

N. Legal Skills

Advanced

Knows the responsibility to register for the selective service (if male)	LS-5
Aware of the availability of free legal services	www.slsct.org Connecticut Legal Rights Project (CLRP)
Understands the consequences of signing a contract or lease	LS-6
Knows the legal penalty for all of the following: ⇒ Buying, possessing, selling and smoking marijuana and other drugs; Buying and drinking alcohol if under age; Trespassing; Shoplifting; Burglary; Possession of stolen property; Traffic Violations	LS-7 LS-8 LS-13 http://www.jud.ct.gov/lawlib/Documents/2014_Table_Fines_and_Penalties.pdf https://www.cga.ct.gov/2015/rpt/pdf/2015-R-0219.pdf https://www.cga.ct.gov/2015/rpt/pdf/2015-R-0055.pdf

of Rights. You must still register with the Selective Service System, but you may be permitted to serve through noncombat civilian service. Discuss this with your parents before deciding what to do.



Selective Service System

P.O. Box 94638
Palatine, IL 60094
(847) 688-6888

U.S. Air Force Academy

Colorado Springs, CO 80840-5151
(719) 333-1818
www.af.mil

U.S. Military Academy

West Point, NY 10996
(845) 938-4911
www.usma.edu

U.S. Naval Academy

121 Blake Road
Annapolis, MD 21402
(410) 293-1000
www.nadn.navy.mil

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“Will I get drafted?”

Throughout U.S. history, young men have been called for military service. From colonial times through the Vietnam War, eligible males over eighteen have been drafted. In 1973, the government ended the draft, replacing it with a “stand-by draft” for men and voluntary service for men and women. All males, within thirty days of their eighteenth birthday and continuing up to age twenty-six, are required to register with the Selective Service System. This rule doesn’t apply to women. Registration provides the government with a list of men to call up for service in the event of a national emergency. Failure to register is a crime with a penalty of five years in prison or a \$250,000 fine.

Men and women may join the army, navy, air force, marines, national guard, or coast guard. If you’re interested, contact your local recruiter. He or she will give you complete information about enlisting, including benefits, length of service, and education and travel opportunities. If you’re thinking of a career in the military as an officer, contact the Naval Academy in Annapolis, Maryland; the Air Force Academy in Colorado Springs, Colorado; or the Army’s U.S. Military Academy in West Point, New York, for information.

You may not be eligible to join the armed services because of your age. Not all branches will take you if you’re under eighteen, unless you have your parents’ consent or you’re emancipated. You may also need your high school diploma or GED certificate to enlist. Some branches won’t take you if you’re on probation or parole, or if you have a juvenile record. You may need to ask the court to destroy your record, which will clear the way for your enlistment.* These are all questions to discuss with your recruiter.

If, by reason of religious training or belief, you object to military training and service, you may be excused from active duty. A *conscientious objector* is protected by the U.S. Constitution and the Bill

* See Chapter 8, pages 170-171.

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Chapter 6

You and Other Important Rights

"Make a career of humanity. Commit yourself to the noble struggle for equal rights. You will make a greater person of yourself, a greater nation of your country, and a finer world to live in."

Martin Luther King, Jr., American civil rights leader and Nobel Prize winner

Laws regulate many aspects of your life—from how late you can stay out at night to whether you can sign a contract or cross the border. This chapter addresses these and many other types of rights, including the rights of gay, lesbian, and bisexual teens. You'll even read about a fifteen-year-old whose lack of telephone etiquette took him to the U.S. Supreme Court and changed the way juveniles across the nation are treated in the criminal justice system.

"Can I sign a contract?"

Most transactions today are put into writing, whether a lengthy legal contract or the fine print on a ticket stub or a store receipt. Putting an agreement in writing—between two people, two companies, or a person and a place of business—provides a record of the agreement. Everyone feels safer this way, particularly if one side doesn't follow through. But not all contracts need to be in writing to be valid. Some jobs may be done on an "as-needed" basis.

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Before you sign any document, read it carefully. Take the time to be sure you understand the terms. The fact that you're a minor may not excuse you entirely from having to comply with the contract should you later decide you want out.

no formal contract is involved. Once the work is done, payment is due. The law recognizes this type of informal agreement. Yard work, baby-sitting, and neighborhood car washes are examples.

A *contract* is defined as an agreement to do something for someone in exchange for something else. It may be between individuals, businesses, or governments. If one side fails to fulfill its part of the agreement, it's known as breaking the contract, or *breach of contract*. Generally, as a teenager, you may sue another person or business if you've been harmed or injured. Most states require that a parent, guardian, or other adult join in the lawsuit with you. Breaking a contract is a civil wrong, meaning that your case is filed in a civil, not criminal, court. The amount involved, whether \$10 or \$1,000,000, dictates the court where you'll file your lawsuit.

As a teenager, you may be able to enter into certain types of contracts. Your local laws tell you what kinds and under what circumstances. You may need to have a parent co-sign the contract with you. A cosigner is fully responsible if you back out of the contract or are unable to fulfill the terms.

If you're married and therefore emancipated,* you may be eligible to enter into other contracts—for example, the sale or purchase of a car or house. You can also obtain medical care and treatment for you and your spouse. That may require your signature on a medical agreement, which is a type of contract.

“Can I get out of a contract?”

The laws about contracts and minors aren't the same in every state. Because of your age and lack of business experience, you may be allowed to get out of a contract you sign. This is called

* See Chapter 5, pages 96–98.

disaffirming a contract, and it means you may refuse to honor its terms. The law recognizes that some businesses engage in unfair practices. Teenagers and young adults are frequent targets of scam artists and aggressive marketing campaigns.

To learn what legal protection you have, refer to your state's laws. Ask your librarian for help, or call your district attorney or attorney general's office and talk to a member of their consumer protection staff. The office may have a pamphlet to send you regarding your rights as a consumer.

In the United States, there's a “Cooling-Off Rule,” also called the “Door-to-Door Sales Rule.” If you buy something that costs more than \$25, you have three days to cancel the purchase. The sale must take place in your home or away from the seller's regular place of business—for example, at a home party, at a restaurant, or in a rented room. The rule doesn't cover mail or telephone orders, or sales at arts and crafts fairs. Contact the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) for specifics on how to cancel a sale and deal with any problems.



Federal Trade Commission
Office of Consumer Education
Washington, DC 20580
(202) 326-2222
www.ftc.gov

Request the “Cooling-Off Rule” information sheet. Or download the PDF:
www.ftc.gov/bcp/online/pubs/buying/cooling.pdf

If you sign a contract with an adult cosigner, you may be able to disaffirm the contract, but the cosigner remains responsible. Not all contracts you enter into may be disaffirmed. If you've obtained products or services and fail to pay for them, the provider may take you to court and might possibly involve your parents. This includes purchases involving food, clothing, lodging, and medical care.

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Other large-ticket items that you've contracted for—a car, sports equipment, or stereo—may or may not be disaffirmed. You may be able to return the item without any payment to the store, or you may be required to pay for its use or any damage.

A note of caution: Before you make any out-of-the-ordinary purchase or enter into a purchase agreement, take some time to think it through. Discuss your plans with an adult, and carefully read the contract before you sign it. If you don't understand something in the contract, ask for clarification. If the salesperson is uncooperative or acts confused, walk away from the situation. If the offer seems too good to be true, it probably is. Finally, always get a copy of the contract you sign.

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**“What will happen to me
if I get caught shoplifting?”**

Scene One: After school, Julie, Colin, and Matt stop at the local store for a snack and something to drink. Julie is by herself for a few seconds, and she slips a pack of gum into her pocket, knowing that she doesn't have enough money to pay for all of the items she wants. She pays for her chips and drink and leaves the store with her friends.

