

Section Five

Establishing a Relationship with a Child Client



CLC PRACTICE POINT

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ENGAGING THE CHILD CLIENT

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When working with abused and neglected children who have been removed from their homes, part of your role is to lessen the trauma and instability children face and be part of a stable healing process. How you choose to interact with foster children can make a big difference in their lives.

More foster children are having their voices heard in court. Most of these children have had things “happen to them” most of their lives—events beyond their control impacting their futures. By having an attorney get to know them and represent them during foster care proceedings in Juvenile Court, they start to feel empowered and more a part of their own destiny. By making the court side of the foster care system a more humane system—one that hears what a child thinks about their own situation—we can help these children break the cycle of family and system failure. The opinion of a child in the foster care or state ward system should be taken into account when decisions are made for him or her.

HOW TO ENGAGE THE CHILD CLIENT

Ten key tips for engaging child clients:

1. Try to see the world through the eyes of a foster child.
2. Meet with the child in his/her own environment.
3. Begin to establish a relationship with your client.
4. Explain your role.
5. Listen to your client's story.
6. Be prepared for your client to be reluctant to talk.
7. Use simple language.
8. Show respect to the client.
9. Reach out to the client.
10. Be accessible.

In Minnesota, the role of the lawyer for a child is the same as the role of the lawyer for an adult: the attorney advocates for the child's expressed wishes. This is not true in other states where lawyers have hybrid roles as both guardian ad litem and advocate. Fortunately for us, we do not have to worry about that, as a separate guardian ad litem is appointed in Minnesota to represent the child's best interests.

A child that is involved in the child protection system has one spokesperson, one advisor, and one champion—their LAWYER. The relationship between a child client and their lawyer is vital and requires the greatest care a lawyer can give. A lawyer has several goals in developing a relationship with his child client:

Build trust.

Establish rapport.

Explain roles.

Identify alternatives.

The following techniques will help you to reach these goals with your client:

- **Meet with the child in their comfort zone.** Give the child choices about the meeting when possibilities exist (e.g., "Where would you like to sit?," "Would you rather go on a walk?"). Call to make an appointment—don't just show up.
- **During your meeting, explain who you are and your role.** Make sure that the meeting is private and explain the concepts of privilege and confidentiality. Throughout the interview remind the child that what the child tells you is privileged and confidential.
- **Make your interactions child focused and age appropriate.** When interacting with the child, be on the child's level. Explain what's going on in an age-appropriate manner (simple grammar, short sentences). Where appropriate, use the child's own media to communicate thoughts and ideas (text, email, music), and encourage the client to express himself/herself in whatever way feels comfortable (writing, music, art).
- **Listen to the child and their story.** Communicate with the child by using open-ended questions ("what happened after that?"), using open-ended statements ("tell me more about..."), and paying special attention to language. Engage with the child about his/her hopes, dreams and goals.
- **Use of silence**—A successful interviewer can never be afraid of silence, or of talking about what the child wants to talk about. Sometimes children need to come to sharing information in their own time. This is called "child-centered interviewing." Patience will go a long way in building trust.
- **Acknowledge the child's feelings.** Start by finding out what the child believes about what's going on. Address any misconceptions the child may have and be careful not to dismiss how the child feels. Do not make assumptions.
- **Make the child feel heard.** The child needs to know that their concerns are being taken seriously. Lawyers for children need to explain that it is their job to ensure that the child is heard. Let the child know that you don't make the decisions, but that you will let the decision maker know what the child wants.
- **Don't show alarm.** When interviewing the child, be prepared for when the child starts raising things that seems alarming on the surface. An alarmed reaction (a look of surprise or shock) is sensed by the child and can send the wrong message and cause the child to shut down. Stay calm and supportive.
- **Don't stay too long at the first meeting;** take your cues from the child.
- **Assist the child in comprehending their own rights and responsibilities as well as those of the people who will appear in court.** Help them understand the court process, the child's options, and the decisions being made at every stage of the case.
- **Be truthful, but don't overwhelm the child.** Children take in what they're emotionally ready to handle, especially children who have been traumatized. The manner in which you deliver information—word choice, tone of voice, repetition of information and use of pauses—affects how the child perceives the situation.
- **Reach out to the child and be accessible.** If the child does not return your call, call the child back and explain to them how they can reach you and what the best time is that you can be reached. Remember that children who are in foster care will not let their guard down until they began to trust you. So you might need to make a few extra calls before you receive one from them.
- **Show the child client the same level of respect you would with any adult client.**

Remember these strategies for engaging child clients, as well as the 10 key tips at the beginning of this article, and you will provide a measure of dignity and self-validation to kids at risk of being lost in the system.

ICEBREAKER QUESTIONS FOR CHILD CLIENTS

SCHOOL

- ❖ Where do you go to school?
- ❖ What grade are you in?
- ❖ What is your favorite/least favorite subject and why?
- ❖ Do you have a favorite teacher?
- ❖ Do you have any thoughts about what you want to do when you finish school?
- ❖ Do you like going to school?
- ❖ Are there subjects in school you think you need more help with?
- ❖ Do you participate in any after-school activities?
- ❖ Have you ever had to switch schools?

FAMILY

- ❖ Do you have any brothers and sisters? Have you been able to see them? How often? Has that been working out okay?
- ❖ Have you been able to spend any time with mom/dad?
- ❖ Do you have any other relatives that live in the area? What about in other states?
- ❖ How are things going in your foster home?
- ❖ Are there any other kids in the foster home? Do you get along?

HOBBIES/INTERESTS

- ❖ What types of things do you like to do in your free time?
- ❖ Are you involved in any community organizations?
- ❖ Are there things that you would like to get more involved in?
- ❖ How do you spend your time in the summer?

Questions to think about throughout the interview

- Am I going too fast?
- Am I sacrificing the child's interests for some other objective?
- Am I really hearing the child?
- Is my attention really on the child's words, behavior, and emotions?
- Am I failing to reassure the child or to remove blocks to communication?
- Am I anxious about "getting the information"?
- Am I trying to "confirm" rather than "discover" abuse?
- Am I being driven by a desire to "get the perpetrator"?
- Am I concerned about how I'm going to look if this interview does not "produce"?
- Am I avoiding digging a little deeper because of my own discomfort?

Trauma and the Developing Child

*By Kyle Dareff, William Mitchell College of Law Student (JD Candidate, 2012)
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There are about 500,000 children in foster care throughout the country at any given time. In Minnesota alone, 185 children enter the foster care system each week. Most of these children have experienced trauma in their lives. This trauma may have occurred through a number of different ways but the majority of these children have suffered at the hands of their caregiver in the form of neglect or physical, emotional or sexual abuse. Specifically, CLC historical data shows that 40-50% of our clients were emotionally abused or neglected before entering the system and that more than 70% of our clients were physically or sexually abused before entering the system. As a lawyer for a child in child protection, understanding the impact of trauma on your client will help you better understand and more effectively advocate for your client.

What is Trauma?

The definition of trauma is an event outside normal human experience. However, trauma is not the event; trauma is what happens inside the individual. An event can become traumatic if it affects your response to stress and causes dysregulation in your life. What constitutes trauma for one person may not be considered traumatic to another. Going through a traumatic experience impacts the developing child. Essentially the trauma that the child has experienced causes an interruption in the development of the brain.¹ The trauma increases the risk of behavioral, emotional, academic and physical problems that could persist throughout the life of the child. These problems can range from being diagnosed with psychiatric conditions, experiencing developmental delays that can affect school performance, substance abuse and so on.

It is likely that our clients, children in foster care, are at an even greater risk for brain development issues because of the prolonged history of trauma that these children have experienced. The typical foster child's life has been full of painful and unimaginable circumstances. The child has likely been neglected by the person or people that are supposed to care for him in addition to suffering some sort of abuse. Before the child has entered into the foster care system he has learned to deal with pain and suffering. Then an event occurs, maybe not more horrific than any other event that has happened in the past, but one that comes to the attention of child protection. The child is taken out of the home due to this event. Being removed from the home is yet another trauma that the child has experienced because he is being taken from the only life he has ever known. Being uprooted from your life is painful and stressful, even when it is necessary. The child has to deal with the grief of losing his family and most likely his friends, while adjusting to new people, a new house, a new bed, and a new school. The reality is that most children in the foster care system have lived through many different traumatic experiences throughout their short lives including, abuse, neglect, removal from the home, as well as, multiple placements throughout their years in foster care. These experiences will shape the adults they become. Regrettably, the majority of traumatized children will not grow into healthy adults, unless they are given the proper treatment to deal with the trauma. This is why it is important for you, as the child's attorney, to know about the effects that trauma can have on the children you are representing. Being aware of what happens developmentally to the traumatized child can help you advocate more effectively for your

¹ www.childtrauma.org

client by making sure that the root of the issues are being treated rather than just putting on a band-aid to treat immediate behavior or exacerbating the problems, as so many methods of treatment do.

Brain Development

At birth, because our brains are undeveloped we are essentially a blank slate and have a vast amount of potential at our fingertips. Once we begin having life experiences our potential is narrowed, this is due to the fact that the brain develops in response to what it experiences. The brain develops in a use-dependent way, the more certain parts of the brain are stimulated the more it changes, this includes both good and bad stimulation. If a specific part of the brain is not being stimulated as it should be, whatever function that area serves will not develop normally. For example, if a child does not receive enough love and attention from its caregiver as an infant, the child may have a difficult time forming emotional bonds with others. The impact of experience on the individual is the greatest during early childhood. By the age of 3, the brain is 90% of what the adult size brain will be and the emotional, behavioral, cognitive and social framework for the rest of an individual's life has been formed.² This means that if a child is not given the necessary tools to develop the brain by the age of three, there is a high likelihood that the brain will be underdeveloped.

What Happens When Brain Development and Trauma Collide

An interruption in brain development can negatively affect how the brain functions. When a child experiences a traumatic event the brain goes into a state of fear-related activation. Entering into the state of fear leads the brain to adopt changes in emotional, behavioral and cognitive functioning to promote survival. If the child enters into this state repeatedly, the chronic activation of the fear response can result in a persistent state of fear. This state of fear can cause the child to respond by fighting, fleeing or freezing. The fight or flight reaction is characterized by increased blood pressure, heart rate and respiration. This reaction causes hypervigilance, and prepares the child to fight with or flee from the potential threat. The freezing reaction occurs when the child uses dissociative methods to psychologically flee from the situation. The child may not have the option to physically flee, so the child instead withdraws from the outside world in order to disconnect from the experience. A hypervigilant response is more common in older children, males and when the trauma involves witnessing or participating in the event. A dissociative response is more common in younger children, females and during traumatic events that the child may be unable to escape from. The more prolonged and pronounced the trauma is, the more likely the changes in the child's brain functions will be long-term and maybe even permanent.

Children who experience a traumatic event and are in the persistent state of fear may exhibit behavioral challenges such as, impulsivity, hypervigilance, hyperactivity, withdrawal from reality, depression, sleep difficulties and anxiety. These behavioral challenges can often be misdiagnosed as various conduct disorders, ADHD, anxiety disorders and a variety of other diagnoses. A misdiagnosis leads to improper treatment and because of this the child never gets treated for the real problem, which is the trauma.

What This Means for the Child Attorney

- Recommend that the court order that your client be assessed for trauma. Many times children that have experienced trauma display what could be thought of as psychotic symptoms, when they are actually symptoms of trauma. If the child is not tested for trauma he may be given medication to quell the psychotic symptoms that are being displayed when he does not need it. Children who have experienced trauma and have undeveloped brains are often misdiagnosed and in the process they are incorrectly treated. If the child is tested for trauma it is much more likely that the root of the problem will be discovered and that is when true treatment can begin.

² Biological Relativity: Time and the Developing Child, Bruce D. Perry, M.D., Ph.D.

- Be aware that the child's actions may be out of their control because of their brain chemistry, NOT because the child is choosing to be oppositional or violent. Sometimes something as simple as a smell or sound can bring a child back to the memories of the trauma.

Tip: If your client is acting out, check into whether there may be any cues that the child is picking up on that are essentially re-exposing the child to the trauma all over again. Look closely because it may be something you have never thought of. Picking up on the cue and attempting to eliminate it from the child's life may help cause a change in the child's behavior.

- Don't be afraid to suggest to the court that alternative treatment may be helpful for your client. Activities such as yoga, martial arts and animal therapy have been known to benefit trauma victims. You could also ask the court to refer your client to a trauma informed massage therapist or acupuncturist.
- When you interact with the child make sure that you are calm and confident. People tend to mirror the actions of those around them. We reflect our internal state to others and that affects them. For example, if you are anxious, the client may become fearful or anxious, which could ultimately cause an escalation in behavior. On the other hand, if you exude calm, the client will become more at ease.

Tip: Be aware of your tone of voice and nonverbal cues, such as body language. When in a hypervigilant state, the child may focus on things such as nonverbal cues because they may be seen as threat related. If the child feels threatened, he is much more likely to enter into the fight or flight state of the fear response.

The clients that you represent as a volunteer attorney through Children's Law Center have almost certainly experienced trauma in their lives. As an advocate for the child, it is your responsibility to attempt to understand the hurdles that your client has faced in the past, is currently facing, and will be facing in the future. Discovering the effects that traumatic experiences have on the developing child will make you look at your clients with a different perspective. The child who has become increasingly defiant may not actually be defiant but rather in a constant state of hypervigilance due to the trauma he has experienced. The child who has completely tuned everyone out and is being described as being distant and unresponsive may have retreated inside her mind because she cannot deal with the reality of what she has been through. Being aware of the fact that your client has experienced trauma and that the trauma has shaped who the child is, will help you become a more effective advocate because you will have the knowledge to seek out the necessary treatments to remedy the true problems and not just the immediate ones. If you would like more information on trauma and its effects on children contact CLC.

***Tools
for Engaging
Children
in Their
Court Proceedings***



***A Guide for Judges, Advocates
and Child Welfare Professionals***

New York State
Permanent Judicial Commission on Justice for Children

New York State



Permanent Judicial Commission on Justice for Children

Tools for Engaging Children in Their Court Proceedings

*My little sister asks me how
I feel about my placement
and what I'd like to see
happening as my plans and goals.*

*I think that this would give me a
chance to speak out and let the
judge know how I'm feeling.*

Jocelyn

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New York State

Permanent Judicial Commission on Justice for Children

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A MESSAGE FROM CHIEF JUDGE JUDITH S. KAYE

Dear Reader,

What a wonderful idea: encouraging and listening to the voices of children in court in connection with their cases! Any caring, intelligent person would immediately see wisdom in that. What is at stake is the courts' disposition but, even more, it's the kids' lives. Having an opportunity to share their feelings, needs and desires in court gives them a sense of control over their lives. It also enriches the court process and assures better fact-finding.

Not surprisingly, the idea of bringing kids into court – once discouraged as unnecessary and potentially even damaging – has caught on like wildfire. Indeed, the law now requires judges to consult with children in an age-appropriate manner at all permanency hearings.

As we know, often in life there is a significant gap between a good idea and its implementation. We know that we must both create an empowering atmosphere for youth who already attend their court hearings and encourage others to come to court. But that is easier said than done. Simply scheduling kids' appearances in court can be problematic; What about school? And transportation? When they arrive in court, where will they wait (an inevitable issue in our busling, often less-than-pristine Family Court facilities)? What books, materials, people should be in waiting space we allocate for them? How best do we communicate with an upset nine-year-old or an angry teenager, especially when the courts' ultimate decision contravenes their requests?

Not every caring, intelligent person can readily answer those – and many, many more – essential questions.

This handbook represents the efforts of the Permanent Judicial Commission on Justice for Children to bridge the gap. It is distillation of a lot of thinking and a lot of research in the area, as reflected in the Resource List and Acknowledgments that conclude this publication. Nearly twenty years ago, the Commission vowed that it would be action-oriented, not report-oriented – our shelves are already overflowful of



CHIEF JUDGE KAYE'S MESSAGE CONTINUED

well-meaning reports. The Commission has remained true to its word, having produced many achievements but thankfully few reports. Its two substantive reports – one on the Healthy Development, the other on the Education Needs of Children in Foster Care – have proved their value by wide distribution in New York and throughout the nation.

This report, we believe, follows in the Commission's tradition: it meets a need, is easy to use and hopefully will be helpful in your preparation for encounters with kids in court.

This is the last report of the Permanent Judicial Commission Justice for Children that I will preface as Chief Judge of the State of New York. Chairing the Commission has been one of the great experiences of my life. While it is hard, and inadvisable, in the area of justice for children ever to speak of "successes" – there is so much, yet to do – I do feel that the Commission has inspired and driven reforms that have benefited the courts' approach to children and families in New York, even beyond our State's borders. For that the credit belongs to our Executive Directors (first Sheryl Dicker, more recently Kathleen DeCataldo and Deputy Toni Lang), to my original co-chair Ellen Schall, to the Commission's phenomenal members, and to the dedicated judges and staff of New York State's Family Court.

Judith S. Kaye
October 2008



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INTRODUCTION

The New York State Permanent Judicial Commission on Justice for Children was established in 1988 to improve the lives and life chances of children involved with New York courts. The Commission is chaired by Chief Judge Judith Kaye, and its members include judges, lawyers, advocates, physicians, legislators, and state and local officials.

As a means to promote the safety, permanency and well-being for all New York State children in out-of-home care, the Commission is working to increase the participation of children in permanency hearings – special court hearings where the health, well-being and future steps for children in out-of-home care are reviewed and determined with the goal of achieving permanency for these children. Their meaningful participation in these hearings will empower children, help New York State comply with the recent federal and New York State laws requiring Family Court judges to consult with children in an age-appropriate manner at all permanency hearings, and ultimately produce better fact-finding that will lead to better decisions and better outcomes for children and their families.

This handbook highlights the developmental stages of school-age children (ages 5 to 20 years), provides tips on how to engage children in their court proceedings and offers a series of age-appropriate questions. Considering the numerous biological, physical, social and cultural factors that contribute to a child's developmental trajectory, the developmental highlights are not intended as rigid guidelines but as tools to help understand why children act the way they do and to assist judges and other professionals interact with children in court. Materials can be adapted to fit the individual needs of the court and child.

The intention of this handbook is to provide basic knowledge, in an easy to understand format, related to children in court along with highlighted tips and guidance regarding developmental stages. Age-appropriate questions which judges might ask children are provided to both assist in preparation of children for their court proceedings and as a starting point for judges. The goal of this handbook is to encourage child participation in court proceedings and make the court experience easier, more comfortable and more productive for all participants.



INVOLVEMENT IS GOOD

Children in foster care often feel disconnected – by adult decisions that have not been fully explained or explained at all to them. Involving children in their critical life decisions helps build self-efficacy skills. Self-efficacy – a person's own belief in his/her capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to produce a given goal – provides the building blocks for motivation, well-being and personal accomplishments throughout one's life course. Giving children in foster care the opportunity to share their feelings, ideas, needs and desires will help them gain a sense of control over their lives, practice the art of advocating for their well-being and develop the decision-making and negotiating skills needed to be self-reliant. Child involvement also enhances the perception held by adults of children's competence, heightens adults' commitment and energy, makes adults feel more effective and confident and makes adults more aware of the needs and concerns of children. Seeing the children involved in the complex cases before the court reminds all participants of the importance of their work.

We know from a national survey of current and former youth in foster care that a large proportion of youth in care never attended (25%) or infrequently attended (60%) their court hearings. Nearly one out of four youth who did not attend or attended infrequently thought no one would listen to them. Nearly two out of five youth did not know they were allowed to go to court. More than 40 percent of youth did not know their hearing dates.

The Commission gained some insight into the extent of child involvement in New York State during a training that was produced by the Commission in collaboration with the New York State Child Welfare Court Improvement Project and the Judicial Institute, called *Tools for Engaging Children and Youth in Their Court Proceedings*. Presented at the 2008 Summer Judicial Institute, this venue gave all New York State Family Court Judges the opportunity to attend. Based on preliminary findings from the poll conducted at the training, we believe that nearly one in three children never or rarely attend (32%), one in three sometimes attend (36%) and one in three attend at least frequently (32%) (Table 1).



Table 1. In Your Court: How Often Do Children Attend Their Permanency Planning Hearings?

Frequency	Percent
Never	4
Rarely	28
Sometimes	36
Frequently	17
Most of time	7
Every time unless excused	8

INVOLVEMENT IS CHALLENGING

As demonstrated by interviews conducted by the New York City Youth Justice Board* with professionals in the permanency planning system, there are concerns about children attending their hearings. They include a concern that professionals in the courtroom might feel restricted from speaking freely about the cases in an effort to protect youth from sensitive information either about the youth or their family members; they might be upset by some things they hear in court, with the court calendars already overwhelmed, having to explain everything that takes place in a hearing to the youth might slow down the proceedings; and youth might miss school.

Preliminary findings from the poll conducted at the 2008 Judicial Institute training show what the attending judges considered the greatest barriers to child participation. One in four judges identified the child becoming upset, one in four judges identified agencies coming on board and one in five judges identified court congestion as the greatest barrier (Table 2).

* The Youth Justice Board, a project of the Center for Court Innovation, is an after-school program that brings together 15 to 20 teenagers from around New York City to study and devise policy recommendations on an issue affecting youth in the City today.



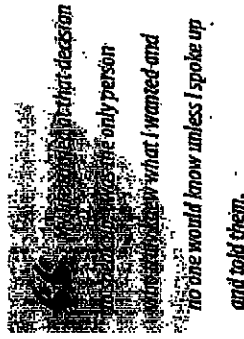
Table 2. What Do You See as the Greatest Barrier for Child Participation?

Barrier	Percent
Transportation	6
Court congestion	19
Professionals feel speech is restricted	13
Children may become upset	25
Children will miss school	6
Agencies coming on board	25
Attorney for the child coming on board	6

THERE ARE SOLUTIONS TO THE CHALLENGES

Preliminary findings from the poll conducted at the 2008 Judicial Institute training show that nearly all attending judges thought that there were solutions for all of these barriers. The Youth Justice Board, while recognizing that these issues are valid, also found that these issues can be overcome or mitigated through a variety of solutions.

The poll included a question to identify steps that would make the court process more child-friendly. Nearly all attending judges considered a combination of best practices, training, scheduling in the afternoon and notifying children of their court hearing would help. The benefits for the children, the process and the child welfare and court systems mandate that efforts are made to strengthen the meaningful participation of children in the permanency planning process.



Dominica



THE BOTTOM LINE

At the end of the 2008 Judicial Institute training, the judges were asked what they thought was the most significant outcome of child participation. Overwhelmingly, they thought it would promote better outcomes for children because their participation would lead to better fact-finding and decision-making (Table 3).

Table 3. Which Best Describes the Most Significant Outcome of Child Participation?

Outcome	Percentage
Better fact-finding produces better decisions that lead to better outcomes	68
Children will feel better about themselves	28
Children will hear and see things that are harmful	4
The court process will be slowed down	0

HANDBOOK STRUCTURE

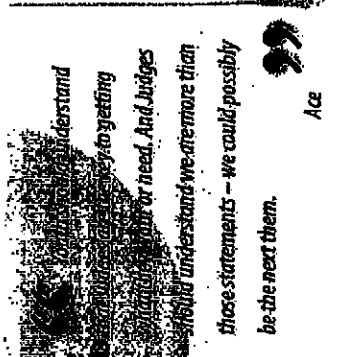
This handbook is intended for judges, advocates and child welfare professionals involved with children in court. We focus on children ages 5 to 20 years. This is not intended to minimize the importance of infant and toddler development or the potential benefit of their interaction with the courts. By having young children attend court, the judge is able to visually assess their physical and emotional well-being and their developmental progress. For example, the judge could see if the child shows a bond with the birth parents or whether the child is able to walk and talk.

While the handbook separately provides information about personal development, relationships and attachments, and behaviors, these domains are interdependent. The cognitive, social and emotional growth that is expected during childhood (Table 4) is dependent upon numerous factors. Plainly, a discussion about "normal" development is relevant only within the context of each child's individual characteristics and social and cultural environments. In addition,

children can experience chaos, unpredictability, fear and other trauma. Children of all ages, and adults, use defense mechanisms to deal with these types of situations (Table 5). In the short term, these mechanisms are protective. If prolonged, these mechanisms, like trauma, can interfere with child development.

Encouraging children's involvement in their court hearings requires thoughtful planning. It is a win-win situation for the professionals and children when children know what to expect when they attend their hearings and know what is expected of them. Children – regardless of age – need to be prepared to attend their court hearings and they need to be debriefed after their hearings (Table 6).

This handbook examines three age groups: 5 to 11 years, 12 to 15 years and 16 to 20 years. The term "children" is used when referring to all age groups and the 5 to 11 age group in particular. The term "youth" is used in the two older age group sections and when referencing older children. Each age group section includes age-specific tips on how to engage children in court and highlights age-specific developmental aspects related to personal development, relationships and attachments, and behaviors that are relevant to appearing in court and participating in permanency hearings. The materials are intended as guidelines that are flexible and can be adapted to fit the individual needs of the court and child. We hope this handbook will encourage you to encourage child participation in court proceedings and make the court experience easier, more comfortable and productive for judges, advocates, child welfare professionals and children.



CHILD DEVELOPMENT

The developmental progression of children sheds light on why they act the way they do in their everyday lives and in the context of appearing in court and participating in court proceedings. The field of child development examines changes from the time of conception and infancy through adolescence. This non-linear, interconnected path is influenced by many factors, including genetics; social, physical and emotional environments; nurturing; and the child's own activity. Children can also become too mature – an issue that can jeopardize their health and development. Often times when an older child has been neglected or is the child of a parent with substance abuse or mental health issues, the child (called “a parentified child”) will assume the care giving responsibilities for family members.

The following highlights some of the expected developments during childhood (Table 4).

Table 4. Developmental Progressions: From Infants to Older Youth

Development	Infant	Older Youth
Sense of Control	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Desires control over immediate wants, needs and likes Depends on caregivers to set limits and boundaries and gains perspective of self and others 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Desires control over most aspects of life Understands limits to own control Comes to terms with not having control over others, including authority figures
Independence and Autonomy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Begins completely dependent on caregiver Develops autonomy and independence with walking and talking Wants to do things but also wants help on demand 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Begins taking care of self (e.g., financially and emotionally) Wants to make own decisions and often believes he/she must do it alone Wants input but does not always want others to know it



Table 4. Developmental Progressions: From Infants to Older Youth

Development	Infant	Older Youth
Self-regulation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Requires caregivers to help regulate emotions and behaviors Needs help to soothe distress, follow rules, and control impulses 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develops ability to regulate emotions, impulses and behaviors Continues to need help from others but can ask for this help
Empathy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Begins to develop understanding of how others might feel 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Gains ability to put self in the shoes of others Gains understanding of chain of events that lead to different life consequences
Thought Process	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Thinks in the here and now Interprets words literally Sees things as extremes with no middle ground Begins to develop ability to consider different perspectives and meanings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Grasps the “bigger picture” Understands hidden meanings and agendas Becomes more idealistic Becomes more logical
Relationships and Connections	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Needs to physically connect with caregiver to feel safe and develop secure, healthy attachments Develops understanding that people exist even if not physically present 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Struggles for independence can create conflicts with relationships but secure attachments serve as a foundation for future relationships within and outside the family



DEFENSE MECHANISMS

For too many children involved in the child welfare system, their social, emotional and physical environments have exposed them to chaos, unpredictability, fear and other trauma. Additionally, the very act of removal from home and placement into foster care is traumatic. People – regardless of age – use various behaviors to help deal with such overwhelming events, thoughts and emotions. These behaviors are called defense mechanisms.

In the short term, defense mechanisms are protective and help individuals maintain a sense of balance or control. If prolonged, they can interfere with development, daily functioning and the ability to relate to and get along with others. Children, including infants, often use defense mechanisms before and after they visit with their family. As children develop, their defense mechanisms become more complex. Less mature defense mechanisms (e.g., acting out) are supplemented or replaced by more complex defenses (e.g., idealization) that require cognitive developments beyond the functioning of younger children. The following highlights some common defense mechanisms (Table 5).

Table 5. Common Psychological Defenses

Defense	Description	Examples
Acting Out	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Behaviorally expressing feelings or attitudes toward others – often involves lashing out, breaking rules, destroying toys or objects and showing aggression Refusing to believe facts or accept real events and possibly accusing others of lying or failing to do their jobs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Child in foster home breaks new family rules to see if the family will “keep” or send him/her away Child is angry at parents and breaks his/her toys Child does not think mother has been drinking even when the floor is covered with empty beer cans and mother cannot be awakened Child blames police for taking dad away and “wrecking” things after arresting him for stealing and drug use
Denial		

Table 5. Common Psychological Defenses

Defense	Description	Examples
Disassociation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Disconnecting with reality 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Child who is actual victim describes sexual abuse as if it happened to best friend
Humor	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Focusing on the lighter aspects of situations or events 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Older child learns that brother is being moved to another home and jokes about not having to watch the him eat with his mouth open
Idealization	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Believing someone or some “power” exists that is omnipotent 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Child believes parent or teacher knows everything or can do anything Child believes parent can do no wrong despite mounting evidence of that parent’s wrong doings
Projection	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Trying to hide own flaws by seeing them in others and denying them in self 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Child claims sibling is name-calling when the opposite is true
Regression	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Going back or retreating to a younger developmental level – often an attempt to return to an earlier stage that felt safer or more nurturing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Child begins wetting bed, sucking thumb, waking during the night, becoming clingy, having toddler-like tantrums after progressing beyond those behaviors
Unlovable Attitude	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Acting in ways that portray self as aloof as a result of feeling unwanted and unworthy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Child treats people rudely, puts self down, repeatedly picks the “worst” choice and uses behavior to push others away
Withdrawal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Avoiding person-to-person interaction, including falling asleep, shutting down, using substances and running away 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Child refuses to talk or look at others Teen refuses to leave his/her room Child spends hours on the internet but does not personally socialize with anyone



BEFORE CHILDREN ATTEND THEIR HEARINGS

Before attending their permanency hearings, children need to receive information and support (Table 6). When they know what to expect, the experience is less intimidating for them and more productive.

Table 6. Everyone has a Role in Preparing a Child for Court

	<p>The attorney for the child makes certain the child is aware of the hearing and lets the child know he/she is entitled but not required to attend. The attorney is the point person for familiarizing the child with all aspects of the hearing, for explaining what is going to happen, and determining the child's preferences and wishes so that they can be taken into consideration. Here are some things children will want to know:</p> <p><i>Initially</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> X What does the courtroom look like? X Who will be in the courtroom? X What does each person in the courtroom do? X Where will the child sit? Who will sit next to the child? <p><i>Ongoing</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> X What is the purpose of the hearing? X Who will be attending the hearing? X Will the child be expected to speak? What if he/she does not want to speak? Can the child use other means of communication? X What should the child do if he/she has questions, needs to use the bathroom or feels scared? X How is the child expected to behave? What happens if the child misbehaves? X Can the child bring quiet toys to court? X Can the child bring a support person or item to court? X How should the child dress for court? Why is attire important? X How long will the hearing last? X How long will the child have to wait for the hearing? X Where will the child wait for the hearing?
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Table 6. Everyone has a Role in Preparing a Child for Court

	<p>The caseworker is also a source of information and can answer questions about the purpose and expectations of the hearing. Discussing who will be in court, what the child will see and what is expected of the child will help alleviate stress and provide a better understanding of what to expect.</p>
Caseworker	<p>Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA) volunteers can be a resource for the attorney for the child and can share insight if the volunteer has a connection with the child.</p>
CASA	<p>The foster parents should support the child and provide reassurance about the hearing, answer questions, encourage participation and support the child's decision whether to attend court.</p>
Foster Parent	<p>Where appropriate, the birth parent(s) can speak to the child about the hearing, answer questions, encourage participation and support the child's decision whether to attend court.</p>
Birth Parent	<p>The judge can request that children attend their court hearings and can ask why a child is not in court. It is not the responsibility of the judge to prepare children for court but the judge can determine if a child has been prepared for court and proceed accordingly.</p>
Judge	

AFTER CHILDREN ATTEND THEIR HEARINGS

Just as children need to be prepared for their hearings, they should be debriefed after a hearing. Debriefing is a process that requires immediate and ongoing discussion to ensure the child understands what happened, what it means for the child and what are the next steps. Debriefing also provides an opportunity to identify any supports the child might need going forward. As with the preparation, the attorney for the child is the point person for the debriefing. Children also need their foster parent(s) and caseworker to be supportive, answer questions and provide ongoing support.



AGES 5 TO 11 YEARS

Communication with Children

- X Define the purpose of the hearing and ask everyone in the courtroom to identify themselves and their role.
- X Build rapport by talking with the child at the beginning of the hearing.
- X Ensure the child understands why he/she is attending.
- X Ask and answer one question at a time, using child-friendly terms.
- X Allow breaks for emotionally intense or overwhelming situations.
- X Consider age-related attention spans: 15 to 30 minutes for a child 6 years of age vs. 30 to 60 minutes for a child 11 years of age.
- X Allow alternative ways of communicating (e.g., pictures or notes).
- X Use terms and language the child will understand.
- X Acknowledge even the smallest attempt at participation – this adds to a child's sense of control and self confidence.
- X Ensure the child understands what is being said and what is happening.
- X Focus the child by asking why he/she wants to be there and hopes to gain.
- X Explain to the child that an important rule is to tell the truth and that it is all right to change an answer or correct a mistake.
- X Reassure the child that he/she is in no way responsible for the court proceedings or events.
- X Be attentive for signs of frustration, being overwhelmed or being tired (e.g., squirming or sluffing).
- X Avoid known conflicts.
- X Reassure the child that the court received and noted his/her input.
- X Compliment the child on accomplishments and contributions.
- X Encourage participation in court proceedings by asking the child to attend the next hearing.

AGES 5 TO 11 YEARS

Building Confidence

Building Confidence: Talking with a child at the beginning of the hearing makes the child feel more comfortable in court as well as provides insight into his/her level of preparedness, well-being and communication skills. This helps inform the judge as to how to proceed and sends a message to the participants that the child is the most important person in the room. The child should have been prepared for the hearing (see pp. 12-13). If this conversation shows otherwise, the judge may choose to explain what will happen, the reason for being there and what is expected of the child. Children will want to know who is in court and their respective roles, where to sit, who to tell if they feel talking is "too hard" or what to do if they feel they need a break. Making the physical environment more welcoming (e.g., posters and books) can help children feel more comfortable in court. Children also need support after the hearing and the judge can inquire about the plans for debriefing.

Reassurance: Children need reassurance that the court is concerned about their best interests. They need to feel safe and understand that they can say they don't know or can't remember if that is the case. To help reduce anxiety and build confidence, some children may benefit from the presence of a supportive adult or favorite comfort item, like a stuffed animal or toy.

Framing Questions: When a child articulates reasons for wanting to attend and what he/she hopes to gain, it provides context, structure and meaning to the hearing that benefit both the child and the court. To get to this point, the judge will need to ask questions and know how to ask the questions. Asking "how school is going" is apt to get the response "good." When asked, "What grades did you get on your last report card?" the same child could respond, "I'm failing two classes and have C's in the other three classes."

Questions that start with "how" often elicit non-informative responses.



When a child tells you why he or she is in court or how to act and we can help the child understand what was going to happen.

Kelly & Charlie



AGES 5 TO 11 YEARS

The Court Connection

There have been times that I have been upset waiting and have seen things that I really didn't want to see or hear. I was given being upset and people arguing over what to do with me. I knew that I would be all right. Just as other youth will be when they experience these emotions in court.

Antonio

the court proceeding is expected to be especially upsetting, children should be excluded from that part of the hearing.

Attention Span and Cues: Children provide a wealth of information through non-verbal expressions – such as showing affection, fear or dislike – that can assist in decision-making. Most children also signal it is time for a break by becoming squirmy or displaying other signs of distress or boredom. Children have relatively short attention spans and may become distracted if their court appearance lasts too long. Generally younger children (6 years of age) can stay focused for 15 to 30 minutes while older children can participate for as long as 30 to 60 minutes (11 years of age). Children can read, color and use quiet games and still pay attention. Attention spans in court can be influenced by numerous factors, including the wait time before a hearing and symptoms of Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD).

More Perspective: The following provides questions to consider asking children in court and further insight into the interrelated personal and social development and behaviors of children ages 5 to 11 years.

AGES 5 TO 11 YEARS

Initial Questions

- X Did I pronounce your name correctly?
- X Do you know who everyone is in the courtroom?
- X Tell me about something that has happened to you since I last saw you.

Feelings

- X What do you do when you are happy?
- X What worries you the most?

School

- X What is your favorite part of school?
- X Do you like to read?
- X Do you have someone who helps you with your homework?

Friends

- X Do you have a best friend?
- X What do you do after school? Who do you do that with?

Family

- X How often do you visit your parents? Your brother(s)/sister(s)?
- X What did you do during your last visit with your family?
- X Do you talk, text or email your brother(s)/sister(s) or parents between visits?

Health

- X Have you been to the doctor since I saw you last? The dentist?
- X What do you do for fun?
- X What games do you play?

Wrap-up Questions

- X Did anyone use any words you didn't understand today?
- X Is there anything that we are missing?
- X Do you have any questions?



AGES 5 TO 11 YEARS

Personal Growth

Self-awareness: The understanding that others – in particular caregivers – exist even when they are not present, allows children to enter school or participate in non-familiar activities without becoming overwhelmed or anxious. For many children, this cycle of separation and re-unification has become routine by attending preschool.

Self-reliance: Children's increasing ability to depend upon themselves is influenced by their environments and school is a primary context of childhood. The school environment provides much more than academic opportunities as it encourages children to hone their ability to plan and follow directions, complete tasks independently, sharpen their language skills and develop attachments beyond members of their family and immediate community. Children gain an increasing sense of self-pride that builds on their successes.

Cause and Effect: Children tend to think in the present, about tangible things and events that they can observe. They begin to develop an understanding of cause and effect. For young children, their interpretation is generally concrete and dichotomous (e.g., good vs. bad). As children approach preadolescence, they are learning to reason, think abstractly and negotiate, which gives them a more in-depth perspective. Along with learning to take responsibility for their own actions and to accept the consequences of their behavior, children also recognize when others do not accept responsibility for their actions and behaviors.

*At this time in my life, I remember
that I was going to be here longer than
I thought.*

Auriano



AGES 5 TO 11 YEARS

Personal Growth

Independence: Children are gaining a sense of independence while achieving more self-reliance and control. They begin testing values and beliefs and recognize that parents and other authority figures are not always right.

Identity: As puberty approaches, children become more aware of their body and continue to develop their gender and sexual identity. They are apt to have periods of curiosity about the opposite sex but tend to focus more on same-sex friendships. Their perception of themselves and their activities are influenced by family and societal norms and behaviors. Children are apt to imitate or reflect what they see and hear from adults, siblings, peers and the media.

Trauma: Trauma can interfere with children's ability to bond and develop trusting relationships. Children may blame themselves for these unpleasant situations even when they know the truth. To cope with stressful situations, children may alternate between reality and fantasy and use other psychological defenses (see pp. 10-11). Defense mechanisms in the short-term can be protective

but if prolonged, they can interfere with physical and social development and daily functioning. Prolonged effects can lead to speech and language difficulties and to behavioral and learning problems. Children may also tune out some feelings as a means to deal with other feelings. Since development is cumulative, it is crucial for children to reach milestones that will in turn be foundational for future growth and well-being.

Trauma during childhood can lead to disruptions in personal growth, causing ...

- Long-term grief
- Attachment disorders
- Inadequate coping skills
- Suicidal feelings
- Self-blame for the actions and decision of others
- Lack of resolution or closure
- Decrease sense of mastery and self-efficacy



AGES 5 TO 11 YEARS

Relationships and Emotions

Thoughts and Emotions: Developing more complex socially-based feelings (such as guilt, envy, modesty, embarrassment and shame), children's emotions surpass feelings based on survival (such as pleasure, fear and sadness). By gaining an ability to distinguish between their feelings, thoughts and actions, children learn to control their behaviors and regulate their emotions. Children begin to communicate their feelings as they link words with their emotions.

Children are still grasping and meshing concrete and abstract thought and often struggle with their understanding of events and situations. This age group is apt to take things personally and be particularly sensitive to criticism. Further, the onset of puberty and hormonal fluctuations can have a profound effect on emotions.

Social Network: This age group has a wider social network than younger children. Their peers take on a greater significance -- with children often developing a "best friend" relationship. Children are also able to understand the relationship between people and concepts, such as judges and their authority. Children are able to reach out beyond their family and use friends and other adults as resources to meet their emotional needs. If their basic needs

are not being met at home, children will search for other people who can provide a sense of being cared for or feeling wanted. Research suggests girls are apt to seek emotional support from their network while boys are less apt to seek emotional support but will share their feelings in response to a request for information.

"I'm in the wild with me how was being in the school going and how was being in my parent placement. By being in the judge developed a relationship with me so that I actually felt comfortable going to court. This gave me the motivation to attend all of my hearings."

Anthony

AGES 5 TO 11 YEARS

Relationships and Emotions

Positive peer relationships help children develop the skills needed for healthy social interactions. These relationships can increase self-esteem, reduce emotional stress and increase social competence in children.

Trauma: Children's emotions and social interactions are affected by their thoughts and perceptions of the world and their place in it. Trauma can have devastating effects on that perspective as well as on the development and maintenance of relationships. Children who experience trauma may exhibit changes in their behavior, social interactions or academic achievements or they may show no signs of their suffering. When children are distressed, they often demonstrate defensive behaviors and can strike out, sulk, withdraw or regress. Seemingly minor provocative cues may lead to a "fight or flight" reaction with the child using impulsive violence as a defense.

The brain responds to the stimulation associated with fear and trauma. The persistent activation of the fear response plays a major role in the various behavioral and cognitive problems associated with traumatized children. Considering the normal emotional fluctuations during this stage of development, trauma is apt to intensify mood swings or provoke unexpected or exaggerated responses to nondangerous sights, sounds or events.

Trauma during childhood can lead to disruption in building healthy relationships, such as...

- Children assume parental role
- Children develop inadequate social skills
- Children show aggression toward others
- Children have difficulty with peers
- Children lose interest in friends, school, exploration and age appropriate interests



AGES 5 TO 11 YEARS

Array of Behaviors: Children's behaviors reflect a culmination of not only their age and temperament but also societal and family norms and expectations, parenting styles, social relationships and their experiences. Children are eager to please adults and want to show off their knowledge and skills. They also tend to want to keep everyone happy. As a result, they may be slightly resistant to talk about difficult situations. While children are also gaining a greater sense of responsibility and independence, they may seem very competent and mature one moment and then quickly regress to exhibiting toddler-like behavior.

Remember the care directly after entering the hospital... Initially having been with two of my siblings but when we were separated when I was still a baby... I was lucky because they were placed in a home that was nearby.

Anthony

Friendship: Children may identify a "hero," adult or another child who they want to emulate or impress. In building stronger, more complex friendships and peer relationships, children choose a "best friend" or friends that may or may not share similar characteristics. Children can assume and fluctuate between reciprocal, leader or follower roles and begin to experience more peer pressure. They are likely to imitate newly observed behaviors that can be limit-testing. Such experimentation helps children gain a better understanding of social norms while furthering their moral and conscience development. Ultimately, children gain a sense of security through limits and containment. Through this process, children learn to take reasonable risks, to deal with failure and to recover.

AGES 5 TO 11 YEARS

Physical Activity: Physical activity not only helps children develop coordination and motor skills but also helps children release stress, develop social skills and build confidence. While still gaining the capacity to communicate, understand and deal with feelings and emotions, physical activity helps release pent-up energy and frustration.

Trauma: When children need to focus their attention on safety and security issues, they have little energy remaining for fun and games, exploration or schoolwork. Trauma can cause children to experience what appears to be unrelated bodily aches and pains. Children can also use behavioral "defensive" strategies, including regressive, passive or aggressive behavior. These behaviors can further alienate children from their peers and family members, which in turn separate them from their support and safety net for risk-taking.

Trauma during childhood can lead to behavioral issues, such as...

- Destructive behavior
- Oppositional or defiant disorder
- Aiding out to try to control or rest their way when they lack the words or ability to identify their feelings
- Children have difficulty with peers
- Children lose interest in friends, school, education and age appropriate interests



AGES 12 TO 15 YEARS

- X **Remember** youth generally can remain focused for 60 to 90 minutes.
- X **Define** the purpose of the hearing and ask everyone in the courtroom to identify themselves and their role.
- X **Build** rapport by talking with them at the beginning of the hearing.
- X **Acknowledge** that the youth has chosen to attend the hearing and may be missing an activity and thank the youth for coming and helping the court make a more informed decision.
- X **Use** terms and language the youth will understand.
- X **Ask** for their opinions and input, keeping in mind youth may argue for the sake of arguing.
- X **Set** limits as needed to provide structure and containment – youth want to know how far they can go.
- X **Frame** questions to elicit detailed responses – use open-ended, not leading questions.
- X **Reassure** the youth that he/she is in no way responsible for any of the court proceedings or events.
- X **Offer** to provide breaks if difficult situations arise – this gives youth a coping mechanism and provides a sense of control.
- X **Share** documents that are appropriate for the youth to read – this increases his/her awareness and sense of control.
- X **Allow** the youth to respond to documents and discussions through written or verbal methods.
- X **Reassure** the youth that the court received and noted his/her input.
- X **Acknowledge** even the smallest attempts at participation – this adds to a youth's sense of control and self confidence.
- X **Encourage** participation in court proceedings by asking the youth to attend the next hearing.

AGES 12 TO 15 YEARS

Building Confidence: Whether a youth has previously attended his/her court hearings or whether it is the first time, welcome and talk to the youth, make sure he/she knows who is in the courtroom and clearly state the purpose of the hearing. Knowing what will and will not happen can address preconceived ideas that might be based on the media or hearsay and encourage an interactive relationship with the court. Youth can and will tell the court their needs and opinions and how they feel, especially when they know their participation is valued. By acknowledging their contribution to the hearing, the court will build their confidence to participate. The attention span for youth is substantially greater than for younger children but they still may become distracted if they have waited a long time for their hearing.

Participation: Simply having youth attend their court hearing does not ensure their meaningful participation. Even if they talk a lot in court, it does not indicate meaningful participation. To be meaningful, youth need to be acknowledged as real contributors – not just stakeholders – in the decision-making process. Since this age group likes to talk and may be argumentative, it is important to provide instructions as to when the youth's participation is expected.

Youth-friendly: Preparing youth for their hearings starts long before entering the courthouse and requires a concerted effort by all professionals involved (see pp. 12-13). Youth need to know what is being decided, have an opportunity to discuss and understand his/her options and have an opportunity to participate in court. Avoiding acronyms and unfamiliar legal terms will make the discussion more understandable. Once a decision is made – even one contrary to their request – youth will see that many factors contributed to the decision, have a better understanding of the decision and its consequences and hear that the decision is based on their best interests. The attorney for the child is the point person for debriefing and ensuring the youth understands the meaning and consequences of the decisions. Youth also need their foster parent(s) and caseworker to be supportive and answer any questions that may arise and provide ongoing support.

...the directly
...Social Services
...using all kinds of legal
...terms that we didn't understand.

Kelly & Charlie



AGES 12 TO 15 YEARS

Non-verbal Communication: Even if youth opt not to speak in court, their presence alone is valuable. Non-verbal cues and communications can provide insight into the youth's feelings and reactions. Their appearance can indicate a sense of well-being or raise flags. As youth observe what occurs during their hearing, they are able to gain a better understanding of what has occurred and what is expected to occur in their lives.

Difficult Discussions: Youth might be exposed to unpleasant information or conflict during their court hearings but it is their lives, their experiences and their futures being discussed. Youth may be more upset by being excluded from the hearing. By hearing or seeing these realities, youth are provided accurate information. This first-hand experience can give them the necessary pieces to understand and accept decisions made as well as to provide closure. The court can also minimize difficult experiences by taking a break, encouraging the presence of a support person or bifurcating the hearing in extremely difficult situations.

Framing Questions: To get reliable responses, questions need to be framed to elicit the desired information. For example, when asking youth in care if they want to be adopted, their response may be a quick "no." If asked if the youth wants a family to go on vacations with, take care of him/her when he/she is sick and attend his/her sports activities, the response may be "yes" and the youth may be willing to continue a discussion about adoption. Youth participation not only empowers them but also provides the courts with better fact-finding that in turn produces better decisions and ultimately better outcomes.

More Perspective: The following provides questions to consider asking youth in court and further insight into the interrelated personal and social development and behaviors of children ages 12 to 15 years.



AGES 12 TO 15 YEARS

Initial Questions

- X Did I pronounce your name correctly?
- X Do you know who everyone is in the courtroom?
- X Tell me about something that has happened to you since I last saw you.

School

- X What is your favorite subject?
- X Are there any subjects that you would like to have additional help?
- X Have you changed schools during the school year?
- X What would help you do better in school?
- X Have you started to think about college or vocational school?
- X What school or community clubs or teams do you belong to?

Friends

- X What do you do for fun? Who do you do that with?
- X Who do you go to for advice?

Family

- X When was your last visit with your family?
- X What did you do at your last visit with your siblings? Birth parents?
- X What household responsibilities do you have?

Health

- X Have you been to the doctor since I last saw you? The dentist?
- X Who would you talk to about health issues?

Feelings

- X What do you do when you are happy?
- X When you think about the future, what are you most concerned about?

Wrap-up Questions

- X Did anyone use any words you didn't understand today?
- X Is there anything that we are missing?
- X Do you have any questions?

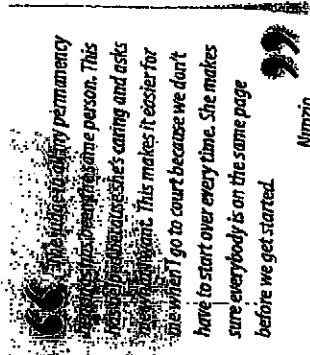


AGES 12 TO 15 YEARS

Competencies: Youth are beginning to think about their future and formulate their educational, career and family plans. In order to gain the confidence and skills to work towards and achieve those plans, youth need to develop competencies — being able to do some things well and feeling a sense of accomplishment and effectiveness. By identifying and building upon an existing success or talent (whether it is related to school, art, sports or a hobby), there is an opportunity to help youth develop competencies. Each success in turn promotes self-regulation, responsibility, pride and humility. Youth need to know that others believe in them in addition to believing in themselves.

Physical Growth: Youth experience rapid growth, the onset of puberty and the physical changes that accompany it. These changes affect their self-image, sexuality, moods and relationships with adults and peers. Not only do these physical qualities enable youth to feel more autonomous but they also change adult perceptions that encourage adults to give youth more independence. The actual timing of these physical changes for each youth is influenced by a combination of factors, including genetics, health and environmental influences. By having youth in court, the judge is able to do a visual assessment of the youth's physical development and well-being.

Belonging: While searching for a sense of independence, identity and uniqueness, youth also strive to be the same as others and fit in. During this process, youth begin to identify their own morals and values but their feelings of loyalty may affect their rational thought and their actions can be driven by their need to feel that they belong. Also, they are prone to excessive guilt feelings when things do not go as they expect.



Nimzio

AGES 12 TO 15 YEARS

Reasoning: Youth have a more advanced sense of moral reasoning than younger children. Younger children tend to base their sense of what is right and wrong on what they are told and tend to focus on the rewards or punishments that are associated with their actions. Youth tend to base their moral reasoning on how their actions will be judged by others. Wanting to gain social approval, they are apt to consider not only the consequences and benefits of their action but also the impact the action will have on their relationships. Youth may often choose to do or say things simply to impress their peers.

Idealistic: Having an idealistic point of view, youth can uphold their principles with a vengeance and challenge social conventions using those principles in ways that suit their needs.

Trauma: Youth having experienced trauma may have a heightened consciousness of threats or perceived provocations. Rather than confront perceived conflicts, they may attempt to escape or try to avoid these painful or frustrating situations altogether. The resulting isolation — from adults, peers and society in general — can alienate them and make them feel unsafe. Such isolation, stress and fears can have a detrimental impact on their physical development and decision-making capabilities and actions.

Trauma can lead to disruptions in personal growth for youth, causing...

- Desire to escape or avoid painful or frustrating situations
- Lack of knowledge and ability for self care
- Disconnection
- Anxiety disorder
- Depression
- Attachment disorders
- Personality disorders



AGES 12 TO 15 YEARS

Relationships and Friendships

Expanding Relationships: Along with gaining a greater sense of independence from adults, youth begin to recognize the shortcomings of their parents, caregivers and other adults and question authority. Peers – ranging from pairs to cliques to crowds – take on a greater importance and contribute to a sense of identity. Youth are also beginning to develop relationships while gaining an appreciation of the complexity of themselves and others. Relationships are also brought to the forefront by the curiosity and interest related to pubertal changes.

Fitting In: Along with having a strong desire to fit in and please others, youth want to appear “cool” and avoid embarrassment. They need to feel like they belong and their strong sense of loyalty may make them act, say, dress or do things that make them feel of look like their peers. At the same time, youth are apt to test their standing or influence in relationships especially with adults. They may play people against one another, manipulate people or see just how far they can push someone.

Peers: Youth have a greater exposure to influences outside of the home. They seek approval and acceptance from their peers and upon receipt they gain confidence, social skills and a sense of fitting in. It is during the early teen years that peer pressure is its strongest and tends to be a greater influence for boys compared to girls. Failure to “fit in” with peers can lead to emotional distress and cause internal conflicts (e.g., depression, anxiety, obsession or bodily complaints) or troublesome behaviors (e.g., aggressive or destructive behaviors or substance use and abuse).

My life has changed from how I used to live. My life is now independent living. My life is now independent living. My life is now independent living. My life is now independent living.



at that point I didn't want to be adopted because she was moving to a different state and I wanted to stay close to my friends and family.

Anthony

AGES 12 TO 15 YEARS

Relationships and Friendships

Gang Membership: If youth's social and emotional needs are not being met at home or with friends, youth may turn to gangs to meet their needs. At the personal level, gangs can provide a source of recognition, excitement, money, advice, encouragement and a sense of belonging. At the social level, gangs can provide status, protection and “rules.” The gang's guiding set of rules and codes can reduce independent thinking and the need to make decisions. Gang association can range or graduate from “wannabe's” to membership. Regardless of their level of involvement, youth may dress or exhibit gang-related attire or behaviors. Research has shown that gang membership contributes to delinquency to a greater degree than associating with delinquent non-gang peers or having exhibited previous delinquent behavior.

Trauma: Youth having trauma-related experiences can develop a distrust of others, particularly adults. This perception of not being able to rely on adults can make them feel isolated and solely responsible for themselves. This sense of isolation – from adults and society in general – can lead to withdrawal that further limits their opportunities to develop trusting relationships and leads to antisocial behaviors. This isolation is not the same as demonstrating the independent behaviors that are so critical during the developmental progression to adulthood.

Trauma can lead to disruptions in building healthy relationships for youth, such as

- ✓ Lack of opportunity to connect and build relationships with others
- ✓ Distrust of adults and authority figures
- ✓ Inconsistent support with learning disabilities and mental health issues



