

# BENEFITS OF YOUTH COURT

- Confidential handling of cases
- Youth are held accountable by their peers
- Youth learn from their mistakes through early intervention
- Parents or guardians are involved in the entire process
- Youth Court allows first time respondents the opportunity to keep their record "clean"
- Offers a speedy trial
- After school activity
- Receive community service hours
- Members send a message that they do not condone illegal behavior in their community
- Offers self empowerment and teaches the value of being law abiding

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# Huntington Youth Court

Justice For Youth By Youth



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## What is Youth Court?

The Huntington Youth Court (HYC) is a program run for youth by youth. Youth respondents under 18, who have committed a school violation or their first misdemeanor crime, are given the opportunity to have their case heard by a jury of their peers. Volunteer high school youth perform the roles of prosecuting and defending attorney, judge, bailiff, and jury. In a trial setting, the volunteers hand down an appropriate and restorative justice based sentence to the respondent.

## What does the jury decide?

The Huntington Youth Court practices restorative justice principles when handing down the sentence to a respondent. Restorative justice is an approach that (1) holds the respondent accountable for their actions, (2) involves the community when handing down an appropriate sentence, and (3) develops the skills and competencies of the respondent, so they will lead a law abiding life and become productive members of society. The jury may impose a sentence that includes community service, written or verbal apology to the victim and/or parents, written essays pertaining to the offense, counseling sessions, or a jail tour. Respondents must also participate in a mandatory peer discussion group and serve on the jury for another case.

## Types of Cases

Referrals come from two sources: local high schools and the Suffolk County Department of Probation. These cases are sent to the Youth Court Director, who accepts cases meeting the criteria. Typical Probation cases include: shoplifting, criminal mischief, vandalism, and other misdemeanor crimes. Respondents have been arrested or charged with an offense, and admit guilt to the crime. Referrals coming from the school district include violations against the school's Code of Conduct, such as fighting, vaping, possession, and under the influence of illegal substances, etc. The respondent, with a parent or guardian, then meets with the Youth Court staff member for an intake, in which the rules and guidelines of the program are explained.

## Goal of Youth Court

The goal of youth court is to prevent delinquent behavior through positive peer influence, strengthen self-esteem, instill motivation for self improvement, and enhance a sense of community involvement among youth. Through restorative justice, a positive educational experience is provided for both the respondent and the youth court members. Youth gain experience with the legal process and become familiar with the court system and the various career opportunities within it. Respondents also learn about career opportunities through the community service they perform. Counseling and parent education are also available through the Youth Court.

## Membership Requirements

Membership requires any student age 14-18 years old be willing to make a voluntary commitment for at least one year. Each member will successfully complete a 20-hour training program, which covers a multitude of topics, including the operation of youth court, the penal law, and sentencing guidelines. The training program concludes with a mock trial, a youth court bar exam, and the annual Induction Ceremony, which will prepare members for participation in the proceedings of Huntington Youth Court.

## Trial Team Members Include:

**Judge:** Presides over the trial and sentences the respondent in accordance with the jury's verdict.

**Community Advocate:** Represents the interest of the people in the community. Investigates circumstances of the offense and makes a recommendation for sentencing.

**Respondent Advocate:** Advocates on behalf of the respondent. Investigates the circumstances of the offense, presents mitigating factors, and makes a recommendation for sentencing.

**Bailiff/Clerk:** Maintains accurate records of court proceedings, ensures smooth operation, and administers oath.

**Jury:** Hears evidence during youth court proceedings and decides on an appropriate sentence.