

A Family's Guide to
York County Office of Children, Youth &
Families



York County Office of Children, Youth & Families

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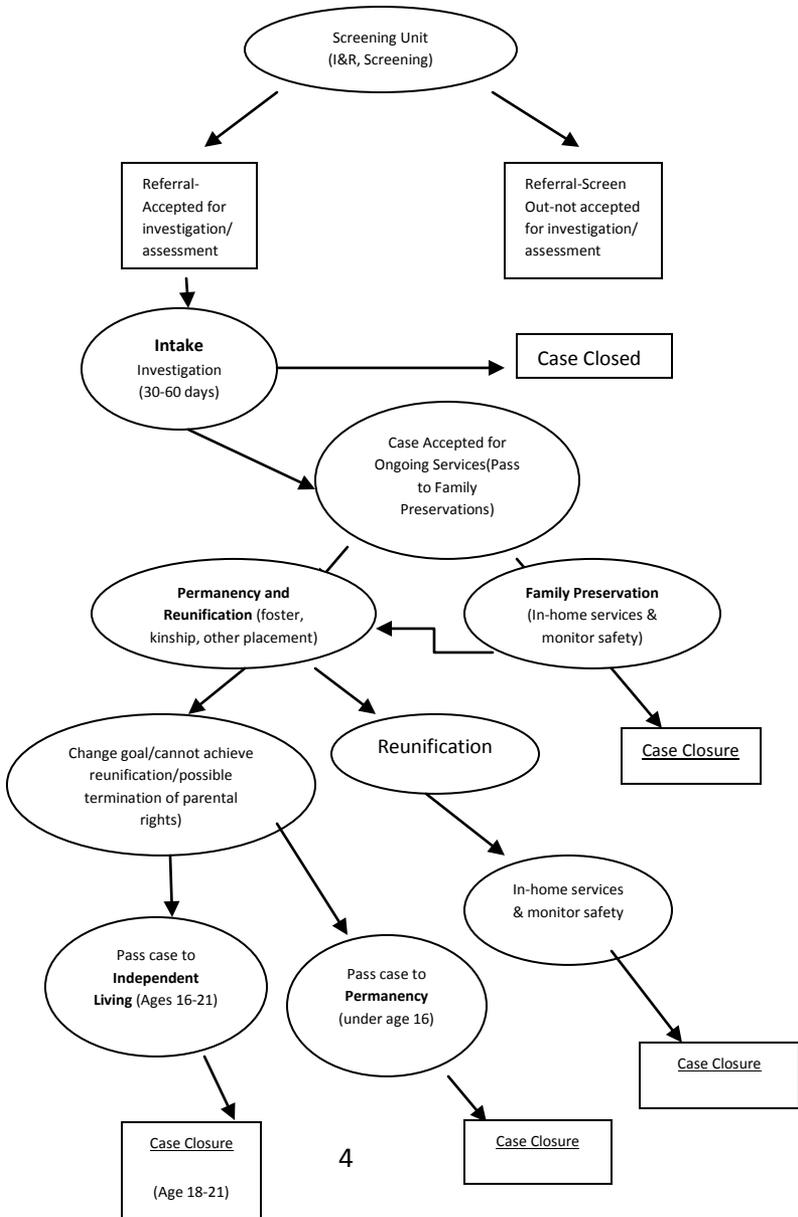
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CONTACT INFORMATION

	Name	Phone	Ext
Caseworker	_____	717-846-8496	_____
Caseworker Supervisor	_____	717-846-8496	_____
Division Director	_____	717-846-8496	_____
Agency Assistant			
Director	_____	717-846-8496	_____
Agency Administrator	_____	717-846-8496	_____
Court Administrator		717-771-9234	

CYF PROCESS



ABOUT THIS HANDBOOK

This handbook was developed for families involved with York County Office of Children, Youth & Families (CYF), an office of York County's Department of Human Services. This handbook gives you information about CYF, explains how we can work together, and explains what may happen while you and your family are working with CYF.

