



PARENT HANDBOOK

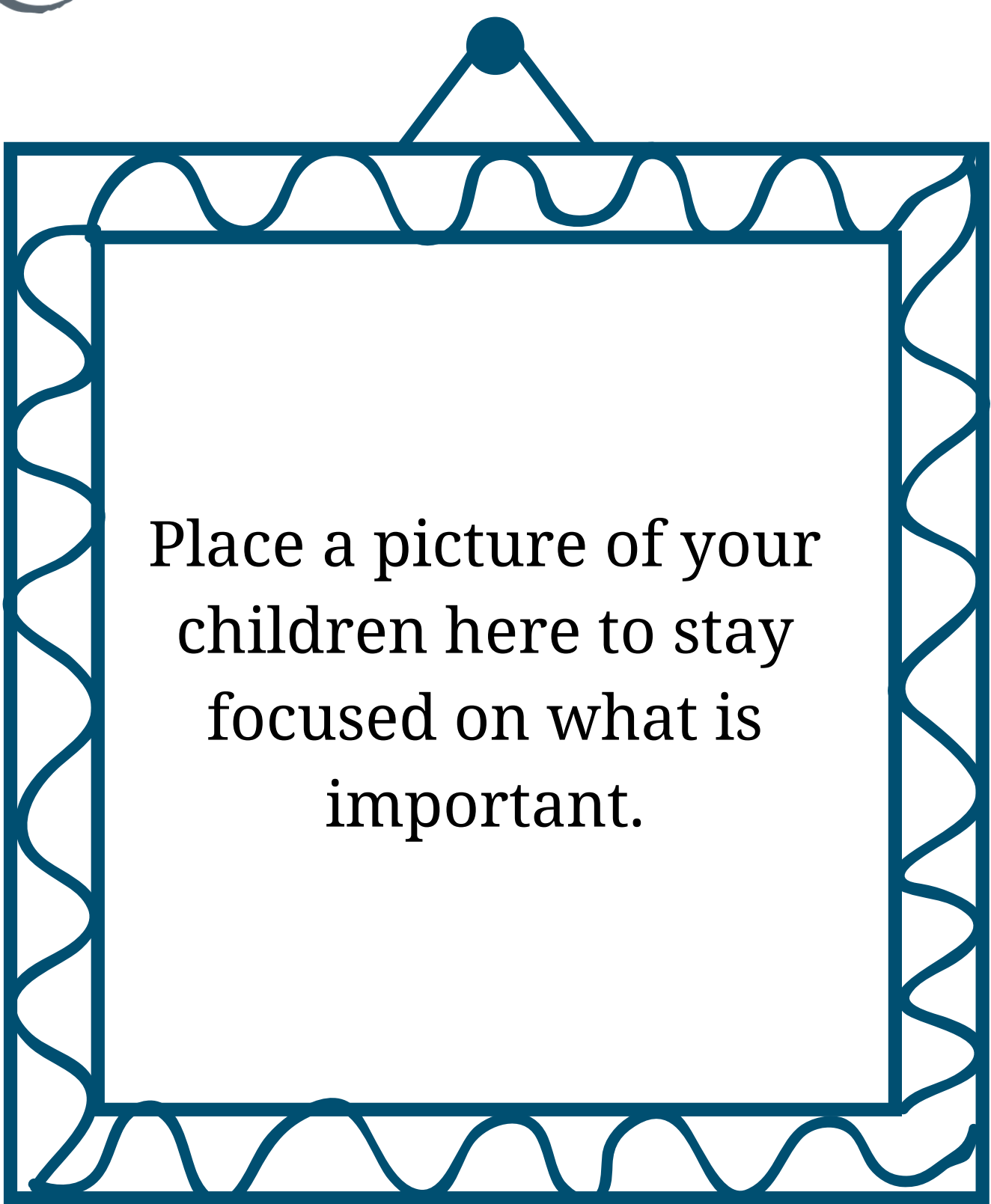
NAVIGATING THE SYSTEM
ONE DAY AT A TIME



ssyaf.org

(916) 344-0199

8912 Volunteer Lane, Sacramento, CA 95826



Place a picture of your
children here to stay
focused on what is
important.

Introduction:

If you are reading this then you are most likely involved with the child welfare system. You may feel like someone else is controlling your life, so I am glad that you are reading this guide. I hope that it better helps you understand what it is you can do to empower yourself to reach a positive solution for your family.

This binder has been assembled for you by your Parent Partner. It is a guidebook to the journey you will be taking as you navigate the Child Welfare System and work to regain custody of your children. It is also a place to record and track your journey.

We hope you will take the time to read what is in the book and to fill out those pages where space has been left for details about your specific case. Then, bring the binder with you to any meetings or court appearances. It will help keep you organized and focused on your journey.

Parent Partner Info:

Your Parent Partner is: _____

Your Parent Partner's contact info: _____

Parent Partners are parents like you whose children were removed from their care due to allegations of abuse or neglect. These are parents who worked diligently to regain custody of their children. They understand what you are going through and what it takes to prevail in the hardest of times.

Here is one Parent Partner's story:

The worst day of my life was when I found out I was a rotten Parent. I had to be because Child Protective Services (CPS) took my children away. They said I had a drug problem and neglected and endangered my children. Because I spent the next month in jail, I had a strong possibility of never seeing my children again. This made me feel as though I had died inside. I was angry with myself and felt guilt and shame. I love my children more than life itself but I did have a drug problem. I did neglect my children and endanger them. It wasn't that I was a bad person; I just made bad choices.

I decided I was going to do whatever it took to get my children back. But because of my rocky start, it took me a little longer to get started on my reunification plan. My children were removed and placed in foster care until their adult sister could complete the RFA process. Not only was I navigating the child welfare system but probation, and attending intensive outpatient treatment program. I followed recommendations from my social worker and team to be successful. My children were returned 7 months after they were removed and placed in Family maintenance. My case was successful closed 8 months later.

Since the day my children were taken away, I have made a lot of changes in my life. I no longer use drugs. I no longer neglect my children and I am a good Parent. You see, I've learned that what we do is not always what we are. And when we know better, we can do better.

Things You Should Know:

Organize:

- Keep important papers concerning your case in this binder or in a separate folder or briefcase.
- Keep a phone log, an event log, and a journal so you can document everything. Bring these with you whenever you meet with any professional involved in your case.

You and your child:

- Always keep your child's best interest at heart, and remember to look at this situation from your child's point of view.
- Let your child know that it is okay to like his or her foster family.
- Stay active and involved in your child's life. Remind your child that this situation is not his or her fault.
- Complete and comply with any court-ordered services that will either keep your child safely in your home or return them to you.
- Keep records of all information about your child.

You and the Resource parent:

- It is helpful to your child if you and your child's resource parents build a working relationship based on mutual respect.
- Let your social worker know you would like to meet the resource parent if possible.
- Tell resource parents about your child's likes and dislikes, eating habits, and any cultural, religious, health or special needs your child may have.
- Ask if maybe the Resource parent can facilitate the visitations between you and your child.
- Talk about ways you can be more involved with your child's life. For example, you might arrange with the resource parents to go with them to a doctor's appointment, or a parent/teacher conference.
- If you have any concerns about the resource home in which your child is placed, speak with your caseworker.

Things You Should Know:

Visitation:

- Always call your social worker to schedule visits. This shows you are involved.
- Visit as regularly as possible and arrive on time.
- Keep records of all visits, even cancelled visits.
- If you cannot attend a visit, cancel in advance. Failure to show or repeated tardiness will be seen unfavorably by the courts. Even more importantly, it disappoints your child.
- If you are unable to pay for transportation to visits, talk to your caseworker about funds for travel.
- Think of an activity to do with your child during the visit, such as a game, project, or book.
- Even though it may be difficult, remain calm during visits. You don't want to cause your child any unwanted stress.
- Encourage your child while in foster care and tell them that you are doing everything in your power to have them return safely home.

Meetings:

- Present yourself in an appropriate, polite manner at court and all meetings. Remain calm, and dress appropriately.
- Come to meetings prepared by knowing ahead of time what the meeting is about. Ask questions, provide information, and take notes.
- Think about your goal for the meeting. Write down what you want to say and cover during the meeting.
- Never leave a meeting without understanding what the focus of the meeting was. Find out about what rules or regulations might affect you.
- When you leave a meeting, make sure you have the names and phone numbers of all the people you can contact with questions or concerns.

Things You Should Know:

Advocacy tips:

- Know your strengths as well as your limitations. Let others know what you might need help with.
- Participate in the development of the service plan for you and your child.
- Respond promptly to telephone calls from all involved in your case.
- Notify your social worker about any changes in your life, such as address, telephone number, people you are living with.
- Request medical, psychological, and educational updates concerning your child. Ask to attend scheduled medical appointments and school conferences.
- If you don't agree with your petition, discuss it with your attorney.
- Review all court reports in advance. Know that you have the right to speak to your attorney at anytime within normal business hours.
- Work to create a safe environment to which your child can return.
- Accept the responsibility that brought your family to CPS and use all the resources offered along with your own family strengths to correct the situation.

“Though no one can go back and make a brand new start, anyone can start from now and make a brand new ending.”

~Author Unknown

Time to Think:

Are you:

- At the crossroads, needing to make a decision...

Ask yourself, where do I go from here?

- In the wilderness, a strange place, a new uncomfortable place...

Ask yourself, how did I get here?

- Lost in the valley of depression and stress...

Ask yourself, am I tired of being here?

