

September 2016

Am I old enough?

Common legal issues for young people



Victoria Legal Aid

Do you need this booklet in a different format?

Please ring us on (03) 9269 0234 and ask for Publications.
We can talk with you about what you need.

Produced by Victoria Legal Aid

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For help with legal problems, call Legal Help on 1300 792 387
For business queries, call (03) 9269 0234

www.legalaid.vic.gov.au

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Contents

About this booklet	1
What do these words mean?	2
Your life, your rights	3
School	7
Becoming independent	17
Relationships	38
Family	46
Health	53
Out there	59
Buying things	69
Police, PSOs, bouncers and ticket inspectors	75
Courts and tribunals	92
Where to get help	95

Changes to the law

The law changes all the time. To check for changes you can:

- call Victoria Legal Aid's Legal Help phone line on 1300 792 387
- visit Victoria Legal Aid's website at www.legalaid.vic.gov.au.

About this booklet

This booklet is about common legal issues for young people in Victoria. It covers what you can and can't do in Victoria because of your age. It has general information. It shouldn't be used instead of legal advice.

The law can be different in other states. To check, see www.nationallegalaid.org for contact details of legal aid commissions around Australia.

Getting more help

If you have a legal problem, you have the right to speak to a lawyer, so contact Victoria Legal Aid, Youthlaw or a community legal centre. You can get free legal advice and you may be able to get a lawyer to help you free of charge.

These organisations and others are listed at the end of most chapters in this booklet, as well as in the 'Where to get help' chapter on page 95.

Victoria Legal Aid

Victoria Legal Aid is a government funded agency set up to ensure that people who cannot afford to pay for a private lawyer can get help with their legal problems. We provide free information for all Victorians, family dispute resolution for disadvantaged families, provide lawyers on duty in most courts and tribunals in Victoria, and fund legal representation for people who meet our eligibility criteria. We help Victorian people with legal problems about criminal matters, family breakdown, child protection, family violence, child support, immigration, social security, mental health, discrimination, guardianship and administration, tenancy and debt.

For free information about the law and how we can help you, call Legal Help on 1300 792 387.

What do these words mean?

bullying – something done on purpose against a person or group of people to upset or hurt them or damage their property, reputation or acceptance by others

consent – agree

contract – an agreement between two parties which the law says must be carried out

cyberbullying – the use of the internet or mobile phones to upset, hurt or damage the reputation of a person or a group of people on purpose

evidence – information used in court to prove something

independent person – an adult who must be with you during police questioning when you are under 18 and your parents or guardian cannot be there

intervention order – a court order to protect you from family violence or stalking

sexting – the sharing of sexually explicit messages or photographs (nude or semi-nude pictures) electronically, most commonly through mobile phones and social networking sites

sexual assault – behaviour of a sexual nature that makes you feel uncomfortable, frightened or intimidated

Will – a legal document setting out who gets part or all of a person's estate when they die

Your life, your rights

You have rights, regardless of your age. Under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, which sets out the rights of people under 18, you have the right to:

- be free from sexual and economic exploitation
- your own opinion
- education, health care and economic opportunity.

You also have rights and responsibilities under Victoria's Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities. The Victorian Government and its agencies must consider these rights when they make laws and provide services. For more information about the charter contact the Victorian Equal Opportunity & Human Rights Commission, [see](#) page 6.

Your right to see a lawyer

No matter how old you are, you have the right to see a lawyer if you think you have a legal problem or you need legal advice. A lawyer will listen to you and give advice about the best way to handle things. It's up to you whether you take that advice or not.

You can get free legal advice from a lawyer at Victoria Legal Aid, Youthlaw or a community legal centre. [See](#) 'Where to get help' on page 95. You may be able to get a lawyer to give you ongoing help. This can include help with writing letters or help with going to court.

If you have to go to the Children's Court, a lawyer may be able to go with you and speak on your behalf. Try to see a lawyer before going to court. A lawyer's job is to help you present your case in the best way. The lawyer isn't in charge of how you run your case. You are.

The information you give the lawyer is confidential. They can't tell anyone else (like the police or your parents) about your situation unless you say it's okay.

A lawyer who acts as an independent children's lawyer in the family law courts has a different role. An independent children's lawyer has to tell the court what is best for a child. The lawyer will listen to what the child says, but may not always do what the child wants.

See 'What does an independent children's lawyer do?' on page 47.

What is discrimination?

Discrimination means being treated unfairly because of a characteristic like age, gender, race or marital status (whether you're married or not). The law says that it is wrong to discriminate against someone on these grounds in certain areas of public life. It shouldn't matter what your sex, race, marital status, religion, sexuality or gender identity is or what physical features, disability or political views you have.

When is discrimination against the law?

Discrimination, including sexual harassment, is against the law if it happens at school, at work, in accommodation (for example, staying at a hostel), during sporting activities, in local government, at public or publicly funded clubs and community organisations, or when you receive goods or services. For example, it's illegal to refuse to serve someone because of their race or for a landlord or real estate agent not to rent a house to a couple because they're unmarried.

It's also illegal for someone to discriminate against you because you're friends with someone who has a characteristic that's protected by the law (for example, a disability or certain religious views).

It's also illegal to vilify (spread negative information about) someone because of their racial or religious background. Vilification includes things like racist graffiti.

Sometimes discrimination may not be unlawful. For example, when a character makes racist comments in a play. But even in these situations the character's behaviour has to be reasonable – the comments must fit the situation and be made 'in good faith' (honestly and sincerely).

What is sexual harassment?

Sexual harassment is when someone behaves in a sexual way that offends, humiliates or intimidates you. It can include things like:

- telling dirty jokes
- staring and leering
- someone making comments about another person's sexual behaviour
- offensive pictures, emails or text messages
- someone touching, pinching or brushing up against another person unnecessarily
- someone kissing or hugging another person when they didn't say yes to it.

It's also sexual harassment if you agree to someone behaving sexually towards you because you were scared or pushed into it. Sexual harassment can happen anywhere, for example at work, at school, or when helping out with a local sporting event.

Sexual harassment is against the law, and if the person's behaviour is serious then the police could charge that person with a criminal offence – this means it could go to court. So if you are in this situation, get help. See 'Where to get help' on page 95.

See also 'What is incest?' (page 41), 'How do I know if I've been sexually assaulted?' (page 41), 'Violence and sexual assault' (page 40), 'What happens if a child is being abused or neglected?' (page 47).

What is not sexual harassment?

It isn't sexual harassment if both people agree to the sexual behaviour. None of this stops you developing friendships, sexual or otherwise, with people your age.

Where to get more help and information

- **Australian Human Rights Commission** – call 1300 656 419 or visit www.humanrights.gov.au
- **Centre Against Sexual Assault (CASA)** – to contact any centre in Victoria or the after hours Sexual Assault Crisis Line (free call, open 24 hours) call 1800 806 292 or email the crisis line ahcasa@thewomens.org.au visit www.casa.org.au
- **Fair Work Ombudsman** – call 131 394 or visit www.fairwork.gov.au
- **Victorian Equal Opportunity & Human Rights Commission** – call 1300 891 848 or 1300 289 621 (TTY). visit www.humanrightscommission.vic.gov.au
- **Victoria Legal Aid Legal Help** – call 1300 792 387 Monday to Friday, 8.45 am to 5.15 pm visit www.legalaid.vic.gov.au

School

This section looks at leaving school before you're 17 and what happens if you're suspended or expelled from your school. There may be different rules for state and private schools. This section also explains what **bullying** is and how to deal with it.

Am I old enough to leave school?

You have to go to school until you have completed Year 10. After that you can leave school as long as you do at least 25 hours per week in education, training, employment or a combination of these things, until you turn 17.

Most young people stay on at school until 17, to do the Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE), the Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning (VCAL), or Vocational Education and Training (VET) subjects. If you don't do these things, you can study somewhere else (like a TAFE) or get an apprenticeship or a full-time job instead. Anyone aged between 15 and 19 can apply to go to TAFE or a Registered Training Organisation to continue their education.

Before finishing Year 10, you can stop going to school for reasons like:

- your parents or guardian are giving you proper and regular lessons at home
- there's no state school within five kilometres and you're learning by correspondence
- you're very ill or unable to get to school

- the Department of Education and Training (DET) has said you don't have to go for some other reason – for example, you're completing your education in another program out of school, or you have to leave school to work because your parents are very ill or suffering severe hardship.

If you want to leave school before finishing Year 10 you need approval from the education department. Ask your school about this or contact the department (see page 16) to find out the name of their regional director in your area.

What happens if I am suspended from school?

Suspension is when the principal doesn't let you go to school for a short time.

Suspension is normally only used when the school has tried other ways of sorting out the problem but these things haven't worked.

If you are a student at a government (state) school you can be suspended if, while you're at school, or travelling to or from school, you:

- create a danger to people at school
- use serious violence against people
- seriously damage property
- steal or help others steal
- sell, use or bring weapons, drugs, alcohol or cigarettes to school
- disobey clear and reasonable instructions from school staff
- disturb order at school or stop others from learning or taking part in school life
- discriminate against, harass or bully other people.

See also 'What is discrimination?' on page 4, 'What is bullying?' on page 12.

If you are 15 years or older, a principal can suspend you if you consistently skip classes and fail to complete school work. The principal must consider any special needs you have, such as a disability, and your age.

Before you are suspended the principal must give you a chance to respond to concerns about your behaviour. The principal must also take into account any information or documents that you or your parent or guardian provide, and consider if there is any other way to address your behaviour.

If you are suspended, the principal must give you and your parent or guardian a Notice of Suspension that says the reason why you were suspended and the dates your suspension begins and ends. The principal must also explain where the suspension will happen.

The principal can suspend you immediately if they think this is necessary.

The principal can't suspend you for more than five school days at a time unless the Regional Director of DET gives permission to suspend you for longer. You can't be suspended for more than 15 school days in a year unless the school gets permission from the Regional Director.

You can still do school work while you're suspended. If you are suspended for less than three consecutive days, the school must give you meaningful work to do during the suspension period. If you are suspended for more than three days, the school must give you and your parent or guardian written copies of a Student Absence Learning Plan and a Return to School Plan.

If you don't agree with the suspension and want advice about what to do, you can contact your local regional office of the education department – see page 16. If you're not happy with their response you can contact Ombudsman Victoria – see page 16.

If you're worried about getting advice or taking action, ask for help from your parents, your guardian or someone else you trust.

What does it mean if I am expelled from school?

Expulsion is when the principal excludes you from school permanently. The principal can expel you for any of the things they can suspend you for (see the previous section). They expel you rather than just suspend you if your behaviour is so serious that suspension isn't enough and expulsion is the only option left after balancing your educational needs against the health, safety and wellbeing of other students and staff. Expulsion is a last resort and the principal must make sure that the school has looked at what else can be done apart from expulsion.

The school can only immediately expel you if you behave in a way that places another person in severe immediate physical threat.

Before you are expelled, the principal must let your parent or guardian know that you may be expelled. If you don't live with either of your parents or a guardian, the school must notify the Regional Director of DET that you may be expelled. The principal must then organise a Behaviour Review Conference and notify you and your parent or guardian of the date, time and location of the conference.

You may have a support person with you at the conference (as well as your parent or guardian) as long as the support person is not being paid to be there. The principal will be there, as well as another person from DET.

At the Behaviour Review Conference, the principal must tell you why they want to expel you and tell you about the evidence they have to expel you. You or your parent or guardian must be given a chance to respond and explain why you should not be expelled.

The principal must give you a Procedure for Expulsion booklet and discuss alternatives if you are expelled, such as other education options, or options for training or employment. The school must provide an interpreter at this conference if you need one.

The principal must make a decision that takes your circumstances into account, and let you and your parent or guardian know whether you have been expelled within 48 hours of the conference.

If you are expelled, the principal must give you and your parent or guardian a Notice of Expulsion, and if you are under 17 the principal and education department must make sure you are enrolled in another school or registered training organisation, or that you have a job.

What if I disagree with my expulsion?

You can appeal the expulsion if you think:

- that the school didn't follow the expulsion process very well
- that the reason the school expelled you was unfair
- there were other circumstances that the school should take into account. Include your reasons and say whether you want to argue your case in person.

You or your parent or guardian have to give the principal an Expulsion of Appeal form within 10 days of receiving a Notice of Expulsion. The principal sends this notice to the education department. The education department may then organise an Expulsion Review Panel to help them make a decision about your appeal. If an Expulsion Review Panel is held, you and your parent or guardian will be notified and will be given the opportunity to explain why you should not be expelled. The education department does not have to organise a review panel. They may just make a decision about whether or not to uphold the expulsion.

Get legal advice and other support. See 'Where to get more help and information' on page 16.

Private or independent (non-government) schools have more freedom to suspend and expel students than government schools. Get a copy of your school's disciplinary procedures to find out how to challenge a decision. You may be able to challenge your suspension or expulsion in court or through a tribunal.

What is bullying?

Bullying is when someone behaves in a way towards another person or group of people to upset or hurt them or damage their property, reputation or acceptance by others. It is usually repeated behaviour and can be carried out over a number of days but it can go on for weeks, months or years. Bullying can happen anywhere and anyone can be a bully, like a teacher or a student, even a family member or someone you've had a close relationship with.

