



Adams County Children and Youth Services

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Adams County Children and Youth Services Guide

The Adams County Children and Youth Services Mission is to provide a work environment that is educational, responsive, efficient, and safe for our staff, so we can deliver high quality services to ensure that each child and youth in Adams County has a safe and permanent family.

Your Intake Caseworker is _____

Your Intake Caseworker's Supervisor is _____

Your Family Support Caseworker is _____

Your Family Support Caseworker's Supervisor is _____

Your Independent Living Caseworker is _____

Your Independent Living Caseworker's Supervisor is _____

If you call before or after regular business hours with an emergency, you will reach an answering machine. If it is a life-threatening emergency, you should call 911. Otherwise, the message will direct you to contact County Control at 717-334-8101 or 911. Briefly explain your emergency to County Control and they will contact the After-Hours caseworker who will call you back and listen to your concerns. Someone is always available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, even on holidays. For non-emergency calls, before/after hours, you will be able to leave a message in a general voicemail box.

If you would choose to appeal a case decision, a letter to Bureau of Hearings and Appeals needs to be sent to PO Box 2675, Harrisburg, PA 17105.

This guide was developed for those being served by Adams County Children and Youth Services (ACCYS). This guide gives you information about ACCYS, how we can work together, and what may happen while you and your family are working with ACCYS. This guide also gives you information about your rights and responsibilities and your child's rights and responsibilities. It also explains ACCYS' and the legal system's rights and responsibilities.

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Not everything in this book will apply to you; however, reading the whole booklet may help you better understand ACCYS. For example, this book includes information about placement but not every child that is involved with ACCYS is in placement. We work with you to keep your children safely at home.

At times, you may be asked questions that are personal, and you may not want to answer them. If you are uncomfortable with the questions, this guide may help you understand the need for the caseworker to ask for personal information. Please remember that we only ask these questions to gather as much information as we can to help you and your family. If you still have questions or concerns, talk to your caseworker.

Your caseworker is the first person to call with questions. His or her supervisor may also be able to help. Their names and phone numbers should be written on the first page of this guide. For legal advice, you should contact an attorney.

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Acronyms:

- **ACACC** – Adams County Adult Correctional Complex
- **ACCYS** – Adams County Children & Youth Services
- **ADA**-Assistant District Attorney
- **AH**-After Hours
- **AP** – Alleged Perpetrator
- **ASFA** – Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997
- **BHA** – Bureau of Hearings and Appeals
- **CAC** – Children’s Advocacy Center
- **CAO** – County Assistance Office
- **CPP** – Child Permanency Plan
- **CPS** – Child Protective Services
- **CPSL** – Child Protective Services Law
- **CWS**-Casework Supervisor
- **CW**-Caseworker
- **DA** – District Attorney
- **D&A**-Drugs and Alcohol
- **DHS** – Department of Human Services
- **DRO** – Domestic Relations Office
- **EI** – Early Intervention
- **FE** – Family Engagement
- **FF** – Family Finding
- **FSP** – Family Service Plan
- **FGDM**- Family Group Decision Making
- **FTM**- Family Team Meeting
- **FFT**-Functional Family Therapy
- **GPS** – General Protective Services
- **GAL**-Guardian Ad Litem
- **HIPPA** – Health Insurance Portability and Privacy Act
- **ICPC** – Interstate Compact on the Placement of Children
- **IEP** – Individualized Education Plan
- **IL** – Independent Living
- **JPO** – Juvenile Probation Officer/Office
- **MA** – Medical Assistance
- **MDIT** – Multi Disciplinary Investigative Team
- **MH/IDD**-Mental Health and Intellectual developmental disabilities
- **MST**-Multisystemic Therapy
- **OCYF** – Office of Children, Youth & Families
- **PD** – Public Defender
- **PLC** – Permanent Legal Custodianship
- **RASE**-Recovery Advocacy Service Empowerment
- **RPP/BB**-Resource Parent Program/Building Bridges
- **RTF** – Residential Treatment Facility
- **SPLC** – Subsidized, Permanent, Legal Custodianship
- **TPR** – Termination of Parental Rights

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What is ACCYS and why are they involved with my family?

ACCYS is the local public child protective services (CPS) agency. It is mandated by federal and state laws to protect children from child abuse and neglect, to preserve families, and to seek permanent families for children where they can be safe and protected if they cannot remain safe at home.

