up on purpose if something is wrong.
- Sometimes custody officers, youth justice workers or key workers may need to search you by holding a metal detector or by patting you down to check that you are not hiding anything which could be dangerous to you or others. This can include a more thorough search of your clothes or body.
- You can ask to see an **advocate** if you want support after a search.
- Keeping you and others safe is a priority, so you will be kept separate from another child when there might be a safety risk to either of you. You should tell custody officers if you are worried about any other children.
- Sometimes staff may need to use force to stop you hurting yourself or others, but only after they have tried other ways to prevent harm.
- If they use force, you should always have the chance to talk through what happened afterwards with a member of staff who was not involved and a member of the health team. You can also ask to speak to an advocate at any time.



Custody  
standard  
**15**

**I will be supported if I need to  
move to an adult prison.**

- After you turn 18, you may be moved into an adult prison (even if you are on **remand**). This is sometimes called transition.
- Your YJS **case manager** will meet with you at least twice to discuss what will happen and create a plan for you. They will explain the main differences between youth custody and the adult prison. You will also talk about your health and education needs, as well as any worries you have about the move.
- The first meeting will be at least one month before you move into the adult prison and the second meeting will be at least 10 days before you move.
- Your parents or carers, **social worker** and **personal advisor** (if you have one) will be invited to join these meetings.





## What can I do if these standards are not met?

If you think these standards have not been met, you should tell the person named in the standard, or any adult who supports you can tell them for you. If you do not want to do this or are unhappy with the response you get, you can make a complaint.

There are different ways to complain, and you can choose which way you prefer. The type of **placement** you are in affects who you should complain to.

### If you don't agree with the placement decision

- ✍ If you, your parents or carers, or your **lawyer** are unhappy about where the **Youth Custody Service** have placed you, any of you can **appeal** the decision. This means that the decision will be looked at again.
- ✍ To place an appeal, you must write out your reasons in an email to [YCSTransfers@justice.gov.uk](mailto:YCSTransfers@justice.gov.uk)

### In all placements

- ✍ You can speak to your key worker, any staff member that you trust, your health worker, the **chaplain**, your **YJS case manager**, an independent **advocate**, your **social worker**, your **personal advisor** or your **independent reviewing officer** if you have one.
- ✍ You can call the **Children's Commissioner's** advice line. If you are in England, the number is **0800 528 0731**, or you can [contact them on their website](#). If you are in Wales, the number is **0808 801 1000**, or you can [contact them on their website](#).
- ✍ If your complaint is about something to do with your health care, you can complain to the health team. If you are in England, you can also complain to NHS England. Their number is **0300 311 2233**, or you can [find out more on their website](#). If you are in Wales, you can complain to Public Health Wales. Their number is **0300 003 0383**, or you can [find out more on their website](#).
- ✍ You can [complain about your lawyer to the Solicitors Regulation Authority](#).



### If you're in a young offender institution (YOI)

- ✍ You can contact your **Independent Monitoring Board**, or you can speak to them when they visit. They check whether YOIs are safe and that you are being treated fairly there.
- ✍ You can complain to the **Prisons and Probation Ombudsman** or the **Independent Prisoner Complaint Investigations**. You can ask an independent **advocate** to help you.
- ✍ You can write down your complaint and put it in a box. There are different coloured boxes for different types of complaint.
- ✍ Barnardo's can provide an advocate to support you. You can call Barnardo's on **0808 168 2694**.

### If you're in an a secure training centre (STC)

- ✍ You can complain to the **Prisons and Probation Ombudsman** or the **Independent Prisoner Complaint Investigations**. You can ask an independent **advocate** to help you.
- ✍ Barnardo's can provide an advocate to support you. You can call Barnardo's on **0808 168 2694**.



### If you're in an a secure children's home (SCH)

- ✍ You can complain to the manager of the home. You can ask for someone independent (this means someone who doesn't work for the home) to look at your complaint.
- ✍ You can also make a complaint to your **local authority**.
- ✍ Barnardo's can provide an **advocate** to support you. The phone number is different to the number for YOIs and STCs. A member of staff will give you the number if you ask.

### If you're in the secure school (SS)

- ✍ You can complain to any member of staff. You can ask an independent advocate to help you.
- ✍ If you are unhappy with the outcome of your complaint, you can appeal to either the manager or the principal director.
- ✍ If you are still unhappy with the outcome, staff will support you with the next steps.



# Difficult words

We've used some words in this charter that you might not understand. We've listed them below and explained what they mean. These explanations are to help you understand this charter. They are not legal definitions.

**Advocate:** This is someone who can give you information, advice and support and help you understand your rights. They can also help you to raise concerns if you are unhappy about something.

**Appeal:** This is a formal request to reconsider a decision. This might be if you think a wrong decision has been made. One example would be if you are unhappy with where the Youth Custody Service has placed you and want to appeal their placement decision. A decision might not be changed even if you appeal.

