

JUVENILE CRIME DEFENSE

California Juvenile Crimes • Crimes by Minors Juvenile Delinquency • Juvenile Court

In California, crimes committed by minors (17 years or younger) are prosecuted in the California juvenile court system.

Juvenile courts handle cases involving children between the ages of **10 and 17**. The intent is to **rehabilitate the child, not punish** him or her. The **consequences** depend on the **seriousness** of the crime and the **criminal history** of the child.

Types of juvenile crimes include:

- **Skipping school (truancy)**
- **Gang-related activities**
- **Underage alcohol consumption**
- **DUI (driving under the influence)**
- **Speeding and driving without a license**
- **Running away from home**
- **Probation violations**
- **“Three Strikes” cases
(repeat offenses)**
- **Theft, shoplifting, burglary**
- **Vandalism**
- **Drug use**
- **Arson**
- **Trespassing**
- **Sexual misconduct**
- **Fighting in School**

California Law

Under California law, minors can be arrested under one of two categories:

- **Juvenile delinquency:** this is the same as committing types of crimes adults commit—serious felony offenses like murder, rape, assault and robbery—to less serious crimes like shoplifting
- **Status offenses:** these are acts are against the law because they’re committed by a minor—truancy, curfew violations, running away

In addition, the crime can be classified as a misdemeanor or a felony depending on its seriousness:

- A **misdemeanor conviction** can result in probation, detention in a juvenile facility like a boot camp or ranch, a fine, or a combination. Minor infractions, such as a motor vehicle violation, are generally punished with a fine.
- A **felony conviction** is much more serious. Consequences can include imprisonment in a state institution like the California Youth Authority, which is like a state prison for adults, and/or treatment programs, detention, home arrest (electronic monitoring), probation, community service, or graffiti cleanup.

Charging and Convicting Minors

California Juvenile Court is very different from adult criminal court because it has a unique set of rules and procedures. For example, minors are not entitled to a jury trial or bail. The decision to charge a crime as a misdemeanor or felony rests with the prosecutor.

Also, dismissals can occur at any stage in the process. Arresting police officers, juvenile hall intake officers and detention officers all have the authority to completely close your child's case or mandate informal probation before the case goes to court.

When a Minor is Tried as an Adult

In cases involving a serious felony or violence, the court may decide to send the juvenile to adult court and try him as an adult. This decision is left up to the judge and the prosecutor. A minor may be tried as an adult depending on:

- The severity of the crime
- The degree of criminal sophistications
- The probability of rehabilitation (and history of prior attempts)
- Previous criminal history

If it's determined that the minor should be tried as an adult, the juvenile case is dismissed and the prosecutor brings a regular criminal case to adult court, where the punishment can be state prison or the California Youth Authority (CYA).

Time is of the Essence with a Juvenile Crime Charge!

If your child is charged with a juvenile crime and you contact a criminal defense lawyer immediately, you may be able to get your child's case dismissed in its initial stages. In some cases, a knowledgeable juvenile attorney may be able to minimize the juvenile offense charges your child faces—if contacted early enough.

Without an experienced juvenile criminal defense lawyer, your child could go through needless juvenile court proceedings and could wrongfully end up in juvenile boot camp, detention ranch or even the California Youth Authority (state prison for juveniles).

Work With a Lawyer Experienced in Juvenile Cases

At the Law Offices of Jerry Nicholson, we have helped families deal with the arrest of a minor child. We know the juvenile system and we advocate for our clients. Our goal in every juvenile case is to:

- Get the child released from custody
- Convince the District Attorney not to file charges if possible
- Get a dismissal (acquittal) or reduced charges
- If convicted, get the least restrictive penalty (community service instead of juvenile boot camp)

Contact Jerry Nicholson for a free evaluation of your child's case.

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