



# KNOW YOUR RIGHTS

**TN JUVENILE DETENTION  
CENTERS**

## Tennessee Youth Guide

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# INTRODUCTION

Knowing your rights helps you protect yourself and make sure you are treated fairly. This guide explains what staff **can or must** and **cannot** do while you are in a **juvenile detention center**, and how you can report it if someone breaks the rules.

## **What is a juvenile detention center?**

A juvenile detention center is a secure facility where youth stay while they wait for their case or sentence to be decided in court, or while they are waiting for DCS to decide their next placement.

## **What is DCS?**

DCS stands for the Tennessee **D**ePARTMENT of **C**hildren's **S**ervices. Some youth are sent to longer-term facilities run by DCS after the court makes a decision in their case. **This guide only covers juvenile detention center rules.** It does not cover DCS facility rules.

## **About this guide**

This guide was written by the Youth Law Center. It includes basic information about Tennessee laws and rules for juvenile detention. **This guide is for informational and educational purposes only and is not legal advice.**

# INTRODUCTION

If you do not know what a word or sentence means, look at the **DICTIONARY** in this guide to tell you what they mean. The **DICTIONARY** is on pages 10-12. If you still do not understand, ask your parent, guardian, or lawyer to explain it to you. It's okay to ask your parent, guardian, or lawyer when you do not know what something means!

**These rules come from Department of Children's Services Rule 0250-04-08, T.C.A. Section 37-1-189, T.C.A. Section 37-5-214, and State Board of Education Rule 0520-01-12. These rules are current as of November 2025.**

# YOUR RIGHTS

## Seclusion and Restraint

Staff **cannot** lock you alone in your room for no reason.

The reasons staff **can** lock you in your room alone are:

1. You are about to hurt someone
  - If you are going to hurt someone, you **can** be locked in your room for two hours at a time. You **cannot** be locked in your room for more than 6 hours in one day.
2. You chose to go in your room
3. If you are sick and they don't want anyone else to get sick
4. At bedtime

Staff **cannot** hold you down or restrain you for no reason.

The only reasons staff **can** hold you down or restrain you are:

1. You are about to hurt yourself or someone else.
2. You are about to escape.

Restraint or handcuffs **cannot** be used just because you didn't listen to staff.

Before restraining you, staff **must** try to calm you down.

If you are restrained or locked alone:

- Staff **must** tell your parent or guardian.
- Staff **must** write it down.

# Education and Recreation

The juvenile detention center **must** let you go to school at least 4 hours a day.

After you are at the detention center for 3 days, the school **must** help you with your education.

If you have a special education plan, like an IEP or 504 plan, the juvenile detention center teacher **must** follow that plan.

- If you do not know if you have an IEP or 504 plan ask your parent, guardian, lawyer, or teacher

You **must** have access to things to read like books, magazines, and comic books.

Every day you get at least:

- 1 hour of exercise
- 1 hour of indoor recreation

# Phone Calls and Visits

The juvenile detention center **must** let you talk to your lawyer. You **must** be allowed to talk to your lawyer in private. You **must** be allowed to call or ask for your lawyer at “any reasonable hour”.

Within one day of coming to a juvenile detention center you **must** be allowed:

- 1 phone call with your parent or guardian, **and**
- 1 in-person visit with your parent or guardian

The call or visit **can** happen sooner if your parent or guardian asks.

The facility **can** wait up to 6 hours before giving you the call or visit only if you got in trouble. They **must** tell you what you did wrong.

Before the court decides your case, you **must** be allowed:

- At least 3 phone calls each week with your parent or guardian, **and**
- 1 in-person visit a week with your parent or guardian

After your case is decided, you **must** get at least 1 visit and one 10 minute phone call per week. If you are temporarily placed at a detention center by DCS you **must** also get at least 1 visit and one 10 minute phone a week.

# Healthcare

You **must** have access to mental health care and medical care.

If you take medicine, you **must** be allowed to keep taking it unless a doctor or nurse says you shouldn't.

# Food and Hygiene

You **must** have access to soap, shampoo, a toothbrush, toothpaste, a comb or brush, toilet paper, and deodorant. You **must** have pads and tampons if you need them.

You **must** get clean underwear every day

You **must** be offered a shower every day. The shower **must** have a door or curtain.

You **must** get 3 meals + 1 snack every day

- 2 meals **must** be hot

You **must** get special food if needed for medical reasons or religious reasons.

# WHAT TO DO IF YOU NEED HELP

If staff violate these rules, or if you are being abused or neglected, you **must** be able to report those issues:

- You **must** be able to report to someone at the detention center (called filing a grievance) **and** you **must** also be able to report to people outside of the detention center.
- You **can** report by phone or in writing. You **can** report anonymously.

## Reporting to the Detention Center

- The detention center **must** tell you how to file complaints, or grievances.
- Family, guardians, lawyers, or advocates **can** file grievances for you.
- The detention center **must** investigate the grievance and respond to you.

# WHAT TO DO IF YOU NEED HELP

## Reporting to People Outside of the Detention Center

If your rights are violated, you **can**:

- Tell your lawyer.
- Email the Office of Child Welfare Licensing:  
**El\_DCS.licensing@tn.gov**
- Call the DCS Child Abuse Hotline or fill out a report online: **877-237-0004** or **carat.app.tn.gov/carat**
- Fill out a form online for the Tennessee Commission on Children and Youth Ombudsman's Office:  
**tn.gov/tccy/programs0/ombuds.html**
- Call Disability Rights Tennessee or fill out a form online: **1-800-342-1669** or **disabilityrightstn.org/get-help**

# DICTIONARY

**Abuse** → There are several types of abuse.

- Physical abuse is when an adult hurts your body on purpose.
- Emotional abuse is when an adult calls you names or yells at you to make you feel afraid.
- Sexual abuse is when an adult touches your private parts or makes sexual comments to you.

**Education** → School

**Escape** → Leave the detention center without permission or after someone tells you that you cannot leave.

**“Feminine Hygiene Products”** → Pads and tampons

**Grievance** → A problem you want to tell someone about

**Internal Grievance** → telling someone inside the building

**External Grievance** → telling someone outside of the building

# DICTIONARY

**Guardian** → The person who takes care of you is not your parent. This may be a foster parent, grandparent, brother or sister, or aunt or uncle

**Hygiene** → Being able to clean yourself and being clean

**IEP or 504 plan** → IEP stands for Individualized Education Plan. An IEP or 504 plan are two types of plan that tell the teacher how to help you because you have a disability. A disability includes things like ADD, ADHD, Dyslexia, Autism, PTSD, Sickle Cell, not being able to speak or hear clearly, and other things.

**“In private”** → In a room by yourself with your lawyer

**Juvenile** → A person who is less than 18 years old

**“Medical Care”** → Help from a doctor when you are hurt or sick

**“Medical Reasons”** → A medical reason with food is when you are allergic to the food or the food makes you feel sick when you eat it

# DICTIONARY

**“Mental Health Care”** → A therapist or a person who prescribes you medicine to take care of your mind

**Neglect** → When an adult does not give you the things you need to stay healthy. You need food, clothing, and somewhere clean and safe to live. Neglect is also when an adult does not keep you safe.

**Offer** → When you are asked if you want something.

**Recreation** → Time to do an activity you like to do for fun.

**Restraint/Restrain** → When someone keeps you from moving by holding you tightly and not letting go, putting you in handcuffs, or locking you into a chair.

**Seclusion** → When you are in a room by yourself, the door is locked, and you are not allowed to leave.