

Working With CPS and Other Service Providers

With an open CPS case, you will meet and work with a lot of different people. In addition to your CPS caseworker, you may meet with doctors, therapists, drug/alcohol counselors, and teachers, as well as lawyers, GALs, and others actively involved in your case.

Many of these people will be important in your case, so think in advance about how to best use your meeting time with each person. Some of these people will be looked at as experts by the judge and they will tell the judge about the work you are doing to bring your children home. If you build a good relationship with your therapist or your child's therapist, doctor, or teacher, that person can tell then the judge a lot about how ready you are to have your child returned to your care!

Working With CPS

Your CPS caseworker is probably the most important person on your case. He or she is the person you will work with the most to coordinate any services you are ordered to get, arrange visits with your child, talk to a therapist or parenting coach about how you are doing with your services, and he or she will report to the judge how you are doing with your services, your visits, housing, employment, and anything else you've got going on. He or she will also report to the judge when you are doing or NOT doing well with your services, visiting with your children, seeking and finding housing, working at a job for money so you can take care of your kids. If your case goes to trial, your caseworker will be the person telling the judge why your parental rights should be terminated. **For all of these reasons, it is VERY important to have a good relationship with your caseworker.**

CPS caseworkers are good people with caring hearts. They care a lot about the work they do and have chosen their job for this reason. Caseworkers are also very busy and have lots of cases just like yours that they must pay attention to, and like everyone, caseworkers sometimes make mistakes.

Caseworkers work with many families. This means that your caseworker may not respond to your calls as quickly as you would like or may not remember every detail of your case as well as you think he or she should. This can also be very frustrating for parents who are in the middle of the CPS process and for whom every request may seem urgent.

You are in a hard situation and worried about your children and the future of your family. These are very serious worries, indeed. But if you can communicate with your caseworker about your needs, and do what you are asked to do, your caseworker can have a positive impact on your life!

Your caseworker can connect you with valuable services and can give you information about housing, domestic violence, substance abuse, parenting, employment, job training, food assistance, medical care, and anything else you are having trouble with. Take advantage of your caseworker's knowledge!

Working With Other Service Providers

In addition to working with your caseworker, you probably are also working with a lot of other people called "service providers." This might include doctors, drug/alcohol counselors, therapists, parent coaches, and possibly others. These people are important to your case and can be asked to testify in court about how you have done working through your service plan and completing all of the tasks the judge ordered you to complete in order to get your children back home. In other words, it is important to build good relationships with these providers for all the same reasons that you want to have a good relationship with your CPS caseworker!

Some service providers you might like a lot and find really helpful, but that may not always be true. You might not like some of the people or feel they don't like you or you might find some of the services not all that helpful or right for your situation. Whether you like the provider, you should do everything you can to try and make the relationship work. Many of the services are short-term – only a few classes or a few hours. If this is the case for you, try to keep a good attitude. Take notes, prepare for class, ask questions, listen for 2 or 3 key tips – in other words, if you can think of ways to stay interested then the time will go by more quickly!

Even with a good attitude, there may be times that you find that you just can't work with a certain provider. This can be a problem, especially if the person is someone you will work with long-term or one-on-one, such as a therapist or doctor. In these cases, you should talk with your caseworker to see if you can change to a different service provider. You might even speak with the provider to see if she can refer you to someone else who she thinks you might like. Be respectful but also be honest about what it is you are looking for and what you think would be most helpful. If that fails, speak to your lawyer about asking the judge to order your caseworker to find a different service provider.

GOOD COMMUNICATION IS KEY! Here are some ways to build good communication with your caseworker and other service providers:

- Make sure you have the person’s phone number, email address, office address, and his or her supervisor’s phone number written down where you can always find it
- Find out which days they are more likely to be in the office or what time of day they are more available to talk on the phone or meet
- If you call and it goes to voicemail, make sure to leave a message with your name (and your child’s name, if that’s needed), your phone number, what days and times you are free to talk, and why you are calling
- Write down every time you call and leave a message. Keep a record of these contacts so that you can tell the court of your efforts – it shows the court that you are being responsible and working hard to complete your service plan
- If you have called several times and have not heard back, call your CPS caseworker (if you’re trying to reach a service provider) or caseworker’s supervisor (if you’re trying to reach your caseworker) and politely explain the situation; the caseworker should make sure the service provider calls you back; if you’re having a hard time reaching your caseworker, the CPS supervisor should make sure your caseworker calls back
- If you can’t get anyone to return your calls, tell your lawyer what is going on and ask your lawyer to call
- If you still don’t get an answer, there may be other steps you can take, such as filing a complaint; but filing a complaint should NOT be your first step

Making Complaints

If your caseworker won’t help you with something or is treating you disrespectfully, you have the right to make a complaint. Before you make the complaint, try to work out the problem with your caseworker. If you can’t work it out with your caseworker, try to work out the problem with your caseworker’s supervisor. Ask your lawyer to help you. If all else fails, you can make a complaint. But remember that filing a complaint won’t necessarily get you a new caseworker or get your child back right away and it will probably make your situation worse if you file a complaint without good reason.

If you are unhappy with a CPS investigation, See page 46 for more information about filing a complaint or seeking review of investigation findings. For complaints about CPS rules or caseworker conduct, go to:

OFFICE OF CONSUMER AFFAIRS

When: When a CPS worker has acted inappropriately or unfairly.

How: Contact the office at 1-800-720-7777 or at oca@dfps.state.tx.us. When making a complaint, include the names of the people involved, the CPS caseworker involved, the name of anyone else you have made the complaint to, and your contact information.

What: This office will review your complaint and make recommendations.

OFFICE OF THE OMBUDSMAN

When: When a CPS worker has failed to follow CPS policies and procedures, or broken some other rule.

How: Call 1-877-787-8999 (for the deaf or hearing impaired, call 711 or 1-800-735-2989) or make a complaint in writing to:

HHSC 000 MC H-700
PO Box 13247
Austin, Texas 75711-3247

Include your name, phone number, your complaint, and your case number.

What: This office is a neutral third party, which will review your case and make recommendations on how case actions might be changed.

The Office of Consumer Affairs and the Office of the Ombudsman deal only with CPS decisions. Neither office can change a court order or review actions taken by law enforcement. If you want to challenge a court decision to terminate parental rights, you need to talk to your lawyer about filing an appeal in court. (See page 17 for more information about filing an appeal in court.)

 **TIP SHEET:**

ATTITUDE MATTERS. The judge wants to see that you take a report of abuse or neglect seriously. If you seem unmotivated to make changes or if you ignore safety threats to your child, CPS and other providers may think that you will not keep your child safe.

BE HONEST. You should never lie or give false explanations of what happened. If CPS or other providers find out the truth, they will not trust you. On the other hand, sometimes it may be best not to tell everything or answer all questions immediately because these people can talk about what you tell them in court. If you are not sure how much or what you should tell, you should ask your lawyer before you meet. (See page 29 for more information on confidentiality and working with your lawyer.)

BE RESPECTFUL. You should never be violent or aggressive. CPS caseworkers are often young social workers who are doing a very difficult job. Therapists and other service providers work under a lot of stress, as well. If you can remember to remain calm and respectful, then you are showing your caseworker and the court that you can also be calm and respectful toward your child.

SHOW UP. Keep all appointments! This includes visitation with your child. If you cannot get somewhere in time, call and let the person you are meeting know. Time is valuable; don't make the people who are trying to help you wait. When you miss an appointment, the judge may think that you don't care about the case or you may not be ready to be a responsible or protective parent!

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“I chose to get high.”

– Parent Collaboration Group Parent Liaisons

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