



WHO'S THAT?

In Family or Dependency Court

You'll probably see a lot of different people. This guide explains what their jobs are.

There's a section in the back where you can write down the names and numbers of important contacts.

There are also some tips on what to do if you have to go to court, and some information about your rights.



CHILD PROTECTIVE SERVICES (CPS)

Child Protective Services (CPS) caseworkers work for the government and their job is to help make sure kids are safe. If they think someone is hurting or not taking care of a kid or teenager, they investigate, or try to figure out what happened, and try to find a way to make sure the kid or teenager is safe.

(Child Protective Services might have a different name where you live.)

CPS caseworkers help families make a plan and get the help they need to make the home safe for everyone. If they believe kids are in serious danger, they can find a place for the kids to live while the people who take care of them work on making home safe. That place could be the home of another family member or friend, or a helping family that you might not know, which is called foster care.

CPS caseworkers might ask you questions about what you saw, heard, experienced, or felt; you might have meetings with them and your family members; they might come to your house; and you might see them in court, where they will share information about your family and the case with the judge or magistrate.



CHILD PROTECTIVE SERVICES LAWYERS

Child Protective Services lawyers argue CPS' case in court. They talk about what CPS learned in their investigation.

RESPONDENT

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

Who is the respondent in your case?



POLICE

A police officer's job is to enforce laws to protect public safety. When someone reports a crime, the police investigate it, which includes interviewing victims (people who were harmed) and witnesses (people who saw or heard or have information about the crime), to find out what happened. Sometimes they arrest people who they think may have broken the law. As part of their investigation, they might ask you questions about what you saw, heard, or experienced.

Depending on where you live, there will be one or more people to help you in court. These can include an attorney for child (AFC), a GAL, or a CASA.

ATTORNEY FOR CHILD (AFC)

An AFC is a lawyer assigned by the judge to represent you in Family Court. Attorneys can advocate for what you want or represent what they think is in your best interest to keep you safe, which may not be the same as what you want. You should always speak up for yourself and for what you want to have happen.

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.

In some states, you might have a GAL instead of a lawyer.



COURT-APPOINTED SPECIAL ADVOCATE (CASA)

A CASA is a person appointed by the judge to help you in Family Court. They will advocate for what they think are your best interests, and will sometimes help you get any services or supports you need.

In some states, the CASA is the only person that represents you in court.

FAMILY ADVOCATE OR VICTIM ADVOCATE

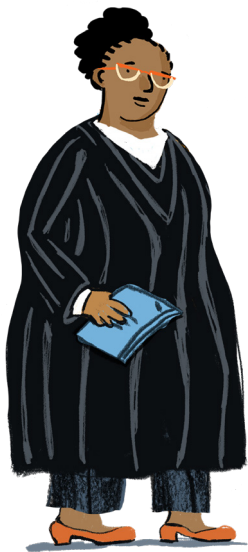
The family/victim advocate's job is to help you during the investigation and in court.

They can do things like answer your questions and help you get help or services you need. They might go to court with you.



SOCIAL WORKERS

Some social workers will work with your lawyer and some will work with your parents' or caregivers' lawyer to help them figure out what's going on with your family and what would be most helpful. They can also help you and your parents with things outside of court. They might go to meetings with you and your parents and advocate for 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 courts, these types of cases are heard by “referees” (or “magistrates”) instead of judges. They can make decisions about the case.



ATTORNEY or ASSIGNED COUNSEL

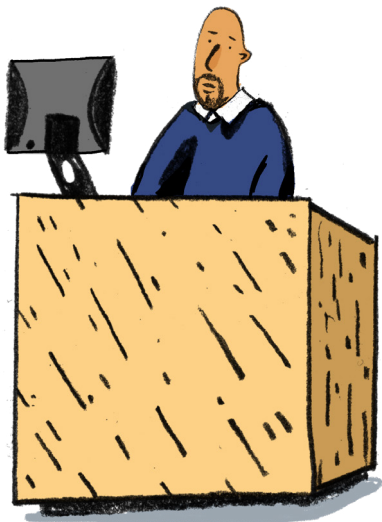
This is the lawyer who helps the respondent in court to tell their side of what happened, and ask for what they want and need.



COURT ATTORNEY

The court attorney is a lawyer who helps the judge by researching legal questions and helping to write decisions. You might see them in the courtroom.

They might also meet with the other lawyers to help them reach an agreement outside of court.



COURT CLERK or COURT ASSISTANT

The court clerk sits near the judge and helps prepare court orders, which are directions from the judge requiring a person to do or not do something.



