
EVIDENCE IN CPS CASES

Cases involving child abuse and neglect present evidentiary issues and procedures unique to this area of the law. This chapter will provide an overview of statutory provisions related to Child Protective Services (CPS) cases.

A. Applicability of Rules of Evidence

Unless otherwise provided, the Texas Rules of Evidence apply as in other civil cases. [Tex. Fam. Code § 104.001](#).

B. Facilitating Child Testimony at Trial

1. Prerecorded Statement of Child

If a child 12 years of age or younger is alleged in a suit under [Tex. Fam. Code Title 5](#) to have been abused, the recording of an oral statement of the child recorded prior to the proceeding is admissible into evidence if:

- No attorney for a party was present when the statement was made;
- The recording is both visual and aural and is recorded on film or videotape or by other electronic means;
- The recording equipment was capable of making an accurate recording, the operator was competent, and the recording is accurate and has not been altered;
- The statement was not made in response to questioning calculated to lead the child to make a particular statement;
- Each voice on the recording is identified;
- The person conducting the interview of the child in the recording is present at the proceeding and available to testify or be cross-examined by either party; and
- Each party is afforded the opportunity to view the recording before it is offered into evidence. [Tex. Fam. Code § 104.002](#).

2. Prerecorded Videotaped Testimony of the Child

The court may, on the motion of a party to the proceeding, order that the testimony of the child be taken outside the courtroom and be recorded for showing in the courtroom before the court, the finder of fact, and the parties to the proceeding. [Tex. Fam. Code § 104.003\(a\)](#).

Only an attorney for each party, an attorney ad litem for the child or other person whose presence would contribute to the welfare and well-being of the child, and persons necessary to operate the equipment may be present in the room with the child during the child's testimony. [Tex. Fam. Code § 104.003\(b\)](#).

Only the attorneys for the parties may question the child. [Tex. Fam. Code § 104.003\(c\)](#).

The persons operating the equipment shall be placed in a manner that prevents the child from seeing or hearing them. [Tex. Fam. Code § 104.003\(d\)](#).

The court shall ensure that:

- The recording is both visual and aural and is recorded on film or videotape or by other electronic means;
- The recording equipment was capable of making an accurate recording, the operator was competent, and the recording is accurate and not altered;
- Each voice on the recording is identified; and
- Each party to the proceeding is afforded an opportunity to view the recording before it is shown in the courtroom. [Tex. Fam. Code § 104.003\(e\)](#).

3. Remote Televised Broadcast of Testimony of Child

If in a suit a child 12 years of age or younger is alleged to have been abused, the court may, on the motion of a party to the proceeding, order that the testimony of the child be taken in a room other than the courtroom and be televised by closed-circuit equipment in the courtroom to be viewed by the court and the parties. [Tex. Fam. Code § 104.004\(a\)](#).

The procedures that apply to prerecorded videotaped testimony of a child pursuant to [Tex. Fam. Code § 104.003](#) apply to the remote broadcast testimony of a child. [Tex. Fam. Code § 104.004\(b\)](#).

4. Substitution for In-Court Testimony of Child

If the testimony of a child is taken as provided by [Tex. Fam. Code Chapter 104](#), the child may not be compelled to testify in court during the proceeding. [Tex. Fam. Code § 104.005\(a\)](#).

The court may allow the testimony of a child of any age to be taken in any manner provided by [Tex. Fam. Code Chapter 104](#) if the child, because of a medical condition, is incapable of testifying in open court. [Tex. Fam. Code § 104.005\(b\)](#).

5. Hearsay Statement of Child Abuse Victim

In a suit affecting the parent-child relationship, a statement made by a child 12 years of age or younger that describes alleged abuse against the child, without regard to whether the statement is otherwise inadmissible as hearsay, is admissible as evidence if, in a hearing conducted outside the presence of the jury, the court finds that the time, content, and circumstances of the statement provide sufficient indications of the statement's reliability and:

- The child testifies or is available to testify at the proceeding in court or in any other manner provided for by law; or
- The court determines that the use of the statement in lieu of the child's testimony is necessary to protect the welfare of the child. [Tex. Fam. Code § 104.006](#).

C. Video Testimony of Certain Professionals

In a proceeding brought forth by DFPS concerning a child who is alleged in a suit to have been abused or neglected, the court may order that the testimony of a professional be taken outside the courtroom by videoconference:

- On the agreement of the department’s counsel and the respondent’s counsel; or
- If good cause exists, on the court’s own motion. [Tex. Fam. Code § 104.007\(b\)](#).

