STEPS TO JUSTICE

Going to Criminal Court Workshop

An OJEN facilitator's guide demonstrating a CLEO public legal information resource.







This workshop guide is a collaboration between the Ontario Justice Education Network (OJEN) and Community Legal Education Ontario (CLEO). OJEN's Steps to Justice workshops introduce audiences to common legal problems and familiarize them with a specific area of law. Using hypothetical scenarios, workshop participants explore a legal topic by navigating the practical step-by-step information on CLEO's Steps to Justice website. They learn how to use the website to find legal information, including the forms, self-help guides and referral information for legal and social services which may be helpful in working through a future legal problem.

This workshop guide was written for use in Ontario high school classrooms, but can be used (or modified) for other audiences. For more information on how to use this workshop guide, please check out our short training video available on the OJEN website ojen.ca/steps-to-justice-workshops-training-video.

We gratefully acknowledge the support of law students who have contributed to this workshop guide through the Osgoode Public Interest Requirement (OPIR) at Osgoode Hall Law School and through placements with Pro Bono Students Canada (PBSC). We would also like to thank the high school students who provide us with their perspectives and feedback on this resource as OJEN summer interns through the Law in Action Within Schools (LAWS) Summer Job Program.

Any legal information in this resource is intended for general educational purposes and should not form the basis of legal advice of any kind. Individuals seeking specific information about their legal problem should always consult a lawyer.

OJEN is a charitable, non-profit, public legal education organization. We develop innovative educational tools that introduce young people to the justice system, help them understand the law, and build their legal capability. We partner with schools and community organizations across Ontario to prepare young people to manage the legal problems that will arise in their lives. For more information on OJEN, please visit ojen.ca.

For over 45 years, **CLEO** has developed clear, accurate, and practical legal rights education and information to help people understand and exercise their legal rights. We produce print and online resources, including the Steps to Justice website, the Family Law Guided Pathways, and CLEO Connect which has information and supports for community organizations. For more information on CLEO, please visit cleo.on.ca.

STEPS TO JUSTICE GOING TO CRIMINAL COURT OVERVIEW

Activity (minutes)	Content
Warm-up (5)	 Clarify differences between criminal and civil law. Group quiz on attending criminal court (Slides 2-6). What are the major topics related to attending criminal court? (Slide 7).
Hook (5)	 Advance to Slide 8 and read the demonstration scenario out loud. Encourage participants to identify potential legal issues in the scenario. Switch to Slide 9. Explain that the Steps to Justice website is a tool that can help people understand what they need to do when they have legal problems like this one. The group will next use the website to answer questions related to this scenario.
Introduce Steps to Justice (10)	 Distribute the participant handout, "Scenario 1: Demonstration". Advance to Slide 10. Read the questions about the scenario out loud. Pull up the Steps to Justice website on the display screen. As a group, use Steps to Justice to find answers to the questions about the demonstration scenario on the slide. Use different searching options (sub-topics, front page keyword search and header menu) and introduce the actual "steps" to follow. Use the presenter's notes on where to find the information included in this guide for support. Ask if anyone has questions.
Group work (25)	 Advance to Slide 11. Divide participants into groups and cue them to pull up Steps to Justice on phones/computer and to start on the Going to Criminal Court topic. It is a subtopic of the criminal law section. Give each group a scenario worksheet (Scenarios 2-5). Each group needs at least one device with internet to complete their worksheet. Circulate and support groups as needed.
Discussion (15)	 Each group has 3-5 minutes to explain their scenario and what they have learned through their investigations. Participants should refer to the completed worksheet for support. Address questions and issues arising from their reporting.
Application (Optional)	 Advance to slide 12. Since the group has practiced using the Steps to Justice website, the presenter may introduce a more complex scenario. Participants should comment on it reflecting what they have just learned. As a group, use the website to answer the scenario questions. Facilitator's notes are included in this guide to support discussion.



