



Children in Court

Parent's Handbook



OVERVIEW



The Division of Child Protection and Permanency (DCP&P) is New Jersey's child welfare and child protection agency within the New Jersey Department of Children and Families (DCF). As required by state law (Title 9 and Title 30), DCP&P must investigate all reports of child abuse and neglect. State law also requires the Superior Court of New Jersey (Family Part) to review the decisions and actions DCP&P makes, to oversee DCP&P cases, and to ensure the safety and well-being of children.

Family cases involving DCP&P matters are a part of the Children in Court (CIC) case system. You are involved in CIC because DCP&P filed a complaint with the family court stating your DCP&P case needs court supervision because the children have been or are in danger of being harmed. When a complaint is filed, it becomes the responsibility of the family court to determine what is best for the children.

Involvement with DCP&P and CIC can be overwhelming for parents, children and families. This handbook was written to help you understand the CIC case system and the different roles of people in CIC. For more information, contact your local court ombudsman by visiting our website: <http://www.njcourts.gov> and searching "Ombudsman Directory." Your ombudsman can answer questions, help you find information and offices, and can explain court processes.



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Descriptions of Hearings

Order to Show Cause Hearing: The first hearing, sometimes on an emergency basis, where DCP&P is asking the court to make decisions about where your child(ren) will live, who will have custody of them, and visitation issues. This is not a final decision on whether you have been neglectful or abusive. It is a hearing to determine whether DCP&P had the right to take emergency action.

Return Order to Show Cause: The second hearing, approximately three weeks after the order to show cause. During the time between the order to show cause and the return on the order to show cause, DCP&P should have continued to investigate the complaint, and could have reached an agency decision on how it proposes to proceed with safety plans, placement options, services, and possibly investigation findings.

Fact-Finding Trial: In this hearing, DCP&P must prove you committed an act of child abuse or neglect. Both DCP&P and you are given the chance to call witnesses, question or cross-examine the DCP&P worker, and present documentary evidence to the court. At the end of the hearing, the court will determine whether one or all of the children were abused or neglected.

Dispositional Hearing: If the court finds the child(ren) have been abused or neglected, the court then determines what the next step is to reunify the family or to accomplish an alternative goal for the child(ren). This could include the completion of evaluations, parenting classes, counseling or substance abuse treatment.

Compliance Reviews: Typically scheduled every two to three months to reassess whether the child(ren) can return to their parent(s)' custody. The court also makes sure visitation is occurring (if ordered), and everyone is participating in all court-ordered services.

Permanency Hearing: Occurs approximately one year after the complaint was filed. This hearing is only held if the child(ren) are still in an out-of-home placement (resource care or kinship care). The court must determine whether the children can return home at that time or within a short time frame. If the child(ren) cannot be safely returned home, then the court will look to a permanent plan other than the parents, usually kinship legal guardianship (permanent placement with kin) or adoption. If adoption is approved as the plan, DCP&P will be ordered to file a new complaint asking the court to terminate your parental rights.

Benchmark Hearing: A youth-centered event where the judge engages in a one-on-one talk with the youth to learn about the youth's needs and future career goals. The judge can then help ensure that those needs are addressed. The youth can also decide to invite an adult support person to attend the hearing.

Notes

Litigation Timeline

Notes

**DAY
1**

Order to Show Cause

DCP&P files the Verified Complaint and you are given official notice that a child abuse/neglect case has been filed against you. Court approves or denies DCP&P actions/requests, you argue against or agree with DCP&P actions.

**10-21
DAYS**

Return Order to Show Cause

Court reviews placement options, checks if safety issues identified at the first hearing are addressed.

**42-81
DAYS**

Case Management Conference

Preparation hearing for the Fact-Finding Hearing where DCP&P attempts to prove abuse/neglect occurred. Your attorney and the DCP&P attorney gather and share evidence, reports for the hearing.

**BY
120-180
DAYS**

Fact Finding and Dispositional Hearing

Fact-Finding Hearing
• Hearing where DCP&P must prove abuse/neglect occurred, and the court decides if abuse/neglect occurred. Possible results: Dismissal, Substantiation, or Stipulation.

Dispositional Hearing
• Based on Fact-Finding results, the court orders the appropriate services/actions.

**EVERY
60-90
DAYS**

Compliance Review

Hearing to inform the court of progress made towards case plan goals.

