

Over-10s and the law

At the age of ten, young people can:

- Face criminal proceedings. A child under ten is not considered to be capable of deciding whether an action is right or wrong. They cannot be taken to court and charged with a criminal offence. If you are aged ten but under 14 years old you are considered to be responsible for a criminal offence and are treated in the same way as any young person under 18.
- Be fingerprinted, photographed and searched while in police custody
- Be sued for negligence. Negligence is defined as failure to act with reasonable care thus causing damage to other people or property. An injured party has the right to sue for compensation.

What this means

All young people over the age of 10 are considered responsible in the eyes of the law. Here are some laws that it is worth young people being aware of.

It is illegal to

- Stream live TV without a TV licence
- Download music, films, TV, games etc without paying for it or otherwise obtain it under licence from the copyright holder
- Defame someone (known as libel when written or slander when spoken) eg on social media
- Write malicious code
- Take or share an 'indecent' picture of yourself if you're under 18. (*if it's naked, a topless girl, contains genitals or sex acts including masturbation it will be 'indecent'*)
- Look at, own or share someone else's 'indecent' picture if they are under 18.
- Force or pressure someone to do a sexual act they don't want to do

16 year olds and the law

At 16, teenagers can:

- Apply for legal aid
- Receive a community sentence called a Youth Rehabilitation Order
- Be detained in custody (but not in an adult jail) under a Detention and Training Order - the maximum term is two years but some of this will be served under supervision in the community

A young person found guilty of a serious crime, such as murder or serious assault, can be detained for longer periods.

16 year olds and relationships

- Have sex, gay or straight, as long as their partner is also 16+ (or 17+ in NI)
- Move out of the family home (but if under 17, social services may apply for a care order)
- Rent accommodation (but an adult guarantor is required)
- Get married (with parental consent)

Medical treatment

- Give consent to medical, dental and surgical treatment
- Choose their own doctor
- Pay prescription charges - unless pregnant, on income support or in full-time education (law differs in Wales)

Study, work, benefits and money

- Get free full-time education (at school, sixth form college and city technology college). This is compulsory until they are 18.
- Access school records
- Claim benefits and get a National Insurance number (this should be sent automatically a few weeks before their 16th birthday)
- Join the armed forces (with consent of parents or carers)
- Work as a street trader and/or sell scrap metal
- Earn the minimum wage
- Claim child tax credit if responsible for at least one child
- Invest in a cash ISA

Leisure

- Drink beer or cider with a meal in a pub or hotel (but can't be the person buying it)
- Do the football pools and play the National Lottery
- Buy Premium Bonds
- Fly a glider
- Order their own passport

Driving

- Ride a moped with a maximum engine power of 50cc (and a provisional licence), drive an invalid vehicle (with a licence) and a mowing machine or small tractor.
- Drive a car if receiving mobility allowance

17 year olds and the law

At 17, teenagers can be:

- Interviewed by the police without an adult present, and given a reprimand or warning
- Given a community sentence called a Youth Rehabilitation Order
- Detained in custody (but not in an adult jail) under a Detention and Training Order - the maximum term is two years but some of this will be served under supervision in the community

A young person found guilty of a serious crime, such as murder or serious assault, can be detained for longer periods.

Medical

- Donate blood

Driving

- Drive most types of vehicle, with a provisional licence, as long as there's an over-21 year old in the passenger seat who is qualified to drive
- Drive alone if they have a full licence and proper insurance
- Apply for a private pilot's licence for a plane, helicopter, gyroplane, hot air balloon and airship

But...

- If a teenager passes their driving test at 17, they will be subject to two years' probation during which their licence can be revoked after six points instead of the usual 12, and then they have to retake the test
- L-plates must be clearly displayed
- Learner drivers must have appropriate insurance

18 year olds and the law

At 18, teenagers can:

- Vote in local and general elections
- Stand for election as an MP, local councillor or mayor
- Serve on a jury
- Be tried in a magistrate's court, and go to prison if found guilty of a criminal offence
- Make a will
- Pawn stuff in a pawn shop

Relationships at 18 years old

- Get married without parental permission
- If adopted, see the original birth certificate (and have their name added to the birth contact register)

Medical treatment

- Consent to their body being used in a medical study
- Carry an organ donor card

Leisure

- Buy cigarettes, rolling tobacco and cigarette papers
- Buy alcoholic drinks in a pub or a bar
- Buy fireworks
- View, rent or buy an 18-rated film
- View, rent or buy pornographic material that does not contravene UK obscenity laws
- Place a bet in a betting shop or casino
- Get a tattoo
- Get body piercings

Driving

- Ride a motorbike above 125cc with a licence
- Drive lorries between 3,500kg and 7,500kg (with the appropriate licence)

Money

- Open a bank account

Things an 18-year-old still can't do legally

- Adopt a child*
- Supervise a learner driver*
- Drive a bus*

** All require the person to be 21*