There are different types of bullying:

- **direct physical:** this means the bully hurts your body, doing things like hitting, tripping, pinching, pushing or kicking you. It can also mean the bully steals or damages things that belong to you
- **direct verbal:** this means the bully speaks to or about you in a mean and hurtful way, like teasing or calling you names that may be racist or homophobic or spreading rumours about you
- **indirect:** this includes things that the bully does to upset, exclude or embarrass you, like leaving you out of a game on purpose, mimicking you, using rude body language, playing nasty jokes, texting, emailing you unwanted messages or using chat rooms to upset you.

Bullying is never okay. In the most severe cases, bullying behaviours can now be treated as a crime in Victoria.

If someone is bullying you, you can take action to stop it. Schools and employers must try their best to make you feel safe and stop bullying from happening. For example, most schools and employers should have policies about bullying.

See also 'Violence and sexual assault' (page 40) and 'Where to get more help and information' on page 16.

What is cyberbullying?

Cyberbullying is when someone uses electronic communication devices, such as the internet or a mobile phone, to upset or hurt another person or a group of people on purpose. Cyberbullying is illegal and is just as serious as other types of bullying. Cyberbullying can sometimes be even more damaging than face-to-face bullying because electronic communication is fast and can spread easily.

Cyberbullying can include:

- someone making threats to another person or group of people online or using email, texting or instant messaging
- someone tricking another person or group of people about his or her identity online
- online stalking (stalking is when someone repeatedly does things that make you feel scared)
- spreading personal information or secrets online or using email, SMS or instant messaging
- bombarding another person or group of people with offensive messages online or using email, texting or instant messaging.

What can I do if I am being bullied?

Make a list of all the things that have happened and when they happened, who was involved and who may have seen it.

If you're experiencing cyberbullying, save any messages you receive.

You may be able to block the sender's messages yourself, or get your internet service provider to help you.

See a doctor if you're hurt or stressed, and tell the doctor why.

If the bullying is happening at school, talk to a teacher, the welfare co-ordinator or the school principal about what they can do. If it's happening at work, talk to your manager or to another adult you trust. Be prepared to name the bully.

Ongoing bullying or harassment may also equal stalking. You may have a right to apply to a court for an **intervention order**.

Remember: you can take action to stop bullying. Talk to an adult you trust. See also 'Violence and sexual assault' (page 40) and 'Where to get more help and information' on page 16.

The internet, social networking and privacy

Many people now use the internet and social networking sites to stay in touch with friends, follow news, and to shop.

It's very important to keep your electronic communications as private as you can. Think about it. If you own a car you're not going to park it in the street with the doors unlocked. To stay safe online, you should be just as careful with your personal information, as you would be with a car.

How can I stay safe online?

Don't put any personal information online that can be used to identify you. Use a screen name rather than your full name, and keep your address, phone number, where you work or go to school, and your date of birth private.

If you shop online, use a pre-paid gift card or a card that is not linked to your savings account or to a credit account.

Make sure you use strong passwords for your email, social media and online bank accounts (use a combination of letters and numbers that is hard for someone else to guess). Use a different password for each account. Change your passwords regularly and don't tell anyone else what they are – not even your friends.

How can I keep my social networking private?

It's hard to keep social networking private. Remember, any information and photos that you put online can be easily shared, without you knowing about it.

Limit who sees your profile and your photos and information. Most sites are not private to start with, but once you set up an account you can change the settings to limit people you don't know seeing your personal information.

Don't just rely on privacy settings. Social networking sites change all the time and what was 'private' one day can be made public the next. See also 'Mobile phone pictures and the risks of 'sexting'' on page 42.

The most important rule is: don't email, post or upload anything that you're not prepared to share with the world.

Where to get more help and information

- **Centre for Adolescent Health** – for free support and referral call 9345 5890 or visit www.rch.org.au/cah
- **Department of Education and Early Childhood Development** – call 9637 2000 or visit www.education.vic.gov.au
To contact the Deputy Secretary, Regional Services Group write to:
c/- Executive Director
Regional Monitoring and Support Division
GPO Box 4376, Melbourne 3001
or email community.stakeholders@edumail.vic.gov.au
- **Independent Schools Victoria** – call 9825 7200 or visit www.ais.vic.edu.au
- **Kids Helpline** – 24-hour telephone and online counselling for children and young people. Call 1800 551 800 (free call) or visit www.kidshelp.com.au
- **Ombudsman Victoria** – can investigate decisions made by government schools and can recommend different action. Call 9613 6222 or 1800 806 314 (country callers) or visit www.ombudsman.vic.gov.au
- **Youthlaw** – call 9611 2412, email legal@youthlaw.asn.au or visit www.youthlaw.asn.au/ask-a-lawyer-now
- For more information about bullying visit www.bullyingnoway.gov.au
- For information about how to stay safe online visit www.cybersmart.gov.au

Becoming independent

Being in charge of your own life means you'll have to think about finding a job and a place to live. You have to vote if you are 18 or over, and you may want to open a bank account. You might also want to make a **Will**, travel overseas and drive a car. This section tells you about the law and gives you a few tips about how to do some of these things.

Where can I look for work?

Depending on the kind of work you want, you could start with:

- local shopping centres, newsagents, pharmacies and restaurants
- job ads in your local and other newspapers
- job websites.

Sometimes employers don't advertise jobs, so it's worth telling people you know that you're looking for work. They may be able to help you.

Using other services to find work

If you're looking for a job you may be able to use the self-service facilities in your local Centrelink office. Some offices have touch-screen machines that list jobs. You may also be able to use the phone, photocopier, computers and printers to help you prepare your job application. Your local library might also have facilities that you can use.

If you are getting Youth Allowance payments, Centrelink might put you in touch with the Jobactive program.

Jobactive is made up of different organisations that can help you find work. Some of these organisations may be able to help you prepare a job application. Some may also be able to help you find an apprenticeship or traineeship.

When am I old enough to work?

The minimum age for most types of employment is 13. If you're under 15, special restrictions apply to your employment (see the 'Any age' section below).

Under 13 years

Generally, an employer can't hire you to work if you're younger than 13. However, if you're 11 or older, an employer can hire you to do jobs like delivering newspapers or advertising material, or making deliveries for a pharmacy.

Under 15 years

There are laws employers have to follow about employing young people under the age of 15. The government can fine employers if they don't follow these laws. For most jobs the employer and supervisor of anyone under 15 must have a Child Employment Permit and a Working with Children Check. Another condition is that the employer can only give a person under 15 a job during school hours if that person has permission not to go to school.

Any age

You can work in a family business or in the entertainment industry at any age. If you work in a family business, your parents must supervise you. They need to make sure you only do light work that will not stop your school work.

Do I need a Child Employment Permit?

If you're under 15, an employer can only hire you if you have a Child Employment Permit. You get these from Business Victoria.

See 'Where to get more help and information' on page 35. Permits are free.

Your future employer must apply for the permit. Your parent or legal guardian (and sometimes your school) must sign the application form. The employer must include details about what you'll be doing as part of the job and your hours of work.

It's illegal to work without a permit. The government can fine employers between \$1000 and \$10,000.

If you're under 15, you don't need a permit if the work involves you:

- working in your family's business and being supervised by your parent or guardian
- taking part in a project or a show with a church or a school
- taking part in a church service or religious program
- doing odd jobs for neighbours or friends like babysitting or tutoring
- taking part in a sporting activity.

What types of work can I do?

Wherever you work, you're only allowed to do light work.

This means work that won't hurt you in any way and work that won't stop you from going to school. Examples of the type of work children can do include:

- golf-caddying
- office work, such as photocopying
- gardening
- delivering newspapers, pamphlets or other advertising material and making deliveries for a registered pharmacist
- entertainment
- farm work
- working as a sales assistant in a shop.

You can't work in door-to-door sales, in the building and construction industry or in deep-sea fishing.

You can't sell alcohol in a bottle shop, hotel or restaurant until you're 18 unless you're on an approved training program.

How many hours can I work?

If you're under 15, an employer can hire you to work for no more than three hours a day and 12 hours a week during a school term. During the holidays you can work for no more than six hours a day and 30 hours a week. These hours include rest breaks.

The employer can only get you to do work between 6 am and 9 pm. Also, if you work in street trading, such as at a fruit stall or mobile food van, you can't work between 6 pm and 6 am.

The employer must give you 30 minutes for a break after every three hours you've worked and give you at least a 12 hour break between finishing one shift and starting the next. Variations can be granted to these restrictions if they are in your best interest and won't be harmful.

Are there any restrictions about doing work experience?

If you're over 14, an employer can only give you work experience for up to 10 days a term but no more than 40 days a year.

The employer can't make you work for more than 10 days in one work experience placement. If you're under 15, the employer will need to give you special forms to fill in. You might not be able to do certain work (such as with animals or money) and you may need a Child Employment Permit. Structured Workplace Learning students need to be 15 years or older.

There are guidelines for selecting work experience placements. Speak to your work experience co-ordinator for more information.

What is an employment contract?

Once you get a job, your employer may ask you to sign an employment contract. This is a legally binding document that sets out your conditions of work. Your rate of pay depends on your age.

Never sign an employment contract until you have read it, understood it and agree with it. It's a good idea to get advice before you sign an employment contract, even if you think you know what you're signing. Make sure you keep a copy of the contract for yourself.

Sometimes an employment contract is oral (spoken) and not in writing. You have a right for the employer to tell you the amount of pay before you take the job.

If you have questions about employment contracts, pay and conditions, being sacked unfairly or other work problems, get advice quickly. See 'Where to get more help and information' on page 35.

What is 'cash in hand' work?

Sometimes your employer might want to pay you cash in hand. This means that the employer does not take any tax out of your pay and that you won't have to do a tax return. It can feel like you're earning more money.

Be careful. You might have trouble if something goes wrong and you try to get help with it. For example, you might go to the Fair Work Ombudsman to get wages back because you were paid less than the minimum wage or you might want to go to WorkSafe to make a claim for an injury. When you do that, the government may find out that you worked cash in hand. This could lead to problems with:

- Centrelink – if you get a benefit and haven't told them about the work, you could owe them money, or even be charged with an offence
- the Australian Taxation Office – if you haven't paid tax, you might owe them money

- visas – if your visa says you're not allowed to work and you do, you could be charged with an offence or even have to leave the country.

Also, because the employer didn't keep a record of your work (for example, payslips) then the employer may deny that you were ever employed (though witnesses could disprove this). As well, cash in hand means the employer won't pay you a superannuation contribution. If you work for years, you could miss out on quite a bit of superannuation. Superannuation is paid on top of the minimum wage for your job into a superannuation fund. The idea is that this money builds up over your lifetime so there is money for you when you retire. Employers must pay superannuation for all casual, part-time and full-time employees who are over 18 and earn more than \$450 per month. If you're under 18 and you work more than 30 hours per week, your employer must pay superannuation for you.

Unpaid trial work

Unpaid trial work is when an employer gets you to work, without pay, to see if you are right for the job. Sometimes employers get young people to do unpaid trial work just to get free labour to help them over a busy period like a long weekend. Unpaid trial work happens in many jobs, but is common in sales and in the hospitality industry.

An employer can only ask you to do some unpaid trial work if:

- the work you do is for you to show that you have a particular skill needed for a job
- you only do this work for as long as is needed for you to demonstrate that skill
- you are under direct supervision the whole time.

If a job does not need any particular skills or your unpaid trial lasts longer than is needed to check your skills for a job, then it may be against the law.

Discrimination and workplace safety

Discrimination, unsafe work environments, sexual harassment, workplace violence and bullying are against the law. If these issues affect you there are people who can help. Contact the Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU) Helpline or JobWatch for advice.

See 'Where to get more help and information' on page 35.

Remember

Make sure you read any contract you're asked to sign. Keep a copy. Don't sign it if you don't understand it. Tell the employer you'd like to take the contract away to think about it and get advice.

There are minimum standards that apply to all Australian workers, no matter what you agree to in your contract. As well, you may have extra entitlements. It can depend on what type of job you do. Contact Fair Work Australia to find out if you're getting your minimum entitlements. If you aren't, the Fair Work Ombudsman may be able to help you get them. See 'Where to get more help and information' on page 35.

If the employer fires you and you think it was unfair, get help quickly. Strict time limits apply. You have 21 days from your dismissal to apply for an unfair dismissal. See 'Where to get more help and information' on page 35.

Am I old enough to open a bank account?

You can open a bank account at any age. You need more than one form of identification, like your birth certificate and photo ID. Ask the bank what kind of ID they need from you. If you have a tax file number, tell the bank. If you don't give the bank your tax file number, you may be taxed at a higher rate by the Australian Taxation Office.

Paying tax and getting a tax file number

How much tax will I pay?

Some of the income that you earn each year is tax-free. This is called the 'tax-free threshold'. You can only claim one lot of tax-free income, so if you work part time and get Youth Allowance, you can only claim the tax-free threshold for either your part-time income or your Youth Allowance income.

Your employer will send you a payment summary after the end of the financial year (30 June). This shows how much you earned in that year and how much tax you paid.

Do I have to do a tax return?