Not everything in this book will apply to you. For example, this book includes information about placement but not every child that is involved with CYF is in placement. We work with you to keep your children at home whenever possible.

At times, you may be asked questions that are personal and you may not want to answer them. If you are uncomfortable with the questions, this handbook may help you understand the need for those questions. Please remember that we only ask these questions to gather as much information as we can to help you and your family. If you still have questions or concerns, talk to your Caseworker.

We hope that this book will be able to answer many of the questions that you may have about CYF. If you still have a question or concern, you can always contact your Caseworker or his/her Supervisor.

MISSION STATEMENT

Children and youth agencies exist to protect the children in our communities. We have developed a mission statement to remind us of the goal of our work.

The Mission of York County Office of Children, Youth & Families (CYF) is to Protect Children, Promote Strong Families, Promote Child Well-Being and Provide Timely Permanency.

Protect Children: All children have the right to be protected from physical neglect and abuse, including sexual victimization, and from emotional neglect and abuse.

Promote Strong Families: All children have the right to live in a strong family that provides a safe, nurturing, and healthy environment in which to be raised, as families are the primary source of the protection and nurturing of children.

Promote Child Well-Being: All children have the right: to be happy, thriving, educated, healthy, and safe; to have the opportunity to reach their full potential as individuals capable of healthy relationships and productive lives; and to have a fair chance in life with opportunities for healthy, balanced and well-rounded development.

Provide Timely Permanency: All children have the right to live in a permanent family and to have timely permanency decisions, as these are critical to the health and welfare of dependent children.



WHO CALLS CHILDREN, YOUTH AND FAMILIES (CYF)?

Anyone can call CYF. A person that calls CYF with concerns about a child's safety is called a referral source. By law, the name of the referral source must remain confidential. Your Caseworker can not say who the referral source is. Some people are mandated (required by law) to report when they suspect child abuse. A mandated reporter is anyone who has regular contact with a child through their job or volunteering. Some examples of mandated reporters are: teachers, doctors, nurses, coaches, scout leaders, and therapists.

When a referral source calls CYF, a screener in the Screening Unit will speak to them. They will take the information and listen to the concerns. Not all calls are investigated. Some concerns can be resolved by linking the family to other community services. If someone calls before or after regular business hours with an emergency, an answering service will take the call. The answering service will contact the on-call, or Emergency

Duty, Caseworker. That Caseworker will call them back and listen to their concerns. Someone is always available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, even on holidays. A referral source can also contact ChildLine which is a state wide child abuse reporting hotline. ChildLine will take the information and listen to concerns (just like CYF's screening unit does) and send the information to CYF.

WHY YORK COUNTY OFFICE OF CHILDREN, YOUTH AND FAMILIES (CYF) IS INVOLVED WITH YOUR FAMILY

State laws require every county to have a children and youth agency to assess concerns of possible child abuse and neglect. You may have heard CYF referred to as Children and Youth, Social Services, or Children Services. This organization exists to protect children from abuse and neglect. For each report, CYF gathers as much information as possible to determine if a child has been abused or neglected or if there is a risk that a child could be in danger.

An Intake Caseworker will meet with you and your family to determine what may have happened. The assessment period for a report takes 30-60 days. At the end of the assessment period, your Caseworker will need to decide if the report meets certain guidelines according to the laws and make a decision regarding the report. If the assessment shows that your child has been abused or neglected, CYF has a legal responsibility to provide protection for your child. You must be able to provide a home for your child that is free from harm.

Some reports of abuse and neglect fall into a category of General Protective Services. Other reports are in the category of Child Protective Services. A General Protective Services (GPS) report will be either Validated or Invalidated. A Child Protective Services (CPS) report will be Indicated, Unfounded or Founded. A Validated or Indicated report means that CYF determined that there was abuse or neglect according to the law. An Invalidated or Unfounded report does not necessarily mean the incident did not happen. It might mean the incident did not meet the guidelines for abuse/neglect as defined in the Child Protective Services Law. A Founded report means that a Court determined that the abuse or

neglect did occur. Your caseworker will discuss and explain the decision with you. If you have any questions, be sure to ask your Caseworker.

