

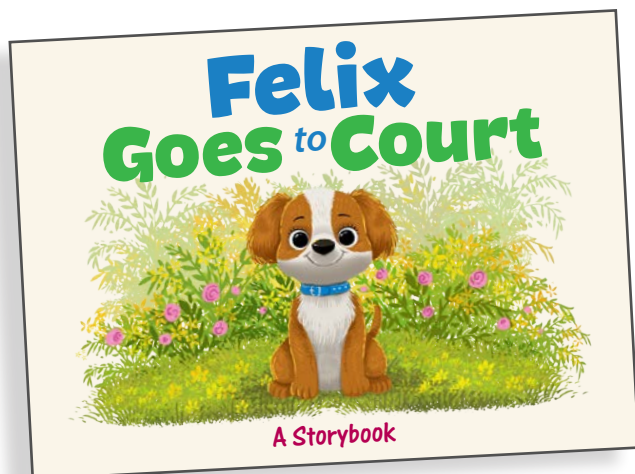
Felix Goes to Court

Tips for Parents and Helpers



The Department of Public Safety, Victim Services Program will work with your child to prepare them for their important role as a victim/witness in court. They may use the storybook, *Felix Goes to Court*, to help explain the court process. It is especially designed for child victims of crime **5 to 11 years old** and it is accompanied by an activity book with relevant age-appropriate activities that can serve as an ice-breaker when talking to a child.

The storybook may also be a useful tool for RCMP/police, Crown prosecutors, counsellors and support persons. Its simple language and engaging graphics will help them explain what may happen after a child becomes a victim of crime.



The Storybook and these tips will help parents or guardians of a child victim talk to their child about going to court, testifying, telling the truth, and so on.

Most importantly, the storybook is not a stand-alone resource. It is intended to complement the information that Victim Services and justice professionals already provide to child victims and their parents. The most important role of parents is to reassure their child throughout the court process that there are people ready to help them and keep them safe. This tip sheet also includes references to more detailed Victim Services resources.

What is the story about?

The structured storyline introduces a puppy named Felix who becomes the victim of a crime, tells a trusted adult (his Mom), goes to the hospital, calls the police, and meets with Victim Services where he finds out he can get help for his nightmares and sad feelings. We see the puppy going back to Victim Services for court preparation and then telling the court what happened (testifying) by video camera in a separate room. A Victim Service Coordinator sits with Felix for support.

Finally, Felix learns the judge has found the accused guilty. Felix draws a picture for his "impact statement" to show the court how the crime hurt him. In the end, the offender is sentenced to *"help clean up in the community, stay away from Felix, and behave himself."*



Reading *Felix Goes to Court* with a child – Tips and resources



Felix lives with his family in a little home on a hill. Felix's favorite toy is a little red ball that is fun to roll down the hill.

Key Messages:

It's just an ordinary day and Felix is out having fun.



One day, the ball rolled too far. It went across the street and under a fence.

Key Messages:

Reassure the child that Felix is not to blame for what happens next just because his ball rolled under the fence. It is never the victim's fault. Big Dog had no right to bite and harm Felix. Hurting someone is wrong.



Felix crawled under the fence. He didn't notice an adult dog watching him. Suddenly the Big Dog ran up and bit Felix's paw. It hurt a lot.

Key Messages:

It is wrong to harm another person by stealing their things, hitting, touching or bothering them in a way that makes them feel uncomfortable. If what they did is against the law, it is called a crime. The person who was harmed is called the **victim**.



Felix limped home. "Mom!" he called, whimpering. "I'm hurt. Help!!"

Key Messages:

Felix tells his Mom what happened. It's important for a child to tell a trusted adult when they have been harmed by someone. Children may feel responsible for being victimized. They may feel what happened is their fault because they made poor decisions or went somewhere they weren't allowed. Avoid blaming or being judgmental.



“Oh no!!” said his mother. “I’ll call 911!” The ambulance came and took Felix to the hospital. The doctor fixed up his leg.

Key Messages:

If your child is the victim of a crime, or has witnessed a crime, you should contact your local police or RCMP detachment. Don’t get excited or angry. It’s the role of parents to be supportive. Try to stay calm – that will help your child to stay calm too.



Officer Sara and Officer Robb came over to Felix’s house. “Please tell us what happened,” they said. Felix told them what Big Dog had done to him. “I’m scared,” said Felix. “Don’t worry,” said the police officers. “We will refer you to Victim Services. They can help you feel better in lots of ways.”

Key Messages:

The police may send an officer to speak with your child. Or they may ask you to bring your child to the police station. The police will be able to refer you to Victim Services to find out about the services and programs that are available to help victims of crime.



“I still have nightmares,” Felix told his Mom, “It makes me feel sad.” “Cheer up,” said his Mom. “Victim Services called. They want to meet with us tomorrow. They can get help for puppies like you. And you can bring your monkey with you.”

Key Messages:

Your child will be counting on you. Keep a positive attitude when talking about going to court. Showing your support is the first step in helping your child through the court process.



Felix and his mother went to the Victim Services office and met Marie. “Felix is feeling nervous,” said his Mom. “He cries a lot. Can you help him?” “Yes, we can,” said Marie. “It’s not unusual to be nervous about going to court. We can find a therapist that Felix can talk to about his feelings.”

