

Cuyahoga County Division of Children and Family Services is actively engaged in strategies to enhance our efforts to identify, locate, engage and empower fathers. #DadsMatter2 is an initiative that demonstrates our commitment to fathers and their role in the lives of their children.



We hope you find this guide to your Rights and Responsibilities helpful and encourage you to visit: http://site.americanhumane.org/fatherhooddocs/father_guide.pdf for a full, informative, step-by-step guide crafted to assist you in navigating the court and child welfare systems.

Resources

Cuyahoga County Fatherhood Initiative
www.fatherhoodinitiative.cuyahogacounty.us
216-348-3967

Healthy Fathering Collaborative of Greater Cleveland
Full Site: www.neofathering.net
Mobile Site: www.justfordads.org
216-245-7842

Passages: Connecting Fathers and Families
www.passages-oh.org
216-881-6776

Esperanza, Inc.
www.esperanzainc.org
216-651-7178

Nueva Luz Urban Resource Center
www.nlurc.org/
216-651-8236

Finding Your Way - A Guide for Fathers
http://site.americanhumane.org/fatherhooddocs/father_guide.pdf

©2011 by the American Bar Association. Reprinted with permission. All rights reserved. This information or any or portion thereof may not be copied or disseminated in any form or by any means or stored in an electronic database or retrieval system without the express written consent of the American Bar Association.



Cuyahoga County
Together We Thrive

Dads Matter 2

Important information about
your rights and responsibilities
concerning your child's safety.

Are you a dad who does not live with your child and learned your child may be the victim of suspected abuse or neglect? Even if you aren't your child's caretaker, or don't see your child often, there are many things you and your relatives can do to ensure your child is safe and with family quickly.

Why this is important

Your child's custody case will move fast. Important decisions will be made early about:

- where your child will live,
- what services your child needs, and
- who your child gets to visit or contact.

You must know how to help your child through this process and protect your rights to your child.

Rights:

As a parent, you have rights in child welfare custody cases. If you are the child's legal father, you have the same rights as your child's mother, including:

- Ongoing contact with your child unless the court or agency finds it is not in your child's best interest.
- To care for and ask for custody of your child.
- To take part in planning for your child's placement.
- To bring whomever you would like to the table to accept care of your children, should you not be able to provide care yourself.
- To be a part of the decision making and case planning for your family.
- To prompt notification of all court hearings and meetings related to your child.

Responsibilities:

PROVING YOU ARE THE FATHER. Knowing you are the child's father does not mean the court will recognize you as the father and automatically give you these rights. You may have to prove you are the child's "legal" father. There are two (2) ways to do this:

(1). Contact the Office of Child Support @216-443-5100 to sign an Acknowledgment of Paternity Affidavit. This is a legal document allowing you and your child's mother to waive genetic testing. Both parties must provide photo identification and the child's birth certificate and sign the document before a notary.

(2). The second method of establishing paternity is through DNA genetic testing. A mouth swab is performed on all parties. The results will be mailed to the parties within thirty (30) days of all parties being tested. This is a free service if it has not yet been determined that you are the father.

BE INVOLVED. Being an active participant in the life of your child will offer your child many life-long benefits. Make sure you attend all visits with your child and be on time. Work with your caseworker to agree on a visitation time that works for you. Your caseworker will make every effort to be sure that your visits are frequent and take place in a comfortable and safe environment for your child.

BE PRESENT. When you visit with your child focus only on your child. This time is best spent interacting with your child through play, sharing a meal, listening to music, or talking about their day.



BE HEARD. Make your identity and contact information known to the caseworker. There will be times that you are invited to join the agency in meetings to talk about progress in your case and discuss problems and identify solutions. This is your opportunity to share your opinion regarding your child's care and case. **Bring relatives or other important people to the table.** Ask questions to be clear about the decisions that are made and what is expected of you and by when. You also have an important role in the court process. By coming to court and having an active role in the hearings you can help your child and protect your rights.

BE ACTIVE. The agency will develop a case plan *with* you. This plan will outline services or tasks that you must complete to live with, or have more contact with your child and to have the case closed. Your input in case planning is very important. Once you are linked to services it is your responsibility to complete them and provide confirmation to the caseworker.

STAY INVOLVED. Respond to the caseworker and stay in touch! Things move quickly and we may have to contact you without much notice. **If any of your contact information changes, be sure to contact the caseworker right away with the new information.** It is your responsibility to update the caseworker regularly about your progress on your case plan services or if you encounter any barriers such as, transportation, child care, conflicts with your job, service not meeting your needs. Keep in regular contact with the caseworker so he/she knows you are interested and care about the well-being of your child.



Cuyahoga County Division of
Children and Family Services
3955 Euclid Avenue
Cleveland, Ohio 44115
www.cfs.cuyahogacounty.us

Main: 216-431-4500

Hotline: 216-696-KIDS (5437)

Customer Relations: 216-432-CARE (2273)

Child Protection Specialist:

Phone No: _____

Supervisor: _____

Phone No: _____

Please visit http://site.americanhumane.org/fatherhooddocs/father_guide.pdf for more information.