

YOUNG WITNESS SERVICE

**Help and support
for young witnesses
in Thames Valley**

Young witnesses may be more vulnerable because:

Age and level of understanding make court stressful/intimidating

Language, roles, used in court can be frightening or confusing.

May have limited attention span

May be dealing with new emotions – and unable able to associate their emotional/physical reactions with being a victim/witness.

May not have the words to describe how they feel

May not have the same support networks as adults

May take more time than adults to build trust

May answer questions in a compliant way

Re victimisation

**Most young witnesses receive only the core support available from
Witness Care Unit, Witness Service and police.**

**Specialist services have evolved through local initiatives in some
areas to provide child focused support and preparation**

***Evaluation of Young Witness Support - Joyce Plotnikoff and
Richard Woolfson 2007.***

**Examined the extent to which these schemes added value for
young people and their carers**

FINDINGS:

- **Consistently higher levels of support**
- **Better informed about what to do when answering questions and what might happen in cross examination**
- **96% more confident about going to court**
- **Carers greatly appreciated the service received - 44% said support made it possible for child to go to court**

Specialist services really do add value!

YOUNG WITNESS SERVICE THAMES VALLEY

- **Support provided by specially trained volunteers**
- **Managed by Victim Support Witness Service with support of multi agency development group.**
- **SLA with Witness Care Unit – all young witnesses are automatically referred to Young Witness Service**
- **Referrals also accepted from any agency concerned about a young person called as a witness**
- **Service available to prosecution and defence witnesses**

WHAT SERVICE DO WE PROVIDE?

Young Witness supporters will:

I. Meet with the young witness and their parent/carer either at home or in an appropriate place

Assessment / preparation visits

Explain role, confidentiality, evidential boundary

Assess whether parent/carer need support

Assess young witness needs

Assess setting for preparation sessions

WHAT SERVICE DO WE PROVIDE?

Young Witness supporters will:

2.) Explain the CJS process, who's who in court and the role of the young witness.

Using Young Witness Pack, 'Giving evidence: what it's really like' DVD and 'toolkit' material

Use of appropriate materials to address any anxieties

WHAT SERVICE DO WE PROVIDE?

Young Witness supporters will:

3.) Explain Special Measures and help the young person liaise with Criminal Justice agencies to obtain the most appropriate Special Measures.

What they will find most helpful – not what others presume

Use of intermediaries

WHAT SERVICE DO WE PROVIDE?

Young Witness supporters will:

4.) Arrange visits to court before the court date (pre-trial visit).

More than one visit if required

See where they will give evidence and how live link works if necessary

See courtroom

Where they will wait

Side entrance if required

Meet people who will be at court on the day

WHAT SERVICE DO WE PROVIDE?

Young Witness supporters will:

5.) Provide support throughout the trial

WHAT SERVICE DO WE PROVIDE?

Young Witness supporters will:

6.) Offer another visit after the trial to explain the outcome and provide further support if necessary

Talk through what happened / what might happen next

Verdict jigsaw

Referral / signpost to VS community based service or other agency

Feedback forms

Post trial phone contact if no home visit

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