If you work and earn more than the tax-free threshold in one financial year (July to June), then you must put in a tax return. If you're under 18 and earn money from investments you may need to put in a tax return. Contact the tax office to check. See 'Where to get more help and information' on page 35.

If you earned less than the tax-free threshold in the financial year and the employer kept some of your pay as tax to pass onto the tax office, you can put in a tax return and get some of that money back. This is called a 'tax refund'.

You can lodge a tax return online at the Australian Tax Office website. Go to www.ato.gov.au. You can also order paper copies of the tax return form, with instructions, by calling 1300 720 092.

What is a tax file number and why do I need one?

The tax office gives you a tax file number and it's yours for life, even if you move states, change your name, live overseas for a while or get a new job.

You need a tax file number when you:

- start going to university on HELP (Higher Education Loan Program)
- open a bank account
- get a Centrelink payment
- join a superannuation fund
- put in a tax return.

It's a good idea to get a tax file number if you start working. If you don't, then your employer has to keep almost 50 per cent of your wages in tax to be passed onto the tax office.

How do I get a tax file number?

You can get an application form for a tax file number from the tax office (see 'Where to get more help and information' on page 35) or at some Australia Post shops. If you're under 16, you need two forms of ID, like your birth certificate or citizenship papers with proof of residence, and a recent school report. If you're over 16 you need three forms of ID.

If you're still at school, you can apply through your school to get a tax file number.

Am I old enough to leave home?

You can leave home if you want to when you turn 17. If you leave home before you turn 17 and someone thinks that you might not be safe or that you might get hurt, they can report this to the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS).

If the department is concerned for your safety, it can ask the Children's Court to make an order to protect you.

The order can say where you'll live and whom you'll live with or whether social workers from the DHHS can decide these things.

The department probably won't take you to court if you:

- have somewhere safe to live
- have enough money to live on
- aren't involved with drugs, under-age prostitution or any other illegal activities.

If there are serious problems at home the court may order that you live somewhere else, like with another family or in a residential home with other young people.

See also 'Violence and sexual assault' (page 40), 'Family breakdown – what will happen to me?' (page 46), 'What happens if a child is being abused or neglected?' (page 47).

Finding a place to live

Emergency housing

You might be able to get emergency housing for a little while if you urgently need somewhere to live. See 'Where to get more help and information' on page 35.

Renting

If you're under 18, you can rent a house or flat (there are age limits on when you can leave home, see page 25). Centrelink might also give you a payment called Rent Assistance.

You usually have to sign a lease when you rent a house or flat. This is a contract between the owner (the landlord) and you (the tenant). Make sure you read and understand the lease before you sign it. The landlord or real estate agent (representing the landlord) should also give you a booklet explaining your rights as a tenant.

You also have to pay a 'bond'. This is usually a cash payment of one month's rent.

You will usually give the bond to the owner or real estate agent who then sends the bond to the Residential Tenancies Bond Authority. The authority then sends you a letter to tell you they got the bond. Keep this letter. You'll get the bond back when you move out if you've paid your rent and kept the place in good condition.

The landlord or real estate agent should give you a 'condition report' when you start your lease. You and the landlord or real estate agent both fill in the report, agreeing on what condition you both think the place is in at the start of the lease. The report is used when you move out to check to see if you have taken care of the place and whether they should give you back your bond.

The owner of the property is responsible for getting repairs done to maintain the place. You can get help if this isn't done.

If you don't pay the rent you may be evicted (thrown out). If you damage the place, the owner may keep your bond money. To do this they have to apply to the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal Residential Tenancies List. Contact the Tenants Union of Victoria if you're in this situation. See 'Where to get more help and information' on page 35.

Centrelink, allowances and payments

When you turn 16, if you're unemployed you can register with your local Centrelink office. Centrelink is a government organisation that can give you money if you don't have financial support. If you aren't sure if you can get Centrelink payments, it's always best to apply.

Centrelink will look at your income and assets (assets are things that you own, such as a car or property) and work out if you're eligible for financial help. If you're under 18, Centrelink may also look at your parents' income and assets. If you're living with your partner, Centrelink will look at their income and assets.

If you're eligible for financial help, the type of payment and how much you get depends on your circumstances.

If you're unemployed, you can register with your local Centrelink office even if you're not eligible for an allowance. By registering you can use a range of job search services.

Below is a description of different Centrelink payments. It's just a summary so if you need more information call Centrelink.

See 'Where to get more help and information' on page 35.

Youth Allowance

This is for young people who need financial support while studying, training or looking for a job. Centrelink may give you Youth Allowance if you're:

- a full-time student aged 18 to 24
- doing an Australian Apprenticeship full-time and you're aged 16 to 24
- aged 16 to 21 and are looking for a full-time job or you're combining part-time study with looking for work
- 16 or 17 and have completed year 12 or its equivalent
- 16 or 17 and in full-time secondary study and need to live away from home to be able to study.

Centrelink may consider you to be 'independent' and they may give you a higher rate of Youth Allowance if you're aged over 22 (this is the age of independence from 1 January 2012).

If you're under 22 you might still be considered independent if:

- you're an orphan, in state care (or have stopped being in state care because of your age), or you are a refugee or homeless
- your parents can't provide a home, care or support
- you have a dependent child
- you've supported yourself by working (there are conditions that you need to meet)

- you have been legally married, in a registered relationship, or living in a de facto relationship.

This can be complicated. Get legal help. See 'Where to get help' on page 95.

If you are a full-time secondary student who is under 19 and living with one or both of your parents, or with a guardian, you may not be eligible for Youth Allowance after 1 January 2012. Your parent or guardian may be eligible for an increase in their Family Tax Benefit Part A.

However, if you were receiving Youth Allowance on 31 December 2011 you may be able to choose to keep claiming Youth Allowance or to stop your Youth Allowance payments so that your parent or guardian can claim the increase in the family tax benefit.

Your family might get more money from the increase in the family tax benefit. Contact Centrelink or use the online calculator on the Centrelink website to compare payments and work out what's best for you. See 'Where to get more help and information' on page 35.

Everyone who gets Youth Allowance payments must meet certain rules that Centrelink makes. If you break these rules, Centrelink may not pay you.

In some cases, Centrelink may want you to agree to a Transition to Work or Job Plan, where you have to do certain activities each week, such as training, paid work experience, or voluntary work. If you don't agree to a plan, or if you don't stick to a plan that you've agreed to, Centrelink may not pay you. Get legal help. See 'Where to get help' on page 95.

If you're sick and are temporarily unable to work, study or look for work, Centrelink may still pay you Youth Allowance. You have to get a medical certificate.

If you're under 18 and you leave school before finishing VCE and you don't plan on doing any further study or training, Centrelink may be unable to give you a payment. You may have to rely on your parents to support you unless you can find work. If you can't live at home, stay at school, or find the right study or training programs, ask to see the social worker at your local Centrelink office to talk about your options. Call Centrelink's youth and students' line on 132 307.

Abstudy

This is a type of payment for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people who are studying or doing an Australian Apprenticeship. If you're at primary school, you must be at least 14 years old for Centrelink to give you Abstudy. There's no age limit for secondary school students.

Parenting Payment

If you have a dependent child, Centrelink may give you a Parenting Payment.

Special Benefit payment

If you're in financial hardship and can't get any other type of income support, Centrelink may be able to give you a payment called Special Benefit.

Disability Support Pension

If you're 16 or over and have a medical condition that is serious and stops you from working or studying, Centrelink may be able to give you the Disability Support Pension. Ask Centrelink how to apply. You will need a report from your doctor and you may also need to see a doctor from Centrelink.

You must tell Centrelink when things change

Every time your circumstances change, tell Centrelink. This is important. Changes, like getting extra income, may affect how Centrelink pays you and how much they pay you.

There can be problems if you don't tell them. If you're unsure whether the change will affect your Centrelink payments, get legal advice. See 'Where to get help' on page 95.

What if I disagree with a Centrelink decision?

Talk to the person who made the decision. If you're still not happy, you can ask for an independent officer to review the decision. If you still think the decision is wrong, you can appeal to the Administrative Appeals Tribunal. This is free but you must appeal within three months if you want to get 'back pay'.

You can appeal by:

- phoning the tribunal on 1800 228 333 (free call)
- writing to the tribunal at GPO Box 9943 Melbourne VIC 3001
- filling in an appeal form at your local Centrelink office.

Get legal advice before appealing. See 'Where to get help' on page 95.

Am I old enough to drive a car?

You need to get a learners permit (L-plates) and then a drivers licence (P-plates). You can get your L-plates when you turn 16 and your P-plates when you turn 18. Up until you're 21 you need to be on your L-plates for at least 12 months before you get your P-plates.

Sometimes people under 18 can have a shorter learners permit period, for example, if the licence is essential for work or you live in a very isolated area. There are rules you need to follow.

The penalties are tough if you break the rules. The rules include things like:

- you can't drink any alcohol and drive
- you can't drive if you're affected by drugs (even if your doctor has prescribed the drugs)
- you must carry your permit or licence with you at all times
- you must register your car with VicRoads
- when you're on your L-plates you must always have a fully licensed driver with you when you drive.

What are graduated licences?

Graduated licences are two-stage licences for probationary licence drivers aged 18 to under 21. In the first stage, you get a P1 licence (red P-plate) for the first 12 months. In the second stage, you get a P2 licence (green P-plate) for three years. If you have a bad driving record, it takes longer to get to the P2 stage and then the full licence.

Special rules apply if you are on a probationary licence:

- P1s and P2s must have a zero blood alcohol content at all times when driving – you cannot drink any alcohol and drive
- P1s and P2s must not use any mobile phone, hands-free or hand-held, or do any text messaging while driving
- P1s can't have more than one 'peer passenger' in their car. A 'peer passenger' is someone aged 16 to under 22 years old. But if you have brothers and sisters in this age group you can have them as passengers even if there are more than one.

There are also restrictions for some drivers on what sort of vehicles can be driven, and on towing. Check with VicRoads before you drive to make sure you understand and are up-to-date on these rules.

What about motorbike licences?

You can apply to VicRoads for a learners permit to ride a motorbike when you're 18 or older. You must have the permit for at least three months before you can apply for a full licence. The length of time on P-plates depends on what kind of car licence you already have.

There are some other rules you need to follow. For example, for the first year of your licence, you can't ride a motorbike with an engine bigger than 260cc or carry a pillion passenger (a pillion passenger is someone who sits behind the driver). If you're riding a motorbike or a bicycle, you must wear an approved helmet.

What happens if I'm caught 'hoon driving'?

'Hoon driving' includes things like:

- deliberately skidding or not having proper control of the vehicle
- giving off too much noise or smoke
- excessive speeding
- being a part of a speed trial or drag race
- careless or dangerous driving (such as deliberate skidding or driving at very high speeds)
- failing to stop when police tell or signal you to
- repeated drink driving offences
- repeated drug driving offences
- repeatedly driving while disqualified.

The police can immobilise or take possession of your vehicle for up to 30 days if they believe it was used for hoon driving. If you keep doing hoon driving, police can ask the court to take your car away permanently, even if you were driving someone else's car.

Am I old enough to vote?

You can register to vote when you turn 17 but you can't vote until you're 18. Once you're 18, and if you're an Australian citizen, you have to enrol and vote in state, federal and local government (council) elections. The government will fine you if you're registered and don't vote.

Do I need a passport?

You need a passport to travel outside of Australia. You can apply to the Australian Passport Office for a passport before you turn 18 (but only if your parents or guardian agree). If your parents or guardian can't or won't agree, there are steps you can take.

Contact the Australian Passport Information Service on 131 232.

You don't need your parent's or guardian's consent (agreement) to get a passport if you're married.

You can get passport applications from your local post office.

Making a Will

You can make your Will as soon as you're 18. A Will is a document that says who you want your money and belongings to go to if you die. Your Will is only valid if you sign it and two other people witness you signing it. Get legal advice if you want to make a Will – see 'Where to get help' on page 95. Some agencies offer free Wills but check to see if they ask for a commission or payment from your estate (the assets of a dead person) after your death.

If you're not yet 18, you can only make a Will if you're married or plan to marry. The Will is only valid if you actually marry or if you have court approval.

