



# Working with Hamilton County Children's Services

A guide for families



Hamilton County Children’s Services policy requires that your caseworker give you this booklet at your first meeting. Reading it will help you understand what to expect while we are involved with your family.

If you have any questions, call your caseworker or his/her supervisor listed below:

Your Caseworker’s Name:	Phone:
Supervisor’s Name:	Phone:

- Hamilton County Children’s Services is dedicated to protecting children from abuse, neglect, and dependency when their families are unable or unwilling to do so.
- We are committed to preserving and empowering families and respecting their dignity.
- We strive to reach the goals of safety, permanency and well-being of children by advocating for their rights and providing helpful services to children and families in the least intrusive manner as required by law.

**Main Office:**

222 East Central Parkway,  
Cincinnati, OH 45202

**(513) 946-1000**

**Web site: [www.hcifs.org](http://www.hcifs.org)**



## About Hamilton County Children's Services

Hamilton County Children's Services is a division of the Hamilton County Department of Job and Family Services. Ohio law requires Children's Services to receive and document all reports of abuse and neglect and protect children who are abused, neglected, or dependent and in need of protection.

Children's Services believes it is best for children to live in a family setting. We strive to help families stay together as they solve problems. But when parents are unwilling or unable to protect their children, Children's Services develops a plan to keep the child safe. This could be both in-home plans and out of home plans.



## Receiving Reports of Maltreatment (241-KIDS)

241-KIDS is Hamilton County's 24-hour line for reporting abuse or neglect of children under age 18 (or age 21 if physically, mentally or developmentally challenged). Anyone, including professionals (such as teachers and doctors), can call 241-KIDS when they have reason to believe a child is being abused or neglected. Children also call to report abuse or neglect of a relative, friend, or themselves.

## What can I expect when Children's Services visits my home?

Ohio law requires Children's Services to complete an assessment of child safety on reports to 241-KIDS about children who may have been abused or neglected.

### ***Under Ohio law:***

Child abuse is:

- Endangering a child.
- Non-accidental injury of a child.
- Sexual conduct or contact between an adult and child.
- Physical, or mental injury that harms or threatens to harm the child's health or welfare.

Child neglect is:

- Inadequate food, shelter, supervision, education or medical care of a child due to parental faults or habits.

The Children's Services caseworker who comes to your home after a report of abuse or neglect is received begins the assessment. The caseworker will tell you what concerns were reported and will need to investigate the report by talking with you, your children, and school or other professionals, relatives, and neighbors, if necessary and appropriate. Under Ohio law, we cannot tell you who called us.

### **Important points to remember:**

- After completing the initial assessment, Children's Services must make a case disposition. That disposition will conclude the abuse or neglect is "substantiated" (direct evidence of maltreatment), "indicated" (signs but no direct evidence), or "unsubstantiated" (unconfirmed).
- If the assessment determines that your children are safe in your care, we don't stay involved. Instead, we will close our case or refer you to other community service for support.
- If the assessment determines that your children are unsafe, Children's Services will partner with you creating a plan to keep your children safe while helping your family with the identified concerns.

## What if Children's Services stays involved with my family?

Children's Services will transfer your case to an Ongoing Caseworker if further services are needed. This caseworker will partner with you to develop and implement a case plan for your family. The plan will describe goals, actions, services and changes needed for your children's safety. You'll be asked to sign the plan and will be provided a copy.

Because we are concerned about your wellbeing and your child's safety, your Children's Services caseworker will visit you regularly. We will work together to talk about the progress you are making in following your plan. You will be asked to participate in reviews of your progress in meeting the goals of the case plan. We will stay involved with you until we determine you don't need our help to keep your children safe.

To reach that point, many caregivers agree to participate in services such as counseling, parenting classes, or drug treatment. These services have helped many families in Hamilton County. If caregivers refuse to participate, Children's Services must decide if seeking other interventions, such as involving Hamilton County Juvenile Court, are needed to protect your child.

## Important things you should know

- Children's Services investigates reports of abuse and neglect and provides services to families to reduce maltreatment to children.
- Sometimes, child abuse and neglect can be crimes. Children's Services must report possible crimes to police. Children's Services does not make arrests. Only police can arrest people and charge them with a crime.
- Children's Services may recommend that children be removed from home and will help decide if and when they will return. Hamilton County Juvenile Court will make the final decision.
- The Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) is a federal law which regulates how child welfare agencies provide services to Native American children and families. If your child is a member of a tribe, or might be eligible for membership, your family has the right to be provided services. Please tell your caseworker if you believe your child is a tribal member or might be eligible to become one. The agency will verify tribal membership. The Indian tribe and extended relatives will be offered the opportunity to work with you and the caseworker to develop, implement, and review the case plan.

