



What is a Dependency Petition?

A dependency petition is a legal document addressed to the court about concerns that a child has been abused, neglected or abandoned, and that there is no parent able to safely care for the child. The dependency petition asks the court to step in and protect the child from harm and have the State assume temporary legal custody of the child.

Who are the legal parties to a Dependency case?

The parents and DCYF are legal parties to the case and are represented in court by attorneys. A child's tribe is a legal party to the case. Caregivers are not legal parties and do not have a right to information about the parent's case.

Who is the voice of the child in court?

Children are either appointed a Guardian ad Litem (GAL) or an attorney to tell the judge at court hearings what they believe is in the child's best interests and what the child needs or wants. You may hear the GAL referred to as an Advocate or CASA (Court Appointed Special Advocate). The child's representative will contact you requesting updates on how the child is doing and to arrange a time to talk to the child one-on-one. While it is the child representative's duty to gather information about the child, they cannot share confidential information about the case with you.

What is the caseworker's role in court?

The caseworker makes efforts to keep children safe. The caseworker makes efforts to return the child to the parent, partners with children, youth and families to create a case plan, and makes recommendations and reports progress to the court.

To Resolve Concerns

Contact the assigned caseworker, followed by the assigned supervisor, and then the Area Administrator.
<https://fortress.wa.gov/dshs/ca/employeeirectory>

DCYF Office of Constituent Relations can help to resolve issues.
Toll free phone: 1-800-723-4831
constrelations@dcyf.wa.gov
www.dcyf.wa.gov/contact-us/constituent-relations

Family and Children's Ombuds investigates complaints about agency action or inaction that involve a child or parent involved with child protection or child welfare services.
Toll free phone: 1-800-571-7321
Phone: (206) 439-3870
<https://ofco.wa.gov/>

To Report Child Abuse or Neglect

Call 1-866-ENDHARM (1-866-363-4276)
24 hours/seven days a week hotline that will connect you directly to the appropriate local office.
www.dcyf.wa.gov/safety/report-abuse

Important Contacts

Caseworker name, phone number and email:

Supervisor name, phone number and email:

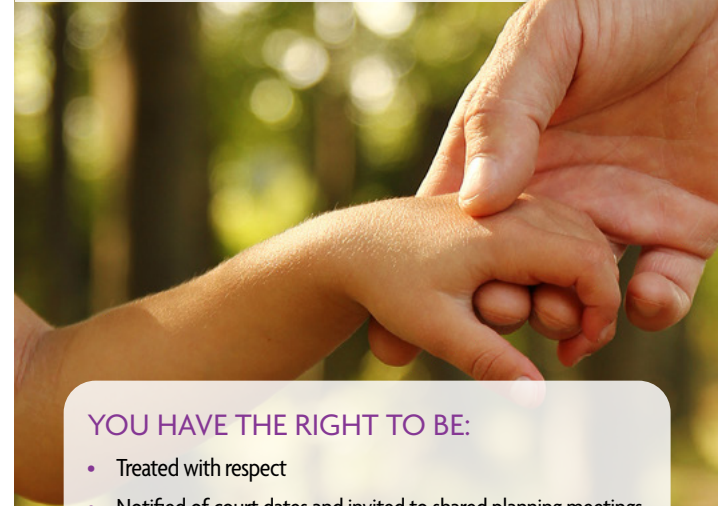
CASA/GAL name, phone number and email:

Child's attorney name, phone number and email:

If you would like copies of this document in an alternative format or language, please contact DCYF Constituent Relations (1-800-723-4831 | 360-902-8060, ConstRelations@dcyf.wa.gov).

DCYF PUBLICATION CWP_0065 | DSHS 22-1741 (12-2020)

Understanding the Dependency Court Process for Caregivers



YOU HAVE THE RIGHT TO BE:

- Treated with respect
- Notified of court dates and invited to shared planning meetings
- Given the "Caregiver's Report to the Court" to complete