Where to get more help and information

Jobs and work

- **Fair Work Commission** – if you've been unfairly dismissed, call them on 1300 799 675. If you want to make a complaint, you'll need to do this within 21 days after your job has ended, so get help quickly.
- **Fair Work Ombudsman** – call the Fair Work Infoline 131 394 or visit www.fairwork.gov.au
- **Job Watch** – 9662 1933, 1800 331 617 (country callers), email jobwatch@jobwatch.org.au or visit www.jobwatch.org.au
- **Jobvoice** – an independent service created by Social Security Rights Victoria, visit www.jobvoice.org.au
- **Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU)** – helpline 1300 486 466 or visit www.worksite.actu.org.au
- **Victorian Trades Hall Council** – if you're a member of a union and want more information call them on 9659 3511
- **Business Victoria** – for child employment permits 1800 287 287 (free call) or visit the 'Hiring and managing staff' section of their website www.business.vic.gov.au
- For tips on finding a job visit:
 - www.myfuture.edu.au
 - www.youthcentral.vic.gov.au

Tax and banking

- **Australian Taxation Office** – for information about getting a tax file number, starting your first job or the Australian tax system call 132 861 or visit www.ato.gov.au/youth
- **Financial Ombudsman Services** – call free on 1300 367 287 or visit www.fos.org.au

Renting and housing issues

- **Consumer Affairs Victoria** – call 1300 558 181, visit www.consumer.vic.gov.au or drop in to their service centre located at 121 Exhibition St, Melbourne VIC 3000 (12–2 pm Mon, Tues, Thurs and Fri or 12–1 pm Wed). If you have an Android phone or iPhone, you can also download the Rent Right smartphone app from iTunes or the Google Play store.
- For complaints about real estate agents call the **Estate Agent Resolution Service (EARS)** on 1300 737 030
- **Kids Helpline** – for emergency housing call 1800 551 800
- **Office of Housing** – for emergency housing call 1800 825 955 or visit www.housing.vic.gov.au/home
- **Residential Tenancies Bond Authority** – for tenancy bond issues call 1300 137 164, email rtba@justice.vic.gov.au or visit www.rtba.vic.gov.au
- **Tenants Union of Victoria** – 9416 2577 or visit www.tuv.org.au
- **Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal (VCAT)** – visit www.vcat.vic.gov.au and follow ‘Residential Tenancies’ link

Centrelink and allowances

- **Centrelink** – Youth Allowance (if you are under 22) 132 490 or Newstart Allowance (if you are over 22) 132 850, visit www.centrelink.gov.au
- **Victoria Legal Aid Legal Help** – call 1300 792 387 Monday to Friday, 8.45 am to 5.15 pm
- **Social Security Rights Victoria** – call 9481 0355 or 1800 094 164 (country callers) or visit www.ssr.org.au

Voting, driving and passports

- **Australian Electoral Commission** – call 132 326 or visit www.aec.gov.au
- **Australian Passport Information Service** – for information about passports call 131 232, email passports.australia@dfat.gov.au or visit www.passports.gov.au
- **VicRoads** – call 131 171 or visit www.vicroads.vic.gov.au

Relationships

This section is about the people you're closest to and some of the things that can happen in these relationships. There are laws about relationships and about how people should treat each other. There are no laws about when you can start to have a relationship with someone else, but there are laws about when you can start to have sex.

Having sex is a big step. It's important that you feel in control and make decisions that are right for you. You may want to get advice from someone you trust. If you're thinking about having sex, talk to your doctor or family planning clinic about contraception and sexually transmissible infections.

If you're not sure about your feelings or feel uncomfortable about how someone is treating you, you can talk to someone you trust or to a counsellor.

Sex and the law

The law applies to sexual penetration, which includes anything that involves a penis touching a vagina, anus or mouth. It also includes putting an object or a part of the body into contact with a vagina or anus. The law also applies to touching a person in a sexual way, like touching another person's vagina, penis, anus or breasts.

Am I old enough to have sex?

The law makes rules about sex and sexual touching. It says that if someone touches you sexually without your agreement (consent), this is a crime.

This is known as a 'sexual offence' and is a very serious crime. Sexual offences can be committed by anyone, it doesn't matter what their sexuality is. The law sets age limits for having sex to help protect you from other people taking advantage of you, especially people older than you.

Even if a person says they don't know the rules about age limits, the police can still charge that person with committing a sexual offence. The police can also charge young people with sexual offences. Make sure you know the rules for your age – not knowing the law is no excuse.

Same-sex relationships and having sex

The age of consent for same-sex relationships is the same as it is for heterosexual relationships. Schools must provide supportive environments that are respectful of students who are same-sex attracted or may be questioning their gender identity.

What are the age limits for having sex?

- **Under 12 years old:** you can't consent (you can't agree) to have sex with anyone, let anyone touch you sexually or let anyone perform sexual acts in front of you. If someone who is 12 sexually touches someone who is 11, the 12-year-old has committed a crime, even if the 11-year-old 'agreed'.
- **12 to under 16 years old:** if someone is more than 24 months older than you, you can't consent (you can't agree) to have sex with them, let them touch you sexually, or let them perform sexual acts in front of you. If someone who is 17 has sex with someone who is 15, it's not a crime, as long as the age gap is not more than 24 months and they both consent (agree). But if the older person is 18, it's a crime unless the 18-year-old honestly believed the younger person was 16.

- **16 or 17 years old:** you can't consent (agree) to have sex with anyone who is caring for you or supervising you (like a teacher or foster carer), or let them touch you sexually or let them perform sexual acts in front of you. It's not a crime if the person caring for you or supervising you honestly believed you were 18 or older. If an adult (someone 18 or over) has a sexual relationship with someone in their care who is 17, it's a crime, unless the adult honestly believed the younger person in their care was 18 or older.
- **18 years old and over:** People over the age of 18 can consent (agree) to have sex with anyone else. If someone who is 18 has sex with someone who is 19, it's not a crime as long as both people freely consent.

What if I don't want to have sex?

The law says that two people can't have sex unless they both agree to it. If you don't agree and someone threatens you or touches you sexually, that person is breaking the law. If someone has sex with you or touches you sexually when you're asleep, unconscious or so affected by alcohol or drugs that you're unable to agree, it's still sexual assault.

See also 'What is incest' (page 41), 'How do I know if I've been sexually assaulted?' (page 41), 'Can I choose my own doctor?' (page 53), 'Do I need my parents' permission to get contraception?' (page 55), 'Girls: What are my options if I'm pregnant?' (page 55), 'Are there age limits for getting an abortion?' (page 56).

Violence and sexual assault

There are many different types of violence, including sexual assault and incest, bullying and family violence. Violence can happen to a person at any age and can come from a complete stranger or from someone that person knows. Violence isn't just physical abuse.

It can also include emotional abuse like teasing, threats or stalking. Specifically, sexual assault is when someone behaves towards you in a sexual way that makes you feel uncomfortable, frightened or intimidated.

Violence can have a very bad effect on a person, whether that person experienced it or saw it happen to other people. You don't have to put up with violence of any kind. There are things you can do. You can talk to someone you trust or contact one of the services listed in this booklet. You can also ring the police and you may be able to take out a personal safety intervention order. A personal safety intervention order is a court order to stop someone being violent towards you. This could include stopping the person from threatening you, contacting you or coming near you.

If a family member is being violent towards you, you may be able to take out a family violence intervention order. See 'What happens when there's family violence?' on page 49.

What is incest?

Incest is sex between family members: between siblings, between a child and parent, between a child and grandparent. It's illegal whether you consent to it (agree) or not and no matter how young or old you are. It's still incest even if a person isn't related to you by blood but is a close family member, like your stepfather. You also can't have a sexual relationship with a de facto partner of your father or mother while you're under 18.

How do I know if I've been sexually assaulted?

If someone has sex with you or touches you sexually and you don't consent (agree) to this, that person is breaking the law. The police can charge them with a criminal offence.

This is the case even if you started having sex with that person or agreed to be touched sexually but then changed your mind. If you're asleep, unconscious or so affected by alcohol or drugs that you can't agree, it's still sexual assault. Sexual assault is never your fault.

If you've been sexually assaulted you can call the police (dial 000 or your local police station). The police have special units that investigate sexual assault and child abuse. You can also call the Centre Against Sexual Assault (CASA) for support and information, see page 45.

Child pornography

You could be charged by the police with producing child pornography if:

- you take a nude or semi-nude picture of a person under 18, even if that person is your friend and they consent (agree) to the picture being taken
- you take photos or video of a person under 18 involved in sexual activity or posing in an indecent sexual manner (or who looks like they are).

Mobile phone pictures and the risks of 'sexting'

Sexting is where nude, semi-nude, or sexual images are taken or sent on a mobile phone or other digital device.

Under Commonwealth (national) laws you could be charged with child pornography offences if you take, send, receive or store a sexual or intimate image of someone who is under 18 or who looks under 18 (including photos or video you take of yourself). It is an offence to store child pornography even if you did not ask for it to be sent to you. Under Commonwealth laws, there are serious consequences if you get caught.

Victorian laws about sexting changed in 2014. It is now against the law in Victoria to post or send a sexual or intimate image of another person who is under 18 to anyone else, even if the person in the image agreed to it. There are serious penalties if you do this – up to two years in jail. It's also against the law to send on or share an intimate image of someone who is over 18 if the person in the image did not give permission for you to share it.

It is against the law in Victoria to threaten to distribute an intimate image of someone who is under 18 or without their permission. You could face up to one year in jail if you threaten to send on an image you've received, or post it online.

Under Victorian laws you could be charged with possessing child pornography if you have a film, photograph, publication or computer game that shows a person under 18, or who appears to be under 18, involved in sexual activity or posing in an indecent sexual manner. You can also be charged for making or printing a publication, image or computer game that shows a person under 18 doing these things. Child pornography offences are serious and penalties in Victoria can include up to 10 years in jail and registration on the Register of Sex Offenders.

There are some exceptions to child pornography laws in Victoria for people under 18. If you are under 18 and in Victoria you can take, keep and send an intimate image of yourself.

And you can take or keep an intimate image of someone else who is under 18 as long as:

- no-one in the image is more than 24 months younger than you, and
- the image does not show any crimes (such as rape) being committed.

Remember, if anyone else in the image is under 18, you cannot send the image, post it online or share it with anyone else. And these exceptions do not apply to people over 18, even if they have just turned 18.

Sexting might seem like harmless fun, but once you send images electronically you can lose control over who sees them or shares them.

Sexting can be risky, especially if you're under 18. Even if you live in Victoria, Commonwealth laws can still apply in some situations. It is up to the police or the court to decide which law applies to different situations.

Am I old enough to get married?

If you're 16 or 17 you can only get married if:

- your parents or guardian agree
- your boyfriend or girlfriend is at least 18
- a court agrees that your situation is special enough to allow the two of you to get married – pregnancy may not be enough.

The court considers things like how long you have been together, your maturity, your financial situation and how independent you are from your parents. If the court agrees that you can marry, you have three months to do so. See 'Where to get more help and information' on page 45.

You can get married without anyone else's permission at 18.

Where to get more help and information

- **Centre Against Sexual Assault (CASA)** – to contact any centre in Victoria or the after hours Sexual Assault Crisis Line (free call, open 24 hours) call 1800 806 292 or email the crisis line ahcasa@thewomens.org.au. Visit www.casa.org.au
- **Domestic Violence Resource Centre** – call 9486 9866 or visit www.dvrcv.org.au
- **Family Planning Victoria** – visit www.fpv.org.au and click on 'Young people'
- **Gay and Lesbian Switchboard** – counselling, information and referral service. Call 9663 2474 or 1800 184 527 (country callers) or visit www.switchboard.org.au
- **Magistrates' Court of Victoria** – visit www.magistratescourt.vic.gov.au and go to the Family Law page for information about getting married if you're a minor (under 18)
- **Transgender Victoria** – for support and advice call 9020 4642 or visit www.transgendervictoria.com
- **Women's Domestic Violence Crisis Service of Victoria** – 24-hour crisis support and referrals to safe accommodation. Call 9322 3555 or 1800 015 188 toll free 24 hours, 7 days a week
- information for young people about relationships and sexuality – visit www.reachout.com
- **Victoria Legal Aid Legal Help** – call 1300 792 387 Monday to Friday, 8.45 am to 5.15 pm

You might want a copy of our free booklet:

- *You and family law: a short guide*

For copies call (03) 9269 0234 and ask for Publications or visit www.legalaid.vic.gov.au

Family

There are many different kinds of families. We're born into families and develop our identities within the family. This section looks at your rights to information about your identity and what happens when families break down.

Family breakdown – what will happen to me?

If your parents are splitting up, or have split up, things can be pretty tough and confusing. Your parents might need to work things out like where you will live, who you will live with and what time you'll spend with each parent and your brothers and sisters. The law says your 'best interests' are the most important thing. Working out what is in your best interests can be quite hard. It doesn't necessarily mean you'll get what you want, although the court will always take this into account, as well as the needs of other family members. Each family is unique so there are many different arrangements that can be made.

As a general rule the law says:

- it's in your best interests to have a relationship and spend time with each of your parents, and your brothers and sisters as long as you are protected from abuse or neglect (how and when this happens depends on your family's circumstances)
- your parents are responsible for your financial support, as far as they possibly can be.

What can I expect if my parents go to court?

If your parents go to court to sort things out, the court will want to know if they have made suitable arrangements for you. The court may ask that you talk to a counsellor or other professional about what you want, and how you're feeling about the situation.

What does an independent children's lawyer do?

A family law court might ask an 'independent children's lawyer' to look into your situation and try to find out what's best for you, and then work towards this.

To do this the lawyer will usually talk to you and other people involved in your life, like your teacher or doctor. They will listen to what you want and make sure the court knows this, but the lawyer or court may not follow your views. The independent children's lawyer should also explain how the system works and the choices the court might have to make about your future. You can ask the independent children's lawyer any questions you might have about the court case.

See also 'What is incest' (page 41), 'How do I know if I've been sexually assaulted?' (page 41), 'Violence and sexual assault' (page 40), 'Where to get more help and information' (page 51).

What happens if a child is being abused or neglected?

