Your Legal Rights

What is a LEGAL RIGHT? It is something guaranteed to every citizen. Where do you get your legal rights? Your legal rights come from the laws of this country. You will learn that the laws and your legal rights help you to live a better life.
Authority - the power or right to make decisions or to command. *Policemen and judges have the legal authority to do their jobs.*

Branch - a part of a larger thing. *The county and city are branches of the state government.*

Commissioner - a person elected or chosen to be in a group to do certain work. *The county commissioners meet once a week to direct the business of the county.*

Congress - a group of people given power to make laws. *The United States Congress is made up of the House of Representatives and the Senate.*

Congressman/woman - persons elected by the people to serve in Congress. *The Congressmen and Congresswomen in the House of Representatives are given power by the Constitution to make all laws necessary for the government of the United States.*

Consequence - the result of an action. *A car accident could be the consequence of driving too fast on slippery streets.*

Council - a group of people elected to make laws for a city or town. *This city has ten people on the City Council.*

County - a unit of local government in a state. *States are divided into areas called counties which have their own local government. Texas has 254 counties.*
**Debt** - something that is owed to another. *I will pay my debt of $20.00 to you when I get paid on Friday.*

**Executive** - a person with the authority to be in charge and to direct the matters of business or government/ the branch of government with the duty and power to put the laws into effect or carry out the laws. *The President of the United States is the head of the Executive branch of the government.*

**Federal** - has to do with the central government of the United States. *The authority to have an army is a federal power.*

**Government** - the group of elected and appointed people in charge of managing a country or state, city or town. *Abraham Lincoln said we have a government of the people, by the people, and for the people.*

**Guarantee** - a promise. Your right to worship is *guaranteed* by the Bill of Rights.

**Judicial** - one of the branches of government - has to do with the courts of law and judges. *The Judicial branch has the authority to hear and decide questions about the laws.*

**Legislative** - one of the three branches of government! has the power to make laws. *The Legislative branch of government is called the Congress. It has two parts: the House of Representatives and the Senate.*

**Liable** - to be responsible by law. *If you cause a car accident you are liable for the damage done to the other car.*

**Ordinance** - a rule or law made by an authority, usually a local authority. *The City Council passed a new traffic ordinance.*

**Privilege** - a special right given to a person or a group - a right that has been earned. *The State grants the privilege of driving a car.*

**Regulate** - to control, manage or set. *County ordinances regulate smoking areas in the County Court House.*
Regulation - a law, rule or order. *The factory has safety regulations to protect workers.*

Representative - a person who is chosen to speak or act for others. *We have the right to elect our representatives to Congress.*

Responsibility - a job or duty. *A parent has the responsibility to feed and clothe the children.*

Responsible - (1) having a job or duty. *The manager is responsible for opening and closing the store.* (2) able to be trusted, reliable. *A good citizen is someone who is responsible to obey the laws.*

Government

The United States is a nation of LAWS.

- The laws are made to carry out the everyday life of the nation and its people.
- Laws make sure our rights and privileges are protected. Laws make us responsible for our own actions.
- Laws guarantee safety and protection to the people.

This book was written to help you know your legal rights that come from the laws of this country. Legal rights are things that you are guaranteed by the government. Where do we get these laws? Laws are made by the government. The government is made up of representatives of the people. The representatives make the laws. These representatives are in different parts of the government. Different parts of the government make the laws that affect everyone in this country. The different parts of the government are called branches. The federal governing branch is called the Congress. The members of Congress are called congressmen, congresswomen, representatives, and senators. The people elect them by voting. Congress makes the laws. The chart on the next page shows how these branches work.
# Branches of Government

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In the state where you live, elected representatives in the legislature make the laws for that state. In the city and county where you live an elected group of people will make laws. These elected people may be called city council members and county commissioners. In some cities these elected officials are called aldermen. This is how the city government works. The City Council passes the ordinances for the parks in the city. The ordinances are the rules that tell what activities are allowed in the park. The rules tell what time the park opens and closes.

The laws are carried out by the leaders of the federal and state legislatures and the city councils. The executive branch leaders are elected by the people. The President of the United States is given the duty in the Constitution to see that the laws passed by the Congress are followed and obeyed. Other executive branch leaders are the governor of the state and the mayor of the city. Their job is to see that the laws of the state or the city are followed and obeyed. On the federal, state, and local levels there are groups whose job it is to enforce the laws. Some of these law enforcement officers you may know about are policemen and women, deputies, and state troopers.

The branch that decides the law is the judicial branch. The judicial branch is made up of judges and courts on the three levels of government. The courts are called city and county courts and magistrates, state district courts, federal districts courts, and Supreme Court. The judicial branch has the authority to hear and determine questions about the laws. Judges and courts decide if the law is being obeyed. These groups, representatives, and leaders are all responsible to the people to carry out the laws of the land.
Rights and Responsibilities

This book is a basic guide to your legal rights. You have rights and responsibilities. Legal rights include your rights and the rights of other people. Responsibilities may be said to be the legal rights of other people. Responsibilities are the things you are required to do by the law. This book is your guide to some of the laws, rights, and responsibilities that you have. The things you learn will help you make good decisions. This book will help you when you go to work or go to school. You need to know these things to be an independent adult. As soon as you are 18 years old, you have adult legal rights.

Some of your RIGHTS
1. To get married
2. To sign contracts
3. To buy things on credit
4. To work for pay
5. To vote
6. To make a will

Some of your RESPONSIBILITIES
1. To support yourself
2. To pay your taxes
3. To accept the consequences of your actions
4. To pay your debts
5. To serve on a jury
6. To be liable for your accidents
7. To respect the rights of others
8. To register for Military Service if you are an 18 year old man
9. To obey the terms of contracts and leases you sign

A privilege is a special right granted by an authority. The state government grants privileges and regulates them by laws. You have privileges if you follow the regulations.

Some PRIVILEGES
1. To drive a car
2. To buy beer, wine or liquor
3. To own property
4. To vote
The information in YOUR LEGAL RIGHTS is based on laws of Texas and federal laws. Many laws are the same in other states. Remember that all the laws that affect your rights cannot be given in one book. Not all laws are in this book. Laws are being changed all the time. If you have a legal problem, you should see a lawyer or legal aid office.