



# THINGS TO KNOW ABOUT Child Protection and Domestic Violence

## SELF-REPRESENTED LITIGANTS SERIES

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Facing a child protection investigation is scary for any parent and even more for domestic violence survivors. A parent who uses violence against the other parent, not surprisingly, is often found to use violence against the children. Also, some parents who use violence try to manipulate survivors by making reports against them. If you are a domestic violence survivor with children, you may become involved with the child protection process. This guide has some general information to help you understand more about the child protection system, and it identifies some of the people who may work on your case. It also has some practical tips.

Not everything in this guide may apply to

your state or community because state laws are different. Even within states, different counties may have different practices. So while this guide provides a basic overview, you must find out the laws in your state and community. If you need help, please call the **Resource Center on Domestic Violence: Child Protection and Custody** at the confidential toll-free number, **1-800-527-3223**, and we can connect you with information and resources in your state. Other resources that might help you are on our website at [www.rcdvpc.org](http://www.rcdvpc.org). You can also call us and we can mail them to you.

**For more help, visit the website or call anytime.**

# Purpose

Child protection agencies and the child protection process are intended to protect children from abuse and neglect. The goal is to have the children in a safe, permanent home in a timely manner. This may be achieved by helping the parents improve their parenting and providing support and resources so that the family can stay together. It may also be deemed necessary to remove the children from an unsafe home and place them with other caregivers, who may be relatives, foster parents, or adoptive parents.

The system's focus is on protecting the children, not the parents. In cases with domestic violence, the child protection workers and the judge will be concerned with the effects of the violence on the children. Some agency staff, judges, and attorneys understand domestic violence and know that the survivor parent's safety is important to the children's safety and wellbeing. But others may not have the training or experience to make this connection. You, and your lawyer, if you have one, may need to be prepared to explain why protecting your safety helps keep the children safe.

# People

If you are involved in a child welfare case, you may meet a lot of people. Not all states use all of these people, and not all cases will use them all. But this list has information about the people you may meet and their role in the case:

**Child welfare caseworker:** Caseworkers work for the child welfare agency. A caseworker generally has education and training for the job and works to promote the safety and welfare of children and their families. Some caseworkers may have a primary responsibility for investigating a child abuse and neglect report, assessing the children's safety, and initially determining if the child can remain safe in their home. Some caseworkers focus on providing services to families to ensure that children can safely remain in their homes, while other caseworkers work with families whose children have been removed to provide appropriate services to the children and parents so they can be together again. These caseworkers assess the family's situation and work with the children and families to develop a case plan to address the reason the children were removed. In some places, caseworkers play all these roles.

**Judge:** The judge oversees the court case if the agency files a petition and makes the

final decision about whether child abuse or neglect has occurred and the permanent placement of the children.

**Caregiver/foster parent:** If children are removed from the home, they will be placed with other caregivers; this may be relatives of either parent, foster parents, or another licensed placement.

**Peer mentor:** A peer mentor has been involved in the child welfare system personally, has received training, and is assigned to help parents navigate the system. Peer mentors work with parent attorneys and with social services and are a great support for parents. Ask if parent mentors are available to assist you with your case.

**Parent attorneys:** These are lawyers who represent the parent in the case. All states allow parents to hire an attorney, and recent federal funding has allowed more states to provide attorneys for parents who cannot afford them early in the case. Other states provide attorneys at later stages in the case or rely on legal aid offices to represent parents.

**Children's representatives:** The children can be represented in different ways depending on your state and community. Some places have children's attorneys (who represent the children's wishes during the case), other use guardians ad litem (GALs;

attorneys or others with training in child welfare cases who argue for the children's best interests), and/or court-appointed special advocates (CASAs; volunteers sworn in by the court who advocate for the children's best interests).

**Mediators:** In some communities, instead of arguing to the court about what should be in the case plan or what is best for the children, the caseworker, parents, and others involved in the case may try to reach an agreement or a partial agreement, using the help of a mediator trained in how to help people find points of agreement and settle disputes.

**Domestic violence advocate:** This is someone knowledgeable about domestic violence and resources available in the community for survivors. They can be a great source of help and emotional support. Depending on the rules in your community, they may not be allowed to come to court or to meetings with your caseworker due to confidentiality requirements.

**Agency attorney:** This attorney represents the child welfare agency. It may be the district attorney, attorney general, or in-house counsel with the agency.