## What services can help my family?

To reduce safety concerns to your children, Children's Services may provide or refer you to services such as:

- Mental health counseling and treatment.
- Medical treatment.
- Drug or alcohol screening and treatment.
- Parenting skills training.
- Educational services.
- Help with finding a place to live.
- Intensive in-home help to solve family crises and other serious issues (family preservation).
- Part-time care of children to give stressed parents a break (protective child care).
- Social development services for children.
- Programs for troubled teens.



## What will I be asked to do?

With Children's Services' help, you will have the opportunity to overcome problems that caused your children to be unsafe. Children's Services will expect you to:

- Work with your caseworker to develop a plan for reducing the safety concerns to your children.
- Participate in programs and services listed in your plan.
- Make changes that will help ensure a safe, clean, nurturing home for your children and adequate food, clothing, and medical care.
- Meet with your caseworker and other professionals regularly to review your progress.
- Attend hearings and follow court orders, if your case is involved with Hamilton County Juvenile Court.

## What if my children must leave home?

In non-emergency situations, when Children's Services considers removing a child from home, we hold a formal meeting called a Family Conference. Family supports, relatives, other professionals involved in your case can attend along with Children's Services. You should attend this meeting, so you can help make decisions about your children and the help your family needs.

Hamilton County Juvenile Court must give permission before Children's Services can remove children from your home. Then, Children's Services seeks a temporary placement in the least restrictive setting available to meet children's needs. This could be a friend, relative or foster or group home.

You will probably be able to visit your children regularly. If the safety concern to your children is eliminated, your children will be returned to your care. But if not, placement of your children can become permanent.

## What are my rights?

When you are involved with Children's Services, you have the right to:

- Be treated with courtesy and respect.
- A caseworker who listens to your needs and concerns and works with you. Your caseworker should manage your case in a caring, private, professional manner.
- Decline to cooperate with the assessment.
- Refuse to accept services recommended by Children's Services on a voluntary basis.
- Participate in preparing the case plan. You also get a copy of the plan.
- Clear, honest answers to your questions so you understand why decisions are being made and actions taken in your case.
- Be informed about other ways to get help if Children's Services cannot assist your family.
- Written notification of Hamilton County Juvenile Court hearings and actions on your case if the court is involved.
- Be involved and informed regarding health, education, and well-being for your child.
- Be served without discrimination on the basis of age, race, national origin, religion, gender, sexual orientation, lifestyle, or physical, mental, or developmental disability.
- State any concerns you have and file a complaint.



## How can I help Children's Services best serve my family?

There are several ways you can help:

- Give truthful information.
- Cooperate with your caseworker and others who are trying to help you.
- Act to improve your family situation for the good of your children.
- Participate in developing your case plan.
- Follow your case plan and participate in services.
- Attend meetings about your case—and court hearings if the court is involved.
- Tell us if you have a problem with our services so we can serve you better.



## What if I have a problem with Children's Services?

### Complaint of Court Action/Order

You may not always agree with our decisions or actions. If your case is involved with Hamilton County Juvenile Court, you may also not always agree with an action or order of the Court. The following will help you address problems or disagreements you may have about your case.

If you want to make a complaint about a Court action or Court order related to your Children's Services case, you must contact your attorney or bring it up at the next Court hearing. Only the Magistrate or Judge on your case has the final authority to change a Court action or Court order. Examples of Court actions or issues are:

- Visitation
- Foster placement
- Court-ordered case plan services

### Appeal of Case Disposition

An appeal can be filed by the individual the agency found to be a substantiated or indicated perpetrator of abuse or neglect of a child after an assessment/investigation. Only the alleged perpetrator (appellant) may file an appeal of the report disposition. If you are an alleged perpetrator and you disagree with the case disposition regarding a substantiated or indicated report of abuse or neglect, you have the right to an appeal. When the investigation is completed, you will receive a letter explaining the caseworker's disposition. If you want to appeal the disposition, you must request a hearing within 30 calendar days from the date the disposition letter was mailed by either calling 513-946-1313 or writing to:

**Attention: Children's Services Hearing Scheduler  
Hamilton County Job and Family Services  
222 East Central Parkway  
Cincinnati, OH 45202**

Upon receipt of a request for a hearing, a hearing scheduler will contact the appellant to set up an appointment to present their case to the hearing officer and will provide the appellant with a notification letter of the date, time and place of the hearing. A copy of the Children's Services Policy on Appeals to Case Dispositions will be included along with the notice.

