

Neighborhood Courts Participant Frequently Asked Questions



1. What is Neighborhood Court?

Neighborhood Court is an alternative to the traditional Criminal Justice system. Instead of prosecuting the case in Criminal Court, the District Attorney's Office refers appropriate low-level misdemeanor cases to Neighborhood Court. At Neighborhood Court, volunteer panelists—qualified residents who live and work in the community—hear the case in what is called a conference. Conferences are held at various community locations throughout the County. The panelists use restorative justice principles to problem-solve and address the harm caused to the victim and the community by the incident. There are no judges, juries, or attorneys. All Neighborhood Court hearings are voluntary and confidential.

2. How do cases get referred to Neighborhood Court?

If a misdemeanor case is appropriate for Neighborhood Court, the District Attorney's Office will reach out to the person cited. If you have received a phone call or a letter stating that you may be eligible for Neighborhood Court, please call the number on the letter to get more information, determine your eligibility, and schedule a conference date.

3. What happens when I go to Neighborhood Court?

Prior to your Neighborhood Court Conference, you will be contacted by the District Attorney's Office. At the Conference, three volunteer panelists will meet with you and discuss the incident. The goal of the conference is for the panelists and the participant to reach a mutual agreement to make things right. To be successful in Neighborhood Court, and have your case closed, you must complete the agreement. **If you decline to participate, would like to dispute the incident in question, or you do not make contact, your case will proceed through the criminal court system.**

4. Do I need to go to Criminal Court too?

If you attend Neighborhood court, you do not need to go to Criminal Court. If you successfully complete Neighborhood Court, you will not be charged with a crime and you will not have a criminal conviction on your record. **If you do not complete the agreements given during the conference, your case will proceed through the criminal court system.**

5. I thought my case was dismissed. Why am I being asked to go to Neighborhood Court?

Your case has not been dismissed. It has been diverted to Neighborhood Court. The District Attorney's office has determined that you are eligible to resolve your case through the Neighborhood Courts diversion program. Participation is voluntary. If you participate and successfully complete the directives, the DA's

Office will not charge the case and the matter will be dismissed. **If you choose not to participate, or if you fail to comply with the Neighborhood Court directives, your case will proceed through the criminal court system.**

6. Is there a cost to participate in Neighborhood Court?

Yes. Neighborhood Court Fees are on a sliding scale of \$50- \$100 for misdemeanor offenses. This is a small cost compared to what you would pay in Criminal/Traffic Court fines and fees. If you currently receive CalFresh, CalWorks, General Assistance (GA), or Supplemental Social Income (SSI), you may qualify for a fee reduction or waiver. **You must submit proof within fourteen (14) days of your conference date, or you will be responsible for the full program fee.**

If you have legal questions, you can call a lawyer: You can speak to a defense attorney at no cost to you by calling the Public Defender's Office at (831) 429-1311.