



Department of  
**Justice**  
An Roinn Dlí agus Cirt  
Mánnystrie O tha Laa  
[www.justice-ni.gov.uk](http://www.justice-ni.gov.uk)



## **CONSULTATION ON COURT SENTENCES FOR CHILDREN**



**The Department of Justice is changing court-ordered community sentences for children and would like your views**

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## Introduction

The Department of Justice is changing court-ordered community sentences for children and would like your views.

This document should explain the issues and proposals in a way that is easy to understand. However, if you need any further assistance or information, we are happy to help.



In this document, hard words are in **bold**. We explain what these mean in the sentence before or after we have used them. A fuller explanation of some words is provided at the end of this document in a page called 'glossary'.

[Blue and underlined](#) words show links to websites and email addresses. You can click on these links on a computer, mobile phone or other such devices.



When answering our questions, if you provide personal information, we will remove it to protect your identity.

You can see the full version of this document online on the Department's website [here](#).

## How to give your views



We need your answers back by Friday 4 July 2025

You can send us your views by:



Using the QR code or link below to answer the questions online:

<https://consultations.nidirect.gov.uk/doj/child-friendly-version-single-order-consultation>

OR



Answering the questions in this paper and emailing them to: [yjpu@justice-ni.gov.uk](mailto:yjpu@justice-ni.gov.uk)

OR



Answering the questions in this paper and posting to:  
Reducing Offending Directorate  
Department of Justice  
Room A.13, Block A, Castle Buildings  
Stormont Estate BELFAST BT4 3SG

## What's it all about?



When someone under 18 is found guilty of a crime, they rarely go into custody. Instead, a judge, usually gives them what is called a **community order**. This is a plan made up of things they must do and things they must not do over a certain period of time.

Usually, an organisation helps children to stick to the conditions in their order: this is called **supervision**. Children are normally supervised by the Youth Justice Agency, although it could be the Probation Board.

There are **7** different types of community orders that children can be given which work in different ways, and can be supervised by both organisations. Children can have lots of orders at the same time, with lots of conditions that they have to stick to.

We were told by children and their parents or carers that having so many different orders can be confusing. We agree, and want to make things easier for everyone to understand by creating a new single community order.



So that's what we are going to do. We will change the law so that a child can only have **one order** at any time, supervised by only **one organisation**.

When a child is given this new order, there will be a meeting to agree the contents of a plan for them to stick to. The plan will be **flexible**: this means conditions can be taken away or added if a child either does well or keeps on breaking the law.

Now we want to know what you think, to help us make some final decisions.

## What do we want to do?

We want to make sure the new order:

- ✚ Is fair in how long it lasts and what conditions are in the plan.
- ✚ Lets those who need to have a say in what should be in the plan, including people who have been hurt or upset by a crime.
- ✚ Is easier to understand and to stick to than the current orders.
- ✚ Provides support to help children keep to the conditions in the plan.
- ✚ Helps with other problems, like in school or at home, to give children the best chance in life.

## Your views are important

We have spent a lot of time thinking about this new order, what it should look like and how it should work. Before we make any final decisions, we want to hear your views.



You can help by looking at our ideas on the next few pages, and answering the questions underneath each one.

## Our ideas – Your Voice

### Length of the order

We do not think there needs to be a limit on how short the order can be. This means that children can do things in their plan at their own pace, and when they are done, the order is finished!



**Question 1: Do you think there should be a limit on how short the order is? (please tick)**

- No limit.
- Yes there should be a limit (if you select this option, please say what you think the limit should be).



We think there needs to be a limit on how long the order can be, to make sure it is fair.

Current orders can be one, two or three years long. We think that more than one year is too long for children.

**Question 2: Do you think there should be a limit on how long the order is? (please tick)**

- No limit.
- Yes there should be a limit (if you select this option, please say what you think the limit should be).

## What goes in the order

We think judges should be able to pick from a list of things that can go into the order and the plan that children have to stick to. These are called **requirements**.

We think having a list means judges can treat everyone the same...if there is no list to pick from, some judges might choose lots of different requirements that others wouldn't think of.



We also think children and those who care for them should have a say in what requirements go into their plan.

