

HANDBOOK FOR PARENTS, GUARDIANS, AND CUSTODIANS ----- IN CHILD ABUSE AND NEGLECT PROCEEDINGS

Sixth Edition 2017



**CHILDREN'S
JUSTICE PROJECT**
A Project of the Wyoming Supreme Court



This handbook and companion DVD will help you, as the parent, guardian, or custodian, understand Juvenile Court and to inform you of your rights and responsibilities as a parent. This handbook/DVD provides general information about the court process and your rights and responsibilities and is not intended to provide legal advice. If you do not understand what you have read in this handbook/DVD, please ask your lawyer.

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HANDBOOK FOR PARENTS, GUARDIANS, AND CUSTODIANS
In CHILD ABUSE AND NEGLECT PROCEEDINGS
WYOMING JUVENILE COURT

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**For more information about the Wyoming Children's Justice Project (CJP)
or to download additional copies visit our webpage at
<https://www.courts.state.wy.us/childrens-justice-project/>.**

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**Your Lawyer:**

Name: _____

Address: _____

Phone: _____

Email: _____

Notes: _____

_____**The DFS Caseworker:**

Name: _____

Address: _____

Phone: _____

Email: _____

Notes: _____

_____**Your Child's Guardian Ad Litem (GAL):**

Name: _____

Address: _____

Phone: _____

Notes: _____

Contacts

Your Child's CASA Volunteer:*(If there is a CASA in your county.)*

Name: _____

Address: _____

Phone: _____

Notes: _____

_____**Other:**

Name: _____

Address: _____

Phone: _____

Notes: _____

_____**Other:**

Name: _____

Address: _____

Phone: _____

Notes: _____

Important Dates



Shelter Care Hearing:

Date:

Time:

Place:

Initial Hearing:

Date:

Time:

Place:

Adjudicatory Hearing/Trial:

Date:

Time:

Place:

Disposition Hearing:

Date:

Time:

Place:

Six-Month Review Hearing:

Date:

Time:

Place:

Permanency Hearing:

Date:

Time:

Place:

Termination of Parental Rights Hearing:

Date:

Time:

Place:

Multidisciplinary Team (MDT) meeting:

Date(s):

Time:

Place:

Multidisciplinary Team (MDT) meeting:

Date(s):

Time:

Place:

You have many RIGHTS and RESPONSIBILITIES as a parent. The judge will tell you of your legal rights before you are asked to admit or deny the allegations in the petition. Make sure you understand your rights. If you do not understand your rights, tell the judge. If you are served with a petition and fail to respond, you may not later assert your parental rights in a permanency plan for your child unless there was good reason why you did not respond to the petition.

Your Responsibilities as a Parent

- Take this matter seriously.
- Attend all court hearings, multidisciplinary team meetings, and family service planning meetings.
- Stay in touch with your lawyer and caseworker. Be sure they always have your current address and telephone number.
- Things move quickly in child abuse and neglect cases. Be involved in developing your case plan (sometimes called family service plan). Be sure you know what you are supposed to do and when, and be sure you follow through and do what is required.
- Tell the judge, your caseworker, and your lawyer if your child has any special needs (for example, if your child is taking any medication or has a physical or mental disability) and also the names of people that may be able to take care of your child.
- You may be ordered to pay child support while your child is in foster care.
- If you don't comply with the case plan, you can't complain about the services that were provided to you and your child later on in the case.

Your Rights as a Parent

- You have the right to a lawyer. You should consult with your lawyer before making any admissions. If you cannot afford a lawyer, the judge may provide one for you if you ask.
- You have the right to admit or deny any allegation made against you.
- You have the right to know what could happen if you admit to the allegations or child abuse or neglect is proven in court.
- You have the right to a jury trial if you deny the allegations but only if you request one within ten (10) days of being advised of this right, whether or not you have a lawyer.
- You have the right to notice of, and to attend, all court hearings, MDT meetings, and family service planning meetings.
- You have the right to take the witness stand and tell your side of the story, but you are not required to do so.
- You or your lawyer (if you have one) has the right to ask questions of the witnesses in court.
- You have the right to work with your caseworker in developing your case plan/family service plan and to receive a copy of the plan.
- You have the right to an interpreter in court if you do not speak or understand English.
- You have the right to talk with your caseworker and lawyer.



