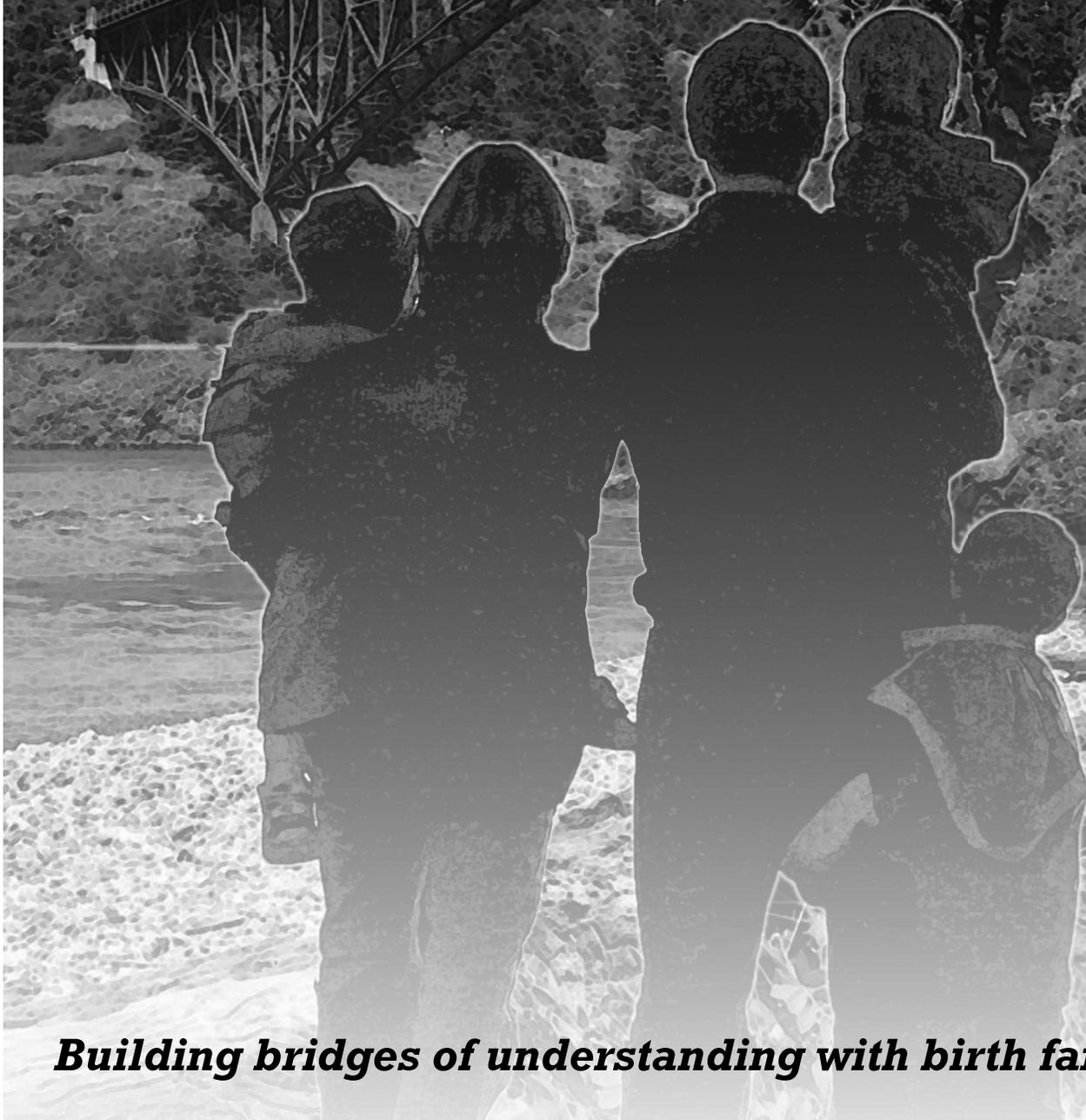




ISLAND COUNTY Dependency 101



Building bridges of understanding with birth families.

Table of Contents

Rights & Responsibilities..... 2

Frequently Asked Questions 2

Roles of People Connected to Your Case..... 3

Dependency Court Timeline 4

Glossary of Court Terms..... 5

Shared Case Planning Meetings..... 6

Working with Kin Caregivers & Foster Parents..... 6

Get Connected: Community Support 7

Be Connected: Self Care..... 7

Stay Connected: Plan Visits with Your Child 7

Why Visits Are Important to Children:..... 8

Supervision..... 8

Tips for Great Visits With Your Child..... 9

After Visits: Keep Connected, Keep Caring 10

Rise Tips: Fight or Flight - coping with sadness and anger in visits 10

Anger and Denial: After Your Child is Taken 11

Words of Wisdom from Parent Mentors..... 11

General Tips for Success 12

Finding Resources & Services 12

Important Case Dates, Contacts, & Notes 13

 **Attitudes*** 

The longer I live, the more I realize the impact of **attitude** on life.

Attitude, to me, is more important than facts.

It is more important than the past, than education, than money, than circumstances, than failures, than successes, than what other people think or say or do.

It is more important than appearance, giftedness, or skill. It will make or break a company ...a church...a home.

The remarkable thing is we have a choice every day regarding the **attitude** we will embrace for that day.

We cannot change our past. We cannot change the fact that people will act in a certain way.

We cannot change the inevitable.

The only thing we can do is play on the one string we have, and that is our **attitude**...I am convinced that life is 10% what happens to me, and 90% how I react to it.

And so it is with you...we are in charge of our **ATTITUDES!**



* "Attitudes" is excerpted from *Strengthening Your Grip on Attitudes (SYG7A)* by Chuck Swindoll. Copyright © 1981 by Charles R. Swindoll, Inc. All rights reserved worldwide. Used by permission. The complete audio can be heard on-line at www.insight.org.

About This Guide

This is a guide to help inform parents about the dependency process, and is not intended as legal advice. Communication is important with attorneys, case workers, and service providers. Each case is unique, each family faces its own challenges, and parents should talk with and listen to an attorney regarding legal options. Parents are also encouraged to speak with case workers and service providers in order to locate the resources and supports that best fit their family's needs. Mentors, someone parents can trust and discuss thoughts and feelings with, may be helpful too.

Some information within this guide was provided by: Child Welfare Information Gateway, American Bar Association Center on Children and the Law, Washington State Office of Public Defense Parents Representation Program, Washington State Children's Administration, University of Washington Court Improvement Training Academy, and many more child welfare partners.