Going to Criminal Court Workshop

TRUE OR FALSE

- 1. I'm supposed to go to court next week, but I can't make it. It's okay though, because I hired a lawyer. I'm sure my lawyer will go to court for me.
 - F Unless your lawyer tells you that you don't have to be there, you must be at court on the date shown in your document.
- 2. I was charged with causing a disturbance in a public place, but I'm not too worried. I'm confident a jury will find me not guilty.
 - F Causing a disturbance is a public place is a summary offence, so it will not proceed with a jury. It is a judge-alone trial.
- 3. The Crown withdrew the assault charges against me. What a relief! They can't charge me again later for the same assault.
 - T When the Crown withdraws your charges, they can't prosecute you again later for the same incident.
- 4. I've been charged with theft, but I can't afford a lawyer! I guess I won't have anyone to help me on my first day in court.
 - F You can speak with duty counsel before you go to the courtroom if you don't have a lawyer.

 They can't represent you, but they can give you information and advice.
- 5. I don't understand English or French very well, so I guess I have to pay for an interpreter when I'm in court.
 - **F** The government pays certified interpreters to help people in court.



Facilitator's Package Scenarios



Start on the Steps to Justice question, "I have an emergency and can't make it for my court date. What do I do?" under **Missing court**. Follow the steps from the landing page to answer the questions. The relevant steps are listed in brackets following the question.



Scenario 1: Demonstration

I'm supposed to attend court today, but I'm stuck out of town because my flight was cancelled. I'm worried about what will happen when I don't show up. Is there any way I can miss court without any problems?

Start on the Steps to Justice topic, "Missing court" with the question, "I have an emergency and can't make it for my court date. What do I do?"

- What will the court do if your absence goes unexplained? (Landing page)
- Can you avoid consequences for missing court if you can explain your absence? (Landing page,
 Step 1)
- If you don't have a lawyer, who should you call about your absence? (Steps 1 and 2)
- If you don't have a lawyer, is there any way the court can proceed without you? (Steps 2 and 3)
- If you were charged with a serious offence, is there any way the court can proceed without you? (Step 3)

Discussion

If you miss a scheduled court appearance without an explanation, the judge or justice of the peace will likely order a bench warrant for your arrest. If this happens, you will be arrested and held for a bail hearing, and can be charged with the criminal offence of "failure to appear."

(Continued on the next page.)



If you can explain your absence, the court might issue a discretionary bench warrant instead of a bench warrant for your arrest. A discretionary bench warrant means the court adjourns your case to another date and the police will not arrest you. But if you miss your next court date, the court will order a bench warrant for your arrest.

If you are arrested, you have some options about what to do to get help. You can call a lawyer, but if you don't have a lawyer, you can call the duty counsel office at your courthouse. Duty counsel are lawyers who act on behalf of accused persons who do not have access to a lawyer. This is a free service, and they can tell the court about your situation and ask the court for a discretionary bench warrant for you. You can also have a friend or family member explain your absence to duty counsel at the court house.

If you have no lawyer or duty counsel, a friend your family member can try to appear as your agent, but they can only appear as your agent if you are charged with a **summary** (less serious) offence. When you send an agent, the court will treat the situation as though you attended court. If you are charged with an **indictable** (more serious) offence, you cannot send someone to act as your agent. In the case of indictable offences, it is possible for your lawyer to act in court without you present, but for this to happen you must sign a "designation of counsel" giving your lawyer authority to handle your case as though you were there yourself. However, some lawyers dislike designations because they want their clients to make every effort to get to court and may not allow you to sign a designation of counsel.



I used to have a real anger problem, and I was charged with uttering threats. But I'm a calmer person now, and I don't think it would be fair for me to stand trial. I'm going to tell my lawyer that we should get the Crown to drop the charges against me.

Start on the Steps to Justice topic, "Court appearances" with the question, "How can I get my criminal charges dropped?"

- Is there anything I can do to force the Crown to drop the charges? (Landing page)
- Is there anything that might help me convince the Crown to drop the charges? (Landing page)
- Can I get any information about whether I can do anything to convince the Crown to drop the charges before I get to a trial? (Step 1)
- What is the difference between withdrawing the charges against you and staying the charges?
 (Step 3)
- What is the best way to discuss dropping charges with the Crown? (Step 4)

Discussion

You cannot force the Crown to drop a charge against you. This is the Crown's decision alone and the Crown can still choose to prosecute you even if a complainant (the alleged victim) doesn't want to press charges. But there are things you can do that might help. The Crown might decide to withdraw charges if you complete diversion; enter a peace bond; plead guilty to other charges; finds there isn't enough evidence to convict you; or decides it is not in the public interest to convict you.

