Parent Rights & Questions Guide

A plain-language starting point for understanding legal processes and finding local advice.

IMPORTANT: This guide does not state or determine your legal rights. Do not rely on a national guide for state-specific deadlines, consent rules, or court procedure.

A practical, family-centered guide

This resource is designed to help people organize information, ask informed questions, and locate appropriate support. It is educational—not legal advice. Procedures, rights, deadlines, and agency practices vary by state, tribe, court, and individual case. Confirm current requirements with a qualified attorney or the relevant agency.

Start with the law that applies to your case

There is no single nationwide checklist of parental rights that applies identically in every child welfare case. State and tribal law, court orders, case posture, and the facts matter. Ask a qualified local attorney to explain your rights and deadlines.

- Ask whether you are entitled to appointed counsel at your current stage and how to request it.
- Ask what notices you should receive and how to update the court or agency if your contact information changes.
- Ask what records you may inspect or obtain, what may be confidential, and how to request them.
- Ask how to challenge an agency decision, request a review, or appeal a court order—and the exact deadline.
- Ask what rules govern interviews, home visits, drug testing, and proposed safety plans in your jurisdiction.

Questions to take to a lawyer

- Which court has jurisdiction, and what law and local rules apply?
- What is the next deadline, and what happens if it is missed?
- What does the current order require—and what does it not require?
- What should I do if an agency request seems inconsistent with the order?
- How can I request records or correct information I believe is inaccurate?
- What communication should go through counsel?
- What are the options for review, reconsideration, or appeal?

Understanding common terms

Allegation

A reported concern that may be assessed or investigated. An allegation is not, by itself, a final court finding.

Safety plan

A plan intended to address an identified safety concern. Its legal status and enforceability can vary; ask whether it is voluntary, agency-directed, or court-ordered.

Case plan

A written plan that may identify goals, services, responsibilities, and timeframes. Ask for the current version and an explanation of each item.

Adjudication / jurisdiction

Terms used in some courts for decisions about whether legal grounds exist for the court to take jurisdiction. Exact meanings and procedures vary by state.

Disposition

A stage or order addressing what happens after the court makes required findings. The terminology and process vary.

Permanency

A legal and planning concept focused on a safe, stable, lasting family arrangement for a child.

Accessibility and nondiscrimination

Federal disability nondiscrimination laws can apply to state and local child welfare agencies and courts. The U.S. Department of Justice provides guidance about Title II of the ADA and Section 504 in child welfare matters: Protecting the Rights of Parents and Prospective Parents with Disabilities. Ask a lawyer or qualified advocate how these protections apply to your circumstances.

If you need an interpreter, accessible communication, or a disability-related accommodation, make the request as early as possible and keep a copy of the request and response.

Find legal help

Legal Services Corporation's locator can help identify civil legal aid organizations: Get Legal Help. You can also contact your state bar for lawyer referral information. Availability, eligibility, and representation in child welfare cases vary.

My questions and follow-up

Question / issue	Who can answer?	Date asked	Response / next step

Important safety note

If a child or another person is in immediate danger, contact local emergency services. Do not delay urgent safety action to complete a worksheet. Keep sensitive records secure and share them only with people who have a legitimate need to know.

Prepared by A Voice 4 Our Children. Review date: November 5, 2026. Verify links, laws, contact details, and procedures before relying on them. This publication does not create an attorney-client relationship or guarantee any outcome.