

# Teen Parent Rights When DHS Investigates

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**Initial Contact.** Remember, DHS has to respond to every call they get about abuse or neglect. While some people have to report abuse or neglect (i.e. teachers and doctors), anyone can call including neighbors, friends and family.

**DHS Investigation.** When DHS comes to check on you and your kids it can feel scary and invasive. DHS will talk to you, your children, your family, and your neighbors. They may request medical records or school records. You should be polite and answer their questions.

- **Remember:** what you say to the DHS worker is not confidential and can be used against you in court! Talk to your lawyer if you have any questions.
- **Remember:** if DHS wants to remove your kids from you, you should give the DHS worker the names and phone numbers of relatives who may be willing to care for your child.
- **Remember:** if DHS removes your kids from you in an “emergency” situation you will get to see a judge within three days and a lawyer will be there to represent you!

**DHS and Court.** DHS can take someone to court if they are not cooperating with an investigation or if they have or want to remove your kids from you.

## YOUR RIGHTS IN COURT

- You have the same rights as adult parents.
- You have the right to a lawyer who will represent your wishes as a parent.
- If your lawyer does not return your phone calls or you do not feel like that are representing your wishes you can request a new lawyer.
- DHS has to make an effort to keep your family together or return your children to you.
  - DHS must help you get services to become a better parent, and to be able to provide for your children.
  - For example, if your DHS worker or the judge says you have to go to counseling, your worker should help you find a program and give you tokens to get there.
- DHS has a responsibility to try and place your child with family. You should write down the names and phone numbers of family members who might be willing to help care for your child.

## REMEMBER

- It is really important that you attend all court dates and meetings. Show the judge and everyone else that you are taking things seriously.
- Important decisions about your family will be made in court and at meetings





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- You can make sure your voice is heard and you're getting what you need by being there.
- After every court date there will be a meeting (Single Case Plan meetings) to discuss what steps you need to take to get your kids back or to close your case.
  - Make sure you understand what is expected of you.
  - Ask for help if you need it.
  - You can ask your lawyer to go to the meeting with you, or go over the paperwork from the meeting.
- See and call your kids as often as possible, if they don't stay in your care.
- You should be told about any medical appointments your kids have and you should ask to attend.

## FOSTER KIDS AS PARENT

- If you are in foster care and become a parent, you should be able to keep your baby with you.
- You should talk to your lawyers and your DHS worker about a mother-baby program – it might be a good fit for you.
- Remember that before DHS takes your child they have to prove you are not taking care of them or are harming them.
- You will have two, and maybe three lawyers!
  - One lawyer will represent your wishes as a parent (Parent Attorney).
  - Another lawyer will represent your wishes as a child (Child Advocate).
  - If what you want as a child is not what your Child Advocate thinks is best for you, you may also have a lawyer who will represent your "best interests" (GAL or Guardian Ad Litem).
- If you are in care and will turn 18 soon, you should talk to your DHS worker and Child Advocate about a "board extension."

## Important phone numbers:

- Call the CLS Family Advocacy Hotline if you have questions: 215-981-3765
- Call DHS if you don't know who your caseworker is: 215-683-4347
- Call the court if you don't know who your lawyer is or when your next court date is: 215-686-4119

