

Court Process Overview

Understanding the Foster Care Legal Process

This guide explains the typical court process for children in foster care in clear, simple language. Court hearings are designed to ensure the safety and well-being of children while supporting families as they work toward stability. Understanding what happens at each stage can help foster parents feel more prepared and confident throughout the journey.

1. Removal and Emergency Placement

A child may enter foster care when authorities determine that the child cannot safely remain at home. Law enforcement or child protective services may remove the child and place them with a foster family or relative while the court reviews the situation.

2. Preliminary Protective Hearing (Usually within 72 hours)

This early hearing allows a judge to review why the child was removed from the home. The judge decides whether the child should remain in foster care temporarily and what services the family may need.

3. Adjudication Hearing

During this hearing, the court reviews evidence to determine whether abuse, neglect, or dependency occurred. If the judge determines that the concerns are valid, the child will remain under court supervision.

4. Disposition Hearing

This hearing focuses on the plan moving forward. The judge reviews recommendations from caseworkers and may establish a case plan for the biological family. The goal is often to help families address challenges so reunification can occur safely.

5. Review Hearings

Periodic review hearings allow the judge to monitor progress on the case plan. The court reviews reports from caseworkers and ensures the child's needs are being met while the family works toward stability.

6. Permanency Hearing

This hearing focuses on determining the long-term plan for the child. The court evaluates whether reunification with the biological family is possible or if another permanent solution should be considered.

Possible Permanency Outcomes

- Reunification with the biological family

- Guardianship with a relative or caregiver
- Adoption if reunification is not possible
- Another planned permanent living arrangement in some cases

The Role of Foster Parents

Foster parents play an important role in the court process by providing care and stability for children during a time of uncertainty. Foster parents may be asked to provide updates about the child's well-being, school progress, or behavior to caseworkers or the court.

Before a Court Hearing

- Keep notes about the child's behavior, progress, and challenges
- Communicate regularly with your caseworker
- Prepare any information requested by the agency or court

After a Court Hearing

- Your caseworker may share updates about court decisions
- Continue supporting the child through any emotional reactions
- Maintain routines that help the child feel safe and stable

Faith-Based Encouragement

For Christian foster families, the legal process can sometimes feel long or uncertain. During these moments, many caregivers find strength in remembering that God cares deeply for vulnerable children and families. Foster parents play an important role in providing stability, compassion, and hope during difficult seasons.

- Psalm 82:3 — 'Defend the weak and the fatherless.'
- James 1:27 — 'Look after orphans and widows in their distress.'
- Micah 6:8 — 'Act justly and love mercy and walk humbly with your God.'