

Terms You May Want to Know

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This section contains words or phrases used in the *A Family's Guide to the Child Welfare System* that may be unfamiliar to you. It also contains other words or phrases that are not used in the *Guide*. These are terms that you may be exposed to as you are involved with the child welfare system.

Advocates: People or groups that support or help parents or children (for example, parent advocate or child advocates). They may provide parents and children with information. They may be present with parents in court or at appointments with providers. They help to make sure the rights of the child and/or parent are looked out for.

Adoption: This is when children, who will no longer live with their biological parents, become full and permanent legal members of another family. Sometimes they also maintain contact with their birth family. This is called an “open adoption.”

Allege: When someone claims something happened (for example, child abuse) without having to prove it. An “allegation” is what you call the claim someone has made.

Appeal Process: The process parents can use when they do not agree with an agency or a court decision. There are two types of appeals. The first is at the agency level and is sometimes referred to as a “grievance process.” The grievance process is for families who do not agree with a decision about services; for example, when a service is denied, when there is a failure to take into account a family’s choice of service, or when the family is not satisfied with the quality of the service being provided. The agency should have a process in place to address these concerns. The second type of appeal is related to the court process. Those who do not agree with decisions made in court regarding themselves or their children can appeal the decision with the help of a lawyer.

Assessment: This is a process to find out a family’s strengths, needs, and resources. When these strengths, needs, and resources are known (that is, when they are “assessed”), the information is used to plan services and supports. When a family becomes involved with the child welfare agency, the worker will first do a “safety assessment” to find out if a child is in any immediate danger. Next, he will do a “risk assessment” to determine the likelihood that a child might be abused or neglected in the future. A full “family assessment” will also be done. This finds out what a family’s strengths are and what families need so that their children can remain at home. If a child is removed, then the assessment determines what is needed for the child to return home.

There are other kinds of assessments that children and parents participate in. For example, when a child goes to a doctor, his physical health will be assessed. If he goes to see a counselor, his emotional health may be assessed. This is done to find out what the child needs, how well he is doing, and what can be done to help.

CASA (Court Appointed Special Advocate): This refers to a specially trained person chosen by the juvenile or family courts. This person is usually a volunteer. The CASA’s job is to ensure that the needs and best interests of children who have been abused or neglected are addressed during the court process. The CASA usually meets with the child, his parents, and often others involved with the family. The CASA reports to the Court about how a child is doing. (For more information see the National CASA Association in the resource section.)

Child Abuse and Neglect: (See Section 2, p. 14.)

Child Abuse Report: The call that is received by the child welfare agency to report an incident of abuse or neglect or concern about risk of abuse or neglect of a child. The information is written down and some kind of follow-up takes place.

Child and Family Teams: The child and family team comes together to develop family service plans. The team is usually made up of the providers and agency representatives who are working with the family, extended family members, and other support persons, such as neighbors or ministers. The family approves all team members. The team reviews each family's strengths and needs. Then it identifies the services and supports that will be put in place. Family members are active partners in the planning for their children.

Child Abuse Hotline (sometimes called ChildLine): A toll-free line to report suspected child abuse or neglect. Anyone can report suspected abuse and neglect to this Hotline. It is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. All reports are confidential.

Child Maltreatment: This means the same thing as child abuse and neglect.

Child Protection Agency (sometimes referred to as Child Protective Services—CPS): The public agency that is responsible for investigating cases of suspected abuse or neglect of children and for providing services and supports to children and families.

Child Protection Services: An array of services and supports that are set up to assess and address the safety of a child. These services and supports are provided when it is determined that the child is at risk or has been abused or neglected.

Community Collaboratives for Child Protection: This is an approach where the responsibility for the safety and protection of children is based in their neighborhoods or communities. The community as a whole becomes accountable for child safety. The development of community partnerships helps child welfare systems to provide a wide array of services. This includes prevention, early intervention, and services to families and children in crisis. Child welfare agency offices are located in the neighborhoods they serve. They may be co-located with other service providers. Services for the family are designed in the community to meet the individual family needs. Families are connected to community resources. Community collaboratives have various names and are located in numerous places across the country.