ACCYS responds to reports about possible harm to children and requests for help to reduce risk of potential harm. Many services of the Agency are provided to parents who ask for assistance with caring for their children. Other services may be provided as ordered by the court or required by law. When ACCYS receives a report of harm to a child or children, the Agency gathers as much information as possible. However, the Agency must act quickly when it appears that a child is at risk of injury or has a current injury.

Under the Child Protective Services Law (CPSL) and the Juvenile Act, ACCYS must protect children and provide services to the family if:

- Children have been injured, abused, or mistreated by their parents or caretakers.
- Children are not being adequately cared for to include being left alone or with someone unable to care for them.
- Parents are unable or unwilling to care for children and no other responsible adult is available.

ACCYS can also provide services to the family if parents have concerns regarding their ability to care for or manage their children, or if there are concerns regarding their children's functioning/behaviors.

Child abuse and neglect are serious matters. ACCYS has a legal responsibility to provide protection for your child if an investigation determines that your child has been abused or neglected. You must be able to provide a safe home for your children. To do this, you may have to make changes in your life. If abuse or neglect is determined to have happened, you may be asked to modify the way you care for your child.

Caseworkers understand that family, financial, or personal problems are not easy to solve. They are aware of a number of community resources that can help you. You know others, family, friends, and community resources. Together, you may be able to do more to assist and support your family. Caseworkers understand that it may upset you to have a stranger give you advice. You may disagree with your caseworker at times but talking helps. It can uncover possible causes related to the concerns and lead to possible solutions.

Now that I am involved with Adams County Children & Youth Services, what should I do?

You should:

- Communicate with your caseworker and other team members to work together to help your family.

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- Make sure you understand the goals in your case plan that you must meet in order to reunify with your child;
- Talk with your caseworker often about your progress in meeting the goals of your case plan;
- Tell your caseworker if you do not understand something and ask for it to be explained in a different way;
- Tell your caseworker if you need help getting access to the services needed to work on your case plan;
- Share information about your child to your caseworker and team members;
- Stay involved with your child(ren)'s school, medical providers, and other professionals working with them;
- If involved with court, meet with your attorney regularly to share information about your case and ensure this information gets shared with the Juvenile Court;
- Attend all Juvenile Court hearings;
- Ask family members and other supports who care about you and your child to help, to attend family meetings.

Family Engagement Meetings

One of the ways that we can assist your family in identifying your family strengths is through Family Engagement (FE) Meetings. The Agency offers a variety of meetings such as Crisis Response, Rapid Response, Family Team Meeting, Family Group Decision Making and follow ups. These meetings are where families, their supports and providers make plans for the safety and well-being of the child(ren). With the help of a Family Engagement Coordinator, your family meets with your supports in a FE meeting to create a plan for the best interest of your children.

Family Engagement empowers your family to invest in your own strengths and energy to create a workable plan rather than professionals setting up a plan.

As you participate in FE Meetings you will be asked to meet with the FE Coordinator to make a list of relatives and additional supports to invite. Family meetings are utilized to identify strengths/challenges and develop tasks to better achieve goals in a timely manner. These meetings can occur virtually or in person.

Locations for family meetings are typically neutral locations in the community like churches, libraries, or parks. Understanding that distance may be a factor, the agency or its provider will try to accommodate each participant. It is important to have a safe and comfortable environment, to include allowing the family to decide who can participate in their meeting.

At the FE meeting, a FE meeting facilitator will welcome everyone and remind them of the guidelines and purpose of the conference. Food and beverages may be provided as a courtesy to all participants. Your Agency caseworker will also participate in the conference to explain the Agency's reason for involvement with

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the family.

After identifying strengths and challenges, your family and supports will be asked to meet alone to create a plan which is referred to as Family Private Time. At this time, all providers, including the caseworker and facilitator will leave the room. When your family has created a plan that is agreeable to everyone, your caseworker, the facilitator, and all providers will re-enter the room. You will then be asked to have someone from your family present your plan to your caseworker for approval.

A follow up meeting will be scheduled at the end of each meeting in order to review how the plan is progressing, if it is working for the family, or if it needs any changes. Follow up meetings are scheduled every 30 days for the first 3 meetings and then up to every 90 days until case closure.

Family Finding

Family Finding is required by state law and is a process that ACCYS uses to find your family members and get them involved with helping your family throughout the case. Family Finding is an ongoing process that begins when your family is accepted for services. It is important for your family to remain connected with your child, so he/she does not feel alone. Family participation is essential in planning for your child's future.

