



Your Rights in Juvenile Court



in dependent/neglect or abuse cases

Hearings in Juvenile Court are a big deal.

The judge decides where you will live, who you can see, what help you get.



Judges are supposed to decide this using only what they learn at the hearing. You have the right to make sure the judge hears from you. It's your life.



1. You have the right to be told about your court hearings ahead of time.

You should be told when the hearing will be and where. You should be told what the hearing is about.



2. You have the right to be at all court hearings about you.

They are deciding your life. You need to be there and say what you want. Your case manager or guardian ad litem should make sure you get to the hearings.



3. You have the right to have your own lawyer that the Court gets for you.

Your lawyer is called a Guardian Ad Litem (G-A-L). Your G-A-L should be at all your court hearings.

Your G-A-L should:

- Help you tell your side.
- Call witnesses to speak on your side.
- Ask other witnesses questions.
- Tell you what is happening and what it means to you.



To find out more, ask for our booklet about G-A-Ls.

4. You have the right to tell the judge what is going on with you. And, you can say what you want to happen.

At your court hearings, the judge should ask you:

- How you are doing where you live and at school
- If you have any problems
- If you get to see or talk enough with your family, friends and other people
- What you would like to change in your life



- If you need anything – like counseling, tutoring, medical care, fun time or a job
- What you want to happen or want the judge to order.



5. You have the right to speak for yourself at the hearing. Or you can have other people speak for you.

You can also give the judge reports, records and evaluations.

6. You have the right to hear and read all the information the judge will see.

You have a right to hear the witnesses at the hearing. You have a right to have your G-A-L question witnesses. You have the right to read any reports, records and evaluations the judge will read. Your G-A-L can question the person who wrote the reports, records or evaluations.

7. You have the right to be treated with respect by the judge and court staff.

This means they must be patient and polite to you. You should also be polite to them.

8. What if the hearing is about something very personal? You have the right to ask for a more private hearing.

It may be hard to talk about some things in a courtroom full of people. If you are worried about this, tell your G-A-L. Your G-A-L can ask the judge for a more private hearing.



9. If you don't like what the judge decides, you have the right to appeal.

When you appeal, a different judge or group of judges will look at the facts in your case. They may make a new decision. Or, they may agree with the first judge.

This booklet explains key parts of the Tennessee rules and laws for juveniles. They are the Rules of Juvenile Procedure, Juvenile Court Act (Tennessee Code Title 37), and the Code of Judicial Conduct (Supreme Court Rule 10). You can see these rules and laws on the Tennessee Supreme Court website (www.tsc.state.tn.us).

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