Rights & Responsibilities

When a parent is contacted by child protective services (CPS) because of alleged child abuse or neglect, he or she may be asked to answer questions and attend court to determine the best course of action. The court decides whether the child will stay in the home or be removed. The child may be allowed to stay home if services can be provided or if other actions can be taken to ensure the child is safe. It is important to remember that as a parent, you have certain rights and responsibilities while your child welfare case is being investigated.

Your rights include the following:

- The right to an attorney, appointed by the court or hired by you. You can schedule a case screening appointment with the Office of Public Defense by calling **360-679-7326**.
- The right to notice, which is a legal term referring to your right to be informed about the reasons you are being investigated. You also have a right to know the outcome of the investigation, and details regarding upcoming court hearings.
- The right to ask questions, such as, “Why am I being investigated?”
- The right to a hearing.
- The right to play an active role in planning for your case.
- The right to suggest a relative or other placement if your child cannot remain in your care.
- The right to appeal decisions within a certain timeframe.

Your responsibilities include the following:

- Asking questions to help you understand your role and the court process, including asking whether services and supports can help you understand and navigate the legal process.
- Attending and being well prepared for all appointments and court hearings. Keeping track of activities and services, via a calendar and/or journal. Bring documentation to meetings and show how you are making progress during the case.
- Taking care of yourself. Cooperating with the case plan you help develop and telling others about any difficulties you may be experiencing. Getting help when you need it.
- Being prepared for all visits with your child.

Federal law requires child welfare agencies to make reasonable efforts to prevent your child from being removed from the home and...if your child is removed, the agency is required to make reasonable efforts to support your family’s reunification.

Frequently Asked Questions

What kind of support will I need during this experience?

Interacting with the child welfare system and the court can be stressful and overwhelming. It is important for you to take care of your mental and physical health during this process. There are many State and local organizations available for counseling or peer support.

What is case planning? Planning and court hearing processes work together to determine the changes needed to return a child home or reach another goal, such as placement with a relative. Parents might be ordered to participate in specific services before children can be returned home. These services may include mental health or substance abuse treatment. It may be challenging, but these services are designed to enable you to keep your child safe and ultimately back at home.

What is family court? The primary role of a juvenile or family court in child welfare cases is to protect children and help their parents provide a safe home environment. This is a civil court, not a criminal court, and the hearings are often less formal than those you might have seen on TV. In most cases, everyone in court has the same goal—to make sure your child is safe.

What is expected of me in court? You are expected to be on time; dress appropriately; avoid inappropriate language; and leave food, drink, or chewing gum outside the courtroom.

How can I prepare for court? Talk with your lawyer, the GAL/CASA volunteer, parent mentor (if you have one), or caseworker before the hearing. You should also arrange for transportation

(and if needed child care). Bring important papers and documents. Arrive at least 15 minutes early and locate the hearing room, check in with the court officer outside the courtroom, and be prepared to wait.

How long will hearings take? The judge is responsible for listening to many cases throughout the day. You should plan on it taking several hours and ask your caseworker or lawyer for more information.

What if I don’t have a way to get to the courthouse? Make sure you consult with your lawyer or caseworker in advance of the hearing so they can assist with transportation.

What happens after the hearing? The judge makes a decision and issues a court order, which takes place either immediately or within a specified timeframe. The judge will explain the expected course of action that you and the case will take. Ask for written copies of all court papers and orders before you leave the courthouse. Ask your lawyer or caseworker to explain what is next.

Can I participate if I am in jail or prison? You have a right to be included in your child’s case management, including notification about court hearings and interviews about your child’s safety and potential placement with relatives. You should let your case manager know you want to be as involved as possible with your child’s case, including any allowed visits with your child, as well as participation in court. If it is not possible for you to make a physical appearance in court, your lawyer or case manager can help coordinate your participation by telephone or by video conference.

3 Roles of People Connected to Your Case

Judge or Commissioner: This person presides over the courtroom and decides whether alleged abuse or neglect occurred and whether the child needs to be removed from the home. The judge may rule certain conditions must be met for the child to remain at home (e.g., monitoring by CPS, participation in parenting classes, or enrollment in treatment services). When there is a disagreement in the case, everyone comes to court and asks the judge to make a decision; ultimately, the judge has the final say in all decisions made about your case.



Parent's Attorney: This is the person who represents your legal interests. If you cannot afford an attorney, you may ask the court to appoint a public defense attorney to represent you. The determination of eligibility for an attorney is handled by the local court. Besides appearing with you in court, your attorney will help you understand your legal rights, and assist in working with your social worker. If there are problems, your attorney can negotiate a solution with the agency or bring it to the judge's attention. The Office of Public Defense Parents Representation Program can provide information to you on child dependencies: <https://opd.wa.gov>.

Child's Representative: The court appoints a person who speaks for your child throughout the legal process, this person is often called a Guardian Ad Litem and/or a Court Appointed Special Advocate (GAL/CASA). This trained volunteer represents your child's best interests and needs, serves as a factfinder for the court, may help find services for your child, and in general is an advocate for your child. You can assist your child's representative by providing information about your child to help them represent your child. It is also a good idea to talk to your attorney about what might be useful to share.

Child's Caregiver: When your child is placed in out-of-home care, it might be with your child's relatives (kinship care) or with unrelated parents (foster care). Foster care can also refer to placement settings such as group homes, residential care facilities, emergency shelters, and supervised independent living. As primary caregivers, foster and kinship parents have significant roles in carrying out permanency plans. Foster and kinship parents often work with birth parents and support reunification efforts. However, if for some reason your the child cannot return home, your child's caregiver also may consider adoption.

Agency Attorney: This person is an Assistant Attorney General who appears in all court hearings to represent the Washington State and work with agency social workers assigned to your case. Because of court rules, the agency attorney cannot talk to you directly without permission from your attorney.

The Agency: The Child Protective Services (CPS) and Child Welfare Services (CFWS) are part of the Department of Children, Youth, and Families (DCYF). During your case you may hear about CPS, CFWS, the agency or the department, these all refer to the agency investigating and offering formal services to you and your child.

- **Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA):** DCYF conducts inquiries concerning Native American ancestry or heritage. This enables culturally appropriate support to children and families, in coordination with identified Tribes. If there is a reason to know your child is a member or eligible for membership in a federally-recognized Tribe, then ICWA may apply. There are Federal and State laws that specifically protects family and tribal interests of any child who is an "Indian child" as defined under ICWA.