- You have the right to visit your child if he or she has been placed outside your home, unless the judge decides that it is not in your child's best interest to visit you.
- In most cases, you have the right to services and assistance (such as counseling, drug treatment, etc.) to prevent the removal of your child from your home or to make it possible for your child to be reunited with you. Your lawyer can request the judge to order needed services if the Department of Family Services has not provided them in a timely manner.
- You have the right to receive a copy of the judge's written decisions and orders.
- You have the right to appeal the judge's final written decisions and orders within thirty (30) days.

✓ Important Note - Ask your lawyer what other rights you may have as a parent.

What Is Juvenile Court?

- Juvenile Court is a civil court for children and their families when there are issues of child abuse and neglect.
- The purpose of Juvenile Court is to keep children safe, to make decisions that are best for children, and to help families create a safe home for their children.
- The judge can require you and your family to get help and services. Examples are: counseling, drug and alcohol treatment, mental health evaluations, and parenting education.
- If your home is not safe for your child, the judge may order the Department of Family Services (DFS) to take care of your child until it is safe for your child to live with you again. This means that DFS is legally responsible for your child. With the approval of the judge, DFS makes recommendations about where your child should live and what you need to do to have your family reunited.
- The same issues that brought you to Juvenile Court could result in criminal charges against you or others. You should consult with your lawyer if you believe you may face criminal charges. These charges will not be decided in Juvenile Court. You may have to go to another court to deal with the charges. This handbook does not deal with criminal cases.
- The general public is excluded from child abuse and neglect hearings. Only parties, lawyers, witnesses and court staff involved in your case may be present at the hearings.



How a Juvenile Case Starts

The county attorney/district attorney files a petition. The petition lists one or more allegations. An allegation is a statement of what is believed to have happened. The petition may ask the judge to allow DFS to take care of your child. If you do not understand the petition or any of the papers you get, you should talk to your lawyer or the caseworker.

What Happens If Your Child Is Removed From Your Home?

- You will be notified, and you will receive a copy of the paperwork that has been filed with the Juvenile Court.
- A shelter care hearing will take place within 48 hours of your child's removal (not including weekends or holidays).
- You have the right to a lawyer. If you cannot afford one, the court will appoint a lawyer for you if you ask.
- You may be ordered to pay child support while your child is in foster care.

SPECIAL CONCERN FOR PARENTS

If your child has been out of your home for **15 of the last 22 months**, a petition to terminate your parental rights (TPR) may be filed by the State of Wyoming. If the petition is successful, your legal rights to your child will end. Therefore, it is extremely important to attend all court hearings and cooperate with your case plan/family service plan to ensure your child is returned to you quickly. For additional termination provisions, speak with your lawyer about Wyoming Statute 14-2-309.

Who Will Be Involved In Your Case?

The Judge

The *judge* is the person who conducts the court hearings. The *judge* listens to each side of the case and makes decisions that are in the best interests of your child. The *judge* is not permitted to speak with you unless all the parties are present. Similarly, the *judge* cannot receive or respond to any letters you send to him/her.



**The judge will issue an order that includes his/her decisions.
If you refuse to obey that court order,
the judge may fine or jail you.**

The County Attorney



The *County Attorney* files the neglect or abuse petition and is responsible for proving to the judge that the allegations in the petition are true. The *County Attorney* is the lawyer for the State of Wyoming. The *County Attorney* works with the caseworker and makes recommendations to the court regarding your case. If you live in Laramie County or Natrona County, the lawyer for the State is called the *District Attorney*.

Your Lawyer

You have the right to a *lawyer*. It is important for you to have a *lawyer*. In child abuse and neglect cases, the result may be the termination of your parental rights. The *lawyer* advises you and speaks for you at every court hearing. For instance, your *lawyer* can help you get the services you may need to address issues specific to your case.



If you do not have the money to hire a *lawyer*, tell the judge or the court clerk that you need a **lawyer**. You will be asked to fill out a form to prove that you do not have the money to pay for a *lawyer*.

Your lawyer should:

- Give you his/her telephone number.
- Help you understand your rights.
- Meet with you regularly and before every hearing.
- Attend the multidisciplinary meetings.
- Tell you what to expect at each hearing.
- Speak for you in court.
- Tell the judge what services and resources you need.

