**Foster Parents & the Legal System**

Jennifer M. Alvarez, Esq.

Catherine Bond Wallace, Esq.

ChildLaw Services, Inc.

childlawservices@gmail.com

304-425-9973

1. Purpose of Foster Care
2. To allow for reunification, this is usually first
3. Why is the child in foster care?
4. How long does the process take?
5. Abuse & Neglect Court Proceedings
6. *Preliminary Hearing*: Court will review the petition and take evidence regarding status of the child, whether the Department made reasonable efforts to preserve the family, and whether imminent danger necessitates removal of the child from custody of the parents or continuation of the ordered emergency custody.
7. *Adjudicatory Hearing*: If temporary custody has been ordered, an adjudicatory hearing shall commence within 30 days of entry of the temporary custody order following the preliminary hearing unless a pre-adjudicatory improvement period has been ordered.
8. *Dispositional Hearing*: The Court may terminate parental rights if warranted by the evidence. The court may also commit the child to the permanent custody of non-abusing parent or guardian.
9. Permanency Reviews
10. Regular Reviews
11. Regular Reviews
12. Improvement Periods (depends on county)
13. Multi-Disciplinary Team Meeting – MDT
14. Included: Fosters, kinship can choose, child, case worker, parent(s), foster parent(s), service providers, lawyers, juvenile probation officers (if necessary), and others as deemed necessary.
15. Make case plan – permanency plans, visitation, services
16. Foster parents provide updates and offer insight
17. Team usually meets every 90 days (depends on county)
18. Primary and secondary permanency
19. Permanency
20. Reunification
21. Kinship care
22. Adoption
23. Guardianship
24. Visitation
25. Keeps communication open between child and parents.
26. With more visits, there is a better chance of reunification.
27. Try to help, work with the case worker.
28. Rights & Responsibilities to Foster Child
29. Provide a stable home environment
30. Enroll child in school.
31. Help the child with transportation as needed
32. Treat all the child’s personal information confidentially
33. Maintain the child’s wardrobe and personal effect, DHHR will help.
34. Support the child’s beliefs
35. Keep track of all necessary records.
36. Be positive about the child’s family to the child
37. Be respectful toward the child’s family.
38. Work with the family on plans created by the MDT.
39. Cooperate with the visitation plans.
40. Confidentiality
41. Rights & Responsibilities to DHHR
42. Cooperate with monitoring and compliance procedures.
43. Participate in required training.
44. Be a participating member of the MDT.
45. Give advance notice about any changes that will affect life and circumstance of your family.
46. Report all accidents or illnesses.
47. Report any abuse or neglect disclosures.
48. Foster Rights
49. You have a right to background information on the child before placement.
50. You have a right to know about any and all possible behavior problems.
51. You have a right to know about possible problems with the family.
52. You have a right to know your role in carrying out the MDT plans.
53. You have a right to be aware of all visitation plans and the role you will play in them.
54. You have a right to be notified of all the hearings, you do not have to necessarily be present.
55. You have a right to have all of your records to be kept confidential by DHHR.
56. When Reunification is the Plan:
57. You can provide updates to the parents regarding school, activities, etc…email, phone call, letters
58. Support the parents, as mentors/motivators
59. Stay in touch with the family and child, share observations.
60. Helpful Hints
61. DO NOT TRY THIS ALONE
62. You have a support system – USE IT!
63. Reach out to the case worker
64. Keep in touch with the Guardian ad litem. Keep them up to date on any issues that arise.
65. Take advantage of services (WIC, Birth to Three) they are set up to help.
66. Therapists
67. Schools, talk to teachers and even the guidance counselors.
68. Be an advocate for the child while you have him/her. The child needs you right now! Let the child know they are loved and care for. Let the child know they are important and have a purpose in this big world. Please remind the child that their parents love them. Never let the child feel they are facing this alone.
69. Most of these children are taken from their homes with very few personal items and feel completely lost. Help them get settled in, try to make them feel at home, comfortable and safe.
70. Remember what you are doing IS having a positive effect, even if it is for a short time. This is a time this child will remember feeling safe and loved. This child will always remember you as someone who helped save them.