During the disclosure period, when the Crown and defense are dealing with the evidence against you, you may be given a Crown Screening form, or a Charge Screening form. This will tell you what kind of sentence the Crown will ask for, whether some of your charges will be dropped if you plead guilty early, and whether you've been approved for diversion. This information will help you figure out how to deal with your charges.

The Crown might decide to stay your charges instead of withdrawing or dropping them. This means the Crown decides not to prosecute the case for now, but could reconsider this in the future and start prosecuting you again. Usually, the Crown will have to restart the prosecution within one year of the stay, but sometimes they can re-commence even after a year passes.



The best way to pursue any of the options discussed above is to schedule a Crown pre-trial. There are instructions for how to do this during the first disclosure. You can ask the Crown to withdraw charges if you complete diversion, or about other ways to try to resolve the charges without going to trial. If you get a lawyer, or have the help of duty counsel, they can also ask for a Crown pre-trial.



I keyed somebody's car, but I regret doing it. I was charged with mischief, which is the first time I've been criminally charged. It was a bad choice, but I still think it is overkill to put me on trial for this. I know what I did was wrong and I want to show that I'm sorry and make up for it. Is there some way to resolve this without going to trial?

Start on the Steps to Justice topic, "Court appearances" with the question, "What is diversion?"

- What happens if the Crown offers you diversion instead of charging you? (Landing page)
- What are some examples of "upfront work" for diversion? (Landing page)
- What sort of things will the Crown consider when deciding whether to offer diversion? (Step 1)
- How can I find out whether I'm eligible for diversion? (Steps 1 and 2)
- What happens when a person agrees to diversion? (Steps 3 and 4)

Discussion

Diversion is a way for the Crown to deal with a criminal charge without the time and expense of holding a trial. Because it is "outside" of the formal justice system, some kinds of diversion are also called **extrajudicial measures** or **extrajudicial sanctions**.

If the Crown offers diversion, it is offering to either stay or withdraw your charges after you complete some kind of task or service that has benefit to the community, makes up for the harm you caused or shows that you understand and regret your conduct. This could mean things like:

- Community service
- Making a charitable donation
- · Anger management training
- · Addiction or mental health counselling
- A combination of the above.

When the Crown decides whether to offer diversion, it is likely to consider things like:

- · Whether you have a criminal record
- The seriousness of the charges (such as the amount of damage done or the type of injuries caused)
- The cost of prosecuting you compared to the seriousness of the offence

- The impact a conviction would have on you compared to society's interest in punishing criminal behaviour
- What the complainant (person you have harmed) thinks about whether you should have diversion

You usually find out whether you've been approved for diversion at your first court appearance. There is usually a list of cases screened for diversion taped to the courtroom door on your first day. If your name is on the list, follow the instructions. Even if your name is not on the list, the Crown may tell you that you have been screened for diversion in the courtroom.

You can still get diversion after your first appearance in court, though: the Crown can offer diversion at any time during the court process. You or your lawyer can also try to convince the Crown to offer diversion.

If you accept diversion, your case will be adjourned while you complete the conditions given. You may have to update the court on your progress if it takes longer than expected. When you can provide proof that you have completed your diversion, the Crown will stay or withdraw the charges.

If the Crown withdraws the charges, the Crown cannot prosecute you again for the same incident and the charges will not appear on your criminal record. If the Crown stays the charges, the Crown will not continue the prosecution but can change its mind and continue prosecution later. The Crown typically has one year to continue the prosecution, but in some cases, it has more time to change its mind.



I had an argument with my cousin who lives across town and I hit him. I was charged with assault. I really don't think I should have to go to jail or stand trial, though. It was a one-time mistake. Can't I just stay away from my cousin instead of going through all this trouble?

Start on the Steps to Justice topic, "Court appearances" with the question, "Should I sign a peace bond in my criminal case?"

