

What's Happening In Dependency Court?

An Activity Book For Children Going To Court In Florida

You're Not Alone



What's Happening In Dependency Court?

Why did I have to leave my home?

The main job of parents is to take care of their children. This is so important that there are laws to make sure that parents do this. This means they have to protect you from harm, make sure you have food and clothes, take you to the doctor, and make sure your home is safe. If your mom or dad has not given you these things, or has not been watching you, you may have to go live somewhere else away from your home until your mom or dad can care for you.

If you have to leave your home, there will be a lot of people by your side to help you. The judge (a person who works very hard to figure out what is in your best interests and how to keep you safe) might pick a person called a Guardian ad Litem (GAL) for you to help the judge understand how to keep you safe. Your GAL is a good person to talk with about any problems you may be having.



Petey the Panther says, "Let me walk you through the steps!"

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Where will I live now?

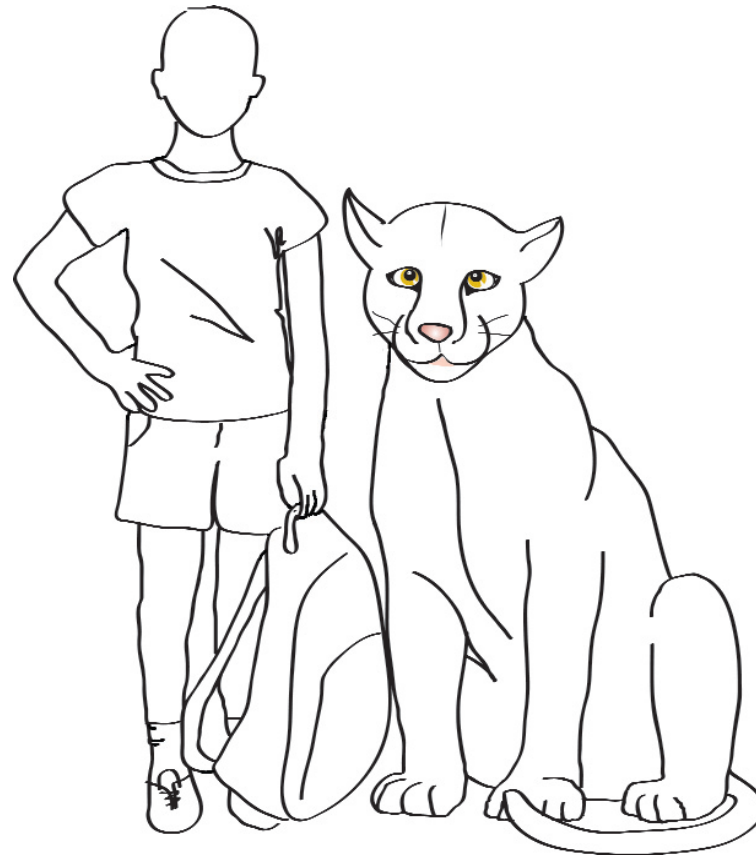
If a relative, such as your grandparent, aunt or uncle, or a family friend can take care of you, you might be able to live with them. If you know of a nice relative or other adult who might let you stay with them, tell the people helping you. If there is no relative or family friend to take care of you, another place will be found for you to live.



What's Happening In Dependency Court?

