

Should I go to Court? (while in foster care)

While you are in care, you will be invited and encouraged to go to court for your Judicial Review. If you haven't heard about your court dates, talk with your caseworker to make sure that you know about them in advance. Work with your family team meeting members, your caseworker, or your GAL/CASA to plan what and how you want to talk about your life.

By going to court, you:

- Provide important information about your situation.
- Hear what is actually said in court and take part in the decision making process.
- Share your feelings, ideas and needs.
- Advocate for yourself.
- Gain a sense of control over your life.

The Judge really wants to hear from you. Your Judicial Review is a great time for you to speak for yourself about what you need and to participate in decisions being made on your behalf. In fact, the Judge may offer to talk with you privately in his/her office in order to learn more about your wishes.

The Judicial Review happens every 6 months and usually takes 15-30 minutes. There will be a Judge, DHHS caseworker, Assistant Attorney General (AAG) who represents the state, your parents' attorney(s), maybe your parents, and a Guardian ad litem (GAL) or Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) to represent your best interests. Sometimes a foster parent may attend. There will also be a Bailiff, or law enforcement officer who maintains order and security in the courtroom, assisting the Judge, but not participating in your review.

The Judge will read the GAL Report and review the DHHS proposed court order. The Judge will allow anyone present to speak about what has gone on since the last review. It's important to remember that you do have control over some things, even though it feels like everyone else has control. You can:

- Brainstorm different solutions and back up plans.
- Be straight forward and truthful.
- Ask questions and don't make assumptions.
- Be ready to listen and negotiate.

Here are some things to remember for the court room:

- Speak only when you are called on to speak. If you wish to speak, make sure that your caseworker, GAL or AAG know.
- Speak clearly and calmly. Never yell or use swear words.
- Do not chew gum.
- Look your best. Wear clean clothes without words and holes.
- Treat everyone with respect.

You should know that going to court can be exciting, empowering and sometimes a little scary...but with preparation, it can be GREAT!