



You & Your Law Guardian

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Because you are involved in a court case that may be very important to you, a Law Guardian has been appointed to be your lawyer. This booklet will tell you about Law Guardians and explain why you should

- talk to your Law Guardian
- answer all questions
- ask any questions you have
- decide what you want

WHAT IS A LAW GUARDIAN?

A Law Guardian is a lawyer who helps children and youth in Family Court cases and other special cases. Your Law Guardian is your lawyer and will protect your rights and your interests. Your Law Guardian is paid by the State and does not work for anyone but you: not for your parent, or the Judge, or the social worker - only for you!



WHAT DOES YOUR LAW GUARDIAN DO FOR YOU?

1. YOUR LAW GUARDIAN LISTENS TO YOU: Your Law Guardian will meet alone with you, so that you can say anything you want, and he or she will listen while you tell your side of the story.

To help you remember all that happened and to learn how to help you, your Law Guardian will ask you many questions. Be ready to tell your Law Guardian about yourself, your home, what happened, and what you want to happen.

Because he or she is your lawyer, your Law Guardian will not tell anyone else what you say, unless you say it is okay to do so. That means you can be honest with your Law Guardian, even if you think it might make you look bad. Your Law Guardian will use the law and what you say to him or her to help you.

2. YOUR LAW GUARDIAN INVESTIGATES: Your Law Guardian investigates (finds out) what happened and how to protect you by talking to many people. You can be helpful by telling your Law Guardian the names of witnesses (people who saw or know what happened) or people who know you and might be able to help you (like friends, relatives, teachers, counselors). Your Law Guardian may also visit places, read a lot of legal papers and research the law. All the information will be used to help and protect you.

3. YOUR LAW GUARDIAN EXPLAINS. He or she will explain

- why you are in court
- what is going to happen
- what rights you have
- any charges that are against you or your parents
- the choices you can make and what might happen if you make a certain choice

4. YOUR LAW GUARDIAN TALKS: Your Law Guardian will talk to you, to the Judge, and to other people - like a probation officer, your parent, a policeman, or a teacher.

Ask...



Your Law Guardian will answer any question you ask. And if your Law Guardian doesn't know the answer, he or she will try to get the answer for you.

Talk...



Your Law Guardian will ask you what you want to happen. If your Law Guardian believes something else might be better for you, he or she will explain why, but you must decide.

Listen...



Your Law Guardian will tell the Judge what you want to happen.

WHAT SHOULD YOU DO?

Your job is to give full information and to cooperate with your Law Guardian, so that he or she can help you. Another very important job is to make decisions that can guide your Law Guardian. Your lawyer can help and advise you, but you must decide what you want.

If you have been accused of a crime, tell your Law Guardian

- what you were doing and where
- who else was there or saw what happened
- how the police treated you
- whatever else you're asked

If your parent or someone else has been accused of mistreating you, or your parents are fighting over custody or visitation, tell your Law Guardian everything about your home, your parents, and your school.

Your Law Guardian is on your team!



If the Judge is deciding whether to put or keep you in detention or in placement (like a group home or foster care), your Law Guardian needs a lot of information to help you get the best outcome possible. Tell your Law Guardian if you want to be home or somewhere else and why.

Do not leave things out because you think that you, a friend, or your parent might look bad. Your Law Guardian knows things may be upsetting you and may be hard to talk about. But, the more information he or she has, the more your Law Guardian will be able to help you. Remember, your lawyer is not just being nosy and will not tell your secrets.

WHAT HAPPENS AFTER THE JUDGE DECIDES?

After listening to all the lawyers and witnesses, the Judge will decide your case. If you do not like the Judge's decision, you may be able to appeal - that is, to ask a higher court to decide your case. Your Law Guardian will explain to you if you have a good chance to win on appeal. Even after your case is over, you can call or write to your Law Guardian, if you think you are being mistreated at home or in placement, or if you think your rights are not being protected.

Cooperate with your Law Guardian!



Ask your Law Guardian or an adult you trust about anything you do not understand in this booklet.

Your Law Guardian is:

(Law Guardian: Please fill in information below.)

Name: _____

Address: _____

Phone: _____