COURT OFFICER

The court officer makes sure everyone in the courthouse is safe. They call everyone into the courtroom when the judge is ready to hear the case. Sometimes they have a clipboard with the list of cases to check people in. They wear uniforms and carry guns.



COURT REPORTER

The court reporter's job is to take notes on everything people say in the courtroom so there is a record of what happened.



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. If you need an interpreter, ask one of the adults involved with your case.



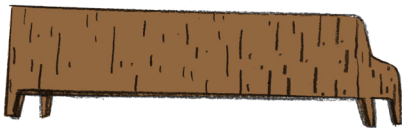
YOU

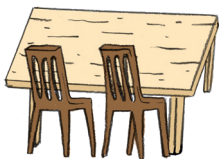
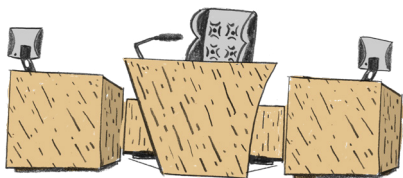
Your story is one piece of the puzzle. Your job is to show up, answer questions, and tell what you know and remember about what happened.

THE COURTROOM.

Many of these people work in the court.
At some point, you might have to go to court, too.

It can help to understand who will be there and where they will be sitting. Ask your advocate or one of the adults working with you on this case to show you using the drawing below.





COPING WITH COURT.

Going to court can be stressful, but there are things you can do to feel a little more in control. These tips come from other teens, 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 teens 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 teens 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 from your belly in and out 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 adult you can talk to, talk to them before and after court.
-

Getting through it.

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

YOU HAVE RIGHTS!

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

You have the right to...

1. ...be in court and be heard! You should always have your voice heard and be taken seriously in conversations with judges, caseworkers, lawyers, and police.
2. ...be treated with respect.
3. ...have an advocate to help you understand what's happening with your case.
4. ...live in a place where you feel safe and that meets your needs, like food, school, medical care, and counseling. Ask your advocate or caseworker for help getting these.

5. ...stay with your own family, except in an emergency, or if the judge decides your family isn't able to keep you safe.
6. ...understand what the people involved in your case are saying and doing.

If you (or your parents or guardians) don't understand what's happening for any reason, ask your advocate!

If you (or your parents or guardians) want to talk in a different language, tell your advocate. They can have someone interpret for you or translate important documents.

If you (or your parents or guardians) have a disability or something makes it hard to understand what's going on, tell your advocate right away! You have the right to an interpreter to help you understand what people are saying in court and other meetings. See the section below on disability rights for more information.

7. ...services for your parents or guardians to help them take care of you, like therapy, parenting classes, and other programs. They can ask their advocate or caseworkers for help getting these.

Depending on where you live, you may have even more rights!

If you have questions or your rights have been violated, talk to your advocate, a caseworker, or another person working with you on your case right away.

If you're in foster care, you have the right to...

1. ...a foster care placement that's as close to your community as possible and still meets your needs. 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, so talk to your advocate about finding the right one for you.

You can always ask your advocate for the placement you prefer. They might not be able to get exactly what you want, but they can help you make a case for it.

2. ...visits with your brothers, sisters, and other family members.
3. ...have a plan that explains what your family and the people helping you need to do so

you can live in a “forever home.” This is called a “permanency plan.”

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

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 always 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, lawyers, and judge – know about your disability and what you need help with right away. Your advocate may need to make a separate request for assistance at each court date and meeting, so don’t be afraid to keep asking!

You can ask for help to address your needs. You have this right under the law, and you can say you need “reasonable accommodations.”

Examples include (but aren't limited to):

- A sign language interpreter (for non-American sign language, ask for a Certified Deaf Interpreter, also called CDI)
- An interpreter who can type everything that's being said for you (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 hearing devices, captioned videos, and visual aids
- Wheelchair access or accessibility for any kind of physical disability

There are many more accommodations you can ask for 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.

WHO'S WHO?

If you want, you can keep track of the people working on your case here.

CPS Workers:

Name:

Phone:

CPS Lawyers:

Name:

Phone:

Attorney for Child/GAL/CASA:

Name:

Phone:

Family/Victim Advocate:

Name:

Phone:

Judge:

Name:

Phone:

Other:

Name:

Phone:

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

Illustration: Ryan Hartley-Smith

Design: Anabelle Pang

The Center for Court Innovation is grateful to the project partners and stakeholders; and the children, caregivers, and justice system practitioners all over the country who contributed to the development of this product.

NCJ 300656

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
OVC