**Service providers:** Depending on the needs of the children and the family, services could include therapists, substance abuse counselors, batterer

intervention programs, parenting classes, domestic violence advocacy, employment assistance, public benefits, social workers, housing assistance, or other resources.

**Law enforcement:** Depending on the case, police may have responded to a complaint that revealed suspected abuse or neglect or may assist in investigations.

**Court staff:** The specific staff varies from courthouse to courthouse but may include security (provides screening at court entrance and/or in front of the court room), bailiff (law enforcement officer in the courtroom), court file clerk (files documents in the case and may be able to answer questions about case status); courtroom clerk (present during the hearing to keep notes and keep track of any evidence presented during hearings); and a court reporter (records everything said during hearings; some courts use a video or audio recording instead).

**Self-help center staff:** If you don't have an attorney, they can answer questions and help with court papers, hearings, and court process. They can't provide legal advice, but they can provide information and answer questions. A self-help center may be in the court, at a law library, or through a legal aid office.

## Law

Child welfare law is based on a combination of federal and state statutes. The federal statutes, passed by Congress, impose certain requirements to be met by all states. The Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA) provides federal funding and guidance to support prevention, reporting, investigation, assessment, and treatment of child abuse and neglect. States follow this guidance and have laws concerning their reporting and investigative process. The Adoption Safe Families Act (ASFA) requires states to make "reasonable efforts" to keep children with their families, reunite children with their families if removal was necessary, and promptly finalize a permanency plan when children have been removed. (More information about reasonable efforts and permanency is below.) ASFA also sets time limits for the court to finalize a permanency plan no later than one year after children have been removed from their home. One newer law, called the Families First Prevention Services Act, directs states to provide more support to families who need it to try to keep families together so removal does not become necessary.

## Indian Child Welfare Act

The Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) is a federal law that explains how child welfare services must act in cases involving Native American and Alaskan Native children, who are called “Indian children” under this law, meaning children who are members of a recognized tribe. In cases involving Indian children, the tribe must get notice of the case and may participate, and they may take jurisdiction of the case at any time, meaning the case would move to tribal court. ICWA also places a stricter duty on child welfare services to help the family. Specifically, child welfare services is required to make “active efforts” instead of “reasonable efforts” in cases involving Indian children. This means that child welfare services must actually provide services to families. It is not enough for them to make a referral to services and then require the parents to follow up. The agency must make affirmative active, thorough and timely efforts to maintain or reunite an Indian child with his or her family including assessing or developing resources when necessary.

For more information about the Indian Child Welfare Act and what it requires, please contact us at our confidential toll-free number at **1-800-527-3223** or email us at [info@rcdvcp.org](mailto:info@rcdvcp.org).

State laws contain the process to be followed in that state. The federal laws direct states to include the federal requirements, but some are slow to do so. Most states follow a process similar to the one described below, but you must check your state’s law to be sure. Most child protection agencies have websites with information about the process. Some have toll-free numbers to call with questions. You can also ask your caseworker, lawyer, peer mentor, or advocate for information.

State law also defines abuse and neglect. For domestic violence survivors, it’s important to know whether your state includes a “failure to protect” the child from domestic violence in its definition of child abuse. Also, some states define child abuse to include witnessing domestic violence.

## Process

The child welfare process starts with the child welfare agency when a report of possible child abuse or neglect is received. About one-third of reports are not substantiated and a case is often not even opened. Other reports are investigated, which usually takes between 30 to 90 days, depending on state law. Many of these reports result in services being offered to the family to improve the

safety and wellbeing of the children, but a court case is not started.

In other cases, the agency decides that a court case is appropriate. For example, if the children may not be safe and removal may be necessary, a court case must be started. Also, if the parents have trouble addressing the reasons for the child welfare case, the agency may decide that court supervision may be helpful.

The court case and the child welfare investigation can be happening at the same time. This can be very confusing to parents because the timelines and results can be different. If you're confused, ask for help from your caseworker, attorney, peer mentor, or the court (if you have a court case).

More information about the different parts of the process is below.

