



Ministry  
of Justice

# Youth Justice Charter

What happens if I am stopped by the police?







The police have an important job of keeping you and everyone safe. They work with people in your neighbourhood to make sure everyone follows the rules and feels secure. The law gives the police powers to help them solve crime and stop it from happening. But they have to make sure that they use these powers fairly, only when necessary, and in the right way. The police standards below explain how you should be treated if you come into contact with the police.

These standards form part of the Youth Justice Charter. To find out more, search 'Youth Justice Charter'. You can also find out about going to court, working with Youth Justice Services, going to custody 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'.



Police  
standard

1

I can be approached by the police at any time and they must provide proof of who they are if they are not in uniform.

- It is important you know that the person stopping you is from the police. If the person is not in uniform, they should show you their warrant card, which is a form of ID that proves they are part of the police.

Police  
standard

2

I can be stopped and searched by the police but they must explain why they are searching me and follow specific rules before, during and after the search.

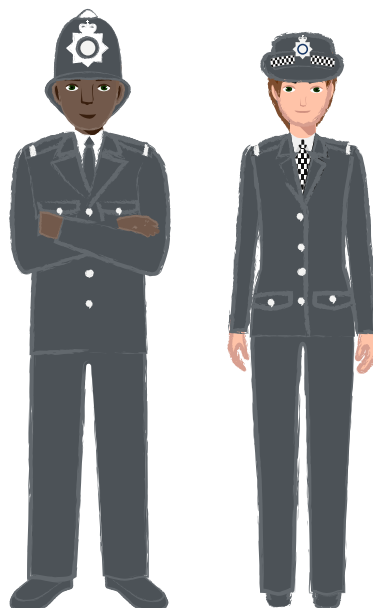
- You can be **stopped and searched** by the police if they have **reasonable grounds** to think you are carrying something you shouldn't have, for example, illegal drugs or a knife. You might also be stopped and searched if you are in an area that a senior police officer has decided is at risk of serious violence.
- You cannot say no to being searched if there are reasonable grounds, and the police can stop you from walking away if you try to.
- If the police record the search on their **body-worn camera**, they should tell you they are recording you.
- If you are asked to take off something you wear for religious reasons, like a turban or hijab, the police should take you somewhere private where others can't see.
- The police must complete a record to say they have searched you and either give you a copy of that record or tell you how you can get a copy.
- The police should contact your parent or carer if you are stopped and searched.



Police  
standard  
**3**

**If I am taken to a police station, the police must organise for an appropriate adult to come and support me.**

- The **appropriate adult** could be your parent, carer, a **social worker** or a trained adult from an appropriate adult scheme, but they must be independent from the police.
- The appropriate adult's job is to protect your interests, rights and welfare. This includes helping you communicate, making sure you understand your rights, and checking that the police are acting fairly and respecting your rights. They can't give you legal advice or answer questions on your behalf.
- You have the right to ask to speak privately to your appropriate adult at any time.
- Your appropriate adult must be with you during many police procedures. These include interviews, fingerprinting, taking samples (such as hair, blood or urine), non-urgent strip searches, giving you a **youth caution or youth conditional caution**, or **charging** you. Being charged with an **offence** means you will have to go to court, and the court will decide what happens next.





Police  
standard  
**4**

**If a police search exposes intimate parts of my body, the police must respect my rights and dignity.**

- If the police need to do a search which exposes intimate parts of your body, an **appropriate adult** must be with you during the search.
- There are some situations where an appropriate adult doesn't need to be with you. This includes in urgent cases where there is a risk of serious harm, or if you don't want an appropriate adult to be there (the appropriate adult must sign a record agreeing to this).
- If the search is not urgent, then a minimum of two people must be with you. This could be two police officers (if you do not want your appropriate adult to be there). There shouldn't be any more than three people with you, unless in exceptional circumstances.
- Everyone present must be the same sex as you, except if you have requested a specific appropriate adult.
- The search must take place in a private space, usually inside a police station and never in a police vehicle.
- You must be searched as quickly as possible, allowed to dress as soon as the search is complete, and won't normally have to take all your clothes off at once.
- If the police record the search, they should cover the camera or turn it away when your intimate body parts are exposed.



