



Juvenile Justice Terminology Guide



Juvenile Justice Terminology

Youth are developmentally different from adults and require responses grounded in adolescent brain science, trauma awareness, and rehabilitation. As such, children in Ohio's juvenile justice system are treated differently than adults in the criminal justice system. Juvenile justice in Ohio focuses on graduated sanctions and services to "provide for the care, protection, and mental and physical development of children;" "protect the public interest and safety;" "hold the offender accountable for the offender's actions;" "restore the victim;" and "rehabilitate the offender."¹ Terminology in the juvenile system does not always track terminology in the adult system. This list of juvenile justice terminology highlights those terms that may not be familiar to the average person.

Abused Child: See Child.

Adjudicatory Hearing: A hearing to determine whether a child is a juvenile traffic offender, delinquent, unruly, abused, neglected or dependent or otherwise within the jurisdiction of the court.² A child adjudicated a delinquent is not a criminal because of the adjudication.³

Admission or Denial: The court asks the child to admit or deny the allegations contained in the complaint. A child who admits the allegations waives their right to an adjudicatory hearing.⁴

¹ R.C. 2152.01.

² Juv. R. 2(B). Chapter 2152 of the Revised Code also uses the term "adjudication" to mean the determination of the adjudicatory hearing.

³ R.C. 2151.357(H)

⁴ Juv. R. 29(C).



Amenability: Before considering a discretionary transfer, the juvenile judge orders “an investigation into the child’s social history, education, family situation, and any other factor bearing on whether the child is amenable to juvenile rehabilitation, including a mental examination of the child by a public or private agency or a person qualified to make the examination.” The juvenile judge considers specific factors to determine whether the child is transferred to adult court or is amenable to staying in juvenile court.⁵

Bindover: The term used to describe the transfer of jurisdiction from juvenile court to adult court for prosecution.⁶

- **Discretionary Bindover:** A discretionary transfer or bindover means that the child may be transferred to adult court upon the finding of probable cause and amenability. If the child is not subject to a mandatory transfer, a discretionary transfer is based on whether the child is 14 or older at the time of the offense, the level of felony, and additional factors.⁷
- **Mandatory Bindover:** A mandatory transfer or bindover means that the child must be transferred or bound over to adult court upon a finding of probable cause. Mandatory transfer is based on the age of the child at the time of the offense and whether the offense was a Category 1 or 2 offense⁸ (aggravated murder, murder, attempted aggravate murder, attempted murder, voluntary manslaughter, kidnapping, rape, aggravated arson, aggravated robbery, or involuntary manslaughter). Additional factors of prior commitment to the Ohio Department of Youth Services (ODYS) for Category 1 or 2 offenses and firearms come into play based on the age of the child.⁹

Child: A child is a person under eighteen. Once the child is in the juvenile justice system, the juvenile court has jurisdiction over the child until they reach twenty-one. Exceptions are made for a child who is transferred to adult court or who is a serious youthful offender.¹⁰

- **Abused Child:** An abused child includes any child who is the victim of sexual activity, endangered, or who shows evidence of non-accidental physical or mental injury or death.¹¹
- **Delinquent Child:** A child who violates any law that would be a criminal offense if committed by an adult or who violates certain juvenile court orders.¹² The term “delinquent” is used in juvenile court instead of “guilty.”

5 R.C. 2152.12.

6 R.C. 2152.12.

7 R.C. 2152.10; 2152.12.

8 R.C. 2152.02.

9 R.C. 2152.10.

10 R.C. 2152.02(C).

11 R.C. 2151.031.

12 R.C. 2152.02(E); Juv. R. 2(K).



- **Dependent Child:** A dependent child includes any child who, through no fault of their parents, guardians or custodians, is homeless or destitute or lacks parental care.¹³
- **Juvenile Traffic Offender:** A child who violates any traffic law, traffic ordinance, or traffic regulation.¹⁴
- **Neglected Child:** A neglected child includes any child who is abandoned, or because of omission lacks basic parental care or special medical care or suffers physical or mental injury.¹⁵
- **Unruly Child:** An unruly child is one who does “not submit to the reasonable control of the child’s parents, teachers, guardian, or custodian, by reason of being wayward or habitually disobedient;” is habitually truant from school, injures or endanger “the child’s own health or morals or the health or morals of others; or who violates a status offense, with some exceptions.¹⁶

Collateral Consequences: Collateral consequences are the ways a juvenile record can impact on a youth’s life beyond detention and probation. Examples include FBI background checks for employment, occupational licenses, school enrollment,¹⁷ driving until the child turns 21,¹⁸ immigration issues,¹⁹ enlisting in the military,²⁰ housing issues,²¹ gun ownership,²² and having to register as a sexual offender.²³

Community Control: A juvenile court may place the child under community control under any sanctions, services, and conditions.²⁴ Community control can include basic probation supervision, reporting to an approved location for work, education, training, treatment or other program, community service, completing high school or other education programs, drug or alcohol monitoring, curfew, monitored time, house arrest, suspension of a driver’s license, including probationary or temporary licenses/permits.