Social/Case Workers: Various social workers are assigned to your family's case, typically there is a Child Protective Services (CPS) social worker and a Child and Family Welfare Services (CFWS) social worker. Sometimes an independent social worker is appointed through the Office of Public Defense (OPD). Each social worker has different areas of responsibilities:

- **CPS Social Worker** is the person who investigates allegations of child abuse and/or neglect and if possible provide services to parents prior to court involvement. CPS must investigate the facts and determine whether your case meets statutory (state law) definitions. Generally, the investigation covers physical abuse, neglect, sexual abuse, or maltreatment under circumstances which indicate the child's health, welfare, or safety were harmed.
- **CFWS Social Worker** is a person who becomes involved when a case transfers to court. This social worker works with the family and others to identify barriers to healthy parenting and offers for services to correct the parental deficiencies. The CFWS Social Worker reports to the court on the compliance and progress of the parent with their court-ordered and/or court recommended services (these also known as formal supports).
- **OPD Social Worker** is a person contracted through the Parents Representation Program. This social worker works with parents as well as a support to the court, under the direction of an OPD attorney. In general an OPD social worker assists parents in becoming their own advocate in asserting rights and finding community-based services (also known as informal supports).

Service Providers: If the court orders or strongly recommends a service for you or your child, then you to need work with social workers to find and participate in a formal service. Depending on your case, service providers may include professional supports such as chemical dependency counselors, mental health counselors, parenting teachers, and visitation supervisors. The court determines the formal services which may help your parental deficiencies and keep your child safe. You may want to consider participating other informal or community-based services to help you cope with the challenges you face. For example: an additional parenting class, a parenting support group, or an alcohol/addicts anonymous group.

Parent Mentor/Parent Ally/Parent Partner: This is a person who is typically a volunteer, and might be a birth parent who might have faced similar life challenges like you. This person works with a parent to listen to concerns, to provide emotional support, as well as constructive feedback. See page 11 for "Words of Wisdom from Parent Mentors."

Dependency Court Timeline

State and federal laws establish a timeline when hearings must be held and decisions made. If your child is out of the home for 15 of 22 months, a termination petition must be filed, unless the court finds a compelling reason not to. Within approximately one year, you must demonstrate you have changed and have the ability to keep your child safe, otherwise you can lose the right to parent your child.

At any point during the process a judge may decide your child can safely return home. Social workers will work to offer you court ordered and recommended services and supports. Make an effort to connect with other community services and resources too, this may help increase your chances of reunifying with your child.

You need to show the court you are making every effort to become the best parent you can be. Keep trying, stay connected with supports, and don't lose hope; many other parents have successfully reunified with their children.

*"The days are long, but the years are short."
— Gretchen Rubin,
The Happiness Project*



CPS Referral:	Child Picked Up:	Shelter Care Hearing:	Continued Shelter Care:	Fact Finding Hearing:	Disposition Hearing:	First Dependency Review Hearing:	Permanency Planning Hearing:	Dependency Review Hearing:
<p>CPS receives a report about suspected abuse or neglect of your child.</p> <p>CPS does an assessment.</p> <p>Reports are either:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Screened out—<i>no action is taken.</i> <p>OR</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Screened in—<i>an investigation is started.</i> <p>If an investigation determines your child needs protection from immediate harm, then your child is removed from the home.</p>	<p>CPS, police, or medical professionals, remove your child from your care. Your child is placed with a relative or in a foster home.</p> <p>Within 72 hours, <i>not including weekends and holidays</i>, a Shelter Care Hearing will be held.</p>	<p>At the hearing you can ask for an attorney.</p> <p>A judge decides if your child can safely return home, or needs to remain in care.</p> <p>You can ask your child to stay with relatives rather than staying in a foster home.</p> <p>If your child remains in care, then a social worker will setup a visit plan with you.</p>	<p>In some cases the court decides if your child can safely return home, or needs to remain in care.</p> <p>The court reviews your visitation plan and where your child is living.</p>	<p><i>Within 75 days of filing of a dependency petition.</i></p> <p>If you continue to object to the dependency, then the court hears testimony from you and others about child safety threats.</p> <p>The court will decide:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Your child is a dependent of the agency and will remain in care. •Your child is safe enough to go home, but order an in-home dependency with supervision. <p>OR</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •To dismiss the case and order your child to be returned to your care. 	<p><i>Within 90 days of filing of a dependency petition. This may happen immediately after the fact finding hearing.</i></p> <p>If the court decides your child is a dependent of the agency or an in-home dependency with supervision is needed, then you will be ordered to participate in services to help reduce safety threats in your home.</p> <p>The court also reviews your visitation and placement issues at this hearing.</p>	<p><i>90 days from a disposition or 6 months after original placement, whichever is first.</i></p> <p>The court reviews compliance with orders and progress with services, and may consider additional services or orders to strengthen your ability to provide a safe home to your child.</p> <p>The court might decide your child is safe enough to go home, and order an in-home dependency with supervision.</p>	<p><i>Every 12 months from the original placement date.</i></p> <p>The court decides what your child's permanent placement should be and what also your child's concurrent plan should be if you are unable to safely parent your child.</p> <p>The court may order more than one permanent plan for your child.</p> <p>These plans might include: return home, adoption, guardianship, long term foster /relative care placement, independent living, or third-party custody.</p>	<p><i>Dependency review hearings occur every 6 months.</i></p> <p>The court reviews compliance with orders and progress with services.</p> <p>If you have not made sufficient progress by this time, in some cases, the court will order the agency to file a request to terminate your parental rights.</p> <p>If a termination petition is filed, then there will be a trial. Your attorney and the agency's attorney will present evidence on your case. Then a judge will decide whether or not to terminate your parental rights.</p>
 <p><i>You need to demonstrate you are capable of changing things in your life in order to keep your child safe.</i></p>								

Glossary of Court Terms

The following terms may come up in court proceedings. If something is unfamiliar or unclear, ask your attorney or caseworker.

Fact Finding Hearing: Held by the court to determine if there is enough evidence to prove that a child was actually abused, neglected, abandoned or whether another legal basis exists for the agency to intervene to protect the child. Also referred to as an Adjudicatory Hearing.

Best Interests of the Child: The court decides the type of services, actions, and orders which will best serve a child.

CASA/GAL: This is a court-appointed special advocate and/or a Guardian ad litem, usually a volunteer appointed by the court, who works to ensure that the needs and interests of a child are fully protected. Usually this person considers the best interests of a child and may perform a variety of roles, including being an independent investigator, advocate, advisor, and guardian for the child.

Caregiver: One who provides for the physical, emotional, and social needs of a dependent person. The term most often applies to parents or parent surrogates; child care and nursery workers; health-care specialists; and relatives caring for children, elderly, or ill family members.