Concurrent Planning: (See Section 3, p. 30.)

Court Order: A legally binding document that describes the judge's instructions or directions. (All parties to a court order must follow it.)

Custody: A judge grants this to an adult or an agency so that they have the legal right to care for a child. The custodian has the power to make major decisions regarding the child.

Emergency Placement/Removal: This is when a child is temporarily removed from his family and lives in a different place. This is done when the CPS worker has concerns about the safety of a child. The CPS worker is supposed to get an emergency protection order either before or immediately after the child is placed. The emergency protection order will then be reviewed in a court hearing to see if your child can return home. The type of place where your child can go on an emergency basis might be to a relative, foster home, or an emergency shelter.

Emergency Shelter: This is a type of out-of-home placement. It is a temporary, short-term place where children and youth who are taken into state custody stay. It may be a family home or a group facility. It is set up to provide an immediate safe environment while decisions are being made about where a child will live.

Families as Resources and Service Providers: This refers to families who have had experiences with the child welfare system who become resources to other families entering the system. Families can be resources in many different ways. They can be respite caregivers who provide relief to other families. They can be mentors, which is like being guides or teachers. They also might be co-trainers or presenters with professional staff. This might be for such things as foster parent training and parenting classes.

Family-Centered Practice: Family-centered practice is based on the belief that children thrive in healthy stable families and communities. The best way to protect children in the long run is to support their families. The family refers to a child's immediate family, extended family, foster family, guardian, or adoptive family. Before family-centered practice was used in the child welfare system, professional service providers were considered the experts who told families what to do. Family-centered practice is a shift away from that way of thinking. Family centered practice builds on the strengths of family relationships to help children and families. The family's agenda and its priorities shape the service delivery process. When the child welfare system operates with a family-centered approach,

- the family as a whole unit, as well as its individual members, are the focus of attention
- the main purpose for working with a family is to help strengthen the family so that it can carry out its responsibilities and care for its children
- successful services reflect a family's language, culture and spiritual beliefs.
- services affirm the family's values and styles of decision making
- families are actively involved in developing the service plan (see Section 3). The plan is based on family strengths. Family members help carry it out and evaluate how it is working.

Family Mediation: This is a process in which a neutral person helps to find solutions on issues regarding a child's welfare and placement. This person (often called a "mediator") is not directly involved with the family or with the child welfare agency. This person works with the agency workers and family members to create an agreement on the issues. Mediation is intended to be a collaborative process. The goal is to find solutions to the issues in a positive way. The mediation process allows the following:

- everyone has the opportunity to be heard
- development of better working relationships
- ability to reach agreements

When an agreement is reached, it usually is made formal by a legally drafted contract or by a court order. Mediation may not be appropriate for all families. The safety of the persons involved must come first and not be compromised through the mediation process.

Family Group Decision Making (sometimes called "family group conferencing" or "family team decision making"): This approach is used to help ensure a child's safety and care. It is based on the belief that:

- children do better when they have strong connections to their parents or primary caregivers
- services that keep the main responsibility for the care of children in the hands of the family are the most effective

In this approach, a meeting is held with the family and extended family members to get them involved in planning for the safety and permanency of the child or youth. Information about the family's situation is presented at the beginning of the meeting. Families are given time to consider the information presented to them and to make a plan. They decide how they can offer support to keep the child safe. They present their plan to the professionals and other people attending the meeting. The plan is reviewed and approved by this group. This family team helps create a network of support for the child and for parents. Family group decision-making meetings work differently in different communities. Many communities hold the meetings around a family meal.

Family-to-Family Initiatives: This is an approach that began in 1992 and provides an alternative way of thinking about family foster care. In this type of initiative, networks or groups of family foster homes are developed. These homes are neighborhood based, culturally sensitive, and located primarily in the communities in which the children live. The Family-to-Family Initiative is designed to do the following:

- better screen children being considered for removal from home to determine what services might be provided to safely preserve the family and/or what the needs of the children are
- bring children in group or institutional care back to their neighborhoods
- involve foster families as team members in family reunification efforts
- become a neighborhood resource for children and families and invest in the capacity of communities from which the foster care population comes
- provide permanent families for children in a timely manner

Foster Family Home: This is a type of out-of-home placement. It is an essential child welfare service for children and their parents who must live apart from each other for a temporary period of time. This might be because of abuse or neglect or other special circumstances. This type of placement is a home setting. The foster parents are licensed, trained caregivers. The role of the foster parent is that of caregiver and nurturer.

