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Child Victims and Witnesses Support Materials

A Guide for Practitioners

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A Guide for Practitioners

Child Victims and Witnesses Support Materials includes materials for young children ages 2 to 6 years old, school-age children ages 7 to 12 years old, and youth ages 13 to 18 years old. However, you can use whichever set of materials seems most appropriate for each child, given their stage of development.

For each age group, there are materials about the criminal justice system and the child welfare system, so you can choose the materials that will be most helpful to each child.

How To Use The Materials

Here are some suggestions for how to use the materials most effectively:

- Familiarize yourself with the materials first, before providing them to children or caregivers.
- Provide the materials to children and their caregivers as early in the justice system process as possible, and regardless of what the case outcome might be.
- If a child doesn't yet read well, either you or one of the other people working on their case, such as a therapist or advocate, can read the materials to them.

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- Regardless of a child's age, it is important that an adult is available to help them understand what they are reading and provide emotional support.
- Whenever possible, ensure that caregivers are provided with the materials first so they are aware of the content and can be the primary support for their child during this process. It benefits children when their caregivers also learn about coping skills and how the justice system works.
- The materials can be read all the way through in one sitting, or different sections can be used at different times, depending on a child's situation, their age, the stage of their case, and how they are feeling. For example, you may choose to use the sections about testifying only if it is likely a child will testify, or use the section on foster care only if a child has had that experience.
- As you read the story, you'll come across activities along the way. Encourage children to try the activities, because they teach coping skills that can help them (and maybe you!) de-stress. You can also use the activities as reminders to take a break and check in with a child about how they're feeling.
- Be aware that children can be triggered by anything that reminds them of the traumas they have experienced. If a child becomes distressed at any time, it is okay to take a break, offer support, and practice coping skills like deep breathing together.
- Feel free to make changes to the materials so that they work well for each child. This might mean adjusting the details of what happens in the story or using words that make more sense in your community.
- Ask children questions to help connect the story to their feelings and experiences. Some examples: *Is there someone like Linda helping you? Oscar felt scared when this happened; how do you think you would feel?*
- We recognize that all courtrooms look different; you may want to explain how your courtroom looks different than the diagram in the materials, and/or compare a photo of your courtroom with the diagram.

- Consider keeping the materials in your office if there is someone living in a child's home who should not have access to them, such as the defendant.

Tips for Supporting Child Victims and Witnesses

Here are some ways to support children while using these materials, and as they go through this experience:

- Let them know that it is okay to have a lot of big feelings, or no feelings at all, and that there are things they can do to feel better.
- Remind them that none of this is their fault.
- Meet with them in a child-friendly space, if possible. Sitting on the rug with them or providing Play-Doh and materials for coloring can go a long way in helping children feel more comfortable.
- Tell them that they are not the only one that has gone through this; other kids and families have had these experiences, too.
- Remember to use language that children can understand, especially when explaining the justice system. Ask children (and adults) to repeat back the information in their own words, so you can assess if they understood fully.
- Keep in mind that you may have to provide the same information multiple times and/or in multiple ways (e.g., verbally and in writing).
- As much as you can, let children (and adults) know what to expect each step of the way, so they can feel less anxious and more prepared.
- Remind them that there are people who support them, such as family members, friends, caseworkers, advocates, therapists, and lawyers; and name those people together.
- Make sure that children and caregivers are aware of any resources they need now or may need in the future, including victim advocacy services and trauma-focused therapy.

- Encourage children to ask as many questions as they'd like, and to express their thoughts and feelings to you, their caregivers, and other grownups working on their case.
- Give children the chance to make choices whenever possible, even about seemingly minor things such as where each person sits, when to take a break, which topic to discuss first, or which part(s) of the materials to work on each time you meet. This helps children regain their sense of control and personal power.
- Remind children that they are strong and will get through this.



Family and Dependency Court Resources

Use these materials to teach children involved with family and dependency court how the child welfare system works, what their rights are, and how they can cope with the difficult feelings they might have.

[View the resources.](#)



Criminal Court Resources

Use these materials to teach children involved with criminal court as a crime victim or witness about how the justice system works, what their rights are, and how they can cope with the difficult feelings they might have.

[View the resources.](#)



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