13 R.C. 2151.04.

14 R.C. 2152.02.

15 R.C. 2151.03.

16 R.C. 2151.022.

17 R.C. 3313.662(A), (B).

18 R.C. 2152.19(A)(4)(I); In re R.K., 2004-Ohio-6918, 2004 WL 2931013, at *1 (Ohio Ct. App. 2004) (prohibiting a juvenile court from imposing a driver’s suspension beyond age 21; R.C. 4510.17(D), (G)(2)(a); 4510.31(A)(I); 4510.34.

19 8 U.S.C.A. 1227(a)(2); 1182(a).

20 See generally, 32 C.F.R. 66.6 (listing the military’s basic enlistment rules). See also www.usa.gov/join-military

21 R.C. 24 C.F.R. 966.4(I)(5)(i)(B), (I)(5)(iii); 24 C.F.R. 982.553(a)(1)(ii)(C)-(a)(2)(i), 960.204(a)(3)-(4).

22 R.C. 2923.13(A)(2)-(3). See also R.C. 2901.01(9) (An offense of violence includes “offenses that involve physical harm to persons or a risk of serious physical harm to persons.”).

23 R.C. 109.57 (E)(2).

24 R.C. 2152.19(A)(4). For resources, see <https://dys.ohio.gov/courts-and-community>.



Complaint: A complaint is the charging document that initiates a case in juvenile court. The complaint sets forth the charges which are allegations, based on the “information and belief,” that the child has engaged in conduct that constitutes a delinquent act.”²⁵

Concurrent/Consecutive Sentencing: Concurrent sentencing is when a term of imprisonment is served at the same time as another term of imprisonment; consecutive sentencing requires the first term of imprisonment to be served before starting the second term.²⁶

Delinquent Child: See Child.

Dependent Child: See Child.

Detention: “The temporary care of children pending adjudication or disposition, or execution of a court order, in a public or private facility designed to physically restrict the movement and activities of children.”²⁷

Dispositional Hearing: A hearing in which the court decides what action shall be taken concerning a delinquent child.²⁸

²⁵ R.C. 2152.021 (A)(1).

²⁶ R.C. 2929.41.

²⁷ R.C. 2151.011(A)(13).

²⁸ Juv. R. 2(O).



Diversion: “Diversion is the redirection of youth from the formal processing of juvenile court and occurs prior to the youth’s initial appearance before the judge. Rule 9 of the Rules of Juvenile Procedure calls for “formal court action” to be “avoided and other community resources utilized to ameliorate situations brought the attention of the court.”²⁹ “By creating informal alternatives to court processing, diversion interventions serve as an opportunity to reduce the criminogenic effects that entry into the juvenile justice system and incarceration have on long-term youth development such as increased recidivism, stigmatization, and increased criminal-justice costs.”³⁰

Diversion can be initiated by many entities to redirect youth from formal processing. Entities include communities, schools, resource and assessment centers, law enforcement, prosecutors and courts.³¹

Diversion can be initiated at many points as well, including pre-initial appearance, pre-trial, and post-adjudication. In 2025 the Supreme Court of Ohio Task Force on Judicial Diversion developed a working definition for pre-initial appearance diversion: “the redirection of youth in intervention services prior to an initial appearance before a judge or magistrate. This does not apply to any pre-trial or post-adjudication diversion.”³² The Task Force recommendations “aimed at providing uniformity and additional transparency in how juvenile courts administer pre-initial appearance diversion, with particular emphasis on complying with victim rights protections found in Marsy’s Law statutes. The recommendations also seek to build upon successful practices by encouraging the expansion of resource and assessment centers statewide through continued support by the ODYS and the Ohio General Assembly.”³³

Expunged: A court ordered process in which the legal record of an arrest or an adjudication that is already sealed is erased in the eyes of the law.³⁴

29 [Juvenile Diversion Toolkit for Judicial Use](#), 2 (citing Juv. R. 9(A)), 2021.

30 *Id.* at 6.

31 For more information, see Supreme Court of Ohio, *Juvenile Diversion: Toolkit for Judicial Use* (2021), <https://www.supremecourt.ohio.gov/docs/JCS/CFC/resources/juvenileDiversionToolkit.pdf>

32 *The Supreme Court of Ohio Task Force on Juvenile Diversion: Final Report and Recommendations*, (June 2025). <https://www.supremecourt.ohio.gov/docs/Boards/juvDiversionTF/FinalRR.pdf>

33 *Id.* at 23.