**BY
365
DAYS**

Permanency Hearing

Hearing for children in DCP&P custody and presents a permanent plan for the child; the court approves or denies the plan

Terms You Will Hear at Fact-Finding

- **Dismissal:** Your case is closed.
- **Established or Substantiated Findings:** Abuse or neglect has occurred; services are ordered to address safety issues.
- **Stipulation:** You admit to at least one allegation; services are ordered to address safety issues.
- **Mediation:** Mediation could be ordered to discuss services, visitations, or other disputed issues.
- **Reunification:** Court determines it is safe for child(ren) to return home.

Possible Results

Depending on the circumstances of your case, the following are possible results you could experience:

Reunification with parents: Your child is returned to you. Services could be put in place to support your family.

Kinship Legal Guardianship (KLG): Kin becomes long-term legal guardian for the child. Kin can be relatives or people who are unrelated but have such a close emotional relationship that they are considered like family to the children.

Termination of Parental Rights (TPR): TPR is the permanent, legal action taken to end legal ties to your biological or adoptive child. If TPR is granted, you have no rights or legal authority in decision making for the child, and the plan for the child would change to adoption.

You can appeal a termination of parental rights. If the court terminates your parental rights, you have 21 days to file an appeal. The following are basic steps for informational purposes, and is not legal advice.

If you are interested in appealing, you should contact your lawyer to file your appeal. You must submit the following to the Appellate Division of Superior Court:

- A completed notice of appeal with the court.
- A transcript request.
- A copy of the family court order being appealed.

All paperwork should be mailed to:

**Appellate Division Clerk's Office, Richard J. Hughes Justice Complex
P.O. Box 006, Trenton, NJ 08625-0970**

You can contact the Appellate Division emergent clerk at 609-815-2950 ext. 52614 between 8:30 a.m. and 4:30 p.m. for help filing these documents.

Another planned permanent living arrangement. For example, independent living is an alternative living arrangement possible for youth 16 years and older in which a transition plan is created to meet the youth's goals.

Notes

Who Will Be In Court

Notes

The Judge - In New Jersey, child protection cases are heard by family court judges. The judge decides if DCP&P actions are timely and appropriate, requires DCP&P, the parents and attorneys to take actions and makes decisions to keep the child safe.

Deputy Attorney General - The DAG is the attorney for DCP&P. The DAG presents DCP&P's position to the court and must prove the state's case.

Law Guardian - The law guardian is your child's attorney. The law guardian is independent of DCP&P and will advocate for your child in court. The law guardian is allowed to interview your child in private.

Parental Defense Attorney - You have the right to have a lawyer represent you in DCP&P proceedings. Your lawyer should meet with you before every hearing or mediation to discuss your case, represent your interests in court and help you to understand your rights and obligations.

DCP&P Caseworker and/or Supervisor - DCP&P caseworkers or supervisors also must attend court to update the court on DCP&P actions, your progress and the child's well-being. You should be able to meet with your caseworker at court to receive and provide updates.

Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) - A Court Appointed Special Advocate is a specially trained volunteer who could be appointed by the court when a child is removed from their home. The CASA volunteer becomes familiar with your family's case and finds solutions and services available to the family that are in the best interest of the child. The CASA volunteer provides a report with recommendations to the court. Anyone who is part of the case can request that a CASA volunteer be provided, but the judge must assign the CASA volunteer to the case.

Finding a Lawyer

You should begin looking for an attorney to represent you as soon as you are served with a summons to appear in family court OR as soon as you receive the order to show cause and verified complaint.

If you cannot afford to pay for an attorney, contact the Office of Parental Representation (OPR), a unit in the Office of the Public Defender. Attorneys are available to income-eligible parents in child protection cases. You must complete an Application for Assignment of Counsel ([Form CN 11727](#)), which is the application for an OPR attorney.

To complete the application, contact:

- Court staff at your assigned courthouse, or
- Your regional OPR based on the county where you live. The regional offices are listed on page 9.

New Jersey Bar Association Attorney Referrals

Call the New Jersey Bar Association at 732-249-5000 to find your county bar association and request an attorney referral or visit <https://tcms.njsba.com/PersonifyEbusiness/Default.aspx?TabID=2011> to find your county bar association.

Legal Services of New Jersey Family Representation Project

The Family Representation Project offers advice and legal representation for low-income parents involved in DCP&P cases. Legal Services of New Jersey offers representation in cases that meet their case priorities. For more information, call 1-888-LSNJ-LAW (1-888-576-5529).

Notes

Office of Parental Representation Contacts

Notes

Capitol Region - Burlington, Hunterdon and Mercer Counties

210 S. Broad St. - Fourth Floor
Trenton, NJ 08625
Tel: 609-599-6900 | Fax: 609-599-6899

Central Region - Middlesex and Monmouth Counties

928 Livingston Ave. - Second Floor
North Brunswick, NJ 08902
Tel: 732-545-1530 | Fax: 732-545-2216

Southern Region - Camden, Cumberland, Gloucester, and

Salem Counties
2 Riverside Dr. - Fourth Floor,
Camden, NJ 08103
Tel: 856-614-2100 | Fax: 856-614-2202

Shore Region - Atlantic, Cape May and Ocean Counties

5914 Main St., Suite 104
Mays Landing, NJ 08330
Tel: 609-909-2780 | Fax: 609-909-2793

Northern Region - Essex, Passaic and Union Counties

31 Clinton St., Twelfth Floor
Newark, NJ 07102
Tel: 973-792-1820 | Fax: 973-792-1837

Northwest Region - Morris and Somerset Counties

2170 Headquarters Plaza
Morristown, NJ 07960
Tel: 973-656-4488 | Fax: 973-656-4496

Northwest Region - Sussex and Warren Counties

314 Front St.
Belvidere, NJ 07823
Tel: 908-475-1789 | Fax: 908-475-5647

Northeast Region - Bergen and Hudson Counties

438 Summit Ave. - Fifth Floor
Jersey City, NJ 07306
Tel: 201-217-5953 | Fax: 201-217-5964

You and Your Lawyer

Your relationship with your lawyer is important. You should make every effort to make the relationship with your attorney work to your advantage.

Be honest with your lawyer. Keep your lawyer fully informed of your case and your progress. If there are things that you do not want DCP&P to know, you should tell your lawyer that you do not want that information shared.

Show all documents to your lawyer. Share any documents that are relevant to your case, such as evaluations, case plans, and visitation schedule, with your lawyer.

Review court documents with your lawyer. Take time to discuss and review the order to show cause and complaint filed in your case as well as court orders with your lawyer.

Maintain contact with your lawyer. Make sure that your lawyer has your current contact information. Return phone calls from your lawyer as soon as possible. If you have any questions about your case, ask your lawyer to explain.

Discuss your case with your lawyer. Talk to your lawyer about how you would like your case to be resolved.

Always talk with your lawyer before signing any documents about your case.

Notes

Your Child's Lawyer

Notes

The law guardian is your child's attorney. Your child has a right to their own attorney through the Office of Law Guardian. The law guardian will represent your child's position in court and will be present at every court hearing. As your child's attorney, the law guardian will assist your child in understanding the court process and will have discussions with your child privately regarding their legal rights in the court proceedings. The law guardian also will support your child's position when negotiating with other parties in the case and is allowed to interview your child in private.

The law guardian has an investigator who conducts independent investigations by gathering and reporting information. The investigator and/or law guardian will visit your child and interview school personnel, caregivers, health care professionals, and other people involved with your child and family. Following the independent investigation, the law guardian could advocate for your child to receive needed services.

The law guardian and the investigator are employees of the New Jersey Office of the Public Defender (OPD) and are independent of the DCP&P. A law guardian is appointed by a family court judge at the beginning of each case. The law guardian will remain your child's attorney while the case remains open in litigation.



Courtroom Basics

PREPARE FOR COURT. Make sure that you have childcare available for any of your children who are not part of the case. Children who are in placement are entitled to attend all court hearings and are encouraged to attend their permanency hearings to share their interests and wishes with the court in person. For more information, see the Youth Participation in Court definition in the glossary. If you have any documents to present to the judge, you should give them to your lawyer.

ARRIVE ON TIME. If you are late or fail to attend, the judge could decide your case in your absence.

DURING THE HEARING. When entering the courtroom, turn off cell phones and remove all hats. Do not bring any food or beverages into the courtroom. Have your relevant documents and court notices with you, or with your lawyer. Address the judge as “Your Honor” and speak directly to the judge, not to the other party.

WAIT FOR A COPY OF THE COURT ORDER. After each party has presented his or her side, the judge will decide and issue an order. The order will contain important information about your case, including services that DCP&P must provide and the tasks you must complete.