Some reports to CYF are assessed with the help of the Children's Advocacy Center (CAC). The CAC involves a team of professionals who work together to determine if abuse has occurred. This is a child/family friendly center with the purpose of limiting the trauma of the assessment for the child and family.



KEEPING FAMILIES TOGETHER

CYF wants to keep families together. If your children can live with you and be safe, they will stay with you. During your involvement with CYF, you might be included in developing what is called a Safety Plan. A Safety Plan is a voluntary plan of action that is designed to keep your child safe in your home or the home of a relative or friend. All parties must be in agreement in order for a safety plan to be put in place. You have the right to speak to your attorney before signing the safety plan. You will sign and get a copy of the Safety Plan. Depending on their age, your child may also be asked to sign the Safety Plan. There will be a Safety Plan Review Hearing in a court room within 3 days of creating the Safety Plan.

Most families who are accepted for services through CYF continue to live together. The services will help the family achieve their goals. These are goals that need to be met for CYF to end services with your family. They are part of what is called the Family Service Plan (FSP). The Plan is reviewed each time you meet with your Caseworker.

Families may be asked to participate in a variety of different Team Meetings in an effort to work together to learn what the family hopes to accomplish, set realistic goals, recognize and encourage the family's strengths, identify what the family needs, find solutions that build on the family's strengths that lead to necessary changes, make a plan for who will do what and when it will be done and agree on next steps. Some of

these Team Meetings are called Family Team Meetings (FTM), Family Group Decision Making (FGDM) Meetings, Child & Adolescent Service System Program (CASSP) Meetings, or Integrated Practice Team (IPT) Meetings.

Family Team Meetings are voluntary meetings that include family members, supports, community partners, stakeholders and service providers who all work together to develop an immediate action plan with the goal of keeping your child(ren) safe in your home, a relative's home or a friend's home.

Family Group Decision Making is a voluntary meeting for you and your family, friends and supports to come together and create a plan that will work for your family. This is a way to give you and your family, friends and supports the ability to have a voice and to make decisions and plans regarding the safety and well-being of your children. This meeting will allow you, your family and supports private time alone without the professionals in the rooms in order for you to create a plan that will work for you.

Child & Adolescent Service System Program meeting is a voluntary meeting that brings service providers and the family together to navigate through multiple systems in order to meet specific emotional, behavioral and mental health needs of a child or an adolescent. This meeting results in a coordinated plan for addressing that child or adolescents emotional, behavioral or mental health issues.

Integrated Practice Team is a voluntary meeting for you and your family that is a community-oriented individualized planning process to help you and your family meet any unmet needs both within and outside of formal human services systems, while you and your children remain in your neighborhood/home. A team of community partners will be present to offer you their knowledge, expertise and services and work together to develop a comprehensive family service plan with ideas that are sometimes "outside of the box" thinking; meaning that the solutions may at times be non-traditional and not normally tried before. The goal is to safely maintain your child(ren) in your home.

PLACEMENT

If your child cannot live safely with you, CYF will provide a safe, temporary home for your child. This placement may be with relatives, another support, or a foster family. If your child is placed with family or another support, this is called kinship. CYF will ask you about your child's extended family in order to find a relative that your child can stay with. We will ask you about your child's grandparents, siblings, aunts, uncles and other friends or support people. If we do not know where a parent is, we will try to locate that missing parent.

A Shelter Care Hearing will be held within approximately 72 hours with a Judicial Hearing Officer, sometimes called a Master. This hearing is to determine if continued placement is necessary. Please refer to the section on Parent's Rights to learn about your right to an attorney for this hearing.

If your child is not living with you, CYF will work with you to provide a safe home for your children until it is safe for them to be reunified with you.. You will work with your Caseworker to establish goals to provide a safe home for your family. These goals will become part of what is called the Family Service Plan. The Family Service Plan is a list of the goals that need to be met for your child to return home and for CYF to end services with your family. This plan is reviewed each time you meet with your Caseworker. The Judge will review your progress on your goals every 90 days in court.