If your *lawyer* is not helping you, you should tell the judge in your case. If your *lawyer* does not call you for a while or if you have questions or problems, you should call him or her.

Each person served with a petition may hire a *lawyer*. If you cannot afford a *lawyer*, the court may appoint one for you.

Department of Family Services Caseworker

Whether or not your child is removed from your home, one of the first people you meet is a *caseworker* from the Department of Family Services (DFS). The *caseworker* is the person who works with your family. The *caseworker* has the job of communicating, providing and coordinating any services you may need for your family. The *caseworker* will attend all court hearings. The *caseworker* will make recommendations to the court on what kinds of services should be provided to you and your family and what visitation should take place between you and your child. It is important to establish a good working relationship with your *caseworker* since he or she is looking out for the best interests of your child and family.

The caseworker should:

- Help you understand the issues that brought you to court.
- Give you more information about the case.
- Set up a meeting after the initial hearing for a Family Service Planning Meeting. The caseworker will work with you at this meeting to write a case plan/family service plan. This meeting should take place as soon as possible after your child is removed from your home. It is very important that you and your lawyer go to this meeting. You should also ask any family members or friends to attend if you think they can help you.
- If your child was removed from your home, the case plan/family service plan lists the steps you must take for your family to be reunited.
- If your child was not removed from your home, the case plan/family service plan lists steps to keep your child safe and remaining in your home.



- Help you get the services and resources listed in the case plan/family service plan. The services may include counseling, drug and alcohol treatment, mental health evaluations, parenting education, or other services you may need. The case plan/family service plan can also include rides to your services appointments. These efforts, on the part of DFS, are called “reasonable efforts.”
- Tell the judge what services or resources should be provided to your family.
- Visit you and your child regularly to make sure all services are going well and everyone is safe.

It is important for you to stay in touch with your caseworker. If you do not hear from your caseworker for a while, or if you have questions or problems, call him or her. If he or she does not return your calls, you should call the caseworker’s supervisor or district manager. You may also contact your lawyer. If you do not have a lawyer, hire one or request that the judge appoint one.

Your Child’s Guardian Ad Litem (GAL)

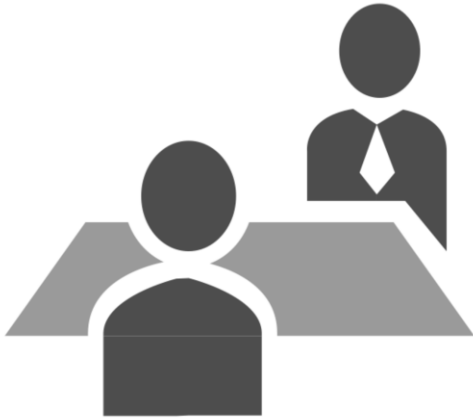
The judge will appoint a lawyer for your child. This lawyer is called a *guardian ad litem* (*GAL*). The *GAL* legally represents your child’s best interests. The *GAL* reviews the allegations in the case, meets with you, your child and others—such as teachers, doctors, and daycare providers—and tells the judge what is in your child’s best interests. You should meet with the *GAL* regularly.

If you believe your child is not getting this help from his or her GAL, you should tell the judge.

Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA)

The judge may also appoint a *Court Appointed Special Advocate* (*CASA*). The *CASA* is a trained volunteer. He or she will meet with you and your child and others involved in this case. The *CASA* gathers information about your child. The *CASA* tells the judge how your child is doing and what he/she thinks is best for your child. If your case has a *CASA*, you should meet with him/her regularly. Not all counties in Wyoming have a *CASA*.

Multidisciplinary Team (MDT)



The *Multidisciplinary Team (MDT)* recommends what goes into your case plan/family service plan. The case plan/family service plan lists the steps you need to complete before your child can be returned and how those steps need to be completed. The purpose of the *MDT* is to bring a team of people together who know you and your child and can recommend what should be included in the case plan/family service plan. The *MDT's*

recommendations are provided to the judge. The judge reviews the recommendations at the Disposition Hearing.