- In a new place, developing a new attitude, grateful, at peace, working on new goals?

Give thanks for being where you are at this moment.

Use the uncertainty of life as a constant reminder to be grateful.

Journal:

Date: _____

This is where I am today...



Journal:

Date: _____

This is where I am today...

This image shows a blank sheet of white paper with horizontal black ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.



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Date: _____

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Journal:

Date: _____

This is where I am today...

[illegible]



Journal:

Date: _____

This is where I am today...

[illegible]



Journal:

Date: _____

This is where I am today...

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Journal:

Date: _____

This is where I am today...

[illegible]

Words for life:

When you say, "it's impossible" . . . Clorita Kent says,

"Love the moment. Flowers grow out of dark moments. Therefore, each moment is vital. It affects the whole. Life is a succession of such moments and to live each, is to succeed."

When you say, "I'm too tired" . . . Maya Lin says,

"To fly, we have to have resistance."

When you say, "Nobody really loves me." . . . C.S. Lewis says,

"Why love if losing hurts so much? We love to know that we are not alone."

When you say, "I can't go on" . . . Marian Wright Edelman says,

"You're not obligated to win. You're obligated to keep trying to do the best you can every day."

When you say, "I can't figure things out" . . . Harriet Beecher Stowe says,

"Common sense is the knack of seeing things as they are, and doing things as they ought to be done."

When you say, "I can't do it" . . . Rollo May says,

"Commitment is healthiest when it is not without doubt but in spite of doubt."

When you say, "it's not worth it" . . . Mohandas Gandhi Says,

"The dignity of man requires obedience to a higher law, to the strength of the spirit."

When you say, "I can't forgive myself" . . . Helen Keller says,

"Character cannot be developed in ease and quiet. Only through experience of trial and suffering can the soul be strengthened, vision cleared, ambition inspired, and success achieved."

When you say, "I can't manage" . . . Stephen Covey says,

"Whatever is at the center of our life will be the source of our security, guidance, wisdom, and power."

When you say, "I'm afraid" . . . Rosa Parks says,

"I have learned over the years that when one's mind is made up, this diminishes fear; knowing what must be done does away with fear."



Stanford Sierra Youth & Families

An Attitude of Gratitude:

Our lives are not determined by what happens to us, but how we react to what happens; not to what life brings to us, but by the attitude we bring to life. A positive attitude causes a chain reaction of positive thoughts, events, and outcomes. It is a catalyst - a spark that creates extraordinary results.

Date: _____

Today I am grateful for:

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[illegible]

Juvenile Court:

This is different than criminal court.

Within 48 business hours or 2 business days of the time your child is placed into protective custody, a petition will be filed and a court hearing will follow to decide if your child should be returned to you.

Additional hearings will follow and it is very important that you attend all these hearings.

At the hearings:

- You have the right to be represented by an attorney. If you cannot afford one, the Court may appoint an attorney to represent you. You may also represent yourself in court.
- You do not have to testify against yourself.
- You or your attorney can ask questions of any witness against you, including people who wrote police reports and other reports filed with the court.
- You or your attorney can subpoena witnesses and make them come to court to testify.

The different types of court hearings include:

- Detention Hearing
- Jurisdictional Hearing
- Dispositional Hearing
- Status Review Hearing
- Permanency Planning/Review Hearing
- Hearing to Terminate Parental Rights ("26 Hearing")

Detention Hearing:

The Detention hearing is held after your child has been placed into protective custody or into foster care or when CPS wants to place your child out of your care. It must be held within 72 business hours of your child being removed from your home.

At this hearing, a legal document called a petition is given to the Judge or Commissioner. The petition gives the reasons your child could not safely remain in your home. You will be given a copy of this petition.

You will be meeting your Court Social Worker at this time. The Social Worker may be asking the judge to keep your child in foster care based on their investigation and information in the petition. If you disagree, you can ask the judge to release your child to you.

The judge will decide if your child can be returned to you. A Jurisdictional Hearing may then be set for your case. At this hearing, the judge may appoint an attorney to represent your child.

Your Detention Hearing is scheduled for: _____

Date & Time: _____

Site of hearing: _____

Location/transportation options to court:

Jurisdictional Hearing:

This is the hearing where the Judge or Commissioner determines if the allegations in the petition are true and if your child is so endangered that the court must act to keep your child safe. A court report is written that describes the evidence against you and what the witnesses would say about the issues stated in your petition.

The Judge or Commissioner will decide if the words in the petition are true. If it is decided that your child was abused or neglected based on the facts presented to the court, a Dispositional hearing date will be set.