YOU AND YOUR CYF CASEWORKER

After the Intake Caseworker has completed their assessment, your family may be accepted for services. If your child is able to remain safely in the home with you, your family will be transferred to the In-Home Services Unit, which is called Family Preservation Unit. If your child is placed out of the home, your family will be transferred to the Placement Services Unit, which is called Reunification & Permanency Unit. You will receive a

new Caseworker in one of those units who will work with you to support you in reaching your Family Service Plan goals.

The main person you will work with from CYF is your Caseworker. CYF Caseworkers are trained to assist families. They work with many families. You will work as a partner with your Caseworker. CYF provides some services directly to you. You may also work with Caseworkers from other agencies. You, your CYF Caseworker, and other agency Caseworkers will work together as a team to help you achieve your Family Service Plan goals.

THE FAMILY SERVICE PLAN (FSP)

If your family is accepted for services, your family, the CYF Caseworker and possibly a team of others will work together to discuss your needs and goals and write a plan. The plan will identify the steps you need to take to reach your goals. This may include services to help you. These areas of need are based on you, your Caseworker and the team's assessment of your child's safety and risk of harm. This plan is called the Family Service Plan (FSP). Your Family Service Plan is your key to making the necessary changes needed to support your child(ren) being cared for in an environment that meets their safety, well-being and permanency needs.

The Family Service Plan must be signed by you and your Caseworker and your thoughts must be included in the plan. When you sign the plan, it means that you agree with it. If you do not agree with it, you do not have to sign it, but you must tell your Caseworker in writing why you disagree. You will receive a copy of your Family Service Plan to keep. Speak often to your Caseworker about your progress on goals. Remember to tell your Caseworker about any changes in your life. When something in your life changes, such as moving to a different house or starting a new job, your Family Service Plan may need to be updated with this new information. You and your Caseworker will review your Family Service Plan every time you meet to see how you are doing with your goals and what help you may need to reach these goals.



SERVICES FOR YOUR FAMILY

The services your CYF Caseworker will talk to you about will depend on what your family needs, what you ask for, or what a Judge might put in a court order. Sometimes services are provided by CYF. Sometimes CYF will refer you to services provided by another agency or program. It is very important that you participate in the services identified in your Family Service Plan.. You may request and/or be asked to participate in the following services in order to determine your needs or to strengthen your family:

- Parenting classes
- Psychological or Psychiatric evaluations
- Counseling or therapy
- Self-help or support groups
- Drug and alcohol evaluations and/or treatment
- Family Group Decision Making or other types of team meetings

You may be assigned an in-home team to help you complete these tasks. Your Caseworker can tell you more about this.

Please talk with your Caseworker if you have problems with any service or program, such as:

- Scheduling problems
- Transportation to a program's location
- Meeting the requirements of a program
- Problems talking to staff in a program or agency



COURT ACTIVE CASES

Some families have court active cases. This means that a Judge or Juvenile Hearing Officer regularly reviews the family's case. Your child will have a Guardian Ad Litem (GAL). A GAL is an attorney who represents your child's best interest. In some cases, the Court may also

appoint legal counsel for your child. His/her role is to advocate for the child's position.

As a parent, you can choose to be represented by an attorney. It helps to have an attorney with you in court. You can talk to your attorney at any time and he/she can review paperwork with you, such as: petitions, court orders, and Family Service Plans. They can also attend meetings with you between Court hearings.

If you cannot afford an attorney, you can contact Court Administration (See contact Information in the front of booklet for the number) to see if you qualify for a court-appointed attorney. Please do not contact the Public Defender's Office because they only represent parties in criminal matters.

It is very important that you attend all scheduled court hearings. Hearings are held about once every three months. If you do not come to court, the Judge may make a decision without being able to hear what you have to say. The Judge may also think that you are not interested in your child(ren)'s well-being. If you absolutely cannot attend a hearing, you must call your attorney or Caseworker as soon as possible to let them know why you cannot attend.

