



WHO IS EVERYBODY?

In Family or Dependency Court

There are lots of people trying to figure out what happened and how to help you and your family and make sure that you are safe.

Here are some of the people you might see and what their jobs are.



Child Protective Services (CPS)

Child Protective Services workers' job is to help make sure kids are safe. If they think someone is hurting or not taking care of a child, they investigate, or try to figure out what happened, and try to find a way to make sure the child is safe. They might ask you questions to help them understand what happened.



Child Protective Services Lawyers

These lawyers work for Child Protective Services and will talk in court about what they learned.

Respondent

When CPS brings someone to Family or Dependency Court because they think the person is hurting or not taking care of a child, that person is called “the Respondent.”

Who is the respondent in your case?

Police

A police officer's job is to try to keep people safe and make sure they follow the laws. They investigate crimes, and might ask you questions to help them understand what happened.

Some police officers wear uniforms but others wear regular clothes.



There will be one or more grown-ups to help you in court. Depending on where you live, you may have an attorney for the child, a GAL, and a CASA.



Attorney For Child (AFC)

The attorney for child, or AFC, is a lawyer whose job is to help you tell your side of what happened, and what you and your family want and need.

In some places, the AFC can be called Guardian Ad Litem (or GAL) or Court-Appointed Special Advocate (or CASA).



Guardian Ad Litem (GAL)

The GAL's job is to help you (not your family or others involved in the case). They find out as much as they can about how you are doing and figure out what they think could help you most (including where you should live) and say that in court. You might not always agree with them.



Court-Appointed Special Advocate (CASA)

A CASA's job is to try to help you get what you need in court.



Social Workers

Social workers are there to help you and your family. They'll try to make sure you're getting everything you need outside of court, and can help advocate for you in meetings with your family. You can talk to them about anything you're worried about, or ask them any questions you have.



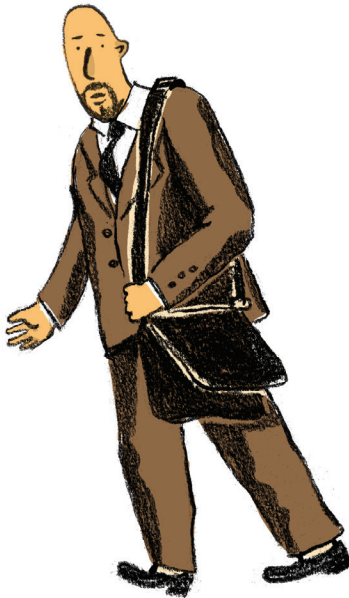
Family/Victim Advocate

The family/victim advocate's job is to help you during the investigation and in court. They can help you understand what's happening. You can ask them questions, and they might go to court with you.



Judge

The judge is the person in charge of the courtroom, who makes sure everyone follows the rules. Their job is to listen and make decisions about the case. In some places, they're called a referee or a magistrate.



Attorney or Assigned Counsel

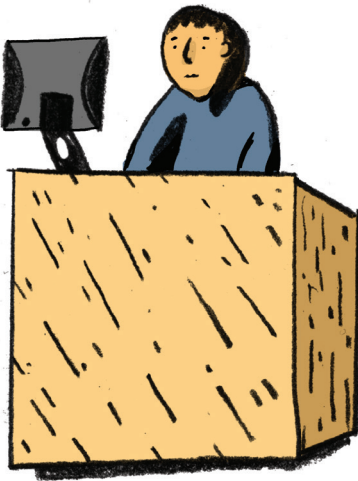
This person is a lawyer who helps the adult called the respondent tell the judge their side of what happened, and ask for what they want or need.



Court Attorney

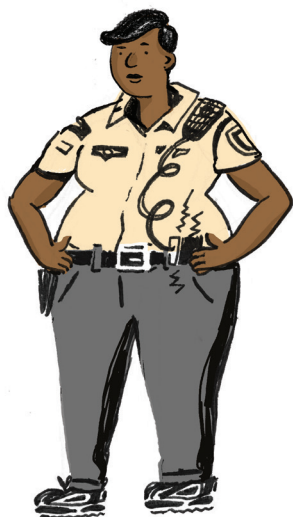
The court attorney is a lawyer who helps the judge. You might see them in the courtroom.

They may also meet with the other lawyers and the people involved in the case to try to help everyone agree to a plan to help your family.



Court Clerk or Court Assistant

The court clerk sits near the judge or referee in court and helps them.



