

Teen Court Roles

Defense attorneys: Represent the interests of the defendants during the hearing.

Prosecuting attorneys: Represent the interests of the "state" during the hearing.

Court clerks: Keep a record of the court proceedings, swear in the jury and witnesses, and assist the judge during the youth court session.

Bailiffs: Sign in youth court volunteers, open the youth court session by announcing the judge, escort the jury to and from deliberations.

Jurors: Hear the circumstances of the case and determine constructive sentences for the defendants.



KARNES COUNTY TEEN COURT

*Karnes County Teen Court
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Teen Court is a voluntary judicial program that allows Class C misdemeanor offenders to “pay” for their citations through community service, educational programs and future participation in teen court. Texas Teen Courts are governed by Section 45.052 of the Texas Code of Criminal Procedure and Section 54.032 of the Texas Family Code. Young defendants can plead no contest or guilty and have their case heard amongst their peers. Once the penalty is satisfied, the case is dismissed and the offense does not count as a conviction on the defendant’s record.

To be eligible for Teen Court, the juvenile must be under the age of 18 and/or are enrolled in a full time educational program leading towards a high school diploma or GED. A defendant may only choose to participate in a Teen Court program for a first offense. There must be no previous referrals to the probation department.



Juveniles who are charged with misdemeanor crimes, such as theft, traffic offenses, disorderly conduct, criminal mischief, tobacco/alcohol offenses, etc., first appear before a judge of a municipal court or justice court. They can elect to have their case heard before a Teen Court. The case is then referred to the Teen Court and set for trial. The defendant normally appears with his/her parent the night of the hearing. Once a sentence is determined, the defendant then has a specified amount of time in which to complete their sentence. If they successfully complete the sentence ordered by the Teen Court jury their case will be dismissed. If they do not complete their sentence, their case is returned to the referring court where a fine can be issued, and a conviction may appear on the defendant’s criminal record.

The charge will be returned to the referring court if the juvenile and/or parent is being uncooperative, if the juvenile is acting inappropriate, if the juvenile fails to comply with the rules and conditions of their disposition given by Teen Court or if the juvenile fails to report to appointments and/or court.

Instead of simply assessing a fine that will likely be paid for by the defendant’s parents, Teen Court requires the teen to answer personally for his or her wrongdoing. This helps prevent repeat offenses as the defendant will not want to spend more time doing community service or going to Teen Court. Also, when a case is tried in front of juries and lawyers comprised of one’s peers, there can be a profound effect on the defendant as well as respect and understanding of the legal system.

Justice

means being fair and impartial, regardless of personal preferences.