



4. The Legal Age

Please don't take the following as legal advice! It simply gives an indication of the law.

Professional Information and Advice

The Children's Legal Centre is an independent national charity concerned with law and policy affecting children and young people.

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At any Age

You may enter a bar with a person over the age of 18, if the licensee holds a 'children's certificate'. You can have your body pierced though your parent may have to accompany you and provide consent. You can enter a bingo club as long as you don't take part in the game. You can smoke cigarettes, but you aren't allowed to buy them until you are 16. If you are caught smoking by a

uniformed police officer or park keeper in a public place when under 16, they can seize your tobacco and cigarette papers, but not your pipe or tobacco pouch

At Age 5

You can drink alcohol in private. You become of compulsory school age.

At Age 7

You can open and draw money from a National Savings account or Trustee Savings Account.

At Age 10

You have full responsibility for your own actions and can be convicted of a criminal offence. If you are a boy, the law regards you as capable of committing any sexual offence, including rape. If you are convicted of, or cautioned for, one of the sexual offences specified in the Sex Offenders Act 1997, your name will be placed on the Sex Offenders register.

At Age 12

You can be trained to participate in dangerous performances, subject to the grant of a local authority license. If you are arrested you can be kept in police detention and placed in local authority accommodation, including secure accommodation, if you are charged with an offence. You can buy a pet.

At Age 13

If you are 'looked after' by a local authority you can be locked up in a secure unit of a children's home for 72 hours, or longer by court order, if you have a history of running away and you are likely to suffer significant harm as a consequence.

At Age 14

You can enter a bar on your own, but you can only buy soft drinks. It's a criminal offence to buy, attempt to buy or drink alcohol in licensed premises. You can get a 'light-work' job part time but there are restrictions - you cannot work for more than two hours on a school day or on a Sunday. You cannot work during school hours or work before 7am or after 7pm. During the school holidays you may not work for more than 5 hours a day nor for more than 25 hours a week. You can possess an air weapon under the age of 14 if you are supervised by someone aged 21 or over, or you are using it at a rifle club or shooting gallery.

At Age 15

If you are convicted of a crime, other than homicide or a serious crime and the offence is so serious that only a custodial sentence is justified or adequate to protect the public from harm you may be sentenced to a detention and training order for a maximum of two years. Half of this will be spent in young offender's institution or other accommodation and half on supervision in the community.

At Age 16

You can buy beer, cider or porter with a meal in the restaurant or other room used for meals in a pub or hotel. You may join the Army, Royal Navy and Royal Air force with parental consent. You can be used by another person to beg in the street or on any premises. You can register as a blood donor, but won't be called to give blood until 17. You're allowed to enter or live in a brothel (which you can do under the age of four). You can hold a license to drive an invalid carriage or a moped. If you're disabled, you may also hold a license to drive a car.

You can leave school on the last Friday of June if you are either 16 by that date or will reach 16 during the summer holidays before the beginning of the next school year. You are still entitled to receive full time education. Schools, sixth form colleges and city technology colleges are free. You can work full time if you've left school but there are some restrictions on the work you can do. For example, you can't work in a betting shop or in a bar during opening hours. You can sell scrap metal. You can join most trade unions at 16; you can join some unions if you're under 16. You can bet on the football pools and buy a lottery ticket. You can buy cigarettes, tobacco and cigarette papers. You can get a National Insurance Number. If you're female you can purchase emergency contraception (the 'morning after' pill) over the counter in a pharmacy.

A girl can consent to heterosexual intercourse and a boy can consent to homosexual act with another male over the age of 16. Neither a girl nor a boy commits a criminal offence if they have sexual intercourse below this age. Anyone in a 'position of trust' who is over the age of 18 will commit an offence if they have sexual intercourse or engages in sexual activity with a person aged 16 or 17 in their care.

You can apply for you own passport, but a parent or person caring for you must give written consent. This doesn't apply if you're married or in the armed forces. It's no longer an offence for a shopkeeper to sell you a knife, knife blade, razor, axe, or any article that has a blade or is sharply pointed which can be used to cause injury.

At Age 17

You can join the Royal Navy as an officer with parental consent, the RAF at 17yrs 6months and

the Army at 17 years and 9 months. You can donate blood without parental consent. A Care Order can no longer be made on you. You can hold a license to drive a car, a small goods vehicle and an agricultural tractor. You can obtain a private pilot's license to fly an aeroplane. You can buy or hire a firearm.

At Age 18

You can buy and drink alcohol in a bar, apply for a license to sell alcohol, join the armed forces without parental consent, you must be paid the minimum wage by your employer, you can enter a betting shop and bet, you can leave home without parental consent. Criminal charges against you will be dealt in the adult courts, you can serve on a jury, make a will, get married without parental consent and pay for dental treatment unless in full time education. You can donate your body to science without parental consent, vote in general and local elections, take part in an exhibition or performance of hypnotism, be tattooed and apply for a passport without parental consent.

At Age 19

All young people are entitled to full time education up to the age of 19.

At Age 21

You can adopt a child, supervise a learner driver if you have held a full license for three years and apply for a provisional license to drive a large passenger vehicle. If you receive a custodial sentence you will be sent to prison. You can become a Member of Parliament, a local councillor or a local mayor. If you were 'looked after' by the local authority between 16 and 18, the local authority continue to be under a duty to advise and befriend you and, in exceptional circumstances, to assist you in cash until you are 24.

Whilst every effort has been made to offer accurate and up to date information the Llandaff Diocesan Youth Department can take no responsibility for omission or errors.

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