



## The Teen Court Philosophy

Teen Court is based on the premise that most young people want to do what is right when making decisions. Even those who may make the wrong choice due to external factors, such as peer pressure, are often gratified to learn they have an opportunity to make amends.

What better way to influence a young offender than to put the individual before a jury of his or her peers? Peer pressure in a Teen Court setting can have a more immediate and meaningful effect upon a young defendant than the traditional juvenile justice approach. The message given by a peer jury will be long remembered by those seeking to fit within a group and be accepted.

## Students and adults can volunteer with Teen Court

There are several ways students and adults can become involved with Teen Court.

### Become a Student Volunteer

High school students who volunteer for Teen Court receive hands-on knowledge of the justice system, become active in the community, develop healthy attitudes toward authority figures, and improve critical thinking and communication skills.

### Become a High School Liaison

Teachers can have a positive influence by recruiting student volunteers and serving as a liaison to the attorney-coaches.

### Become an Adult Volunteer

Local attorneys and judges can gain satisfaction from sharing their legal expertise when they serve as Teen Court coaches.



*For more information, contact:*

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# KENTUCKY TEEN COURT

*Using Peer Pressure in a Positive Way*

## Teen Court uses peer pressure in a positive way

Teen Court provides first-time juvenile offenders the opportunity to participate in a less formal court process carried out by their peers. Teen Court began in 1992 as one of many law-related education programs offered by the Kentucky Court of Justice through its Department of Family and Juvenile Services.

Today the Teen Court concept has been embraced statewide and operates in 22 Kentucky counties. More than 17,000 students have participated in the program since its inception. The program succeeds as a positive alternative to Juvenile Court by bringing together high school students and volunteer teacher-coaches and attorney-coaches.

### Role of Teen Volunteers

Although a district judge presides over Teen Court, it is operated almost entirely by student volunteers, ages 13 to 17, who have completed five training sessions in courtroom roles such as prosecutors, defense attorneys, court clerks, bailiffs and jurors.

Before participating in actual cases, all student volunteers attend a formal swearing-in ceremony where they take an oath of confidentiality to protect the privacy of the defendants who will appear before them. The Teen Court program takes place from September through May to coincide with the school calendar.

### Criteria for Defendants

After being found guilty in District Court, the district judge has the option to refer defendants to Teen Court for sentencing. The local court designated worker may also refer eligible teens to the Teen Court Diversion Program.

Defendants who are eligible to appear before Teen Court are first-time misdemeanor offenders, age 10 to 17, who have pleaded guilty. Teen Court cases deal with offenses such as shoplifting, theft, harassment and other misdemeanors deemed appropriate by a judge.



Graves County Teen Court students posed together at the Graves County Courthouse in Mayfield after completing a project for National Youth Service Day. Graves County District Judge Deborah Crooks presides over Teen Court and Donna Creason is the coordinator.

Teen jurors review the facts of the case and hear testimony before recommending a punishment. Often the juvenile defendant will speak on his or her own behalf and apologize for the crime.

Teen Court has been known to impose stiff penalties of up to 80 hours of community service. More common sentences include

lesser amounts of community service, letters of apology, and serving on Teen Court jury duty.

Teen Court sentences are legally binding and defendants must complete their sentences within six months or face being sent back to the court designated worker or District Court.



John D. Minton, Jr.  
Chief Justice  
of Kentucky

## Teen Court teaches court processes and accountability

The Kentucky Law Related Education Program, offered by the Administrative Office of the Courts, gives students the opportunity to learn about the law, legal processes and our democracy. These programs equip young people with the skills to contribute to society as conscientious adults. Teen Court is an excellent example of the positive benefits of law-related education. I invite you to become involved in this exciting endeavor.

## Teen Court programs operate in 22 Kentucky counties

