



Family Court Glossary

A definition of common terms used in family and juvenile courts

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Definitions of common terms used in family and juvenile courts

AA/NA/GA/SAA & ALANON Alcoholics, Narcotics, Gamblers, and Sexual Addicts Anonymous - worldwide program supporting partners in relationships with addicts.
ABA - American Bar Association.
Abandonment - a parent, caretaker or legal guardian fails or refuses to physically, emotionally, or financially support his or her child.
Abused Child - any person under the age of 18 years in the charge of a caretaker who is non- accidentally injured by neglect or on purpose.
Acknowledged Father - lawful husband of a mother is presumed to be the father of any child(ren) conceived during the term of the marriage unless he has been proven otherwise by paternity testing or by court order.
Adjournment – the end of business or sessions.
Adjudicated - the finding, by a judge, that a youth is responsible for committing a delinquent act.
Adjudication – the giving of a judgment or decree. A court hearing in which a determination is made whether a child is a CINC (child in need of care) or juvenile offender.
Adjudicatory hearing - held by the juvenile and family court to determine if there is enough evidence to prove that a child was abused, neglected, or abandoned, or whether another legal basis exists for the State to intervene to protect the child. Also referred to as a fact-finding hearing.
Administrative (Ad. Rev.) Hearings - within six months of a child's removal, the courts must conduct an administrative hearing.
Admission - the process where a juvenile admits to having committed a delinquent act (known in adult court as a “guilty plea”).
Adoption - the legal process through which children who will not be raised by their birth parents become full and permanent legal members of another family.
Adoption Assistance - Federal (title IV-E of the Social Security Act) or State benefits granted to adoptive families to offset the short- and long-term costs of adopting eligible children who have special needs (defined differently in each State).
Advocacy – intervention strategy through which a person plays an active role assisting or helping a specific child or family on behalf of the children or families which may include finding and coordinating services or developing new services or promoting community resources.
Affiant – person who signs the affidavit and swears to the truth of its contents.
Affidavit - a formal legal document containing written statements of legal significance that are being sworn to under oath by the author of the document, who is known as the "Affiant."
Aggravated Circumstances – the abandonment, torture, chronic abuse, sexual abuse or chronic, life threatening neglect of a child.
Allegation – charge, statement, claim or declaration.
Alleged or Putative Father – man who has contributed regularly to the support of the child and/or who has been named by the mother as the father of a child, but for whom there has been no evidenced of paternity.
Alternative Dispute Resolution - the use of methods such as mediation and arbitration to resolve a dispute instead of litigation.
Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) - the procedure for settling disputes without litigation, such as arbitration, mediation, or negotiation. ADR also allows the parties to come up with more creative solutions that a court may not be legally allowed to impose.
Alternative Response - a formal response of the agency that assesses the needs of the child or family without requiring a determination that maltreatment has occurred or that the child is at risk of maltreatment.
AP - Absent Parent.
Appeal – refers to a complaint to a higher court of an error or injustice committed by a lower court.

Area Office or Administrative Officer (AO) - An officer of the judicial system who performs administrative and clerical duties essential to the proper operation of the business of a court, such as tracking trial dates, keeping records, entering judgments, and issuing process.
Assessment - considering, and weighing factors that impact children, youth, and their families that occurs from the time children and families come to the attention of the child welfare system and continues until case closure.
Attachment - child's connection to a parent or other caregiver.
Authentication - the process of certifying documents for use.
BA - Breath Alcohol Test or Breathalyzer Test.
Background Check - an investigation of prospective service providers, caregivers, foster and adoptive parents, and all adults residing in a household or program.
Behavioral Health - means the promotion of mental health, strength and wellbeing; the treatment of mental and substance use disorders; and the support of those who experience and/or are in recovery from these conditions, along with their families and communities.
Best Interests of the Child - deciding what type of services, actions, and orders will best serve a child as well as who is best suited to take care of a child.
Birth Family - the child's biological mother and father and other relatives, blood relations descended from a common ancestor, extended family members, kin.
Birth Mother - the woman who gave birth to a child (the biological mother).
