

# Arraignment Hearing (Plea)

An arraignment hearing is a meeting with the judge where your child is formally charged and has the chance to “answer” to the charges. That means he will “enter a plea” by telling the judge he is guilty or not guilty of the charges against him. The charges and your child’s plea become part of the court record.

**Before the arraignment hearing**, your child’s own attorney or the public defender (PD) will meet privately with your child to discuss available options. He will help your child decide which one to take. The options are:

1. **Plead guilty** and get a decision from the judge about his consequences either right then or at a later hearing.
2. **Plead No Contest.**
3. **Plead not guilty** and prepare for an adjudicatory hearing (trial).
4. **Ask the judge to postpone the hearing** so the PD has more time to prepare your child’s case.

**At the arraignment hearing**, your child is:

1. Informed of his rights.
2. Formally charged by the court (judge).
3. Asked how he wishes to plea (admits or denies he committed the act).

**Denies  
Guilt**

The judge schedules an Adjudicatory Hearing (a trial before the judge with evidence and witnesses)

**Admits  
Guilt or  
Pleads  
No  
Contest**

If the state attorney, PD, and your child have already agreed to what should happen, they may present a “plea bargain” to the judge. The judge will agree with their deal or delay his decision until the Disposition Hearing (sentencing).

The judge makes a decision on his own.

The judge schedules the Disposition Hearing to determine consequences.

## What You Can Do While Waiting for a Final Decision by the Judge

### 1. Help your child stay out of trouble.

Close supervision may avoid more serious charges. If your child disobeys any court order, you should tell your child’s probation officer.



By Lakeland 1 Prodigy Artist Sean

### 2. Visit your child as often as possible if he has to stay in a detention facility.

Show you care and support him even though he has made mistakes and poor choices. The decisions were bad; your child is not.

### 3. Give helpful information about your child to everyone who is involved in his case.

The better they understand your child, the better his case plan, the results, and his future will be.

### 4. Gather all the information you need to understand what is happening and how you can help.

Ask for names and numbers for everyone you meet. Write down ways to get help, questions, etc.



### 5. Ask questions.

Ask anyone... about anything..., especially your child’s Juvenile Probation Officer (JPO).

### 6. Let everyone (JPO, attorney, etc.) know you want to be involved.

Work with them throughout the process. Attend every meeting.

### 7. Never miss a meeting, court hearing or discussion.

Ask others if they can be flexible around your schedule. Call in if you cannot go in person.

### 8. Keep a working phone and return calls quickly.

The Florida Department of Juvenile Justice

Rick Scott, Governor

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