Case Permanency Plan: A document outlining outcomes, goals, and tasks necessary to ensure the child's safe return to a home.

Child Abuse and Neglect: Any non-accidental physical injury or failure to act on the part of a parent or caretaker that results in death or serious physical or emotional harm.

Child Protective Services (CPS): This is a part of the agency, which receives reports, conducts investigations and assessments, and provides intervention and treatment services to children and families in which child maltreatment is reported to have occurred.

Concurrent Planning: Working toward the safe return of a child to his or her family while also developing an alternative plan in case a return to the birth family home is not possible.

Corporal Punishment: Inflicting physical pain to discipline a child (e.g., spanking).

Custody: Refers to the legal right to make decisions about children, including where they live. Parents have legal custody of their children unless they voluntarily give custody to someone else or a court takes this right away and gives it to someone else such as a relative, foster parent, or the agency.

Dispositional Hearing: Hearings to determine what needs to happen with the child and the family while the case is in discussion (e.g., where the child will live, who will have legal custody, and what services are needed to reduce the risk and to address the effects of maltreatment).

Due Process: The principle that every person is entitled to a fair and unbiased legal process.

Fictive Kin: People not related by birth or marriage with an emotionally significant relationship with an individual.

Foster Care: A substitute care for children placed away from their parents or guardians and for whom the agency has been given placement and care responsibility.

Foster Parent: Adults who provide a temporary home and everyday nurturing and support for children who have been removed from their homes. The adults may be relatives or non-relatives and are required to be licensed in order to provide care for foster children.

Full Disclosure: Information provided to the family regarding intervention steps, the case plan requirements, family expectations, the consequences for not fulfilling the expectations, and the rights of parents in order to ensure that the family completely understands the process.

Jurisdiction: The legal authority of a court to hear and decide a certain type of case.

Legal Guardian: An adult to whom the court has given parental responsibility and authority for a child. A guardian appointment requires filing a petition and approval by the court. It can be done without terminating the parental rights of the child's parents.

Mediation: A voluntary process allowing the parties to agree on a permanency decision in the best interests of the child with the help of a trained, neutral, third party. Mediation generally avoids confrontational court hearings.

Paternity: Legal or biological fatherhood.

Perpetrator: The person who has been determined to have caused or knowingly allowed the maltreatment of a child.

Physical Abuse: Child abuse that results in physical injury.

Physical Neglect: Failure to provide for a child's basic survival needs, such as nutrition, clothing, shelter, hygiene, or medical care.

Protective Custody: A form of custody required to remove a child from his or her home and placement in out-of-home care. Law enforcement may place a child in protective custody based on an independent determination that the child's health, safety, and welfare is jeopardized. A child can also be placed in protective custody via court order.

Putative Father: The legal term for a man who is not married to the child's mother and who is alleged, or claims to be, the biological father of a child.

Relinquishment: The voluntary termination or release of all parental rights and duties that legally frees a child to be adopted. This is sometimes referred to as a surrender or as making an adoption plan for a child.

Review Hearing: Held by the juvenile or family court to review case progress (usually every 6 months) and to determine the need for the court's continued oversight.

Safety Plan: A document developed when a child is considered in imminent or potential risk of serious harm. The plan lists factors causing or contributing to the risk of imminent serious harm to a child. It identifies, along with the family, the interventions that will control the safety factors and assure a child's protection.

Service Agreement: The casework document developed between the caseworker and the family that outlines the tasks necessary to achieve case goals and outcomes. A service agreement may also be known as a case plan.

Substantiated: A CPS determination that means credible evidence exists that alleged child abuse and/or neglect occurred. An unsubstantiated finding means that there is not enough evidence to prove that alleged child abuse or neglect occurred.

Termination of Parental Rights (TPR): The voluntary or involuntary relinquishment of parental legal rights for the care, custody, and control of a child.

Shared Case Planning Meetings

6

The agency uses shared case planning meetings to engage parents, youth, caregivers, relatives, fictive kin, and other natural supports as appropriate. The purpose of these meetings are to help develop plans that a) prioritizes child safety and b) addresses the support and service needs of parents, children, and other caregivers. Planning meetings are a chance for everyone to share information, to develop plans, and make decisions together, which support child safety, permanency, and well-being.



As a parent your involvement in shared planning meetings is extremely important. You will help develop your family's case plan in order to eliminate safety threats and create a permanency goal for your child. You may be asked to participate in these following types of shared case planning meetings:

- **Family Team Decision Making (FTDM):** These occur throughout the entire case. They are intended to bring together your family members and other community supports, along with professionals in order to make recommendations regarding your child's temporary and permanent placements.
- **Child Protection Teams (CPT):** These teams include doctors, school personnel, mental health practitioners, and other community professionals. Together these individuals provide consultation and recommendations to the agency regarding cases in which there is risk of imminent harm to a child who is six years old or younger, or in which there is a dispute about the need for out-of-home placement.
- **Permanent and Concurrent Planning:** In addition to working with you to reduce or eliminate safety threats, the agency works to develop case plan goals for your child's short term and long term care. The agency's primary goal is to return your child to your care, however, another (concurrent) plan must be made if the goal to return home cannot be achieved.
- **Local Indian Child Welfare Advisory Committee (LICWAC):** If you or your child are identified as possibly Native American your case could be assigned to the Local Indian Child Welfare Advisory Committee. LICWAC is a group of volunteers who consult with the agency on child welfare cases when your Native American status has not been determined or your child's tribe is unavailable.

THE BENEFITS OF SHARED PLANNING:

Consensus: The goal of shared planning is for a team to work together and agree on a placement that protects a child and preserves and/or reunifies a family. If an agreement by the full team cannot be achieved, then the agency maintains a legal responsibility to make a decision regarding placement that is in the child's best interest.

Confidentiality: The strict confidentiality of information disclosed at shared planning meetings is not guaranteed. Privacy and respect are emphasized. However, information parents share during the meeting can be used by the agency for case planning, as well as for further investigations and/or in later court proceedings.

Benefits of Shared Case Planning: The agency's mission is to transform lives by acting to protect children and promote healthier families through strong partnerships with communities and tribes. By including your trusted and healthy community supports, i.e. extended family, friends, and/or neighbors in this process, then you could help ensure there are safe supports for you and your child. The team could help improve the quality of planning and decisions with more supportive ideas and more information on resources and services available to your family.

If you have questions or concerns regarding shared planning meetings, then talk with your attorney or social worker.

