



# Working with Hamilton County Children's Services:

A guide for families



It is the policy of Hamilton County Children's Services that your caseworker gives you this booklet at your first meeting. Reading it will help you understand what to expect while your family is involved with us.

If you have any questions, call your caseworker or his/her supervisor listed below:

Your caseworker's name, location, and telephone number:

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Supervisor's name, location, and telephone number:

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Your caseworker is from the HCJFS:

Investigations & Assessments Section       Ongoing Section

## About Hamilton County Children's Services

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Hamilton County Children's Services is a division of the Hamilton County Department of Job and Family Services. Ohio law requires Children's Services to protect abused, neglected, and dependent children (those who have no one to care for them).

Children's Services believes it is best for children to live in a family setting. We strive to help families remain together as they solve problems. But when parents are unwilling or unable to protect their children, Children's Services looks for safe alternatives – perhaps in a relative's home, a foster home, a group home, or some other setting.



## About 241-KIDS

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241-KIDS is Hamilton County's 24-hour line for reporting abuse or neglect of children under age 18 (or age 21 if physically, mentally or developmentally challenged). Anyone, including professionals (such as teachers and doctors), can call 241-KIDS when they have reason to believe a child is being abused or neglected. Children also call to report abuse or neglect of a relative, friend, or themselves.

## What can I expect when Children's Services visits my home?

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Ohio law requires Children's Services to investigate calls to 241-KIDS about children who may have been abused or neglected.

### ***Under Ohio law:***

Child abuse is:

- Endangering a child.
- Non-accidental injury of a child.
- Sexual contact between an adult and child.
- Some instances of sexual contact between children.
- Mental or emotional injury to a child caused by parental behavior.

Child neglect is:

- Inadequate food, shelter, supervision, education or medical care of a child due to parental faults or habits.

The Children's Services caseworker who comes to your home after a report of abuse or neglect has been received is a caseworker from the Investigations and Assessments Section. The caseworker will tell you what concerns were reported and will need to investigate the report by talking with you, your children, and school or other professionals, relatives, and neighbors, if necessary and appropriate. Under Ohio law, we cannot tell you who called us.

**Important points to remember:**

- After investigating, Children's Services must make a case disposition. That disposition will conclude the abuse or neglect is "substantiated" (direct evidence of maltreatment), "indicated" (signs but no direct evidence), or "unsubstantiated" (unconfirmed).
- If our assessment shows no or only minimal risk of maltreatment to your children, we don't stay involved. Instead, we will close our case or refer you to other community services.
- If our assessment shows continuing risk of maltreatment to your children, Children's Services will seek to help your family and reduce risk to the children.

**What if Children's Services stays involved with my family?**

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Children's Services will open an ongoing case and you will work jointly with a caseworker from the Ongoing Section to develop and implement a case plan for your family. The plan will describe goals, services and outcomes for your children's safety. You'll be asked to sign the plan and you will get your own copy.

Because we are concerned about your well being and your child's safety, your Children's Services caseworker will visit you regularly. We need to work together to see how much progress you are making in following your plan. You will be asked to participate in reviews of your progress in meeting the goals of the case plan. We will stay involved with you until we determine you don't need our help to keep your children safe.

To reach that point, many parents agree to participate in services such as counseling, parenting classes, or drug treatment. These services have helped many families in Hamilton County. But if parents refuse to participate, Children's Services must decide if seeking other interventions - such as petitioning Juvenile Court is needed to protect a child.

## Important things you should know

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- Children's Services investigates reports of abuse and neglect, and provides services to families to reduce the risk of maltreatment to children.
- Sometimes, child abuse and neglect can be crimes. Children's Services must report possible crimes to police. Children's Services does not make arrests. Only police can arrest people and charge them with a crime.
- Children's Services may recommend that children be removed from home and will help decide if and when they will return. Juvenile Court will make the final decision.
- The Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) is a federal law which regulates how child welfare agencies provide services to Native American children and families. If your child is a member of a tribe, or might be eligible for membership, your family has the right to be provided services. Please tell your caseworker if you believe your child is a tribal member or might be eligible to become one. The agency will verify tribal membership. The Indian tribe and extended relatives will be offered the opportunity to work with you and the caseworker to develop, implement, and review the case plan.



