

Do's and Don'ts of Interacting with Child Welfare Agencies

DO

1. If Children and Youth/DHS shows up at your door, let them in, even though you may be angry or afraid. Have a witness present if possible.
2. Understand that you have the right to refuse to sign a Voluntary Placement Agreement, which gives CYS/DHS 30 days to have a hearing.
3. Know that you have a right to an attorney at placement hearings. One can be appointed for you if you cannot afford one.
4. Work with your attorney to address questions about your ability to parent, provide a safe home and get treatment for illness. Educate your attorney about your illness and your needs.
5. Dress neatly for court and speak politely and respectfully with the judge and others in your case.
6. Get a notebook and keep the names and phone numbers of everyone involved in your case, including summaries of calls and meetings and letters you receive.
7. Help your children with their feelings of fear and hurt.
8. Maintain as much quality contact with your children as you can. Show the court your children are your priority. Request as much visitation as possible.
9. Meet your Family Service Plan (FSP) goals fast! Attend all FSP meetings and court hearings.
10. Be careful about what you say and do with everyone involved in your case because it can be used against you in court.

DON'T

1. Don't refuse to let investigators into your home because they can get a court order and return with the police. They can interpret your refusal as trying to hide something. Don't argue, swear, or fight with the investigator. Don't let your emotions take over.
2. Don't sign a Voluntary Placement Agreement. A hearing must then be held within 72 hours to keep your children in foster care.
3. Don't avoid hiring an attorney.
4. Don't refuse to talk to your attorney about your family and don't refuse to sign a consent form that permits your service provider to share information with your attorney about your participation in classes, treatment or other services.
5. Don't dress in casual clothes – shorts, t-shirts, jeans. Don't lose your temper and speak disrespectfully in court.
6. Don't avoid staying organized and informed. Don't be afraid to ask for help from a friend or counselor if you can't get motivated to do this.
7. Don't leave your children guessing about what's going on.
8. Don't miss visits or phone calls with your children! Don't act in ways that will upset your children during visits.
9. Don't be afraid to ask for help or clarification if you have questions about your FSP. Don't forget to give everyone any changes of phone number or address.
10. Don't behave in any way that would show you to be uncooperative or not serious about getting your child back.