At court, the Judge reviews your progress on the goals in your Family Service Plan. You must show that you are working on the goals in your Family Service Plan. The Judge may also assign other tasks that you must complete. Speak to your attorney immediately if you do not understand, or if you disagree with the decision of a Judge or a Juvenile Hearing Officer.

DEPENDENCY AND PERMANENCY

If your child is adjudicated dependent, it means that there will be court oversight for your child. The Judge will make all final decisions regarding your child's well-being, including where they go to school, what services they need and where they will live.

A Dependency Hearing is a hearing where the Judge decides whether or not your child is dependent. Some children who are adjudicated

dependent are able to remain safely in their home with their family. Others are placed out of their home in kinship or foster care. Some children are placed in a shelter, group home, or residential treatment facility, depending on the child's needs.

Your Caseworker and the Judge will be talking about permanency for your child from the moment he/she is placed in the agency's custody. If your child is placed in the agency's custody, the Court will set a primary permanency goal. The primary permanency goal is most often reunification. This means that your caseworker will work with you to return your child to your home as soon as it is determined that it is safe to do so. However, at the same time, your Caseworker will be working on a second permanency goal or what is called a "concurrent goal". The concurrent permanency goal may be adoption or permanent legal custodianship with other individuals.

Under federal and state law, you have up to 15 months to complete the primary goal of reunification. If you are not making progress towards your primary goal of reunification, the Court may make the decision that the concurrent goal is more appropriate and another permanency resource is needed. This may mean that the Court will terminate your parental rights in order for your child to be adopted. Adoption could be by a foster family or a family member.

IF YOUR CHILD IS IN PLACEMENT

While your child is in placement outside of your home, your Caseworker will work with you and others to make sure that your child's social, emotional, educational, developmental, and medical needs are met. Give your Caseworker as much information as you can about any allergies, any medicines routinely taken, or other health needs. Offer a copy of your child's health records, and tell your Caseworker about all regularly scheduled appointments.

Children experience many different losses and emotions when they are not living in their home. They miss their parents and other family members and may not understand why they are not living at home. Foster/Kinship care can be confusing for children. The best way you can help your child with their confusion and feelings of loss is to have a positive relationship with your child's foster/kinship caregiver while you are working to have your child return home. Your children may form a

bond with their caregivers. Your child's caregivers are also encouraged to have a positive relationship with you and keep you and your child connected.

One way to stay connected is to attend your child's medical and school appointments, as well as other events in your child's life. You may continue to attend meetings at your child's school about his or her education. You may also attend after school activities or sporting events that your child may be involved in. You should talk to your Caseworker and your child's foster/kinship caregiver about these events.

With your help, your Caseworker will prepare a plan of services, called a Child Permanency Plan (CPP). For older youth, this plan is also sometimes referred to as a Transition Plan. The CPP shares important information about where your child is living and going to school. It also references religious beliefs and concerns that you may have for your child continuing his/her religious customs while in placement. It lists doctor and dentist appointments and also lists your plan for visiting with your child.

Your Caseworker will also need to ask you questions about your child's medical insurance and financial situation. When your child is in the legal custody of CYF, CYF must ensure that your child is covered by health insurance. ***CYF is required to file for child support. CYF will file the necessary paperwork with Domestic Relations so they can determine the amount of child support that you are responsible to pay.*** If you have questions about this, please ask your Caseworker.

VISITING YOUR CHILD WHO IS LIVING AWAY FROM HOME

If your child is not living with you, visit your child regularly. These visits are very important for your child. Regular visits will help you and your child keep family ties. Cards and letters are nice ways of staying connected to your child.

Unless there are safety concerns that may limit your visits, you may visit at least once every other week. Visits are required by law, so for most families, visits are an important part of the FSP. You and your Caseworker will plan visits at a place in your community or at another location, as agreed upon by CYF and the court. If there are safety concerns, visits may be supervised by the Agency or a Private Provider

Agency with whom CYF has a contract. As treatment progresses, these visits will increase. If your child is placed in a group home or a residential treatment facility, you will be encouraged to visit there, based on the facility's visitation guidelines.