Working with Kin Caregivers & Foster Parents

Seeing your child in the care of another person is hard. Hearing your child call someone else "mommy" or "daddy" can be devastating. When someone else parents your child in a way you do not agree with, it can be much worse. Keep in mind kin caregivers and foster parents are people too, with their own set of family values and life challenges. Don't blame or shame them for doing their best to care for your child. What you need to focus on is ensuring your child is safe, secure, and is getting the care they need.

Work with kin caregivers and foster parents, by talking about and focusing on things your child may need or want. For example: Is your child missing a favorite toy? Does your child have any allergies or need medicine? Does your school-age child need their school work? Is it possible for your child to call and say good night to you?

Be respectful and kind towards your child's caregivers, while also showing how much you care about your child too. As you work with others to make sure your child is safe, you may find other ways to stay connected with your child.

If your child is safe, instead of worrying about what is going on at the kin caregiver or foster home, then focus on your health, well-being, and becoming the best parent you can be.

If you feel your child is unsafe or at risk of harm while in out-of-home care, then tell your attorney or social worker. Do not bad-mouth your child's kin caregiver or foster parents. Keep in mind your child was reported unsafe while in your care, so always be respectful, try not to judge, and always focus on your child's safety and needs.

7 Get Connected: Community Support

Raising children is hard work, and it is even more difficult when your family is in crisis. It can be hard to ask for help, especially if you feel ashamed of your child being in out-of-home care. However, isolating yourself and your family can lead to even more challenges. Therefore, it is a good idea to find support from others in your community.

Look around you, find people you can trust, and ask about local supports they might know about. Some parents find support groups, such as AA or NA which can help with substance abuse

recovery. Others find a spiritual or religious group helpful.

Extended family, friends, and neighbors can also be a resource. Many parents find connecting with a parent mentor who has successfully navigated a child dependency, to be an understanding and supportive guide.

What is most important is to find others you can trust and who are capable of giving you the guidance and emotional support that you need in order to get and stay connected to your community.

ALSO CONSIDER WHO IN YOUR COMMUNITY CAN HELP WITH:

Providing transportation to visits, services and/or meetings.

Supervising visits and/or transporting your child.

Understanding your family's traditions and/or celebrations.

Name: _____ Contact info: _____

Can help with: _____

Name: _____ Contact info: _____

Can help with: _____

Name: _____ Contact info: _____

Can help with: _____

Be Connected: Self Care

Your family is in crisis. The agency and court got involved, may have removed your child, and disrupted your family's life because you and your child were reported to be unsafe. This is traumatic for both you and your child. Acknowledging this is difficult and how it makes you feel is a first step towards caring for yourself.

Your child needs you, however, until you are in a safer and healthier place, it can be hard to be the caring parent you need to be. Consider how you would act in a different type of crisis, like on an airplane which lost air pressure. In such an emergency, you would need to put on your oxygen mask first, before you helped your child, otherwise you would both suffocate. Taking care of yourself first in almost any crisis, including a child dependency, is a vital factor to keeping you and your family safe.

Self care might include finding a support group, a mentor, or a counselor. You need help to get through this challenging time; find others you trust and can confide in with your anger, sadness, fear, and other worries. Keep in mind, focus on yourself, your safety, and then your child's safety. You cannot change the past or what others say about you, but you can work on the changes the court is asking you to make. Do all you can to make these changes happen.

If you are in treatment or recovery, then be open to your on-going self-care needs. Consider what helps you feel connected, safe, and healthy. Consider what does not help or anything that may trigger unsafe or unhealthy behaviors. Make a list of trusted people, those who can help you when you feel headed towards a crisis, and don't be afraid to ask for support whenever you need it.

Stay Connected: Plan Visits with Your Child

After self-care and safety, visits with your child are most important. You need to work with your social worker to plan and arrange visits with your child. Visits are the right of the family, and a written plan must be developed to include all parties. All parties must know about the plan, even incarcerated parents.

Provide names of family members and other safe people in your community who can transport your child to and/or monitor visits. However, do not bring other people to visits with your child without permission.

Commit to consistent regular visits. Arrange your own transportation, arrive on time, and come prepared.

If possible, identify visit locations. Consider places in your community where you feel comfortable. If your child is younger, consider places that are safe to play and fun to

explore. If your child is older, consider places where your child would enjoy and comfortable talking with you. You need to be able to demonstrate you can parent your child safely at home and in any normal community setting.

During visits always follow the plan and visit rules. For example: no discussing the case with your child; no drugs, no weapons, no profanity, and no spanking.

Never come to a visit while in crisis, intoxicated, or high. Do not use drugs or alcohol before or during any visit. If you are experiencing a mental health crisis and/or under the influence, then ask for a visit to be postponed.

If you need to cancel a visit, then contact your social worker or visit provider as soon as possible, so your child is not transported unnecessarily.

Why Visits Are Important to Children:



“Early, consistent, and frequent visits are crucial for strengthening and maintaining family relationships. It is also important for parent-child attachments and can decrease the sense of abandonment that children often experience when they are removed from their home.

Purposeful visitation is linked to positive outcomes, increased safety, improved child well-being, less time in out-of-home care, and faster reunification when it is in the best interest of the child.”

— Partners for Our Children

Children’s Needs: All children, even babies, need to feel safe and secure and attached to their family. Visits help children stay connected to you and others in their family. Whenever possible visits should be a normal part of life, and include activities the child would normally be doing with your family.

First Visit: If a child is placed in shelter care, then a first visit should occur within 72 business hours. However, business hours may not include holidays and weekends, which means a week could go by before your child is transported for a first visit with you.

Frequency: Whenever possible visits should occur weekly. If possible babies and young children should be given more frequent visits. When a visit is possible and practical, however, depends on many factors including, matching schedules, arranging transportation, and establishing a place to visit.

Duration: Visits need to be long enough to help maintain the parent-child relationship. Visits may last between 1 to 4 hours, depending on schedules and location availability. The attention, care, and “quality” time you give your child are most important. Make the best use of visit times and focus on your child’s needs.

Location: Visits should occur in the least restrictive, most normal environment as possible within a child’s community, while also assuring child safety. In order of preference visit locations are as follows: 1) in a parent’s home; 2) in a relative’s home; 3) in a park or public location; or 4) in an institutional setting. Institutional visit settings, such as a jail or an agency office, should only be held in such a location, if it is the only way to assure a child’s protection.

Siblings: The agency should encourage as much parent, child, and sibling contact as possible. Unless safety concerns exist, siblings who live apart should visit at least twice a month.

Other Visits: Other forms of contact may be substituted when face-to-face visits are not possible. Overnight visits should be considered when it is assured a child can be protected at home. Furthermore, if the child considered safe during lengthy home visits, then the child probably should be moved back home with close follow-up supervision and in-home support services.