## Report and Investigation

A child welfare agency investigates when it receives a report of possible abuse or neglect. Anyone, including neighbors or others in the community, who sees something that appears to be abuse or neglect can make a report. In many states, certain professions, including law enforcement, teachers, health care

workers, coaches, and others are required by state law to make a report if they see signs of abuse or neglect. In other states, everyone is encouraged to report child abuse and neglect. When someone makes a report to the agency, the information is confidential. The person does not have to give their name. Even if known, the agency cannot provide the name of the person who filed the report to the parents.

If the caseworker does not find enough evidence of abuse or neglect, the caseworker issues a report that it is unsubstantiated. If the caseworker finds enough evidence for abuse or neglect, the caseworker issues a report that it is substantiated and follows the process of that state's law. In most cases, the caseworker refers the family for services, works with the family to provide services, and/or helps them to develop a safety plan, but does not file a case with the court.

However, during the investigation the caseworker may determine that children cannot remain safely in the home and may remove the children. In some states a court order is required. Most states allow the caseworker to remove the children on an emergency basis, called a hold. This hold can only be for a few days, and the agency must show the court that it had probable cause to remove the child.

This emergency hearing is usually *ex parte*, meaning only the agency attorney and perhaps the agency caseworker are there; the parents may not be notified or allowed to come. If the court determines there was probable cause to remove the child, a hearing with the parents must be held within a specified time, usually no more than two weeks. This hearing may be called a shelter hearing, a preliminary hearing, or it may have another name. The agency and the parents can tell their side and present any information to support their story. The court must determine if there was probable cause at the time of the removal and if that probable cause continues to exist.

Sometimes the agency will file a petition requesting the court to have jurisdiction of the case, but will not request removal of the children. This is done in cases where the agency feels they need court oversight in a case.

In cases with domestic violence, the caseworker may decide the violence poses a threat to the children. Sometimes, the caseworker files a petition, or may even remove the children if they appear to be unsafe, and the case begins. But sometimes, the caseworker tells the survivor parent that if they separate from the other parent and get a civil protection order, the agency will close their file. This

practice is becoming less common, but it still happens. This can be a simple way to resolve the child welfare matter. But it may not be safe, and you may not have a safe place to go or be able to afford your own place. You may also need to find work or child care. If this option is offered to you and you need help to be able to leave safely and provide a home for your children, ask your caseworker about any resources or support that may be available. Also, a domestic violence advocate can help you with safety planning and may help you think through possible unintended consequences of seeking a protection order that might actually make you less safe. If you need help finding a domestic violence advocate near you, call the National Domestic Violence Hotline at 1-800-799-7233 or visit their website at [thehotline.org](http://thehotline.org).

## Mediation/ Conferencing

Sometimes, when a court case is filed, the judge may refer the parties to mediation or another form of alternative dispute resolution, which means a way to try to settle the case or part of the case without a court trial. Programs like these have a neutral person help the family, the agency, and others involved in the

case try to reach an agreement or partial agreement. For example, mediation may help set visitation plans for parents or requirements and conditions in the case plan. Some programs will mediate at any stage of the case. Other programs only mediate conversations between adoptive parents and biological parents when it looks like the children will be adopted.

A practice called family group conferencing is becoming more common. This generally happens early in the case, before a court case is filed or in cases when the child welfare agency is working with the parents directly, without filing a court case. But it can happen at other times and even when a court case has been filed. A meeting is called to talk about what is needed to keep the children safe and prevent removal or how to keep the children's time out of the home as short as possible. Parents and the caseworker, and any others who may be involved with the case, have knowledge about the family, or may provide help to the family may be invited to attend. Ask whether this is an option in your community. If so, think about who you want to invite and what you think is needed for the family to be safe.

Mediation or conferencing may be hard in cases involving domestic violence. If you are ordered to mediation or called to a

conference, let the mediator or caseworker know if you do not feel safe talking with the other parent in the room. You can also let them know if you do not feel like you can speak freely in front of the other parent. They may be able to offer alternatives that will make you feel safer.

## Case plan

When the child welfare agency opens a court case, it is required to develop a detailed case plan. It must include several pieces of information, including the reasons why the case was opened, what will be done to address those reasons (including any services or referrals for the parents), and a plan for the children's permanent home. The agency will list what the parents are expected to do to get their children home. It also lists the ways that the agency will help the parents succeed. For example, if the children were removed because of substance abuse, the case plan will list substance abuse as one of the reasons the children were removed. It will probably also require the parents to get treatment for their addiction before the children can go home safely. It should state who will provide those services. In cases involving domestic violence, the agency may create separate plans for the child, the domestic violence survivor, and the person responsible for the violence.