Founded: a finding after the initial CPS assessment that there is believable evidence that child abuse or neglect has occurred. Another term that means the same thing is “substantiated.”

Group Home: This is a type of out-of-home placement. It is a homelike setting in which a number of unrelated children live together for different lengths of time. Group homes may have one set of house parents or may have rotating staff. Some therapeutic or treatment group homes have specially trained staff to assist children with emotional and behavioral difficulties.

Guardian Ad Litem (GAL): This is a person, usually a lawyer appointed by the court, who meets with a child and tells the court what the GAL believes is best for the child.

Guardianship: A legal way for an adult other than the parent to assume parental responsibility and authority for a child. This is done without ending the parental rights of the birth parents. Legal guardianship for a child is a relationship between the child and a caretaker that is created by the court. It is intended to be permanent. Sometimes the child welfare agency provides financial help in caring for the special needs of the child. This is called subsidized guardianship.

Home- and Community-Based Services Waiver: Federal Medicaid law allows certain Medicaid rules to be “waived” or set aside so that states can make changes to their Medicaid programs. The home- and community-based services waiver allows an expanded array of home- and community-based services for children or adults with physical or mental disabilities so that they don’t have to be placed in institutions. This waiver also allows states to provide Medicaid for some children who would otherwise not be eligible for Medicaid because their parent’s income is too high. To be eligible, the child must require care in a hospital or nursing home. The waiver allows the child to receive that high level of care in his home or community.

Home Study: This is the process of assessing and preparing families to determine their potential to become either foster parents or adoptive parents. It looks at the strengths and needs of families. It also helps families determine which children (for example, based on age and level of need) would benefit most from being in their care. A home study may also take place for a person being considered for kinship care (when a licensed provider) or guardianship of a child.

Independent Living Placement: This is a type of out-of-home placement, for example, an apartment. It is for older youth in foster care and those who leave the foster care system to live on their own. This includes youth who cannot return home to live, are not placed with relatives or guardians, and are not adopted.

Independent Living Services: These are services to prepare youth for adulthood. They may focus on developing skills in areas such as money management, job hunting, daily living skills, and communication skills. Services to prepare for living independently are most helpful when they are taught to youth at an early age.

Indicated: This is a finding after the initial assessment of a child abuse and neglect report that there is reason to suspect that the child has been abused or neglected or that the child is at risk for abuse or neglect. However, the abuse or neglect cannot be proven. Currently, only 10 states have this category.

Individualized Education Program (IEP): Federal Law 94-142 states that children with disabilities have the right to attend public schools with their peers. A team of school staff and parent(s) create a plan to identify areas the child needs help with in the current school year. The IEP also describes how the school will provide these services.

Investigation: This is the formal information gathering process used by a child protective service agency to determine whether or not child abuse or neglect has occurred.

Kinship Care Placement: This is a type of out-of-home placement where the full-time care of the child is provided by relatives, godparents, step-parents, or other adults who have a kinship bond with the child. This could include a close friend, a neighbor, or a member of a child's tribe. This is also called "relative placement." Children may be placed formally in homes of relatives by the courts. This is also known as kinship foster care. They also may be placed informally on a voluntary basis by the parent or guardian. A subsidy (or financial support) is generally not provided by the child welfare agency unless relatives are licensed foster parents. Relatives may also apply for TANF assistance.

Medicaid: Medicaid finances health and mental health care for eligible people with low incomes. Medicaid is run and funded jointly by the federal government and states. Children normally qualify either because they live in a family with very low income or because they have a disability severe enough to qualify them for federal disability benefits such as Supplemental Security income (SSI).