Key Messages:

It is common for victims to feel nervous about testifying in court. Counselling may be available through Victim Services to help reduce the stress and anxiety your child is experiencing. Your child will look to you for strength. You may need to find support for yourself so you can support your child. Sometimes parents experience fear, anger, and other emotional distress when a child suffers trauma as the victim of a crime. Talk to the child about the tips for staying calm in the activity sheets.



A while later, a letter arrived at Felix's home. It said that Big Dog was charged with a crime and would be going to court. Felix would have to go to court and tell what happened.

Key Messages:

Be prepared for delays. It may take a long time to get to court. Whenever possible, try to shield your child from your anger, disappointment or frustration.



Felix and his Mom went back to Victim Services to talk about going to court. "Does Felix have to be in the courtroom?" asked Felix's Mom. "We can ask the judge to let Felix sit in another room. He can talk to the people in the courtroom on a TV screen," said Marie. "No matter where you sit Felix, you must promise to tell the truth."

Key Messages:

Ask about testimonial aids for child victims. If your child is concerned about facing the accused in court, speak to the Victim Services Coordinator or Crown prosecutor. They can explain the use of testimonial aids such as **screens** or **closed-circuit television**. Getting permission from the judge to use these tools may make it easier for your child to testify in court.

• *Services for Victims of Crime*



"Will I be all alone?" asked Felix, as tears came to his eyes. "You won't be alone when you testify," said Marie. I will be sitting right beside you for support when you tell the court what happened."

Key Messages:

Victim Services can help children deal with the stress of going to court in many ways. The Victim Services Coordinator can:

- Explain the court process, who will be in the courtroom, and the role of a victim.
- Provide information on the status of the case, and explain the verdict.
- Provide a trained support person during the trial.
- Provide information on Impact Statements and how they may be presented at a sentencing hearing.
- Arrange counselling and other services.



Kathryn, the Crown prosecutor, also met with Felix and his Mom. She explained to them: “The judge will listen to everyone’s story about what happened and then decide if Big Dog is guilty.”

Key Messages:

Your child may want to ask questions about what happened. They may need you to reassure them that they will be safe in the courtroom. However, do not ask questions that suggest a particular response. Your child may tell you what they think you want to hear. Do not rehearse your child’s testimony. Only the Crown prosecutor can talk to the victim about the specifics of the crime.

• *Picture this...A Guide to the Criminal Justice System*



When the day of the trial arrived, Felix was ready. With everyone’s help, he was not worried about testifying. He took three deep breaths and told himself, “I will do just fine.”

Key Messages:

Victim Services will give you tips and activities to help your child stay calm when they go to court.

- *You Are Not Alone: A Parent’s Guide to Helping Youth Victims of Crime*
- *You Are Not Alone: Tips for Teen Victims*



Felix was allowed to testify outside of the courtroom through a TV. The Crown prosecutor and the defence lawyer asked Felix a lot of questions. It was stressful, but it helped Felix to have Marie with him for support.

Key Messages:

Your child may be afraid of seeing the accused in the courtroom. Explain that the victim will be safe and supported. Vulnerable victims, like children, can ask to be shielded from seeing the accused. You may wonder about your child’s identity being made public. Your child’s name will not be in the media. The Court will automatically issue a publication ban for witnesses under 18 years of age to prevent the media from using any information that could identify a victim or witness.



After Felix finished answering questions in court, his Mom took him for a treat. “You were so brave and I am so proud of you! You did an important job telling the court what happened,” she told Felix.

Key Messages:

Emphasize that going to court and promising to tell the truth about what happened is important. No matter what the judge decides, explain that you are very proud of your child.



A few weeks later, Marie phoned Felix and his Mom to tell them that the judge had decided that Big Dog was guilty.

Key Messages:

Victim Services will explain that even if the judge does not find the accused guilty, it doesn't mean they didn't believe the victim. The Crown prosecutor must prove beyond a reasonable doubt that a crime happened.

- *Restitution: Repairing Financial Harm to Victims of Crime*



Felix and his Mom were asked to fill out an Impact Statement form to tell the court how the crime harmed them. Felix decided to draw a picture to show the court how he felt.

Key Messages:

If the judge finds the accused guilty, the next step for the victim is to make an impact statement. This is voluntary. It helps the judge know how the crime affected the victim. The victim may present the statement at the sentencing hearing. In the case of young children, they will likely not go back to court. However, parents of child victims may also prepare a statement and present an impact statement to the court.

- *Impact Statement Program*

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The judge ordered Big Dog to clean up in the community, stay away from Felix and behave himself.

Key Messages:

Victim Services will explain the verdict and the sentence. Not everyone who is guilty goes to jail. Some will serve their sentence in the community. The judge may order the guilty person, called the offender, not to contact the victim or the victim's family.

- *You can ask for No-Contact with the Offender*

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Felix is feeling much better these days. "Thanks to everyone who helped me!"

Resources

- *Know Your Rights*





Published by:



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and Information Service
of New Brunswick**

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In collaboration with:



www.gnb.ca/publicsafety

Felix Goes to Court was created by Public Legal Education and Information Service of New Brunswick (PLEIS-NB), a non-profit charitable organization. The goal of PLEIS-NB is to provide the public with information on the law. PLEIS-NB receives funding and in-kind support from the Department of Justice Canada, the New Brunswick Law Foundation and the New Brunswick Department of Justice and Public Safety. We gratefully acknowledge the collaboration of the New Brunswick Department of Justice and Public Safety, Victim Services program in the production of these resources.