



Mahoning County Children Services

and

You

222 West Federal Street, 4th Floor
Youngstown, Ohio 44503
(330) 941-8888; FAX: (330) 941-8787
www.mahoningkids.com

Office Hours:
8:30 a.m. – 4:30 p.m.
Monday – Friday
24-Hour Hotline for Child Abuse and Neglect Referrals

Mahoning County Children Services



Our Vision

Mahoning County Children's Services will be the best, most caring child protective agency working cooperatively with the community to preserve quality family life.

Our Mission

Mahoning County Children Services, in partnership with the community, is committed to being the leader in protecting children while helping to preserve families.

Our Goal

To provide a full array of high quality social services to children and families by minimizing placements, increasing resources, enhancing community image and improving staff satisfaction.

Our Values

Individualization
Expression of Feelings
Controlled Emotional Response
Acceptance
Non-Judgmental Attitude
Self Determination
Confidentiality

Mahoning County Children Services



Guiding Principles

We are child welfare leaders

- We take pride in working with families and our community with care and compassion.
- We provide quality services that respect each family's culture.
- We are fiscally responsible, effectively utilizing resources to benefit the families we serve.
- We educate the community on recognizing and preventing child abuse and neglect.

We respect and value families and their children

- We respect families' strengths and provide individualized services.
- We empower parents and partner with families to ensure child safety, permanency and well-being.
- We recognize children are best served within their family and community.

We value our partnerships with the community

- We recognize the need to work in collaboration with the community to protect children and preserve families.
- We support the well-being of children and families; it is a shared agency and community responsibility.

Mahoning County Children Services and You

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For **emergencies**, the agency has a 24-hour answering service.
The telephone number is: **(330) 941-8888**.

Purpose of Agency

The role of Mahoning County Children Services is to protect your child by helping you be a more effective parent. We will assist you through various agency and community services to learn how to keep your child safe and resolve family issues. In the event that you can no longer parent your child, we will assist you in finding a safe alternative placement with relatives or friends. If you are unable to suggest an appropriate alternative, your child may be placed temporarily in one of our foster homes or a group home.

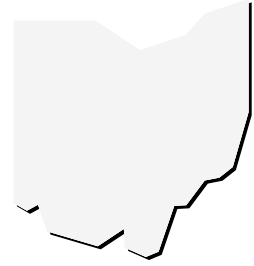
What the Family Services Department can offer you:

- **A caseworker** who will help you make contacts regarding housing, financial assistance, financial education, employment, counseling, substance abuse treatment, schooling and other community services.
- **Parenting classes** that are provided to teach new ways of dealing with difficult problems you and your child are facing. You will learn new skills to motivate, stimulate, discipline and care for your child safely.
- **A Family Service Aide** who will assist you in various activities such as budgeting, home management, and transportation when available, if this is a case plan need.
- **Protection of a child** from abuse or neglect by engaging the family to learn how to keep the child safe, or when necessary, placing him/her with appropriate family or friends or in a foster home or group home while the family works on issues that may have been endangering.
- **Adoption services** to a child if he/she cannot be safely returned to his/her parent, a relative or approved family friend.



Questions you may have:

A. Child Protection Laws and Regulations in the State of Ohio (Ohio State House Bill 484)



- Mahoning County Children Services is required by state and federal law to assess **all** reports of abuse, neglect, and dependency. It is important to take all claims seriously for the protection of all children in the area.
- If you are contacted by a Mahoning County Children Services caseworker, you may have some questions about the visit. The following questions are most often asked:
 - **What is child abuse?**

Abuse exists when a person within or outside your household injures your child physically or emotionally and/or puts your child's safety in danger. Examples may include:

- Repeated injuries such as cuts, bruises, broken bones, and burns which are not an accident;
- Internal injuries that happen because of hitting, shaking, or kicking your child;
- Punishment that is so strong as to harm the child physically;
- Any kind of sexual touching, not only intercourse;
- Use of your child for pornographic pictures and films;
- Emotional abuse – constantly criticizing or belittling your child;
- Putting your child's safety in danger;
- When manufacturing, possessing, using or exposing your child to illegal drugs such as heroin, cocaine, crack, LSD, morphine, opium, oxycodone, and other methamphetamines.