VIRTUAL HEARINGS. Some of your hearings could be conducted virtually. If your hearing is virtual, the same courtroom expectations apply. Make sure that you have a caretaker for your children, and that you dress and act as you would if you were in the courtroom.

Prepare in advance by making sure that the platform you will be using (Zoom or Teams) is working on your phone or laptop, and make sure you have the instructions for joining the proceeding. Make sure your device is plugged in or fully charged, and choose a location that is well-lit, private, and quiet. Remember to join at least five minutes early to have time to fix any potential technical issues you could have, and mute your microphone when you are not speaking.

If you need an interpreter, notify the court as soon as you are given a court date.

COURT TECHNOLOGY ROOMS. If you do not have access to a computer or the internet, courthouses now have technology rooms for you to take part in court matters remotely. These rooms also are available if you need an accommodation under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). The private rooms are sanitized after each use and have a desk, chair, monitor, and webcam. Please give the court advance notice if you need a court technology room.

Notes

What to Expect if Your Child is in an Out-of-Home Placement

Notes

Visitation Plan: Unless you are restricted from doing so by a court order, you are encouraged to visit with your child as often as possible on a regular schedule. Visiting regularly with your child has many benefits for you and your child, including improving the likelihood of reunification and continuing the important bond between parent and child.

Case Plan: You should be involved in the development of your case plan with your caseworker to identify needs and issues that must be addressed to make sure your child can safely return home.

Services: Your caseworker will assist you to identify services that are needed to address safety issues preventing reunification. You can expect your caseworker to connect you with services, help you get to and from your appointments, and help with funding services, if applicable. Services should address your specific needs and you are encouraged to communicate with your case worker regularly about your needs as well as the quality and helpfulness of any services you receive.

Concurrent Planning: In the first year your child is in out-of-home placement, DCP&P develops a plan to safely return your child to you, and also develops alternative plans for permanent placement if your child cannot be safely returned to you. This is called concurrent planning, and it's done to ensure that your child will be cared for

regardless of the result of your case. Alternative permanent placements could include placing your child with kin or terminating your parental rights so that your child can be adopted. Your attorney will help you understand the orders from your case that would help keep you on the path to reunification.

Reasonable Efforts: In most cases, New Jersey law requires DCP&P to make “reasonable efforts” to help families stay together or be reunified. Unless your child’s safety is at immediate risk or unless a court determines reasonable efforts are unnecessary, prior to removal, DCP&P must make reasonable efforts to prevent the placement of your child in out of home care. If your child is unable to remain in your care, DCP&P must prove that reasonable efforts were made to prevent your child’s placement and must make reasonable efforts to address concerns to safely reunify you with your child or make another permanent arrangement for your child. “Reasonable

What to Expect if Your Child is in an Out-of-Home Placement

Continued from page 13

efforts” are usually services and support provided to the family. This includes the caseworker’s consistent efforts to encourage, assist and advocate for you and your family to access and use appropriate services. Reasonable efforts must be tailored to the specifics of your case.

“Reasonable efforts” by DCP&P could include, but are not limited to:

- Family therapy
- Parenting classes
- Drug and alcohol abuse treatment/counseling
- Respite care
- Parent support groups
- Home visiting programs
- Child care
- Homemaker services
- Individual, group, and family counseling
- Healthcare services
- Behavioral health evaluation and treatment
- Vocational counseling
- Transportation expenses
- Anger management treatment
- Housing services
- Referrals to social service agencies

Your lawyer can request services from DCP&P for you and your children. You should talk to your lawyer about services that you need.

A Note About Child Custody: Custody sought 1) between unmarried parents, 2) during a divorce, 3) for palimony (settlement of a non-marital relationship), 4) in an annulment, or 5) in a similar case, involves private parties. This is not to be confused with custody during a child abuse/neglect case, where the state is removing children from their parents. The private custody cases listed above are separately determined by the court.

Notes

Family Team Meetings

Notes

Whether your child is home with you or in out-of-home placement, you are strongly encouraged to request and participate in family team meetings (FTM). The purpose of the family team meeting is to increase your involvement and your family's involvement in your case planning.

FTMs focus on your strengths and past successes to improve the likelihood of having successful results for you and your family. Your voice and input is important in the development of your family's case plan.

With FTMs, from the beginning of your case, you can build a support team, which can include interested family members, friends, resource parents, and others you and your family chose to invite, such as teachers and therapists.