Police  
standard  
**5**

**If the police want to ask questions about whether I was involved in a crime, they must explain and respect my rights.**

- The police cannot ask you any questions unless you have an **appropriate adult** with you.
- The police must ask you and your appropriate adult whether you want a **lawyer**. If either of you do, they cannot ask their questions until the lawyer arrives.
- Your lawyer works for you and not the police. They will explain the interview process to you, give you advice before the interview starts and support you during the interview.
- The police must explain that a **caution** means you don't have to answer their questions, and that what you decide to say could be used as evidence later.

Police  
standard  
**6**

**If I am arrested, the police should explain what is happening and their reasons for arresting me.**

- You cannot be **arrested** if you are under 10 years old.
- You should not be arrested at school or college unless this is unavoidable.
- You should be taken straight to a police station unless you are **de-arrested**.



Police  
standard  
**7**

**My health and wellbeing will be looked after while I am at the police station.**

- The police might ask a specialist health worker to meet with you if they are worried about your health or wellbeing.
- The health worker gives advice on how best to support people with any health needs. This includes if you take any medication, you have mental health difficulties or a learning disability, or you are neurodivergent (for example, if you have autism or ADHD).

Police  
standard  
**8**

**The police will only keep me at the police station for as long as necessary, and they will keep me safe and respect my rights while I am there.**

- You should be able to make a phone call to your parent or **guardian**.
- You should not be put in a **cell** unless there is nowhere else safe and comfortable at the police station. You must never be put in a cell with an adult.
- The police must try to contact someone who is responsible for you (like a parent, carer, guardian or **social worker**) to let them know where you are.
- If you are female, a female member of staff will look after you.
- You will have food and water, a place to sleep, clothes or blankets to keep you warm, and sanitary products if you need them.
- You can ask for a book to read, or something to draw or write with. The police should give you an activity unless they think it is a risk to your safety and wellbeing.
- You should not be kept at the police station for more than 24 hours before the police decide whether to **charge** you, unless you are accused of a serious crime.

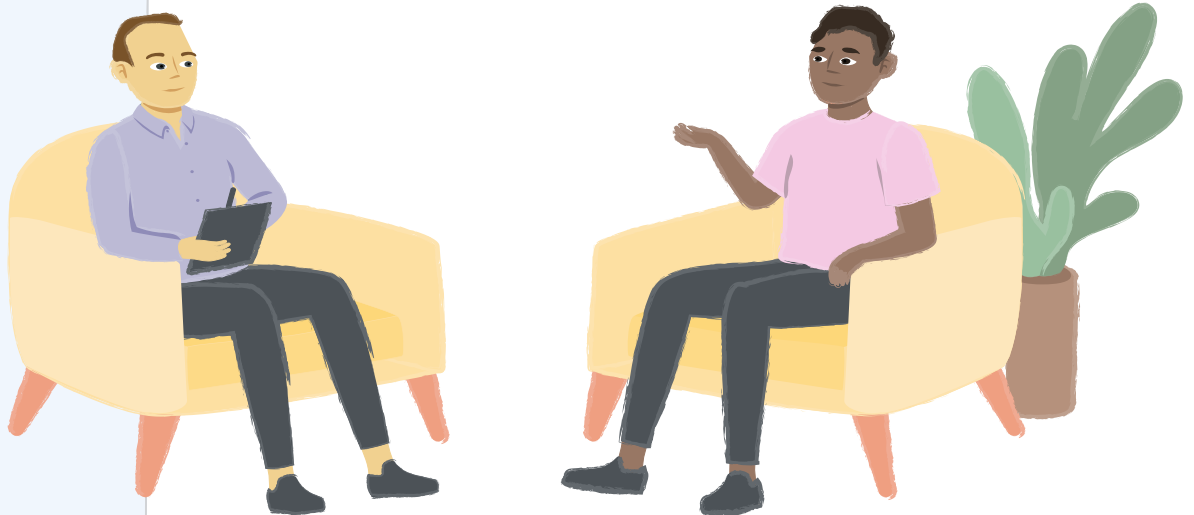


Police  
standard

9

I have the right to free, independent advice from a lawyer and the police should arrange this for me.

