



What is your caseworker's role?

Your caseworker will inform you of the identified safety threats that led to your child being placed in out-of-home care. They will partner with you to assess your needs and help you with services to focus on reducing or eliminating safety threats and risks.

What is a Dependency Petition?

A dependency petition is a legal document addressed to the court about concerns that your child has been abused, neglected or abandoned and there is no parent able to safely care for your child. The dependency petition asks the court to step in and protect your child from harm and have the State assume temporary legal custody of your child. Children are returned home when the identified safety threats can be safely controlled and managed in the family home.

Attorney

You have a right to an attorney. If you cannot hire your own attorney because of your income, the court will appoint you one.

Volunteer GAL/GAL

Volunteer GALs (Guardians ad Litem) or GALs (Guardians ad Litem) are appointed by judges to advocate for your child. The volunteer GAL or GAL reports to the judge at court hearings what they believe is in the best interest of your child (under age 12) and what your child needs or wants. The Volunteer GAL or GAL will work to make sure that your child is always considered in every decision that the court makes.

Important Contacts

Caseworker's Name:

Need a Lawyer?

Office of Assigned Counsel:
Office of Public Defense
Phone: 360-586-3164
Email: opd@opd.wa.gov
www.opd.wa.gov/index.php/program/parents-representation

Volunteer GAL/GAL Name and Phone Number:

The Office of the Family and Children's Ombuds

investigates complaints about agency actions or inaction that involve a child or parent involved with child protection or child welfare services.
Toll free phone: 1-800-571-7321
Phone: (206) 439-3870
www.ofco.wa.gov

Report Child Abuse/Neglect

Call 1-866-END-HARM (1-866-363-4276)
24 hours/seven days a week hotline that will connect you directly to the appropriate local office.
www.dcyf.wa.gov/safety/report-abuse

You can also contact DCYF Office of Constituent

Relations at 1-800-723-4831 to understand the formal complaint process.

www.dcyf.wa.gov/contact-us/constituent-relations

If you would like copies of this document in an alternative format or language, please contact DCYF Constituent Relations (1-800-723-4831 / 360-902-8060, ConstRelations@dcyf.wa.gov).

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Understanding the Dependency Court Process

YOU HAVE THE RIGHT TO:

- Be treated with respect
- Know what is happening with your case and your child
- Receive culturally appropriate services
- Have your information kept confidential

YOU HAVE A RESPONSIBILITY TO:

- Participate in shared planning meetings
- Visit your child
- Let your caseworker know of phone number and address changes
- Explain what you need to be a safe parent

YOUR ROLE IS TO:

- Express your wishes for planning for your child
- Communicate with your caseworker and be involved in your case plan



Washington State Department of
CHILDREN, YOUTH & FAMILIES

Important to know

At any point during the court process, a judge can decide that your child can be safely returned home. However, if you are unable to make the changes necessary to keep your child safe, you could lose the right to parent your child. DCYF will offer you supports and services to help you to avoid this outcome and reunify with your child.



Dependency Court Process Timeline – Please make sure you talk with your lawyer about your court hearings.

| CPS REFERRAL | CHILD IS PLACED INTO PROTECTIVE CUSTODY | SHELTER CARE HEARING <i>(your child can be returned home after any of the listed court hearings)</i> | CONTINUED SHELTER CARE HEARING <i>(in some courts)</i> | FACT FINDING HEARING <i>(within 75 days of filing a Dependency Petition)</i> | DISPOSITION HEARING <i>(within 90 days of filing a Dependency Petition)</i> | FIRST DEPENDENCY REVIEW HEARING | PERMANENCY PLANNING HEARING | DEPENDENCY REVIEW HEARING <i>(Ongoing every 6 months)</i> |
|---|---|--|--|--|---|---|--|---|
| Process begins here | | | 30 days | 90 Days | 6 Months | 12 Months | 18 Months | |
| CPS receives a referral regarding abuse or neglect of a child. The referral is evaluated and either screened in for investigation, Family Assessment Response or screened out. If it is believed necessary to protect the child from imminent harm, your child may be removed from your home by the court or law enforcement. | Child is removed from your care and placed into out-of-home care either with a relative or foster home. A Shelter Care Hearing will be held within 72 hours of your child being removed from your home. | At this hearing, you can ask that the court appoint you an attorney. A judge decides whether your child needs to remain in out-of-home care or can be safely returned to you. You can ask that your child stay with relatives rather than in a foster home. If your child will remain in care your caseworker will set up a regular visitation plan. | The court again decides if your child will stay in out-of-home care or will be returned to you. The court reviews your Family Time visitation plan and where your child is living. | If you continue to object to the dependency, the court will take testimony from you and others about the identified child safety threats in the dependency petition. The court will either rule your child a dependent of the State or order that your child be returned to your care and dismiss the dependency or order your child safe enough to go home with an in-home dependency with court oversight. | If your child is declared a dependent, the court will order that you participate in services to reduce the safety threats in your home. The court will also address any placement or visitation issues at this hearing. | The court reviews your progress with services and considers if there are additional services that can strengthen your ability to provide a safe home for your child. The court might determine that it is now safe for your child to return home with an in-home dependency with court oversight. | The court decides what your child's permanent plan should be and also what your child's concurrent plan should be if you are unable to safely parent your child. | The court reviews your participation in services and if you have not made sufficient progress by this point, the court will order (in some cases) that the State file a petition to terminate your parental rights. If the termination petition is filed, there will be a trial where your attorney and the State's attorney will present evidence on your case. A judge will decide whether or not to terminate your parental rights. |

Shared Planning Meetings

Your involvement in all DCYF shared planning meetings is very important. You will help develop your family case plan to eliminate safety threats, create permanency goals for your child and make a plan to visit with your child. There are multiple types of meetings in which you will be involved. The most frequent types of meetings include Family Team Decision Making (FTDM) and Permanency Planning. These meetings are a great time to present your view, what you believe needs to change and what support you need to make these changes happen.

Parent, Child and Sibling Visitation

The initial Family Time visit plan is developed at the first Family Team Decision Making (FTDM) meeting. Your participation in regular Family Time visits with your child helps you and your child maintain your bond and connection during the time your child is not living with you. The Family Time visit plan will describe where, how frequently and how long visits will happen. Other details will include who can be at a Family Time visit and the level of supervision. Family Time visit plans can be updated at any time. Discuss your Family Time visit plan with your caseworker during monthly Family Time visits. If you need assistance in order to visit your child, your caseworker can help you.