



Westmoreland County ABA Permanency Barriers Project

Parent Handbook

Table of Contents

| | |
|--|----|
| What happens after a report of neglect or abuse is made? | 2 |
| Why was my child removed from my home? | 2 |
| Where will my child be placed? What should I do? | 3 |
| Can I visit with my child? | 4 |
| How do I get a lawyer? | 4 |
| Who will be working with my family | 5 |
| Why do I need to go to court? (types of court hearings) | 7 |
| What is a Family Service Plan? | 16 |
| Why do I have to go to so many different meetings? | 18 |
| What is a “permanency plan” and how do I get my child back home? | 18 |
| What is confidentiality and why am I being asked to sign a release of information? | 22 |
| What if I am in jail or prison? | 23 |
| What are my rights? | 25 |
| Important information | 26 |

Westmoreland County ABA Permanency Barriers Project Parent Handbook
© 2011 American Bar Association

The view expressed herein have not been approved by the House of Delegates or the Board of Governors of the American Bar Association and accordingly should not be construed as representing policy of the American Bar Association.

Nothing contained in this book is to be considered as the rendering of legal advice for specific cases, and readers are responsible for obtaining such advice from their own legal counsel. This book and any forms and agreements herein are intended for educational and informational purposes only.

What happens after a report of neglect or abuse is made?

Westmoreland County Children's Bureau (WCCB) is required by law to investigate all reports of child abuse and neglect. WCCB must provide services that will keep a family together whenever possible. A Family Court judge will only remove a child from the child's home to protect the child's safety, or health.

If WCCB thinks your child cannot safely remain with you, WCCB must tell the Family Court judge and get an emergency order allowing them to remove your child from your home. You must stay in contact with WCCB and go to all meetings to plan for your child's safe return home. In some situations, WCCB may agree to a family arrangement for care of your child by a relative without involving the Family Court.

Why was my child removed from my home?

Your child was taken from your home because the Family Court judge believes there is a serious concern about your child's safety. This concern may come from reported neglect (you did not meet the basic needs of your child) or abuse (physical, sexual or emotional). Sometimes emergencies like sickness, injury, or death of a child's parents or caregivers puts a child at risk and the Family Court judge decides the child cannot remain at home.

Where will my child be placed? What should I do?

You have an important role helping WCCB decide where to place your child. When possible, WCCB will try to place your child with a family member or good friend who knows your child well.

Children do best when living with people they know. Make sure to give your WCCB

caseworkers the names, addresses and phone numbers of family members and/or close family friends who might be willing to care for your child.



You may be able to arrange for your child to stay with a relative. If you do this, the court would not be involved. WCCB may agree to the family making a private arrangement to care for the child. Although WCCB does not have legal custody of the child, they must first do a background check of the relative and all adults in the home as well as check the home before placement. In other cases WCCB may place the child with a relative who can apply to become a licensed foster parent. Your relative can only apply if the child is in WCCB custody. Placement with a relative is called kinship care.

It may not always be possible to place your child with someone the child knows. If that cannot happen, your child will live with a foster family. In some cases, a child's special needs may require a more structured home, such as

a treatment foster home, group home or live-in treatment center. WCCB will try very hard to place your child somewhere close to your home and school. WCCB will also try to place siblings together whenever possible.

Can I visit with my child?

You can help your child adjust by visiting. Your visiting plan will usually be decided during your meetings with WCCB or by a judge/master in Family Court. Talk about this with your lawyer and WCCB caseworker. Typically, you can visit every two weeks. Tell your WCCB caseworker about any problems you may have that would prevent visiting. Visit with your child as often as possible according to the plan and go to doctor visits, school activities and meetings, and other important events in your child's life. If you must miss a visit, call before the time to explain why you can't make it, and ask to reschedule. If you need help getting to a visit with your child, let your WCCB caseworker know. Even if you are in jail, you can still visit your child. Talk about visiting with your attorney and caseworker.