The Multidisciplinary Team (MDT) Meeting

The judge will appoint a *Multidisciplinary Team (MDT)* in your case. The *MDT* meets to discuss with you what services you and your child may need. The *MDT* makes recommendations to the judge. It is important for you to be an active member of the *MDT*. Members of the ***MDT*** will include:

- the child's parent(s) or guardian(s),
- your lawyer,
- a person from the child's school,
- the Guardian Ad Litem (GAL),
- a Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA), if appointed,
- the Department of Family Services (DFS) caseworker,
- the child's mental health professional,
- the County or District Attorney, and
- the foster parent.

Other persons the judge **may appoint** include your child, a relative, and other professionals or people who work with you and may be able to help you and your family.

During the MDT meeting you can:

- Provide background information on your current living situation.
- Say what services or resources you have tried in the past that were successful and which services were not successful.
- Tell the MDT what you think could be successful.
- Provide the MDT with names of family members or friends that may be able to take care of your child.
- Provide information on how your child is doing and what you feel is best for him/her.
- Voice concerns you have whether you will be able to participate in the case plan/family service plan recommendations.
- Identify problems that may prevent you from completing the case plan/family service plan.

After the meeting:

- You will be provided with a copy of the MDT report in a timely manner.
- Meet with your attorney to discuss the MDT report and its recommendations

The Juvenile Court Process



You are required to attend the Juvenile Court hearings so that the judge and others can listen to all sides of the case and decide how to help your family. Child abuse and neglect cases have many court hearings during the first year. You must attend case plan/family service plan and multidisciplinary (MDT) meetings. The names of the court hearings include:

- Shelter Care Hearing
- Initial Hearing
- Adjudicatory Hearing/Trial
- Dispositional Hearing
- Review Hearing
- Permanency Hearing
- **Termination of Parental Rights (TPR) Hearing**

Each of these court hearings has a different purpose. The following pages will explain what happens at each hearing. **It is important for you to attend every hearing.**

If your child has been in foster care more than **15 of the last 22 months** and you have made little or no progress on your case plan/family service plan, a Termination of Parental Rights (TPR) petition may be filed. The TPR is a hearing to decide if you can keep your rights to take care of your child. If the court terminates your parental rights, your child may be adopted.

The Shelter Care Hearing

The Shelter Care Hearing is where the judge listens to the reasons your child was removed from the home and decides whether your child should remain in out-of-home care. The Shelter Care Hearing should be held within 48 hours of the child's removal from your home. Sometimes it may take longer to hold the hearing because of a weekend or a holiday. The County Attorney presents information about the case to the judge. You have the opportunity to tell the judge where you think your child should stay and be safe, including relatives or trusted friends.

See "Tips for Unrepresented Parents at Shelter Care Hearings" on pg. 21.

The Initial Hearing

The Initial Hearing occurs in all child abuse and neglect cases and may be held at the same time as the Shelter Care Hearing. The judge will ask you to admit or deny the allegations listed in the petition. **Before admitting or denying the allegations, you should talk with your lawyer.**

You have a right to have a lawyer at this hearing. If you cannot afford a lawyer, the court will appoint one for you. If the court has not already done so, the court will appoint a Multidisciplinary Team (MDT) and a guardian ad litem (GAL).

If the judge decides that your child will remain in out-of-home care, be sure to tell your lawyer or the caseworker if there are any family members or trusted friends who may be able to take care of your child. The court is required to place your child in the least restrictive placement. This means that your child has the right to the most family-like setting. The judge may decide what the visiting schedule will be with your child.

At any time before the adjudicatory hearing/trial, you may enter into a consent decree. A consent decree is a legal written agreement wherein parents, the county attorney and the GAL agree to specific conditions and terms. It is effective for up to six months. The judge may extend it one time for up to an additional six months. During that time, the adjudicatory hearing/trial does not take place. If conditions or terms are not met, the judge may schedule an adjudicatory hearing/trial. Talk with your lawyer before agreeing to a consent decree.

The Adjudicatory Hearing/Trial

The Adjudicatory Hearing/trial is to determine whether there was abuse or neglect. This hearing/trial should be held within 60 days of you first appearing before the judge and denying the allegations in the petition. At this hearing/trial, the County Attorney tries to prove that you abused and/or neglected your child. The judge or jury hears evidence from you, your lawyer, the County Attorney, your child's GAL, as well as others who are involved in your case. At the end of the hearing/trial, the judge/jury decides if your child has been abused or neglected. The decision is called adjudication.