Your support team can be involved in the decision-making process and in developing a plan to best meet the needs of your family. The team can develop assigned tasks and timeframes to formulate goals and build solutions. The safety, protection and well-being of children must always be maintained.

DCP&P attempts to hold a FTM before or within 45 days of a child's out-of-home placement.

Three additional FTMs are done within the first year of placement. For children who remain in placement after the first 12 months with a goal of reunification, at least three additional FTMs should occur within the year. For children with a goal other than reunification who remain in placement after the first 12 months, at least two additional FTMs a year will be held. You can request a family team meeting at any time.

Other Proceedings

Child Placement Review (CPR) Board

Child Placement Review (CPR) boards are groups of court-assigned volunteers that review the cases of all children under DCP&P supervision who are placed in out-of-home living arrangements. The CPR board conducts a detailed review of your child's case once your child has been in care for 60 days, discusses the arrangements that DCP&P makes for your child and then reports information and recommendations to the court. This is done in a meeting format that is less formal than a court hearing with a judge. You will be notified when the CPR board reviews your child's case, and you will have the chance to attend and speak at the review, with an opportunity to voice any concerns you might have about your child's placement and needs. Kin, foster parents, and others who are interested in the case have the right to attend the review and/or to submit written information to the CPR board. All should be encouraged to participate.

Child Welfare Mediation

Child welfare mediation is a meeting where a neutral person, a mediator, helps parents, caseworkers, attorneys and resource parents discuss issues and reach agreements concerning your child and your case. Anyone interested in the child's well-being can attend if ordered by the judge, which could include relatives, CASA volunteers and the child, if appropriate. With few exceptions, whatever is said in mediation is kept confidential. During mediation, you and the other participants have an opportunity to express their opinions about what is best for the child. Anyone involved in your case can request mediation at any point. A judge must approve the request. The judge also can order mediation if the judge feels mediation is best to resolve issues.

The judge will sign an order that says everyone involved in the case must attend at least one session. Most sessions are one to three hours long. If the judge orders mediation in your case, you will receive a referral order from the judge giving you the date, time and place of your mediation session. If an agreement is reached, it will be presented to the judge for approval. If approved, the agreement will become an enforceable order of the court.

Notes

Child Abuse and Neglect Law

Notes

Under New Jersey state law, an “abused or neglected child” is a child under 18 years of age whose parent or guardian:

1. Inflicts or allows to be inflicted upon the child physical injury by other than accidental means which causes or creates a substantial risk of death, or serious or protracted disfigurement, or protracted impairment of physical or emotional health or protracted loss or impairment of the function of any bodily organ.
2. Creates or allows to be created a substantial or ongoing risk of physical injury to such child by other than accidental means which would be likely to cause death or serious or protracted disfigurement, or protracted loss or impairment of the function of any bodily organ.
3. Commits or allows to be committed an act of sexual abuse against a child.
4. A child whose physical, mental or emotional condition has been impaired or is in imminent danger of becoming impaired as the result of the failure of his parent or guardian, as herein defined, to exercise a minimum degree of care (a) in supplying the child with adequate food, clothing, shelter, education, medical or surgical care though financially able to do so or though offered financial or other reasonable means to do so, or (b) in providing the child with proper supervision or guardianship, by unreasonably inflicting or allowing to be inflicted harm, or substantial risk thereof, including the affliction of excessive corporal punishment; or by any other acts of a similarly serious nature requiring the aid of the court.
5. A child who has been willfully abandoned by his parent or guardian, as herein defined.
6. A child upon whom excessive physical restraint has been used under circumstances which do not indicate that the child’s behavior is harmful to himself, others or property.
7. A child who is in an institution and (a) has been placed there inappropriately for a continued period of time with the knowledge that the placement has resulted in or could continue to result in harm to the child’s mental or physical well-being or (b) who has been willfully isolated from ordinary social contact under circumstances which indicate emotional or social deprivation.

Adoption and Safe Families Act (ASFA)

New Jersey changed some of its laws and policies related to families with children in resource care to comply with the federal Adoption and Safe Families Act.*

These changes speed up how things work when children are placed into resource care. Generally, when children are first placed in resource care, DCP&P is required to help the family get their children returned home.

If a child remains in resource care for 12 months, the law requires that there be a court hearing (permanency hearing) to set a plan for the child's future. If it is decided that the child should not go home, DCP&P will make plans for the child to either achieve Kinship Legal Guardianship (KLG) or be adopted.

