



Childline

☎ 08000 55 555

Child Justice Act

Made simple



Sometimes a child may do something that is against the law – this is called a criminal act. **The government has passed a special act that applies to children who are accused of and/or have committed crimes.**

This is called the Child Justice Act.

In making this Act, many people (including children), made suggestions about how we should deal with, and help, children who are accused and who have committed crimes. Many of these ideas became part of the Act.

A brief outline of the Act :

- **The Act protects the rights of children who are accused or who have committed crimes.** Just because a child is accused or has committed a crime does not mean that they should not be treated properly or abused in any way. They must still be treated like children.
- The Act says that if a child that is under 10 years has committed a crime, they should not be taken to court as they are not able to take responsibility fully for what they have done. **These children must be helped in other ways** and provided with care, protection and treatment according to their needs.
- The Act provides that **when a child over 10 years has been accused of committing a crime, they must be “assessed” by a probation officer.** A probation officer is someone with special training to understand and help children involved in crime.



Laws that are written down are called “Acts”.

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“Assessed” means that the probation officer has to interview the child, and people who know the child, to understand what may have caused the child’s behaviour and what needs to be done to help the child.

- The Act says that older children must be helped to take responsibility for their behaviour and to make “restitution” – this means try and make right the wrong they have done. This can be done by attending “diversion” programmes – these are programme that help the child understand the wrongfulness of their behaviour and learn skills that help them behave differently. Sometimes an older child may be ordered to do community service as well as attend a helping programme. This may be, for example, helping at a home for the elderly, or washing cars at a welfare organisation.
- The Act says that children may only be kept in police cells or prison as a very last resort as these are not healthy places for children to be and that children cannot be given a sentence of life imprisonment if they are sentenced to prison.

A sentence is what the Magistrate or Judge (person in charge of the court) decides must happen to the child if they are found guilty of committing the crime.