Child abuse or neglect includes things like physical, sexual and emotional abuse. If something like this has happened to you or to another young person, or if you're worried that it will, make sure you tell someone you trust, or call the police or the Child Protection Crisis Line on 131 278.

Some people – like doctors, nurses, teachers, principals and police – must tell the Department of Human Services if they think a person under 17 is being sexually or physically abused, or is at risk of abuse. If someone believes that a child is being neglected or abused that person can report this to the Child Protection Crisis Line.

The department may take action to try to protect you from neglect or abuse including:

- working with you and your family to sort things out
- involving you in making decisions
- going to the Children's Court.

Sometimes the department might ask you or a family member to live somewhere else or they may put restrictions on you or a family member. If you are uncertain or unhappy with something the department wants, you can ring Victoria Legal Aid's Legal Help service for help. See 'Where to get more help and information' on page 51.

Children and young people have the right to have their wishes listened to at all times.

If the department takes your case to the Children's Court, older children and young people are always given a lawyer. If your court case is urgent, you will be given a lawyer when you come to court.

The Children's Court can make decisions about where you live, who you see and how often you can see them. But if you are put on a guardianship order, all these decisions will be made by the department. A guardianship order is a court order that says that the Department of Human Services is responsible for you, either for a set amount of time or until you are 18 years old.

See 'Where to get more help and information' on page 51.

Many families need help and support, but not all families need the department to be involved.

Child FIRST (Child and Family Information, Referral and Support Teams) can connect children, young people and their families to the services they need.

People might call Child FIRST because they have seen:

- significant parenting problems that may be affecting a child's development
- family conflict, including family breakdown
- families under pressure due to a family member's physical or mental illness, substance abuse, disability or grieving after death
- young, isolated or unsupported families
- significant problems (like money problems) that might have bad effects on a child's care or development.

Child FIRST can contact the department if they think the problems are serious and the department needs to be involved.

See 'Where to get help' on page 95.

What happens when there's family violence?

Family violence is behaviour by a parent, sibling, another family member or a boyfriend or girlfriend that is threatening, coercive or controlling and causes you to feel fear for your safety, wellbeing or for someone else. Family violence also includes when someone under 18 witnesses family violence, for example:

- sees or helps a family member who has experienced family violence
- sees damaged property in the family home
- is there when the police arrive.

Some family violence behaviour has criminal penalties.

Intervention orders

A family violence intervention order is a court order to keep you safe from a family member who is using violence. It is a set of rules that the person using violence must follow. The family violence intervention order may say that the person must not hurt or threaten you or damage your property.

The order may also say that the person can't come near you or must leave the house. The police can arrest the person if they disobey the order.

If a family member has been violent with you, you can get help to apply for a family violence intervention order. If you're under 18, you apply in the Children's Court.

If you are under 14, your parents or guardian or the police can apply for you.

If you're:

- 14 to 17 – you can only apply in your name if the court allows it. You should go to the Children's Court to ask. The court staff will help you with this
- 18 and older – you can apply in your own name.

You can get free legal advice from Victoria Legal Aid before applying for an intervention order or you can speak to a lawyer when your application is heard at court. The court staff will also help you to fill out the application. You do not need a lawyer to do this. See also 'Where to get help' on page 95.

If someone applies for an intervention order against you and you are under 18, you should go to court on the date of the hearing. The magistrate will read what has happened and listen to you before deciding whether to make an intervention order. If an intervention order is made, it will have conditions that are needed to keep your family member safe. These conditions are a set of rules about what you can and can't do. If you disobey any of the rules, the police can arrest you. If the magistrate is thinking about making a condition that says you must leave home (an exclusion order), the magistrate will consider how an exclusion order will affect your education, work or access to health services.

The magistrate must also check that you have somewhere else to live and that you will be properly cared for.

It is very important you get legal advice if someone applies for an intervention order against you. You can ring a lawyer or ask to speak with a free lawyer when you go to court.

Can I apply for a copy of my birth certificate?

Yes, at any time, from the Registry of Births, Deaths and Marriages. A standard birth certificate costs \$31.

Can I change my name?

You can't change your name until you're 18, unless your parents agree or you're married or divorced. If you're 12 or over and your parents want to change any part of your name, you have to agree before it can happen.

You can get application forms from Births, Deaths and Marriages. It costs \$70.40 to apply, plus \$31 if you need a certificate.

Where to get more help and information

- **Centre for Adolescent Health** – for free support and referral call 9345 5890
- **Child Protection Crisis Line** – call 131 278 (open 24 hours, 7 days a week)
- **Domestic Violence Resource Centre** – call 9486 9866 or visit www.dvrcv.org.au
- **Magistrates' Court of Victoria** – visit www.magistratescourt.vic.gov.au
- **Family Court** – visit www.familycourt.gov.au

- **Gateway Reconnect** – offers support for young people to reconnect with their families and communities. Free mediation and referral. Call 9611 2452 or visit www.melbournecitymission.org.au
- **Kids Helpline** – 24-hour telephone and online counselling for children and young people. Call free on 1800 551 800 or visit www.kidshelp.com.au
- **Melbourne Youth Support Services at Frontyard Youth Services** – call on 9611 2411 or visit www.melbournecitymission.org.au
- **Ombudsman Victoria** – for complaints about the Department of Human Services call 9613 6222 or visit www.ombudsman.vic.gov.au
- **Registry of Births, Deaths and Marriages** – visit www.justice.vic.gov.au and follow the Births, Deaths and Marriages links or call 1300 369 367

You might want a copy of our free booklet:

- *You and family law: a short guide*

For copies call (03) 9269 0234 and ask for Publications or visit www.legalaid.vic.gov.au

Health

Being healthy means feeling physically and emotionally good. Looking after yourself, knowing your legal rights and where to go for help are steps in the right direction. The more information you have, the better you are able to make decisions about what happens to your body.

Can I choose my own doctor?

You have the right to choose your own doctor, someone you trust. In most cases your doctor must keep the things you talk about confidential (not tell anyone else). You can say it's okay to tell other people, like your parents or guardian. Ask your doctor if they have rules about confidentiality. If you don't agree with the rules, choose another doctor.

There are some things your doctor must report, like some infectious illnesses, or when they think you've been abused or you're at risk of harm.

See also 'What happens if a child is being abused or neglected?' on page 47.

Can I refuse medical treatment?

Except for immediate, life-threatening emergencies, a doctor must get your consent (agreement) for any medical treatment. If you're under 18, it isn't always clear how old you must be to consent to or refuse treatment, even if you already have a child of your own.

These are the general principles:

- minor medical treatment (like treatment for colds or acne) – if you're mature enough to understand what the treatment is about, you have the right to say yes or no
- more-complicated treatment (like abortion and contraceptive advice) – you may still have the right to say yes without your parent's or guardian's consent (agreement). The doctor has to be satisfied that you understand the treatment and its consequences. The doctor must also believe that the treatment is in your best interests.
- some 'non-therapeutic' treatments (not involving illness, like sterilisation or gender-changing operations) – these may not be legal without court approval, even if you and your parents or guardian consent (agree)
- complex treatment (like treatment of eating disorders and other mental illness, or refusal of a blood transfusion on religious grounds) – you might not have the right to refuse such treatment, even if you fully understand the treatment and its consequences.

If you refuse medical treatment but the doctor thinks you're not well enough to understand what you're refusing, the doctor may request for you to be given the treatment without your agreement.

Some medical procedures done for cultural reasons, like clitoridectomy (female circumcision), are illegal. There are heavy penalties for them.

Your parents or guardian can only say yes or no to medical treatment on your behalf if you're not mature enough to make your own decisions. In this case the decision must be made in your best interests.

If you, your parents or guardian and your doctor disagree about treatment, a court will need to decide what will happen. The court must consider what's in your best interests. You can get legal help, [see page 57.](#)

When can I get my own Medicare card?

You'll need to think about how you'll pay for your medical treatment. Some doctors 'bulk bill' under the government health system called Medicare. This means you won't have to pay. In other cases you have to pay but the government will refund you some of the money.

You need to show your Medicare card or your parents' Medicare card when you go to the doctor. If you're over 15 you can apply for your own Medicare card. If you're under 15 you need to use your parents' card. If you're 14 or older, Medicare won't give information about your treatment to your parents. However, if you use your parents' card they may find out themselves that you went to a doctor.

Do I need my parents' permission to get contraception?

If you're under 18 you may be able to get contraception, like the pill, from a doctor. This depends on whether the doctor thinks you're mature enough to understand what you're doing and to use the contraception properly. Make sure you know your doctor's rules about confidentiality.

You can buy condoms at any age – there are no restrictions. Most chemists and supermarkets sell them.

Girls: What are my options if I'm pregnant?

It's important to know you have options. There are people you can talk to. A counsellor, nurse or doctor can help you think through your choices.

These can include:

- going ahead with the pregnancy and keeping the baby
- going ahead with the pregnancy and adopting out the baby
- having an abortion.

Medical and health professionals shouldn't judge your situation. Your decisions should be private. If you're not happy with the medical or health professional you're talking to, you can get a second opinion or make a complaint.

See also 'Where to get more help and information' on page 57.

There's no minimum age for keeping your baby. What matters is your ability to support yourself and the baby, and to make sure the baby is safe. If you're under 16 and someone's worried about your welfare or your baby's, that person may call the Department of Human Services, see 'What happens if a child is being abused or neglected?' on page 47.

Boys: What are my responsibilities if I get a girl pregnant?

You're legally responsible for financially supporting the child. It doesn't matter how young you are. If you can't support the child because you're still at school and don't earn any money, you may have to pay later when you can afford to.

If you're proved to be the father, you have to make child support payments until the child is 18.

Are there age limits for getting an abortion?

There's no age limit on getting an abortion. You may be able to get an abortion without your parent's or guardian's consent if the doctor thinks that you're mature enough to understand what you're doing.

If you're thinking about having an abortion, get advice from a doctor or Family Planning Victoria early in your pregnancy.

Most abortions are performed in the first twelve weeks of a pregnancy. You can still have an abortion up to 24 weeks of pregnancy but there's a lot to think about. Abortion is legal in Victoria after 24 weeks in some circumstances but it is rare that an abortion would be performed this late.

See 'Where to get more help and information' on page 57.

Am I old enough to use a sun-tanning unit?

From 1 January 2015 it is illegal for any business to operate ultraviolet sun-tanning equipment in Victoria.

Am I old enough to get a tattoo?

You can't have anyone tattoo you or perform scarification, beading, branding and tongue splitting on you before you're 18, unless it's for medical purposes.

Am I old enough to get a body piercing?

If you're under 16 you must have permission from your parents or guardian to let someone to pierce your ears, or any part of your body.

It's illegal for people under 18 to get a piercing in an 'intimate area', such as genital and nipple studs and rings.

Where to get more help and information

- **Family Planning Victoria** – for information for young people visit www.fpv.org.au
 - For free and confidential information about sexuality, pregnancy, sex, contraception, family counselling, sexually transmitted infections, call the Action Centre on 9660 4700 or 1800 013 952 (country callers) or email action@fpv.org.au

- **Centre for Adolescent Health** – for free support and referral call 9345 5890
- **Department of Health** – for information about having a baby, visit www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au
- **Health Services Commissioner complaints and information** – call 1300 582 113
or email hsc@dhhs.vic.gov.au. Call this service if:
 - you haven't been treated well by your doctor, a hospital or any health service, like a dentist, physiotherapist or pharmacist
 - a health professional hasn't treated your privacy respectfully
 - you've had trouble getting your health information
- **Medicare** – call 132 011 or visit www.humanservices.gov.au/customer/dhs/medicare
- **Office of the Public Advocate** – visit www.publicadvocate.vic.gov.au and follow 'Medical Consent' link
- **Somazone** – health information for young people, visit www.somazone.com.au
- **Youth Central** – visit www.youthcentral.vic.gov.au and follow 'Health & Relationships' link

You might want a copy of our free booklet:

- *Child support and parentage testing*

For copies call (03) 9269 0234 and ask for Publications or visit www.legalaid.vic.gov.au

Out there

What happens 'out there' in everyday life is hard to predict. Have you had problems with security guards, drugs, weapons, fights or alcohol? You might think it won't happen to you but it helps to be prepared and know your rights.

Cigarettes

No-one is allowed to sell you cigarettes or tobacco, buy cigarettes or tobacco for you, or let you buy cigarettes or tobacco from a machine on their premises if you're under 18. It isn't against the law to smoke or carry cigarettes or tobacco if you're under 18 but if you're a student, this could be a reason for your school to suspend you.

Alcohol

You can't drink, buy or possess alcohol until you're 18, unless you're in a private home – your house or someone else's house – and your parent or guardian has given permission. You can only go into licensed premises (like a pub or club that sells alcohol) if you're with your parents, guardian or spouse and you're having a meal there or you're staying the night.

If you leave the private home or the licensed premises, and you take your drink with you, you'll be committing the offence of underage drinking in public. The person who gave you alcohol could be fined by the police for supplying alcohol to a minor.

Alcohol affects your judgment and behaviour. You might end up doing things you wouldn't do if you were sober. There's a higher chance you could end up in trouble – committing minor offences like using indecent language right up to serious assaults. It doesn't matter whether this happens somewhere private or licensed, or in public.