Your Jurisdictional Hearing is scheduled for: _____

Date & Time: _____

Site of hearing: _____

Location/transportation options to court:

“Don't make excuses – make good.” ~ Elbert Hubbard

Dispositional Hearing:

The Dispositional Hearing occurs after the Court determines that your child is in danger without the Court's protection (this happens at the Jurisdictional Hearing). One outcome of the Dispositional Hearing is that the Court will decide the best place for your child to live while you work the necessary changes. Your child may remain with you or go into an out-of-home placement. Relatives and others who have a significant healthy relationship with your child are given priority. Make sure you give the social worker the names of relatives that would be an appropriate place for your child to stay. If other appropriate options are not available, your child may be placed in foster care which may be a foster family agency or a group home.

You will receive a Court report that outlines the Children and Family Services Agency's concerns and what you have done to address the issues and concerns. Additionally the court determines whether or not the agency made reasonable efforts to help you get your child back.

The other thing that happens during Disposition is that you and your social worker work together to develop a case plan for your family. This case plan will identify needed services and will help you make necessary life-style and behavioral changes. Additionally, the plan will offer services and supports that meet your child's need for permanency, safety, and well-being.

Your Dispositional Hearing is scheduled for: _____

Date & Time: _____

Site of hearing: _____

Location/transportation options to court:

Telephone Log:

Phone #:	_____	Who is this person?	_____
Phone #:	_____	Who is this person?	_____
Phone #:	_____	Who is this person?	_____
Phone #:	_____	Who is this person?	_____
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Phone #:	_____	Who is this person?	_____

**“Don't be discouraged. It's often the last key in the bunch that
opens the lock.” ~Author Unknown**

Event log:

Date: _____

Time: _____

Who did I speak with: _____

What happened:

Date: _____

Time: _____

Who did I speak with: _____

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“Though no one can go back and make a brand new start, anyone can start from now and make a brand new ending.” ~Author Unknown

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Calendar:

SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT

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Parents' Rights:

All parents have the right to:

- Question or challenge decisions made for them or their children, especially when they don't agree
- Recognize their right to due process and to have meetings and updates regarding their child
- Be treated with courtesy, consideration and respect
- Participate in the creation of their case plan to address the individual needs of their family
- Be given the same consideration and treatment regardless of race, color, national origin, disability, marital status or age
- Know that all human beings make mistakes
- Be forgiven, not judged
- Forgive themselves, learn from their mistakes, move on
- Be treated as an individual, not a stereotype
- Request services they and their children are eligible for

**When the world says, "Give up."
Hope whispers, "Try it one more time."
~Author Unknown**

Parents' Responsibilities:

- Always keep your child's best interest at heart and remember to look at this situation from your child's perspective.
- Work to create a safe home environment to which your child can return.
- Share your cultural, religious, health or special needs your child may have with the agency and/or foster parent.
- Request medical, psychological and educational updates on your child
- Visit and contact your child consistently and frequently (or as determined by the court).
- Stay active and involved in your child's life.
- Notify social workers of any changes in your life, such as address, telephone number or significant people in your life.
- If your child has run away from foster care and shows up at your home, you must notify the agency immediately.
- If your child has been arrested, you must notify the agency as soon as possible.
- Keep your appointments with your social worker, service providers and court.
- Attend all regularly scheduled meetings and participate in the development of the service plan for you and your child.
- Respond promptly to contacts such as letters and phone calls from your social worker.

Conflict with an Adult Attitude:

- Calm down -

Breathe slowly and deeply, know that this moment will not last forever

- Speak calmly -

When you yell, people stop hearing you

- Think about what you really need -

Don't let anger distract you from what you came to accomplish

- Bring a neutral third party to the conversation

- Acknowledge and apologize for any mistakes you have made

- Think about where the other person is coming from and what they are feeling

- Focus on positive goals and give solutions to how the problem may be resolved

- Take responsibility for coming up with specific things that both, you and the other person, can do to help the conflict.

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- Think about where the other person is coming from and what they are feeling
- Focus on positive goals and give solutions to how the problem may be resolved
- Take responsibility for coming up with specific things that both, you and the other person, can do to help the conflict.

Resolving Concerns- A Step by Step Process

- Talk to your Parent Partner to discuss your concerns.
- Make sure you know how to contact your child's social worker, their supervisor and their manager.

Social Worker Phone: _____

Social Worker's Supervisor Phone: _____

Social Worker's Manager Phone: _____

- Allow people time to get back to you. Department policy is to get back to you as soon as possible, but not longer than two business days.
- Discuss concerns with your attorney

One Final Thought:

Dear Parent:

There is nothing magic or impossible about getting your child returned to your care. It may take sacrifice and hard work, but it is possible. I know because I did it, and you can too.

Parent Partners are here to help you every step of the way: in court, at CFT Meetings, Ice Breakers, and more. We believe in families, and in families' ability to draw on their own resources and solve many of their own problems.

If you would like someone to talk to, to give you support, and to tell you about resources, just give us a call.

We believe in families and we believe in you!!

Sincerely,
Parent Partner