It is very important to keep in touch with your WCCB caseworkers and service providers (people who try to help you like a counselor or therapist). Also keep in touch with your attorney. Tell your caseworker and attorney if your phone number or address changes. Go to all meetings and court hearings.

How do I get a lawyer?

At Family Court hearings, you have the right to be represented by a lawyer. The WCCB caseworker will give

you an application, a form to ask for a lawyer. You can also ask for a lawyer by calling the Family Court Administrator at 724-830-3000. Getting a free lawyer is based on how much money you have. You will need to fill out paperwork (called an IFP) about your money situation to see if you qualify for a free lawyer. You may also pay to get a lawyer to represent you in court. If you do not qualify for a free lawyer, you will have to get and pay for your own lawyer. If you are not sure who your lawyer is, call your WCCB caseworker or the Family Court Administrator.

Remember, it is your responsibility to talk with your lawyer. You should tell your lawyer about the progress you are making and how your visits with your child are going. Call your lawyer if you have questions about your case. If something happens that worries you or that you think might hurt your case, call your lawyer to talk about it. Always tell your lawyer if you change your phone number or address.

Who will be working with my family?

When your child leaves your home you will begin working with different people. Your main contacts, however, are the caseworkers working with your family. One of these caseworkers comes from WCCB, and the other may come from a private agency.

WCCB caseworker: The WCCB caseworker sets up planning meetings, and checks in with the service providers working with your family. The WCCB caseworker must make sure you and your family are getting the services you need. Your WCCB caseworker must tell your progress, or lack of progress, to the court. Your caseworker should meet with you regularly.

Your caseworker may change from time to time as your case moves forward. If at any time you don't know who your WCCB caseworker is, or if you don't know how to get in touch with your caseworker, call 724-830-3300.

Lawyers: You will have a lawyer, and your child will have a lawyer. Your child's lawyer may sometimes be called a 'guardian ad litem' or 'GAL.' Lawyers are also called 'advocates,' 'attorneys' and/or 'counsel.' WCCB will have a lawyer called a 'solicitor' to tell the view of the agency. Stay in contact with your lawyer and tell your lawyer if your address or phone number changes.

If at any time you don't know who your lawyer is, or if you don't know how to get in touch with your lawyer, ask your WCCB caseworker.

Family Court Judges/Masters: The judges/masters from Family Court will be making decisions during court hearings about your child and family. Not every hearing will be in front of a judge, it may be heard by a master. Masters can do most of the things judges can do with the judges' permission. If you have any questions, ask your lawyer.

Foster Parents: Foster parents are people who have been trained to care for children removed from their homes. If WCCB has placed your child into the care of a licensed relative, this is called kinship foster care.

Service Providers: These are the professionals providing services to you and your child. They may include (but are not limited to) a therapist, mental health specialist, drug or alcohol counselor, in-home service provider, child profile

worker, child prep worker and supervised visitation staff.

CASA: A Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) volunteer is a trained citizen, appointed by a judge, to represent the best interests of a child in court. A CASA volunteer tells a judge background information about the child and suggests where a child should live to help the court decide the child's future.



Why do I need to go to court?

You need to go to all court hearings because a judge/master will be making decisions about your family. It is important that the judge/master sees you in court so he/she knows you care about what is happening with your family. Your lawyer will tell your views during the court hearings based on what you said. It is very important that you attend ALL hearings in Family Court. If you miss a hearing, the judge or master may still make decisions about your family based on what WCCB and the lawyer representing your child have told the court. Your lawyer may not be able to represent you if you do not come to court every time you have a hearing.

When you are involved with WCCB, you will need to attend several court hearings. A master hears most of the cases instead of a judge. You always have the right to request a judge to hear your case. If a parent or guardian is in jail, he/she still has the right to participate in all court hearings and team planning meetings. In these cases, the jailed parent or guardian should ask his/her lawyer to ask



for a ‘bring down’ order, or ask to participate by phone. Often there are delays due to the many cases heard by Family Court and the hearing may need to be continued to another day.

