

Are you a young person in a child abuse or neglect case in Juvenile Court? You should have a **G-A-L** lawyer.

The Juvenile Court must hire a lawyer for you. Your lawyer is called your **Guardian Ad Litem** or **G-A-L**.

Your G-A-L works for **you** — not for the judge, not for DCS, not for your parents.

Your G-A-L lawyer must listen to your ideas and what you want.

Your G-A-L should make sure the judge knows what you want and need. This should happen before the judge decides anything about you.

Your G-A-L should make sure you are healthy, safe and getting what you need.



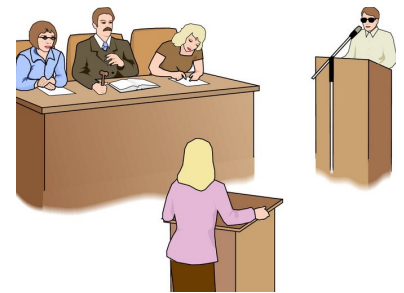
Your **G-A-L** should tell you:

- Your rights
- What he or she can do for you
- What is happening with your case
- How and why things happen in Juvenile Court
- When and where they will have hearings and meetings
- What to expect from a hearing or meeting
- What a decision made at a hearing or meeting means to you.

Your **G-A-L** should help you get ready for court and important meetings.

This means your G-A-L should:

- Listen to what you want and need
- Meet with people who know you well (parents, family, foster parents, teachers, ministers, coaches, etc.) If it would help you, your G-A-L should make them come to hearings or meetings.
- Tell you about hearings and meetings and make sure you come
- Meet with you to plan together. You should meet before hearings and foster care review board meetings. You should meet before child and family team meetings (CFTMs).
- Explain anything the judge or others will use to make decisions about you. This includes court papers and reports.
- Help you practice what you want to say in court or in meetings.



Your **G-A-L** should help you tell your side in court and in meetings.

This means your G-A-L should:

- Speak up for you
- Help you speak up for yourself
- Help explain how you see things, how you feel, and what you worry about
- Call witnesses to speak on your side
- Ask other witnesses questions



Are you going into DCS custody? Then your G-A-L should help you get what you need.

Your G-A-L should make sure your **permanency plan** is right for you. Do you want to live with family or friends? Do you want to live in a foster home instead of a group home? Your G-A-L should help you get the placement that is right for you.

Do you want to visit family and friends regularly and often? Then your G-A-L should make sure you can.

Do you want to make regular calls to family and friends? Then your G-A-L should make sure you can.

Your G-A-L should help you get services like education, health care, and good counseling.

Were you the victim of a crime? Then your G-A-L should see if you can get money (victim's compensation).

Your G-A-L should make the system work for you.

Here are some examples:

Are you waiting too long to find out where you will live? Are you waiting too long for you or your family to get help? Then, your G-A-L should speed things up.

Do you think the Judge or DCS made the wrong decision about you? Your G-A-L can appeal. Then a different judge will look at your case.



Not getting enough visits or phone calls from family and friends? Not getting regular visits from your case manager? Then your G-A-L should help you get your visits and phone calls.



Will my G-A-L look at my juvenile court file, my DCS file, and other records about me?

Yes. Your G-A-L needs to know what people say about you and your family. Your G-A-L should get copies of any important reports and records.

Will my G-A-L show me and talk to me about these reports and records?

In most cases, yes. Your G-A-L should make sure you understand the reports and records. Your G-A-L should make sure the reports and records are right. Is your judge going to read any reports or records about you? Then most of the time you have a right to read them too.



What if the judge thinks it would harm you to read a report or record? Then the judge can order the G-A-L not to share that part with you.

How can I make it easier for my G-A-L to help me?

Tell your G-A-L the truth about your feelings and what's going on.

Having problems? Tell your G-A-L so you can get help.

Don't understand something? Ask your G-A-L to explain it.

Keep your G-A-L's name and phone number with you. Stay in touch with your G-A-L.

What if my G-A-L says what I want would not be good for me?

Here's an example. You want to go back home. But your G-A-L says you should stay in foster care.

Then you and your G-A-L should have a long talk. Your G-A-L should be sure what you want and should think about it. Does the G-A-L have serious worries about what you want? Then your G-A-L will tell you why.



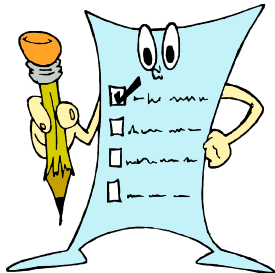
What if you and your G-A-L still don't agree? Then your G-A-L should speak up for what you want.

Or, the G-A-L should ask the judge to find you a different lawyer. This new lawyer should speak up for what you want.

How do I know if my G-A-L is doing a good job for me?

Ask yourself these questions. If your answer is **yes**, your G-A-L is doing a good job.

- Does your G-A-L spend time getting to know you?
- Does your G-A-L explain what is going on with your case?
- Does your G-A-L give you a chance to say what you are feeling?
- Does your G-A-L ask what you want to happen? For example, does your G-A-L ask if you want to see your family more? Or, do you want to live with relatives? Or, are you getting to see your friends?
- Does your G-A-L speak up for you in court and in meetings?
- Does your G-A-L keep in touch with you by visiting, calling or writing to you?
- Can you call your G-A-L when you have a problem or question?
- Does your G-A-L try to help you with problems?



What if I don't think my G-A-L is doing a good job?

Was your answer to the questions "**no**"? Tell your G-A-L how you feel and why.

Still think your G-A-L is not doing a good job? Then ask the judge for a new G-A-L.

You can also write the Board of Professional Responsibility of the Tennessee Supreme Court. They are at 1101 Kermit Drive, Nashville, TN 37217. Or call them at 615-361-7500.

What if I don't have a G-A-L? What if I can't get in touch with my G-A-L?



Tell your DCS case manager. He or she should help you get a G-A-L or get in touch.

You can also contact the Ombudsman for Children and Families. They are at the Tennessee Commission on Children and Youth. The address is 710 James Robertson Parkway, Nashville, TN 37243-0800. Or call 532-1572 (in Nashville) or 1-800-264-0904. It's a free call.

This booklet explains Rule 40 of the Tennessee Supreme Court Rules. Rule 40 tells G-A-Ls what to do. You can see Rule 40 on the Tennessee Supreme Court website (www.tsc.state.tn.us).

This booklet is one of the "Know Your Rights" booklets from the Tennessee Youth Advisory Council (TYAC). The TYAC is a group of foster youth and former foster youth. They work to improve Tennessee's foster care system (www.tnfosteryouth.com).

Fostering Results helped pay to print these booklets. They raise awareness of issues facing children in foster care (www.fosteringresults.com).

The Legal Aid Society of Middle Tennessee and the Cumberlandds helped write this booklet. 12/2004