The police or a staff member can ask for your name and address if you buy or have alcohol. They can take alcohol away from you if you're under 18 and if they think it's illegal for you to have it. On public transport and in some public places, like in the street (in some council areas) or at a festival or some music events, it's illegal to carry or drink alcohol no matter how old you are. Your school may also suspend you if you have alcohol at school.

Remember, if you're on L-plates or P-plates, you're not allowed to drive if you've had any alcoholic drinks.

Parties

It's a good idea to plan carefully before you have a party. Think about how big the party will be and who you want to invite. Gatecrashers can sometimes cause things to get out of hand. The police could hold you or your parents responsible if someone is injured while they're at your house. This may be more likely to happen if your guests are drunk. The police could also charge you with making a public nuisance if the party gets out of hand, and could charge anyone over 18 who has supplied alcohol to anyone under 18.

There are restrictions on when you can play loud music or make a lot of noise. The law restricts noise from musical equipment after 10 pm on weeknights (Sunday to Thursday) and after 11 pm (Friday and Saturday). Let your neighbours know a week or more before you have a party. They may understand if there's a little more noise than usual.

Drugs

There are many laws about illegal drugs. The four most common drug-related laws are about using, possessing, trafficking and cultivating a 'drug of dependence'.

Using

This includes smoking, inhaling fumes, injecting or swallowing a drug. The police can charge you if you admit to using. The police can also charge you with 'introducing a drug into the body of another person' if you inject someone else or slip a drug into someone's drink without their knowledge.

Possessing

This means having a drug on you (like in your pockets or bag) or in a house or place where you live. This includes cannabis plants. The police might also charge you with possession if they find drugs in a car you own or a car you're driving. It is also illegal to sell, display or supply bongs in Victoria.

Trafficking

This usually means selling a drug but it can include exchanging, agreeing to sell or offering drugs for sale (even if you don't go through with the deal). The police can also charge you with trafficking if you:

- sell or offer to sell someone a harmless substance, acting as though the substance is an illegal drug
- manufacture (make) drugs or prepare them for selling
- possess a 'traffickable quantity' of drugs (this amount is different depending on the type of drug)
- help someone else to do any of the above (like picking up someone else's drugs for them).

Selling drugs to a friend could be trafficking. Trafficking is a serious offence and the penalties can be very harsh.

Cultivating

This means growing a drug, like marijuana or opium poppies. It's an offence to plant, look after or harvest a 'narcotic plant'. Growing drugs to sell is considered trafficking.

If you're a student, on top of getting charges from the police, your school can suspend or expel you from school for using, possessing or providing other people with drugs. Taking drugs prescribed for you by your doctor is legal. If you have to take prescription drugs at school, let your year level co-ordinator know.

Syringes and the law

It's legal to carry new and used syringes. However, never carry illegal drugs on you if you're carrying syringes or visiting a needle exchange. Even if the police don't find drugs on you, they can still charge you if you admit to using drugs. The police can consider used syringes or traces of drugs as **evidence** of you using a drug of dependence.

Always dispose of syringes safely by:

- returning used syringes in a sharps container to a needle syringe program. You can get a free sharps container from the program
- getting rid of the syringe in a public disposal unit, often found in public toilets.

There are services that collect used syringes and give you new ones. Contact Direct Line for your nearest program, [see](#) page 67.

There are penalties for unsafe disposal of used syringes. If you throw syringes down toilets or on the street, they end up at sewerage plants or get washed up on the beach. Somebody may get hurt.

What should I do if someone has taken a drug overdose?

If you think someone has overdosed, call an ambulance immediately. Phone 000 and say someone needs urgent medical attention. You can call 000 from a mobile phone even if you have no credit. If there is no mobile coverage, your phone will tell you what number to use.

Tell the ambulance officers as much as you can, like what drugs the person took, when they collapsed and any other health problems like asthma.

An ambulance worker isn't supposed to call the police. They might do this, however, if someone dies or if people feel threatened.

[See](#) also 'Speaking to the police' on page 75, 'Where to get help' on page 95.

Graffiti laws

Am I old enough to buy spray paint cans?

It's illegal for a business to sell you a spray can if you're under 18 unless you can prove that the spray can is for your work. Get a letter or statutory declaration from your employer to say this. A statutory declaration is an official statement that is signed in front of an authorised person, such as a police officer, chemist or school principal.

Can I be searched by police for spray paint cans?

Yes but only if you're:

- 14 or over (or if you 'appear' to be 14 or over. Carry ID if you're under 14), and
- on or near public transport and the police or protective services officers suspect you have spray paint cans.

The police can search you if they think you've already committed or are about to commit a graffiti offence.

For example, if you have paint on your fingers and there's wet graffiti nearby, the police officer is probably going to search you.

Police can search your bags and ask you to take off your coat, hat and shoes. You'll also need to give them your name and address.

Protective services officers also have search powers at train stations and some designated areas around train stations.

See 'Protective services officers' on page 89.

What happens if I am caught with spray paint?

Unless you can prove you're using the paint for work, the police can charge you with a graffiti offence for:

- carrying spray paint cans on or near public transport
- carrying a spray can if caught trespassing on private property
- carrying something that can be used to graffiti and the police suspect, or can prove, that you have used it (or were going to use it) for graffiti.

The police can give you an on-the-spot fine of at least \$550 or the court could sentence you to up to two years in jail.

Protective services officers on duty at train stations can also fine you for carrying spray cans.

If you're a student, your school could also suspend or expel you if you're caught damaging school property with graffiti. Police may also charge you with criminal damage.

Weapons and the law

There are strict rules for owning or carrying a weapon. There are big penalties too. The police could give you an on-the-spot fine or the court could order you to go to jail. Protective services officers on duty at train stations can also fine you. See 'Protective services officers' on page 89.

If you're at school and the school thinks you're carrying a weapon, your school principal or an authorised teacher can search you or your bag or locker and take any weapons they find or they can call the police to search you and your locker.

Guns

The law says you can't own or buy a gun until you turn 18.

You must register the gun with the police and have a licence for it.

If you're aged between 12 and 17, you can get a licence for a gun from the police but only for learning how to use a gun for sport.

You'll only get a licence if:

- your parents or guardian agree in writing
- you're a member of an approved shooting club
- you've done a firearms safety course
- you're a responsible person.

If you get the licence, you can only use a gun with a person over 18 who has a shooter's licence.

Anyone can use an airgun or air rifle in a shooting gallery at a show or amusement centre.

Other weapons

The law says you can't carry, possess or use a weapon to hurt people or to defend yourself. You can't carry knives, like kitchen knives, box cutters, flick knives, daggers, butterfly knives or knuckle knives. It is a very serious offence to have a knife within 20 metres of licensed premises and the penalties are doubled. You also can't carry weapons like nunchakus, batons, knuckle-dusters, shanghais, blow guns, capsicum spray, slingshots, weighted or studded gloves, throwing stars or catapults.

If you can prove you have a 'lawful excuse' (legal reason), you may carry or possess some weapons.

A lawful excuse could include having the weapon for work, for sport, for a weapons collection, display or exhibition. Lawful excuse doesn't include self-defence. You can only carry or possess some weapons if you do so safely.

If the police tell you they believe you're illegally carrying a weapon, they can search you and your car without a warrant. If they find a weapon, they can take it from you.

See also 'Speaking to the police' on page 75.

What are 'dangerous articles'?

Dangerous articles can include things like an axe, a cricket bat or a hammer if there is proof you intended to use them as a weapon.

You can't carry or possess an object that has been adapted for use as a weapon unless you have a lawful excuse. It's also an offence to carry an article with the intention to use it as a weapon.

In the case of dangerous articles, a lawful excuse can include having the weapon for work, for sport, for a weapons' collection, display or exhibition, but not self-defence.

Am I a victim of crime?

No matter how old you are, if you've been hurt (physically or mentally) or have lost property or money as a result of a crime, you may be able to get financial help, compensation and counselling. Make sure you report the crime to the police as soon as you can. You can still apply to get compensation even if the person who did the crime doesn't end up going to court or goes to court and is found 'not guilty'.

If you are a victim of violence, including domestic violence, and the crime committed against you was serious enough, you may be able to apply to the Victims of Crime Assistance Tribunal (VOCAT) to get compensation.

If you're under 18 your parents or guardian have to apply. For more information, call the Victims of Crime Helpline.

See 'Where to get more help and information' below.

Am I old enough to gamble?

The legal age for gambling in Victoria is 18. This includes gambling on websites or apps, playing the pokies, betting on horses or buying lottery tickets and 'scratchies'. It's illegal to go into a gaming room or casino if you're under 18, even if you're with an adult.

Where to get more help and information

- **Australian Drug Foundation** – call 9611 6100 or visit www.adf.org.au
- **Direct Line** – for free, anonymous and confidential 24-hour drug and alcohol counselling, information and referral. Call 1800 888 236 (free call) or visit www.counsellingonline.org.au
- **Frontyard Youth Services** – call 9611 2411 or visit www.melbournecitymission.org.au
- **Gambler's Helpline** – 24 hours, 7 days a week for free confidential telephone counselling and referral service on 1800 858 858. Or visit www.responsiblegambling.vic.gov.au/getting-help
- **Kids Helpline** – call 1800 551 800 (24 hours, free call) or visit www.kidshelp.com.au
- **Lawstuff** – lots of legal topics for young people. Email them with your legal questions. Visit www.lawstuff.org.au
- **Somazone** – health information for young people. Visit www.somazone.com.au
- **Victims of Crime Assistance Tribunal** – call 9628 7855 or 1800 882 752 (free call) or visit www.vocat.vic.gov.au

- **Victims of Crime Helpline** – call 1800 819 817 or visit www.victimsofcrime.vic.gov.au
- **Youth Support and Advocacy Service** – 24 hours a day for confidential counselling and referral on 1800 458 685 (free call) or visit www.ysas.org.au

You might want a copy of our free booklet:

- *Drugs, the law and safer injecting*

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Buying things

We all buy things. Sometimes it's a small thing like a piece of clothing, sometimes it's a bigger thing like a car or TV. Regardless of what you're buying, there are laws about exchanging things you've bought and about contracts between the buyer and the seller. Spending more than you can afford is an easy trap to fall into. This section includes contacts for organisations that can help you manage your money.

What is a contract?

A contract is an agreement between two parties which the law says must be carried out. Most contracts do not have to be in writing. You can have an oral contract. For example, when you buy something, you and the seller have made a contract with each other whether you signed anything or not. But if you're buying a car, you do have to sign a written agreement.

Am I old enough to agree to a contract?

If you're under 18, you have to stick to a contract if:

- you've bought things you need to live on, like food, housing, clothing or medicine
- it helps you with employment or education
- what was agreed to under the contract has already happened.

For example, if you bought something you won't be able to get a refund just because you're under 18.

If you've completed the contract – for example, you've paid all the money – you may not be able to go back on the contract unless:

- the goods are faulty
- the sales assistant told you the goods were for a particular purpose but they're not – for example, the sales assistant told you that a plate was microwave safe but when you used it in the microwave it broke.

What is a guarantor?

Because under-18-year-olds don't have to stick to contracts except for the reasons above, shops and companies that lend money may not let you use a credit card or borrow money without a guarantor. A guarantor is someone aged 18 or over who promises that you'll stick to your side of the contract and that they'll pay if you don't. If you don't pay, the seller or moneylender can take the guarantor to court as well as taking legal action against you. Usually you can't buy a car without a guarantor.

Exchanging goods and refunds

Choose carefully when you buy something. The shop owner doesn't legally have to give you a refund or exchange goods just because you change your mind. If you're not sure about buying something, talk to the sales assistant. Tell them what you want the goods for and find out if it's what you need.

Some stores, like bigger department stores, will give you a refund or exchange goods if you change your mind but it's up to the store. The store does have to give you a refund if the goods are faulty or if the sales assistant told you the goods were suitable for a particular purpose but they weren't. However, when you buy something it's always worth asking the sales assistant if you can bring it back and get a refund or exchange if the goods aren't right or if you change your mind.

If the sales assistant says yes, then you should be able to get a refund or exchange. Keep the receipt as proof of your purchase.

Many shops have a sign near the cash register about their policy on exchanges and refunds. A sign that says 'No refunds' is illegal. Even a policy saying 'No refunds on sale items' is breaking the law.

A shop must give you a refund for goods that are faulty, regardless of whether you bought the goods on sale or not.

If you think you should get a refund but the shop refuses to give it to you, you can complain to Consumer Affairs Victoria or to the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission. See 'Where to get more help and information' on page 73.

Private sales

The laws about exchanging goods and getting a refund don't apply to sales between private individuals, like friends or family. Make sure you buy what you want and that it works.

Buying 'dodgy' goods

If you're buying things from friends or privately, like at a market or second-hand stall, check that the person selling the goods has the right to sell them. This means that the goods aren't stolen. It's worth asking for proof of ownership or evidence that the seller has authority to sell. If the goods are stolen, the original owner may be able to claim them back. If you are buying an expensive item, like a car, you can check the Personal Properties Securities Register to make sure that the owner is not still paying it off.

See 'Where to get more help and information' on page 73.

