

Court Support

The Criminal Justice System is confusing for many people and we are often asked to explain how the court system works and provide court support. Whilst I only have limited space in this article I would like to attempt to answer some commonly asked questions.

There are many different Courts in South Australia, such as the Youth Court, Coroner's Court, Family Court and Industrial Relations Court. In this article I wish to focus on the three main courts in which adult criminal matters are heard – Magistrates, District and Supreme.

Magistrates Court is for less serious offences, which are referred to as summary offences. It is also the court used for determining if there is enough evidence to proceed or commit a matter to be heard in a higher court, that is the District or Supreme courts.

More serious offenses are dealt with in the District Court and the most serious of offenses are dealt with in the Supreme Court. District and Supreme courts are held in Adelaide, Port Augusta and Mount Gambier. Cases in Whyalla which are to proceed to either court will usually be heard in Port Augusta or Adelaide.

Whilst court attendance and giving evidence can be stressful, there are steps which victims of crime can take to lessen the impact. It is important to be well rested the night before court. To give evidence when not refreshed can make the process seem much more difficult. For those anxious about attending court, a court tour can be arranged to familiarise victims of crime, other witnesses and their families with the workings of a courtroom.

When attending court, the Victim Support Service can provide a Court Companion. It is not always possible for victims of crime to have family or friends with them in court, especially if they are also witnesses, and so it can be reassuring for many people to know that there will be someone with them throughout the process.

The Court Companion may be the local Victim Support Service Regional Coordinator or a trained volunteer who will meet the victim at the courthouse and will stay with them until they are permitted to leave court. For further information and assistance regarding attending court support please contact Victim Support Service.

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