



# ***Putting it all Together***

***A handbook for Youth***



Illinois Department of Children & Family Services



## ***Objectives of this Handbook***

It is difficult to be away from your family. You can use this booklet to help make it easier while you are in DCFS care. This handbook can help you by:

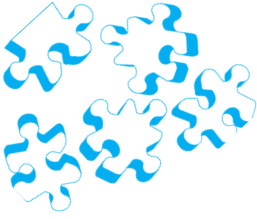
- answering some of the questions you may have
- describing what may happen after placement
- describing what you can do in different situations, such as in court or DCFS care
- describing the responsibilities of the people involved at this time
- providing phone numbers and names of people you can call for help
- providing definitions of terms you may hear while in DCFS care and in court

This handbook does not try to answer all the questions you may have. If you have more questions, ask your caseworker or your caregiver.



## ***How to use this Handbook***

- Use the Table of Contents to find where things are explained in the handbook. The Table of Contents is on the next page.
- **This handbook is yours** and you may want to keep it in a safe place because you will probably want to look things up several times.



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## **Why was I removed from my home?**

The reason you were removed from your home is to keep you safe. **It is not your fault that you are in DCFS care.** It is important to know that you were **not** removed from your home because of anything that you did. Your family needs help with the difficult problems that caused you to be placed in DCFS care.

A doctor, police officer or DCFS investigator thought you were not safe at home or were not being well taken care of. That is why one of them took you into **Protective Custody** and the DCFS investigator placed you into DCFS care where you will be safe.

Youth come into DCFS care for many reasons:

1. parents or caretakers are not able to keep them safe
2. physical, sexual or other abuse
3. the situation at home is out of control
4. other situations like when the parents are sick or in the hospital and they cannot take care of their children

### **Medical care**

You will go to a doctor for a medical exam as soon as you come into DCFS care. This is to make sure that you get the care that you need. This checkup could be in a doctor's office or a hospital. Be sure to tell the doctor if you feel sick. Tell the doctor if you hurt anywhere or if there is anything about you that is important to know to make sure you get well and stay well.

If you need a doctor or dentist while you are in DCFS care, your foster parents, caseworker or caretaker in a group home or residential placement will make sure that you get to a doctor or dentist. Always let your foster parents or caretaker know if you are not feeling well. Remember, only you know about your body and how it feels.

### **The DCFS investigator**

This is the person who investigated if you were abused or neglected. The investigator will introduce you to your caseworker.

## The caseworker

This is the person who makes sure that you get the help you need and that you are taken care of while your parents get the opportunity to make a positive change in their behavior that made you unsafe in your home.



## What will happen to me?

- 1) You are placed in safe care (see the section on “Where might I live in DCFS care” below).
- 2) Many important decisions about what will happen to you while in DCFS care are made by the judge (see the section on “The court and court decisions” on the next page).
- 3) The caseworker and your parents will work together to write a **Service Plan** that lists the steps your parents need to take to change their behavior and make your home safe so you can return home. This Service Plan may also include some things for you to work on while you are away from home. For example, for you to attend school or participate in counseling either by yourself or with your family.



## Where might I live while in DCFS care?

You may find yourself in one of the following living arrangements that provide care and safety to children in DCFS care:

### Foster care

A family or persons other than your own parents will take care of you to get you a safe place to live. There are two types of foster care:

- **Relative Foster Home** – You are placed with a relative, such as your grandparents, aunt or uncle who loves you and want you to live with them.
- **Foster Family Home** – Another family that is not related to you has agreed for you to live with them.

## Group home

A home where several youth live together under the supervision of adults that work at the group home.

## Residential care

A type of home that has more youth than a foster home or group home. Many people may work there to give you a safe place to live and special help. You may also go to school in the same building or in another building very near where you live.

## Emergency shelter

Emergency shelters are temporary. They are not places where youth live permanently. They are just places to keep youth safe for a short time while another place to live is found.



### *How long will I be away from home?*

How long you will stay away from home depends on how quickly your parents can change their behavior and make your home safe for you. Your parents must cooperate with the judge, your caseworker and the written corrective plan to show the judge that they have made positive changes and can make your home safe. The judge will decide when it is safe for you to go home.



### *The courts and court decisions*

While you are in DCFS care, there are meetings, called court hearings, where you, your caseworker, your parents and others involved in this situation meet with the judge. Each court hearing has a special name and purpose.

In the courtroom, **the judge** is the person in charge and listens to everyone who comes to your court hearing. The caseworker tells the judge whether your parents have changed their behavior so that you can return home. The judge makes the decision whether it is safe for you to go home or whether you must stay in DCFS care to be safe.

## The Shelter Care Hearing

This hearing is a meeting where the judge listens to people who know about the problem in your family and want you to be safe. These people, such as the DCFS investigator, will tell the judge why you were removed from your home and will ask the judge to decide if you should stay in DCFS care or return home. The judge may ask questions. It is important to remember that you can talk to the judge if you want to. Always tell the truth to the judge.

At the Shelter Care Hearing, the judge may ask a **Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA)** or a lawyer (attorney) called **Guardian Ad Litem (GAL)** to help you. The GAL or CASA will know about the law and why you are in court. The GAL or CASA will look out for your interests. Always tell the truth to your GAL or CASA.

## The Adjudicatory Hearing (sometimes called a trial)

At this hearing, the judge listens to what people say and decides if you were abused, neglected or dependent. Your family will be at this hearing and so will your caseworker. Your Guardian Ad Litem (GAL) or CASA will be here and should explain anything you don't understand.

## The Dispositional Hearing

The judge decides if it is safe for you to return home, stay in DCFS care or live with another guardian while your parents get help with their problems. The judge may say that your parents need to go to counseling, parenting training or need other things to help them take good care of you and keep you safe. The judge and your caseworker want to help your family get back together. They do not want to keep your family apart for a long time, but they want you to be safe.

Your parents also have a caseworker assigned to help them work in changing their behavior and make your home safe.

## Administrative Case Review (ACR)

This is a meeting where a DCFS Administrative Case Reviewer checks the Service Plan to see whether you and your parents are getting the help you need. The Reviewer checks whether your parents are following the list of steps in the Service Plan and are making positive changes in their behavior and sends a report to the judge for the next hearing. The ACR is held every six months and in most cases you may be present at all these meetings.

## Permanency Hearings

These are meetings with the judge or a Hearing Officer held every six months to see how things are going and whether your parents are making positive changes in their behavior. These meetings will occur as long as you are in DCFS care.

Your parents will have to show the judge or Hearing Officer at these permanency hearings that they have cooperated with the caseworker, completed all the steps listed in the Service Plan and made positive changes in their behavior before the judge decides whether it is safe for you to go home. The judge will want to make sure that it is safe for you to return home. If your home still not safe for you, the judge will also make the decision about a plan for your living situation. The Service Plan will also include things that are important for you to do, like attend school, participate in counseling, follow the rules where you are living and participate in other activities.



## ***You have rights in court***

You have a right to have representation in court. This means that:

- You have the right to have a lawyer.
- The GAL is to represent you in court, not your parents nor DCFS or the court. Your GAL makes sure that your best interest is taken into account when the judge makes decisions that will affect you and your future.
- You have the right to speak with your court representative anytime that you feel there is a need.



- You can have an interpreter to help you if you have trouble hearing or understanding English.
- People in court should extend the same professional courtesy to you that they extend to an adult. Your concerns and opinions should be heard.
- You should not be made to feel bad about yourself because of the words or actions of any person in the court system.
- You can ask questions and keep asking questions until you understand what is happening.



## ***What are my rights?***

Everyone has the right to be treated with dignity, honesty and respect.

### **You have the right to:**

1. be protected from physical, emotional and sexual abuse and/or neglect
2. be told why you came into DCFS care and why you are still in DCFS care
3. participate in the decisions concerning you and your future
4. be placed in DCFS care that can best meet your needs
5. be placed with your brothers and sisters if it is possible and if DCFS believes it is in your best interests
6. talk and visit with your parents, brothers, sisters, relatives and other people important to you unless the judge or your caseworker thinks it is not in your best interest
7. ask for help if you ever feel that decisions made are not the best for you
8. be visited by your caseworker at least monthly
9. be listened to, respected and heard
10. get the medical attention you need, this includes regular medical, dental and eye exams
11. go to school

12. participate in school, religious, cultural and other activities
13. have a plan for a permanent living arrangement after you leave DCFS care, and to take part in developing and committing yourself to this plan
14. receive enough to eat and enough clothing, as well as a monthly allowance for your personal expenses

### **You have the responsibility to:**

1. tell your caseworker or foster parent or other caretaker when things are not going right for you
2. tell your caseworker or adult you trust when you feel that you are in danger of abuse or neglect
3. go to school
4. follow your part of the Service Plan



## ***My family – Rights and responsibilities***

### **Your family has the right to:**

1. be told about why you were removed from the home and what behaviors they need to change to make your home safe so that they can have you back
2. visit you, unless the judge decides otherwise
3. make a written formal complaint to DCFS if they are unhappy about services they receive
4. surrender their parental rights if they are not able or willing to change to make it safe for you to return home
5. get an attorney to represent them in court

### **Your family has the responsibility to:**

1. work with DCFS to develop a written Service Plan that lists the steps they must take to make your home safe for you
2. work with DCFS to develop a permanent plan for you

3. give financial support to the state for your care, depending on their ability to pay



## **DCFS care provider – Rights and responsibilities**

DCFS care providers are foster care homes, group homes and residential facilities.

### **Your DCFS care provider has the right to:**

1. be heard and supported in providing good care for you
2. establish rules to help keep you safe
3. receive payment for the expenses they have made while taking care of you

### **Your DCFS care provider has the responsibility to:**

1. advocate for your needs. Advocate means to “speak out for you – to be on your side”
2. keep you safe and provide day-to-day care for you
3. treat you with dignity and respect
4. be licensed as a DCFS care provider and receive all the necessary training to provide good care to you. Relatives who care for you do not have to be licensed
5. make sure you get the medical, educational and emotional support you need
6. use the money from DCFS to meet your needs, including providing meals, clothing, allowance, toiletries, etc. See the section “Living in DCFS care”
7. get enough training to be a care provider for children/youth who have been abused and/or neglected



## **Your caseworker - Rights and responsibilities**

### **Your caseworker has the right to:**

1. receive the cooperation of DCFS and others in arranging the support and help you need
2. represent the Department in court, in getting the services you and your parents need and in monitoring the progress your parents are making in changing their behavior

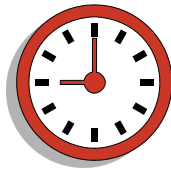
### **Your caseworker has the responsibility to:**

1. make sure that you are protected and safe
2. make decisions that are in your best interest and arrange or provide services to help your care provider meet your needs
3. keep your Service Plan current
4. check your general well being
5. set up visits between you, your parents, brothers, sisters and other people important to you, if it is safe for you and in your best interest
6. keep information about you and your family confidential, unless sharing the information helps to meet your needs and/or your family's needs. For instance, giving some background information to a therapist or doctor is important to assure that you get the help you need
7. tell the court of the progress you and your family have made and make recommendations to the judge about whether it is safe for you to go home to your family
8. work hard to get a permanent home for you, whether it is to return home with your parents, to find an adoptive home or to become independent
9. help you learn to live independently and obtain independent living services if you reach 18 years of age and are still in DCFS care

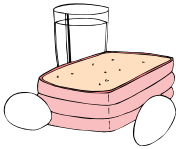


## Living in DCFS care

Living away from your parents may be hard at first. You will be more comfortable as you get to know your foster family or staff members if you live in group home or residential home. Ask questions about the house rules and other things you need to know.



I can't believe I'm  
in bed at 9 o'clock!



You may eat foods  
you are not used to.



It's hard to move  
to a new home.

## Family and Friends

- **Your family situation is private** – If you want to talk to others about living in DCFS care, of course you may – but you don't have to. It's not in your school records but your teacher may know. This is nothing to be ashamed of. You did nothing wrong. Your family situation is private and you can choose to talk about it or not talk about it.
- **About calling your family** – Families have a right to contact each other unless the judge says that they are not to have contact. Just make sure that you ask your foster parents or staff person in the group home or residential home about what time, how often and how long. They can help you set up a schedule so everyone will feel comfortable.
- **Visiting your family** – Your caseworker is responsible for arranging visits with your family.

- **Keeping and making friends** – You may be able keep your old friends. Ask your foster family or staff person about calling or writing to your friends. If you and your foster parents or staff person agree it is a good idea, you may be able to have friends visit you.

## Personal stuff

- **Clothes** – You will get enough clothes for your needs when you are placed in DCFS care. If you need additional clothes because you have outgrown them or they are worn or damaged, your foster parent or your caseworker will be able to buy clothes to meet your needs.
- **Personal belongings** – Your caseworker should bring to you any of your favorite clothes, toys, books or other things from home. You will be able to take your personal belongings with you when you leave your foster home, group home or residential home.
- **Personal allowance** – Your foster parent or staff person should give you money for some of your personal expenses (For example, going to the movies or buying candy).
- **Pets** – Most pets will have to be left at home. You might be able to call your family to make sure your pets are being fed and taken care of. Your caseworker could try to make arrangements for you to see your pets.

## School and special activities

Of course you will go to school. If your foster family or group home is close to your old school, you may go there. But you may have to go to a new school close to where you are living now or on campus of the residential home.

There is special money set aside to help foster youth with school lessons and activities. Your foster parents or caseworker should make arrangements to pay for things like:

- **Tutoring** – If you are having difficulty in learning at school it is best to get the help from your teacher or counselor at school. If you need special help, tutoring or teaching help is available to you. Tell your foster parent or caseworker that you need help in this area. Don't wait; be sure to ask for help (if you need it) right away.

- **Music or other lessons and activities** – You should also be able to participate in the school band and other school clubs or lessons if you want.
- **School supplies** – At the beginning of school your foster parent or caretaker should provide required school supplies for you.
- **Sports** – You should be able to participate in sport activities at school.
- **Camp** – You may also be able to participate in summer camp or other activities.



## *Will I get to visit my family?*

Family members have the right to see each other. The amount of time you can visit may depend on the judge's decision. You may be able to see your family frequently or not at all until it can be shown that the visits will be safe. You can see your brothers and sisters usually twice a month even if the judge says you can't visit your parents. You have a say in planning the visits such as where and when they may occur.

You may be able to have overnight visits with your brothers and sisters if the judge or the caseworker thinks that it would be in your best interest.

## **There are two kinds of visits with your parents**

- **Supervised Visits** are not private. You will **not** be left alone with your parents. Another adult will be in the room with you and your family to make sure the visit goes smoothly. Supervised visits can be at a DCFS office, a visiting center, a group home, a family home or many other places. The important thing is that you get to see your family.
- **Unsupervised Visits** are private visits with family members. These visits may be at your home. Other places for visits could be a DCFS office, your foster home, group home or residential placement, a visiting center or even a restaurant.



## Beyond DCFS care

DCFS care is meant to be temporary. The goal is to provide you with a safe home and to work to get a permanent home for you to live in.

### Permanency

Permanency is determining where you will live permanently. If your parents have changed their behavior, and if it is safe for you to go back home, the judge may allow you to return home. If the judge determines that enough time has been given to your parents to change and no progress has been made, the judge may request that the Department find another permanent home for you.

- **Return Home** – means that you are going to return home and a caseworker will continue to help your parents and you for a few months to make sure that everything is going well and you are safe. Tell your caseworker about any concerns you have.
- **Adoption** – means that another family that loves you wants you to be a part of their family. In many cases that family is the foster family that has been taking care of you for some time and the foster parents will become your adoptive parents. If the family that is interested in adoption is another family, the caseworker will first make sure that you and that family get to know each other well and that you agree to be adopted by them. If you are 14 years old or older, you have to okay an adoption.
- **Guardianship** – is a term used to indicate a “legal guardian” who has legal responsibility for you that makes legal decisions for you. The judge is the only person who can take guardianship from your parents and give legal guardianship to someone else to take care of you. The judge may give guardianship to DCFS or to one of your relatives or another person that will care and provide safety for you. A legal guardian makes important decisions like registering you for school and giving permission to a doctor for medical care.



## Independent living

When you are older and act with maturity and you don't feel comfortable with the idea of being adopted or leaving DCFS care and you cannot return home to your parents, your caseworker may enter you in a program that prepares you to become independent. In other words, live on your own. Ask your caseworker for more information on these programs.

Some Independent Living programs include:

- Youth in Transition Employment Program
- Youth in Transition College Program
- Transitional Living Program, which could include enrolling you in the Basic Life Skills Training course. This course will teach you how to open a bank account, how to look for apartments, how to budget your money, etc.



## *Problems in DCFS care?*

Living away from home will take a little adjustment. Things will be different than they were at your home. You will have new rules and maybe foster brothers and sisters or you may be living with other youth in a group home or residential home. At first, things may seem different and strange. You may feel angry, sad and afraid. After you and your foster family or staff members spend some time together, you should begin to feel more comfortable in your foster home, group home or residential home. There may be times when you feel that you need someone to talk with about your problems and this is okay.

## Runaways

Running away is not the solution to a problem.

### **Ten Questions to Ask Yourself Before You Run Away**

1. What else can I do to improve my home situation before I leave?
2. What would make me stay at home?
3. How will I survive?
4. Is running away safe?

5. Who can I count on to help me?
6. Am I being realistic?
7. Have I given this enough thought?
8. What are my other options?
9. If I end up in trouble, whom will I call?
10. When I return home, what will happen?

If you don't think your caseworker or foster family can help you or understand, you can call The Youth Hotline Number listed on the next page or the National Runaway Switchboard at 1-800-421-4000 any time of the day or night. Whether you are thinking of running or have run, they can help you.

### **What should I do?**

If you do not like your caseworker, foster parents, staff members or the other youth in the foster home, group home or residential home; if you are having problems in your DCFS care placement; if you are having problems in school or feel that you are being treated unfairly:

## **TALK TO SOMEONE**

**You are special. You have value.  
You do not have to feel you are alone.**

### **Working out problems**

- The caseworker and/or others who work with DCFS are here to provide services to you and to your parents.
- You are not a number or a thing, you are a very important person and you should be treated with respect and dignity. That means that people should listen to what you have to say and take into consideration your feelings and how those decisions will affect you.
- Things should be explained to you clearly. If you do not understand something and can't get a good explanation from your caseworker or other caregiver, ask for the supervisor. Everyone has a supervisor.



## Where can I go for help?

**Don't be afraid to ask questions.** There are many people willing to help you and to work hard to make sure that you are cared for.

Feel free to call these people or organizations:

### Your Caseworker

**Name:**

\_\_\_\_\_ Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

The name of the person who **supervises** your caseworker:  
(Your caseworker or the Youth Hotline could give you this name)

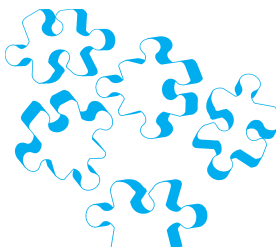
\_\_\_\_\_ Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

### The Youth Hotline

**1-800-232-3798**

**TTY/TDD 1-217-524-3715**

- You can call this number to get information and help when the caseworker or supervisor is not helping or if you have difficulty speaking or understanding English and no one is there to help you.
- The worker at this number will work in resolving your concern or problem without you getting in trouble with the caseworker or his/her supervisor.
- This is a toll free number so you do not have to worry about having money to call and/or long distance charges.



## **The Child Abuse Hotline**

**1-800-252-2873**

**TTY/TDD 1-800-358-5117**

- This is the office that people call to report abuse or neglect. There is always someone there to answer the phone day or night, weekends, and holidays. This office never closes. If you are not safe, you call and ask for help. Someone will help you. This number is easy to remember, if you remember 1-800-25-ABUSE.
- This is also a toll free number that you do not need money to call.

## **The Office of Child and Family Advocacy**

**1-800-232-3798**

**TTY/TDD 1-217-524-3715**

- You can call this number to have someone in that office take a look at problems you are having that are not being resolved with the caseworker or the caseworker's supervisor.

## **Your Lawyer/Guardian Ad Litem (GAL)**

(See page 6 for an explanation of the GAL)

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Phone \_\_\_\_\_

It is important that you get the help you need. If you are nervous about talking to your foster parents or to your caseworker, remember the other numbers like the Youth Hotline, your GAL or CASA or get someone else to call or write for you – like:

Teacher \_\_\_\_\_ Phone \_\_\_\_\_

Minister \_\_\_\_\_ Phone \_\_\_\_\_

Neighbor \_\_\_\_\_ Phone \_\_\_\_\_

Friend \_\_\_\_\_ Phone \_\_\_\_\_

## Service Appeal

If you don't agree with what DCFS is doing and you have discussed your concern with your caseworker, the Youth Hotline, and/or the Office of Child and Family Advocacy and the problem has not been resolved, you can ask the Office of Administrative Hearing Unit to review the decisions made by the caseworker. This is called "making a Service Appeal."

To make a Service Appeal you can write or call:

Administrative Hearing Unit  
Department of Children and Family Services  
406 E. Monroe  
Springfield, IL 6201  
217-782-6655

This office is open from 8:30 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. Monday through Friday.

You could ask your caseworker to help you file an appeal. Your caseworker cannot refuse to help you, even if you are appealing a decision that the caseworker made.

## Unfair Treatment

If you think that DCFS staff or the private agency staff have not been fair to you (discriminated against you) because of:

- race/color
- gender
- nationality
- physical or mental handicap

you can call or write:

Office of Affirmative Action  
Department of Children and Family Services  
1911 South Indiana Avenue 4th Floor  
Chicago, IL 60616  
(312) 328-2495

This office is open from 8:30 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. Monday through Friday.

## Other Important Phone Numbers


## NOTES

## Definitions

**Abused Youth** - A youth whose parents or other people who live with or take care of the youth does any of the following things:

- hurts the youth or allows someone else to hurt the youth and it is not an accident.
- makes a situation where there is a risk that the youth may be hurt.
- commits or allows someone to commit sexual abuse against the youth.

**Adjudicatory Hearing** - Sometimes called a trial, is when the judge listens to what people say and decides if you were abused, neglected or dependent. Your family will be at this hearing and so will your caseworker. Your Guardian Ad Litem (GAL) will be here and should explain anything you don't understand.

**Administrative Case Review (ACR)** – Administrative Case Review, or ACR, is a meeting to review your case to make sure your family is receiving all of the services it needs and is making progress. It is conducted by a person who is not the caseworker or supervisor. The first review is held six months after the Temporary Custody Hearing. After this, an ACR is held every six months. The caseworker or a substitute will be there and others, such as your parents, the GAL, foster parents and counselors, are invited. In most cases, you will attend these meetings.

**Administrative Case Reviewer** – The Administrative Case Reviewer is the person conducting the ACR. Since the Reviewer is independent of the caseworker or the caseworker's supervisor, the Reviewer may ask questions or raise issues that are not addressed in the Service Plan. After the ACR, the Reviewer writes a report explaining any issues from the meeting and makes a report to the judge.

**Adoption** – Adoption means that a family that loves you wants you to be a permanent part of their family. In most cases that family is the foster family that has been taking care of you for some time and the foster parents will become your adoptive parents.

**CASA** - This stands for **Court Appointed Special Advocate**. A CASA is appointed by the Judge to help a youth. Sometimes the CASA is the youth's Guardian Ad Litem (GAL). Not every child in DCFS care will have a CASA, but every youth will have a GAL.

**Caseworker** - This is the person who works for DCFS or a private agency and helps parents and youth solve the problems that caused DCFS to become involved with the family.

**DCFS Care** - This is when another family or persons other than your own parents take care of you. A relative foster home is where a relative of yours, such as your grandparents, aunt or uncle are given the responsibility for taking care of you. A foster family home is when another family that is not related to you has agreed to take care of you. Other types of DCFS care are group homes and residential facilities.

**DCFS or Department** - These refer to the Department of Children and Family Services, the part of the state government that is responsible for making sure that children in the State of Illinois are safe.

**Dependency** - This means that a youth doesn't have anyone to take care of him or her. A dependent youth is not necessarily abused or neglected.

**Discrimination** - Discrimination is when people are being treated unfairly just because they are different than others, whether because of their race or the color of their skin, gender or if they were born in a different country, etc.

**Dispositional Hearing** - After the judge decides that you have been abused or neglected, this is the hearing where he or she will decide where you will live. The judge may decide you need to stay with your foster parents while your family gets some help with their problems. The judge may say your family needs to go to counseling, parenting training or other things to help them take good care of you. The judge and DCFS want to help your family get back together. They do not want to keep your family apart for a long time, but they want you to be safe.



**Foster Youth** - This is a youth in DCFS care, including relative foster care.

**Guardian Ad Litem (GAL)** - The Guardian Ad Litem is often called the GAL. This is someone that the judge appoints to look out for your best interests and to help you in court and other places. The GAL is often a lawyer, but not always.

**Guardianship** - This is a Court Order giving the responsibility for taking care of a child to someone other than the youth's parents. This responsibility includes all the rights of legal custody plus being able to say yes or no to important things for the youth, such as can they join the Army, get married, etc. If the judge has made DCFS the guardian, the youth is called a "Ward of the Court."

**Hearing Officer** - A Hearing Officer is an Officer of the Court who is authorized to conduct permanency hearings to review the progress made toward the permanency goal set for a youth.

**Independent Living** - This is a program that prepares you to live on your own when you are older and act with maturity and you do not want to be adopted and cannot return home to your parents.

**Investigator** - This is the DCFS employee who talks with children/youth and families to see if there has been any abuse or neglect. If the investigator believes that there has been abuse or neglect, a caseworker will provide your parents with opportunities to make positive changes and find solutions to their problems. The investigator and the caseworker are not the same person.

**Judge** - This is the person who listens to all people involved in this situation. The judge is also the person that makes the decision whether or not you go home or stay in DCFS care.

**Neglected Youth** - This is any youth whose parent or guardian is not giving them adequate food, clothing or shelter. It is up to an investigator to determine the adequate steps to take when youth are reported to be neglected.

**Permanency** - This is the process of determining where you will live permanently. If your parents have made all the needed corrections, and if it is safe for you to go back, the judge may allow you to return home. If the judge determines that enough time has been given to your parents to correct the problems and no progress has been made, the judge may request that the Department find another permanent home for you.

**Permanency Hearings** - These are meetings every six months between your family and the judge. The judge will see if your parents have made all the necessary corrections listed in the Service Plan before he or she will decide to let you return to them. If the situation is not safe, the judge may also make the decision about a plan for your permanent living situation.

**Private Agency** - This is a private social service provider that is hired by DCFS to provide caseworkers and sometimes other services for youth in DCFS care.

**Protective Custody (PC)** - Protective Custody, or PC, is when a medical doctor, police officer or DCFS investigator takes a youth under his or her protection. They can take this action when they believe that a youth must immediately be removed from a home to protect him or her from being abused or neglected. PC can only last for 48 hours, except weekends and holidays, so a **Shelter Care Hearing** occurs during that time to determine if the youth taken into PC is to be returned home or placed in DCFS care.

**Service Appeal** - If you don't agree with what DCFS is doing, you can ask the Administrative Hearing Unit to review the decisions made by the caseworker, foster parent, counselor, etc. This is called "making a Service Appeal"

**Service Plan** - This is a list of steps your parents need to take in order to change their behavior and make your home safe so you can return home. This Service Plan may also include some things for you to work on while you are away from home, like going to school, etc.

**Shelter Care Hearing** - This is a meeting where the judge listens to people that are concerned with your safety. These people, such as the DCFS investigator, will tell the judge why you were removed from your home and ask the judge to decide if you should stay in DCFS care or return home. The judge may ask questions. It is important to remember that you can talk to the judge if you want to and also to tell the truth when he or she asks you questions.

**Surrender of Parental Rights** - This is when a parent legally decides that he or she (or both parents) can no longer care for his or her child/youth and tells the judge that he she surrenders the rights to a child/youth. In other words, he or she will no longer have the responsibility for the child/youth.