In ordering testimony to be taken as provided by [Tex. Fam. Code § 104.007\(b\)](#), the court shall ensure that the videoconference testimony allows:

- The parties and attorneys involved in the proceeding to be able to see and hear the professional as the professional testifies; and
- The professional is able to see and hear the parties and attorneys examining the professional while the professional is testifying. [Tex. Fam. Code § 104.007\(c\)](#).

Professional means an individual who is licensed or certified by the state or who is an employee of a facility licensed, certified, or operated by the state and who, in the normal course of official duties or duties for which a license or certification is required, has direct contact with children. The term includes teachers, nurses, doctors, day-care employees, employees of a clinic or health care facility that provides reproductive services, juvenile probation officers, and juvenile detention or correctional officers. [Tex. Fam. Code § 104.007\(a\)](#); [Tex. Fam. Code § 261.101\(b\)](#).

If the court permits the testimony of a professional by videoconference as provided by [Tex. Fam. Code § 104.007](#) to be admitted during the proceeding, the professional may not be compelled to be physically present in the court during the same proceeding to provide the same testimony unless ordered by the court. [Tex. Fam. Code § 104.007\(d\)](#).

D. Allegations of Abuse and Neglect and Attorney-Client Privilege

1. Requirement to Report

The requirement to report child abuse and neglect under [Tex. Fam. Code § 261.101](#) applies without exception to an individual whose personal communications may otherwise be privileged, including an attorney, a member of the clergy, a medical practitioner, a social worker, a mental health professional, an employee or member of a board that licenses or certifies a professional, and an employee of a clinic or health care facility that provides reproductive services. [Tex. Fam. Code § 261.101\(c\)](#).

2. Privileged Communication

In a proceeding regarding the abuse or neglect of a child, evidence may not be excluded on the ground of a privileged communication except in the case of communications between an attorney and client. [Tex. Fam. Code § 261.202](#).

E. Testimony of Children’s Ad Litem

1. Attorney ad Litem

An attorney ad litem or an attorney serving in the dual role may not:

- Be compelled to produce attorney work product developed during the appointment as an attorney;
- Be required to disclose the source of any information;
- Submit a report into evidence; or
- Testify in court except as authorized by [Tex. Disciplinary Rules Prof'l Conduct R. 3.08](#). [Tex. Fam. Code § 107.007\(a\)](#).

[Tex. Fam. Code § 107.007\(a\)](#) does not apply to the duty of an attorney to report child abuse or neglect under [Tex. Fam. Code § 261.101](#). [Tex. Fam. Code § 107.007\(b\)](#).

2. Guardian ad Litem

Unless the guardian ad litem is an attorney who has been appointed in the dual role and subject to the Texas Rules of Evidence, the court shall ensure in a hearing or in a trial on the merits that a guardian ad litem has an opportunity to testify regarding, and is permitted to submit a report regarding, the guardian ad litem's recommendations relating to:

- The best interests of the child; and
- The bases for the guardian ad litem's recommendations. [Tex. Fam. Code § 107.002\(e\)](#).

In a nonjury trial, a party may call the guardian ad litem as a witness for the purpose of cross-examination regarding the guardian's report without the guardian ad litem being listed as a witness by a party. If the guardian ad litem is not called as a witness, the court shall permit the guardian ad litem to testify in the narrative. [Tex. Fam. Code § 107.002\(f\)](#).

In a contested case, the guardian ad litem shall provide copies of the guardian ad litem's report, if any, to the attorneys for the parties as directed by the court, but not later than the earlier of:

- The date required by the scheduling order; or
- The 10th day before the date of the commencement of the trial. [Tex. Fam. Code § 107.002\(g\)](#).

Disclosure to the jury of the contents of a guardian ad litem's report to the court is subject to the Texas Rules of Evidence. [Tex. Fam. Code § 107.002\(h\)](#).

F. Prohibition of Certain Testimony Not Applicable in DFPS Cases

[Tex. Fam. Code § 104.008](#) requiring an expert to conduct a child custody evaluation prior to testifying about conservatorship or possession of or access to a child does not apply to a suit in which DFPS is a party. [Tex. Fam. Code § 104.008\(c\)](#).

G. Resources

Heather L. King and Jessica Hall Janicek, Evidence – Update and Current Issues, State Bar of Texas 40th Annual Advanced Family Law Course, August 4-7, 2014.

Heather L. King and Jessica Hall Janicek, Evidence Jeopardy – It’s All about the Hearsay, State Bar of Texas Judges and Associate Judges Program, August 5, 2015.