Federal and state law also requires that when a child enters foster care, the Agency must notify relatives, via a Fostering Connection letter, who may be willing to care for the child within 30 days of the child's removal. This notification provides family members with an opportunity to be a support for your child and remain connected with him/her. ACCYS also gives them information on how to become a kinship resource for your child.

When a child enters foster care, the Agency runs a search through a database called Accurint. This compiles a list of names that may be connected to you as a parent. You will be asked by your caseworker to confirm and give the names and addresses of all other family members. When you are asked information about your child's family members and you are not sure who they are or where they live, efforts will be made by the Agency and the court to find this information and contact those relatives.

Children may experience less trauma and loss when they are placed with family members or people that they already know. When families are notified, they are also given information on how to contact your caseworker. Please encourage your family and supports to contact your caseworker.

Referral Process and Intake

Anyone can call ACCYS. A person that calls with a concern is called a referral source. By law, the name of the referral source must remain confidential. Your caseworker cannot reveal the name of the referral source. When a referral source calls ACCYS, a screener will speak to them. If a report needs to be made, the screener will direct them to call PA Childline who will take the report and refer to the appropriate entity as not all concerns or

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referrals are sent to the local children and youth agency.

Child abuse and neglect are serious matters. If ACCYS receives a report of suspected abuse or neglect, a caseworker will meet with you and your family to assess or investigate that report to determine what may have happened. If an investigation/assessment shows that your child has been abused or neglected, ACCYS has a legal responsibility to provide protection for your child. You must be able to provide a home where your child is free from harm.

The main person you will work with from ACCYS is your caseworker. ACCYS caseworkers are trained to assist families. They work with many families. You will work as a partner with your caseworker. You may also work with individuals from other agencies. ACCYS helps coordinate services for your family by asking other agencies to work with you to help you achieve your goals. Your caseworker will help monitor this progress.

ACCYS is required by law to investigate all reports of abuse or neglect. ACCYS must provide prevention services that will keep families together whenever possible. The Agency will encourage a family plan or a safety plan with your supports if needed. The Juvenile Court will only remove a child from the child's home to protect the child's safety or health. If ACCYS thinks your child cannot safely remain with you, the Agency must tell the Juvenile Court Judge and get an emergency order allowing them to remove your child from your home. In some situations, ACCYS may agree to an alternative arrangement, made by you, for the care of your child without involving the Juvenile Court.

CPS or GPS

Some reports with concerns about the safety and well-being of a child fall into a category of General Protective Services. Other reports are in the category of Child Protective Services. The investigation/ assessment period for a report takes between 30-60 days. At the end of the investigation period, your caseworker will determine if the report meets certain guidelines according to the laws.

A General Protective Services (GPS) report will be either Validated or Invalidated.

A Child Protective Services (CPS) report will be Indicated, Unfounded or Founded.

An Indicated report means ACCYS determined there was abuse or neglect according to the law. A Validated report means the concerns presented to the Agency exist and prevention services may or may not be put in place to address these concerns. If you are identified as the perpetrator of an indicated report, you have the right to appeal to BHA.

A Founded report means that a Court determined the abuse or neglect did occur.

An Unfounded or Invalid report does not necessarily mean the incident did not happen. It might mean the incident did not meet the guidelines for abuse/neglect as defined in the Child Protective Services Law.

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Your caseworker will discuss and explain the determination with you. If you have any questions, be sure to ask your caseworker.

Some reports to ACCYS are investigated with the help of the Children's Advocacy Center (CAC). This is a child/family friendly center with a purpose of limiting the trauma of the investigation for the child and family.

Multidisciplinary Investigative Team

A team of professionals work together and are known as the Adams County Multidisciplinary Investigative Team (MDIT). MDIT members are professionals from Children and Youth Services, the Children's Advocacy Center, local and state law enforcement agencies, the Adams County District Attorney's Office, Adams County Victim Witness Assistance Program and the mental health and medical community.

These professionals work together as a team to conduct interviews, investigate, and make collaborative decisions on cases of suspected child abuse. Medical, mental health and advocacy services are also coordinated to prevent duplication of these services.

Family Support Services & the FAMILY SERVICE PLAN (FSP)

If it is determined while working with you that more assistance is needed, your family will be accepted for ongoing services; meaning a formal case will be opened with ACCYS. Family members and the caseworker will work together to discuss your needs and goals and write a plan. This plan is called the Family Service Plan (FSP). The FSP is required by law. The purpose of the plan is to identify goals that will address the needs and concerns in your family and will identify who is responsible for identified tasks. You should meet with the ACCYS caseworker to help create your plan. These areas of need are based on you and your caseworker's assessment of your child's safety and risk of harm to your child. Your FSP is your key to improving your situation, as well as successful closure of your case.