Buying things online

If buying from an online store, check what that store's refund or return policy is before you pay. You will usually have to pay return postage costs if you want to exchange or return an item purchased from an online store.

When you buy something, make sure you know exactly what you're paying for. Do you pay for it once or do you have to make repeat payments?

Some sites have services that can help you sort out disputes with sellers, for example, if what you bought doesn't match the item's description.

Other private online sales can be risky. The person you're buying from may live in another state or overseas so getting your money back may be hard. You might be able to get help from your credit card provider. Some providers have services to help when online purchases go wrong. See 'How can I stay safe online?' on page 14.

Am I old enough to get a mobile phone contract?

You have to be 18 to sign a mobile phone contract. Often young people ask their parents to sign the contract. This means your parents have to pay if you can't. Technically the contract can be transferred into your name once you're 18. In reality this can be hard as you need to have a credit check, more than one form of ID and a credit card.

You can get a prepaid phone at any age.

If you're thinking about getting a mobile phone, remember:

- **There's no such thing as a free phone.** There's always a catch. The cost of 'free' handsets may be included in the monthly bill or may mean higher call costs. Check the contract for hidden costs. Shop around and get advice.
- **Work out if you can afford to pay the minimum monthly payment** for the whole contract period, which can be as long as three years. Once you sign up, it's hard to break the contract.
- **The person who signs the contract is responsible** for paying the bills or making sure the bills get paid.

- **Read and understand the contract.** If you don't understand it, don't sign it.
- If your phone is stolen, lost or cut-off because of non-payment of bills, you still have to pay out the rest of your contract.
- Most contracts for smart phones that can connect to the internet have data limits and **it can be very expensive if you go over your data limit.** Get a pre-paid account or use free wifi networks to access the web on your phone,
- **If you download ringtones or pictures to your mobile, check it is a one-off download** and not a subscription service that sends you more ringtones or pictures that you have to pay for. Keep the 'unsubscribe' information so you can stop the service.
- **If your phone gets stolen, ring your phone company immediately.** You pay for all calls until the phone is reported missing.
- **If you buy a second-hand phone make sure the SIM card is unlocked.** Some carriers charge to unlock SIM cards.
- If you want to take your phone to school, check first if there is a rule about mobile phones. **Some schools don't let students take phones to school.**

Where to get more help and information

- **Australian Competition and Consumer Commission** – call 1300 302 502 or visit www.accc.gov.au
- **Consumer Action Law Centre** – call their Legal Advice Line 9629 6300 or 1800 466 477 or visit www.consumeraction.org.au
- **Consumer Affairs Victoria** –
 - call 1300 558 181. Open Monday to Friday, 8.30 am to 5.00 pm
 - visit www.consumer.vic.gov.au

- **Personal Property Securities Register** – visit www.ppsr.gov.au
- **Telecommunications Industry Ombudsman** – for complaints about bills, contracts, coverage and network faults call free on 1800 062 058
- **Victoria Legal Aid Legal Help** – call 1300 792 387 Monday to Friday, 8.45 am to 5.15 pm

Police, PSOs, bouncers and ticket inspectors

When dealing with the police, security guards, protective services officers or authorised officers (public transport ticket inspectors) it's important to try to stay calm and polite. Don't resist and don't be abusive or violent. Be firm about your rights. If you're not happy with how you were treated, you can make a complaint.

Speaking to the police

Your main rights if you're under 18:

- the right to legal advice
- the right to say 'no comment' – also known as the right to silence
- the right to let someone know if you're arrested
- the right to have an adult with you during questioning.

In general, you have the right not to answer any questions, except those about your name and address. For example, you could answer 'no comment' or stay silent to all other questions. It can be a good idea to use this right because what you say to the police, no matter when or where, could be used as **evidence** to arrest or charge you, or it might be used against you in court.

There is no such thing as 'off the record'

Sometimes police might ask to talk to you informally or 'off the record'. There is no such thing as 'off the record' – the police can use any information you give them. Always tell the police you want to use your right to remain silent.

If you're interviewed, held, arrested, charged or about to be charged, always get legal advice, see 'Where to get help' on page 95.

If you threaten to hurt or assault the police, the police could charge you with 'resisting arrest' or 'hindering police in the exercise of their duty'.

Do I have to give police my name and address?

It's a criminal offence to refuse to give your name and address, or to give false details to the police, protective services officers or authorised public transport officers. The police may ask for your name and address because they believe:

- you've broken the law
- you're about to break the law
- you're able to help them with information about an indictable (serious) offence.

The police must tell you why they want your details. If they don't give you a reason, you should ask for it.

The police can demand your name and address without giving a reason if you're:

- driving a car, motorbike, boat or bicycle
- in a hotel or licensed premises (staff can also ask for your age).

If police want you to go with them to a police station, you can refuse unless they are arresting you or in special circumstances such as:

- when you're driving and they want to do a breathalyser or drug test
- they're investigating a report of family violence
- they believe you're mentally impaired and need to be taken into custody.

Always ask why they want you to go with them. If you ask the police, they must also give you their name, police station and rank. You can ask for this in writing.

Do I have to let police search my mobile phone?

Police can seize a phone if they think it's stolen or has been used to commit a crime. It's a good idea to use a password to protect the information you store on your phone. If the police stop you to ask for your name and address, then ask to look at information stored on your phone, such as text messages, photos or emails, you don't have to give them your password. Police need to get a court order to search your phone.

When can the police search me?

Police have the right to search you:

- at any time in a public place if they reasonably believe you may be carrying illegal drugs, stolen goods or weapons
- if you're under 18 and they suspect you're going to inhale a volatile substance (chroming). It's not a crime to chrome. The police can stop you and take you somewhere safe if they think you'll hurt yourself by chroming
- if they think you've committed or are about to commit a graffiti offence, such as carrying a spray can on a train
- if you're in custody or under arrest if they believe you're carrying a weapon.

You must be searched by a police officer of the same sex as you, unless it's an urgent situation and there's no-one of the same sex available.

If the police search you, they can also:

- search anything you're carrying
- search the car you're travelling in
- take things from you that could be used as evidence.

If the police search you they must make a record of this. You can ask for a copy of the record. If police search you for a weapon, they must give you a copy of this record if you ask for it.

Where can the police search me?

In general

The police can search you in any public place including a shop, at the train station, on public transport (buses, trams or trains) or in a hospital or welfare centre.

In 'designated' search areas

The police have the power to search you in certain 'designated' areas, even if there's no reason to suspect that you're carrying illegal drugs, stolen goods or a weapon.

A designated area is a place where:

- there was more than one incident of violence involving weapons in the last 12 months
- there's going to be an event in that area and there were violent incidents involving weapons when the event was on before (even if the event was somewhere else)
- the police think that an incident involving the use of weapons is about to happen.

The police must publicise that they're going to do a search.

The police do not have to do this if they're searching areas where they believe there's going to be a weapons-related offence and doing a search will stop this from happening. The areas can stay 'designated areas' for usually no more than 12 hours.

If you refuse to be searched within this designated search area, the police can charge you with refusal to be searched.

The police don't have to make a record of these searches. If you ask them to, the police officer searching you must tell you their name, rank and the police station they're from. You can also ask them to put this in writing.

Searches, other than searches with an electronic metal detector, must be conducted in the presence of your parent, guardian or an independent person, unless it is not practical for police to get them to be there.

The police can also strip search you if they believe that you're carrying a weapon. A strip search must be conducted by an officer who is the same sex as the person being searched. Police must record any strip search that they do in a designated area.

For more information about 'Weapons and the law', see page 64.

Protective services officers also have search powers at train stations and some designated areas around train stations.

See 'Protective services officers' on page 89.

Are there different types of searches?

Yes, there are three types of personal searches the police can do:

- **pat-down search:** this is the most common type of search where police use their hands to feel over the outside of your clothes. They may also ask you to empty your pockets or take off your jacket, shoes or hat. The police can use a metal detector to look for something they 'reasonably suspect' is a weapon. These searches can be done in public or private.
- **strip search:** the removal and search of all clothing. The police must do these searches in a private place, usually at a police station. A parent, guardian or independent person can usually be with you during the search.
- **internal body search:** only doctors can do these. The doctor must be the same sex as you. You have the right to say no if the police want to do an internal body search.

The police may ask the court for permission to do the search. They must have very strong evidence to justify the search.

In all cases: Talk to a lawyer as soon as possible if you are not happy with how the search was done. See 'Where to get help' on page 95.

Can police ask me to move on from a public area?

New laws in Victoria mean police can ask you to move on from a public area if they believe you are disrupting the peace, obstructing a business, traffic, or other people, or are behaving in a way that might be dangerous to public safety, cause injury or damage property.

Police may decide that you have to stay away from the public place for up to 24 hours. If you refuse to move on or stay away, police can fine you.

Your rights before police questioning

You have rights. This includes the right to remain silent. You should talk to a lawyer about this before the questioning starts. Also, the police must let you:

- **call a lawyer from a private space (this means somewhere that the police can't hear you).** The police may be able to call a legal advice line for you
- **call a friend or relative from a private space.** However, the police don't have to allow this if it is a driving matter involving drinking or drugs or if they believe that during this time:
 - someone else involved in the crime might get away
 - some evidence may be lost or tampered with
 - other people may be in danger.

Your rights during police questioning

If you're under 18, the police must not formally question you unless your parents or guardian are there – unless you don't want them there. If your parents or guardian can't be there, the police must arrange for an independent person to be with you during questioning. You must be given the chance to talk privately to your parents, guardian or the independent person before the questioning.

While you're waiting to speak to them, you should refuse to answer any questions after giving your name and address.

The independent person is there to make sure you and the police understand each other and that you understand your rights. They don't give legal advice. Either you or the police can suggest who will be the independent person.

If an independent person is not with you during questioning, the court may decide that the information can't be used as evidence.

When the police are questioning you, you have the right to remain silent, and to answer 'no comment' or stay silent to all the questions except those about your name and address. You can't get in trouble for saying 'no comment' or staying silent and it shouldn't affect whether you get bail or work against you in court. If the police record the interview, they should give you or your lawyer a copy of the interview within seven days.

The police don't have to wait for a parent, guardian or an independent person to arrive before questioning you when someone else involved in the crime might get away or if waiting may cause danger to other people.



Youthlaw have produced a series of online *Street Law* videos about young people's rights when dealing with police. Go to www.legalaid.vic.gov.au/street-law

Am I old enough for the police to fingerprint me?

There are different rules depending on your age:

- **under 10** – the police aren't allowed to fingerprint you
- **10 to 14** – you and your parents or guardian must agree before the police can take your fingerprints. You don't have to agree to this. If you or your parents or guardian refuse fingerprinting, the police have to get permission from the Children's Court
- **15 to 17** – your parents, guardian or an independent person must be with you when the police ask to take your fingerprints. They must also be there if the police take your fingerprints
- **18 years and older** – in most situations you have to let the police take your fingerprints if they believe you've committed an offence. This isn't the case in some minor offences like jaywalking and littering.

What happens if I refuse to give my fingerprints?

The police can use 'reasonable force' to get them. Reasonable force means the police may physically restrain you. If you're 16 or younger, the police must audiotape or videotape this.

The police must destroy your fingerprints within six months if the police don't charge you or the court finds you 'not guilty'. The police must also destroy your fingerprints if you don't re-offend before turning 26 (unless the police charged you with a serious offence like murder, assault or rape). Check with the police to make sure that this has been done.

What is a 'forensic procedure'?

A forensic procedure is a physical examination. Some forensic procedures involve taking 'intimate' body samples, like blood, pubic hair, anal, genital or breast swabs, saliva, and mouth or dental impressions.

A qualified doctor or dentist must carry out these procedures.

The police must tell you beforehand that you don't have to answer any questions the doctor or dentist ask you.

The police can take 'non-intimate' body samples from you, like hair, fingernail or toenail scrapings and some external body swabs. Depending on your age, different rules apply if the police want to get body samples:

- **under 10** – police can't take a body sample from you
- **10 to 17** – police can only take a body sample if they get a court order. A parent, guardian or independent person must be with you if the police take a body sample
- **18 years or older** – you don't have to agree to give body samples. If you refuse, the police can apply to a court for permission to take a sample or a senior police officer can give the go ahead for non-intimate body samples.

You should always get legal advice before agreeing to give any blood or a body sample.

Why do the police want to take my photo?

The police may want to take your photo so they can identify you when you're being:

- kept in a police cell
- released from custody on bail with conditions that you report to a local police station.

The police may try to photograph you without your permission when you're sitting in the waiting room or in a cell. You have the right to say no to having your photograph taken. You don't have to show a tattoo or part of your body. You have the right to say no. If police take your photo after you've said no, get legal advice.

See 'Where to get help' on page 95.

What if the police want me to be in an identification parade?

You have the right to refuse to be in an identification (ID) parade and the police can't force you to do it. An ID parade is where the police put you in a line of people to see if a witness can identify you as the person who committed the offence. A witness is a person who saw or heard something about your case, like someone who was injured by the offence.

Always talk to a lawyer before agreeing to be in an identification parade. If you take part in an ID parade, you may be mistakenly identified by the witness as the person who committed the offence.

Can I complain about the police?