Petey and me

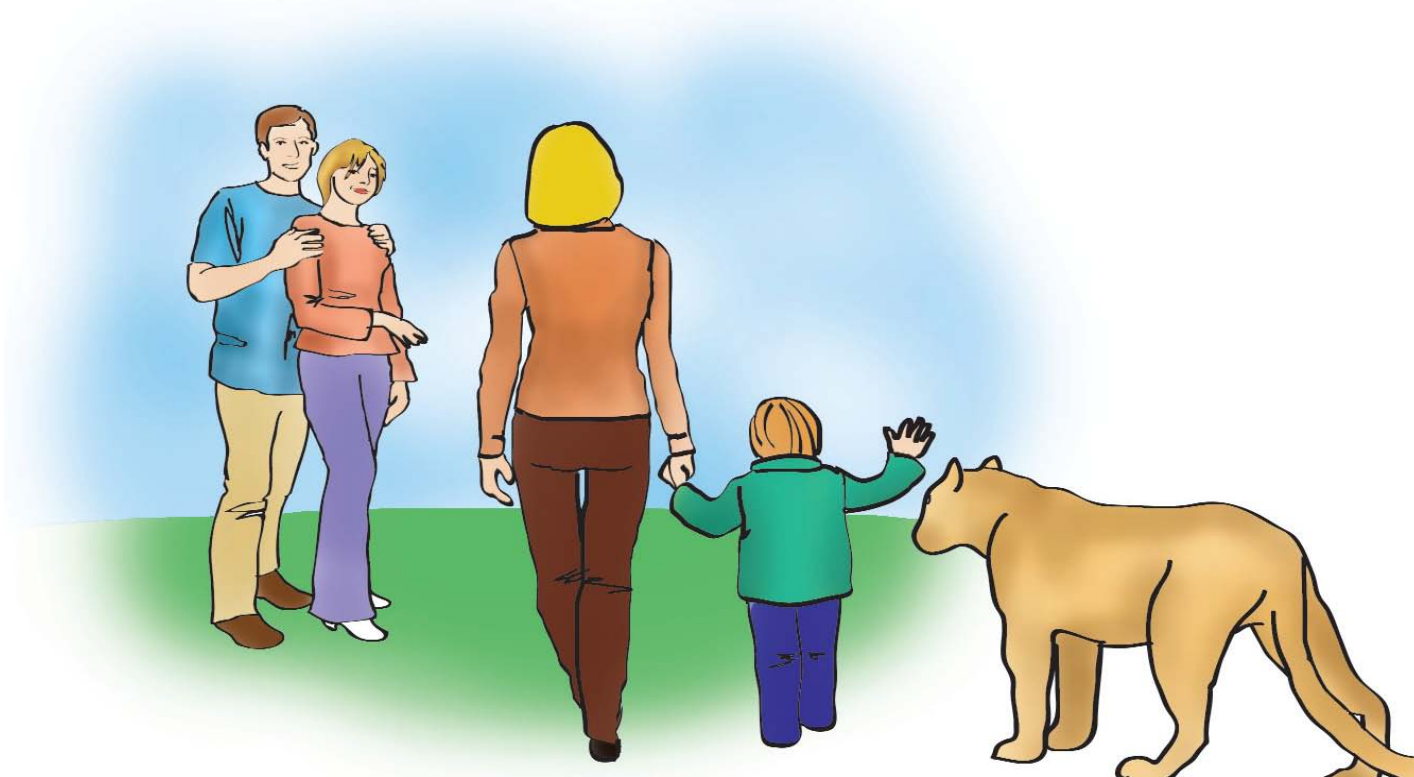
Color yourself and Petey together in your back yard!



What's Happening In Dependency Court?

Will I get to see my mom and dad?

Most of the time, you can see your mom or dad. The judge will let you know when, where, and how often you get to see your mom or dad. These visits may be alone, or other people may be there. As things get better, you may get to see your mom and dad more often.



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Will I get to see my brothers and sisters?

You should know that you have the right to see or talk to your brothers and sisters, and most of the time you should be living in the same place with them. If you are not living with them, be sure to let someone know that seeing or talking with your brothers or sisters is important to you, so they can tell the judge. If there is some reason why you cannot see your brothers and sisters, ask if you can talk to them another way, like on the phone or through email. The judge will think about your wishes and tell you when you get to visit your brothers or sisters or call them.



What's Happening In Dependency Court?

Space for you to draw



What's Happening In Dependency Court?

Will I get to stay at my same school?

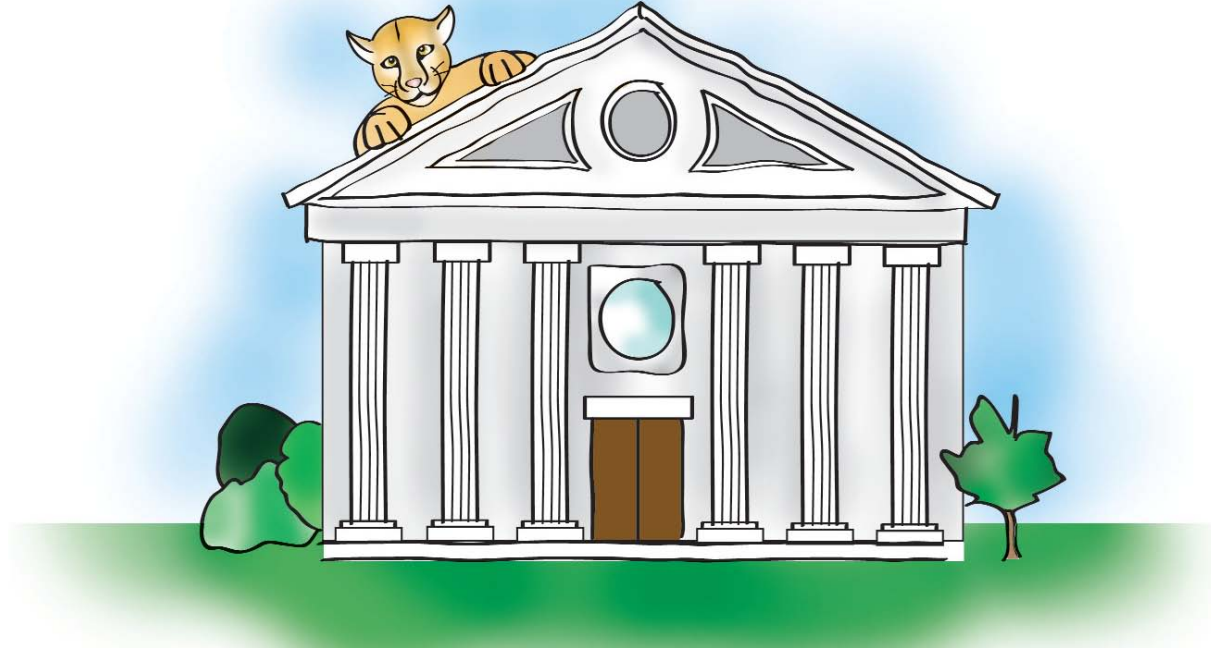
School is very important, and everyone who is helping you knows how much it matters to you. Make sure to tell the people helping you if you want to stay in your same school. If you have any problems at school, be sure to tell the people helping you so they can get you what you need.