The case plan must be presented to the court at the disposition hearing (see below for more on court hearings).

Ideally, the parents will be asked to participate in meetings to start working on the case plan before the disposition hearing. But it's common for the agency to create the plan without talking to the parents and bring it to the hearing, expecting the parents to read it quickly and sign it before the hearing starts. If you have an attorney, ask them to try to get the agency to let you look at the plan and ask for changes if needed. If not, try to ask the caseworker yourself. You know your family best, and you likely have ideas about what would help keep you and the children safe and well. If you're not able to help create the plan and it includes things that you're worried about, be open about any concerns you may have for the safety of yourself or your children. If the case plan would require you to do something you can't do, tell your caseworker and attorney, if you have one, and the court, so it can be changed to something that is possible for you to comply with.

## Court hearings

### Emergency Protective Custody Hearing/

**Preliminary Hearing:** If child protection services decides to remove the child from the home, the emergency removal will trigger the court to schedule an emergency protective custody hearing. The name of the hearing is different in different states. At this hearing, the agency must prove to the court that the child cannot be safe at home because the child is in immediate danger. If the agency seeks an immediate removal, this hearing happens very quickly. The parents must be notified and allowed to say why removal was not or is no longer necessary and why the children should come home.

**Adjudicatory Hearing:** At this hearing, the agency must prove that the child is abused or neglected. The agency, the child's attorney or guardian ad litem, and the parents can call witnesses to help the court make a decision. (For help on how to testify, call witnesses, and present information, see 10 Steps for Presenting Evidence in Court, available at <https://rcdvcpc.org/10-steps-for-presenting-evidence-in-court.html>.) The parents can present facts to support ending the case or to deny certain facts presented by the other parties. They can present evidence to help the court decide whether the child should return home that day even if the

case continues because the court finds there has been abuse or neglect. The child's attorney also presents facts to help the judge make a decision. Parents can also agree to certain facts and deny others. The court will consider the facts and evidence and decide whether there are enough facts to support a finding of abuse and neglect.

**Dispositional Hearing:** The court holds a disposition hearing once the facts show the child has been abused or neglected. This often takes place right after the adjudicatory hearing, but sometimes it may happen shortly after. At or before this hearing, the parties receive a case plan (see above for more information) that tells what the agency is going to do to help the family create a safe environment for the child. The case plan talks about the health, educational, and social needs of the child and the parents, and it gives information about the services the agency is to give to the parents. The case plan also details the deadlines for completion of the case. The agency provides the court with information about how the parents are using the services offered by the agency and whether the child is receiving the services needed. Finally, the case plan states what is planned for the child's permanent home, called the permanency plan, which may be staying or reunifying with one or both parents or may

include other options. More information on permanency is below.

In child welfare cases that also involve domestic violence, the caseworker may ask the parent survivor to leave the person who committed the violence before the child will be returned home. If the social worker tells a parent to move away or to secure an order that keeps the person responsible for the violence away, the caseworker may be able to assist in finding alternative, safe housing for the survivor parent and child. Some child welfare agencies work with domestic violence advocates either as part of the agency staff or in agreements with advocacy groups at domestic violence coalitions or shelters. For more information about what domestic violence resources are available in your community, please contact us at our confidential toll-free number at **1-800-527-3223** or email us at [info@rcdvcpc.org](mailto:info@rcdvcpc.org).

**Review Hearings:** Review hearings are held periodically to check on the parents' progress in meeting the requirements of the case plan. If the children have been removed, the first review hearing must be held within six months from the removal. As long as the case continues, they must be held every six months. These hearings can be either administrative hearings at the agency or court review hearings. They

give parents, caretakers, and children an opportunity to report on how things are going. They also allow things listed in the case plan to be changed if the needs of the children or family have changed. These reviews are a chance for parents to let all know what they are doing to have their child returned home.

**Permanency Hearing:** The first of these hearings must be held no later than 12 months from the date a child is removed from the home and must be held regularly until the child is in a permanent placement. At this hearing, the court reviews the case plan and the status of the case, and it decides on the child's permanent placement. Federal law sets the following priorities, in order, for a child's permanent placement:

1. Return to parent (reunification)
2. Adoption
3. Permanent guardianship
4. Placement with a fit and willing relative
5. Another planned permanent living arrangement

At every permanency hearing, the court must examine each permanency option. It may not proceed to the next priority unless it has made a finding that the higher priority is not appropriate. For example, the court cannot decide that adoption is the best placement unless it first finds that reunification would not

protect the child's safety and wellbeing.

