



TWELFTH JUDICIAL CIRCUIT
RELATIVE AND NON-RELATIVE
CAREGIVER'S GUIDE TO DEPENDENCY

Guardian's Name: _____ Phone # _____

Guardian email address: _____

A Guardian ad Litem (GAL) has been appointed by the Court to advocate for the best interest of the child(ren) in your care. The GAL is separate from the Department of Children and Family Services and the Court so the GAL can provide the Judge with independent information and recommendations. The GAL visiting the child(ren) in your care will either be a Certified Child Advocate Coordinator or a trained volunteer for the GAL Program.

The appointed GAL is required by the Court to visit at your home at least once a month. These visits may or may not be announced and the GAL may visit more than once a month. The GAL will interview the parent(s) or legal custodian(s) of the child(ren), relatives, teachers, day care providers, doctors, therapists and all other individuals involved in the child(ren)'s life. The GAL will attend Court hearings and meetings. Additionally, the GAL may be authorized to transport the child(ren) and, with the caregiver's permission, may take the child(ren) to events away from the caregiver's home. The GAL will help you, as the caregiver, obtain needed services for the child(ren) and help you understand the Court system. Child(ren) who have reached the age of 13 and are in care are eligible for independent living services and the caregiver should ask the GAL about the services.

The caregiver is encouraged to visit the website for the Guardian ad Litem Program at www.12gal.org and click on the tab for caregivers. The Children's Guardian Fund provides funding for items of enrichment and normalcy in a child's life. The GAL can provide further information about this and apply for funding. The caregiver is also encouraged to visit the Fund's website at www.childrensguardianfund.org

As a caregiver, you will be notified of Court Hearings; and may request to speak to the Judge at Court Hearings. Caregivers often have valuable information for the Court. You may have information about the child(ren)'s physical, emotional, educational, and social development that could assist the Court in deciding issues regarding the child(ren)'s placement, services to the child(ren) and visitation. You may also have information about the child(ren)'s strengths, hobbies, interest and activities that the Court would find helpful. If you have been supervising visits between the child(ren) and parent(s) or sibling(s), you may have information about these visits to relay to the Judge.

It is very important to keep the GAL advised about all aspects of the child(ren)'s life. If help is required with a monetary issue or transportation, let the GAL know about the problem. It is important to keep the GAL informed about school issues, medications, visitation issues, changes to your phone numbers, or address or any other issues pertaining to the welfare of the child(ren). You are encouraged to call the GAL if you have any questions or concerns regarding the care of the child(ren).

THE COURT SYSTEM

The following is meant to provide basic information about the Dependency Court System. It is not all inclusive and the Caregiver is encouraged to ask the GAL about what to expect at all Court proceedings.

The Dependency Court process begins with a report to the child abuse hotline alleging child abuse, neglect, or abandonment. As a result of the report, a child protective investigator (CPI) or county sheriff visits the child(ren)'s home to determine whether or not the child(ren)'s living environment is unsafe. If the living environment is unsafe such that the child(ren) is at risk of abuse, neglect or abandonment, the child may be removed from the home or a Petition filed for dependency or shelter without prior removal. If a child is removed, a Shelter (Dependency) Petition must be filed immediately thereafter.

SHELTER HEARING: A Shelter Hearing is held before removal or within 24 hours after removal from the home. At the Shelter Hearing, the Judge will hear testimony and determine whether probable cause exists to place the child(ren) or keep the child(ren) in shelter status pending further investigation of the case.

ARRAIGNMENT HEARING: The Arraignment Hearing should occur within 28 days of the Shelter Hearing. At the Arraignment Hearing the parent(s) or legal custodian(s) enter a plea of admit, consent or deny the allegations in the Dependency Petition.

ADJUDICATORY HEARING (TRIAL): If the parent(s) or legal custodian(s) deny any of the allegations in the Petition, an Adjudicatory Hearing (trial) should occur within 30 days of the Arraignment Hearing. During this hearing, the Judge listens to the facts of the case and makes a determination regarding the allegations.

DISPOSITION HEARING: During this hearing, the Judge makes decisions regarding the most appropriate placement for the child(ren) and determines the necessary protections and services.

CASE PLAN APPROVAL: The Judge reviews the case plan and may accept it or suggest changes. A case plan contains specific goals and steps the parent(s) or legal custodian(s) need to remedy the reason for the Court's involvement. Additionally the case plan lists the services to be provided to the child(ren), caregiver, parent(s) or legal custodian(s)

JUDICIAL REVIEW: The Court must hold the first Judicial Review within 90 days of the Disposition Hearing or six (6) months from Shelter, whichever is earlier. During the Judicial Review Hearing the Court receives updates on the parent(s) or legal custodian(s)' case plan progress. The GAL is statutorily required to file a written report for the Judicial Review Hearing advising the Judge of the GAL's recommendations regarding the child(ren); the child(ren)'s status and wishes and the progress of the parent(s) or legal custodian(s) case plan progress. After the initial Judicial Review Hearing, a review occurs every six months.

PERMANENCY HEARING: The Court must hold a Permanency Hearing no later than 12 months from the date of shelter. At the Permanency Hearing the Court considers the permanency options of reunification, adoption, permanent guardianship, permanent placement with a fit and willing relative, and placement in another planned permanent living arrangement.

TERMINATION OF PARENTAL RIGHTS: At this hearing the Judge will make a determination if the parent(s) legal rights to a child shall be terminated.