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Why do we keep going to court?

The judge wants to help you return home as soon as possible. If that is not possible, the judge wants to help you find a safe and clean place to live so you will not have to move a lot. The law requires the judge to hold court hearings so he or she can check on how everyone is doing.



What's Happening In Dependency Court?

Can I go to court?

Yes! You will be told or sent a letter every time there is a court hearing. You don't have to go to court if you don't want to, but it may be good for you, and you may want the judge to hear some things about yourself.



What's Happening In Dependency Court?

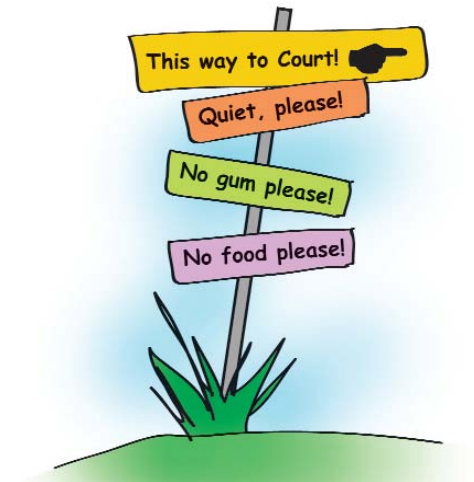
Can I talk to the judge?

- Yes! If you want to talk to the judge, tell the people who are helping you. If you do not want to go to court, you can write a letter to the judge, and the people helping you will give it to the judge. If you can't miss school to go to court in person, you can ask to talk to the judge by telephone.
- You know what you want. You can help the judge understand you and what you need. Going to court and talking to the judge is always a good thing for you to do.
- Remember: You might not get exactly what you want, but the judge will think about what you have to say and do what is best for you.

What's Happening In Dependency Court?

What should I say and how should I act in court?

- Be on time.
- Try to look your best.
- It's ok to be nervous.
- Don't go in alone. Make sure there is an adult with you.
- Be nice to the people who are there.
- Don't eat or drink in court.
- Don't chew gum.
- Don't use your cell phone in court.
- Don't listen to your iPod in court.
- There may be other cases before yours. You have to be quiet and wait.
- You can read a book while you wait.
- When your hearing starts, call the judge "Your Honor" or "Judge." That is what people call the judge.
- If you don't understand something, say that you don't understand. Someone in the courtroom will explain it again for you.



What's Happening In Dependency Court?

Who else will be in the courtroom?

There may be a lot of people in the courtroom during your hearing. You will probably see the judge, attorneys, GAL workers, and your mom or dad. A clerk will also be in the courtroom to keep track of what's going on and help the judge with the paperwork. A bailiff will keep the courtroom safe for everyone – a bailiff will usually be wearing a uniform that looks like a police officer.



Attorney



Attorney



Guardian ad Litem



Bailiff

What's Happening In Dependency Court?

When will I know what is going to happen to me?

The judge has to give your mom or dad time to do some things before you can go home. The judge needs your mom or dad and the people who are helping you to attend court from time to time. In court, the judge listens to everyone to learn how things are going with you and with your mom or dad. The judge has to decide what should happen and if or when you should go home.

What's Happening In Dependency Court?

How does the judge decide if I should go home?

The judge's job is to think about what is best for you and make sure you are always safe. The judge will listen to what the people helping you have to say, what your mom or dad says, what your relatives say, and what many other people who care about you say. The judge will also listen to what you have to say. After hearing from everyone, the judge will think about where you should live. Remember, the judge will make a decision based on what everyone says and what is best for you.



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Contacts Some Important Information

I can go to court. My next court date is _____

The judge's name is _____

My lawyer's name and phone number are _____

My case manager's name and phone number are _____

My GAL's name and phone number are _____

Names of other important people and their phone numbers: _____

If I have a problem, I can call _____

About Me

My name is _____. I have _____ brothers and _____ sisters. My favorite color is _____. I love to play with _____. My favorite food is _____. My birthday is _____.

About this Book

What's Happening In Dependency Court?

This booklet is intended for children who are in court for their dependency hearings. It aims to introduce children to the dependency court process, the people who work in the judicial system, and the vocabulary that surrounds judicial proceedings. It is meant to be used as a teaching tool that may foster conversations between children and adults about the dependency court system, and as a game book that gives children who are in court something to do while they wait. This book is not intended to give or substitute for legal advice.

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