

Neighborhood Court Victim Frequently Asked Questions



1. What is Neighborhood Court?

Neighborhood Court is an alternative to the traditional criminal justice system. Instead of prosecuting a case in Criminal Court, the District Attorney's Office refers appropriate low-level misdemeanor cases to Neighborhood Court. At a Neighborhood Court conference, volunteer panelists—qualified residents who live and work in the community—hear the case. Conferences are held at various locations throughout the County. The goal of the conference is for the panelists and participants to reach a mutual agreement that addresses the root of the behavior and the harm caused. As a requirement, all participants must be willing to admit their criminal behavior. 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 the person declines to participate, or would like to dispute the incident in question, or there is no contact, the case will proceed to the criminal court system.

3. What happens at Neighborhood Court?

Three volunteer panelists meet with the participant and victim (if applicable) to discuss the case. The panelists use restorative justice principles to problem-solve and address root causes of the behavior and the harm to both the victim and community. Together, panelists and participants may issue one or more directives. Directives are personalized and may take many forms.

4. How can I participate in the conference?

There are several ways that you can participate in the conference. Full, partial, or no participation. Full participation means that you attend and participate in the conference. Partial participation means that a victim advocate participates on your behalf, and no participation means that you do not participate in any form. If requested, the program coordinator and/or victim advocate will update you regarding the conference.

5. How can I request compensation for my damages?

A victim may request restitution for monetary loss that resulted from the crime committed by the offender. Please send documentation verifying your loss to Program Coordinator Elaine Johnson at elaine.johnson@santacruzcounty.us . You can also drop off or submit by mail to Santa Cruz County District Attorney's Office - Neighborhood Court, 701 Ocean Street, Room 200, Santa Cruz, CA 95060.