



# Understand Your Rights & Responsibilities in the United States

## YOUR RIGHTS

All people in the U.S. have basic rights. You must learn and know the laws. You are responsible for knowing the laws and understanding what may happen to you if you break them. In the United States, you can be **punished** if you break the law, even if you **did not know** about the law you broke.

These are just a few rights that are important for you to know:



Everyone who lives in the United States has basic civil rights, such as freedom of speech, freedom of worship, and the freedom to peacefully assemble.



Job discrimination is illegal in the United States. No one can use your race, color, religion, sex, and national origin to deny you a job.



If USCIS has granted you work authorization, you can work in the United States.



Public services and benefits are available to those who are eligible for them.



## U.S. LAWS

In the United States there are many laws. Every person in the U.S. is responsible for knowing the laws and understanding what may happen to them if they break them.

People can be arrested and punished if they break the law, even if they did not know about the law they broke.

The punishments can include things like:



**Fines (having to pay money)**



**Jail**



**Deportation (return) to a home country**

For this reason, it is very important that everyone in the U.S. learn and obey the laws.

If someone breaks the law, they can be arrested and their immigration status could be affected.

## CONSENT IN SEXUAL RELATIONS

Before having sex in the U.S., both people must consent –or agree –to it. This is true even if people are married or in a relationship. Consent cannot be forced by threats, violence or misinformation.

Silence is not consent, and someone cannot consent if they are unconscious or asleep.

In the U.S., there are laws against:

### VIOLENCE & EXPLOITATION

Intentionally causing harm or injury to another person is against the law in the U.S.

**Sexual violence includes –**

- trying to force someone to have sex or perform sexual acts
- forcing someone to have sex or perform sexual acts
- unwanted touching

**Physical violence includes –**

- pushing
- hitting
- strangulation
- any other act that could result in physical injury or harm

**Exploitation includes –** taking advantage of another person to profit from them or to pressure them to do something against their will.

For example:

- making someone work without pay or underpaying them for work
- forcing someone to steal or beg
- deceiving, forcing or coercing someone into sexual activity
- making someone marry against their will

**Violence and exploitation is against the law for everyone and it does not matter if the violence occurs between strangers, family members, or friends. For example, it is against the law for parents to hit their children or for a husband to hit his wife.**

## DISCRIMINATION & HARASSMENT

U.S. law prohibits discrimination and harassment.

Discrimination means:

- someone has been denied their rights
- someone has experienced unwelcome behavior because of their race, color, religion, sex (including sexual orientation, gender identity, or pregnancy), national origin, age, or disability

Harassment includes things like:

- provoking, stalking, and agitating through behavior such as intimidation, physical violence, threats of harm, and offensive images.

## CHILD ABUSE AND NEGLECT

A child is anyone under the age of 18. Children have the right to be safe. Every state in the U.S. has laws that protect children. These laws include parents and children. The types of harm that are illegal in the U.S. include:

**PHYSICAL ABUSE** - Hitting, slapping, beating, kicking, shaking, or any other kind of physical act that harms or injures, or could harm or injure a child

**SEXUAL ABUSE** - Any sexual activity between a child and an adult

**EMOTIONAL ABUSE** - Frequent rejecting, screaming, name calling or belittling a child such that it impairs their development and self-worth, or could impair their development and self-worth



**NEGLECT**- Not meeting a child's needs  
Some examples of neglect include:

- not sending children to school - all girls and boys in the U.S., including children who have disabilities, are required to attend school
- not taking children to the doctor when they need to go
- not supervising children appropriately - young children should be supervised at all times, especially in public places. The person who is supervising should be old enough to be able to care for a child and respond if there is an emergency. For example, a seven year old supervising a two year old would not be considered safe

**If you have been the victim of a crime, you have the right to seek legal action. To report criminal activity, contact your local police or sheriff's department first. They can determine if a report of criminal activity needs attention.**

**If it is an emergency, call 911.**

## CONTACT WITH THE U.S. CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM

If an individual is arrested and accused of a crime in the U.S., they are considered innocent until proven guilty. All individuals have a right to legal counsel in the U.S. criminal court system, meaning that if an individual cannot afford to hire a lawyer, they will be provided a publicly funded defense attorney.

Individuals who are not U.S. citizens should discuss their immigration status, and any pending immigration applications, with their criminal defense lawyer. If an individual is working with an immigration attorney, it is also important that the individual informs their immigration attorney of any previous or pending criminal arrests. Non-U.S. citizens who have been arrested should speak to an immigration attorney before filing any immigration applications or traveling internationally.



## HOW TO INTERACT WITH POLICE

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The role of police in the U.S. is to maintain public order and safety, enforce the law, and protect the rights of individuals. If someone encounters police in public, are stopped by them, or engages with them, they can follow these guidelines:

- Stay calm and control emotions
- Be respectful and don't argue
- Keep their hands visible and out of their pockets
- Don't run away
- Don't reach for anything suddenly
- Stay in one place and be still
- Don't touch or stand too close to a police officer