If it is decided that the child should achieve KLG, DCP&P will file a complaint for KLG. In KLG, the children are placed with kin, but their parents retain their rights to visit their children and must give consent to any name change or to adoption. Parents can petition the court for the return of their children if they meet certain conditions. If it is decided that the child should be adopted, DCP&P will file a complaint to terminate parental rights.

In situations where KLG or adoption is not in the child's best interest, the child could be placed in another planned permanent living arrangement.

These timeframes give you a limited amount of time to get your children back. It is important for you to cooperate with court orders so that your children can be returned as quickly as possible. It is also important for DCP&P to act quickly to provide you and your family with the services you need after a child goes into resource care. If DCP&P does not provide services right away or does not provide the services you think you need, you should contact your case worker to create a service plan that helps your family quickly. You also can ask your lawyer to request mediation with DCP&P.

Notes

*See also Legal Services of New Jersey, Looking Out for Your Legal Rights, New Laws Affect Families with Children in Foster Care, Jan-Feb 2000.

Child Placement Bill of Rights

Notes

CHILD PLACEMENT BILL OF RIGHTS

Under New Jersey state law, a child placed outside their home has the following rights appropriate to the individual circumstances of the child's physical or mental development. **These rights were updated in January 2023 to add the rights of siblings.**

- Placement outside the home only after reasonable efforts have been made to enable the child to remain at home.
- To place the child with kin.
- To place the child in an appropriate setting in their own community.
- To place the child in the same setting with the child's sibling if the sibling is also being placed outside their home, or in the closest proximity possible to other siblings who are not in out-of-home placement.
- To visit with the child's parents immediately after the child has been placed outside their home and on a regular basis thereafter, and to maintain contact with the child's parents.
- To visit with the child's sibling on a regular basis and to otherwise maintain contact with the child's sibling if the child was separated from his sibling upon placement outside his home. This includes arranging transportation as necessary, and to have access to a phone number or computer that allows for virtual visits between face-to-face visits or when face-to-face visits are not possible.
- To placement in the least restrictive setting appropriate to the child's needs and conducive to their health and safety.
- To be free from physical or psychological abuse and from repeated changes in placement before the permanent placement or return home of the child.
- To receive adequate, safe and appropriate food, clothing, housing, education, and adequate and appropriate medical care.

Child Placement Bill of Rights

- To have a placement plan reflecting the child's best interests and designed to facilitate the child's permanent placement or return home.
- To be allowed to participate in the permanency planning decisions of the child's siblings whenever appropriate.
- To have a placement plan reflecting the child's best interests and designed to facilitate the child's permanent placement or return home.
- To invite any other siblings of the child who is the subject of the permanency planning to participate in the permanency planning decision whenever appropriate.
- To receive adequate, safe and appropriate food, clothing, housing, education, and adequate and appropriate medical care.
- To have a placement plan reflecting the child's best interests and designed to facilitate the child's permanent placement or return home.
- To be allowed to participate in the permanency planning decisions of the child's siblings whenever appropriate.
- To invite any other siblings of the child who is the subject of the permanency planning to participate in the permanency planning decision whenever appropriate.
- To have the child's recommendations and wishes, and those of each sibling who participates in the permanency planning decision, documented in the case record of DCP&P.
- To know, or be made aware of by the DCF, expectations for continued contact with siblings after an adoption or transfer of permanent physical and legal custody to a caregiver. Continued contact shall be subject to the approval of the adoptive parents or caregiver.
- To be promptly informed about changes in sibling placements or permanency planning goals.
- To be actively involved in the lives of the child's siblings to the greatest extent possible.
- To not have sibling visits, including phone calls and virtual visits, be denied as a result of behavioral consequences when residing in a resource family home or congregate care setting.
- To be provided updated contact information for all siblings at least annually, including a current telephone number, address, and email address, unless not in the best interests of one or more siblings.