You and your Caseworker will develop a schedule for visits. If you cannot attend a visit, you must call and cancel within 24 hours before the visit. If there is a special occasion, talk to your caseworker at least 2 weeks before the event in order to plan.

If you are in court, the Judge or Juvenile Hearing Officer will ask you if you have visited your child regularly. Be able to say – YES!

Remember, your child should benefit from your visit:

- Be positive with your child during visits: praise him/her, hug him/her, and talk with him/her about school.
- If you have questions or concerns about what is happening, talk to your Caseworker before or after the visit, not to your child.
- Follow all CYF and court rules at visits.
- If you have problems with transportation or with visits, tell your Caseworker.

If you have more than one child in placement outside of your home, your Caseworker will work to have your children placed together whenever possible. If your children can not be placed together, then your Caseworker will work to make sure that your children are visiting with each other as well.



FAMILY CONNECTIONS

The Family Connections Unit will assist your Caseworker in helping you build a support network of family, friends, and other important people for your child. They do this through Fostering Connections and Family Finding.

Fostering Connections is a federal law that requires CYF to contact family members within 30 days of your child's placement. This notification provides family members with an opportunity to be a support for your child and remain connected with him/her. Children have less trauma and

loss when they are able to remain connected to family and people they know.

Family Finding is a required practice in the law that CYF uses to find your family members and get them involved with helping your family. Family Finding gives all families a voice in planning for their children. Family Finding is an ongoing process that begins when your case is accepted for services. Your family's participation is essential in planning for your child's future.

When families are notified, they are also given some information about your case so they can be a support to you and your child.

INDEPENDENT LIVING (IL) SERVICES

CYF's Independent Living (IL) program assists youth ages 14 and older in developing various skills, tools, resources and personal enrichment to help them obtain independent living within the community. Some of the services that may be available to youth include:

- Life Plan
- Independent living skills class (MYLIFE)
- Assistance with college financial aid applications
- Assistance with job searches
- Driving Lessons/Permit
- SAT waivers/college waivers
- Transitional housing
- Aftercare services

If your child is in placement after the age of 14, talk to your Caseworker about these Independent Living services for your child.

CONTINUOUS QUALITY IMPROVEMENT (CQI)

CYF also has a Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI) Unit. This unit is committed to making sure CYF is doing its best to help the families with whom we are working. One way we do this is to review case files to assure that our federal and state laws and regulations are being followed by CYF staff. You may receive a phone call or letter from one of our Continuous Quality Improvement Program Specialists asking for your feedback.

RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Everyone has an important role to play. This includes your child, your family and your Caseworker, as well as the providers working with your family, including resource parents, attorneys, and the Judge.

Some rights and responsibilities are very simple and apply to everyone. Everyone has the right to have their voice heard and their opinions valued. Everyone has the right to be treated with respect. Everyone has the responsibility to provide honest and accurate information. If you are involved with the court, everyone also has the responsibility to follow through with the orders directed by the court.

Listed below are more specific rights and responsibilities for your family and those who may be involved with your family.

Child's Rights

- To be safe and protected from danger
- To have their needs met, including but not limited to food, shelter, clothing, supervision, medical and dental care, religion and education
- To be informed as to what is happening with their case and to be involved in the decision making process
- To have a permanent home
- To agree to being adopted (children over age 12)
- When involved with the court, children also have the right:
 - To be in contact with their family members, including phone calls, letters and visits.
 - To have a Guardian ad Litem (GAL) to advocate for the child's best interest.
 - To have an attorney appointed, in addition to the GAL (if needed) to advocate for what the child wants.
 - To participate in Independent Living (IL) services (children over age 14).

Child's Responsibilities

- To follow the rules and routines of the home or placement setting.
- To attend school daily.
- To participate in the services provided for them.