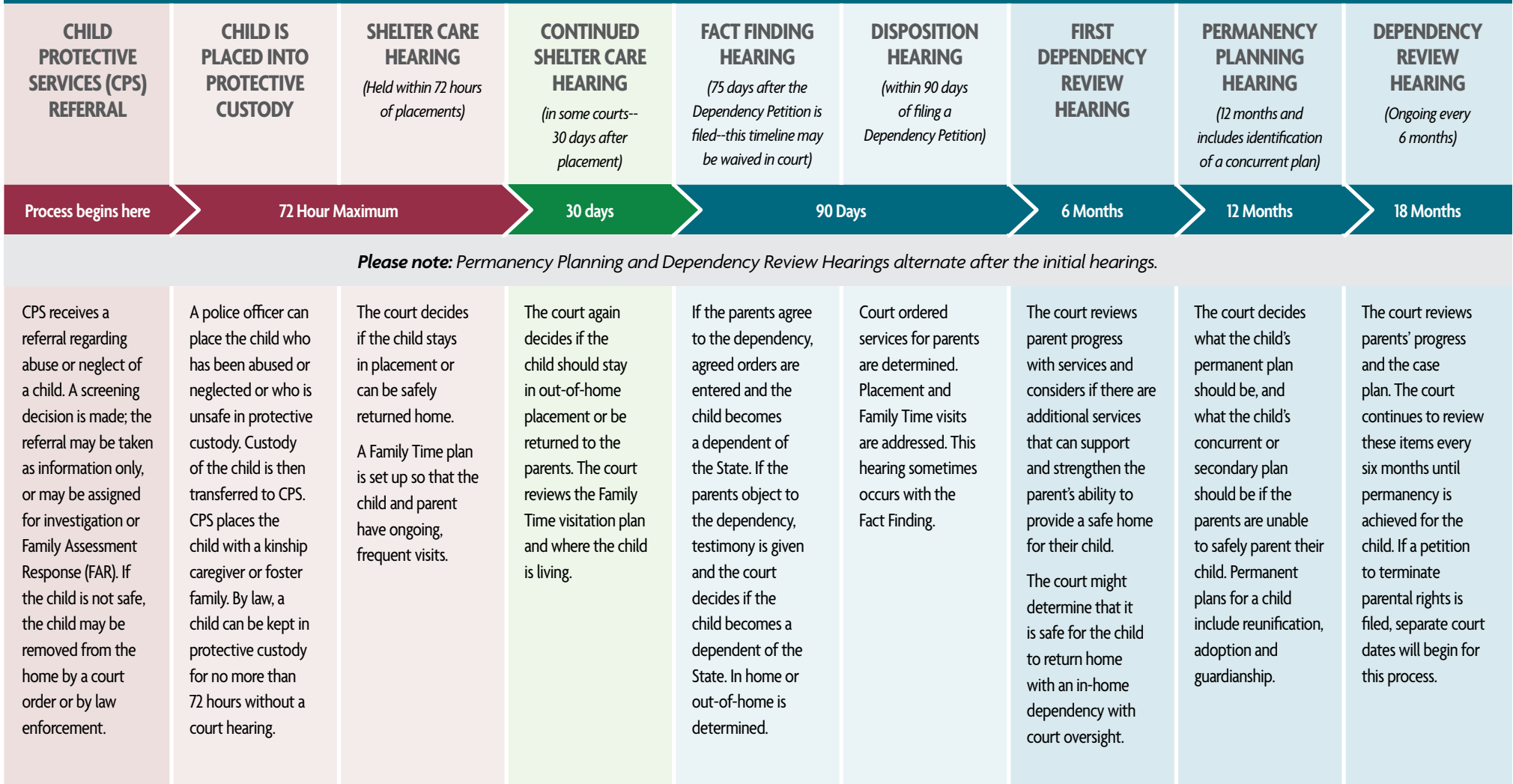
YOU HAVE A RESPONSIBILITY TO:

- Care, love, nurture and provide a safe home for the child
- Explain to the child in a positive, age appropriate way that their parent is not able to safely care for them right now
- Cooperate with the court ordered service and Family Time visitation plan
- Keep the caseworker and court informed of the child's progress and needs
- Express your concerns and ask for support when you need it



Washington State Department of
CHILDREN, YOUTH & FAMILIES

Dependency Court Process Timeline



Shared Planning Meetings

Caregivers are notified and invited to participate in all shared planning meetings. These meetings are a key opportunity to share how the child is doing and to share your perspective and opinions about the case.

Shared Planning Meetings include discussions about the child's safety, well-being and permanency. Other topics includes services to support the child.



What is important for me to know?

The Department of Children, Youth, and Families (DCYF) must offer parents supports and services to help them safely reunify with their child. Children are returned home when they can be safe in the family home. A judge decides it is safe to return a child home at any point in the case. It is important to remember that caseworkers make recommendations; the court makes decisions.

DCYF is responsible to make permanency planning recommendations to the court which can include reunification, guardianship and adoption. If a parent is unable to make the changes necessary to keep the child safe, they could lose the right to parent their child. Reunification efforts continue until parental rights are terminated.

The Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) governs the dependency process for American Indian and Alaskan Native children. This includes additional protections as well as case planning and coordination with the child's tribe.