- What is a peace bond and when will a Court order one? (Landing page, Step 1)
- What will happen if I sign a peace bond? (Landing page, Step 1)
- Are there any reasons to consider not agreeing to a peace bond? (Steps 1 and 2)
- What are some conditions this person might expect in their peace bonds? (Step 2)
- How do I accept my peace bond and what happens when I do? (Steps 3 and 4)

Discussion

A peace bond is a kind of legal agreement made in a criminal court. Peace bonds are issued by justices to prevent one person from harming another. In general, they are issued to protect another person who has a reasonable concern that you will:

- · Hurt them, their spouse, their common-law partner, or their child
- Damage their property
- Distribute or share an intimate image or video of them without their permission

If you sign a peace bond, you are promising to keep the peace and be of good behavior. They can also require you to follow other instructions. The peace bond will usually last for one year, but it could be longer, and you may have to pay money if you breach the bond.

Sometimes, the Crown might offer to deal with a less serious criminal offence with a peace bond, such as minor assault, criminal harassment, or domestic assault. It will not pursue criminal charges if the person enters a peace bond.

Agreeing to a peace bond is an important decision and should be considered very seriously. You will have to follow **all** the conditions in the peace bond for as long as it is active, even if you do not agree with even **one** of them. The peace bond will appear on some police record checks and it may also stop you from volunteering or working with vulnerable people like children or senior citizens.



It may also affect your ability to travel into foreign countries. Also, agreeing to the peace bond means that you are admitting there is a reasonable basis for the complainant to be afraid of you.

Some common conditions in a peace bond include:

- Paying or promising to pay money to the court for failing to follow any condition
- · Keeping the peace and not breaking the law
- Not contacting a specific person or their spouses or children
- Not keeping any weapons
- Any other conditions the court considers necessary

If you decide to accept a peace bond, you must tell the Court that you do not want to give reasons why the peace bond order should not be made. You do this by telling the court you "do not wish to show cause." Once you sign the peace bond, a copy is given to the national RCMP headquarters and a recorded is added to the national Canadian Police Information Computer database. The police can access this information during investigations if they do a police record check.



I have been charged with murder! I could be facing over 14 years in jail if I'm convicted, but I swear I'm innocent! I think the prosecutor's case is probably weak. I bet they shouldn't have even charged me in the first place. How can I learn more about the evidence against me?

Start on the Steps to Justice topic, "Pre-trial hearings" with the question, "What is a preliminary inquiry?"

- What is a preliminary inquiry and how is it different from a trial? (Landing page)
- Why might this person want a preliminary inquiry? (Step 1)
- What must this person do to ask for a preliminary inquiry? (Landing page, Step 2)
- How should this person prepare for a preliminary inquiry? (Step 3)
- If the Court decides there is enough evidence to go to trial, is there anything this person can do with the witness testimony from the preliminary inquiry? (Step 4)

Discussion

A preliminary inquiry is a hearing held to determine whether the Crown has enough evidence to bring the accused to a trial. The Crown does not have to prove the accused's guilt beyond a reasonable doubt like it would at the trial itself, because this hearing does not determine guilt or innocence. The Crown only needs to show that there is evidence that could, if true or accurate, be used to find the accused guilty.

An accused must ask for a preliminary inquiry: it is not automatically given. A preliminary inquiry is only available for people charged with indictable (serious) offences facing at least 14 years imprisonment who choose to be tried at the Superior Court of Justice.

This person might want a preliminary hearing. A preliminary inquiry will let you see and hear the Crown's case against you. Also, if you plan to rely on evidence from witnesses who may not be available at the time of your actual trial, those witnesses could be available for the preliminary inquiry and would be able to give their evidence there.

To request a preliminary hearing, an accused person must first choose to be tried at the Ontario Superior Court of Justice. They must request their preliminary inquiry verbally in court. When the court asks them "how do you elect?" the person must answer that they elect for a preliminary



inquiry followed by a trial at the Superior Court of Justice. Next, they must file a Statement of Issues requesting the preliminary inquiry and identifying the Crown witnesses they want to hear from and the issues they want to hear evidence about. The Statement of Issues and the Notice of Election must be filed with the court clerk at the court house.

To prepare for a preliminary hearing, you should review the disclosure (evidence) received from the prosecution. The disclosure can help understand what the Crown's witnesses are likely to say and what questions to ask them at the inquiry.

