

## Final Hearing Checklist (for non-jury trial)

### Prior to Hearing, review court file to determine:

- Notice provided to parties within 45 days of setting for trial. [Tex. R. Civ. P. 245](#)
- All parties have been served. [Tex. Fam. Code § 102.009](#)
- Legal relief sought by parties properly plead. [Tex. Fam. Code § 102.003](#); [Tex. Fam. Code § 102.008](#)
- Ensure compliance with the Indian Child Welfare Act, if applicable. [25 U.S.C. § 1912](#)

### At Hearing:

- Recite appearances of all parties present at the hearing.
- Take announcements regarding readiness to proceed to trial.
- Rule on any pending pretrial motions.
- Opening Statements, unless waived.
- Evidence
  - See **Grounds for Termination Checklist**
  - Best Interest Factors to Consider:
    - the desires of the child
    - the emotional and physical needs of the child now and in the future
    - the emotional and physical danger to the child now and in the future
    - the parental abilities of the individuals seeking custody
    - the programs available to assist those individuals to promote the best interest of the child
    - the plans for the child by these individuals or by the agency seeking custody
    - the stability of the home or proposed placement
    - the acts or omissions of the parent which may indicate that the existing

parent-child relationship is not a proper one

- any excuse for the acts or omissions of the parent. *Holley v. Adams*, [544 S.W.2d 367](#) (Tex. 1976)

- Closing arguments, unless waived

### At the End of the Hearing:

- Determine if evidence meets burden of proof to support pleadings:
  - For Termination of Parental Rights: Clear and Convincing Evidence, specified as to each ground alleged, and as to Best Interest of child. [Tex. Fam. Code § 101.007](#); [Tex. Fam. Code § 161.001](#)
  - For Conservatorship: Preponderance of the Evidence. [Tex. Fam. Code § 105.005](#)
  - For ICWA: Beyond a Reasonable Doubt. [25 U.S.C. § 1912\(f\)](#).
- If termination is ordered, appoint a managing conservator (DFPS or other suitable individual). [Tex. Fam. Code § 161.207](#)
- If termination is NOT ordered and DFPS is awarded managing conservatorship, find that:
  - Appointment of parent would not be in the child's best interest because it would significantly impair the child's physical health or emotional development; and
  - It would not be in the child's best interest to appoint a relative of the child or another person as the managing conservator. [Tex. Fam. Code § 263.404\(a\)](#)
- If termination is NOT ordered and DFPS is awarded managing conservatorship, consider whether:
  - The child will turn 18 in not less than 3 years;
  - The child is at least 12 years old or has continuously expressed a strong desire against being adopted; and
  - The needs and desires of the child. [Tex. Fam. Code § 263.404\(b\)](#)

- Advise parties of their right to appeal. [Tex. Fam. Code § 263.405](#)
- Set Permanency Hearing After Final Order for 90 days if PMC granted to DFPS with termination. [Tex. Fam. Code § 263.501\(b\)](#)
- Set Permanency Hearing After Final Order for no later than 180 days if PMC granted to DFPS without termination. [Tex. Fam. Code § 263.501\(a\)](#)

**Best Practices:**

- Remind Parent Attorney of appellate duties.
- Set initial placement review hearings sooner than statutorily required to ensure progress toward the child's permanency goal.
- Continue appointment of child's attorney ad litem (AAL) and guardian ad litem (GAL) until child reaches permanency through reunification, adoption, or conservatorship being given to an individual.