If the judge or jury decides that your child was not abused or neglected, the judge dismisses the case. If the judge or jury decides your child was abused or neglected, the judge then decides what you must do for your family to be reunited. The judge may proceed immediately to disposition at the end of the Adjudicatory Hearing/Trial or set the Disposition Hearing at a later date.

The Disposition Hearing

The Disposition Hearing determines how DFS and other programs and services will help the parent and child reunify. This hearing is sometimes held at the same time as the Adjudicatory Hearing/Trial. If not, it is typically held within 60 days of the Adjudicatory Hearing/Trial. At the Disposition Hearing, the judge decides what is best for your child.

- The judge will consider the recommendations of the MDT and the caseworker's predisposition report.
- If your child is living with the family, there may be requirements of counseling or other services.
- The judge may decide if your child:
 - may stay in your home without supervision;
 - may stay in your home with supervision;
 - may be placed with a relative; or
 - may be placed with the Department of Family Services or other agency.

- If your child is in out-of-home care, the judge states in the court order what you must do for your family to be reunited. If you do not do what the judge orders, it could take you longer to be reunited with your child. You may lose your rights to your child forever. The judge also states in the court order what DFS must do to help you. The case plan/family service plan prepared by you and the caseworker provides more detail as to what steps you must take for your family to be reunited. The judge may decide to change the case plan/family service plan.

You should work hard on your case plan/family service plan and do what it says. If you do not comply with the case plan you cannot complain about the services that were provided to you and your child later on in the case.

The Review Hearing

The Six-Month Review Hearing is held by the court to see how the case plan/family service plan is going. If your child is removed from your home, the hearing must be held within six (6) months after the child abuse/neglect petition was filed and every six (6) months thereafter. The judge reviews the case to see how you and your child are doing, what progress has been made on the case plan/family service plan, if services have been provided, if any changes need to be made to the case plan/family service plan, and if there are any new issues that must be considered. The judge decides then: if you have followed the case plan/family service plan, if it is safe for your child to be returned home, and the date your child is to be reunited with you. The judge may decide that it is in the child's best interest to stay in out-of-home care and that you need to keep working on your case plan/family service plan.

The Permanency Hearing

At the Permanency Hearing, the judge decides the best permanency plan for your child and may order DFS to take steps needed to carry out that plan. It is only held when the child is in out-of-home care. The Permanency Hearing is held within 12 months of your child's removal from the home. At the Permanency Hearing, the lawyers and the caseworker will tell the judge what the permanent living plan should be for the child. The judge may decide one or more of the following:

- that your child should be returned home,
- that legal guardianship be granted to a relative, foster parent, or other non-relative,
- that another permanency plan should be made for your child,
- or move toward termination of parental rights so that your child can be adopted.

The judge decides what the best permanency plan is for your child and may order DFS to take the steps needed to carry out the plan.

The Termination of Parental Rights Hearing



Termination of parental rights is a separate legal action. The judge or jury decides if you will lose your right to take care of your child forever. A TPR petition may be filed by the State of Wyoming if your child has been out of the home for 15 of the last 22 months, or for any of the following reasons:

- You are not visiting with your child.
- You are not paying child support.
- You are not making progress on your case plan/family service plan.
- You are not following court orders.
- Criminal behavior (talk to your lawyer for more information).

You will be served with a petition. You must file a written response within twenty (20) days. You have the right to have a lawyer represent you. If you cannot afford one, you may request the judge to appoint one. You have the right to a jury trial only if you request one within ten (10) days, whether or not you have a lawyer.

At the TPR Hearing, the County Attorney will present witnesses (including the DFS caseworker) and evidence to the judge about why your parental rights to your child should end. If your parental rights are terminated (ended), the State will secure a permanent home for your child. You may appeal the judge's final written decision/order.

VERY IMPORTANT!

Work hard on your case plan/family service plan. Visit your child. Do what the judge orders you to do so your case will not get this stage. If your case does go to the termination of parental rights stage, it is very important that you go to the Termination of Parental Rights Hearing! If your parental rights are terminated, you will not get to visit or make decisions for your child. You will not be part of your child's life.