Supervision

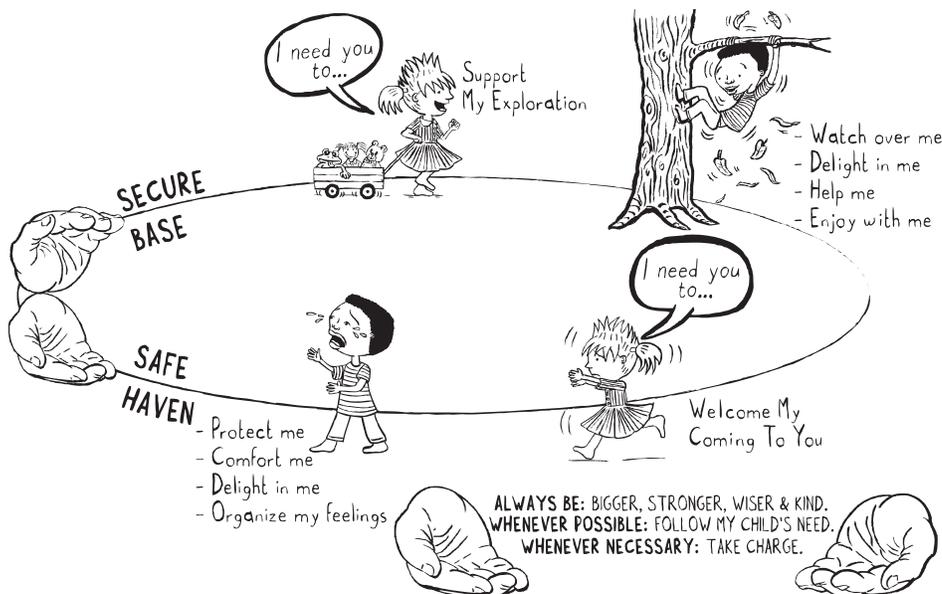
Three supervision levels are recognized by the courts:

- 1. Supervised:** Requires the presence of another assigned adult who maintains line of sight and sound supervision. The visit supervisor intervenes as needed. Child safety is a priority in supervised visits.
- 2. Monitored:** Requires another adult to monitor the visit periodically and intervene as needed. If visits are monitored, the social worker needs to document in the case notes the reasons for the decision.
- 3. Unsupervised:** A safety plan must be completed first. It means parent has shown the ability to care for the child in a safe and age-appropriate manner. If visits are unsupervised, the social worker must document the decision.

Most visits begin within an agency office. If parents can demonstrate they are safe, then visits may change to community-based settings. Home visits might begin after a safety plan is completed and approved.

Circle of Security[®]

Parent Attending to the Child’s Needs



9 Tips for Great Visits With Your Child



Prepare for Visits: Plan ahead, bring a few of your child’s favorite toys, books, games or music. Avoid bringing expensive gifts or items you cannot afford to lose. If you are given a list of what is allowed, then bring required items and nothing else. If needed you can ask what toys and activities are available during the visit.

Although visitations are a right, remember there are rules that still need to be followed. If you have questions or concerns, then ask visitation staff before

or after a visit. It might be best to talk about these at different times other than visits.

Bring a visitation bag or backpack to hold everything you need for visits. If your child is still in diapers or potty training, it is a good idea to bring diapers and a change of clothes.

Attending Visits: Attend all visits you can with your child and arrive on time. As simple as this may sound, this is very important. Your children will miss you and won’t understand if you aren’t there or show up late to a visit.

If you are unable to attend a visit due to a conflict (like a court-ordered service or you are in crisis), then let the visit provider know as soon as possible. Let your social worker know too, sometimes a makeup visit can be scheduled

Food for Visits: Before you visit, it is a good idea to eat something healthy with protein. Avoid salty or sugary food, energy drinks, and too much caffeine; these can make you feel nervous, irritable, or tired.

Feeding your child is something that all parents do. You can bring food that is part of your culture and family traditions, however, make sure it is a light healthy snack that you and your child will enjoy. If needed, you can ask your social worker or child’s caregiver to tell you what your child is eating these days. If your baby is nursing or drink from a bottle, you can ask about providing milk or formula during visits.



Focus on your child, turn off distractions.

Be Emotionally Present and Available During Visits: Unless there is time to talk to others before your child arrives, wait until after the visit to discuss your concerns with visit staff or your social worker.

This time is for bonding with your children. Avoid venting your frustrations about your case, social worker or anyone else. The visit is your time to be with your child, it is your time to shine, so make the best of it.

Turn off your mobile devices during visits so you won’t be distracted by texts or calls.

Follow Your Child’s Needs: Give your child your full attention, try to make meaningful, emotional connections. Share some special moments with your child, and spend some “time-in” with them.

You miss your child, they miss you too, but during visits your child may not behave in ways you expect. Acknowledge this is hard for your child too. Try to understand your child’s moods and behaviors; be open to any feelings your child may share.

If your child wants to be close to you, then sit with them, talk, and do a quiet activity of your child’s choosing. If your child is angry, crying, or upset, and pushing you away, then take some deep breaths, sit next to them, and talk calmly about his or her feelings.

If your child wants to play, then you can offer some fun games or toys. Let your child choose what they want to play with or pretend to do. Don’t take control of playtime. As long as it is safe, enjoy playing and doing what your child wants to do. If they want to play alone, then sit back, enjoy watching them explore and offer to help them as needed.

Frequent and consistent visits can:

- Help maintain a child-parent-sibling connection and preserve the continuity of these relationships.
- Develop appropriate connections between parents and children.
- Nurture emotional and behavioral well-being in children.
- Reassure a child, he or she has not been abandoned by a parent.
- Provide opportunities for a child to maintain connections to others in the child’s extended family.
- Give a child a connection to his or her community, as well as a sense of belonging and a cultural heritage.

If your child asks you for something you cannot give, it is okay to say “not today” or “sorry we can’t afford that.” It is okay to set limits on things your children can ask for or what to do while with you, because this is what all parents do to keep children safe. If there is something your child truly needs and you cannot provide it, then it is okay to talk about it with your social worker or child’s caregiver after the visit.

Help your child with homework or pre-school activities. Ask your child to show you what they are learning. Listen and support their education. It is okay to talk to your child about how things are going at school and what they are learning, but try to focus on the positive. Use encouraging statements with your child. For example: “You did a good job,” “Wow, you are learning new things,” and “I am proud of you.” If you or your child is worried about something in regards to learning or feeling bullied, then talk about it with your social worker or child’s caregiver after the visit.

