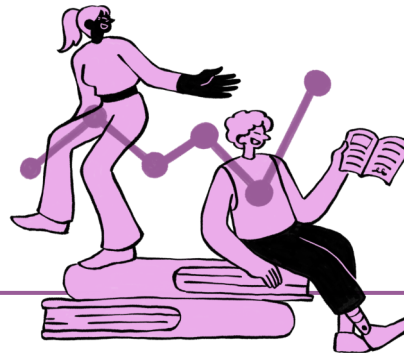


Understanding your rights in the U.S.

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What are rights?

- Rights are legal protections and freedoms recognized by the U.S. Constitution, federal law, and state law.
- These rights help protect people from unfair treatment by the government and, in some cases, by private institutions.
- Some rights apply to everyone in the United States, while others may depend on citizenship, immigration status, age, or the situation.
- Knowing your rights can help you make informed decisions and seek help when needed.

Important rights to know

Freedom of Speech (1st Amendment)

- The government generally cannot punish people simply for expressing opinions peacefully.
- This may include speaking, writing, peaceful protest, art, or sharing ideas.
- However, some speech may be limited, such as true threats, harassment, defamation, or incitement to immediate violence.
- Private companies (such as some employers or social media platforms) may have their own rules.

Simple idea: You usually have the right to express your views peacefully.

Freedom of Religion (1st Amendment)

- You have the right to practice a religion, change religions, or choose no religion.
- The government cannot force you to follow a religion.
- Public institutions must generally remain neutral toward religion.

Simple idea: Your faith choices are protected.

Right to Due Process (Fifth and Fourteenth Amendments)

- Due process means the government must follow fair legal procedures before taking away life, liberty, or property.
- This can include notice of legal action, an opportunity to respond, and a fair hearing in many situations.
- Due process protections can apply in criminal, civil, school, and immigration contexts, though the rules differ.

Simple idea: The government must follow fair rules.

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Equal Protection of the Laws (Fourteenth Amendment)

- The government must apply the law fairly and cannot discriminate in ways that violate the Constitution.
- Anti-discrimination laws may also protect people in schools, housing, employment, and public services.

Simple idea: People should be treated fairly under the law.

Right to Remain Silent and Right to a Lawyer (Fifth and Sixth Amendments)

- If questioned in a criminal case, you may have the right not to answer certain questions.
- If charged with a crime, you have the right to a lawyer.
- If you cannot afford one in qualifying criminal cases, a public defender may be appointed.

Simple idea: You may not have to answer questions alone in a criminal case.

Important Note for Immigrant Families

- Immigration law is separate from criminal law in many ways, and rights can work differently depending on the situation.
- Everyone in the United States has certain legal protections, but immigration status may affect some benefits, voting rights, or procedures.
- If you have immigration concerns, speak with a licensed immigration attorney or qualified legal aid organization.

What To Do If You Think Your Rights Were Violated

- Stay calm and respectful.
- Write down names, dates, locations, and what happened.
- Save documents, messages, or photos if relevant.
- Seek help from a trusted adult, attorney, or legal aid group.

Educational disclaimer



- This handout is for general education only and is not legal advice.
- Laws may change and can differ by state or by individual circumstances.