Court Officer

The court officer tries to make sure everyone in the court is safe. They call everyone into the courtroom when the judge is ready. They wear uniforms and may carry guns.



Court Reporter

The court reporter's job is to write down everything people say in the courtroom.



Interpreter

The interpreter's job is to help anyone who doesn't speak English very well or who is deaf or hard of hearing understand what other people in court are saying.



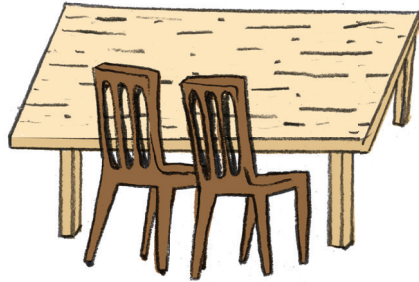
You

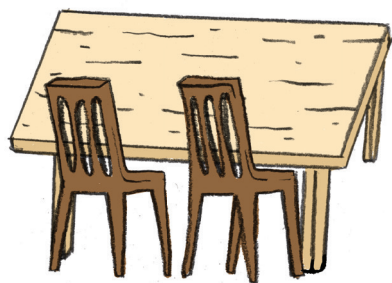
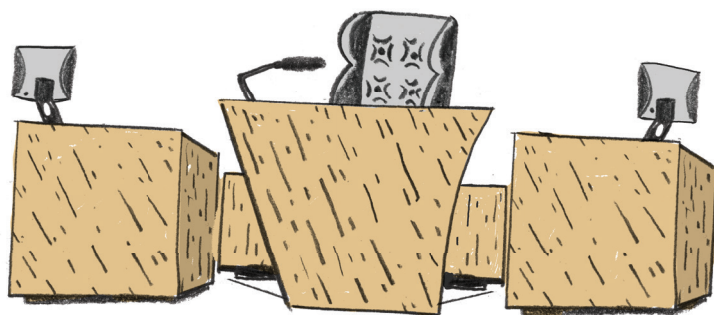
You are a witness, and you might be a victim, too. Your story is one piece of the puzzle. Your job is to answer questions and tell the adults what you know and remember about what happened.

This Is A Courtroom.

Many of the people in this book work in the court.

Where do you think all of the people go? Ask one of the people working on your case to show you.





COPING WITH COURT.



Going to court can be stressful, but there are things you can do to feel a little better. These tips come from other kids, who said these were the things that helped them most.

Getting ready.

- Try to get lots of sleep the night before.
- Eat something before you go to court. It will help you feel better and have the energy to get through the day.
- You don't have to dress up, but wear something nice if you can. Something that makes you feel good and helps you feel confident.
- You'll probably spend a lot of time waiting, so bring something to read, play, or do while you wait. Some kids listen to music, read, draw, write in a journal, or do homework.
- If you have a special object that helps you feel calm, bring it with you. Some kids like things like a stress ball you can squeeze, but others like more personal things like a special lucky charm.

Getting nervous.

If you feel nervous, try one of these things:

- Try to picture how you want the day to go, and how you will react if different things happen. It may sound silly, but picturing things can help you feel calmer.
- Try taking deep breaths in and out from your belly a few times. It really helps!

- Tighten your muscles and then relax them. Do this a few times.
 - If you can, take a walk, dance, run, jump or move your body to get rid of some of your extra energy. You can also try walking really fast for a few seconds, then taking a deep breath and walking really slowly for a few seconds, then going fast then slow, fast then slow a few more times.
 - If you have a special prayer or song that is important to you, try saying or singing it, either out loud, or in your head.
-

Getting support.

- Think about who you can talk to about how you're feeling and who can support you in court.
 - Is there an advocate, friend, or family member who can come to court? If so, you can look at them if and when you get nervous.
 - If you have a therapist or another grown-up you can talk to, talk to them before and after court.
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Getting through it.

- It can feel good to do something nice when it's over, like watch a movie you love, eat a favorite meal, or just spend some time with a friend. Think of something to look forward to.

KNOW YOUR RIGHTS.



If your family is part of a case in Family Court or Dependency Court, you have rights. Don't be afraid to ask for them.

You have the right to...

1. ...be in court and have your voice listened to!

You should always be heard when talking to judges, caseworkers, lawyers, and police.

2. ...be treated with respect.

3. ...an advocate to help you understand what's going on.

That means you have the right to ask as many questions as you want!

4. ... live in a place where you feel safe.

This means you have enough food, go to school, and see a doctor or counselor when you need to.