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Scene Two: Julie, Colin, and Matt only have 60 cents between them. They stop at the store, and while Matt keeps the car running, Julie and Colin enter the store. While Colin distracts the clerk, Julie puts a six-pack of beer in her backpack. They leave the store and begin to party at a nearby park.

Shoplifting is defined as taking property that's displayed for sale, without paying for it. It's a crime with both civil and criminal consequences. It's also a crime that requires *intent*. If you were shopping and put something in your pocket, continued shopping, went to the checkout, and paid for everything but the item in your pocket, you could be questioned about your intentions. If it turned out that you had the money to pay for the item and didn't act or look suspicious during the incident, you would probably be allowed to leave. Otherwise, you could be held for further questioning or for the police.

Scene One above presents a different picture. Julie knew that she didn't have enough money for everything she wanted, so she stole the gum and paid for the rest. This is shoplifting, and since her friends didn't know or play any part in the incident, they would be free to go if caught by the store owner.

Scene Two is your classic "beer run," where all involved know exactly what's happening and what their role is. Just because Julie took the beer doesn't mean the others won't be prosecuted if caught. Under the law, anyone aiding a crime shares full responsibility, just as if he or she had actually committed the act. Julie, Colin, and Matt could all be charged with shoplifting and possession of alcohol.

In many jurisdictions, a store can collect a civil penalty, plus the cost of the item taken, from the shoplifter or his or her parents. For example, the civil penalty for the stolen six-pack could be \$100, plus the retail cost of the beer.

If you shoplift, the police may send their report to the local prosecutor who decides whether to file charges. If filed, you'll be in

court facing possible detention or probation. First-time shoplifters usually go through a diversion program, which includes counseling, community service hours, and restitution. If you're caught a second time, probation may be considered, with specific terms set by the court. If you continue to steal, it's possible you'll receive detention or placement with the state department of juvenile corrections.

FYI



Cleptomaniacs and Shoplifters Anonymous

1-800-848-9595

Call to request printed materials or audiocassettes for a

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“What is ‘trespassing?’”

“Do Not Enter,” “Private Property,” “No Trespassing.” You’ve probably seen these signs on vacant lots, wooded areas, abandoned houses, or near factories. *Trespass* is defined as entering or remaining on someone’s property without permission. If there’s a sign posted (whether you see it or not), or if you’ve been told by the owner not to be on the property, this is considered adequate notice. Disregarding these rules can result in a charge of trespass, which is a misdemeanor.

It’s not always necessary to post a “No Trespassing” sign. If the owner of the property or a security officer tells you to leave and not return, that’s notice enough. If you return, you’re trespassing.

If you’re disruptive at a mall and a security guard tells you to leave and not return, you must do so. As long as you’re not excluded based on race, gender, religion, or disability, the restriction placed on you is valid.

Other places that are off-limits include mines, railroad cars and tracks, and fenced commercial yards.

If a property is fenced, it’s a good indication that you need permission to be there. This includes fenced property in rural areas where you might want to hunt or target practice. Places that aren’t as obvious include your neighbor’s yard or pool, school grounds when school is out, or church property and parks when they’re closed. Someone’s car or garage are off-limits, unless you have permission. If you’re ever in doubt about whether you’re trespassing,

- In Hawaii, no minors are allowed in dance halls where paid partners are available.
- If you’re caught peeking into someone’s window in South Dakota, you’ll be explaining why to a judge.
- If you’re under 16 in Washington, you must be with a parent or guardian at an outdoor music festival. If you’re not, you could be charged with trespassing and/or a curfew violation, depending on the time of day.

Independent Living Skills Module IV



ACTIVITY

Research the possible legal consequences for the following offenses and record the answers in the chart below.

Offense	Penalty
<i>Shoplifting</i>	
<i>Driving Without a License</i>	
<i>Robbery</i>	
<i>Possession of Stolen Property</i>	
<i>Assault</i>	
<i>Possession of Drugs</i>	
<i>Possession of a Dangerous Weapon</i>	