The requirements in each order will depend on things like the child's age, whether they have been in trouble before, and how serious their behaviour has been.

### Question 3: Do you think there should be a list for judges to pick from? (please tick)

- Yes, so everyone is treated the same.
- No, judges should be able to choose to put anything into the orders (if you select this option, please say why).



Some requirements might be things children are not allowed to do, like go to certain places, meet certain people, or do certain things.

Other requirements might be things children must do, like meeting their youth worker, and working with them on things that will help them make better choices and improve their wellbeing. For example, this could be education or training, or improving their health or mental health.

**Question 4: What do you think should go into the order to help children make better choices?**



A **victim** is someone who has been hurt or upset by a crime. We think that victims should be allowed a say in what goes into the child's plan.

This already happens sometimes. It can help the victim and the child to feel better and make up for the harm their actions have caused.

**Question 5: Do you think victims should have a say in what goes into a child's plan? (please tick)**

- Yes, because they are the ones affected by the crime.
- No they should not (if you select this option, please say why).

Some children may make poor decisions or commit crimes because they are using things like drugs and alcohol, or maybe going through a time of poor mental health.



As part of the order, we want them to get help and support with these issues.

We think the best way of doing this is for them to work with their youth justice supervisor on these issues on a **voluntary basis**. This means they can choose to get help when they feel ready, rather than being made to do it.

We are worried that if children are forced to get help as part of their order, they may not do it, and they will end up back in court.

**Question 6: Do you think work to help with these personal problems should be done on a voluntary basis? (please tick)**

- Yes, because they may not be ready to get help so there is no point in forcing them to do it.
- No, they should be made to do it, even if it means they get into trouble if they don't do it.
- Don't know.
- Is there anything else you would like to say on this?

## Keeping it simple – only one order

We want to make these changes so that things are easier for everyone to understand. That is why we are taking away the seven current orders and putting one new order in place instead.



At the moment, if someone has an order and they go back to court for a different crime, they can get more orders – there is no limit.

We think this is confusing. Instead, we think if a child goes back to court and the judge finds them guilty, they should be able to change the existing order. They could do this by adding more requirements, or by making the order longer.

Doing that would still mean there is only one order and one plan, even if there are more things in it. We think that's easier to understand – what do you think?

**Question 7: Do you think having one order and one plan is better than having lots of them, no matter how many times you go to court? (please tick)**

Yes.

No (please say why below).

## Sticking to the plan

It can be hard for some children to stick to all of the requirements in their plan. Their youth justice worker will usually support them when they are finding it tough.



If they are brought back to court because they are not following their plan, we think the judge should have a few options for dealing with this, such as:

- ✚ Letting the order continue without any changes.
- ✚ Changing the order to either add or remove requirements.
- ✚ Ending the order and giving the child a new sentence.
- ✚ Ending the order with no further action.

### Question 8: Do you think these are the right options? (please tick)

Yes, because the judge can select the best option depending on what is happening with the child.

No, I think there should be different options. (If you select this answer, please tell us what options you think should be available to judges)

## Final Question

**Question 9: Is there anything else you would like to tell us about our new community order for children? (please tick)**

No.

Yes (please tell us below).

Thank You!

## What happens next

We need your answers back by **Friday 4 July 2025**



We will look at everyone's answers and share what we find out.

## Glossary of Terms

**Community Order** – this is a plan made up of things that children must do and things they must not do over a certain period of time, if they are found guilty of an offence.

**Custody** – being taken into custody means being put into a prison. If you are a child, in Northern Ireland that means that you will be taken to the Juvenile Justice Centre, which is a place where only children are held.

**Judge** – makes decisions in court about what will happen to a child who is charged with an offence.

**Probation Board** – this is an organisation that supervises people in the community, usually adults, who have committed offences.

**Requirements** – a list of things that can go into a community order and the plan which children will have to stick to. Examples include spending time with a youth justice worker each week or not being allowed to go into a certain area or shop.

**Supervision** – a period when a young person is supported by a youth justice (or probation worker) in order to help them stick to the requirements in their community order.

**Youth Justice Agency** – this is an organisation that supports young people and their families when children have offended.