Tips for Visiting Your Child: Your Family Visiting Plan

- Make your visits a priority. Be on time. Your child wants and needs to see you regularly. Your child values this time with you. If you need help getting to your scheduled visit, ask your caseworker for transportation assistance.
- If you have to change or cancel a visit, call the caseworker at least 24 hours ahead of time if it is an emergency. Be sure to tell your caseworker why you need to cancel or change a visit. Make certain you have a very good reason for canceling or changing the visit.
- Plan for your visit. Bring activities that you and your child can enjoy together. If a visit occurs at mealtime or after school, bring a healthy snack/meal for your child.
- Visiting is a time for you and your child to rebuild your relationship. Use your visiting time to practice new parenting skills with your child. If you need help disciplining your child, ask the caseworker.
- Ask your child about his or her activities, foster home and school. Let your child know that you are OK and that your child does not need to worry about you.
- During a visit, tell your child you are glad to see him/her. Find nice things to say.
- Show support for your child's foster parents and reassure your child it is OK to like foster parents and to feel safe in their home. If you feel there are problems, talk to your caseworker or your lawyer when your child is not there.
- At the end of visits, reassure your child that you still love him or her and that you will see him or her again soon. Say goodbye and smile at your child when the visit is over. Keep track of your visits with your child. Also, keep track of any phone calls or visits you make to the caseworker. The following pages are to help you record your visits with your child and the caseworker.



DO NOT

- Do not drink alcohol or use drugs before or during a visit. Do not come to the visit under the influence of drugs or alcohol. If you do, your visit will be stopped.
- Do not make promises you cannot keep.

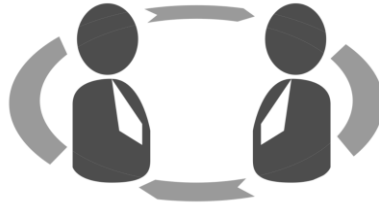
Tips for Unrepresented Parents at Shelter Care Hearings

The purpose of today's Shelter Care hearing is for the Judge to decide if your child(ren) who was (were) removed from your home and placed in foster care should continue to need "shelter care," also called "protective custody."

- Request the Judge appoint an attorney to represent you if you cannot afford one.
- You don't have to speak in court, but if you do tell the truth.
- Tell the Judge if you don't think the efforts prior to removing your child(ren) was (were) accessible, available and appropriate.
- Ask what efforts were made to keep your child(ren) at home with you
- Suggest alternative safe placements for your child(ren) such as the other parent, relatives (adult siblings, aunts, uncles, grandparents, great-grandparents, cousins) and friends
- Tell the Judge if the Court returns your child(ren) to your custody, you will agree to a safety plan that includes supervision by DFS or another court approved person or organization who agrees to supervise the child(ren).
- When the Judge asks for your input, tell the judge why it's safe for your child(ren) to return home without incriminating yourself.
- If the Judge orders that your child(ren) continue to be in foster care, ask the Judge to order frequent visits with your child(ren).
- The Shelter Care hearing removing your child(ren) from your home can be revisited.
- Only speak about the allegations with the attorney who is appointed to represent you.

Important: Remind the Court that the burden of proof to keep your child(ren) in foster care is CLEAR AND CONVINCING evidence.

Visits with My Child



Date: _____ Place: _____ How Long: _____

What did you do with your child? _____

Date: _____ Place: _____ How Long: _____

What did you do with your child? _____

Date: _____ Place: _____ How Long: _____

What did you do with your child? _____

Date: _____ Place: _____ How Long: _____

What did you do with your child? _____

Date: _____ Place: _____ How Long: _____

What did you do with your child? _____

Date: _____ Place: _____ How Long: _____

What did you do with your child? _____

Date: _____ Place: _____ How Long: _____

What did you do with your child? _____

Date: _____ Place: _____ How Long: _____

What did you do with your child? _____

Date: _____ Place: _____ How Long: _____

What did you do with your child? _____

Contacts with the Caseworker

Date: _____ Type of Contact _____

We talked about _____

Date: _____ Type of Contact _____

We talked about _____

Date: _____ Type of Contact _____

We talked about _____

Date: _____ Type of Contact _____

We talked about _____

Date: _____ Type of Contact _____

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Date: _____ Type of Contact _____

We talked about _____

Date: _____ Type of Contact _____

We talked about _____

Definitions of Common Words and Phrases

Please note: The words and phrases listed below provide an understanding of what they mean. They are not legal definitions. If you have any questions about any of the words and phrases, please ask your lawyer or the judge in your case.