5. ...stay with your own family, except if there's an emergency, or if the judge thinks it's not safe for you at home.

6. ...understand what the people in your case are saying and doing.

If you don't understand what's happening for any reason, ask your advocate!

If you want to talk in a different language, tell your advocate. They can have someone translate for you.

If you have a disability or something makes it hard to understand what's going on, tell your advocate right away!

There are lots of ways you can get help. See the section about disabilities on the next page.

- 7. ...help for your parents or guardians so they can make home safer for you. Ask your advocate about this.**
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If you're in foster care, you have the right to...

- 1. ...be in a place that's as close to your community as possible.**

The courts call this the "least restrictive foster care placement." There are a lot of different options like a foster home, group home, or residential center. Talk to your advocate about finding the best one for you.

You can always ask your advocate for what you want. They might not be able to get exactly what you want, but they can try to help.

- 2. ...visits with brothers, sisters, and other family members.**
- 3. ...have a plan that says what your family and the people helping you need to do. The first goal is to get you back together with your family. If this can't happen, then a "permanency plan" is made, to find another safe place for you to live in a "forever home."**

If you're happy with your foster care placement and don't want to leave, make sure to tell your advocate!

Depending on where you live, you may have even more rights! If you have questions or your rights are not being respected, talk to your advocate, a caseworker, or one of the grown-ups working on your case right away.

If you have a disability...

You ALWAYS have the right to understand what's going on with your case and what the people working on it are saying and doing. You also have the right to express what happened and how you feel. This means you can get support so people can understand you.

You should always be able to get to (and around) the court or any other place you have to go for a meeting.

Let the people working on your case – like your advocate, caseworkers, and lawyers – know about your disability and what you need help with right away. You may have to ask for help at each meeting and each time you go to court, so don't be afraid to keep asking!


You can ask for help to address your needs. These are called “reasonable accommodations,” and you have this right under the law. Examples include (but aren't limited to):

- A sign language interpreter (for non-American sign language, ask for a Certified Deaf Interpreter, or CDI for short)
- An interpreter who can type out what other people are saying (called Communication Access Real Time, or CART services)
- A transliterator to make sure people around you understand what you have to say
- Different kinds of aids like videos with subtitles, and devices to help you see or hear
- Wheelchair access, or accessibility for any kind of physical disability

There are many more accommodations you can get that aren't on this list! Talk to your advocate to find the right ones for you. And don't be afraid to ask.

If your parent or guardian has a disability, they have the right to request reasonable accommodations, too!

If you want, you can write down the names of the people working with you here.



CPS Workers:

Name:

Contact Info:

CPS Lawyers:

Name:

Contact Info:

**Attorney for Child/
GAL/CASA:**

Name:

Contact Info:

Family/Victim Advocate:

Name:

Contact Info:

Social Worker/Therapist:

Name:

Contact Info:

Judge:

Name:

Contact Info:

Other:

Name:

Contact Info:

The Center for Court Innovation's Child Witness Materials Project is a collaborative effort between the Center for Court Innovation and the Center for Urban Pedagogy, and is supported by cooperative agreement #2016-VF-GX-K011, awarded by the U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Office for Victims of Crime. The opinions, findings, and conclusions or recommendations expressed in this document are those of the contributors and do not necessarily represent the official position or policies of the U.S. Department of Justice.

The Center for Court Innovation works to create a more effective and humane justice system by performing original research and helping launch reforms around the world.

www.courtinnovation.org

The Center for Urban Pedagogy is a nonprofit organization that uses the power of design and art to increase meaningful civic engagement, in partnership with historically marginalized communities.

www.welcometoCUP.org

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The Office for Victims of Crime is committed to enhancing the Nation's capacity to assist crime victims and to providing leadership in changing attitudes, policies, and practices to promote justice and healing for all victims of crime.

www.ovc.ojp.gov

The Office of Justice Programs is a federal agency that provides federal leadership, grants, training, technical assistance, and other resources to improve the Nation's capacity to prevent and reduce crime, assist victims, and enhance the rule of law by strengthening the criminal and juvenile justice systems. Its six program offices—the Bureau of Justice Assistance, the Bureau of Justice Statistics, the National Institute of Justice, the Office for Victims of Crime, the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, and the Office of Sex Offender Sentencing, Monitoring, Apprehending, Registering, and Tracking—support state and local crime-fighting efforts, fund thousands of victim service programs, help communities manage sex offenders, address the needs of youth in the system and children in danger, and provide vital research and data.



Office for Victims of Crime

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