Bullying - unwanted, aggressive behavior that involves a real or perceived power imbalance. The behavior is repeated, or has the potential to be repeated, over time.
Burden of Proof - refers to the responsibility or burden of producing evidence.
CA - Cash Assistance.
Caregiver - one who provides for the physical, emotional, and social needs of a dependent person. The term most often applies to parents or parent surrogates, childcare and nursery workers, health-care specialists, and relatives caring for children, elderly, or ill family members.
Case Closure – the process of ending the case between the DCS worker and the family when families have achieved their goals and the risk of abuse has been reduced or eliminated.
Case Management – a process that includes the coordination, delivery, and monitoring of services to best address strengths and needs and frequent contact with the family to review progress toward goals.
Case Manager (CM) - duties include assessing, planning, implementing, monitoring and evaluating actions required to meet the client's health and human services needed.
Case Plan - a document that describes the outcomes, goals, and tasks concerning a child's care while in placement. Progress is watched by the case worker and may affect court actions.
Case Planning – where the caseworker develops a case plan with the family members.
Caseload - individuals (usually counted as children or family units) for whom a social worker or case worker is responsible.
Central Registry – the Child Abuse and Neglect Central Registry is a computerized name-based list of persons who have been confirmed validated or substantiated for child abuse or neglect.
Child Abuse and Neglect - any act or failure to act on the part of a parent or caretaker that results in death, serious physical or emotional harm, sexual abuse, or trafficking, or an act or failure to act that presents an imminent risk of serious harm.
Child Advocacy Center (CAC) - community-based, child-friendly, multidisciplinary service center for children and families affected by sexual abuse or severe physical abuse.
Child Custody (in Child Welfare) - a court's determination of which parent, relative, or other adult should have physical and/or legal control and responsibility for a child who is younger than age 18.

Child Family Team Meeting (CFTM) - a meeting where key people come together and work together, assisted by a DCS Family Case Manager, to build a system of support and accountability for a family that has a child or children in the system.
Child Maltreatment - Sometimes referred to as child abuse and neglect, includes all forms of physical and emotional maltreatment, sexual abuse, neglect, and exploitation that results in actual or potential harm to the child's health, development, or dignity.
Child Protection (CP) - the protection of children from violence, exploitation, abuse and neglect. At the level of prevention, their aim includes supporting and strengthening families to reduce social exclusion, and to lower the risk of separation, violence and exploitation.
Child Protective Services (CPS) – the designated social services agency (in most States) to receive reports, investigate, and provide intervention and treatment services to children and families in which child maltreatment has occurred.
Child Sex Trafficking - the act of enlisting, concealing, transporting, obtaining, soliciting, or keeping a child (under 18 years of age) for commercial sex, including prostitution and the production of child pornography.
Child Support Enforcement - agency that has the responsibility of getting child support for children.
Child Support Enforcement (CSE) - responsible for overseeing the system of child financial support under which non-resident parents are required to pay towards the upbringing and support of their children.
Child Welfare Services - a range of services designed to protect children, strengthen families to care for their children, and making sure children have a lasting home when they cannot remain with or return to their families.
Circumstantial evidence - instances where proof of certain facts is assumed from connected facts and may follow common experience.
Clear and Convincing Evidence - the level of proof sometimes required in a civil case for the plaintiff to succeed.
COA - Change of Address.
COB - Close of Business.
Community-based programs - a service designed to meet a child's needs or interests that is located near where he/she lives.
Complaint - a legal document submitted to court that alleges the facts and reasons why the person who wrote the document thinks a child committed a delinquent act. If approved, the complaint becomes a petition and the youth goes through the formal court process.
Comprehensive Family Assessment - identifying, considering, and evaluating factors that impact children, youth, and their families.
Confidential - classification for information, whether verbal, written, recorded or expressed by another media, that restricts who may view or learn the information that it pertains to.
Consent Decree - a judge's order that is based upon an agreement between the parties to a lawsuit instead of continuing the case through a trial or hearing, almost always put in writing.
Continuance – a delay of a case from one day to another or to a later date.
Co-parenting/Shared Parenting - when two or more adults together take on the care and upbringing of a child (children) for whom they share responsibility.