**Bail:** This is your temporary release if you are being investigated about your involvement in a crime. When you are on bail you must return to the police station or go to court at a particular time and on a particular day. It is a criminal offence not to do this. Conditional bail is where you have to follow certain rules while you are on bail. If you don't do this, you might be arrested.

**Carer:** Someone who looks after and gives support to another person. This can be practical support (like cooking meals) and emotional support (like listening to the person if they are upset). Carers can be adults or children.

**Case manager:** The Youth Justice Service case manager is your main point of contact from your local Youth Justice Service. Your case manager will work with you, your family and other professionals to understand your situation and give you the support you need. They will make a plan to support you and help prevent you from committing a crime in the future.

**Chaplain:** A chaplain is a religious leader who can give you support and guidance. They can be of any faith and you don't have to be religious to talk to them.

**Children's Commissioner:** There is a Children's Commissioner for England and a Children's Commissioner for Wales. They protect the rights of children and stand up for your views and interests. They can give you support and advice.

**Custody:** Custody can mean a locked room in a police station, a locked room in court, or at the place where you stay if you are sentenced to custody (for adults this place is called a prison).

**Custody staff:** These are people who work in young offender institutions, secure training centres and secure children's homes.

**Independent Monitoring Board:** This is a group of volunteers who visit young offender institutions and report on whether they are safe and the young people there are being treated fairly. They are separate from the people who run the young offender institution. You can ask to talk to them privately about any problems you might have, and they will help where they can or get someone to help you.

**Independent Prisoner Complaint Investigations:** This is an organisation that investigates complaints made by anyone in secure training centres or young offender institutions.

**Independent reviewing officer:** This is someone who leads reviews for 'looked after children'. Their main job is to make sure that your care plan meets your needs. They are separate from your social worker.

**Induction:** This is when you are helped to settle in and find out about the secure accommodation and the people who work there. You will learn what you can and cannot do.

**Hearing:** A formal meeting in the court where decisions are made about a criminal case.

**Judge:** This is the person in charge of the court room. In the Crown Court, the judge will tell the jury about the law. The judge makes the decision about what should happen if you are found guilty of a crime.

**Lawyer:** This is someone who is trained to understand the law. They will make sure you know your rights, explain to you what is happening, and give you legal advice. The lawyer works for you (not the police or the court).

**Local authority:** This is another name for the local council or local government. They run services like schools, sports centres, social services and Youth Justice Services.

**Magistrate:** This is someone who does a similar job to a judge. There are usually two or three magistrates who work together in a youth court. They listen to all the evidence and make decisions, including about what should happen if you are found guilty.

**Personal advisor:** This is someone who offers advice, support and information to young people leaving care. They will work alongside your social worker to help you prepare for adulthood and will continue to support you once you've turned 18.

**Placement:** This is the type of secure accommodation you are going to or staying in.

**Prisons and Probation Ombudsman:** This is an organisation that investigates complaints from adult prisoners, children in young offender institutions or secure training centres, and people on probation. They are not part of the government.

**Remand:** If you are charged with an offence and refused bail, you will be remanded. This means the judge or magistrate decides that you should stay in local authority accommodation or youth secure accommodation. The decision is made at a remand hearing.

**Resettlement worker:** This is someone who will work with you, your Youth Justice Service case manager, your social worker and your personal advisor (if you have one) to help you plan for leaving custody. This could include your health needs, your education or employment, and where you will live.

**Secure accommodation:** This is somewhere you have to stay if you are given a custodial sentence or you are remanded to custody. A judge or a magistrate decides how long you have to stay there. There are different types of secure accommodation, including young offender institutions, secure training centres, secure children's homes and secure schools. These all make up the youth secure estate.

**Sentence:** A judge or magistrate can give you a sentence if you are guilty of committing an offence. A sentence is an order from the court that you must follow. There are different types of sentences. All sentences have certain requirements you must follow but some involve going to custody (custodial sentences) whereas others (community sentences) mean you can stay at home. A 'sentencing hearing' is when the court decides what your sentence will be.

**Social worker:** This is someone from your local authority who is trained to support children and their families who may be having difficulties.

**Substance misuse team or worker:** These people will help you if you have a problem with drugs or alcohol.

**Supervision:** This is when you meet with your Youth Justice Service case manager. This might be as part of your bail conditions or as part of your sentence. You must go to these meetings.

**Trial:** This is when a court hears all the evidence in a case and decides if you are guilty or not guilty. In the Crown Court this decision is made by a jury. In the youth court this decision is made by a judge or several magistrates.

**Youth Custody Service:** The Youth Custody Service is responsible for running the youth secure estate for children and young people in England and Wales.

**Youth Justice Service (YJS) or Youth Offending Team (YOT):** A team of professionals (including police, social workers and substance misuse workers) who work with you if you have committed, or are suspected of committing, a crime. The work they do with you might be voluntary or compulsory and will depend on your circumstances and the crime you have been involved in.

**Youth secure estate:** This is made up of the different types of accommodation you can be placed in if you are sentenced or remanded to custody. The types of accommodation are young offender institutions, secure training centres, secure children's homes or a secure school.



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