

Youth Criminal Justice Act: Scope and Principle

Introduction

At the end of this lesson you should have a basic understanding of the underlying principles and intentions of the Youth Criminal Justice and the key terms and vocabulary used in the act.

You may access the full text of the [Youth Criminal Justice Act \(YCJA\)](http://canada.justice.gc.ca/en/ps/yj/ycja/ycja.html) on the Department of Justice Canada Website (<http://canada.justice.gc.ca/en/ps/yj/ycja/ycja.html>)

The Youth Criminal Justice Act consists of a Declaration of Principle and nine parts:

- Part 1 : Extrajudicial Measures
- Part 2 : Organization of Youth Criminal Justice System
- Part 3 : Judicial Measures
- Part 4 : Sentencing
- Part 5 : Custody and Supervision
- Part 6 : Publication, Records and Information
- Part 7 : General Provisions
- Part 8 : Transitional Provisions
- Part 9 : Consequential Amendments, Repeal and Coming into Force

The Scope of the Act

Laws and regulations can be created by the federal government, the provincial government and the municipal government (by-laws). The YCJA applies to youth who break federal laws and regulations. Each province has separate laws for dealing with youth who break provincial laws or municipal by-laws. The Youth Criminal Justice Act is administered primarily by local police and through the provincial courts and judicial system.

The YCJA applies to youth ages 12 to 17.

Children younger than 12 who commit a crime are dealt with outside of the youth justice system. This may include the involvement of police, social workers, the school, the community, and parents or guardians. Children under 12 may be removed from their home and placed in care for their own safety or for the safety of their community.

The Principles of the Act

The act focuses on the basic principles of crime prevention, rehabilitation, reintegration, meaningful consequences, protection of the public, and accountability.

It considers the unique nature of youth, in particular their level of maturity, and gives special consideration to fair treatment, protection of rights and privacy, and timely intervention.

It is meant to reflect social values while taking into account each individuals unique social, cultural and developmental situation, and meaningfully involve the community, social agencies, family, and the victim in the rehabilitation and reintegration process.

The act encourages compassion, empowerment, respect, dignity, participation, and facilitates understanding by through the sharing of information and offering support for both the victim and offender.

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The Act

Section 3(1)a of the Youth Criminal Justice Act sets out the Scope and Principles of the act in the following manner

The purpose of the youth justice system is to:

3(1)a

- (i) prevent crime by addressing the circumstances underlying a young person's offending behaviour,
- (ii) rehabilitate young persons who commit offences and reintegrate them into society, and
- (iii) ensure that a young person is subject to meaningful consequences for his or her offence in order to promote the long-term protection of the public;

There is an emphasis on:

3(1)b

- (i) rehabilitation and reintegration,
- (ii) fair and proportionate accountability that is consistent with the greater dependency of young persons and their reduced level of maturity,
- (iii) enhanced procedural protection to ensure that young persons are treated fairly and that their rights, including their right to privacy, are protected,
- (iv) timely intervention that reinforces the link between the offending behaviour and its consequences, and
- (v) the promptness and speed with which persons responsible for enforcing this Act must act, given young persons' perception of time;

The measures taken against young persons who commit offences should:

3(1)c

- (i) reinforce respect for societal values,
- (ii) encourage the repair of harm done to victims and the community,
- (iii) be meaningful for the individual young person given his or her needs and level of development and, where appropriate, involve the parents, the extended family, the community and social or other agencies in the young person's rehabilitation and reintegration, and
- (iv) respect gender, ethnic, cultural and linguistic differences and respond to the needs of aboriginal young persons and of young persons with special requirements; and

Special considerations apply in respect of proceedings against young persons:

3(1)d

- (i) young persons have rights and freedoms in their own right, such as a right to be heard in the course of and to participate in the processes, other than the decision to prosecute, that lead to decisions that affect them, and young persons have special guarantees of their rights and freedoms,
- (ii) victims should be treated with courtesy, compassion and respect for their dignity and privacy and should suffer the minimum degree of inconvenience as a result of their involvement with the youth criminal justice system,
- (iii) victims should be provided with information about the proceedings and given an opportunity to participate and be heard, and
- (iv) parents should be informed of measures or proceedings involving their children and encouraged to support them in addressing their offending behaviour.