The first meeting between you and the ACCYS caseworker to discuss the FSP should happen within 30 days of your case being accepted for service. The ACCYS caseworker or other family engagement provider will schedule a date, time, and place that works with your schedule. During these meetings, you will talk about the strengths and needs of your family. You may feel everyone is asking you a lot of questions, but the answers to these questions will help the caseworker understand how to assist in stabilizing your family, so no further Agency involvement is needed. You will also have the opportunity to invite people in your life that are supportive of helping you with these goals.

Once you set goals, the caseworker will generate the actual FSP. The caseworker will review the plan with you, and you will be asked to sign it. When you sign the plan, it means that you agree with it. If you do not agree with it, you do not have to sign it, but you must tell your caseworker in writing why you disagree. You will receive a copy of your FSP to keep. Remember to speak often to your caseworker about your progress on goals and remember to tell your caseworker about any changes in your life. When you have life changes, such as moving or starting a new job, the FSP will need to be updated with this new information. You and your caseworker will review your goals every time you meet to assess your progress and what additional help you may need to move forward.

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The FSP needs to be renewed every 6 months (and more often if necessary). This will coincide with Family Engagement Meetings. The FSP is about you, your family, and your children. Regularly and openly discuss the FSP with your caseworker, and make sure the services are helpful to you and that you know what you need to accomplish.

If your FSP is not working for you, and/or you are having trouble getting the services you need, ask for a meeting with your caseworker. The purpose of the meeting should be to see how your child is doing and to follow up on the work you have done to reach the goals of the FSP. The ACCYS caseworker can update the FSP at any time to show the changing needs of your family. The FSP may also include services for your children, such as therapy, educational services, or medical services. The specific service providers should be listed within the FSP as well.

Unsafe Conditions and Court Involvement

If ACCYS determines your home to be an unsafe environment for the child to reside in, your caseworker will explain the reasons why a change in living arrangements is required. Your caseworker will also work with you to plan for safety and possibly identify alternative living arrangements without having to get the Juvenile Court involved. This may require asking you questions about family members or friends that your child could possibly stay with.

If you are able to identify an appropriate resource for your child, involvement with the Juvenile Court may be avoided.

If you are unable to provide an appropriate resource for your child to stay with when safety concerns are present, ACCYS may be required to seek removal of your child through an emergency protective custody order by the Juvenile Court Judge. If your child is removed from your home, the next thing you will need to do is go to an Emergency Shelter Care Hearing. This hearing must be held within 72 hours (3 days) of the issuing of the emergency protective custody order. At this hearing, the Juvenile Court will decide whether your child needs to remain in placement.

If ACCYS took custody of your child, ACCYS will work with you to provide a safe home and attempt to bring your family back together again.

If the Juvenile Court decides your child does not need to remain in placement the Juvenile Court will allow your child to return home. However, an ACCYS caseworker may still need to be involved with your family. If the Juvenile Court decides your child must remain in placement, the Agency will work with you to resolve the concerns.

Not all families are involved with the Juvenile Court. If you are scheduled for court, your child may have been adjudicated dependent. When you have court hearings, under the Juvenile Act, the court will appoint an attorney to you. However, you do have the right to retain your own private counsel at your own expense. You can talk to your attorney before every court hearing. You should keep all legal papers and read over them with

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your attorney. If your case is accepted for in-home services or your child is in placement (not living in your home), your case will be transferred from the Intake Unit to the Family Support Unit.

You will receive a new caseworker who will work with you to develop a Family Service plan to address identified concerns and keep your child at home or a Child Permanency plan to help you work toward your child returning home. Your Family Support Caseworker will support you in reaching your Family Service Plan and/or Child Permanency Plan goals.

ADJUDICATION of DEPENDENCY

If your child is adjudicated dependent, it means that there will be Juvenile Court oversight for your child. The Juvenile Court will make all final decisions regarding your child's well-being. This may include educational decisions, what services they may need and where they will live. An Adjudication Hearing is a hearing where the Juvenile Court decides whether or not your child is dependent based on clear and convincing evidence and information received by the Agency and the family. Some children who are adjudicated dependent are able to remain safely in their home with their family. Others are placed out of their home with a family member, or a caregiver with a significant relationship with you or your child. This home must be approved by ACCYS. This is called kinship care. Some children are placed in a foster home, shelter, group home, or residential treatment facility (RTF), depending on their needs. The Juvenile Court monitors compliance with court orders.