Each Family Court hearing has a specific purpose:

Shelter Care Hearing

If the court granted an emergency order to remove your child for placement, the next thing you will need to do is go to an Emergency Shelter Care Hearing. This hearing must be held within 72 hours (3 days) of the emergency order. At this hearing, the judge/master will decide whether your child needs to remain in placement until the next hearing.

- If the judge/master decides your child does not need to remain in placement until the next hearing, the judge will allow your child to return home. However, a WCCB caseworker may still need to supervise your family.
- If the judge/master decides your child must remain in placement until the next hearing, your child will not come home.

You should apply for a lawyer before this hearing, so you can have a lawyer at the hearing.

Adjudicatory and Dispositional Hearing

The next hearing that you will need to go to is an Adjudicatory (fact-finding) Hearing at Family Court. Before this hearing, WCCB will file a petition with the court (tell the court in writing) saying why your child was removed from your home (these are called “allegations”). This hearing must be held within 10 days from the date of the Shelter Care Hearing. You may be asked to waive this 10 day requirement, that means to allow the court to hold this hearing later than 10 days. The purpose of this hearing is to find out if what WCCB said in their petition (allegations) is supported by the facts of the case.

Often the Dispositional Hearing is held at the same time as the Adjudicatory Hearing. This hearing helps find out what is needed, such as services and things you have to do, for your child to be returned safely home.

- If the judge/master decides that the allegations are not true or the situation has changed, your child will return home under supervision with a safety plan.
- If the judge/master decides that some or all of the allegations are true, the judge/master will then decide who should take care of your child until the next hearing. The judge/master might decide to return your child home with you at that time. The judge/master may also decide to keep your child in care.
- During this hearing the judge/master will also order certain tasks, such as going to therapy or a drug evaluation or parenting support that you must do for your child to safely return home. These tasks will often be included in your Family Service Plan (FSP) (see p. 16).

If the judge/master decides that your child cannot live with you, **you have a limited amount of time to get your child back.** Termination of parental rights or TPR (meaning you will no longer be allowed to parent your child) can start as early as 6 months after the date WCCB removed your child from your home. You should start working on your Family Service Plan (FSP) right away. If your WCCB caseworker is not helping you with your FSP, you should call your lawyer and let your lawyer know.

90 Day Case Conference

The next conference you need to go to is a 90 Day Case Conference at Family Court. This conference is held in the judge's/master's hearing room 90 days from the date your child was removed from your home. The purpose of the 90 Day Case Conference is to review your Family Service Plan (FSP) and see what progress you are making toward getting your child returned to you.

The 90 Day Case Conference is also a time for the judge/master to make sure the WCCB caseworker is giving you referrals to programs, setting up visits and helping you change what led to your child's removal. Go to the 90 Day Case Conference with your lawyer. The following people will also attend: family members involved with you or your child; the attorney for WCCB and the attorney for your child; the WCCB caseworker; and any professionals providing services to you or your child, including school personnel.

Permanency Placement Review Hearing

This hearing is held every 6 months to review the permanency plan and case progress. The judge/master will

hear testimony about services you have been offered and your progress toward completing your goals. Your goals will be written in a Family Service Plan (FSP, see p. 16) and the original dispositional court order.

You need to show the judge/master the steps you have taken to fix the problems that caused your child to be removed from your home. You also must show the steps you've taken to comply with your family service plan (FSP), such as going to visits and working with services. At this hearing the judge/master will decide if your child needs to remain in care and if the permanency plan decided by WCCB is appropriate (see p.18, for an explanation of permanency plans).

