

Moving Forward

The CPS case is over. The court has made a decision. And it is time for you and your family to move forward – that might mean grieving the loss of a child, if you lose your parental rights, or bringing your child back home after a long period of disruption and change. This section offers information and tips on how to help you and your family heal.

My Child Is Not Coming Home, How Do I Move Forward?

Losing any child – no matter how or why – is a terrible loss. Whether you voluntarily agree to give up your parental rights, or you go to court and a judge takes away your parental rights, losing a child can be heartbreaking. Recognize that you are grieving this loss and try to work through your grief in a healthy way. Pushing away sadness is not an answer and can actually make a bad situation even worse.

Right now, you need to be with people you trust and who can support you. You might feel like you have failed as a parent and this can be hard to admit to someone else. But it is important to find **someone**. If you are religious, you might reach out to your religious leader or community for help. **You should not be alone at this time.**

Another option, if you can afford it, is to seek counseling. You can ask your lawyer to see if therapy can continue for some period of time after termination. Sometimes CPS will continue to pay for this support, especially if you are planning for a “good bye” visit.

Take time to care for yourself. Understand how your physical health and your mental health are related. Being physically well makes you mentally and emotionally stronger. Exercise, eat right, drink water, hang out with positive people, and avoid harmful relationships.

Take time to care for any other children still living with you. For many parents, even if CPS removes one child from a home (often a baby or younger child) it does not mean that all of the children are gone. It is important for you to get healthy and to continue to work on any problems that caused CPS to get involved with your family in the first place. You don’t want to risk CPS coming back into your life with concerns for any other children you have now (or might have in the future)!

Losing parental rights does not always mean the end of any relationship your child. Some children search for their birth families later on and want to re-establish links with their parents. For children who do not get adopted, CPS has a duty to keep searching for a permanent placement even after the court enters a final order. Some parents – even ones who have had their parental rights terminated – may be able to show CPS that they are doing much better. If so, it's possible that CPS will decide that you can safely care for the child at a future date. These are not common endings, but they are possible.

Finally, if your child is not returned to you at the end of the case, you may be able to appeal the jury or court's decision. You need to discuss this with your lawyer right away because appeals have strict rules and time limits. Legally, your lawyer must assist you with an appeal unless the court allows the lawyer to withdraw and substitutes another lawyer to take his or her place.

My Child Is Coming Home! What Should I Do Now?

Your child may have been living away from you for over a year – that is a long time! It may be strange to have your child back in your home – your child has grown up a lot and may have different interests or habits. Your child might go to a different school, like different food, have new friends, or go to bed at a different time than he did before. Your child has already gone through so much, it is important to make the transition back home as easy as possible.

PREPARE EARLY! Your child has probably lived away from you for several months or maybe even a year. Taking care of your child on your own may be a challenge and is something you must plan for. Ask your lawyer to help you figure out a good plan to follow as your child returns home. If you have appropriate friends and family, be sure they are there to act as a safety net. If you have never parented your child while clean and sober, you must think about that now. Be sure you're ready to cope with being a parent on a 24/7 basis without any type of alcohol, drugs, or other legal or illegal medications that might cloud your judgment about your child's care and safety.

Consider also whether your child will have to change schools when he comes home. If so, find out what you need to do to enroll your child in school. Think about how your child will get to school and get home after school. Maybe your child needs a new daycare. You need to figure out services and schooling NOW, before your child comes home.

PLAN FOR NEW SCHEDULES OR HABITS. Your child probably has grown up a lot in the time he has been away from you, and his daily habits may have changed quite a lot, too, from when last he lived with you. Here are some things you might want to ask about:

- **Schedule.** Your child might have had time set aside every night to work on homework. He might get up at a set time every morning to eat breakfast and get ready for school. If your child is doing well, you will want to help him keep these routines going.
- **Food.** Ask about what he has been eating. Maybe he can show you something he learned to cook or you can find some recipes to make together.
- **Chores.** Think about how he can help you with household chores once he returns home. Does he like to do laundry? Wash dishes? Take out the trash? It is good for you and your child to work together on these things.
- **Activities.** If your child is involved in new activities, for example sports or music, learn what is needed to keep him involved. It's good for kids to stay active and interested in things outside of the home.

COLLECT YOUR CHILD'S UPDATED MEDICAL INFORMATION. Ask about health insurance and find out if and when it will expire. Get the names and contact information of any doctors your child has been seeing. Ask about any medicines your child may be taking and make sure you know the dosage instructions. Find out if your child has doctor's appointment coming up – put them on the calendar now.

MONITORED RETURN. When your child comes home, the court will likely keep CPS involved and continue to hold review hearings for a while to monitor the situation. This is sometimes called a "Monitored Return." The Monitored Return can last up to six months and during that six months, you may go to court one time or several times so the court can decide the right time to dismiss your case. The Monitored Return period is a very critical time because if your child is re-removed from your care during the Monitored Return period, there can be serious consequences. Depending on why your child is removed again, you may not have time to address CPS's concerns the way you did before your child came home. The law requires that the court finalize the case within six months of the date your child is re-removed from your care. There will be little to no time to complete drug rehab or go through parenting classes or therapy. A good transition plan is critical to your child being able to stay with you without the possibility of CPS re-removing him or her from your care.

What Can I Do to Keep CPS Out Of My Life?

Too often, the same families become involved with CPS more than once. Hopefully, you and your child will never be involved with CPS again. To avoid CPS coming back into your life, it is important to understand why they got involved with you the first time. Why did CPS think you were an unsafe parent? You need to make sure these issues do not come up again.

Here are some common risk factors – do any of them apply to you?

- Your child has special needs such as medical or behavioral issues
- You have mental health issues
- You have trouble finding and keeping a job
- You have trouble finding and keeping housing
- You have been arrested more than once
- You do not have family or friends who can help you
- You have been a victim of domestic violence
- You have abused drugs or alcohol
- You have trouble keeping your house clean and safe
- You have trouble making sure your child is clean, well-fed, dressed appropriately, and gets to school on time
- You have trouble controlling your anger
- You don't know very much about community resources like food banks, shelters, and public transportation

Be honest with yourself about where you have struggled in the past. No parent is perfect and sometimes things will go wrong. **But the most important thing is that you are able and willing to keep your child safe.**

For example, if you have suffered with drug addiction in the past, it is possible that you could relapse. Know your triggers and avoid them. Keep going to AA or NA and have a sponsor. Have a plan for what to do if you need to check into rehab. Talk to friends and family about who will take care of your child if needed. Make sure they know your child's schedule and can take care of any medical needs if you are not available. Sign a medical consent form or give someone else power of attorney, just in case.

If you have lived with domestic violence in the past, have the same conversation – who will take care of your children if you need to remove them from the house to keep them safe? If you have a protective order, know when it will expire. Have a safety plan in place in case your abuser comes back into your life. Make sure you have a place to go and some things packed, just in case.

Nobody wants to have CPS in their lives, but if children are at risk of harm from abuse or neglect, CPS has no choice but to step in. As the parent, it is YOUR responsibility to take whatever steps are needed to keep your children safe!

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“My scars became my child’s wounds.”

– Parent Collaboration Group Parent Liaisons

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