

Shelter Care Hearing Information Sheet



You completed a Shelter Care hearing today.

What does that mean?

The required Shelter Care hearing took place today. This hearing must happen within 48 hours (excluding weekends and holidays) after your children are removed from your home. **A Shelter Care hearing answers three questions:**

- Is there evidence that suggests the suspected abuse or neglect happened?
- Was there an emergency reason to take protective custody of the children?
- Were other options explored to avoid the children having to be removed from your care?

What will happen now?

After the Shelter Care Hearing, a caseworker will be assigned from the Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) or a social service agency.

A caseworker will reach out to you to begin the process of figuring out what services will be required to make progress toward having your children returned to you. **Please stay in contact with the DCFS investigator until your caseworker is assigned.**

It is very important that you respond to all communication from caseworkers. Failure to respond to communications (texts, e-mails and phone calls) will affect the ability to set up services and delay progress toward your children returning to your care.

The caseworker will start the process of creating an Integrated Assessment (IA). This is a history about each parent that is created to determine what services are necessary to make progress toward having your children returned to you. Participating in this process is very important in moving the case forward.

You will have Court dates in the future. It is important to make every effort to attend Court. You should appear in court in person unless given permission by the judge to attend virtually or be excused.

Definitions of common words you may hear during court:

Adjudication: A hearing to determine if the children are neglected, abused or dependent minors.

Disposition: A hearing to determine if a parent is fit, willing and able to properly parent a child.

- Being **fit** means you have the ability to complete the services you have been ordered to complete.
- Being **able** means you have the skills to care for and appropriately discipline your children.
- Being **willing** means you are motivated to have your children returned to your care.

A parent is assumed to be fit, able, and willing. The State's Attorney's Office has the responsibility to prove that you are not fit, able, or willing. Your income level or a lack of access to finances can not be used as a reason to determine a parent is unfit.

Permanency Reviews: A hearing to determine if you have made *reasonable efforts* and *reasonable progress* toward achieving fitness. The Court will also review the efforts of DCFS, if your service plan meets the needs of your family, and the placement of your children. During this process, the Court will review the goals set for each child. If you have questions about what reasonable efforts or progress means, please speak with your attorney.

Reviews: When your children are in your care, you may have court dates for reviews. A **review** is a court proceeding that allows the court to check in on progress made and the status of services recommended.

If you have hired or have been appointed an attorney, communicate with that attorney. If you have any questions speak to your caseworker and attorney.

Public Defenders Office: Winnebago County: 815-319-4900 / Boone County : 815-547-5400

Information about the people assigned to your case:

DCFS Investigator, Name and Contact Information:

Caseworker, Name, Agency, and Contact Information:

Attorney, Name and Contact Information:

Guardian ad Litem (GAL), Name:



17TH JUDICIAL CIRCUIT COURT
WINNEBAGO COUNTY and BOONE COUNTY
State of Illinois