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Questions and Discussion

1) The federal, provincial, and municipal governments all have powers to make laws. Why do you think the Youth Criminal Justice Act is federal act rather than a provincial or municipal act?

2) Why do you think children under 12 are treated differently than children 12-17 years old?

3) Why do you think youth 12-17 are not treated the same way as adults?

4) List ten of the most important words used in the act. Rank them from most to least important

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5a) What are the three most important statements in the act?

1.

2.

3.

5b) Explain and discuss your choices in small groups. Prepare a group explanation of your choices to present to another group or the whole class. Remember to involve all of the members of your group

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Vocabulary

On your own, with a partner or in your small group:

- Describe what each of these terms means in your own words.
- Give an example to illustrate your point.

1. crime prevention -

12. timely intervention. -

2. offence -

13. social values -

3. rehabilitation-

14. cultural values -

4. reintegration-

15. developmental situation -

5. meaningful consequences -

16. compassion -

6. protection of the public -

17. empowerment -

7. accountability -

18. respect -

8. level of maturity -

19. dignity -

9. fair treatment -

20 participation -

10. protection of rights -

21. deterrence -

11. protection of privacy -

Q: **Deterrence** is not mentioned in the principles of the act? Why do you think it may have been intentionally left out?

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Lesson Implementation:

You may use the information and questions presented here in a variety of ways:

- Students can discuss all vocabulary and questions in small groups and then share their answers with the class.
- For each of the activities, if there is limited time, groups may be assigned one section to discuss develop and explain to members of other groups either as a jigsaw activity or to the whole class as a group presentation.
- You may want to have students develop their own questions based on one section of the act, or create their own trivia questions, word searches, crosswords based on the vocabulary and information presented.
- You may direct students to the specific sites below for more detailed information or to collect and review specific vocabulary.

For more detailed information visit the following sites:

Department of Justice Canada

Additional and more in depth information on the YCJA is available from the Department of Justice Canada Website (<http://canada.justice.gc.ca/en/ps/yj/ycja/ycja.html>)

- This includes links to the full Youth Criminal Justice Act [Youth Criminal Justice Act \(YCJA\)](#),
- [YCJA Explained](#) which offers descriptions of each component of the act as well as linked flowcharts of the judicial process,
- [The Youth Criminal Justice Act: Summary and Background \(PDF\)](#) provides a briefer overview of the act.

Canadian Legal FAQs: University of Alberta Legal studies Program

The Canadian Legal FAQs website produced by the University of Alberta Legal studies Program contains basic information regarding youth and the law in an informative question and answer format.

<http://www.law-faqs.org/nat/youth.htm>

Alberta Solicitor General and Public Security

More information on Young Offenders and the YCJA are available from the Alberta Solicitor General and Public Security website:

http://www.solgen.gov.ab.ca/corrections/offenders_youth.aspx

There is also available a downloadable version of the *Youth Criminal Justice Act* Canada Pocket Guide (<http://www.solgen.gov.ab.ca/downloads/documentloader.aspx?id=45626>)

This website also contains extended information on:

[Alternative Measures](#), [Bail](#), [Criminal records](#), [Extrajudicial Sanctions](#), [Facilities \(adults & youth\)](#), [Offenders \(adults\)](#), [Offenders \(youth\)](#), [Pardons](#), [Probation & Parole](#), and [Youth Justice Committees](#),

As well as a comprehensive glossary of terms: <http://www.solgen.gov.ab.ca/corrections/glossary.aspx>

ACJnet

For additional resources and research ACJnet Canada has a comprehensive listing of public legal education organizations, resources, and research at:

<http://acjnet.org/napubliclegaled/>