## What services can help my family?

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To reduce the risk of abuse or neglect to your children, Children's Services may provide or refer you to services such as:

- Mental health counseling and treatment.
- Medical treatment.
- Drug or alcohol screening and treatment.
- Parenting skills training.
- Educational services.
- Help with finding a place to live.
- Intensive in-home help to solve family crises and other serious issues (family preservation).
- Part-time care of children to give stressed parents a break (protective day care).
- Social development services for children.
- Programs for troubled teens.

## **What will I be asked to do?**

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With Children's Services' help, you will have the opportunity to overcome problems that put your children at risk of abuse or neglect. Children's Services will expect you to:

- Work with your caseworker to develop a plan for reducing the risk of maltreatment to your children.
- Participate in programs and services listed in your plan.
- Make changes that will help ensure a safe, clean, nurturing home for your children and adequate food, clothing, and medical care.
- Meet with your caseworker and other professionals regularly to review your progress.
- Attend hearings and follow court orders, if your case is involved with Juvenile Court.

## **What if my children must leave home?**

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When Children's Services considers removing a child from home, we hold a formal meeting called a Family Conference. Other professionals involved in your case attend along with Children's Services. You should attend this meeting so you can help make decisions about your children and the help your family needs.

Juvenile Court must give permission before Children's Services can remove children from your home. Then, Children's Services seeks placement in the least restrictive setting available to meet children's needs. This could be a relative's home or foster or group home.

Most times placement is temporary. You will probably be able to visit your children regularly. If the risk of maltreatment to your children is reduced, you can get your children back. But if not, placement of your children can become permanent.

## **What are my rights?**

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When you are involved with Children's Services, you have the right to:

- Be treated with courtesy and respect.
- A caseworker who listens to your needs and concerns and works with you. Your caseworker should manage your case in a caring, private, professional manner.
- Decline to cooperate with the investigation.
- Refuse to accept services recommended by Children's Services on a voluntary basis.
- Participate in preparing the case plan. You also get a copy of the plan.
- Clear, honest answers to your questions so you understand why decisions are being made and actions taken in your case.
- Be told about other ways to get help if Children's Services cannot assist your family.
- Written notification of Juvenile Court hearings and actions on your case, if the court is involved.
- Be served without discrimination on the basis of age, race, national origin, religion, gender, sexual orientation, lifestyle, or physical, mental, or developmental disability.
- State any concerns you have and file a complaint or grievance.

## **How can I help Children's Services best serve my family?**

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There are several ways you can help:

- Give truthful information.
- Cooperate with your caseworker and others who are trying to help you.
- Act to improve your family situation for the good of your children.
- Participate in developing your case plan.
- Follow your case plan and participate in services.
- Attend meetings about your case—and court hearings, if the court is involved.
- Tell us if you have a problem with our services so we can serve you better.

## What if I have a problem with Children's Services?

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You may not always agree with our decisions or actions. If your case is involved with Juvenile Court, you may also not always agree with an action or order of the Court. The following will help you address problems or disagreements you may have about your case.