As the visit comes to the end, help your child clean up the visit area. More importantly say “I love you” and help your child to say goodbye until next time.

Types of Visits:

Face to face contact is the preferred form of visits. However, other methods that help maintain a child’s connection to family and his/her community should also be used to supplement in-person visits.

These include, but are not limited to:

- Telephone
- Letters
- Email
- Pictures
- Video or auditory tapes
- Attending religious events
- Participation in family or cultural activities
- Any creative method of maintaining connections



Your child needs to know they are not to blame for your mistakes, and no matter what you will always love them.

After Visits: Keep Connected, Keep Caring 10

Take care of yourself. Visits are hard emotionally and can trigger unhealthy behaviors. You are not alone, don't be afraid to reach out and ask for help when you need it. After visits talk with a friend, sponsor, parent mentor, counselor, and/or social worker about your feelings and concerns.

Ask for feedback on how the visit went, and clarification on expectations you do not understand. Listen and ask questions about how to plan and improve on future visits. Negotiate any plan changes and discuss concerns with your social worker.

Stay connected with others in your case. Whenever possible communicate with your social worker and your child's caregiver

before and after visits. Talk about your child's needs and care including: bed and nap times, meal and feeding times, favorite activities, puzzling behaviors, and more.

Keep positive and focused on your child. If contact with the caregiver family is limited, a message notebook could be a good way to stay in contact. If communication is more open, then comfort calls initiated and supervised by the caregiver parent, might also help you and your child.

Before, during, and after visits, be supportive of and kind to the person who is taking care of your child. Always be respectful of social workers and other professionals too.



Rise TIPS

Fight or Flight

copied with sadness and anger in visits

www.risemagazine.org BY AND FOR PARENTS IN THE CHILD WELFARE SYSTEM

Even though we love our children and want to see them, visiting children in foster care can bring up painful feelings for many parents. Sometimes visits are scary, stiff, weird, awkward, or sad. Our kids may act angry at us, or like they don't care. Walking into the agency can make us feel like a failure. If you were in foster care yourself as a child, visits can also bring up feelings of abandonment.

During visits, you may feel jumpy or angry from the get go. You may sit there without playing, feeling emotionless or spaced out. You may forget what you were doing. These can be signs of trauma.

WHAT IS TRAUMA?

Trauma is an experience that makes a person feel that their life is threatened—or a loved one's life is in danger—and overwhelms a person's ability to cope. It's normal in traumatic moments to freeze or feel unable to respond, to feel that you are apart from your own body, or to react with overwhelming fear, anger, or even violence.

The most devastating trauma occurs when people who are supposed to love us, and keep us safe, do us harm. Physical or sexual abuse or domestic violence can make it hard for people to trust anyone. Trauma can also hurt how people feel about themselves, even though the abuse is not their fault.

HOW DOES YOUR BODY FEEL?: Sit quietly, pay attention to your breathing. Mindfulness helps focus on your body. As you begin notice how your body is reacting, it is easier in difficult moments to care for yourself, instead of feeling angry, scared, or shut down.

TIP Feeling helpless and overwhelmed can be a "trauma trigger" if you've had trauma in your past. Trauma doesn't have to keep hurting. Knowing about trauma—and getting treatment—can help you cope.

DID YOU KNOW? Therapy can feel unsafe, if you start by opening up wounds. When you have gone through trauma, the first step in therapy should be how to calm down and feel safe and in control.

TIP Being aware of what trauma is can help you cope and ask for help. Ask for a trauma screening and traumafocused treatment if you think trauma is affecting you.

RISE TIPS is brought to you by the parents at Rise, which trains parents to write and speak about their experiences with the foster care system. For information and peer support, go to: www.risemagazine.org or like us on Facebook: @readrisemag

11 Anger & Denial: After Your Child is Taken.

You are at a crossroads; this is when you need make a choice whether your focus is to get your child home, and take the steps to change; or you're going to fight the system and waste time and energy in doing so. This process is all about choices. Working to get your child home or your case resolved is in everyone's best interest, including your child. Take a few deep breaths and decide what your goal is; and what you are going to do to get it.

After your child is removed there are cycles of loss you will go through. This is normal. You may experience all the stages of grief and loss or only some of them. You may be angry or sad. It could feel crazy because you can bounce around through the stages and even go back to one you have already gone through. The goal is to get to a level of acceptance, while working through the anger and denial. The process can look like this:

Denial: This can be either denial there was a reason to remove the child, or denial that you needed any help. This can be a time many people choose to isolate themselves. However, the consequences of being alone, or feeling alone, are damaging. It is okay to ask for help, and need of it. Find a support system that works for you. It could be Alcoholics Anonymous, NA, a church or a group that applies to your needs.

Anger: This too is a natural process of grieving. Anger can be good when handled appropriately. Ways to handle it well are to talk about it, processing it with a sponsor, or other person you have in your support network. Anger can have consequences when you stay in it too long, or you deny it and let it fester inside of you.



Bargaining: This is a stage when you may think that there is some way to take the pain away, if only you could have done something else instead. Or perhaps you feel, if only they

gave your child back, everything would be fine. This is living in a world of "woulda, shoulda, coulda." The fact is you cannot go back and change anything that happened, but you can change where you are now. You need to move forward. It takes a lot of work to get your child home, and to work through all the emotions. However, it is worth it for both you and your child.



Depression: This stage can make you feel numb, alone, and really sad. This is when it is good to find things to be involved in and have a support network to turn to. It is okay to be sad and hurt. Sometimes if this lasts too long, then you may want to seek help and talk to a professional.

Acceptance: This is where you get to a place of accepting that your child was removed, and now it is time to work on yourself, and work on having your child returned, or decide on other options that may fit for you and your child.

Words of Wisdom from Parent Mentors*

**Child welfare parent mentor means a parent who has successfully resolved the issues that led the parent's child into the care of the juvenile dependency court system, resulting in family reunification or another permanency outcome, and who has an interest in working collaboratively to improve the lives of children and families. – RCW 2.70.060*

You are not alone in this dependency experience. We also felt...confused, sad, scared, and angry after our children were taken too!

We have been in your shoes. We know what it's like to ask, "why me?" When our cases were opened we wondered what would happen next. At times, we felt our families shouldn't be involved with CPS and the system was wrong. We felt isolated and uncertain.

We were told our children were in danger and were harmed. We were charged with abuse and/or neglect; and the things we were accused of were horrible and devastating. We stood in front of the court and were told our children were not going home; so we know firsthand the heartache of having a child taken away.

