



**KENTUCKY
TEEN COURT**

Diversion Program

*Offered by the Court Designated Worker Program
Kentucky Administrative Office of the Courts*

Teen Court Diversion Program offers positive option for young offenders

The Teen Court Diversion Program is an intervention program for juveniles, age 10 to 17, who commit violations such as retail theft, minor theft, disorderly conduct, truancy or minor damage to property.

Teen Court began in 1992 as one of many law-related education programs offered by the Kentucky Court of Justice.

Young offenders who admit their guilt may voluntarily enter the program through a referral by the court designated worker in their county.

Teen Court lets juvenile offenders take advantage of a less formal court process carried out by their peers. They receive their sentences from a teen jury as an alternative to appearing in District Court.

Teen Court cases are presented in local courthouses under strict confidentiality.

High school volunteers are trained to act as attorneys, court clerks, bailiffs and jurors in order to determine an appropriate sentence for the teen defendant. Before participating in actual cases, all student volunteers attend a swearing-in ceremony where they take an oath of confidentiality to protect the privacy of the defendants who will appear before them.

Defendants are questioned by both the teen defense and prosecution attorneys to determine the facts of the case. Local attorneys volunteer to assist the students and local judges.

Jurors adjourn to deliberate and determine a constructive sentence, which may include writing letters of apology, providing community service and paying restitution. Teen Court sentences are legally binding and defendants must complete their sentences within the mandated time frame or face being sent back to the court designated worker.

Referring youth to the Teen Court Diversion Program

The local court designated worker may refer eligible teens to the Teen Court Diversion Program. After Teen Court staff receive a referral, they schedule a meeting with the young offender and one or both parents to discuss the Teen Court process and details of the case.

After the initial meeting with Teen Court staff, the youth and a parent(s) meet with the Teen Court coordinator and student defense attorney. The youth and a parent(s) will then have to appear for the sentencing hearing.

The Teen Court program takes place from September through May to coincide with the school calendar.

"The Teen Court Diversion Program offers our youth an opportunity to not only see how the justice system works, but to actually be part of our system of justice."

– Chief Regional District Judge Karen A. Thomas, Campbell County



The Teen Court Philosophy

Teen Court is based on the premise that most young people want to do what is right when making decisions. Even those who may make the wrong choice due to external factors, such as peer pressure, are often gratified to learn they have an opportunity to make amends.

What better way to influence a young offender than to put the individual before a jury of his or her peers? Peer pressure in a Teen Court setting can have a more immediate and meaningful effect upon a young defendant than the traditional juvenile justice approach. The message given by a peer jury will be long remembered by those seeking to fit within a group and be accepted.

Goals of Teen Court

The Teen Court mission is to:

- Reduce repeat offenses by young offenders.
- Change the attitudes of offenders toward law enforcement, society and themselves.
- Hold young offenders accountable for their actions.
- Increase young offenders' understanding of how their behavior affects others.



Teen Court teaches students about the law and accountability

The Kentucky Law Related Education Program, offered by the Administrative Office of the Courts, gives students the opportunity to learn about the law, legal processes and our democracy. These programs equip young people with the skills to contribute to society as conscientious adults. Teen Court is an excellent example of the positive benefits of law-related education and I encourage young people to take advantage of this valuable program.

*John D. Minton, Jr.
Chief Justice of Kentucky*

Who benefits from the Teen Court Diversion Program?

Juvenile Offenders Young offenders receive a clear message from their peers that their behavior will not be tolerated, which has a lasting impact. Peer pressure reduces the likelihood of repeat offenses and serves as a positive learning experience. In addition, the offense is kept off of an offender's record.

Parents of the Offenders The teens, not their parents, are held accountable for their actions. When parents and peer groups support each other by refusing to accept bad behavior, it sends a powerful statement to young offenders.

Community When teens are empowered to change delinquent behavior, it helps them develop a healthy attitude toward authority and educates them about their rights and responsibilities as citizens. The diversion program is also a cost-effective way to reduce the number of juvenile cases and allow courts to focus on more serious offenders.

Youth Volunteers Teen Court volunteers are trained in all aspects of the judicial system, which serves as an excellent opportunity to examine future career opportunities in the law. Participation improves communication skills, problem-solving abilities and critical thinking. Volunteers also gain a sense of responsibility as they encourage their peers to stop negative behavior.



Kentucky Teen Court Diversion Program
Department of Family and Juvenile Services
Administrative Office of the Courts
1001 Vandalay Drive • Frankfort, Kentucky 40601
502-573-2350 • 800-928-2350 • www.courts.ky.gov

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