Abuse – Inflicting or causing physical injury, harm, or imminent danger to the physical health or welfare of a child other than by accidental means, including excessive corporal punishment. Physical injury includes bruising, bleeding, burns, fractures or substantial malnutrition. Please talk with your lawyer for a complete definition.

Adjudication – A finding in the child abuse or neglect petition by the judge that one or more of the allegations stated in the petition are true.

Adoption – A legal process where a court gives exclusive rights to be a child's legal parent, other than the child's birth parents.

Allegations – Sometimes called charges, allegations are statements made by DFS of what DFS believes happened or did not happen relating to child abuse and/or neglect.

Appeal – A request to another court to review and possibly change the decision of the Juvenile Court.

Caregiver – A person, parent, guardian, custodian, institution, or agency that is responsible for a child's care and welfare.

Case Plan/Family Services Plan – Sometimes called Family Service Plan. A written plan developed by the parent/caregiver and the caseworker that states what services will be provided by DFS and others, and what is expected of the parent/caregiver, DFS, and others.

Caseworker – An employee of the Department of Family Services. The caseworker makes sure your child is safe, develops case plans/family service plans, and provides services to your child, family and other caregivers.

Consent Decree – Legal document where parents, county attorney and GAL agree to specific conditions and terms. It can be effective for up to one year. During that time, the adjudicatory hearing/trial does not take place. If conditions or terms are not met, the judge may schedule an adjudicatory hearing/trial.

County Attorney – The lawyer representing the State Department of Family Services in child abuse and neglect proceedings. In Laramie County and Natrona County the District Attorney represents the Department of Family Services.

Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) - A volunteer appointed by the court to represent the child's best interests to the court.

Court order – Legal document signed by the judge that states what was decided at the hearing and what the parties are ordered to do or not to do.

Disposition – What the judge decides should happen in a case, including where a child should live, the visiting plan, what is expected of the caregiver in order for the child to be reunited with his or her family if the child is in foster care, and any other matters.

District Attorney – See County Attorney.

Family Service Plan – See Case Plan.

Findings – Findings are what the court determines happened in the case based on the evidence presented.

Guardian ad Litem (GAL) – A person, usually a lawyer, appointed by the court to represent a child and make recommendations about the child's best interests.

Judge – A person who hears a case and makes final decisions about a case. Sometimes a district court commissioner will make certain decisions in a case.

Lawyer – Sometimes called an attorney. A person licensed to practice law in Wyoming and represent a person's legal interests to the court.

Legal custodian - A person appointed by the court who makes certain decisions for a child and has the right to protect a child such as providing the child food, shelter, clothing, medical care, and education.

Multi Disciplinary Team (MDT) – Persons appointed by the judge who are required to meet and address the family history and issues. The team makes recommendations to the judge about the child's best interests and the services the family should receive.

Neglect – When a caregiver has failed or refused to provide adequate care, maintenance, supervision, education, medical care, or any other care necessary to a child, which places the child at risk. Please talk with your lawyer for a complete definition.

Permanency – Permanency is the permanent living arrangement for a child as decided by a judge. (Examples of permanent living arrangements are when a child is returned home, adopted, or placed with a guardian.)

Petition – A formal legal document stating the allegations of abuse and/or neglect.

Physical custodian – The person with whom the child lives as ordered by the court. The custody order states where the child shall live.

Review Hearings – The purpose of a review hearing is for the judge to get an update on the progress made on a case plan/family service plan by the caregivers and others and to determine what is in the best interests of a child.

Reasonable efforts – The efforts and services the Department of Family Services must provide to parents in order to prevent removal from the home or to reunite the parents with their children.

Termination of parental rights – This means that a parent no longer has any legal rights to their child. A parent may still have a duty to support the child until the child is adopted. The child may also inherit from the parent.