Termination of Parental Rights Hearing

If your child has been in care for 15 of the past 22 months, the federal Adoption and Safe Families Act (ASFA) says WCCB **must** petition, that is, ask the court, to end your parental rights and therefore free your child for adoption. WCCB **may**, however, petition to terminate your parental rights after your child has been in care for 6 months for one of several reasons. For example, WCCB may petition to end your parental rights if:

- You have failed to show you are working on the problem that caused your child to be removed from your home (for example, you are not working on family service plan); or
- You abandoned your child, or stopped regularly visiting or giving money to support your child (depending on how much money you have);

There are some exceptions known as *compelling reasons* that allow WCCB not to file to terminate parental rights if the child has been in foster care for 15 of the last 22 months. They include:

- Reunification with the parent, guardian or custodian will occur soon (within the next 6 months);
- Grounds to end parental rights do not exist under the law;
- If there is a good reason why ending the parents' rights is not in the best interest of the child;
- If the child's family has not gotten the services they need to achieve a safe return to the home within the timeframes set in the FSP;
- If the child is over the age of 12 and does not want to be adopted; or
- If the child is placed with a fit and willing relative.

If any of these exceptions apply, the judge will consider them when making decisions about your child's permanency plan. All termination of parental rights hearings are heard by a judge, not a master. Once WCCB petitions to end parental rights it is hard to show a compelling reason exists not to terminate. Do not wait until the last minute to start your family service plan (FSP) and hope the judge does not end your parental rights because a compelling reason exists.

Termination of parental rights is forever. By law, when the court ends your parental rights, **all** of your rights to your child are terminated.

If WCCB petitions or has petitioned to end your parental rights, you will be personally served a copy of the petition or receive a copy of the petition by certified mail at least 10 days before the hearing. The petition will include the date, time and court room of the hearing. Your lawyer will also be told about the petition to end your parental rights. If you have hired a private lawyer, not appointed by the court, this lawyer must go to this hearing so he/she can represent you.

If you do not agree with the petition to terminate your parental rights, you **must** go to court on the date and time in the petition and tell the judge that you do not agree and wish to fight the termination of your parental rights. **If you do not attend this hearing your parental rights could be ended on that day without the judge hearing your position.**

If you don't want WCCB to pursue adoption for your child, you may contest (fight) the petition in a hearing called a Termination of Parental Rights (TPR) hearing. At this hearing all parties will have witnesses testify about what is best for the child and what the parent has done to help safely return the child to the parent's home.

The judge will decide what is in the child's best interest, the judge will either grant the TPR petition and therefore free the child for adoption or the judge may deny the petition. If you do not agree with the judge's decision, you can appeal it – this means that you ask another judge to look at the judge's decision.



You might agree with this plan to have your child adopted by another person, known as a “*voluntary relinquishment*” of your parental rights. There are a few reasons why you might do this. You may feel you are unable to keep up with the responsibilities of parenthood. You may feel your child is very attached to his/her caregiver and it would be best for your child to

remain with that person forever to give him a stable home. This is a big decision with many legal effects. Talk to your lawyer before voluntarily relinquishing your parental rights.

If you decide to voluntarily give up your parental rights, you will testify that you agree to have your parental rights ended and allow the adoption of your child. At a hearing the judge will ask you if you still want to give up your rights or you can ask that the hearing be continued so you can talk to your lawyer. If you still decide to give up your rights, the judge will order the termination of your parental rights. You can only change your mind about deciding to voluntarily give up your parental rights within 30 days and only if the judge determines your decision was not voluntary.

Subsidized Permanent Legal Custodianship (SPLC) Hearing

The court’s and WCCB’s goal is to have your child live with you. If that can’t happen, the next goal is to have your child adopted. Subsidized Permanent Legal Custodianship (SPLC) is the third option to give your child permanency, if reunification and adoption are no longer a choice.

Sometimes at the Permanency Placement Review Hearing (see p. 10) the judge/master will decide if it is in the best interest of your child to give a caregiver SPLC. You may agree with this plan or you may contest (fight) the petition to change the child’s goal to SPLC.