More information on permanent placements is below, with additional details about what each priority involves.

**Other issues:** At any time over the life of the court case, the court may call a hearing to address the placement of the child, including a recommendation for the return of the child home. The hearing may be needed to address a change in foster care home or relative placement. These hearings are designed to provide an opportunity for the child and parents to provide facts to help the judge make a decision about placement.

## Reasonable efforts

When the agency opens a case with a family, they must show the court that they have made reasonable efforts to do certain things before a permanent placement can be decided, and especially before any placement other than reunification can be considered. Before deciding on a permanent placement, the court must make findings that the agency made reasonable efforts:

- To prevent the removal of the child from his or her home;
- To safely return a child home; and
- To finalize the permanency plan and placement.

At the removal hearing, the agency must show facts that they made reasonable efforts to prevent removal. Later in the case, they must show facts that reasonable efforts were made to return the child home. They must also show facts that reasonable efforts have been made to reach the permanency goal in the case. The judge has to make findings that the agency did in fact make reasonable efforts. Parents and the child can provide information to the court to help the judge decide whether the agency made reasonable efforts each time.

For a detailed list of the types of reasonable efforts that could be offered in cases involving domestic violence, please see the Reasonable Efforts Checklist for Dependency Cases Involving Domestic Violence, available at <https://www.rcdvcpc.org/resources/resource/reasonable-efforts-checklist-for-dependency-cases-involving-domestic-violence.html>.

## Reunification

When a child welfare agency removes children from their parents, the law requires it to try to reunify the children with their parents. This means that in most cases, the agency must try to get the children back home to their parents. There are some exceptions to this rule in extreme cases. For example, if one of the parents has murdered or severely injured the other parent or a sibling, if a child in the home was sexually abused, or if the parents have abandoned the child, the court may determine that reunification with the offending parent(s) is not required. There may be other exceptions in your state. Your attorney should be able to tell you if any of those exceptions apply to you.

Unless one of these rare exceptions applies, however, federal law requires the agency to try to reunify children with their parents. Usually, parents have one year to work on getting the children home. They will be asked to enter into a case plan and service agreement and to work hard to change the reasons that the children were removed. If the parents are doing well, the agency may return the children before closing the case. After they see that the children can stay at home safely for a period of time, they will close the case. If the parents do not comply with

the case plan, and particularly if they fail to comply with court orders, the children will not be sent home. For this reason, it is important to let your caseworker know if you're having trouble with any of the requirements. Offer to work with them to adjust the case plan so that it meets the agency's concerns for the children's safety and wellbeing but is also something you can do.

In cases involving domestic violence, child protection services will sometimes ask survivors to leave the parent using violence before they will send the children home. This may create other challenges for survivors, such as finding a new place to live, paying the bills, and, in some cases, can even increase the risk to the survivor. If child protection services is asking you to do this, it is a good idea to let them know whether you need additional support from them. Some child protection services programs have domestic violence advocates on staff. Others work with local domestic violence coalitions or shelters. For more information about what domestic violence resources are available in your community, please contact us at our confidential toll-free number at **1-800-527-3223** or email us at [info@rcdvcpc.org](mailto:info@rcdvcpc.org).

## Permanency

The goal of the child welfare system is to find permanency, safety, and wellbeing for each child. As described above, every child must have an individual case plan. It is a written plan and very detailed. It must follow federal law in prioritizing reunification of the children and parents as the top preferred permanent placement. As stated above, the preferred placements, in order, are:

**Reunification:** The child is reunified with one or both parents. This is usually the preferred goal and requires the parents to comply with the case plan. (See above for more information about reunification.) Often, the case plan may include one of the other options as an alternative if a parent does not comply with the plan.