So how did we endure? What did we do to get to a safe place for ourselves, our children, and our families? Why would we want to help you? Like an AA or NA sponsor; mentor parents lead by example. We take responsibility for our actions, share our personal experiences, and demonstrate how to change to anyone who needs help or wants to understand.

A parent mentor's first goal is to give you hope. Then a mentor may offer you guidance in choosing what path to take. However, it is up to you to stand up. You must decide the direction your journey through the child welfare system will take you and your child. The earlier you start, the better; your child is growing and learning quickly, and cannot wait very long. You must connect with the court, social workers, and your attorney to find out what services you need most. You need to start services as soon as possible. When you complete required or recommended services, then look for more resources and community connections for your family. You need to show those in your case you will go the extra mile, to do all you can, to be the best parent you can be.

A parent mentor's wisdom may provide you with an understanding of how to cope with many of the challenges you now face. We know being involved with a dependency can be a nightmare, but we took it one day at a time, we learned what it takes to make it through, so can you. We found people who helped us and provided the services we needed and you can too. However, simply being in services and going to a provider just because you are required to do it; won't cut it. You must want to do it. You must make a commitment to change your life, to love and nurture your children, as well as stay connected with a healthy community.



General Tips for Success

12

Keep track: You need to save and keep information. Put all documents concerning your case in a secure place like a file folder, backpack, or briefcase. Use a calendar to schedule important dates like court hearings, visitations, and service appointments. Create journal to write down your private feelings, thoughts, and concerns each day, it may help you remember things.

Attend appointments: You need to go to all of your hearings, meetings, services, and child's visits. If you cannot attend, call your attorney, social worker, and/or service provider immediately and let them know.

Stay connected: Whether you are struggling with an addiction, a mental health crisis, having partner difficulties, or connecting with your child's caregivers; you must stay positive. Ask for help when you need it. Talking about your concerns, safety, and plans with your social worker, attorney, and service providers is vital. As you move toward safer and healthier choices, ask your social worker or child's caregiver if there are ways you can be more involved with your child's life.

Build relationships: Strengthen your family and build community connections. This starts by keeping in contact with people involved in your case: your attorney, social workers, service providers, and child's caregiver. Try to work together to find agreeable solutions. Do not make things personal. Most everyone understands you are going through a difficult time, and most want to encourage you to be safe as you express your thoughts and feelings.

Rights, Responsibility, and Respect: You have the right to be heard. However, you have a responsibility to listen and learn. You have value, but you need to earn respect by honoring other people's thoughts and feelings too. Keep others' private information in confidence. Bear in mind you are often speaking with mandated reporters, threats of harm or imminent danger to anyone, especially a child is not acceptable. If you are struggling with anger or fear, then talk with a therapist or a parent mentor.

You are still a parent: It can be hard to hear your child call someone else mom or dad; this person could be your child's other parent, a relative, or foster parent. Don't make it personal. This person is a parent too, and right now they are responsible for caring for your child while you get the help you need. You are still a parent. If you cannot have regular, meaningful contact with your child, then save some things to show you care. Write letters, save family pictures, and keep other treasured items for your child.

Learn to nurture: Try to see the situation from your child's viewpoint and always keep their well-being in mind. Show others that you love and care for your children, by asking questions and talking about how your children feel.

Focus on your needs: Don't worry about stuff you cannot control, especially what people say about you, or the care your child is receiving from others. Pay attention to your problems. Get to know your strengths and weaknesses. Find a mentor or counselor you trust and can discuss your feelings with. Don't be afraid to be open and honest about your concerns with your trusted people.

Finding Resources & Services

If you are ordered by the court, or asked by your social worker to participate in a service, you must enroll in an appropriate program as soon as possible. Accepting and participating in services, is the best way to show you are committed to change. Ask your social worker or attorney for a list of providers. If they cannot help, then ask others in your community, and keep searching, until you find what you need.

If you have any problems with required services, then talk to your attorney and social worker immediately. You may be asked to do different services or you may feel a need for additional support, it is okay to ask for help with this too. You may choose to enroll in services on your own, which are not required. If you feel a service or resource is helpful, then do all you can to get support for you and your family, even if it means paying for the service yourself. This is what parents normally do who are not in a dependency.

There are various service providers that might assist you and your family. The Island County Family Resource Guide lists a number of options, you can pick up a copy locally or find it online at: www.unitedwayic.org/resourceguide.htm. Visit any Sno-Isle Library for free internet access, and request assistance as needed. The following list of organizations may also provide helpful information:

LOCAL

N Whidbey Family Resource Center
1791 NE 1st Ave • Oak Harbor
Corner of Whidbey Ave & Regatta
360-240-5554

Community & Family Health
410 N Main St • Coupeville
360-679-7351

Community & Family Health
127 NE Camano Dr • Camano Island
360-387-0184

South Whidbey Community Center
723 Camano Ave • Langley
360-221-0663

Also consider Fleet and Family Services, local churches, and other community-based organizations.

STATE

Department of Children, Youth, and Families
Includes Children's Administration, Early Learning, Juvenile Rehabilitation and other programs.
<https://www.dcyf.wa.gov>

Office of Public Defense Parents Representation Program
<https://opd.wa.gov>
800-414-6064

Washington State Parent Ally Committee c/o CHSW
<http://www.washingtonstatepac.org>
206-695-3238

NATIONAL

Child Welfare Information Gateway
<https://www.childwelfare.gov>
800-394-3366

ABA Center on Children and the Law
https://www.americanbar.org/groups/child_law/project-areas/parentrepresentation.html

Rise Magazine
Provides stories to support parents and to guide child welfare professionals
<http://www.risemagazine.org>
646-543-7099

Birth Parent National Network
<http://www.bpnn.ctfalliance.org/>

13 Important Case Dates, Contacts, & Notes

Your Child's Caregiver: _____ Contact Info: _____

Judge's Name: _____

Other Court Contacts: _____ Court Phone #: _____

Court Ordered Services: _____

Recommended Services: _____

Next Hearing Date: _____ Hearing Room #: _____

Agency Attorney Name: _____ Child's Representative: _____

Your Attorney: _____ Contact Info: _____

Social Worker: _____ Contact Info: _____

Agency Info: _____

Social Worker: _____ Contact Info: _____

Agency Info: _____

Social Worker: _____ Contact Info: _____

Agency Info: _____

Service Provider: _____ Contact Info: _____

Other Info: _____

Service Provider: _____ Contact Info: _____

Other Info: _____

Service Provider: _____ Contact Info: _____

Other Info: _____

Parent Mentor: _____ Contact Info: _____

Notes: _____

