



WHEN YOUR CHILD GOES TO COURT

**HOW CAN I
HELP
MY CHILD?**

NYC[™]
Department of
Juvenile Justice



YOUR ROLE IS VERY IMPORTANT

For a parent with a child involved in a court case, the process can be very confusing. You may be wondering:

- What is my **role**?
- What should and can I **do to help**?
- Who can I reach out to for **answers**?

This booklet will try to help you answer some questions.

HOW CAN I HELP MY CHILD TO COME HOME?

There are things that you can do to help the Judge decide if your child can come back home to you and your family.

Here are some tips:

- Remain **calm**.
- Show **respect** for the court process and the people who work there.
- Be **on time** for all court appointments.
- Remember that your child's lawyer represents your child, not you or your family.
- The court knows why your child is there. It is important that you tell the court some of the **positive things** about your child.
- If you tried without success to get help for your child in the community in the past, share that with your child's lawyer.
- Let your child's lawyer know what services you believe your child needs – you know your child better than anyone else.
- If you believe that your child **should return home**, it is important that you say so to your child's lawyer, the



Judge, and any other court personnel who ask you about this. But if you feel that it is best that your child **not return home**, let your child's lawyer know that in private.

- You may be asked to go to interviews about your child at the Probation Department, Mental Health Services or other programs. You should let them know all the good things about your child, but you can tell them how you think your **child can best be helped**.

When you talk to your child, encourage him or her to follow the rules in court, in a group home, in a detention center, and at home. Following the rules will help people see him or her in a more **positive light**.

IF YOUR CHILD IS RELEASED HOME TO YOU

- Talk to your child about how to **stay away** from friends who might get them into trouble.

Help your child plan things to do after school:

- Make sure your **child gets up and goes to school** every day. School attendance is important to the Judge.
- Talk to your child about **resisting fights**.
- Explain how important it is to be **respectful** to the adults in court, in school, in a group home, and in a detention center. Staying home may depend on it!
- Make sure your child **keeps** all court dates, probation appointments, appointments or services that the Judge orders.
- Help your child make a calendar of all scheduled appointments.





- Help your child with a travel schedule so he or she **will not be late** for appearances or appointments.

IDEAS AND TIPS FOR COURT APPEARANCES



- **Attend all court appearances.** This will be helpful to your child.
 - You might have to spend all day waiting for their case to be called – be prepared to **wait**.
 - Get to court **early** – there are often long lines to enter the courthouse.
- Don't bring anything that could be considered a weapon to the court building – it will be taken away from you, or you won't be allowed to enter the building.
- If you think you will have a problem getting to court for any appearance, notify your child's lawyer at least 24 hours *before* the appearance.
- If you cannot attend, try to send an adult family member who you trust to represent you.
- You and your child should be dressed properly to show **respect** for the court.
 - Your child should not wear clothes that suggest that he or she belongs to a **gang**.
 - Your child should be dressed as **neatly** as possible.
 - Boys should wear a button-down shirt if possible, not a T-shirt.
 - Girls should be dressed neatly and in clothes that fit and are not too short or cut too low.
 - Your child should be dressed **simply** – they should wear little or no jewelry.
 - Pants should be pulled up.

- **Tattoos** should be covered by clothing, if possible.
- **Hair** should be neat or tied back. Avoid du-rags.
- **Make sure your child shows up for *all* court appearances. Missing an appearance can get him or her *arrested* on a warrant.**
- **Arriving late sends a negative message to the Judge. Both you and your child should *be on time* for all scheduled meetings and court appearances.**

DEALING WITH DETENTION CENTER AND COURT PERSONNEL (the Judge, corporation counsel, defense lawyer, advocate, probation officer, group home staff)

- **Get to know the *rules* of the detention center or group home.**
- **Make sure you *visit* your child often while he or she is in the detention center.**
- **Know the *name* of your child's lawyer. Ask the lawyer for his or her card so that you can get in touch easily. Keep the card in a safe place.**
- **If you have a *lawyer appointed by the court*, ask the lawyer to write his or her boss's name and telephone number on the card. If the lawyer doesn't answer your questions or return your calls, you can notify the boss.**
- **Ask if there is a *social worker* involved in the law office, and get their name and number.**
- **If you have *your own lawyer* and he or she does not answer your questions or return your calls, tell the Judge that you want to hire another lawyer.**





- Ask your child's lawyer about anything that you don't understand. **You have the right to have all your questions answered.** Make sure your child's questions are answered.



- Don't sign any **documents** unless they are fully explained to you and you're sure you understand what you will be signing.
- There will be many people in the courtroom who work on your child's case. Ask the lawyer to explain **who those people are and what they do.**
- If you have more information that will help your child, ask the lawyer to pass this information to the appropriate person.
- If your child has **special needs** – like a drug or alcohol problem, or a mental-health or medical problem – tell your child's lawyer about it.
- If the Judge asks you to have a meeting with a mental-health worker or a probation officer, be **on time** and be as **helpful** as you can. Do not use the meeting to talk about how angry you may be about your child's behavior. Keep the talk focused on **how to best help your child.**

LETTERS THAT WILL HELP YOUR CHILD'S CASE

You can get letters that will support a Judge's good opinion of your child.

- You can ask your child's **school** for a report on his or her school attendance.
- You can ask a **teacher** at your child's school to write a letter about your child.
- If your child takes part in **community groups**, ask the group's leader for a letter of support.



- If your child goes to **church**, ask someone important at the church to write a letter.
- If your child has ever had a **job**, ask his or her employer to give you a letter.

Make **copies of all letters** and give the originals to the lawyer. Keep the copies of the letters in a safe place.

COURT APPEARANCES AND CONTACT DETAILS

Use this space to write down the dates and times your child has to appear in court. Also write down the names and contact details of people who work on your child's case.

- **COURT**

Address: _____

- **COURT APPEARANCES**

Date: _____ **Time:** _____

Date: _____ **Time:** _____

Date: _____ **Time:** _____

Date: _____ **Time:** _____

- **LAWYER**

Name: _____

Telephone: _____

Address: _____



• **LAWYER’S SUPERVISOR**

Name: _____

Telephone: _____

Address: _____

• **OTHER PEOPLE**

Name: _____

Title: _____

Telephone: _____

Address: _____

Name: _____

Title: _____

Telephone: _____

Address: _____

Name: _____

Title: _____

Telephone: _____

Address: _____

For more information, call the LIFT Family Law Information Hotline on 212-343-1122. They will answer your questions about family law and court procedure, and can refer you to community-based social and legal service organizations.

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