



# Harris County Juvenile Probation Department

Strengthening Our Communities by Engaging Youth and Families

## | Young People & The Texas Juvenile Justice System



### ..... | General Information

A young person who commits an alleged offense in violation of a Texas Criminal Statute may be referred to the Juvenile Justice System. In Texas, the age range in which a young person can be arrested as a juvenile is ten through sixteen; however, the jurisdiction of the Texas Juvenile Justice System can extend up to nineteen years of age. The administration of juvenile justice in Texas is regulated strictly by the Texas Juvenile Justice Department, (TJJD for short) and is handled at the county level.

For minor violations, law enforcement may simply warn a young person and parents. However, if further action is deemed necessary, the case is referred to local, juvenile probation officials. Here in Harris County, the Harris County Juvenile Probation Department receives and handles those referrals.

All young people charged with alleged, delinquent offenses, which would be punishable by jail were the young person an adult, are fingerprinted and entered into a statewide, central repository. Their criminal history record may then be accessed by law enforcement and juvenile justice agencies throughout the state of Texas.

### ..... | Intake Process

Young people may arrive any time day or night at a juvenile intake facility. Critical, time sensitive decisions must be made to assess and ensure their safety and their physical, mental, and emotional well-being.

Intake personnel who are skilled in crisis intervention, information gathering, and assessment resolve some cases through counseling and refer other cases to more appropriate social agencies.



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At the intake level, young people may be considered for diversion programs, released to a parent or guardian, or may be detained for a Detention Hearing.

In Harris County, a detention hearing takes place no more than 48 hours after the young person was first brought to our detention facility to determine whether that young person can be released or will be detained. If detained, subsequent detention hearings are held, at intervals set by law, to determine whether the young person will be released or detained further. Every young person who is detained is given this due process.

## ..... | [Waiting for Court](#)

When referrals are received or petitions are filed, a juvenile probation officer, also known as a Court Facilitator, initiates a court investigation. After making a detailed assessment of the young persons' behavior, school, home, and social relationships, the Court Facilitator prepares a comprehensive profile of the young person for the judge, district attorney, defense attorney, and other court staff, for their appearance before one of the three, Harris County Juvenile District Courts (313th, 314th, and 315th.) The information provided by the Court Facilitator assists the court in determining a suitable disposition and whether further action is needed on the case.

## ..... | [Going to Court](#)

In the young persons' court proceeding, known as an adjudication hearing in juvenile justice terms, the young person, family, and young persons' attorney appear before a judge who decides whether the young person did indeed commit a delinquent act or engage in delinquent conduct indicating a need for further care, supervision, or restorative rehabilitation. If the young person is adjudicated for the alleged offense, the judge orders a 'disposition' – a plan to care for and protect the young person and the public and to redirect the young person toward a law-abiding future and away from the adult criminal justice system.

## ..... | [What the Judge Can Decide](#)

Juvenile court judges have many options at their disposal from outright dismissal to longer-term detention in a juvenile residential facility. In most cases, the judge orders some form of juvenile probation supervision in the community or placement in a private, state, or local residential treatment facility.



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For certain felony offenses, a young person 14 years old or older can be ‘certified’ to stand trial as an adult.

For other serious offenses, the Determinate Sentencing Law allows a young person to be placed on probation or confined for up to 40 years, first in a Texas Juvenile Justice Department facility, followed by an optional court transfer to adult probation or prison.

## ..... | Residential and Community Facilities

In general, juvenile detention centers are short-term, secure facilities operated by either local, juvenile probation departments or private companies that house youth who are awaiting their court date.

Harris County Juvenile Probation Department operates several facilities focused on specific aspects of care including but not limited to continuing academic education, physical and mental health services, gang involvement rehabilitation, detention, and youth diversion and development programs.

## ..... | Diversion Programs

Diversion programs seek to divert young people from further involvement in the Juvenile Justice System by providing informal alternatives to formal court proceedings.

Through these diversion programs, some of the youngest, least serious offenders get a second chance to prove to the court that no further intervention is needed to prevent future, illegal activity. Young people who complete these types of diversion programs are able to avoid the adjudication process.

## ..... | Probation

Of all the choices before the court, probation supervision is most commonly used. Because young people remain in their homes and schools, probation is less disruptive to their lives and the lives of their families.

When a young person is placed on probation within the community, they will be expected to report to a Juvenile Probation Officer who will assist the young person and family with



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community-based connections to behavior-change programming, advocacy and academic supports, service-learning projects, family engagement opportunities and linkage to a variety of other resources to address identified needs and or to satisfy court ordered conditions. As a source of social, emotional, and financial support, parent participation and engagement are key to a successful probation outcome.

## ..... | Residential Placement

Due to a number of factors, some young people are placed in longer-term residential treatment facilities to address individual needs and provide a measure of increased physical, mental, and emotional care.

In Harris County, these facilities use a trauma informed approach to help young people grow and develop in positive ways. Young people who are placed in a facility participate in individual, group, and family therapy along with participating in both educational and vocational programs. The facilities strive to work with families and community partners to facilitate youth returning home as quickly and safely as possible.

## ..... | What Happens Next

The young person who completes the requirements of their experience with the juvenile justice system gets a fresh start. They are treated with confidentiality and care. Juvenile case records are not made public.

## ..... | Learn More

To learn more about the juvenile justice in Texas, contact the Texas Juvenile Justice Department (TJJD) or your local, county juvenile justice department.

To learn more about juvenile justice in Harris County, contact the Harris County Juvenile Probation Department at 713-222-4100.