

Understanding Our Clients

Children and young people

What do I need to know to work more effectively with younger clients and children?

- Read and apply the Law Society's [Representation Principles for Children's Lawyers](#). This is an essential requirement for any legal practitioner acting for children and young people.
- It is important that children and young people know they've got someone in their corner and that that person is an adult who is going to back them up, who is not going to judge them for doing the wrong thing and is going to represent them and tell their story so that the magistrate understands who this person is.
- A child client is as complicated as an adult client and as varied in their circumstances and presentation. They will be dependent on those around them and, as a result, will require careful guidance, yet they also share the same right to participate as adults do. When acting as their direct representative, it is important to ensure that their voice is heard, and it is your role as their representative to act on this just as you would for an adult.
- In **criminal matters** there exists an **obligation** for the legal representative to support a young person with their own capacity to self-determine, which will often mean excluding others who may seek to interfere with that (including family members/next of kin/caseworkers etc).
- When representing children in **care and protection matters**, there is a responsibility on the practitioner to be able to envisage what impact certain arrangements are going to have on the child long-term as that's not a capacity that children have. It's a fine balancing act of listening to the child, respecting what they are telling you and understanding why they want things to be a certain way but then also having a broader outlook as to all the adults and issues in the picture and seeing what is probably going to have the best impact for the child in the long run.
- Children are compassionate beings; they have concern for all the adults in their lives.
- Every child will need a different approach, every child is unique. You need to be able to try one strategy and if it doesn't work, come up with something else or rethink things so that you can make it work for that individual child.

- Young people lack the life experience that adults take for granted when they come to court. It can be really intimidating for the young person to be in trouble and then have to sit in a court room with adults, lawyers, police officers and a magistrate.
- Put yourself in their shoes, be cognisant of the fact that many of them were dealt circumstances out of their control. By the time we intersect with them in the lobby of the children's court we are approaching a young person who has an origin story involving a lot of challenges and are intersecting with them at a really important point in their life.

Support services for non-legal issues – referral options

Online referral databases

These online databases may also assist you to find appropriate non-legal services for your client.

- [WayAhead Directory](#) – online database used to find local services, to make referrals and access mental health information and resources.
- [Ask Izzy](#) – search over 350,000 services to find housing, meals, healthcare, counselling, legal advice, addiction treatment and more.
- [Data Diction LINCS](#) – LINCS is used by almost all councils in the Sydney area and list community services
- [My Community Directory](#) – directory of health and community services in NSW and other states.
- [Infoxchange](#) – national database of community support services.

Action learning activities

- Reflect on the points raised in the [Understanding Our Clients video](#) and consider if there are aspects you could improve on in the way you work with children and younger people. Take action to make changes where appropriate.
- Think about what you can do to help your client feel less intimidated in the courtroom setting and put this into action. Consider what worked well and what you would do differently next time.
- Discuss support services for non-legal issues with your client and help your client access these services if required.

- Read the Law Society's [Representation Principles for Children's Lawyers](#) and apply these principles to your practice.
- Complete the relevant [Lawyer Education Series modules](#) and reflect on your learnings.
- Review one or more of the resources below and consider how you can apply any insights to your practice.

Useful resources

- **The Law Society's** [Representation Principles for Children's Lawyers](#).
- **Legal Aid NSW** Lawyer Education Series Training Module [Care and Protection: Representing Children](#).
- **Legal Aid NSW** Lawyer Education Series Training Module [Children's Crime](#).
- [The Legal Aid NSW Podcast Channel](#) that you can access via our Podbean account or wherever you get your podcasts. The series covers a variety of topics. Use the search function or topic list to find podcasts that may be relevant.
- [The Bugmy Bar Book](#) summarises key research relating to social disadvantage and deprivation. It is hosted on the Public Defenders Website and is designed to equip lawyers with a sophisticated, accurate understanding of the impacts adverse experiences can have upon individuals.
- [Legal Aid NSW Quality Standards Manual](#) – this document outlines the Practice Standards, Client Service Standards, Panel Requirements and Law Practice Requirements that apply to your role.