

## ***What to expect from your experience dealing with Harrison County Juvenile Probation***

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Your child has been charged with a crime. You can expect courteous and helpful information from the staff at Harrison County Juvenile Probation. We will not tolerate violations to the conditions of release, nor the conditions of probation and will hold your child accountable for their actions. We will do this in a clear and consistent manner; however, we will have to work as a team, in order for your child to be successful. Below is the process of our department:

**Arrest-** The arrest of your child is undoubtedly, very hard to deal with. We do not expect you to fully understand the process and that is the reason for this informational letter. At the time of arrest, we have a few options: we can detain your child in juvenile detention or we can release your child back with you. If your child has been previously referred to this office or has been charged with a crime against person, drug related offense, or a threat of harm, we automatically detain.

**Detention-** Detention serves as a short term placement for your child. It allows the probation department to investigate their past behavior, home environment, and the facts surrounding the arrest/ incident. While your child is in detention, the probation department may ask for the child to be screened by a mental health professional, drug and alcohol counselor for dependency concerns, or provide your child a cooling off period; especially in cases of domestic/ family violence. The child cannot be detained more than 10 BUSINESS days, but can be released within hours of the detention. The probation office knows that the least restrictive environment is best for the child, but in certain situations, where the safety of the child or community is at stake, the child will be in detention until a plan of action is reached between the department and the parent.

**Conditions of Release-** Whether or not your child goes to detention or home, you will ultimately have to be responsible for the child and assure that he/ she follows the COURT ORDERED conditions of release. These will be a list of rules that the child will have to follow and you will be the person to ensure that they meet all of the requirements that the juvenile judge put into place for them. If you do not contact the juvenile probation department with violations, you could be in jeopardy of being brought to court due to contempt of court charges. You are instructed to report any and all violations to the attention of the supervising officer. Should you be having issues with your child, please contact the office, immediately. Sometimes as parents, we wait until we are at our wits ends to do anything, please do not wait that long. Let's start off on a good foot and tell your child that you and your supervising officer are a team.

**Court Appointed/ Retained Attorney-** Every child that comes through the HCJS will have to be represented by counsel, if it recommended that we place your child on probation. You will receive notice. You will be responsible for attorney fees associated with your child's defense. The money assessed in court will be divided over a 10 month time period and you will be required to make monthly payments for the court ordered costs.

**Summons-** You and your child will be called to the office for “service”. This is a notice of hearing to provide to your child’s school or to your place of employment. This is a written notice for you to appear in court on the day that the summons states. This paperwork will also accompany a petition. The petition will tell you what your child is charged with. Your child’s supervising officer will explain any questions that you have and will go over the rules of the courtroom and how to behave in court. Here is a brief list of rules:

- No cell phones- turn them off or leave them in the car
- No inappropriate clothing- dress like you would be going to church. DO NOT WEAR: hats, muscle shirts, or any item with offensive, vulgar, racist, sexist, gang related, obscene language or graphics, and no shorts, tank tops, or attire depicting drug or alcohol use or advertisement.
- Child- When speaking say yes ma’am/ sir or no ma’am/ sir and speak up. There will be a court reporter typing every word that is said in court. You have to speak up; the court reporter cannot type that you nodded your head yes or no and saying “yeah” or “nah” is not an answer
- The child will stand by their attorney, with the parent(s). Make sure you understand what you are agreeing to and what you are signing throughout the whole process
- When your court case is done, the child will wait with the probation officer and be asked over to the bailiff’s desk to thumb print a disposition. At this time the child and parent can come to juvenile probation and wait for the probation officer in the waiting room located in juvenile probation
- The probation officer will do a case plan and go over the conditions of probation and give you copies of everything that you and your child need to be successful on probation

There are 3 types of probation: deferred (you will not go to court, it is a gentleman’s agreement that you will do what is expected of you for 6 months) formal (you will be seen at least one time a month for one year) and intensive, otherwise known as ISP (this is where you are seen at least one time per week).

It is up to you to ask when you need to report. It is not the probation officer’s job to keep reminding you that you need to come into the office. Call when you need to and stay in direct communication with your supervising officer. Communication is important in any relationship and is very important dealing with the probation department.

