



## **What Is Teen Court?**

Teen Court is an alternative approach to juvenile justice where teen defendants are held accountable for their actions by peers. It allows teens who have made poor decisions an opportunity to recognize their mistakes and learn from them without acquiring a juvenile record. At the same time, young offenders learn to respect themselves, their school, law enforcement, the community, and the legal system.

## **What is the Mission of Teen Court?**

The mission of Jefferson County Teen Court is to constructively allow first time offenders to take responsibility, be held accountable, and make restitution for violating the law through a peer operated sentencing hearing. Teen Court is a diversion program and based upon the concept that a youthful offender is less likely to offend again if he or she must appear before a jury of his or her peers - especially when the peers clearly communicate zero tolerance for misbehavior.

## **How Does Teen Court Work?**

Teen Court is a REAL court for juvenile offenders who have been charged with misdemeanors. Teen Court is a sentencing hearing, **not** a hearing to determine guilt or innocence. Defendants are represented and prosecuted by teen attorneys and go before a jury of their peers who decides how the defendant will be held accountable by rendering a constructive sentence for the defendant. Sentencing includes mandatory service on the Teen Court jury and an oral apology to the parents/guardian. Additional sentences may include, but are not limited to, community service, finding employment, attending job skills training class, attending ASAP, and/or adhering to a curfew.

## **What Are the Goals of Teen Court?**

The primary goal of Teen Court is to educate youth who make unfavorable decisions to be accountable and responsible for their actions. In addition, Teen Court teaches competency and leadership skills to both teen volunteers and defendants. Teen volunteers are placed in integral roles that empower them to address problems within their community, enhancing their competence and developing and strengthening their sense of citizenship. Furthermore, Teen Court empowers youth to assume leadership roles and to address juvenile crime in their community while educating them about the judicial process through direct participation.