The child must be living with the caregiver for at least 6 months before the court can grant SPLC. This plan allows you to keep your parental rights while someone else becomes your child’s legal custodian. Most times, this person will be a relative, close friend of the family or your child’s foster parent. The legal custodian will provide a permanent home for your child, and will be legally responsible for raising your child. This person will be making important medical and school decisions for your child, and will get some money to care for your child.

Your parental rights must be ended before your child may be adopted, but with SPLC your parental rights are not terminated. With SPLC:

- You may visit with your child as ordered by the judge/master
- You may still have to pay child support (depending on your resources)
- WCCB will not need to stay involved with your family
- You can petition, or ask the Family Court custody office to change visits or custody if the change is in the child’s best interest

Ask your caseworker and your lawyer to explain both adoption and SPLC if you have questions about these other options to having your child live with you.

What is a Family Service Plan?

The Family Service Plan (FSP) tells you what you need to do to have your child returned to your care. The Family Service Plan also tells you what the WCCB caseworkers need to do to help you reach your goals. You should meet with the WCCB caseworker to help create your Family Service Plan.

The first meeting between you and the WCCB caseworker to discuss your Family Service Plan (FSP) should happen within 30 days after the removal of your child. The WCCB caseworker will tell you the date, time and place. Bring family members and other people who support you to these meetings if they will be helpful. If you agree with the FSP, review and sign the plan. The caseworker will give you a copy of the FSP. Your lawyer and service providers will also get copies.

During these meetings, you will talk about the strengths and needs of your family. You may feel everyone is asking you a lot of questions, but the answers to these questions will help the caseworkers understand how they can help you get your child back home. Ask questions if you do not understand something talked about in these meetings. After the first meeting, there will be a 90 Day Case Conference at Family Court to review the Family Service Plan and see what progress you are making toward getting

your child returned to you. There will be a Family Service Plan meeting every 6 months to review your Family Service Plan (and more often if necessary).

If the Family Service Plan is not working for you, and/or you are having trouble getting the services you need, ask for another meeting. The purpose of these meetings is to see how your child is doing and to follow up on the work you have done to reach the goals of the Family Service Plan. The WCCB caseworker can change the FSP at any time to show the changing needs of the family. The FSP may also include services for your children, such as therapy, educational services, Child Preparation and Child Profile (see below).

Child Preparation is the hard work of helping children make the transition from foster care to the permanency option (reunification, kinship, PLC or adoption) chosen for them. It includes developing a written plan outlining activities during at least 10 meetings with the child over 6 months.

Child Profile details the child's life history, current functioning and special needs. Referrals for this service must come from the county having legal custody of the child.

Remember, there is a time limit for returning a child home. You should start working on your Family Service Plan right away. If your WCCB caseworker is not helping you get involved in your Family Service Plan, you should call your lawyer and let him/her know.

The Family Service Plan is about you, your family and your children. Go to all the Family Service Plan meetings and make sure the services are helpful to you and that you know what you need to accomplish.

Why do I have to go to so many different meetings?

Having your child removed from your home is very hard for you and your family. You, the WCCB caseworker, the attorneys and the judge/master should be focusing on what needs to happen for your child to safely return home. Decisions will be made about you, your child and your family at many different meetings and court hearings. It is very important you attend **all** meetings and court hearings so you have a voice in what is happening and so people know how important your family is to you.

You should plan to attend: (1) all court hearings; (2) the 90 day conference; (3) all Family Service Plan meetings; and (4) all meetings about your child and your family. If you think it is important to have a meeting to discuss your progress or questions you have about your case or Family Service Plan, ask to meet with your WCCB caseworker. If you feel like your WCCB caseworker is not helping you or is not including you in important meetings and decisions, talk to your lawyer.

What is a “permanency plan” and how do I get my child back home?

