



Child Witness Project (CWP)

What is the Child Witness Project?

The Child Witness Project is designed to assist and support young victims and witnesses of crime. The CWP provides assistance during the stressful period after criminal victimization and its disclosure but before resolution of the case in Court. The Child Witness Project provides Court preparation to assist child and adolescent witnesses to communicate their evidence without being traumatized by the challenging process of testifying.

Young victims and witnesses who are involved in Court preparation through the CWP will receive education and information about the justice process, knowledge about how to effectively manage both chief and cross examination, Court tours, information about special testimonial aids, as well as support on the day of their testimony. The CWP clinician will also assess the special and individual needs of all children and adolescents who are involved in the project and will advocate to ensure those needs are met. Court preparation can also include assistance with stress reduction, coping strategies, emotional support and referrals.

Funded by the Ministry of the Attorney General, there is no cost to the client for this service.

How Can I Access Services?

The CWP receives notification from London Police Services, the Ontario Provincial Police, and the Strathroy-Caradoc Police Service any time a child or youth (under the age of 18 years of age) in London or Middlesex County is a victim or a witness to a criminal offense. Cases typically involve child physical or sexual abuse, peer violence, domestic violence and a variety of other criminal offenses such as robbery, Internet exploitation and luring.

While the majority of referrals are received from the police services, referrals are also accepted from Crown Attorneys, parents, child protection agencies, physicians, therapists or anyone involved with a child or youth requiring assistance with Court preparation.

What is the Process?

The Child Witness Project recognizes that every child and circumstance is different. As such, the services offered by the CWP will vary from client to client. Depending on the individual circumstances, services will involve any or all of the below components:

Individual Assessment - Staff at the CWP begin the process with a thorough intake to assess a client's individual situation, special needs, and personal concerns related to testifying. Questionnaires developed by the CWP help to identify the client's most salient fears about Court and their knowledge of the legal process. More in-depth assessments can be completed at the request of the Court and often include an in-depth interview with parents or caregivers as well as standardized psychometric tests which assist in assessing a client's ability to testify, or special accommodations they may require.

Court Preparation - We provide education around Court procedure and etiquette, the role of a witness, oath taking, examination in chief and cross examination, legal terminology, available testimonial aids, the role of Court personnel (Crown, Judge, Defense etc.). Coping strategies and stress-reduction techniques are often explored in Court preparation. Court preparation often includes meeting with the child witness project clinician, a Court tour and a meeting with the Crown Attorney.

Court Accompaniment - The CWP clinician will attend on the day of the Court proceedings to provide support to the victim or witness while they are giving their testimony.

Coordination with Other Services - Case coordination among the key stakeholders is an integral part of the process. The Child Witness Project works closely with the Crown Attorney assigned to each case as well as the investigating officers, to ensure that they are well aware of each child's needs, emotional well-being and feelings about Court. Collaboration with key stakeholders allows the CWP clinician to keep victims and witnesses informed of Court dates and adjournments. More in-depth consultation with the Crown Attorney with respect to testimonial competency and the need for testimonial aids is provided on a case-by-case basis.

Support for Parents/Guardians - Having a child involved as a victim or witness in the Court process can be stressful for parents and caregivers. We can address any questions or concerns, and ensure that parents and caregivers are well informed about the process. The CWP recognizes that the extent to which children are able to cope with the aftermath of physical and/or sexual violence, as well as the additional stress of testifying, depends much on the support received from their parents and other family members. We strive to ensure that parents and caregivers are in the best position possible to support their children.