If the Court decides there is enough evidence to go to trial, the accused person will get transcripts of the preliminary inquiry testimony and can use this as evidence at their trial. This might be useful if one of the witnesses contradicts their preliminary inquiry testimony at trial. The person would be able to point out the contradiction in cross-examination to "impeach" the witness, showing that the witness's testimony may be unreliable.



Last night, I was arrested and charged with breaking and entering and robbery. The police say that a confidential source named me as the robbery suspect and that they have surveillance footage of me fleeing the scene of the crime. I don't see how that's possible: I was at home alone that night. I wish the police would let me see the footage and tell me who reported me. It would make it so much easier to explain that I'm innocent!

Start on the Steps to Justice topic, "Court appearances" with the question, "What documents does the Crown have to give me?"

- Is the prosecution allowed to keep all of its evidence secret from an accused and surprise them with it at trial? (Landing page)
- What sort of information does the prosecution have to give an accused? (Step 1)
- What kinds of information or evidence are NOT required in disclosure? (Landing page)
- When must the Crown hand over this information to the accused? (Step 1)
- Why might this person want a lawyer to review their disclosure? (Steps 2 and 3)

Discussion

The Crown has a legal duty to give you all the information it has about you as part of the prosecution process. This is called disclosure. Disclosure includes information that might help you argue that you are innocent, as well as information that the Crown will use to argue that you are guilty. The Crown cannot withhold evidence that might help your case.

Disclosure can include many kinds of information and documents, such as:

- Police officers' notes
- A police summary of the case
- Surveillance footage and photographs
- · Witness statements
- · Forensic reports
- Forensic reports

It could also include a Crown Screening Form, which explains how the Crown plans to deal with the charges. The Crown Screening Form will explain what kind of sentence the Crown will ask for, whether the Crown will drop some charges if you plead guilty early, and whether the accused can complete community service or counselling (also called "diversion").



A person is entitled to Crown disclosure of everything except evidence that is either clearly unrelated to the case or is protected by a form of privilege. Privileged information cannot be used or shared in court and is intended to keep the judicial system functioning. Confidential police informant identities are privileged because they help the judicial system function smoothly. Therefore, a confidential source's identity would not likely be included in the disclosure.

The Crown must give all disclosure to the accused before the trial date. As well, the Crown's duty to disclose is ongoing. This means that if the Crown receives new information relevant to your case even after you are charged or during the trial, the Crown must disclose that information.

If possible, you should always have a lawyer review your disclosure. A lawyer can also help you identify defences to the charges, and can help you decide whether they should plead not guilty to the charges and proceed to trial, or should plead guilty to anything charged. A lawyer can tell you whether anything in the disclosure might violate rights you are guaranteed under the *Charter of Rights and Freedoms* and whether you should raise a *Charter* challenge in your trial.



Display: Large Group Practice Scenario 7

A little while ago, I got in a fight, and police arrested me for assault. I was released after my bail hearing and given a court date for September 9. I wrote it down and made a note in my phone of the date.

On September 8, I got in a heated argument with my roommate about rent — he lost his job a few months ago and I've been covering his half of the rent since then. When I told him that he needs a new job or should move out, things got heated. I was so frustrated with him that I forgot about my court date and didn't show up in court. I didn't mean to. It was an honest mistake. But money is tight because I've been covering my roommate's rent and I don't know whether I can afford a lawyer to help me sort this mess out.

I'm also concerned about appearing in court again. I want this to be over as quickly as possible and I don't know whether I can get a lawyer before I got back to court. If I can't hire a lawyer, I'm concerned that I won't know what to do or that I might miss something important again and I want to make sure I can prepare properly for my trial. What should I do?

Discussion

Students can draw from their learning to identify potential legal issues and questions to investigate. The main issues here pertain to 1) missing a court date and court procedures; 2) support from duty counsel; 3) diversion; and 4) disclosure.

Start from the topic "Missing Court – I missed my court date. What happens now?" Consider questions like:

- What sorts of warrants might a court issue if a person misses their court date?
- How can a person find out if the court took any action in response to them missing their court date?
- Is there anything a person can do if they face arrest for missing their court date?