Appeal hearings are scheduled for two hours and will be audio recorded. All parties who will be testifying will be sworn in. The hearing officer will submit a written report following the appeal hearing. The decision of the hearing officer is the final remedy within Hamilton County Children Services.

## **Complaint of Action or Decision of Caseworker**

Parents, custodians, legal guardians, foster caregivers, kinship caretakers, applicants or providers of approved adult-supervised living arrangements, and children who have interacted with the agency for the provision of services have the right to voice concern regarding that interaction.

**If you have a complaint related to an action or decision made by your caseworker, you should** try to resolve the issue with the caseworker first. Examples of such complaints are:

- Not being treated with courtesy and respect
- Not being given a voice in preparing the case plan
- Not being given clear answers to your questions so you can understand why decisions are made
- Disagreement with the services on the case plan

## **What if that doesn't help?**

If you and the caseworker cannot solve the problem, follow these steps:

### **Step 1: Talk with the Supervisor**

- Call 513-241-KIDS (5437) and ask for the name and phone number of the caseworker's supervisor.
- Contact the caseworker's supervisor. You can talk with the supervisor over the phone or ask for a meeting.
- Describe your concerns and tell the supervisor why you're not satisfied.
- Listen and ask questions.
- The supervisor will listen and work with you to solve the problem.
- You may also be directed to the HCJFS Customer Service Office
- If you are not satisfied with the supervisor's response, take step 2.

### **Step 2: Talk or Meet with the Section Chief**

- Call 513-241-KIDS (5437) and ask for the name and phone number of the supervisor's section chief. You can also ask your caseworker or supervisor for the name and contact information for their section chief.
- Contact the section chief. The section chief will either talk with you on the phone or schedule a meeting.
- The section chief will listen to your concerns and work to solve the problem.
- You may also be directed to the HCJFS Customer Service Office.
- If you are not satisfied with the section chief's response, take step 3.

### **Step 3: Contact the Children's Services Customer Services Office**

- Call the HCJFS Customer Service Office (CSO) at 513-946-2466 extension 2, send a message via [HCJFS.org](https://www.hcjfs.org), using the Contact tab or send an e-mail to [HamiltonCountyCSO@jfs.hamilton-co.org](mailto:HamiltonCountyCSO@jfs.hamilton-co.org)
- The CSO will listen to your concerns and work to solve the problem.
- The CSO may schedule a meeting with you. The caseworker, and either the section chief or supervisor will be asked to attend. You'll be asked to explain your concerns.
- The supervisor or section chief will explain the decisions or actions taken on the case and why they were taken.
- As a team, we will work to devise a plan to resolve your concerns.
- The CSO may send you a letter that will explain your concerns and the actions the agency will or will not take.

If this case is court involved, the agency may need the Court's approval to make any changes.

## **Do I have any other options for resolving problems?**

The Ohio Department of Job and Family Services makes sure all public children's services agencies follow state rules. If you want to contact the Ohio Department of Job & Family Services for any reason, you can call the Customer Help Line at the following number:

**Ohio Department of Job and Family Services**  
**Toll Free: 1-866-635-3748, Option 2, Extension 3**

If you believe you have been a target of discrimination because of age, gender, national origin, race, color, religion or disability, contact:

- Hamilton County Department of Job and Family Services  
Human Resources (513) 946-1484

or

- Ohio Department of Job and Family Services, Bureau of Civil Rights  
State Office Tower, 18th Floor  
150 East Gay Street  
Columbus, Ohio 43215

or

- U.S. Department of Health and Human Services  
Office for Civil Rights, Region V  
233 North Michigan Ave., Suite 700  
Chicago, Illinois 60601



## **Communication of this Grievance Procedure to Individuals Who Have Limited English Proficiency or Who Are Hearing or Visually Impaired**

If you have limited English proficiency, HCJFS will provide a qualified professional interpreter. If you are hearing or visually impaired, HCJFS will make appropriate accommodations to ensure this procedure is reviewed and discussed with you and that your questions are answered to your satisfaction.