34 R.C. 2151.358.



Facilities:

- **Community Corrections Facility (CCF):** As of publication, there are ten DYS subsidized “Community Corrections Facilities. DYS is statutorily mandated to confine age eligible felony offenders up to age 21 who have been adjudicated and committed by one of Ohio’s 88 county juvenile courts.”³⁵
- **Juvenile Correction Facility (JCF):** There are three DYS facilities that “are accredited by the American Correctional Association and provide a variety of services and treatment for youth including a fully-accredited high school, behavioral-health services, unit management, medical and dental care, recreation, religious services, community service opportunities, victim awareness, and reentry services.”³⁶ The facilities are Cuyahoga Hills JCF, Indian River JCF, and Circleville JCF.
- **Juvenile Detention Center (JDC):** Upon recommendation of the juvenile judge, Ohio counties must establish a single or joint county juvenile detention center to “detain alleged delinquent children until final disposition, to confine children who are adjudicated delinquent children” or juvenile traffic offenders.”³⁷
- **Juvenile Residential Facility (Detention home):** Ohio counties may establish single county or joint county juvenile residential facilities for the training, treatment and rehabilitation of children who are adjudicated delinquent, abused, neglected, unruly or juvenile traffic offenders.³⁸

35 <https://www.supremecourt.ohio.gov/docs/Boards/Sentencing/resources/JuvenileDisposition.pdf>

36 [Facilities | Department of Youth Services](#)

37 R.C. 2152.41; For a list of current Juvenile Detention Centers, see [SECTION I. DYS CONTACTS](#).

38 R.C. 2151.65. This includes forestry camps.



Guardian Ad Litem (GAL): A guardian ad litem is a person appointed by the court to assist the court in its determination of the best interests of a child.³⁹

Indigent: An individual who is unable to pay for a defense attorney. Children under 18 are presumed indigent, and those children accused of committing delinquent acts are guaranteed the right to a cost-free, court-appointed attorney.⁴⁰

Juvenile Court: A juvenile court has jurisdiction over a child who is adjudicated delinquent prior to age eighteen until the child turns twenty-one.⁴¹

Juvenile Traffic Offender: See Child.

Neglected Child: See Child.

Ohio Department of Youth Services (DYS): The Ohio Department of Youth Services (DYS) is the juvenile corrections system for the state of Ohio. DYS is statutorily mandated to confine age eligible felony offenders up to age 21, who have been adjudicated and committed by one of Ohio's 88 county juvenile courts.⁴² ODYS engages youth in programming that is designed to address their criminological and behavioral needs.

Each of the DYS facilities also operates a year-round school that offers general high school curriculum and many vocational opportunities. DYS reaches thousands of youth in Ohio.

Beyond youth in facilities and those on parole, DYS funds and supports 625 community programs throughout the state offering more than 93,000 youth (based on annual program admissions) opportunities and services to encourage positive change. These range from prevention and diversion programs to residential treatment and community treatment in areas such as mental health, sex offending and substance abuse.⁴³

Parole: The supervision given to a child, for a limited period, following the child's release from Ohio Department of Youth Services.⁴⁴

Probable Cause: Probable cause requires a reasonable belief, based on factual evidence, that the child committed the act charged. It is based in Fourth Amendment of the United States Constitution, and Article I, Section 14 of the Ohio Constitution.⁴⁵

Probation: The court supervision given to a child, for a limited period, while the child is still in the community. County probation departments are part of the juvenile court.

39 Sup. R. 48.01(C).

40 Juv. R. 4.

41 R.C. 2152.02(C).

42 For more information, please see Juvenile Disposition Benchcard at <https://www.supremecourt.ohio.gov/docs/Boards/Sentencing/resources/JuvenileDisposition.pdf>

43 [About DYS | Department of Youth Services](#)

44 [Parole | Department of Youth Services](#)

45 U.S. Const. Amend. IV; Ohio Const. Art. I, 14.



Sealed: If a juvenile record is sealed, the court and police paperwork related to the juvenile case is set aside from other court and police files and only available to juvenile court judges and their staff, with some exceptions for prosecutors and police.⁴⁶

Serious Youthful Offender (SYO): A blended sentence disposition available in Juvenile Court for certain children, based on offense type and age at the time of an offense. Children with a SYO disposition are given a juvenile-court sentence, which remains in effect until the child reaches 21. In addition, they are given a suspended adult sentence, which could be served if the juvenile disposition is not successfully completed.⁴⁷

- **Discretionary serious youthful offender:** A person who is eligible for a discretionary SYO under section 2152.13 and who is not transferred to adult court under a mandatory or discretionary transfer.⁴⁸
- **Mandatory serious youthful offender:** A person who is eligible for a mandatory SYO under section 2152.13 and who is not transferred to adult court under a mandatory or discretionary transfer. Includes a person upon whom a juvenile court is required to impose such a sentence under division (B)(3) of section 2152.121 of the Revised Code.⁴⁹

Status Offenses: Status offenses are those offenses that would not be an offense if committed by an adult. These include truancy, violating curfew, running away from home and underage drinking. A child who violates one of the laws can be adjudicated as an unruly child.⁵⁰

Suspended Commitment: A juvenile judge may suspend a disposition that includes commitment, before or during the commitment, upon such conditions as the juvenile judge imposes.⁵¹ Suspended commitment allows the child to remain in the community under certain conditions set by the judge and encourages rehabilitation.

Unruly Child: See Child.

46 R.C. 2151.355(B), 2151.357 (E)(1)-(5).

47 R.C. 2152.02(W); R.C. 2152.121.

48 R.C. 2152.02.

49 R.C. 2152.02.

50 R.C. 2151.022.

51 R.C. 2151.49.