Notes

Important Numbers

Addiction Helpline of NJ

24/7 information and treatment referrals for substance abuse.
1-844-REACH-NJ (1-844-732-2465)

Child Abuse Hotline

Any person with reasonable cause to believe a child has been abused or neglected has the legal responsibility to report it to CP&P. Calls can be made anonymously.
1-877-NJ-ABUSE (1-877-652-2873)

Children's System of Care (PerformCARE)

24/7 access line for services for children and teens with emotional and behavioral health care challenges.
1-877-652-7624

Statewide Domestic Violence Hotline

Information about local domestic violence services.
1-800-572-SAFE (1-800-572-7233)

Family Helpline

Trained volunteers of Parents Anonymous who provide support for parents feeling stressed and referrals to local resources.
1-800-THE-KIDS (1-800-843-5437)

Legal Services of New Jersey (LSNJ)

Family Representation Project-Advice and legal representation for low-income parents involved in CP&P cases.
1-888-LSNJ-LAW (1-888-576-5529)

New Jersey Hopeline

Statewide peer support and suicide prevention hotline.
1-855-NJ-HOPELINE (1-855-654-6735)

NJ 2-1-1

24/7 referral service for various community resources such as housing, professional agencies, utility assistance programs, family financial and emotional support, emergency preparedness, and basic needs.

For more information, go to www.nj211.org.

Dial 211 or text your zip code to: 898-211 or Email: info@NJ211.org

Notes

Important Numbers

Notes

NJ Bar Association Automated Helpline

Contact the New Jersey State Bar Association to find out the number for your county bar association if you need help finding a lawyer.
732-249-5000

NJ Helps

Statewide social services for food stamps, cash assistance and health insurance. For more information, go to www.njhelps.org.

NJ Housing Resource Center

Affordable housing for NJ residents. For more information, go to nj.gov/njhrc.
1-877-428-8844

NJ Mental Health Cares

Statewide behavioral health information and referral service.
1-866-202-HELP (1-866-202-4357)

Reach NJ

Statewide substance abuse referral and information service. For more information, go to www.reachnj.gov
1-844-REACH-NJ (1-844-732-2465)

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services

Administration National Hotline for treatment referral and information. For more information, go to www.samsha.gov
1-800-662-HELP (1-800-662-4357)

State of NJ, Department of Community Affairs Housing Assistance Programs

Oversees programs that prevent homelessness and help people move out of temporary shelters and into stable, permanent housing. Programs include family self-sufficiency, homelessness prevention, shelter support/ emergency housing grant, Section 8 housing voucher, state rental assistance program, Section 8 single room occupancy-moderate rehabilitation, Section 8 homeownership. For more information about these programs, call 609-292-4080 or email dhcr@dca.state.nj.us

Statewide Parent Advocacy Network

Provides support to parents and caregivers and advocates for their rights. 1-800-654-SPAN (1-800-654-7726)

Glossary

Application for Assignment of Counsel: This is an application to have an attorney appointed to represent you in the hearings. You must complete the form in order to have legal representation. This form is to be completed at your first court hearing and again if DCP&P files a termination of parental rights complaint against you.

Adolescent Worker: A DCP&P case worker who primarily works with youth to provide services to help them become stabilized, independent and functional adults.

Adoption Worker: Provides continued services to help find an adoptive home for a child in DCP&P custody, where a judge has decided that the division should prepare for the child's adoption. The adoption worker continues to simultaneously work with the parents to provide services to resolve safety issues preventing the child from returning home.

Concurrent Planning: A process of working towards one permanency goal (typically reunification) while at the same time working towards an alternative permanency goal and plan to move children/youth more quickly to a safe and stable permanent family.

Emergency Removal (aka DODD Removal): The removal of a child from the custody of his or her parents on an emergent basis without parental consent and without a court order.

Independent Living: A permanency plan available to youth 16 years of age and older who are not able to safely return home, achieve KLG or become adopted. Independent living provides various support services to help youth prepare for adulthood.

Intake Worker: DCP&P caseworker responsible for initially responding to and investigating allegations of abuse and neglect. Intake workers are typically assigned to work with families for the first 60 days of a case from the date of a family's referral to DCP&P.

Kinship Legal Guardianship (KLG): Kinship Legal Guardians have the same rights and responsibilities as biological parents. In KLG, the children are placed with kin, but parents retain their rights to visit their children and must give their consent to any name change or adoption. Parents can petition the court for the return of the children if they meet certain conditions.

Legal Orphan: Child whose parents' rights have been terminated and who are waiting for adoption.

Notes

Glossary

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Permanency: A child having a permanent living arrangement in a safe and stable environment with caring, loving and supportive family that will remain involved with the child throughout the child's life.