- If you don't already know a **lawyer**, you can ask for the **duty lawyer**.
- The lawyer will come to the police station but might speak to you on the phone first.
- The lawyer works for you (not the police). They will make sure you know your rights, explain to you what is happening and give you legal advice.
- The legal advice is free: you do not need to pay anything.
- You will be able to speak to the lawyer in private, without your **appropriate adult** if you want.
- If you have a lawyer, they must be with you when the police ask you questions about the crime you are accused of.





Police  
standard  
**10**

**I will be given additional help with communicating if I need it.**

- Your **appropriate adult** can help you understand what the police are saying in your police interview. They can also help make sure the police understand what you are saying.
- You may also be able to get extra help with communication from someone called an **intermediary**, who is independent from the police. Their job is to help you and the police understand what each other say.
- If you speak a different language to English or Welsh, the police can organise for someone who speaks your language (an interpreter) to help you understand what everyone is saying and to speak for you.
- The interpreter might be with you in person, on a video call or on a phone call.

Police  
standard  
**11**

**If I am offered an out of court disposal, I will be helped to understand what this means.**

- An **out of court disposal** means you do not have to go to court if you accept the disposal.
- There are different types, with different rules and things you will need to do.
- An **appropriate adult** must be with you if you are offered a **youth caution** or **youth conditional caution**.
- The police should explain to you what is involved with your out of court disposal, and what will happen if you don't stick to any rules.
- Out of court disposals can show up on your criminal record in future. You can ask a **lawyer** for advice on whether the out of court disposal is the best option for you.



Police  
standard  
**12**

**If I am charged with an offence, the police will explain what happens next and any rules I have to follow until I get to court.**

- If you are **charged** with an **offence**, you will need to go to court.
- While waiting to go to court, you usually have a right to **bail**. Bail means that you can leave but will have to go to court at a specified time and date. If you do not show up to court at that time and date, this means you are committing a crime and may be charged with another offence.
- The police might give you some rules to follow – for example, where you must live until you go to court, or people you are not allowed to contact. This could be to keep you or others safe.
- If you are not charged with an offence, the police might release you under investigation. This means you are free to go home and there are no rules you need to follow, but the police will continue to investigate the offence they think you committed. They could **arrest** you and charge you in the future.





Police  
standard  
**13**

**If I am not given bail by the police, they will explain the reasons why and where I will stay.**

- You may be refused police **bail** if the police aren't certain where you live or if you have been **charged** with a very serious **offence** like murder. They will always explain why you have been refused bail and you are not free to go.
- Your **local authority** and **Youth Justice Service (YJS)** must try to find a safe and secure space for you (for example, with a relative, in foster care or in a children's home). If they cannot find a space, you will stay at the police station. This is called staying in **police custody**.
- The police will explain the rules that you have to follow and what will happen if you don't. They will also tell you whether you have temporarily become a **looked after child** and what this means.

Police  
standard  
**14**

**If I am kept in police custody, they will explain how long this will last and what the next steps will be.**

- If the police decide that you need to stay in **police custody**, you will stay until your first court **hearing**. This will usually be within 24 hours of you arriving at the police station.
- You will be taken straight from police custody to the court.
- Your first court hearing is called a bail hearing. The court will decide whether you can be **bailed**, **remanded to local authority accommodation**, or should stay in custody until your next court hearing (usually your **trial**). This type of custody is not the same as police custody, and you will be placed into the **youth secure estate**.





