

YOUR VOICE IN COURT

Court can be confusing and sometimes scary. We wrote this booklet to help you understand some of what is going on in the courtroom, and to explain who all the people are that are involved with you and your family. It may sometimes seem like people in court speak a foreign language, so we want to explain some of the words that they use. (A lot of the words we use are from foreign languages, too.)

Ask any questions about anything you don't understand. There are no stupid questions, and there are many people who want to help you.

We hope this helps you to understand what is happening in your case and, most importantly, to know that **you do have a voice in court, and if you use it, your voice will be heard.**

COMMONLY USED WORDS AND PHRASES

Case: Your family's situation in court is called a "case."

Court: The building where judges work, hearings are held, and papers are filed. Decisions are made here. This is where everyone meets to decide how things are going in your case.

Department of Social Services: The agency that has the responsibility of making sure that you and your family are cared for properly.

Hearing: This is when the judge listens to what people have to say about your case, and then makes decisions. You may be one of the people the judge listens to. In some cases you can come into the courtroom, in other cases you may need to tell your caseworker or GAL what you want the judge to know.

TITLES OF IMPORTANT PEOPLE WORKING ON YOUR CASE

CASA: "Court Appointed Special Advocate." This person volunteers his or her time to help you and your family while you are involved with the court. The CASA does this because he wants to, and for no other reason. He tells other people in the court what he thinks you want and need, and tries to make sure that you are always safe. This is one of the people we hope you will feel comfortable talking to whenever you have questions or concerns. It is okay for you to

talk to your CASA about your case worker, your foster parent, or your GAL. Not everyone gets to have a CASA.

Caseworker: This person works for the Department of Social Services. His (or her) job is to make sure that you and your family get the things and services you need. This is one of the people we hope you will feel comfortable talking to whenever you have questions or concerns. It is okay for you to talk to your caseworker about your foster parent, your GAL, or your CASA.

County Attorney: The lawyer for the caseworker.

Foster Parent: This person is trained to help families by having children live in their home until the children can return home or live somewhere else. If you have a foster parent, we hope you will feel comfortable talking to him or her about all of your daily activities, so that he can make sure he is taking good care of you. It is okay for you to talk to your foster parent about your caseworker, your GAL, or your CASA.

G.A.L.: "Guardian ad Litem" - Latin for "guardian at law." This person is a lawyer, and has been appointed by the judge to represent you. His or her job is to tell the judge and everyone else what he thinks is best for you, in addition to what you may want. This is another person we hope you will feel comfortable talking to whenever you have questions or concerns. It is okay for you to talk to your GAL about your caseworker, your foster parent, or your CASA.

Lawyer (also known as an Attorney): A person who has special education and training to understand the law and rules of the court.

Judge (or Magistrate): This person is a lawyer who has the job of deciding what will happen in your case, and making sure everyone does his or her job in your case. Sometimes you may come to court to speak to the judge, other times you may come and speak to the judge in his or her office, and other times you may write a letter to the judge.

You: One of the most important people in this case.

WHAT HAPPENS IN COURT

For most parts of the case, your parents always come to court. They can have a lawyer with them. They are told about everything that is happening along the way.

The judge makes decisions about your family, such as where you will live if you can't live with your parents, and a plan is put together about what should happen in your case.

The plan is usually for you to return to your parents, unless there are good reasons that can't happen. If you cannot return home with your parents, you and your parents will be told.

The plan is always that you be safe and well cared for.

The plan is almost always that you stay in the same home with your sisters and brothers, unless there are good reasons that can't happen.

All of the people in your case want to know how you feel about things, and what you want. If you don't tell us, we will have to make decisions anyway, so it's much, much better for you to tell us. That's what we mean by "your voice in court."



NAMES AND PHONE NUMBERS

CASEWORKER:

Phone Number:

GUARDIAN AD LITEM:

Phone Number:

CASA:

Phone Number:

THERAPIST:

Phone Number:

