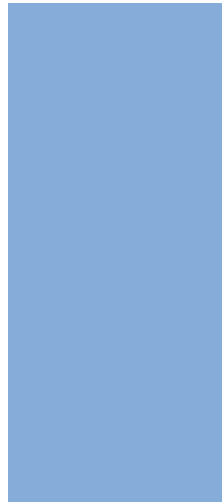
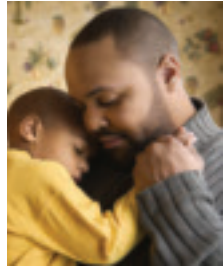


What's Next?

A guide to Hamilton County Juvenile Court
and your first dependency court hearing



Court Date: _____ Notes: _____

Time: _____

Caseworker: _____ Phone Number: _____

Why is My Family Going to Court?

From Time to Time...

Children's Services becomes so concerned about the safety of a child it gets the court involved. Often, Children's Services has already been working with a family to find ways to keep the family together. But, if concerns continue and HCJFS is unable to successfully address the safety concerns within the family, going to court is the next step.

These types of situations are considered dependency cases. These meetings, in Hamilton County Juvenile Court, are known as hearings. They are not for punishing parents, handling criminal charges or for child support matters.

Hearings are led by a Magistrate. That's a specially-trained lawyer who works with the Juvenile Court Judge. The Magistrate considers how to keep a child safe and makes decisions after listening to information at the hearing.



The Goal

Most of the time, the goal is to reunite your family, often by providing additional services to help you and your child. But sometimes a child will need to live elsewhere for a while, such as with a relative, a trusted friend or in a foster home.



Things You Will Want To Know



About Children's Services and Juvenile Court

Children's Services is a part of Hamilton County Job & Family Services.

Community members report their concerns about a child's safety to Children's Services, which investigates.

Children's Services caseworkers help families become more stable and assure children are safe.

Caseworkers also work with families when the court is involved and make sure everyone is doing what was agreed upon and the children remain safe. Children's Services works to increase the parents' ability to protect their children. Children's Services caseworkers also help meet the child's needs, such as getting them to school, doctor's visits and therapy.

Who Comes to Court?

The first step is a Day One hearing. It is called that because it is counted as the first day of the case. It usually lasts about an hour. **Children do not come to court.** The hearing in the courtroom involves the following people:

- The child's parent or guardian
- A lawyer for the parent or guardian
- The Children's Services caseworker
- A lawyer who represents Children's Services (known as the prosecutor)
- A guardian ad litem, known as a GAL, who is appointed by the court to make recommendations in the best interest of the child. The GAL may come from the Hamilton County Public Defender's office or from ProKids. If the GAL is from ProKids, they may also work with a Court Appointed Special Advocate or CASA volunteer.

What if I Don't Have a Lawyer?



Every parent has the right to a lawyer for their hearing. You can hire your own and let them know when your hearing is. **If you do not have a lawyer, and you need to have a lawyer appointed to you by the court, you must arrive one hour early for your hearing.**

At that time, you can find out if you qualify for a court-appointed attorney and, if so, briefly meet to discuss the case and what will be said at the hearing.

What Happens in the Hearing?

These Hearings Focus on Child Safety and the Needs of Your Family

The Magistrate will ask questions about what brought the case to court and will consider whether the child is safe. Everyone has the opportunity to speak and present evidence or facts about what happened. You will hear exactly what everyone says and, when it is your turn, you may speak yourself or have your lawyer speak for you.



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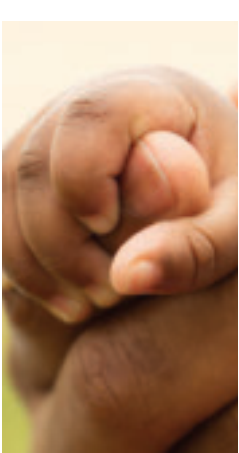
Usually, you will schedule the next hearing while everyone is in the courtroom. You may be given instructions on what you need to do before the next hearing. It may be a formal document called a court entry or a “case plan,” which says exactly what must happen next. If any of it is confusing, ask questions right away.

Your child will be assigned a Guardian ad Litem, known as a GAL. This person may be part of the Public Defender’s Office or from ProKids. ProKids GALs often work with a Court Appointed Special Advocate or CASA Volunteer.

Make sure you know how to contact everyone: your lawyer, your caseworker, your child’s GAL, and, if one is appointed, the CASA volunteer. Also, make sure everyone knows how to contact you.

Find Out How to Continue to Visit Your Child

Depending on the situation, you may have visits on your own, or they may be scheduled with someone you know supervising them. For some families, visits are scheduled at a central location where a Children’s Services worker will supervise.



What Do I Do When I Go to Court?



Helpful Tips

You should wear business-type clothes like long pants, skirts or dresses with collared shirts or simple sweaters. Tattoos should be covered by your clothes. Hats and scarves should only be worn for religious reasons.

You will not be allowed to eat or drink in the waiting area or in court and you may not talk on your cell phone in the waiting area or in court. The Magistrate is addressed as “your honor” and everyone is expected to be polite and treat others with respect.

How Do I Get to Court?

Hamilton County Juvenile Court is at the corner of Eighth Street and Broadway. Allow enough time before your hearing to go through the security scanners in the lobby and to take the

elevator to the sixth floor. When you get there, sign in at the desk. Your case will be called in the waiting room when the Magistrate is ready.

If you are driving to court, parking is available at meters on the street and in several surrounding parking garages.

You can also visit www.go-metro.com and www.cincinnati-bellconnector.com for public transportation routes.



What Else Can I Do?

Everyone understands this is a very stressful situation.



You can talk at any time with your caseworker, your attorney and your child’s Guardian ad Litem and CASA Volunteer, if one is assigned.

Please be aware, they will also regularly visit you and your child throughout the case.

Make sure to let one of those people know if you don’t have transportation and cannot visit your child, attend court or follow through with any other instructions. They will make every effort to help you.