All cases are reviewed in court generally every three months, but no less than 6 months. This helps the Juvenile Court make sure that you, other family members, the Agency, the foster family, and the service providers are all doing their part to make sure that your child achieves permanency as quickly as possible. You have a right to be present and represented by an attorney in all court hearings.

Under federal and state law, once a child is in out-of-home placement for 15 of the last 22 months, the Agency must file for termination of parental rights unless the Juvenile Court determines that the child is being cared for by a relative best suited to the welfare of the child, the Agency has documented a compelling reason why filing for termination of parental rights would not serve the needs and welfare of the child or the child's family has not been provided with necessary services to achieve reunification.

During the review hearings before the Juvenile Court, you, your caseworker, and the Juvenile Court Judge will be talking about two permanency goals for your child, from the moment he/she is in placement. This is called concurrent planning. It means that while everyone is working toward the primary goal of reunification (having your child return to your custody and living in your home), everyone is also working on a back-up plan for your child. If you do not make significant progress toward your service plan goals within a reasonable time frame, the Agency will ask the Juvenile Court to change the goal to the back-up (concurrent) plan, which could include adoption, in order to achieve a permanent home for your child.

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Caseworkers will talk with you regularly about your rights, responsibilities, expectations, and the effects that living in foster care may have on your child. Here are some examples of each of these:

- **Rights:** You have the right to be present in all Juvenile Court hearings and you have the right to be represented by an attorney. You have the right to visit your child (unless the Juvenile Court has decided not to allow visits). You have the right to be kept informed about how your child is doing in foster care. Unless the Court determines otherwise, you have the right to make educational and medical decisions for your child.
- **Responsibilities:** You have the responsibility to follow the directives of the Juvenile Court and participate in services. You have the responsibility to visit your child while they are in foster care. You have the responsibility to know what your case plan requires of you and to take the steps you need to meet the goals of your case plan.
- **Expectations:** You are expected to work with your caseworker and service providers to make progress towards the goals of your case plan so you can provide a safe home for your child. You are expected to help locate other family members who may be willing to be permanent caretakers for your child and to participate in meetings to help decide the best plan and placement for your child.
- **The Effects of Placement on Children:** For a child, living in foster care means being separated from their family and not being sure about whether or not they will go home. This can create stress for the child and the child may become scared, angry, sad, and frustrated. Sometimes children will have a hard time behaving in school and in their foster home because of these feelings.

THE CHILD PERMANENCY PLAN (CPP)

If your child is in an out-of-home placement, a Child Permanency Plan (CPP) will be developed; this is very similar to the FSP.

Your CPP goals must be completed within a short time. If the Juvenile Court finds that you are not making enough progress, your child might not be returned home. This is why your CPP is so important.

The CPP tells you what you need to do to have your child returned to your care. The first meeting between you and the ACCYS caseworker to discuss the CPP should happen within 30 days after the removal of your child. With your cooperation, the ACCYS caseworker or a family engagement provider will establish the date, time, and place to discuss the goals to address the reasons why your child was removed from your home. Goals and objectives will be created, with your input, to help address the identified concerns, and the services that can assist you in making necessary improvements. The CPP shares important information about where your child is living and going to school. It also references religious beliefs and concerns that you may

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have for your child continuing his/her religious customs while in placement. It lists your child's medical providers and also lists your plan for visiting with your child.

You will see on the CPP that it will list two goals for your family. The first is your primary goal. Since your child is not living with you, this goal is usually Reunification. This means that you are working to have your child living with you again. The second goal is the Concurrent Goal. The Concurrent Goal is the back-up plan. If the Juvenile Court determines that you have not made significant progress toward your goals, in a timely manner, and your child can not be returned to your home, the concurrent plan may become the primary goal.

After helping to create the CPP, the caseworker will generate the actual plan and review it with you. If you agree with the CPP, you will be asked to sign it; your signature indicates that you agree with the plan. If you do not agree with it, you do not need to sign it; however, you are required to explain, in writing, why you do not agree. The caseworker will give you a copy of your CPP.

Remember there is a time limit for returning a child home. You should start working on your CPP goals right away. If you feel your that ACCYS caseworker is not helping you achieve your CPP goals, you should discuss your concerns with your attorney.