The Adoption and Safe Families Act (ASFA) is a federal law that says there must be a “permanency plan” for

children removed from their parents so they don’t end up spending their childhood in foster care. Your child’s permanency plan can be return home, adoption, permanent legal custodianship, placement with a relative or another planned permanent living arrangement. One of the goals of the ASFA is to stop children from spending lots of time in foster care.

So federal law says the WCCB caseworker must work on other permanent plans for your child while she is working with you to reunify your family.



WCCB must try to reunify your child with you. At the same time WCCB must also create a back-up plan, known as the concurrent plan, in case your child cannot be returned to you. WCCB will develop this plan as soon as your child enters foster care. Sometimes this is called *concurrent planning*. You can help WCCB develop this concurrent plan by giving the names and addresses of relatives or family friends that might be able to care for your child, if you are not able to have your child return to you.

You should know that WCCB, the court and other parties involved with your child may discuss permanency with your child’s caregivers, including relatives. They may discuss adoption and/or other permanency plans even while WCCB is working with you on reunification. These connections may be valuable even if your child returns to your care.

Reunification (return home)

In most cases the permanent plan for your child will be to *return home* to you. To accomplish this, you need to work on your Family Service Plan and follow all court orders to address the problems that caused your child to be removed from your home. You must make your home safe and guarantee proper care of your child if returned. Remember, you have limited time to complete the Family Service Plan. Federal law also requires the WCCB caseworker to help you with your Family Service Plan so you and your child can be reunited. The work the WCCB caseworker does to help you is called *reasonable efforts*.

Adoption

If you cannot reunify with your child, the federal law says the next best permanent plan for your child is *adoption*. If your child's permanent plan is adoption that means your parental rights will be ended and someone else will legally be your child's parent. Termination of parental rights is permanent. By law, when your parental rights are ended, all your rights to your child are terminated. However, the adoptive parent may voluntarily enter into an open adoption agreement with the parents to continue contact or communication after the child is adopted. This agreement is voluntary and subject to court approval. (For a review of termination of parental rights hearings and your right to present evidence to the judge, see p. 11).

Permanent Legal Custodianship (PLC)

In many cases, if your child cannot reunify with you, your child's other permanent plan will be adoption. If adoption is not possible, your child's alternative plan may be *permanent legal custodianship*. This may or may not be supported with money from the state (subsidized). If it is subsidized, it is called *Subsidized Permanent Legal*

Custodianship (SPLC). If PLC is your child's permanent plan this means you keep your parental rights but someone else becomes your child's legal custodian. The legal custodian will give a permanent home to your child and is legally responsible for raising your child. This person, often a relative, will be responsible for making important medical and school decisions for your child. You may visit with your child, if the judge orders it.

**Placement with a Fit and Willing Relative**

If your child cannot reunify with you and adoption and permanent legal custodianship are not possible, then your child's other permanent plan may be *placement with a fit and willing relative*. This means your child will live with a relative, godparent or family friend and that the caseworker will continue to work with your family and monitor your child. The court case will stay open and the judge or master will review your child's case every 6 months. You keep your parental rights, but your child lives with his/her relative, not with you. You may visit with your child, if the judge orders it.

Another Planned Permanent Living Arrangement (APPLA)

If your child cannot reunify with you and none of the other permanency options described above are available, then the permanency plan for your child will be *another planned permanent living arrangement*. Another planned permanent living arrangement offers your child permanency similar to



that provided by a family, that is, it should provide consistent emotional support and shelter for your child until your child achieves independence or one of the other permanency goals described above. This often includes placement in a group home or residential treatment facility. If your child's

permanency goal is another planned permanent living arrangement this means your child will not be living with you. You may visit with your child, if the judge orders it.

What is confidentiality and why am I being asked to sign a release of information?

Often, Family Service Plans include services for parents like: mental health treatment, substance abuse counseling, family therapy and/or parenting education. Usually, your meetings with mental health treatment providers, substance abuse counselors and therapists are confidential – this means they cannot share information about you with anyone else. Because your situation is unique – you are working to reunify your family – the WCCB caseworker will probably ask you to sign a “release of information” so the service providers you are working with can share information about you with each other and with the WCCB caseworker and the judge/master.