**Termination of Parental Rights** - This is when a judge takes away the rights of a parent over his or her child/youth.

**Ward** - This is a youth whose legal guardian is DCFS.

**Youth Hotline - 1-800-232-3798** This is a number you can call to get information and help when the caseworker or supervisors are not helping.



## INFORMATION CARD

Caseworker's Name

Phone No.

Supervisor's Name

GAL or CASA's Name

Child Abuse Hotline

1-800-252-2873

Youth Hotline

1-800-232-3798

Runaway Hotline

1-800-421-4000

DCFS Web site

[www.state.il.us/dcfs](http://www.state.il.us/dcfs)

Youth in Care Web site

[www.youthincare.illinois.gov](http://www.youthincare.illinois.gov)

Service Appeal

Administrative Hearing Unit

Department of Children and Family Services

406 E. Monroe

Springfield, IL 62701

(217) 782-6655

## GLOSSARY and DEFINITIONS

**ACR** - This stands for Administrative Case Review. An ACR is a meeting to review your case. The Reviewer is a person who is not the caseworker or supervisor. The first ACR is held six months after the Temporary Custody Hearing and every six months after that.

**Adjudicatory Hearing** – Sometimes called a trial, is when the Judge listens to what people say and decides if you were abused or neglected.

**CASA**- This stands for **Court Appointed Special Advocate**. A CASA is appointed by the Judge to help a youth. Sometimes the CASA is the youth's Guardian Ad Litem (GAL). Not every child in DCFS care will have a CASA, but every child will have a GAL.

**Dependency** - This means that a youth doesn't have anyone to take care of him or her. A dependent child is not necessarily abused or neglected.

**Dispositional Hearing** - This is the hearing where after the Judge decides that you had been abused or neglected, he or she will decide where you will live.

**Guardian Ad Litem (GAL)** – This is someone that the Judge appoints to look out for your best interests and to help you in court and other places. The GAL is often a lawyer but not always.

**Independent Living** - This is a program that prepares you to live on your own when you are older and act with maturity and you do not want to be adopted and cannot return to your parents.

**Judge** - This is the person who listens to all people involved in this situation. The Judge is also the person that makes the decision whether or not you go home or stay in DCFS care.

**Permanency Hearings** - These are meetings held every six months between your family and the Judge. The Judge will decide to let you return home or if the situation is not safe, the Judge may also make the decision about a plan for your permanent living situation.

**Private Agency** - This is a private social service provider that is hired by DCFS to provide caseworkers and sometimes other services for children in DCFS care.

**Protective Custody (PC)** - Protective Custody, or PC, is when a medical doctor, police officer, or DCFS investigator takes a youth under his or her protection. PC can only last for 48 hours, except weekends and holidays.

**Service Appeal** - If you don't agree with what DCFS is doing, you can ask the Administrative Hearing Unit to review the decisions made by the caseworker, foster parent, counselor etc. This is called "making a Service Appeal"

**Shelter Care Hearing** - This is a meeting where the Judge listens to people that are concerned with your safety. These people, such as the DCFS investigator, will tell the Judge why you were removed from your home and ask the Judge to decide if you should stay in DCFS care or return home.

## NOTES AND OTHER IMPORTANT INFORMATION

### You have the right to:

1. Be protected from physical, emotional and sexual abuse and/or neglect
2. Be told why you came into care and why you are still in care.
3. Participate in the decisions concerning you and your future.
4. Be placed in care that can best meet your needs
5. Be placed with your brothers and sisters if it is possible and if it is in your best interests.
6. Talk and visit with your parents, brothers, sisters, relatives and other people important to you unless the Judge or your caseworker thinks it is not in your best interests.
7. Ask for help if you ever feel that decisions made are not the best for you.
8. Be visited by your caseworker at least monthly.
9. Be listened to, respected and heard.
10. Get the medical attention you need, this includes regular medical, dental and eye exams.
11. Go to school.
12. Participate in school, religious, cultural and other activities.
13. Have a plan for a permanent living arrangement after you leave care, and to take part in developing and committing yourself to this plan.
14. Receive enough to eat and enough clothing, as well as a monthly allowance for your personal expenses.



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