WHEN YOUR CHILD IS IN PLACEMENT

When your child is in an out-of-home placement, it is important that you help make sure that your child's needs are being met. We encourage you to be part of planning for your child as well as keeping an open dialogue with your child's substitute caregiver(s).

Your caseworker and the people caring for your child need to know information about your child to provide appropriate care. Tell them about allergies, medical care and medicines, and other health needs. Offer other important information such as a baby's routine, bedtime, fears or concerns of older children, and school information. The caseworker will work with you and others to make sure that your child's social, emotional, developmental, and health needs are met. Be sure to tell your child's caseworker of any regularly scheduled appointments. While your child may not be able to keep those appointments, alternate necessary care should be made available. One way to stay connected is to attend your child's medical and school appointments, as well as other events in your child's life. You may continue to attend meetings at your child's school about his or her education. You may also attend after school activities or sporting events that your child may be involved in. You should talk to your caseworker and your child's foster/kinship caregiver about these events.

Children experience many different losses and emotions when they are not living in their home. They miss their parents and other family members and may not understand why they are not living at home. Resource care can be confusing for children. Your children may form a bond with their caregivers. The best way you can help your child with their confusion and feelings of loss is to have a positive relationship with your child's foster/kinship caregiver while you are working to have your child return home. Your child's caregivers are

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also encouraged to have a positive relationship with you and keep you and your child connected.

Your caseworker will also need to ask you questions about your child's medical insurance and financial situation. When your child is in the legal custody of ACCYS, ACCYS must ensure that your child is covered by health insurance. ACCYS is also required to file with Domestic Relations for child support. Their hearings determine the parents' ability to pay support to help with the costs of placement. You will receive a court order telling you the date and time of the Domestic Relations hearing. You must attend. You may be represented by your attorney. For more information, call or visit the Adams County Domestic Relations Office or speak with your attorney.

As soon as your child enters out-of-home care, plans are developed with you and all involved parties, to provide a safe and permanent home for your child. Whenever possible, your child's permanent home should be with you. The law says that you must show progress toward the goals established for you to have your child come home within a reasonable amount of time, or another permanent arrangement will be sought. Children who are in out-of-home care are meant to be there only temporarily, while each person makes changes to alleviate the situation that caused the out-of-home placement to occur.

VISITING YOUR CHILD WHO IS LIVING AWAY FROM HOME

If your child is not living with you, you should visit with your child. These visits are very important for your child. Regular visits will help you and your child keep family ties. Cards, letters, and gifts are nice ways of staying connected to your child, but seeing you is better. **Regular contact with family is important. Visits help children know that you care.**

Visits are an important part of the CPP. You may visit at least every other week by regulation unless the Juvenile Court has ordered otherwise. The Agency will make efforts to support weekly visitation. This visit must be in a place that is safe for the child. That may mean the Agency, a visiting site in the community, a foster home, or your own home. Sometimes a person has to be in all the visits with you and your child. It is hard to visit your child and leave. Your job as a parent sometimes makes you do hard things to make it better or safer for your children.

If your child is in an emergency shelter, group home, RTF, or other formal placement, you will be encouraged to visit there. Usually there are days and times you can visit and others when you cannot. You can learn about the program and sometimes join in activities.

You and your caseworker will plan visits at a place in your community or at another location, as agreed upon by ACCYS. If your child is placed in a group home or a residential treatment facility, you will be encouraged to visit there, based on the facility's visitation guidelines. You and your caseworker will develop a schedule for visits. If you cannot attend a visit you need to notify the Agency as defined by your visitation plan.

Visits with your children can show ACCYS and the Juvenile Court that:

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- Your child is important to you.
- You want to be a responsible parent for your child.
- You want to take care of your child yourself.
- You want to keep up to date with what is happening with your child.

Visiting your child is not simply about seeing them; it is also about demonstrating your ability to provide nurturance, emotional support, and appropriate discipline, and applying any other parenting skills you may have been working on. Remember, your child should benefit from your visit.