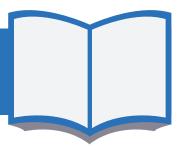
Start from the topic "Court Appearances – What happens on my first court date for a criminal offence?" Consider questions like:

- What can duty counsel do for a person on their first court date?
- What information might this person try to get about their case on their first court date?

- What should this person do if the Crown offers them diversion?
- After their first day in court, what should this person do to prepare for subsequent court appearances?



Participant Handouts Scenarios





Scenario 1 Worksheet: Demonstration

I'm supposed to attend court today, but I'm stuck out of town because my flight was cancelled. I'm worried about what will happen when I don't show up. Is there any way I can miss court without any problems?

Start on the Steps to Justice topic, "Missing court" with the question, "I have an emergency and can't make it for my court date. What do I do?"

- What will the court do if your absence goes unexplained?
- Can you avoid consequences for missing court if you can explain your absence?
- If you don't have a lawyer, who should you call about your absence?
- If you don't have a lawyer, is there any way the court can proceed without you?
- If you were charged with a serious offence, is there any way the court can proceed without you?



Scenario 2 Worksheet

I used to have a real anger problem, and I was charged with uttering threats. But I'm a calmer person now, and I don't think it would be fair for me to stand trial. I'm going to tell my lawyer that we should get the Crown to drop the charges against me?

Start on the Steps to Justice topic, "Court appearances" with the question, "How can I get my criminal charges dropped?"

	Is there anything I can do to force the Crown to drop the charges?
•	Is there anything that might help me convince the Crown to drop the charges?
•	Can I get any information about whether I can do anything to convince the Crown to drop the charges before I get to a trial?
•	What is the difference between withdrawing the charges against you and staying the charges?
•	What is the best way to discuss dropping charges with the Crown?



Scenario 3 Worksheet

I keyed somebody's car, but I regret doing it. I was charged with mischief, which is the first time I've been criminally charged. It was a bad choice, but I still think it is overkill to put me on trial for this. I know what I did was wrong and I want to show that I'm sorry and make up for it. Is there some way to resolve this without going to trial?

Start on the Steps to Justice	topic,	, "Court appearances"	with the d	question	, "What is diver	sion?"
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•	What happens if the Crown offers you diversion instead of charging you?
•	What are some examples of "upfront work" for diversion?
•	What sort of things will the Crown consider when deciding whether to offer diversion?
•	How can I find out whether I'm eligible for diversion?
•	What happens when a person agrees to diversion?



Scenario 4 Worksheet

I had an argument with my cousin who lives across town and I hit him. I was charged with assault. I really don't think I should have to go to jail or stand trial, though. It was a one-time mistake. Can't I just stay away from my cousin instead of going through all this trouble?

Start on the Steps to Justice topic, "Court appearances" with the question, "Should I sign a peace bond in my criminal case?"

•	What is a peace bond and when will a Court order one?
•	What will happen if I sign a peace bond?
•	Are there any reasons to consider not agreeing to a peace bond?
•	What are some conditions this person might expect in their peace bonds?
•	How do I accept my peace bond and what happens when I do?



Scenario 5 Worksheet

I have been charged with murder! I could be facing over 14 years in jail if I'm convicted, but I swear I'm innocent! I think the prosecutor's case is probably weak. I bet they shouldn't have even charged me in the first place. How can I learn more about the evidence against me?

Start on the Steps to Justice topic, "Pre-trial hearings" with the question, "What is a preliminary inquiry?"

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•	What is a preliminary inquiry and how is it different from a trial?
•	Why might this person want a preliminary inquiry?
•	What must this person do to ask for a preliminary inquiry?
•	How should this person prepare for a preliminary inquiry?
•	If the Court decides there is enough evidence to go to trial, is there anything this person can do with the witness testimony from the preliminary inquiry?



Scenario 6 Worksheet

Last night, I was arrested and charged with breaking and entering and robbery. The police say that a confidential source named me as the robbery suspect and that they have surveillance footage of me fleeing the scene of the crime. I don't see how that's possible: I was at home alone that night. I wish the police would let me see the footage and tell me who reported me. It would make it so much easier to explain that I'm innocent!

Start on the Steps to Justice topic, "Court appearances" with the question, "What documents does the Crown have to give me?"

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