



Juvenile Court Terminology/Acronyms

Common Terms

Adjudication

Like an adult “conviction,” an adjudication is a finding by the juvenile court that a youth has committed the offense with which they are charged. This finding is made after an adjudicatory or jurisdictional hearing or after entering a guilty plea (admission).

Admission

An admission in juvenile court is like a guilty plea in criminal court.

Denial

A denial in juvenile court is like a “not guilty” plea in criminal court.

Detention

Detention generally refers to holding a youth in a detention facility while awaiting adjudication or disposition.

Disposition

Disposition in juvenile court is the equivalent of a sentence in criminal court. A disposition hearing follows an adjudication and directs how a juvenile found to be delinquent will be handled. Disposition options generally include probation supervision, out of home placement, or incarceration.

Diversion

Diversion is an alternative response to youth offending that seeks to avoid the formal processing of a youth through the juvenile court. The youth can be placed in a diversion program by law enforcement or the probation department in lieu of filing a petition. Diversion can also refer to programming offered to a youth after a petition has been filed with the eventual dismissal of the case upon successful completion of the program. Diversion programs vary and often include counseling or other social services.



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Dual Jurisdiction

In California, a county can opt to develop a protocol that allows for youth to be both a dependent and a delinquent at the same time. This is referred to as dual jurisdiction. Absent such a protocol, Welfare & Institutions Code §241.1 requires the juvenile court to determine which system—dependency or delinquency—can best serve the interests of the minor and the protection of society.

Dual Status Youth

A dual status youth is a youth who comes into contact with both the child welfare and juvenile justice systems, occupying a variety of statuses in terms of their relationship to the two systems. These youth are sometimes referred to as “crossover youth.”

Electronic Monitoring

In some cases, a judge can order a youth confined to their home except for school or other approved locations. In order to ensure compliance, the youth can be ordered to wear a device that uses GPS to track the youth’s location at all times.

Foster Care

Foster care is the 24-hour out-of-home care provided to children who are in need of temporary or long-term substitute parenting.

Informal Probation

Informal probation can occur in two ways. First, a probation department can offer a youth services for up to six months in lieu of filing a petition. After successful completion of the service program the case will be closed. If the youth is unsuccessful in completing the service program, the original petition may be filed. The second form of informal probation allows a court to place a case on hold following adjudication, giving the youth six months to successfully complete the informal probation program. Successful completion results in dismissal of the petition; if the youth is unsuccessful, the court will proceed with disposition.

Non-minor dependent

A non-minor dependent is a dependent youth or ward of the juvenile court who is in foster care under the placement and responsibility of a child welfare or probation department on their 18th birthday and is thus entitled to financial assistance until the age of 21.

Petition

A petition is the charging document filed in juvenile court, similar to a complaint in criminal court. It describes the alleged offense. A **sustained** petition means that the allegations are found to be true.

Petitioner

The petitioner in a juvenile case is like the prosecutor in a criminal case. The petitioner can be the district attorney or probation officer authorized to file a petition against a minor.

Probation

Probation is an option the court may choose as a disposition for a juvenile. It allows a youth to be released under the supervision of a probation officer and with certain rules and conditions the youth must agree to follow.

Referral

A referral is a citation issued to a youth that requires them to appear before a probation officer.

Revocation

When a youth violates the terms and conditions of probation supervision, the court may order the termination of probation and may impose an alternative disposition such as secure confinement.

Ranch/Camp

Some California counties run camps or ranches that provide a disposition option for secure confinement apart from a juvenile hall.

Risk Assessment Instrument (RAI)

A RAI is a tool used to determine a youth's risk of future re-offending. A RAI can be used at various points in a youth's case, including diversion, detention, or disposition.

Sealing

Sealing juvenile records means that the juvenile court case no longer exists. Juvenile records are sealed automatically in some cases and by petition in others.

Resource Family

An individual or family that has been approved to provide care for a child placed by a public or private agency by court order or voluntarily by a parent or guardian.

Short-Term Residential Therapeutic Program (STRTP)

An STRTP is a non-detention, licensed community care facility that provides specialized care, services, and supports to youth when indicated as necessary in a child or youth's case plan.

Social Study

A probation department is required to create a report with information about the youth for the court to consider when determining an appropriate disposition. The social study will include family and school information, delinquency history, and recommendations for disposition.

Status Offense

A status offense is a juvenile offense that would not be a crime if committed by an adult, such as truancy or running away from home.

Transfer

Transfer refers to the ability to move a youth's case from juvenile to adult court.

Wardship

Wardship refers to a legal relationship between the court and the youth in which the court can make orders concerning the care, custody and control of the adjudicated youth. Declaration of wardship occurs at disposition.

Common Acronyms

CASA: Court Appointed Special Advocate

CCR: Continuum of Care Reform

CFT: Child and Family Team

CSEC: Commercially Sexually Exploited Children

CWS: Child Welfare Services

DJJ: Division of Juvenile Justice

GPS: Electronic Monitoring

IEP: Individualized Education Program

ILP: Independent Living Program

JACI: Juvenile Adjudicative Competence Interview

JJDPA: Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act

LGBTQ: Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer (or questioning)

NMD: Non-Minor Dependent

OJJDP: Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention

RAI/DRAI: Risk Assessment Instrument/Detention Risk Assessment Instrument

SIJS: Special Immigrant Juvenile Status

SOGIE: Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity, and Gender Expression

TAY: Transition Age Youth