Some of the ways to make the visit beneficial are:

- Be positive with your child during visits: praise him/her, hug him/her, and talk with him/her about school.
- Plan for something to do together during visits.
- If something is wrong or bothering you, tell your caseworker, not your children.
- Use your best parenting skills.
- If you have questions or concerns about what is happening, talk to your caseworker before or after the visit, not to your child, so you can avoid making false promises to your child.
- Follow all ACCYS rules at visits.
- Give 24 hour notice if you are not able to make your visit.
- Help your children leave the visit positively.
- If you have problems with transportation or with visits, tell your caseworker.
- If you have more than one child in placement, your caseworker will work to have your children placed together whenever possible. If your children cannot be placed together, then your caseworker will work to make sure that your children are visiting with each other as well.

What are the Permanency Options for Children?

The Juvenile Court decides the primary and concurrent permanency goals for the child with input from everyone who participates in the court hearing. Permanency planning is the process of finding a permanent home for your child. There are four permanency options for children in out-of-home placement, and they exist in a hierarchy:

- **Return home to the parent (Reunification):** The first goal for almost all children in care is for them to return home. You must be able to demonstrate to the Juvenile Court that you can provide a safe home for your child.
- **Adoption:** If the Juvenile Court decides that your child cannot safely return home, the second option the Juvenile Court must consider is adoption. Both relatives and non-relatives may adopt children in their care. Adoption cannot occur until after parental rights have been terminated.
- **Permanent Legal Custodianship:** If return home and adoption have been ruled out, the third option is permanent legal custodianship (PLC). This means that the

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Juvenile Court could order that your child be placed into the permanent legal custody of relative or non-relative caregivers with whom they will live until adulthood. Your parental rights would not need to be terminated for this to happen. Your case would be closed with the Juvenile Court and the PLC caregivers would then make all decisions about school, medical care, and the day-to-day activities of your child. If this were to happen, you may be permitted to visit your child and you may have to pay child support. Although PLC is intended to be permanent, you may file an appropriate custody pleading with the Family Court, in the future, requesting custody of the child.

- **Placement with a Fit and Willing Relative:** If return home, adoption and PLC have been ruled out, the Juvenile Court could order that your child be placed with a fit and willing relative. A fit and willing relative is someone related to your child who is not willing to adopt them or become a permanent legal custodian but is willing to provide care for them. Your child could be placed in the home of a fit and willing relative with continued Juvenile Court and ACCYS supervision of the case, or the Juvenile Court could grant custody of your child to the fit and willing relative and close the case. You may file an appropriate custody pleading with the Family Court, in the future, requesting custody of the child.

Adoption and Safe Families Act (ASFA)

The Adoption and Safe Families Act is a law that was passed in 1997. It requires that children must be safe and must have a permanent place to live. It says that parents have a limited amount of time to make the changes needed to safely return a child to their care.

If your child has been placed in out-of-home care through ACCYS, you should be working with caseworkers from the Agency. You will probably be asked to make adjustments in the way you care for your children. This could mean making significant changes in your life.

There will be hearings held in Juvenile Court to determine if your child should remain away from home or if she/he/they may return home. Whether she/he/they comes home depends on each person making the necessary changes in their life.

These hearings will decide whether your child will be:

- Returned home (and when)
- Placed for adoption
- Referred for legal guardianship
- Placed with a fit and willing relative

If you have not made significant progress toward addressing the necessary changes and your child has been in placement for 15 out of the past 22 months, your rights could be terminated, and she/he/they could be placed for adoption.

The important thing to remember is that you have limited time to address the concerns that led to the placement of your child/children. The Agency will work with you and offer

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services and recommendations to help you resolve the concerns, but you must do the work.

What does Termination of Parental Rights mean?

Termination of Parental Rights (TPR) is a legal decision the Orphan's Court makes to forever end the legal parent/child relationship. Once the Orphan's Court makes this decision, a parent no longer has any rights to see or contact the child and can no longer make any decisions for the child. Although the Agency will be working very hard with you to help you complete your case plan goals so that your child can return home, if you do not complete the service plan or if you are unable to show that you can provide a safe environment for your child, the Agency may ask the Orphan's Court to terminate your rights to your child.

If this were to happen, you would no longer have any legal rights to your child, and your child may be adopted by another caregiver who is approved by the Agency. Your child will then live with the adoptive parent who will care for them and make all decisions about their day-to-day activities, school, and medical care.

In some cases, even after TPR, a parent can make a legal agreement with the adoptive parent to have ongoing contact such as visitation or phone calls with their child. If your case ever progresses towards TPR and you would like to have contact with your child, you should discuss your wishes with your attorney. It is ultimately at the discretion of the adoptive parents to agree to such an arrangement. For this reason, it is critical that you establish a positive and collaborative relationship with your child's pre-adoptive parents.