**Adoption:** In some cases, efforts to reunify a child safely with parents are not successful. The next preferred placement is adoption, which can be by a relative or a non-relative. If the agency recommends adoption as the goal, it must justify the recommendation to the court. Parents can argue against adoption. If adoption is the permanency goal, a parent or both parents may decide to give away (relinquish) their parental rights to the agency. If the parent or parents give their rights away, adoption would become the permanency goal. The

parent or parents may agree (consent) to the adoption, particularly where the parents are familiar with the prospective adoptive parents. If the parents do not relinquish or consent, the government may file a petition to terminate parental rights and the court would schedule a trial to determine whether termination of parental rights is in the best interests of the child.

After termination of parental rights or adoption, the parents lose the rights to their children. This means the parents have no right to communicate with the children, make any decisions about the children's care, or even to be informed of how the children are and what they're doing. Whenever considering whether consent is appropriate for the child and family, make sure you talk with your attorney about all options that may be available.

**Guardianship:** Sometimes, adoption may not be appropriate, but relatives or even foster parents are willing to continue caring for a child while maintaining family contact between children and their parents. The parents' rights may remain in place and the guardians or parents are often able to come back to court and ask for an end to the guardianship because circumstances have improved for the parent or parents. The court must determine what is in the best interest of the child.

### **Placement with fit and willing relative:**

A relative may be willing to care for the child but for some reason be unable or unwilling to adopt the child. If none of the higher priority placements are available and it is in the child's best interest, this arrangement may be appropriate.

### **Another planned permanent living**

**arrangement:** This phrase, sometimes referred to as APPLA, is essentially foster care for older children until they turn 18 or 21 depending on your state law. If a child is over 16 and compelling reasons are found for why another placement is not in the child's best interest, this option may be permitted.

A case plan often has a primary placement goal, most often reunification, and an alternate placement, for example, adoption, if the primary goal is not achievable within the required time. For example, the permanency plan may have a goal of reunification if the parents address substance use issues and take parenting classes, with an alternate goal of adoption if the parents can't meet those requirements. In a domestic violence case, the plan may require separation from the parent using violence, with that parent required to take a batterer intervention program. In that case, the primary goal may be for the child to stay with the survivor with visitation to the

other parent, but if the requirements aren't met, the parent using violence might lose visitation. If the survivor decides not to separate from the other parent, the survivor might not get to keep the children. The alternate placement can only be selected if the court specifically finds that the higher priority placement is not in the children's best interest.

## Communications and cooperation

To have the best chance at keeping your children with you, the single most important thing in a child welfare case is communication: Stay in touch with your caseworker and attorney. Be sure to attend all court hearings. If an emergency happens, call the court, your attorney, and your caseworker as soon as possible. Do your best to comply with anything you're supposed to do under the case plan. If you can't, talk to your attorney or caseworker as soon as you can about modifying the case plan. The agency and the court expect parents to cooperate and follow the plan. If not, it may be seen as an indication that the parent is not willing or able to change what is needed for the children to come (or stay) home. If you find that you just can't talk with your caseworker, for example, they don't seem

to understand domestic violence or other circumstances of your case, try talking to your attorney first. If you don't have one, ask to talk to your caseworker's supervisor or the agency attorney on your case. If nothing else works, and especially if you're concerned for your children's safety, check to see if your state has an ombudsman for the child welfare system that can hear complaints. Other states may have an internal grievance or complaint process, so check the website for your state child welfare agency to see what your options are.

This is an extremely stressful time, and it can be very scary. It's easy to get discouraged, and you may sometimes feel like you just can't do anything more. If possible, turn to family and friends who can provide emotional support. If your community has peer mentors, talk to yours (or ask to be assigned one). This is also where an advocate can help provide support. You're not alone.

# Other Resources

- *How the Child Welfare System Works*, Child Welfare Information Gateway, <https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/factsheets/cpswork/>
- *Reunification: Bringing Your Children Home From Foster Care*, Child Welfare Information Gateway, <https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/reunification/>
- *Understanding Child Welfare and the Courts*, Child Welfare Information Gateway, <https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/factsheets/cwandcourts/>
- *From Complaint to Resolution: Understanding the Child Welfare Grievance Process*, Child Welfare Information Gateway, <https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/factsheets/cw-grievance/>

These factsheets were prepared by the federal government, so they may not reflect your state law. Many states have parent handbooks and videos for their state's child welfare system to help parents learn more about the system. Check the website for your state's system, or ask your caseworker or attorney.

We hope this guide is useful to you. If you have questions, please call us at **1-800-527-3223**, and we'll be happy to help you.

**We wish the best for you and your children.**

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