Parents' Rights

You do not lose your parental rights simply because you are involved with CYF. You maintain your right to be involved in the decisions regarding your child (unless the court terminates those rights). The rights of parents include the following:

- To ask questions and have your questions answered so that you can be an active part of the decision making process.
- To express concerns to your Caseworker, your Caseworker's supervisor, the division director, the assistant director, the director, or your attorney (if involved with the court).
- To have an attorney to represent you if you become involved with the court (If you cannot afford an attorney, you may qualify for an attorney to be appointed to you. Please call Court Administration for more information about court-appointed counsel).
- If your child is in placement, you also have the right:
 - To have bi-weekly visitation with your child in the most home-like setting appropriate (unless directed otherwise by the court).
 - To be notified of and attend all appointments for your child (unless directed otherwise by the court).
 - To be informed of any changes in your child's placement setting.

Parents' Responsibilities

- To work as an active team member in the decision-making and planning process for your child and your family.
- To work toward the goals of the Family Service Plan and participate in the services provided to you.
- To provide information about your extended family and supports in order to help provide a network of support for your child and your family.

- To report (within 24 hours) to your Caseworker and attorney (if you have one) any changes to your phone number, address, or household members.
- To attend all court hearings.
- To support your child through continued contact, including visits and phone calls (unless directed otherwise by the court).
- To pay child support if your child is placed outside of your home.

Resource Parents' Rights

- To be given information about your child, including information about your child's behaviors, medical history, educational records and important family information.
- To be heard in court and to be included as part of the decision-making team.
- To be considered as a concurrent resource if your child has lived in their home for 6 months or more.

Resource Parents' Responsibilities

- To maintain a safe home environment that meets all of your child's physical and emotional needs.
- To transport your child to visits, appointments and other activities.
- To support your child's connections to his/her family.
- To report any concerns or violations to your Caseworker.
- To maintain compliance with all county, state and federal laws and regulations.

CYF's Responsibilities

- To make an assessment of your family's strengths and needs and offer services to assist you where needed.
- To ensure that you are aware of and up-to-date on information about your case.
- To protect your family's privacy; however CYF must report to the proper authorities any incidents of child abuse or threats to harm yourself or others.
- To ensure your child is safe from abuse and/or neglect and has a safe, permanent place to live.

- To visit with you in your home at least one time per month and to visit with children in placement at least one time per month.
- To schedule bi-weekly visitation with you and your child (unless directed otherwise by the court) if your child is in placement.

Court's Responsibilities

- To review all evaluations and assessments provided to them in order to make decisions for your child and family.
- To ensure that everyone is participating with service recommendations and following court orders.
- To ensure that everyone is working in the best interest of the child.
- To review cases every three months to ensure that everyone is working toward their goals in a reasonable amount of time.
- If your child is in placement, the court also has the responsibility:
 - To determine if and when your child will be returned home to you or if another permanency option, such as adoption, is needed.
 - To ensure your child has a permanent home in a timely manner.

APPEALS

If you have questions or concerns about what is happening with your case, you should always talk to your Caseworker, your Caseworker's Supervisor, the Division Director, the Assistant Director or the Director.

The Pennsylvania Department of Human Services (DHS) Bureau of Hearings and Appeals is responsible for receiving and hearing appeals related to actions taken against individuals by CYF. You may appeal to DHS Bureau of Hearing and Appeals, in the following situations:

1. Your family has been accepted for services and you do not agree with being accepted for services (*only if the Agency denies your first level appeal*)
2. You were Indicated or founded as a perpetrator of child abuse and you do not agree with the agency's determination.
3. You receive a Family Service Plan and:

- a. It was a determination which resulted in a denial, reduction, discontinuation, suspension or termination of service for which you do not agree.
- b. The county agency failed to act upon a request for service with reasonable promptness

Note: Each of the types of appeals listed above have different requirements and timelines associated with filing an appeal. CYF or DHS must provide you with those requirements whenever you receive notice about any of the actions listed above.