Corporal Punishment - the act of inflicting physical pain for the purpose of punishment to discipline a child.
Cost of Living Adjustment (COLA) - an increase in benefits to counteract price increases.
Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) – a responsible adult (other than an attorney guardian ad litem) who is appointed by the court to represent the best interests of a child.
Court Counselor - conducts interviews with individuals and/or family members so as to obtain critical information, provide written documents of information obtained and evaluate the situation, making decisions and applying the best approaches.
Court Services Officer (CSO) - primarily responsible for providing security services within the courtrooms. During court proceedings, court officers observe all parties present to ensure proper behavior and overall public

safety. Court officers also prepare and organize court documents and case records for each trial.
Cross-examination – questioning of a witness by attorneys other than the one who called the person as a witness.
CTS - Child Tracking System - statewide, automated case management system to expand system access, improve communications with community partners and providers, and improve overall management and quality of casework.
Custody - a term used to describe a youth’s location and the person who has the responsibility for that child.
D/A - Drugs and Alcohol.
Debrief - a meeting of all relevant parties on a youth’s case team to discuss reports and plan next steps.
Declaratory Judgment – a court decision which declares the rights of the parties or expresses the opinion of the court on a question of law without ordering anything to be done.
Delinquency – the commitment of an offense by a youth of what would be a crime if he or she were an adult.
Delinquent - any youth who is at least 6 years old and is not yet 16-years-old who is found responsible for breaking the law.
Department of Children’s Services (DCS) - public child welfare agency that sets statewide standards for best practices for child welfare, investigates allegations of child abuse and neglect, in charge of the state’s foster-care system and finds permanency for the children and youth who come into care, whether that is through reunification or adoption. The Juvenile Justice division serves the youth who have been adjudicated delinquent and by working closely with scores of private providers and community partners across the state of Tennessee.
Depositions – a court hearing following a verdict in which an order may be issued regarding services, custody, placement, sentencing for juvenile offenders or other matters.
Detention - locked facilities, like jails. Juveniles may be placed in a juvenile detention center pending a court hearing or waiting for a placement for a variety of reasons.
Differential Response – permits CPS agencies to respond differently to children's needs for safety, the degree of risk present, and the family's needs for services and support.
Diligent Search - effort to locate a parent, relative or other adult who could provide permanency for a child in foster care.
Direct Evidence – evidence for which a witness testifies of his/her own knowledge as to the facts to be proved.
Direct Examination - usually the first interrogation of a witness by the side on whose behalf the witness is called.
Discovery –process before the trial that allows each side to obtain information related to the case from the other side.
Dismissal - the process of a judge or prosecutor deciding not to continue with charges.
Disposition - the court’s final decision of what will happen to an offender after a finding of responsibility or guilt for the delinquent act (like the judge giving out a sentence in criminal court).
Dispositional Hearing - hearings held by the court to decide the legal outcome of cases after judgment such as where the children will live for the time being, who will have legal custody of them, and what services the children and family will need.
District Attorney or Assistant District Attorney (DA/ADA) - Generally, the duties of a district attorney/assistant district attorney are to manage the prosecutor's office, investigate alleged crimes in cooperation with law enforcement, and file criminal charges or bringing evidence before the Grand Jury.
District Court - trial courts established in each judicial district to hear matters such as civil cases involving amounts in controversy less than \$25,000, adult criminal cases, divorce, custody, child support, delinquency, abuse/neglect/dependency, and civil commitment.
Diversion - process where a court counselor or law enforcement agency provides an opportunity for a youth to avoid the juvenile justice system by requiring that the he/she complete a diversion program such as a substance abuse program, mentoring program, and/or therapy.
DOB - Date of Birth

Docket - a list containing brief information of court events kept by the clerk of the court.
Domestic/Family Violence - a pattern of abusive behavior in any relationship that is used by one partner to gain or maintain power and control over another intimate partner. Domestic violence can be physical, sexual, emotional, economic, or psychological actions or threats of actions that influence another person.
DOS - Date of Service
Due Process – the principle that every accused person has their day in court, the opportunity to have an attorney, and a trial that is speedy and fair.
Educational Neglect - involves the failure of a parent or caregiver to enroll a child of mandatory school age in school or provide appropriate homeschooling or needed special education training, thus allowing the child or youth to be truant over and over.
Emotional/Psychological Abuse or Neglect - behavior that impairs a child's emotional development or sense of self-worth. This may include constant criticism, threats, or rejection, as well as withholding love, support, or guidance.
Ethical – proper behavior or professional conduct that aligns with the system of principles and values about right versus wrong.
Evidentiary Hearing - most often scheduled upon a parent’s request if a parent disagrees with information provided to the judge in a hearing and allows for parties to have witnesses testify and/or provide other evidence.
Ex Parte – on behalf of or involving only one party to a legal matter and in the absence of and usually without notice to the other party.
Ex Parte Order – order issued by a judge without requiring all the parties in a controversy to be present.
Expert Testimony – opinion testimony about a subject that is outside the judge's or jury's knowledge or experience, provided by a witness with expertise on that subject.
Expunction - the process where a juvenile who reaches the age of adult criminal responsibility may have his/her juvenile charges cleaned or “expunged” from their records if certain conditions are met.
Failure to Protect - not protecting a child from harm. Determination can occur when evidence shows that a parent or guardian knew there was risk or should have known that there was a risk yet did not respond to assure a child’s safety.
Family - any group of persons who act as a family system with or without a legal or biological relationship.
Family Court - a court of limited control that hears cases involving family law, such as family courts typically hear cases involving divorce, child custody, and domestic abuse.
Family Group Conferencing – a family meeting used by agencies to improve family strengths in the planning process, bringing the family, extended family, and others important in the family's life (e.g., friends, clergy, neighbors) together to make decisions regarding how best to ensure safety of the family members. May also be called a Child Family Team Meeting (CFTM).
Family Preservation – social service program to keep families together by providing support and intervention services to children and families in their home with the goal of preventing out-of-home placement where possible.
Family Reunification - the process of returning children in temporary out-of-home care to their family of origin.
Family Support Services - community-based services that assist and support parents in their role as caregivers with the goal of promoting parental skills and strengthening family life, leading to healthy child and family development.
Family Support Specialist (FSS) - a Family Support Specialist (CFSS) is a person who has self-identified as the biological parent, adoptive parent, foster parent, or relative caregiver with legal custody of a child or youth with a mental, emotional, behavioral and/or co-occurring disorder and who has successfully navigated the child-serving systems to access treatment and resources necessary for success in the home, school, and community.
Felony - a crime more serious than a misdemeanor, such as breaking and entering, possessing or distributing drugs, kidnapping, trafficking, and murder.

Fictive kin - people not related by birth or marriage who have an emotionally significant relationship with an individual.
Finder of Fact or Trier of Fact - a person who determines facts in a legal proceeding to decide from the evidence, whether something existed, or some event occurred.
Findings - statements indicating that the judge has reviewed certain parts of a case including such things as placement, the case plan, and/or the efforts of the parents and has made decisions as to how things are going or how they should go. Findings are recorded in the court record.
Foster Care (FC) - 24-hour substitute care for children placed away from their parents or guardians, and for whom the State agency has placement and care responsibility.
Foster Child - a child who has been placed in the State or county's legal custody because the child's custodial parents/guardians are unable to provide a safe family home due to abuse, neglect, or an inability to care for the child.
Foster Parent - adults who provide a temporary home and everyday nurturing and support for children who have been removed from their homes. The individual(s) may be relatives or nonrelatives and are required to be licensed in order to provide care for foster children.
FTA - Failure to appear
Full Disclosure – information provided to the family regarding the steps in the CPS intervention process, the requirements of CPS, the expectations of the family, the consequences if the family does not fulfill the expectations, and the rights of the parents to ensure that the family completely understands the process.
Group Home - a residence intended to serve as an alternative to a family foster home. Homes normally house 4 to 12 children in a setting that offers the potential for the full use of community resources, including employment, health care, education, and recreational opportunities.
Guardian – adult with lawful responsibility for a child, a guardian has nearly all rights and powers of a birth parent, but the relationship can be terminated or changed. A guardian may or may not also have custody or actual care and supervision of the child.
Guardian Ad Litem (GAL) - a lawyer or other non-family or caretaker who represents a child in juvenile or family court who considers the best interests of the child and may act as an independent investigator, advocate, advisor, and guardian for the child.
Guardianship - when a person assumes the legal obligations of care and control of a minor child and has the authority to make major decisions affecting the minor's education and welfare.
Hearing – generally, a court examination of the issues of law and fact between parties.
Hearsay – an out-of-court statement made by someone other than the witness that is offered for the truth.
Home Study - the process of gathering information, preparing, and evaluating the fitness of prospective foster, kinship, and adoptive parents to ensure that each child is placed with a family that can best meet his/her needs.
Home Visiting - method of delivering preventive and family support services directly to the family in the home.
Home-Based Services - services provided primarily to families in their homes.
Imminent – indicates more than hearsay but less than certainty. An event is imminent if a reasonable person using common sense, training or experience concludes an event will occur without delay unless there is prompt intervention.
Immunity – established in all child abuse laws to protect reporters from civil lawsuits and criminal action resulting from filing a report of child abuse and neglect.
In Loco Parentis - in place of a parent and charged with the parent's rights, duties and responsibilities.
Incest – sexual intercourse between persons closely related by blood.
Independent Living Program - a program that assists youth who are transitioning from an out-of-home care placement in receiving services necessary to become independent.
Indicator - information that helps measure progress toward desired outcomes, goals, and objectives.
Indigent - someone who does not have enough money to afford his/her own lawyer for a criminal case; all youth

are considered indigent and are given a lawyer if their case goes to court.
In-Home Services - services provided to children and families who are assessed as being able to benefit from services delivered in the home.
Initial Assessment or Investigation – the stage of the CPS case process where the caseworker determines the validity of the child maltreatment report, assesses the risk of maltreatment, determines if the child is safe, develops a safety plan if needed to assure the child's protection, and determines services needed.
Institutionalization - the practice of placing an individual (including children and youth) in hospitals, residential treatment, institutions, or orphanages.
Intake – process through which cases come into an agency where workers interview persons seeking help or respond to telephoned or other reports of concerns regarding child abuse.
Intensive Family Preservation Services - family-focused, community-based crisis intervention services meant to keep children safely in their homes and prevent the unnecessary separation of families.
Interested Party – a person, corporation or legal entity that has an interest in the outcome of a case.
Interjurisdictional Placement - the placement of children across county and State lines.
Intervention - an action intended to change an outcome; such as therapy or counseling.
Investigation - a response that involves the gathering of unbiased information to determine whether a child was maltreated, or is at risk of maltreatment, and establishes if an intervention is needed.
Judgment – the court’s decision or finding regarding a case.
Jurisdiction – the power or right to exert authority.
Juvenile - a person under age 18.
Juvenile and Family Courts – established to resolve conflict and to otherwise intervene in the lives of families in a manner that promotes the best interest of children.
Juvenile Delinquency - a criminal violation committed prior to one's eighteenth birthday.
Juvenile Detention Facility – any secure public or private facility used for the custody of accused or adjudicated juvenile offenders.
Juvenile Intake and Assessment Worker – a responsible adult authorized to perform intake and assessment services as part of the intake and assessment system.
Kinship Adoption - adoption of a child by someone related by family ties or a prior relationship.
Kinship Care – formal child placement by the juvenile court and child welfare agency in the home of a child's relative or a close friend who acts as a relative.
Kinship Foster Care - when child welfare agencies take custody of a child after an investigation of abuse and/or neglect and place the child with a kinship caregiver who is an approved placement based on the assessment standards developed by the agency.
LA - Living Arrangement
Lack of Supervision – situation in which young children under age 12 are repeatedly left without an adult in attendance or older children are without parental supervision.
Legal Counsel - another term for a lawyer or attorney.
Legal Guardian - an adult to whom the court has given parental responsibility and authority for a child.
Legally Responsible Person (LRP) - one who has a legal obligation under the provisions of state law to care for and make decisions for an individual.
Licensed Clinical Social Worker (LCSW) - Can practice clinical and non-clinical social work in an agency, organization, or independently to help people develop their skills and their ability to use their own resources and those of the community to resolve problems.
Licensed Practical Nurse (LPN) - works under the supervision of doctors and RNs, performing duties such as taking vital signs, collecting samples, administering medication, ensuring patient comfort, and reporting the status of their patients to the nurses.
Long Term Care (LTC) - long-term or permanent fostering where the child remains in care until reaching legal

adulthood.
Malnutrition - lack of enough intake of food and drink necessary to maintain growth, activity, and general health.
Maltreatment – any act or failure to act that results in death, serious physical or emotion harm, sexual abuse, or exploitation; an act or failure to act that presents an imminent risk of serious harm.
Mandated Reporter – individuals required by State statutes to report suspected child abuse and neglect and typically includes professionals, such as educators and other school personnel, health care and mental health professionals, social workers, childcare providers, and law enforcement officers.
Master of Social Work (MSW) - A person holding a master's degree in social work and works in social services in settings such as schools, hospitals and government agencies to help people develop their skills and their ability to use their own resources and those of the community to resolve problems.
Mediation - a voluntary process that allows the parties involved to agree on a decision in the best interests of the child with the help of a trained, neutral, third party.
Medical Neglect - failure to provide or to allow needed care as recommended by a health care professional for a physical injury, illness, medical condition, or impairment, and/or the failure to seek timely and appropriate medical care for a serious health problem that any reasonable person would have recognized as needing professional medical attention.
Mental Health - includes the emotional, psychological, and social well-being and the affect how an individual may think, feel, and act.
Misdemeanor - any crime that is not labeled as a felony, such as simple assault, disorderly conduct, stealing property valued at \$1000 or less, and possession of drug paraphernalia.
Moral Injury - the lasting psychological, spiritual and social harm caused by actions in a high stakes situation that violates deeply held moral beliefs and expectations.
Multidisciplinary Team – representatives of several agencies, programs, and professionals to discuss and to aid in decisions.
NB – Newborn.
Neglect – the failure to provide for a child's basic needs. Neglect can be physical, educational, or emotional.
Nonresident Father - A parent who does not live in the same household as his child. A nonresident father may be divorced, separated, or never married to the child's mother.
Nonsecure Custody - the placement of a juvenile that does not restrict his or her freedom of movement in the custody of the state or a person designated by the court.
Notice – refers to written information, sharing the rights, responsibilities, requests and legal duties. It also contains information of future events such as date, time, and place.
Notice of Action (NOA) - is a prepared legal document that reminds all parties to hear a motion and may be produced by any party. Most contains a time and date for the court clerk to adjust the schedule for and what motion will be attempted.
Notice of Adverse Action (NOAA) - notice to families before taking an unfavorable action on their case.
Ombudsperson - an advocate or spokesperson for a population to ensure that the all duties and rules are being followed and helps with decisions or actions for solutions.
Order of Protection or Restraining Order - order given by a judge to ensure safety and protection against a danger.
Orders - a formal written direction given by a judge.
Ordinance - a law that is created by a city or county legislature.
Orphan - a child is considered an orphan for any of several reasons: the death or disappearance of, abandonment or desertion by, separation from, or loss of both parents; or if a surviving parent or mother is unable to care for the child properly.
Out-Of-Home Care - also called foster care, including family foster care, kinship care, treatment foster care, and residential and group care.

Over the Counter (OTC) – generally refers to medication that can be purchased without a doctor’s prescription..
Paraprofessional - one who has specialized knowledge and technical training and performs under the supervision of a trained and/or certified professional.
Parens Patriae - a legal term referring to the State's power to act for or on behalf of children who cannot act on their own behalf, in their best interest.
Parent – when used in relation to a child or children includes a guardian and every person who is by law liable to maintain, care for or support the child.
Parental Rights - the legal relationship between the parent and the child. This legal relationship includes the parent's responsibility to financially support the child, the parent's right to custody, to visit with the child, to make educational, religious, or medical decisions for the child.
Party – the state, the petitioner, and any parent of the child getting involved on behalf of the child.
Paternity - the legal procedure to determine if a man is the biological father of a particular child and to establish his rights and responsibilities in regard to that child.
Perjury – knowingly and willfully giving false testimony relating to a matter before the court.
Permanency - a child in foster care is determined to have achieved permanency when: (1) The child is discharged from foster care to reunion with his or her family, either a parent or other relative; (2) the child is discharged from foster care to a legally finalized adoption; or (3) the child is discharged from foster care to the care of a legal guardian.
Permanency Hearing –where the court determines when the child will be sent back to live with the parents or placed for adoption.
Permanency Plan – the plan to outline what must be done for being sent back to the parents, adoption, appointment of a permanent custodian or another planned permanent living arrangement.
Permanent Custodian – a court approved permanent guardian of a child.
Permanent Guardianship – means a court created relationship between child and caretaker which is intended to be permanent.
Perpetrator - the person who has been determined to have caused or knowingly allowed the maltreatment of a child.
Petition – a document containing charges that is typically filed by the state’s attorney in court.
Petitioner – the same as plaintiff; a person who brings a case against another in a court of law.
Physical Abuse/Neglect – the inflicting of or not preventing a nonaccidental physical injury upon a child, or the cause of a child’s deterioration, or the likelihood of harm or deterioration.
Placement – the designation by the individual or agency having custody of where and with whom the child will live.
Plaintiff - a person who brings a case against another in a court of law.
Preponderance of the Evidence – the burden of proof for civil cases where the petitioner must show evidence that a crime occurred. This standard means that the evidence is more reliable than the evidence presented by the defendant party.
Probable Cause - the standard that there is enough information to arrest an individual or perform a search of his/her person, home, or belongings.
Probation - a court-ordered period of supervision where an individual is under the supervision of a court counselor and must abide by certain rules, such as following a curfew, abstaining from drugs or alcohol, attending court-ordered treatment and programs, and following the rules of parents.
Protective Custody - a form of custody required to remove a child from his or her home and place in out-of-home care when an independent determination that the child's health, safety, and welfare is jeopardized.
Psych Eval – assessment performed by a psychologist to determine areas in which a child and/or family may need help.
Psychiatric Residential Treatment Facility (PRTF) - a locked facility where youth live and receive mental health,

substance abuse, and education services
Psychological Maltreatment - a pattern of caregiver behaviors that negatively affect the child's cognitive, social, emotional, and/or physical development.
Psychological Parent - a person who, on a continuing day-to-day basis, through interaction, companionship, interplay, and mutuality, fulfills a child's psychological and physical needs for a parent and provides for the child's emotional and financial support.
Public Defender or Court-Appointed Counsel - a lawyer appointed by the state to represent people who cannot afford an attorney.
Putative Father – the alleged or supposed male parent; the person alleged to have fathered a child whose parentage is at issue.
Reasonable Efforts – implies that what can be done should be done.
Referral – process of referring a child or family to a provider for services.
Registered Nurse (RN) - assists physicians in providing treatment to patients suffering from various medical conditions. They may administer medication, monitor patient recovery and progress, and educate patients and their families on disease prevention and post-hospital treatment.
Reintegration Plan – a plan that details specific tasks the parents and child will complete to show that they are prepared to meet the needs of the child so that the child may return home.
Relative – a person related by blood, marriage or adoption.
Relinquishment - voluntary closure or release of all parental rights and duties that legally frees a child to be adopted. This is sometimes referred to as a surrender.
Residential Services - services designed for children or youth who need a more structured environment than generally offered in the child's home or in family foster care and are part of a program where the child or youth lives in a facility.
Residential Treatment Facility - structured, 24-hour facility that provides a range of therapeutic, educational, recreational, and support services for children by a professional team.
Respite Care Services - activities involving temporary care of the child to provide relief to the caretaker.
Respondent – often used to mean the suspect in a lawsuit.
Restitution - a condition where the individual is responsible for returning, to the proper owner of property, the value of his/her loss. Usually this is the amount that must be paid to the victim.
Reunification – having children return to the care of the parent(s) or legal guardian from whom they were removed or to their other legal parent if the parents are not together as a couple.
Review Hearings – court review to determine the need to maintain placement in out of home care or court jurisdiction of a child.
Risk – the likelihood that a child will be abused or neglected in the future.
Risk Factors – behaviors and conditions present in the child, parent, or family that are likely to contribute to child abuse or neglect occurring in the future.
Safety – absence of a threat of harm.
Safety Plan – a document developed when it is agreed that the child is at risk of serious harm where the caseworker shows the factors that are or could cause harm to the child, and identifies, along with the family, the steps that will ensure the child's protection.
Screening – process of determining whether a referral will be accepted as a report of child abuse or neglect based on whether it falls within guidelines established by state law and agency policies.
Secure Care Hearings – can be held any time during a case after a child has been given written and verbal warnings by the court not to run from any placement or the home and child runs again to determine if a locked placement is in the best interest of the child.
Secure Custody - the placement of a juvenile in an approved locked facility after a petition has been filed and certain criteria have been met about the child's charges and status of the case in court.

Secure Facility – a facility which is operated or structured so that all entrances and exits are under the control of the staff, or which relies on locked rooms and buildings or fences in order to control behavior of its residents.
Service Agreement - the casework document developed between the caseworker and the family that outlines the tasks necessary to achieve case goals and outcomes. A service agreement may also be known as a case plan.
Service Provision –when CPS and other service providers deliver specific services geared toward the reduction of risk of maltreatment.
Severance – a legal proceeding that may result in a parent’s rights and responsibilities to a child as being ended.
Sexual Abuse – any contact or interaction with a child in which the child is being used for the sexual stimulation of the perpetrator, the child, or another person.
Sibling – one of two or more persons having one common parent.
Sibling Abuse - the physical, emotional, or sexual abuse of a child by a brother or sister.
SO - Sheriff’s Office/Officer.
Social Worker (SW) - responsible for helping individuals, families, and groups of people to cope with problems they're facing to improve their patients' lives.
SSN - Social Security Number.
Standard of Proof – describes the amount of evidence necessary to prove a claim in a trial. The burden of proof lies with the government and is the obligation of the prosecutor, not the defendant, to prove its case and the crime charged.
Standard Operating Procedures (SOP) - a set of step-by-step instructions compiled by an organization to help workers carry out complex routine operations.
State Child Welfare Agency - state agencies that are mandated to respond to reports of child abuse and neglect and to intervene as needed to protect the child.
Status Offenses – crimes of children that would not be crimes if they were legal age; primarily involve running away and truancy.
Stipulate – to prove agreement during a proceeding that evidence was enough to support a finding.
Subsidized Guardianship - a program to provide financial assistance and social services for relatives who take legal guardianship of children who can no longer live with their parents.
Substantiated – to establish by proof or evidence to prove a charge.
Summons – written notice required to bring a defendant into court, used to tell defendant that the plaintiff in an action seeks a verdict against him and to inform him of the time and place he must appear to answer the complaint.
Supervision - the act of monitoring compliance with court-ordered conditions.
Targeted Case Management (TCM) - helps persons access needed services through a comprehensive assessment, care planning, referral to services and monitoring.
Temporary Custody (TC) Hearing – first hearing to determine if the child’s health or welfare may be in danger without further or immediate action of the court or if the child is a runaway risk or is dangerous to self or others.
Temporary Order of Protection (TOP) - when the judge decides you are in immediate danger of harm.
Termination of Parental Rights Hearing (TPR) – a legal proceeding to remove a child from a parent's legal custody so that others can adopt the child.
Therapeutic Foster Care - intensive care provided by foster parents who have received special training to care for a wide variety of children and adolescents, usually those with significant emotional, behavioral, or social problems or medical needs.
Truant – a child not attending school as required by law.
Tx – Treatment.
Unsubstantiated (not substantiated) – an investigation found not enough evidence under State law or policy to conclude that a crime, such as child abuse/neglect occurred.
Visitation - scheduled contact among a child in out-of-home care and his or her family members.