Yes, if the police have done something you think is wrong, you can make a complaint to the senior sergeant of the station or the Police Conduct Unit of the Professional Standards Command of Victoria Police. If you want to complain, do it quickly. First, write down what you remember happening and get legal advice, especially if the police have charged you with an offence.

See 'Where to get help' on page 95.

If you're hurt, go to a doctor immediately. Tell the doctor that the police hurt you and show them where you were hurt. Ask the doctor to keep a record of any injuries. Take photos of any visible injuries.

The Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission (IBAC) handles complaints about police corruption and serious misconduct. This includes where police officers acted dishonestly, abused their power or broke the law. Call 1300 735 135 or visit www.ibac.vic.gov.au.

Can I complain about my lawyer?

Yes, you can complain to the Legal Services Board on 1300 796 344 (local call within Victoria) or 9679 8001.

Bouncers and security guards

There are many different kinds of security staff with different roles and powers.

Shopping centres and managers of other public places employ security guards to make sure all people can use the space safely. In public places, like parks, security guards have the same powers as any other person. In privately owned places, like nightclubs, security guards can have wider powers depending on what the owners ask them to do. Some places are both private and public, like shopping centres.

You can question the powers of security guards if you believe the guard is being over the top.

Security staff must wear identification badges and tell you their name and identification number if you ask them for it.

What security staff can and can't do

If a security guard sees you doing something that isn't allowed in that area, like smoking or riding a bike in a shopping centre, they can ask you to leave. If you refuse, they can remove you from the premises using 'reasonable force'.

A security guard can arrest you if they see you committing an offence. This is the same as a 'citizen's arrest'. A security guard can also hold you until the police arrive. You don't have to answer any questions a security guard asks you.

A security guard can ask to search your bag. You can refuse. You can also withdraw your permission at any time during the search. However, searching your bag may be a condition of entry to some places, like shops or sports stadiums.

A security guard can't:

- use too much force
- arrest, hold or question you if they only suspect you have committed an offence
- ask you to leave an area because of your age (unless it's a legal requirement, for example, you're under age), race, mental illness, disability or because you may be gay or lesbian.

How to complain about security staff

The Licensing and Regulation Division, which is part of Victoria Police, issues licences for security staff. The division can investigate complaints about security guards, crowd controllers and security companies, and can suspend or cancel a security licence or registration.

Call them on 1300 651 645 if you're thinking about making a complaint.

Then make the complaint in writing to: Regulation Support Unit, Licensing and Regulation Division GPO Box 2807 Melbourne 3001 or email licensingregulation@police.vic.gov.au.

Security companies have a code of practice they must follow. Find out which association the company belongs to and make a complaint. The Australian Security Industry Association Limited covers most companies, call 02 8425 4300 to check if the company is a member.

Tickets and ticket inspectors on public transport

The law says you have to travel on public transport with a valid ticket or myki card.

You can travel without a valid ticket or myki card if:

- before and after your journey, you took all 'reasonable steps' to buy a ticket or myki card or top up your myki card

- you had 'no reasonable opportunity' to buy a ticket or myki card or to top up your myki card while making your journey, such as when the ticket machine wasn't working.

There's no definition of 'reasonable steps' or 'reasonable opportunity'. It depends on your circumstances.

It may be reasonable to travel without a valid ticket or myki card if:

- ticket machines weren't working at the start of your journey and you couldn't purchase a ticket or myki card during or after your journey
- you had a pre-purchased ticket or myki card but the 'validators' weren't working or your ticket was faulty and wouldn't validate.

An authorised officer (ticket inspector) may take your ticket or myki card if you don't validate the ticket for your trip. The ticket inspector should offer you a 'travel permit' so you can finish your trip. You can apply to have your ticket or myki card returned if, for example, it's a weekly ticket that you can use later or a card that still has value on it.

Can ticket inspectors ask for my name and address?

Ticket inspectors can only ask for your name and address if they believe on 'reasonable grounds' that you have committed or are about to commit a public transport offence. This may include travelling without a valid ticket. The ticket inspector must tell you why they believe this, so that you understand what the offence is. If you refuse to give your name and address, or give false information, you may be charged with an offence and can be arrested.

You can ask the ticket inspector for their name and where they work. You can ask for this in writing. A ticket inspector can be fined for not giving you this information.

The inspector must show you their identity card if you ask to see it.

Ticket inspectors can ask you to prove that your name and address is correct if they believe on 'reasonable grounds' that the details are false. Ticket inspectors can also detain you until police arrive if you don't provide proof that your name and address is correct.

Protective services officers can also ask for your name and address at train stations and in some designated areas around train stations. See 'Protective services officers' on page 89.

Do ticket inspectors have the power to detain and arrest me?

Ticket inspectors can only detain or arrest you without warrant if they believe on 'reasonable grounds' that it is necessary, such as to make sure you go to court. Ticket inspectors must use no more force than is reasonable to detain you. What is reasonable depends on the circumstances. Inspectors must hand you over to the police as soon as possible.

Protective services officers can also detain and arrest people at train stations and in some designated areas around train stations. See 'Protective services officers' on page 89.

What happens if I get a fine?

If the Department of Transport gives you a fine for a public transport offence, and you disagree that you committed the offence, get legal advice before paying the fine. See 'Where to get more help and information' on page 90. You can also have the Children's Court hear your case. Always get legal advice before you go to court. The court can reduce the amount of the fine. It can also set up an instalment plan where you can pay the fine off bit by bit. If you can't pay the fine you can ask to go before a magistrate who may give you a different penalty, like a good behaviour bond.

Protective services officers (PSOs)

In Victoria protective services officers work in train stations and designated places around some train stations. Designated places are train stations and surrounding areas, like car parks, tunnels, footpaths and bike paths leading to train stations. Protective services officers have similar arrest powers and the same weapons as police officers.

The protective services officers have many powers. For instance, they can:

- arrest a person if they suspect that person has broken the law
- ask for a person's name, age, address and ID when they reasonably believe that the person is under 18 and has drunk, is drinking or is about to drink alcohol. Protective services officers can caution (officially warn) this person if they refuse to give this information. They can also take the alcohol from the person.
- search a person and the person's car for graffiti implements if they believe that person is 14 or over and carrying these implements. It is an offence to resist a lawful search by a PSO
- stop a person who is under 18 from going anywhere else and take them to a safe place if they believe that person has been chroming (inhaling a 'volatile substance' like a spray can) and might harm themselves
- apprehend (hold) a person who appears to be mentally ill and is believed to have recently tried to seriously hurt themselves or someone else (or is likely to do so)
- direct a person to move on if the person is breaching the peace (causing a disturbance) or endangering the safety of others
- search a person for weapons if they reasonably suspect the person is carrying or possessing a weapon. The search can last as long as the protective services officer thinks is a reasonable length of time to do the search.

- arrest a person found drunk or drunk and disorderly in a designated place
- remove a person from the designated place if the protective services officer believes on reasonable grounds that the person is committing an offence that is a danger or annoyance to the public, or is getting in the way of a police officer, protective services officers or transport employee.

Protective services officers only have these powers when they are working in and around train stations – in designated areas.

Victoria Legal Aid and Youthlaw publish information about protective services officers on our websites so keep checking these if you want to know more about what protective services officers mean for the rights of young people. See 'Where to get more help and information' below.



Youthlaw have produced a series of online *Street Law* videos about young people's rights when dealing with police. Go to www.legalaid.vic.gov.au/street-law

Where to get more help and information

- **Youthlaw** – call 9611 2412, email legal@youthlaw.asn.au or visit www.youthlaw.asn.au/ask-a-lawyer-now
- **Public Transport Ombudsman Victoria** – 1800 466 865, TTY users phone 1800 555 677 then ask for 1800 466 865
- **Public Transport Users Association** – visit www.ptua.org.au
- **Youth Referral and Independent Person Program (YRIPP)** – support for young people under 18 being held in police custody. Call 9340 3777 or visit www.cmy.net.au/YRIPP/YRIPPHome

- For up-to-date information about dealing with police and protective services officers see the **Victoria Legal Aid** and **Youthlaw** websites:
 - www.legalaid.vic.gov.au
 - www.youthlaw.asn.au
- **Victoria Legal Aid Legal Help** – call 1300 792 387 Monday to Friday, 8.45 am to 5.15 pm

You might want a copy of our free booklet:

- *Police powers: your rights in Victoria*

For copies call (03) 9269 0234 and ask for Publications or visit www.legalaid.vic.gov.au

Courts and tribunals

Courts and tribunals are where arguments are sorted out and decisions are made. A court may be asked to decide where you will live or whether you committed a crime, or you can ask for help from a court if you believe your rights have been violated. Talk to a lawyer.

What happens if I am taken to court?

By the police

You can be taken to the Children's Court if the police:

- charge you for an offence they say you committed before your 18th birthday and
- you go to court before your 19th birthday.

If you're older you'll go to the Magistrates' Court. The police can't charge you if you're under 10.

If you're 19 or over, the Children's Court must still hear your case if it began in the Children's Court when you were under 19, unless the court thinks there are exceptional circumstances (very good reasons) not to.

If the police have charged you with an offence, get legal help as quickly as possible. Talk to a lawyer. See 'Where to get help' on page 95.

For unpaid fines

The Children and Young Persons Infringement Notice System (CAYPINS) in the Children's Court deals with unpaid infringement notices (fines). Infringements can include not having a valid train ticket or driving a car without a licence.

By someone else

Someone can sue you if you hurt them or caused them to lose money because of something you did. But the court will only hold you responsible if, at your age, you should have known that what you did would cause that damage or loss.

A person under 18 can only sue another person by getting an adult, usually their parents or guardian, to do it for them.

By the Department of Human Services

If the Department of Human Services thinks you're unsafe because your parents or guardian don't or can't look after you, you may be taken to the Children's Court. This is a welfare case, not a criminal case, so you're not in trouble. You will go to the Family Division of the court.

See also 'Am I old enough to leave home?' (page 25), 'What happens if a child is being abused or neglected?' (page 47).

Legal advice before court

It's always a good idea to get legal advice before going to court.

For example:

- if the police want to interview you
- if the Department of Human Services wants you or your family to sign an agreement that means you or a parent have to leave home.

Legal advice after court

Sometimes you may need legal advice after a court case is over. For example:

- if you don't understand what happened at court
- if you disagree with what happened at court and you want to find out about changing the decision.

There are strict time limits for changing a court decision, so act quickly to get legal advice. See 'Where to get help' on page 95.

Where to get help

There are many ways to get free legal information and advice. There are lots of people and organisations who can help you. If you need information, don't be shy – go get it.

If you need an interpreter:

Call the **Translating and Interpreting Service** for an interpreter to help you speak to any of the agencies below. Ask the interpreter to put you through to the agency you need. This is usually free.

Tel: 131 450

If you are deaf or have a hearing or speech impairment:

Use the **National Relay Service** to phone any of the agencies (including Victoria Legal Aid) in this section. This is free. For more information about the NRS visit www.relayservice.com.au

TTY users: Call 133 677 and then ask for the phone number you need. Include the area code.

Speak and Listen users: Call 1300 555 727 and then ask for the phone number you need. Include the area code.

Internet relay users: Connect to www.relayservice.gov.au and then ask for the phone number you need. Include the area code.

Victoria Legal Aid

Legal Help

For free information about the law and how we can help you, call Legal Help on 1300 792 387

Monday to Friday, 8.45 am and 5.15 pm

More information

More information is on our website at www.legalaid.vic.gov.au

Do you need help calling us?



Translating and Interpreting Service

Tel: 131 450



National Relay Service

TTY users: Call 133 677

Speak and Listen users: Call 1300 555 727

Internet relay users: See www.relayservice.gov.au

Local offices

We have offices all over Victoria. Our offices are open Monday to Friday, 8.45 am to 5.15 pm.

See the back cover for office locations.

All offices are accessible to people with a disability.

Other legal services

Federation of Community Legal Centres

The Federation will be able to give you the phone number of the community legal centre nearest you.

Tel: 9652 1500

Victorian Aboriginal Legal service (24 hours)

For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

Tel: 9419 3888 or 1800 064 865 (free call)

Youthlaw

Tel: 9611 2412

Email: info@youthlaw.asn.au

Useful websites with legal information for young people:

- www.lawstuff.org.au
- www.legalaid.vic.gov.au
- www.youthcentral.vic.gov.au – follow link to ‘Know Your Rights’
- www.youthlaw.asn.au

If you live in the country, there are local organisations that may be able to help you. Contact your community information centre, community health centre, youth worker or school counsellor. Check the front section of your telephone book under ‘Community Services’.

Useful Victoria Legal Aid resources

To order publications

We have free booklets about the law in English and other languages. Visit www.legalaid.vic.gov.au to order or download booklets. Call (03) 9269 0234 and ask for Publications to find out more.

Our public law library

Open Monday to Friday, 9 am to 5 pm
350 Queen Street, Melbourne



Street law (education kit)

A free legal education kit to help young people understand their rights when dealing with police and protective services officers (PSOs) in Victoria.

Am I old enough?

Common legal issues for young people

Victoria Legal Aid

For help with legal problems, call Legal Help on **1300 792 387**

For business queries, call **(03) 9269 0234**

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