During the scope of probation, community service will be offered. You will get a letter explaining when to appear for community service. You need to wear comfortable and appropriate clothing. No short shorts, tight tops, saggy bottoms, or tank tops. You will need to ensure that you are properly attired to be able to bend and crouch down and no part of your skin shows. If you do not come properly attired, you will be sent home and have zero credit for that appearance. Bring a lunch and water. We take breaks, especially when the weather heats up. If the probation officers feel it is too hot, community service can be called off early. In this instance, we will contact the parent to come and get them at the place that we are at OR at the office. We will give you that information when we make you aware that we are quitting for the day. Children are not unsupervised at any time and the probation officers work with the children to ensure that they do not get too hot or the job is not too hard. If the staff of HCJPD has to transport your child, all traffic laws will be obeyed. There is no riding in the back of pickup trucks

or not wearing seat belts. Make sure your child wears old clothing and shoes that are properly functioning. There are times that we walk long distances.

Programs will be offered for the parents and children, during the probation term. These programs are taught by WCJPD staff and professionals within the community. If your child is required to attend a program, you will be held responsible for non attendance. Please understand that planning and effort goes into the different programs and for them to be most effective, participation from you or your child is of vital importance. We, as a department, do not nickel and dime the families that we aid. We do require that you pay probation fees, as well as attend the programs and services that we are providing for you and your child. Should you not attend counseling, services like SOTP, or programs; you will be responsible to pay a \$30.00 no show fee to the department. We understand that emergencies happen and will be as understanding as we can, but will not tolerate no shows on a consistent basis.

Cellular phone numbers are given out for the children to use. Please do not abuse this privilege and respect our time out of the office. If you need to speak to a probation officer, text them first before calling, if a phone call is even warranted at all. We all have families and sometimes we cannot get right back to you, but will make every appropriate action to answer a LEGITIMATE issue after hours and on weekends.

During the probation term, there will be times that you will not agree with the probation officer and that is ok. Disrespect, by either party, will not be tolerated by administration. If you have a concern about the staff or need to speak about an issue with the Chief, please call and schedule an appointment. The staff, parent, and child; all have to be a unified force, to ensure the maximum chance of success during this time.

**Parents:** you are not snitching on your kids, tattle telling, or being mean when you report to the staff that your child is not following his/ her conditions of probation. You are placed under court orders to inform the staff of violations and failure to report them will result in a status hearing before the 402<sup>nd</sup> District Judge, who is also the juvenile judge of Wood County. You must report any and all violations within 24 hours of you finding out, or it is considered contempt of court.

If you or your child needs anything, please let the staff of WCJPD know. We are here to help and will provide you with our experience and work hard for the success of your child. If your child is not being successful at home, placement is an option. Placement can be at a boys/ girls home, boot camp, therapeutic environment, drug and alcohol rehabilitation, or mental health facilities. We do not want your child to be placed outside of the home, but if this happens, the child and the parent will be ordered to attend and complete certain aspects, set forth by the staff of HCJPD, before the child will be allowed to enter back into the home.

If your child is on felony probation and is placed, violates his terms of probation, or commits another offense, prison for children (TJJD ID) may be a possibility. We, as a department, do not want to send your child to prison, but sometimes, we have no alternative. Should your child be remanded into the care of the state (TJJD ID) you will no longer be under the care of our department and will directly speak to the correctional staff employed by the State of Texas, not Harrison County.

In closing, I take pride in this department and the services that we offer children. We promise to be a part of your team, but refuse to be the parent to your child. We will offer services and hold your child accountable, with your help. Please understand it is our job to aid you in your parental role, as well. We will be a unified force, the parent and the probation officer must work as a team. We are here to help and provide whatever service you need, however, if it gets to the point that the probation office is working harder than the parent or the child, other measures will be taken to ensure your child has the maximum chance of success, in a very short window of their lives.

Thank you for sharing your child with us and we look forward to a very successful probation term.

Melanie Whitehurst - Chief JPO Harrison County Juvenile Probation Department

[Melanie Whitehurst](#)

Melanie Holley – Assistant Chief/ ISP Juvenile Probation Officer

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Schyla Slade- Data Coordinator/ Administrative Assistant

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