Permanency Worker: DCP&P caseworker who receives a case once the intake worker and supervisors have determined the case needs DCP&P supervision. The permanency worker is responsible for helping the family meet its case plan goals by providing access to services, making necessary referrals, continually assessing safety and needs, arranging visits between parents and children, if the children are in DCP&P custody, advocating for the needs of the family, providing services to stabilize the family and working on alternative permanency plans for the child in case the child is in placement.

Placement: Refers to the status of a child being under the physical and legal custody of DCP&P.

Resource Parent: Also known as a foster parent; Trained, licensed members of the community who provide a home for children who have been abandoned, neglected or abused and who temporarily are not able to live at home. During the time that children live in a resource home, the resource parents provide the same care that the children's own parents would provide.

Resource Home: A licensed home where children who are in DCP&P custody live under the care of resource parents.

Resource Unit: The Resource Unit consists of DCP&P caseworkers who assist with recruiting, training and offering supports to resource parents. The resource unit also assists other DCP&P caseworkers to find appropriate kin and non-kin resource homes for children who are in DCP&P's care and custody.

Termination of Parental Rights: The legal action taken to end legal ties to your biological or adoptive child. See page 6 for more detailed information.

Verified Complaint: DCP&P prepares this document listing the reasons it is asking for the court to be involved with your family. The complaint is not evidence, only a filing document to bring the matter before a judge. Parents can challenge the information contained in the complaint.

Youth Participation in Court Protocol: A policy that provides youth with the opportunity to participate in court, providing them with a meaningful contribution to the decisions that affect their lives.

Acronyms

AOC: Administrative Office of the Courts

APPLA: Another Planned Permanent Living Arrangement

CARI: Child Abuse Record Information

CASA: Court Appointed Special Advocate

CHEC: Comprehensive Health Evaluations for Children

CHRI: Criminal History Record Information

CIC: Children in Court

Note: New Jersey's designation for all dockets relating to abuse and neglect cases, including voluntary and involuntary cases of termination of parental rights, adoption and kinship guardianship.

CICIC: Children in Court Improvement Committee

CPAC: Child Placement Advisory Council

CPR: Child Placement Review

CPRB: Child Placement Review Board

CSOC: Division of the Children's System of Care;

Note: Under Department of Children and Families (DCF)

CWM: Child Welfare Mediation

DAG: Deputy Attorney General

DCF: Department of Children and Families; **Note:** CP&P and CSOC are divisions of DCF

DCP&P: Division of Child Protection and Permanency;

Note: Under DCF

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Acronyms

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DFCP: Division of Family and Community Partnerships.

Note: Under DCF, meant to enhance DCP&P by supporting community-based, outcome-focused initiative to strengthen families through training and direct services in order to prevent child maltreatment and avoid the need for resource care services.

DOL: Division of Law (Deputy Attorneys General for DCP&P)

KLG: Kinship Legal Guardianship

OTSC: Order to Show Cause

PJ: Presiding Judge

TPR: Termination of Parental Rights

Docket Types (Matters Involving DCP&P)

FN: Child Abuse or Neglect Docket

FC: Child Placement Review Docket

FG: Termination of Parental Rights Docket (Guardianship)

FL: Kinship Legal Guardian Docket

FA: Adoption Docket

DCP&P Investigation Results

Substantiated: Results of a DCP&P investigation where gathered evidence indicates the child has been abused or neglected. Substantiated findings are reported to the Child Abuse Record Information (CARI) system where information regarding their substantiation will remain on a lifetime child abuse registry.

Established: Results of a DCP&P investigation where gathered evidence indicates a child is an abused or neglected child but the acts committed or omitted do not warrant a finding of substantiation.

Not Established: Results of a DCP&P investigation where gathered evidence does not indicate a child is an abused or neglected child but evidence indicates that the child was harmed or placed at risk of harm.

Unfounded: Results of a DCP&P investigation where gathered evidence does not indicate that a child is an abused or neglected child and evidence indicates that the child was not harmed or placed at risk of harm.

Notes

Important Contact Information

DCP&P Caseworker	NAME	PHONE
DCP&P Supervisor	NAME	PHONE
Local DCP&P OFFICE	ADDRESS	PHONE
MY ATTORNEY	NAME	PHONE
MY COURTHOUSE	ADDRESS	PHONE
MY DOCKET NUMBER		
JUDGE		



STUART RABNER
CHIEF JUSTICE

MICHAEL J. BLEE, J.A.D.
ACTING ADMINISTRATIVE DIRECTOR OF THE COURTS

CN 12545 - JUNE 2025