

## What is a Dependency Petition?

A dependency petition is a written request to the court. It explains concerns that a child has been abused, neglected or abandoned, and that there is no parent able to safely care for the child. It asks that the State assume temporary legal custody of the child. Dependency petitions are filed by Children's Administration when a child is believed to be unsafe.

## Who are the legal parties to a Dependency case?

The parents and the Children's Administration are legal parties to the case. A child's tribe is a legal party to the case. Caregivers are not legal parties to the case. Parents and Children's Administration are represented in court by attorneys.



## Who is the voice of the child in court?

CASA (Court Appointed Special Advocate) and GAL (Guardians ad Litem) are appointed by

judges to advocate for the child. The CASA or GAL tells the judge at court hearings what they believe is in the best interest of the child and what the child needs. Older children may be represented by an attorney who tells the court what the child wants.

## What is the caseworker's role in court?

The caseworker partners with families and caregivers to keep children safe. The caseworker makes efforts to return the child to the parent, partners with families to create a case plan, and makes recommendations and reports progress to the court.

## To Resolve Complaints

- **Contact the assigned caseworker**, followed by the assigned supervisor, and then the Area Administrator.
- **Children's Administration Office of Constituent Relations** can help to resolve issues.  
Toll free phone: 1-800-723-4831  
<https://www.dshs.wa.gov/ca/resolve-concerns>
- **Family and Children's Ombuds** investigates complaints about agency action or inaction that involve a child or parent involved with child protection or child welfare services.  
Toll free phone: 1-800-571-7321  
Phone: (206) 439-3870  
<https://fortress.wa.gov/es/ofcoform/>
- **Children's Administration Hotline**  
Call 1-866-ENDHARM (1-866-363-4276)

## Important Contacts

Caseworker name, phone number and email:

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Supervisor name, phone number and email:

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CASA/GAL name, phone number and email:

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Child's attorney name, phone number and email:

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# Understanding the Dependency Court Process for Caregivers



## You have the right to be:

- Treated with respect
- Notified of court dates and case meetings
- Given the "Caregiver Report to the Court" to complete

## You have a responsibility to:

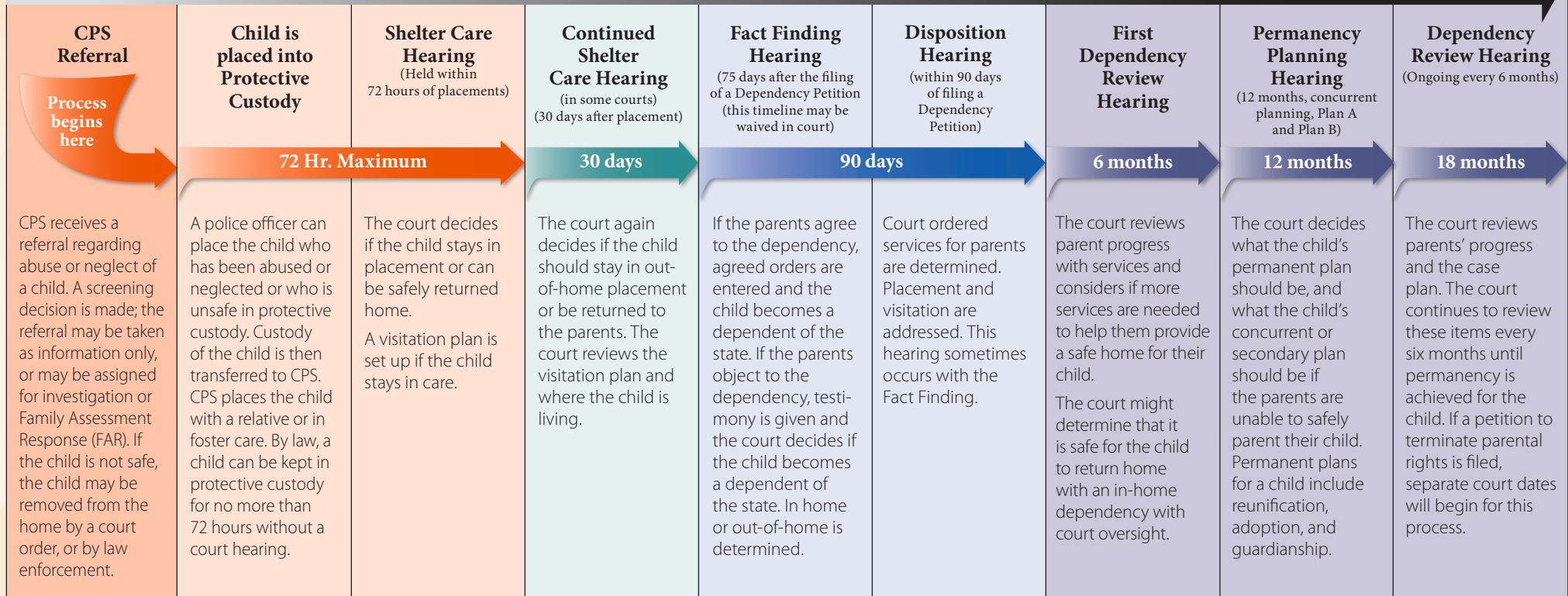
- Provide a safe home for the child
- Cooperate with the court ordered service and visitation plan
- See that the child is cared for and loved
- Keep the caseworker and court informed of the child's progress
- Explain to the child in a positive way why their parent is not able to provide care right now



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## Dependency Court Process Timeline



### Shared Planning Meetings

Family Team Decision Making (FTDM) meetings and Permanency Planning Meetings take place throughout the life of each case. Local Indian Child Welfare Advisory Committee (LICWAC) staffings are additional shared planning meetings for children who are Native American. Caregivers are notified and invited to participate in all shared planning meetings.



### What is important for me to know?

Children's Administration must offer parents supports and services to help them safely reunify with their child.

Children are returned home when they can be safe in the family home. Caseworkers make recommendations; the court decides.

At any point during the court process, a judge can decide that the child can be safely returned home.

If a parent is unable to make the changes necessary to keep the child safe, they could lose the right to parent their child. Reunification efforts continue until and unless parental rights are terminated.

The Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) governs the dependency process for Native American children. This includes additional requirements, as well as case planning and coordination with the child's tribe.