Open Adoption: An adoption in which the adoptive parent and birth parent agree that the birth parent will maintain contact with the child. This type of agreement may not be legally enforceable. The contact may be done through telephone calls, in writing, or face-to-face. The type of contact depends on the individual situation.

Permanency: This is one of the goals established by federal law for children who are in out-of-home placement. When a child has been placed outside of the home, the child welfare agency must establish a permanent home for him. This means a place where the child will have safe and nurturing family relationships expected to last a lifetime. In most cases, the permanency plan for the child is to return to the birth family. This is not always possible, so a judge may decide that the child will live with relatives or with adoptive parents.

Permanency also refers to the importance of continuing family relationships and connections while the child is in out-of-home placement.

Permanency Planning: This is the process the agency worker goes through to ensure that children are in safe and nurturing family relationships expected to last a lifetime.

Prevention and Family Support Services: These are services to support and strengthen families so children do not have to be placed out of their home. These may include services such as family education, respite care, voluntary visiting services, and family support programs.

Public Child Welfare Agency: Social service agency responsible for ensuring the safety of children in stable, permanent environments. These agencies provide a wide array of services to meet the individual needs of families and children.

Reasonable Efforts: These are the steps child welfare agencies must take to prevent children from being removed from their homes and to help children who have been removed to return home. States must also make reasonable efforts to help children find other permanent homes if they cannot return to their own families. Federal legislation requires that reasonable efforts be made, but it does not define what efforts or services are considered as “reasonable.” Individual states have the flexibility to define this.

Registry (also known as Abuse Registry or Central Register): If an allegation of child abuse or neglect is founded by the child protective services agency, the name of the person responsible for the abuse or neglect is usually placed in a registry. Most states have a central place for keeping track of reports of the results of child abuse and neglect investigations. The length of time that a name remains in the registry varies by state.

Residential Treatment Center: This is a type of out-of-home placement for a child. It may also be called residential group care. This is a state-licensed, 24-hour facility. Residential care programs offer intensive treatment services, including mental health services for children with special needs. Many children in residential care have emotional or physical conditions that require intensive, on-site therapy. Residential treatment centers are usually a temporary placement.

Respite Care: This is a service that gives a family a short break or relief by having someone else temporarily take care of a child. It can be for a few hours or a few days. Sometimes respite care occurs in a family’s own home. It also may occur at a center or in someone else’s home.

Risk Assessments: See the definition of “assessment.”

Service Plan: See Section 3, p. 26.

TANF: The Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program is also known as “welfare.” It might also be called “public assistance.” This government program provides cash aid and other services to low-income families who are eligible. Recipients of this aid must meet certain work requirements or other activities set by their state to receive aid. There is a time limit of 5 years (or less in many states) that families can receive aid.

TEFRA Option (also called the Katie Beckett Option): This Medicaid option allows states to enroll children with disabilities who live at home and need extensive care, but who would not otherwise qualify for Medicaid because of their family’s income and resources being too high. It allows states to pay for home- and community-based services for these children. Eligibility for TEFRA is based on the child’s disability and care needs, not on family income. TEFRA also is sometimes called the Katie Beckett option after the child whose situation led to the creation of this option. TEFRA stands for the Tax Equity and Fiscal Responsibility Act of 1982, which created this option.

Termination of Parental Rights (TPR): A legally binding court decision made by a judge. TPR ends all parental rights of birth parents. The child is then legally free to be adopted.

Therapeutic Foster Home (also called “treatment foster care”): This is a type of out-of-home placement. It is a foster home in which the foster parents have received special training and have special skills to care for children and adolescents with significant emotional, behavioral, or medical problems. Treatment is provided within the foster home in a structured and active way. Treatment foster parents receive additional supports and resources to meet the special needs of the children in their homes. Therapeutic foster homes are considered an alternative to institutional settings.

Wraparound Process: This approach includes a specific *process* for planning services. The child and family are fully involved in deciding what services are needed. The services offered usually include a lot of community services and supports from other family members and friends. A child and family team ensures that the services meet the unique needs of each child and family. The goal is to achieve positive outcomes. In a true wraparound process, a child and family will not be denied services. Instead, services will be changed to meet their needs.