In most cases, allowing a release of information is important and can help you reunify with your child. The WCCB caseworker may need to talk to service providers about you to figure out what services will be most helpful.

Also, the people working with you might want to talk to each other about how you are doing and what they should each be doing to help you. The WCCB caseworker cannot recommend that the judge return your children to you unless he/she knows how you are progressing on your Family Service Plan.

In some cases, you may not want to sign a release of information – if you have questions about whether or not you should sign a release of information, talk to your lawyer.

What if I am in jail or prison?

It can be very overwhelming if you are in jail and your child is involved with WCCB. The law says that you can't lose your child just because you are in jail. It is very important that you keep in contact with the WCCB caseworker, your lawyer and your child. If your child is in foster care for 15 months (or sometimes even less time), WCCB may try to end your parental rights. Here are some important steps to maintain your relationship with your child:

- *Stay in contact with your child.* You can do this through writing letters, making phone calls and requesting visits. It is important that you stay in contact with your child, no matter what your child's age, so your child, the WCCB caseworker and the judge/master know how much you care about your family.
- *Stay in contact with the WCCB caseworker.* You need to be involved with making decisions about your child and your family. Stay in regular contact with the WCCB caseworker. You can do this by writing letters

or through phone calls. Talk to the caseworker about your Family Service Plan – ask to participate in Family Service Plan Meetings by phone.

- If the Family Service Plan says you need to take part in services, see if they are available at the jail or prison. Ask your WCCB caseworker to help you find services you can do, while in jail. If you don't know who your WCCB caseworker is, or if you don't know how to get in touch with him/her, call 724-830-3300. Also talk to your prison social worker/counselor about services you can go to at the prison.
- *Make sure your lawyer, the WCCB caseworker and the court know where you are.* You should get written notice about what is happening in your family's case. Write a letter to the WCCB caseworker and your lawyer giving them your address and asking to participate in the case.
- *Ask to visit with your child.* While you are in jail you can still visit with your child, unless the judge does not allow the visits or it's not available at your facility. Ask the WCCB caseworker to set up visits for you and your children. If the WCCB caseworker will not do this, ask your lawyer to ask the judge to order visits.
- *Go to court hearings.* You have a right to have a lawyer for court hearings involving your child. If you do not have a lawyer, ask the judge to appoint one. If you do not know who your lawyer is, ask your WCCB caseworker. Ask your lawyer to ask that you be brought to all court hearings.

What are my rights?

You have a right to raise your child, as protected by the United States Constitution. The state can only get involved if a judge or master decides your actions harm or could harm your child. This includes things you should do for your child like getting him to school, taking her to the doctor, watching over him, and making sure she gets enough to eat and has a safe place to live. WCCB is required to check reports of child abuse and neglect. If WCCB thinks your child cannot safely remain with you, WCCB must tell the judge or master.

You have a right to be told when there are court dates concerning you, your child and your family. You also have a right to tell what happened at the court dates. You have the right to have a lawyer to represent you in court. If you cannot afford a lawyer and you meet the income guidelines, you have the right to a free lawyer appointed by the court. Your lawyer should explain the family court process to you and explain your rights to you. You have a right to an interpreter appointed by the court if you do not speak or understand English or if you are deaf or hard of hearing. Being involved in the child welfare system is hard. This is probably a time of great stress for you, your child and your family. It is important to have someone you can trust guiding you through the process. This booklet will answer some of your questions about what is happening with your family. Remember to stay involved with your child, keep in touch with your lawyer and caseworker and above all, ask for help if you don't understand something or are feeling overwhelmed.

Important Information

WCCB Caseworker:

Phone:

WCCB Supervisor:

Phone:

My Lawyer:

Phone:

My next court hearing is:

