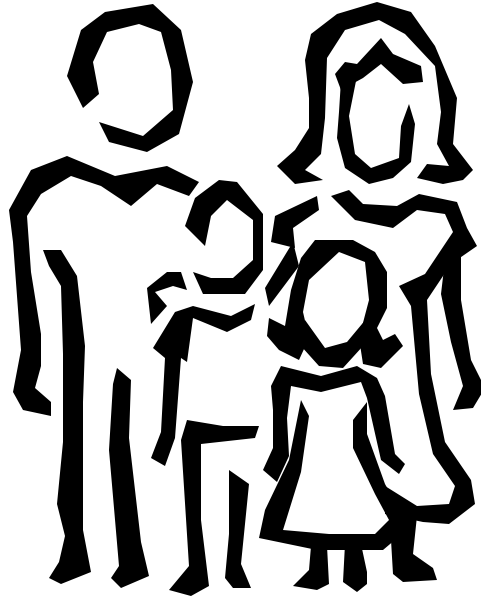


THE FAMILY ADVOCACY UNIT

OF COMMUNITY LEGAL SERVICES, INC.



TIPS FOR PARENTS DEALING WITH THE DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES (DHS)

Parents dealing with DHS often feel hopeless and powerless. Don't Give Up! Take action to keep your children with you or get them back from DHS. Here are some tips on dealing with the system.

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GET THE NAMES AND PHONE NUMBERS OF EVERYONE IN YOUR CASE (your lawyer, the DHS worker/supervisor, your child's lawyer, the foster care worker) and keep in touch.

- ✦ Make sure everyone knows how to get in touch with you, so you don't miss important meetings.
- ✦ Call people every week, so they will know what you are doing to get your children back or keep them with you. Keep asking for what you want, such as more visitation or help getting into treatment.
- ✦ call DHS at (215) 683-4DHS/683-4947, if you don't know who your DHS worker/supervisor is.

My lawyer's name: _____	My DHS social worker's name: _____
Phone no.: () _____	Phone no.: () _____
My SCOH worker's name: _____	My foster care social worker's name: _____
Phone no.: () _____	Phone no.: () _____

ASK THE JUDGE FOR A LOT OF VISITATION. If you don't ask, you will probably be given very little time with your children. If you don't or can't ask in court, keep asking DHS and other social workers in the case. Ask your DHS worker for tokens or train tickets to get to the visits.

GO TO EVERY VISIT. If you miss visits it will be harder to get your children back. If you must miss a visit, call the foster care worker before your visit and explain that you cannot make it.

GET INTO TREATMENT. If you have a problem with drugs or alcohol or a mental health problem (such as depression or anxiety) the **MOST IMPORTANT** thing you can do for your case is to get into a good program right away.

- ✦ For help getting into a drug/alcohol or mental health program, call Community Behavioral Health (CBH) at 1-888-545-2600.
- ✦ If you have an addiction, starting with inpatient programs is almost always the best way to go.
- ✦ Many inpatient drug and alcohol programs will let you bring your children with you either right away or after you've been there a short while. Ask DHS about these programs.
- ✦ If your children are not with you, you should be able to visit them while you are in a program. Ask DHS or the foster care social worker to arrange this.

GO TO EVERY MEETING AND COURT DATE IN YOUR CASE, including *Family Service Plan (FSP)* meetings. Decisions about your case will be made at the meetings. If DHS knows your address, you should get a letter telling you when and where the meetings are. When you go, ask questions and share your ideas. Let people know you really care about keeping your family together.

- ✦ To find out when your next Court date is call (215) 686-4027.



MEET YOUR GOALS FAST. Get into treatment and parenting classes now. Start right away. There are new laws which say that DHS must try to terminate your parental rights more quickly than they used to. If your children have been out of your home for a year, DHS will be thinking about whether they should be adopted.

BE AS NICE AS POSSIBLE TO PEOPLE INVOLVED IN YOUR CASE. If you yell or curse at your DHS worker people will think you treat your children the same way.

- ✦ Being nice does *not* mean you have to agree with what other people say or ask you to do. Disagree, but in a respectful way.



KEEP NOTES OR A JOURNAL OF EVERYTHING YOU DO. Write down dates, names and phone numbers. This will help you prove you're doing your part.

- ✦ For instance, if you're going to parenting classes, keep a calendar or list of dates, get to know the teacher, get letters for DHS showing you attend.
- ✦ Keep all the paperwork and letters you receive in a folder or box and show everything to your lawyer.

EVERYTHING YOU SAY CAN AND WILL BE USED AGAINST YOU. If you don't want something to be used against you in court, don't tell it to anyone involved in your case. Share confidential information only with your lawyer. When in doubt about what to reveal, ask your lawyer first.

ASK FOR A LAWYER. You have a right to a lawyer if your case is coming into court. If you ask, the judge will send you a letter after your court date stating your lawyer's name and phone number.

- ✦ To find out if you have a lawyer or who your lawyer is call (215) 686-4027.
- ✦ If your lawyer does not keep in touch with you (for example, your lawyer fails to return phone calls) or you are very dissatisfied with your lawyer, you can ask the judge to assign you a new lawyer. Keep track of when you contact your lawyer so you can prove your lawyer is not working with you.

HELP FOR PARENTS IN PRISON

It is hard to continue to parent your child if you are incarcerated, but taking the steps in this section will help you keep your legal rights as well as maintain a relationship with your children.

STAY IN TOUCH WITH YOUR CHILDREN. Write them cards and letters; call them when you can; and/or send them messages through relative. Send them presents on birthdays or other holidays (or arrange for friends/relatives to give them in your name).

BE INVOLVED WITH MAKING PLANS AND DECISIONS ABOUT YOUR CHILDREN. Stay in touch with your children and their caregivers through letters and phone calls.

ASK FOR DHS TO BRING YOUR CHILDREN TO YOU FOR VISITS. DHS regularly brings children to visit their parents in prison.

STAY IN TOUCH WITH DHS. Let them know where you are (write to your DHS worker at 1515 Arch St, Philadelphia, PA 19102) so you can find out how your child is doing and about Court dates. Ask your lawyer and your DHS worker to request a "bring down" order for court dates. If you can't be present in Court or at a meeting, ask to be allowed to participate by phone. Judges will usually allow this to happen.

STAY IN TOUCH WITH YOUR LAWYER, so your lawyer can protect your interests while you're incarcerated. If you can't get in touch with your lawyer or don't know who your lawyer is, write to the Judge in your case at: Family Court, 1801 Vine St., Philadelphia, PA 19102. Mention your children's names and birthdays in any letter you write.

HELP FOR VICTIMS OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

If you are a victim of domestic violence, and you live with the abuser, DHS may tell you to leave your abuser to protect yourself and your children.

For help getting out of the abusive situation and into a women's shelter call:

- ✦ Women Against Abuse (24 hour hotline) (215) 386-7777

For advice about getting a Protection From Abuse (PFA) or custody order call:

- ✦ Philadelphia Legal Assistance (215) 981-3800
- ✦ Women Against Abuse Legal Center (215) 686-7082
- ✦ Women's Law Project (215) 928-9801
- ✦ Center for Lesbian & Gay Civil Rights (215) 731-1447



To talk to someone about what you're going through call:

- ✦ Women in Transition (215) 751-1111 (24 hour hotline)

If the abuser is the parent of your child, and you are not living with him, you can ask your DHS worker to keep your address and phone number secret from him. Your DHS worker can also schedule separate FSP meetings so you do not have to go together. The court can order supervised visitation for your abuser at the courthouse so you do not have to interact with him or let him have the kids by himself.

KEY PHONE NUMBERS:



- ✦ **Department of Human Services (DHS)**, (215) 683-4DHS or 683-4347, 1515 Arch St, Phila., PA 19102. You can call to find out who your DHS worker/supervisor is or write to your DHS worker or supervisor.
- ✦ **Find out when your next Court date is, who your lawyer is, or if you have a lawyer** by calling Court Operations at (215) 686-4027.
- ✦ **Community Behavioral Health (CBH)**, 1-888-545-2600: offers help getting into a drug/alcohol or mental health program
- ✦ **AIDS Law Project**, (215) 587-9377: offers special advice to people HIV positive or living with AIDS
- ✦ **The Family Advocacy Unit of Community Legal Services, Inc.**, (215) 981-3765: offers free advice and legal representation to parents whose families are involved with the Department of Human Services (DHS).

THESE TIPS SHOULD NOT TAKE THE PLACE OF LEGAL ADVICE OR CONSULTATION.



Free Legal Assistance to Philadelphia's Low-Income Communities

1424 Chestnut Street, Philadelphia, PA 19102-2505, Tel: 215.981.3700, Fax: 215.981.0434
Law Center North Central, 3638 North Broad Street, Philadelphia, PA 19140, Tel: 215.227.2400, Fax: 215.227.2435
www.clsphila.org

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