

In response to the growing number of court cases involving child victims/witnesses, court awareness programs have evolved in several states. As more reported allegations occur where children have witnessed a violent crime, more filings in criminal and juvenile court follow. This has compelled a more critical examination of how court systems deal with children as victims and witnesses. The result has been the development of programs to improve the criminal justice response.

One initiative began in 2003 and was implemented through a collaborative effort, with our support, the Circuit Court Administrative Judge and the Prince George's County State's Attorney's Office.

Youth Court Education Program (YCEP) conducted by trained and experienced Victim Advocate Volunteers, is a part of Community Advocates for Family & Youths' (CAFY) mission to support all youth who may need to give evidence in a court of law. It is an educational program developed to help youth victims/witnesses and their families better deal with having to testify in court and is the only youth witness education program in Maryland.

YCEP's goal is to help create a positive outcome for all youth in the court system. This approach rests on the belief that when a youth learns about the judicial process and gains some familiarity with a courtroom, he or she is less likely to be frightened and more likely to participate fully in the process. Hence, justice can be served and the rights of all involved protected.

YCEP provides non-evidentiary practical and emotional preparation to children, who are involved in any proceeding as witnesses. Groups serve as a reminder that others face similar circumstances.

Parents/Guardians are included in this process as they, too, are filled with questions. Moreover, their support has a significant impact on the ability of our youth to cope with the court process, and ultimately aids in the healing process.

Evidence is never discussed and this is a free service. For more information, contact CAFY at (301) 390-4092.

Sincerely,

William D. Missouri
Administrative Judge
7th Judicial Circuit & Prince George's County

Serving the Community

Helping Families

Educating Victims



Crime - It's Real, It's Wrong

Speak Out for Yourself

Or

Someone Else.

This project was supported by Office for Victims of Crime, U.S. Department of Justice. Points of view in this document are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the official position or policies of the U.S. Department of Justice.

(301) 390-4092 (phone)

(301)249-1805 (fax)

P. O. Box 4419

Capitol Heights, MD 20791

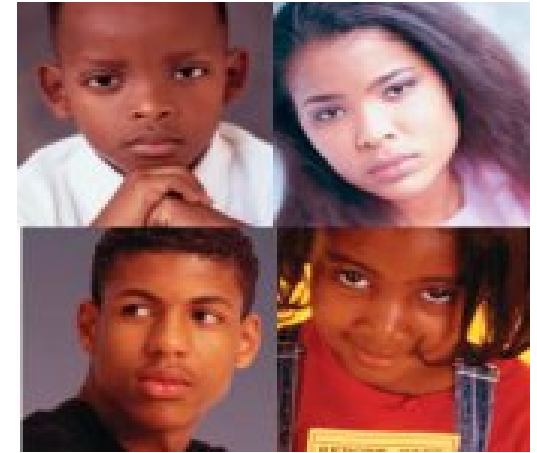
info@cafyonline.org



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Youth Court Education Program



COMMUNITY

ADVOCATES

FOR

FAMILY & YOUTH



www.cafyonline.org

VISION: Let no young person (child or teen) appear in a court of law without assistance in making that experience less intimidating.

Mission Statement: To educate our youth witnesses and assist parents in coping with the court system.

What is the Youth Court Education Program

(YCEP)? A three-hour program grouping youth by similar ages. It is held on Saturdays from 10:00 to 1:00 p.m. in a courtroom at the Prince George's County Courthouse.

In **YCEP**, our youth learn that the most important rule of the court is telling the truth.

YCEP does not ask kids/teens to discuss details of their case, nor are kids told what to say.

YCEP introduces youth who are involved in court cases to the world of adult jurisprudence.

Who attends YCEP? Young victims/witnesses, ages 4 to 18, who face testifying in court can attend this program. Parents and guardians are requested to attend a program designed to address their specific concerns about their family's impending court experience.

Why YCEP? Facing a perpetrator in Court and telling a jury of strangers details of the crime can be a traumatic experience for anyone; for children it can be overwhelming. Through planned activities, YCEP prepares children for what to expect in court, relieving some of the anxiety and allowing for better testimony as witnesses.

What if there is no trial: YCEP is also therapeutic even if the case does not go to trial. The youth have a chance to gain practical knowledge about being a witness as well as a sense of power over the experience.

CALL 301-390-4092

Your Appointment _____

What Happens?

Groups are separated by age to ensure the appropriate preparation.

Youth Learn:

- Why a witness is important.
- How they can participate successfully in the legal system.
- How to reduce their fears and anxieties
- To manage courtroom worries such as, "What if I cry?" or, "What if I don't understand a question?"

Ages 4-7 – Kiddie Court - Romper Room Setting



Romper Room style session is used along with puppets to help children ask questions and talk about their fears of retelling their story.



Ages 8-13

Through games, discussions, labeling, adolescents are introduced to court personnel and their role in the courtroom. They feel more comfortable as they learn about courtroom procedures, personnel, and legal terminology.

Ages 14-18



Teen roundtable is set up to discuss feelings about being a witness. Games and discussions led by advocates, prosecutors and judges to address rules,

process and anxieties that teens may have about testifying.

General Session for all:

- Participation in mock trial.
- Get comfortable with their role as witnesses.
- Learn about the legal process and at the same time experience court as a place that is safe and respectful of them.
- Certificates received congratulating them on becoming educated and empowering themselves to hold offenders accountable

Session for Parents/Caretakers



Parents and caretakers attend a concurrent program designed to address their needs and answer their questions about the justice system. Through discussions led by advocates, judges, and prosecutors, they learn:

- How to support their child during this time.
- Our community cares and will respond with sensitivity to the needs of victims and their families.
- To share common concerns about being involved with their child in the legal process.
- Greater insight into the criminal justice system.