Additional Services

INDEPENDENT LIVING (IL) SERVICES

ACCYS's Independent Living (IL) program assists older youth in developing various skills and provides the tools, resources, and personal enrichment to help them obtain self-sufficiency within the community.

Eligibility

Adams County Children and Youth's Independent Living Program serves youth, ages 14-23, who meet the following criteria:

- Are in, or have been in, out-of-home placement on or after age 14; AND
- Have been adjudicated dependent; or have been dually adjudicated dependent AND delinquent; or have been adjudicated delinquent with shared case management responsibility between ACCYS and Probation Services (Juvenile Division).

Other youth who do not meet these criteria, but are in need of services, can be referred and may be provided with similar services as space and funding permit.

Transition Planning

A youth turning 16 years old while in ACCYS custody will be referred for a Youth Transition Conference which will focus on the youth and his/her plans for transitioning to adulthood. The purpose of the meeting is to bring these people together who are in agreement to support the youth as they make their transition to adulthood to discuss both long and short-

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term goals and to determine resources to assist the youth in accomplishing these goals.

Court approved Transition Plan

In an effort to effectively plan for independence, a meeting will be scheduled and occur before the youth turns 18 years of age while in ACCYS custody. This meeting will be hosted by ACCYS and facilitated by a Transition caseworker. The purpose of the transition meeting is to develop a “personalized and detailed transition plan” providing viable options for housing, health insurance, education, support services and employment. Independent Living Aftercare services will be explained to the youth so they are aware of what services will be available upon discharge from care. The youth will also be notified of what documents will be provided or available to them from their case file. The finalized transition plan will be submitted to the Juvenile Court for approval and is to be reviewed and updated regularly.

Services Available to Youth

Staff of the IL Unit will assist youth with the following services (other services may be provided on a case-by-case basis):

- Life Skills Class [Getting Ready to Overcome (GROW) ages 16-22, Working to Improve Skills and Empowerment (WISE) ages 14 and 15]
- Assistance obtaining state ID, driver’s permit, driving lessons, license
- Assistance applying for Financial Aid and the Chafee Education and Training Grant (ETG)
- SAT Fee Waiver and College Application Fee Waivers
- Post-Secondary Education/College application assistance
- College Tours
- Job Search/Application Assistance
- Diploma/GED assistance - assistance with obtaining tutoring services
- Assistance with locating and maintaining housing
- Assistance with finding Volunteer Opportunities/Job Shadowing
- Assistance in locating permanent connections and establishing what supports those individuals can offer to the youth
- Project Hope Mentoring Program providing a caring adult volunteer to spend quality time with the youth on a weekly basis (ages 13-22)
- Needs Assessment and IL Goal Plan which is updated every 6 months or as needed

Independent Living Aftercare Program

ACCYS Independent Living Aftercare services are offered to youth, ages 16-23, who meet the independent living eligibility requirements. Aftercare services are offered to the youth upon being discharged from the custody of ACCYS. Service areas include education, employment, housing, prevention, support/connections, community resources and life skills. Participation in Aftercare services is voluntary, and services are provided on an as needed basis. Services can be re-opened at any time, until the youth reaches the age of 23.

QUALITY ASSURANCE (QA)

ACCYS also has a Quality Assurance (QA) component which is committed to making sure

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ACCYS is doing its best to help the families with whom we work. One way we do this is by reviewing case files to assure that federal and state laws and regulations are being followed. You may receive a survey, phone call or letter from our Quality Assurance Program Specialist, asking for your feedback. You may also be asked to complete a survey when your case is closed with the Court.

Appealing a Case Determination or Acceptance of a Case

If you have questions or concerns about what is happening with your case, while involved with ACCYS, you should always talk to your caseworker, his/her supervisor, or the Agency administrator. If you still do not agree, you have the right to appeal. Appeals must be made to appropriate persons or agencies. The PA Department of Human Services' (DHS) Office of Hearings and Appeals oversees ACCYS and will review some decisions made by the Agency. You may appeal or request that DHS review a decision in the following situations:

- *Indicated*: You may appeal the determination that you are the perpetrator of the abuse.
- *Accepted for services*: You may appeal the ACCYS decision to accept your family as a client in need of services.

If you disagree with the Agency's determination that a child abuse report is indicated, the person named as perpetrator of the abuse may appeal. If he or she feels the report is not accurate, he or she may request that the report be amended or expunged. Such requests must be made to BHA as referenced above.