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

If you think these standards have not been met, you should tell the person who is named in the standard (for example, the police officer), 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.

### Complaining about the police

- Speak to the duty officer at your local police station.
- Dial **101** to make a complaint by phone.
- Send a complaint to the **Independent Office for Police Conduct**. They are not part of the police and they make all of their decisions independently. [Read more about the complaints process](#), or [send a complaint through their website](#).

### Complaining about your lawyer

- You can [complain about your lawyer to the Solicitors Regulation Authority](#).

### More support

- 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](#).
- Ask your local **Citizens Advice Bureau** for advice. If you are in England, you can call on **0800 144 8848**. If you are in Wales, you can call on **0800 702 2020**.



# 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.

**Appropriate adult:** This is a responsible person aged 18 or older who supports you at the police station and when you are interviewed by the police. An appropriate adult can be a parent, carer or other relative. If the person who normally looks after you cannot be your appropriate adult, the police will request a social worker or a trained appropriate adult from your local scheme.

**Arrest:** This is when a police officer uses their legal powers to take you to the police station. This could be to interview you.

**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.

**Body-worn cameras:** These are recording devices worn by police officers. They can record video and sound when the police are around members of the public.

**Court or police cell:** This is where you stay at a police station or in a court building waiting to go inside the court room. The door is locked to keep you and others safe.

**Charge:** If the police believe you have committed a crime, they will charge you. This usually means you have to go to court. You will either be given bail and a date to attend court, or kept in custody at the police station and taken to court the next day.



**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.

**Citizens Advice:** This organisation can give you confidential advice about lots of different issues. They do this online, over the phone and in person.

**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).

**De-arrest:** This means that you are no longer under arrest. The police will release you because the reasons why they arrested you have changed.

**Duty lawyer:** This is a lawyer who gives legal advice, support and representation to someone who doesn't have a lawyer of their own. You do not have to pay for the duty lawyer.

**Guardian:** This is the adult who is responsible for looking after you and making decisions about your education, health and upbringing.

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

**Independent Office for Police Conduct:** This is an organisation that investigates the most serious complaints involving the police. They are separate from the police.

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

**Intermediary:** This is someone who can help you communicate with the police or the people in court. Their job is to help you and the adults understand what each other say. They can help you understand the questions you are asked and also help you give your answers clearly.



**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.

**Local authority accommodation:** This is a place to live that is provided by the local council (also called the local authority). If you are remanded to local authority accommodation, you will be told where you must live while you wait for your trial. This could be at your family home, a temporary foster home or in a children's home.

**Looked after child:** This means that your local authority has responsibility for your care and wellbeing. You will have a social worker whose job is to look after your best interests.

**Offence:** Committing an offence means doing something that is against the law.

**Open day:** This is when you can visit a school or college to see what it is like and find out what courses it teaches.

**Out of court disposal:** This is something the police might give you if they think you have broken the law. It means that you do not have to go to court. There are different types of out of court disposals with different rules and things you will need to do.

**Police custody:** Staying in police custody means you stay in the police station. Sometimes you might stay in police custody until your first court hearing. This might happen if you have been remanded by the police and there is no space for you to stay in appropriate local authority accommodation.

**Reasonable grounds:** This means that a police officer must genuinely suspect or believe that they will find an item before they stop and search you.



**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.

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

**Stop and search:** This is when police use their legal powers to stop and search you. There are different types of searches and each have different rules that the police must follow.

- Outer clothing search: Removal of 'outer clothing' – for example, a jacket, coat or gloves.
- More thorough search: Removal of more than outer clothing – for example, a t-shirt, but does not expose intimate body parts.
- Search exposing intimate parts: Removal of clothing that exposes intimate body parts.

**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 caution and youth conditional caution:** A caution is a warning the police can offer you if you admit to committing a minor (non-serious) offence. This is instead of going to court. A conditional caution means that there are certain things you must do.

**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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