If you want to make a complaint about a Court action or order related to your Children's Services case, you must contact your attorney or bring it up at the next Court hearing. Only the Magistrate or Judge on your case has the final authority to change a Court action or order. Examples of Court actions or issues are:

- Visitation
- Foster placement
- Court-ordered case plan services

If you are an alleged perpetrator and you disagree with the case disposition regarding a report of abuse or neglect, you have the right to an appeal. When the investigation is completed, you will receive a letter explaining the worker's disposition. If you want to appeal the disposition, you must request a hearing within 10 business days of the post-mark on the letter by either calling 946-1313 or writing to:

HCJFS  
Attn: Children's Services Hearing Scheduler  
222 E. Central Parkway  
Cincinnati, OH 45202

**If you have a complaint related to an action or decision made by your worker, you should** try to settle the issue with the worker first. Examples of such complaints are:

- Not being treated with courtesy and respect
- Not being given a voice in preparing the case plan
- Not being given clear answers to your questions so you can understand why decisions are made
- Disagreement with the services on the case plan



## What if that doesn't help?

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If you and the worker cannot solve the problem, follow these steps:

### **Step 1: Talk with the Supervisor**

- Call 946-1000 and ask for the name and telephone number of the worker's supervisor.
- Contact the worker's supervisor. You can talk with the supervisor over the phone or ask for a meeting.
- Describe your concerns and tell the supervisor why you're not satisfied.
- Listen and ask questions.
- The supervisor will listen and work with you to solve the problem.
- You may receive a letter from the supervisor. The letter will explain your concerns and what actions the supervisor will or will not take.
- If you are not satisfied with the supervisor's response, take step 2.



### **Step 2: Talk or Meet with the Section Manager**

- Call 946-1000 and ask for the name and telephone number of the supervisor's section manager.
- Contact the section manager. The section manager will either talk with you on the phone or schedule a meeting.
- The section manager will listen to your concerns and work to solve the problem.
- The section manager will send you a letter. The letter will list your concerns and what actions the section manager will or will not take.
- If you are not satisfied with the section manager's response, take step 3.

### **Step 3: Meet with the Director or Director's Representative**

- Call 946-1000 and ask for the Director's Office. In an effort to serve you quickly, the Director may appoint a representative.
- The Director or Representative will schedule a meeting.
- You and either the section manager or supervisor will be asked to attend. You'll be asked to explain your concerns.
- The supervisor or section manager will explain the decisions or actions taken on the case and why they were taken.

- The Director or Representative will listen to everyone’s concerns and work to solve the problem.
- The Director or Representative will send you a letter. The letter will explain your concerns and the actions the agency will or will not take.
- The decision of the Director or Representative is final.

## **Do I have any other options for resolving problems?**

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The Ohio Department of Job and Family Services makes sure all public children’s services agencies follow state rules. If you want to contact the Ohio Department of Job & Family Services for any reason, you can call the Customer Help Line at the following number:

Ohio Department of Job and Family Services  
Toll Free: 1-866-635-3748, Option 2, Extension 3

If you believe you have been a target of discrimination because of age, gender, national origin, race, color, religion or disability, contact:

- Hamilton County Department of Job and Family Services,  
Consumer Services (513) 946-2138

or

- Ohio Department of Job and Family Services,  
Bureau of Civil Rights,  
State Office Tower, 18th Floor,  
150 East Gay Street,  
Columbus, Ohio 43215



or

- U.S. Department of Health and Human Services,  
Office for Civil Rights, Region V,  
233 North Michigan Ave., Suite 700,  
Chicago, Illinois 60601

### **Communication of this Grievance Procedure to Individuals Who Have Limited English Proficiency or Who Are Hearing or Visually Impaired:**

If you have limited English proficiency, HCJFS will provide a qualified professional interpreter. If you are hearing or visually impaired, HCJFS will make appropriate accommodations to ensure this procedure is reviewed and discussed with you and that your questions are answered to your satisfaction.



Hamilton County Children's Services is dedicated to protecting children from abuse, neglect, and dependency when their families are unable or unwilling to do so.



We are committed to preserving and empowering families and respecting their dignity.



We strive to reach the goals of safety, permanency and well-being of children by advocating for their rights and providing helpful services to children and families in the least intrusive manner as required by law.

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Main office:

222 East Central Parkway, Cincinnati, OH 45202

**(513) 946-1000**

**Web site: [www.hcifs.org](http://www.hcifs.org)**