



This edition of *Fostering Across Wisconsin* focuses on: The Importance of Going to Court

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Turn A Life
Around

For many foster parents and youth in care, going to court can seem pretty intimidating. Being prepared and informed of the court process can help to mitigate some of your initial concerns. If you have questions about the court process, talk with your social worker ahead of time.

There are numerous benefits that go along with attending a court hearing. You are showing your support to the child by being in attendance at an official proceeding, which can certainly aid in minimizing the nervousness and uncertainty of what they may be feeling deep down inside.

You may get an opportunity to meet members of the birth family who you wouldn't otherwise necessarily encounter. You will gain information about the decisions and outcomes of the court proceedings. Most of all, when you go to court and bring the youth in your care with you, the message

you're sending is that the court hearing about *the child you are caring for* is important.

"I wish the judge would have asked how I feel or what I want to see happen in my life or just any of that – just included me," says Wilton in *Children in Court: In Their Own Words*, a recent video that captures experiences of former youth in care in Wisconsin (see resources for link to video).

In a court proceeding, the judge has the ultimate responsibility of making decisions regarding youth in care. As the foster parent, you play an important role in helping the child to understand the decisions and prepare him or her for the next steps.

The court process can often be a confusing experience and it can create a whirlwind of emotions for children. By being there, you can help the child understand what just transpired and you can work

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Preparing for Court

You've made the decision to attend the next court hearing for the children in your care. Now what's the next step?

If you want to submit a letter to the court, everyone, including the birth parents, will receive a copy of your letter. If you want to submit the letter ahead of time it must be sent 10 days ahead of time, or you can provide it on the same day as the hearing or read it and submit it into the court record.

Whether you're speaking or writing, be factual and specific. Double check your emotions and your opinions. You could share a positive fact, such as, "Since Donovan has arrived at our foster home, his grades have improved from mostly Ds and Fs, and this past quarter, he made the honor roll." These are facts related to the academic achievements that have progressed during a specific timeline.

It's fine if you want to attend the hearing and not submit a letter and not say anything. **Just being there is important too.**

Some judges may ask a specific question or ask if you have anything to add, while other judges may not ask you any questions. Be prepared to share information if asked.

Here are some guidelines to consider if the child will also be attending the court hearing:

- Arrive early to the hearing to allow yourself ample time to get through security and to find the courtroom.
- Let the social worker, guardian ad litem and/or attorney know that the child would like to attend the hearing.
- Respond to any questions with verbal answers, because a court reporter is taking down everyone's statements.
- Read the children's book, *What's Happening in Court?*, which introduces children to the court processes. It's a good overview, even for older kids.
- Let the child know that he or she can write a letter to the judge and explain that everyone in the courtroom also gets to know what the letter says.
- Have the child practice what he or she might say.

The Department of Children and Families also has forms for both foster parents and youth in care, which might make submitting information easier (See resources for link). These forms ask questions like, "How is the child getting along with his or her birth family?" and "Has the social worker talked to you about your permanency plan?"

Being prepared reduces the anxiety for you and the child in your care.

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in partnership with the Wisconsin Department of Children and Families

together with the child's social worker to prepare for the next steps.

"Judges need to know that, throughout this whole process, we are just kids," says Tiffany in the video. "And there's a lot of emotions going on. Even though we don't always know exactly what we want, it's still important for them to involve us as much as possible, so that we're more involved in the court process and not just bystanders."

Thanks to Aaron, Alexis, Christina, Crystal, Desiree, Levi, Scott, Tiffany and Wilton for taking the time to be a part of *Children in Court: In Their Own Words* a collaborative video by the Wisconsin Court Improvement Project, the Department of Children and Families, and Casey Family Programs.

WFAPA provides opportunities to get together with other foster parents through its conferences.

They also have an extensive website, newsletter, and network of supportive foster parents who can be a resource for you.

The Spring 2013 conference is WFAPA's Spring Conference will be held April 12 - 14 at the Blue Harbor Resort in Sheboygan.

For more information go to:

<http://wfapa.org>.

Resources

FCARC Materials Available to Borrow

What's Happening in Court?

By Judicial Council of California

Somebody Else's Children

by John Hubner & Jill Wolfson

Objection Your Honor

by Multiple Teen Authors

Other Resources

Children in Court: In Their Own Words

(video made by several young adults in Wisconsin)

<mms://sc-media.wicourts.gov/sc-media/youth.wmv>

Guide for Foster Parents and Other Physical Custodians to Provide Information at Court Proceedings form <http://dcf.wisconsin.gov/forms/doc/DCF%20F%202474%20e.doc>

Court Participation by Foster Parents

http://www.sjgov.org/hsa/childrens_services/foster_care/pdf/court%20participation%20by%20foster%20parents.pdf

The Clock Is Ticking: Making Permanency Hearings Meaningful training resources materials

<http://www.wicourts.gov/courts/programs/docs/permanency9.pdf>

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January 1, 2015: Why Should You Care?

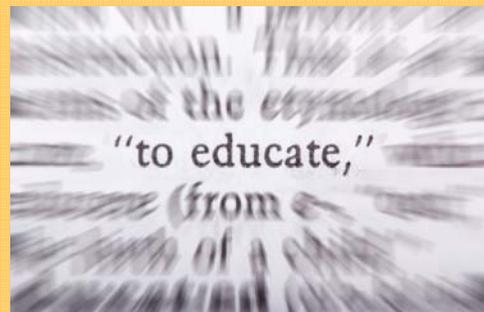
Effective January 1, 2011 foster parent training became mandatory for all licensed foster parents in Wisconsin. Many general, or currently licensed Level of Care 2, foster parents had participated in training through their licensing agency. Some families licensed at the time of the change did not have the opportunity to participate in training prior to the change in state law, so a provision was added in the law to allow currently licensed families time to attend the required trainings.

The families who were licensed prior to the effective date of January 1, 2011 who had not attend Pre-Placement or Initial Licensing (Foundations curriculum) have until January 1, 2015 to complete the required training. This is a friendly reminder to those who have not yet completed the required training to make sure to sign up for trainings at through your regional Child Welfare Training Partnership. The sessions for the Foundations curriculum are scheduled for this year and similar offerings will be made in 2014 as well, but do not wait until the last minute as newly licensed families sign-up for these same courses and space may be limited if you wait too long. Trainings are a great way to meet other families who similar desires to improve the lives of children.

To those of you who have spent time and energy engaged in the new training program, we hope you have gained useful information, knowledge and skills to further prepare you for fostering Wisconsin's children. The more knowledge you have about the needs of the children you care for the better our entire child welfare system becomes.

If the required trainings are not completed by all licensed foster parents in the house it will likely cause issues at the time of re-licensure which may include, a drop in Level of Care Certification, a Corrective Action Plan, impacts on additional placements into your home or a Denial of a renewal application.

To register for the Foundation trainings in your area, visit the Professional Development System on-line (PDS on-line) or contact your foster care licensor for more information about trainings near you and with questions you may have about how to sign-up. Visit PDS Online at:
<http://wcpds.wisc.edu/pdsonline/>.



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