➤ **What is neglect?**

Neglect is when, for any reason, your child does not receive the care he/she needs to be safe and healthy. Examples may include:

- When your child does not have enough food, a safe home, lacks necessary clothing, does not receive needed medical care, has extreme unexcused absences from school, or does not receive other needed care.
- When activities/conditions in or outside the home put your child's safety in danger (an example is leaving your child in the care of a known sex offender or other dangerous individual or a child locked in his room).
- When your child is left home alone or found wandering the streets at a young age.

➤ ***What is dependency?***

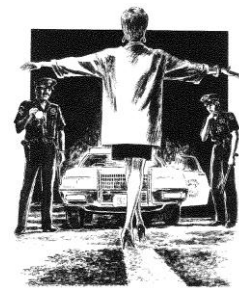
Your child is dependent when you cannot care for him/her and there is no family or friend who can provide a home. If a caseworker from Mahoning County Children Services visits your home, this does not mean that you abused or neglected your child. It just means that the agency received a call of concern about your child.

B. What happens when the caseworker finds there is a concern in the home?

1. The agency caseworker will help you to understand the concerns identified during the assessment and work with you to resolve those concerns.
2. A case plan (permanency plan) will be created with you which identifies your family's strengths, concerns, goals and services, and to outline, step by step, who is to do what and when during the agency's involvement with you and your family. The development of your case plan or "plan of action" may take place at a family team meeting whereby you, other family members of your choice, community supports, foster parents when applicable, and your Children Services caseworker come together to assist you in this effort. Some case plans may be filed in court, and non-compliance of the case plan may cause you to be in contempt of court.



3. The caseworker will coordinate services that may be needed such as counseling, substance abuse treatment, mental health treatment, or parent education. You will be referred to local community organizations for most of these services.
4. The agency and court must refer parents for drug, alcohol, substance assessment/treatment if the child is at risk of being abused, neglected, or dependent due to the drug/alcohol/substance addiction of a parent. You may be required to participate in random drug/alcohol testing as well as an assessment and treatment program.
5. By law, if your child is under three years of age and the agency has determined your child has been abused or neglected, the caseworker will refer your child to the "Help Me Grow" Program.
6. Your caseworker is required by the agency to visit you and each member of your immediate family in the home at least one time per month minimum to assure the safety of all children as well as monitor the effectiveness of services you may be receiving from this and other agencies. Your child may need to be interviewed individually, separate from you and brothers/sisters in order to assess the child's safety.



7. Your case will be regularly reviewed to look at case plan progress and identify any barriers to needed services. You will be notified by letter as to the date and time of each case review.
8. Your Mahoning County Department of Job and Family Services (welfare) worker can receive a copy of your Mahoning County Children Services case plan, and your Mahoning County Children Services caseworker can receive a copy of your MCDJFS (welfare) service contract.

C. What happens when a caseworker from Children Services receives a report of abuse or neglect of a child?

1. The caseworker will advise you of the exact nature of the report at the start of the assessment.
2. Ohio law forbids revealing the referring party so the caseworker **will not** tell you who made the report.
3. Each adult and child living in the home will be interviewed privately in order to allow each person/child an opportunity to explain what happened. A child too young to be interviewed will be observed.
4. The caseworker may ask for a release and check records about your family based upon assessment. Such records may include: child welfare, criminal, medical, mental health, school, to list a few.
5. The caseworker may talk with other experts to make sure the right decision is made.
6. The caseworker has the right to get information from other people to help determine if specifically abuse or neglect took place. This may include doctors, teachers, social workers, and/or sometimes neighbors or relatives.
7. Once the assessment is complete, you and your family will be notified immediately in writing of the results.
8. You have the right to talk to a lawyer at any time during the assessment or after it is completed.
9. Unless there is an emergency or a court order, the caseworker will ask your permission to enter your home and to see or speak with your child.
10. If there are legitimate concerns regarding the safety and welfare of your child, the agency has the responsibility to assess those concerns and to assist you and your family in resolving problems affecting child safety and well being.



D. What is Alternative Response?

- Getting involved with Children Services can be intimidating and confusing for some families. You were referred to Alternative Response because there was report of concern about your child or children received by this agency. Under Alternative Response, your caseworker will not be conducting an investigation of the report made to this agency. Rather, you and your caseworker will discuss the current situation that you and your family are facing, the events and actions that may have caused this situation, and create a plan with solutions so that you can keep your children safe. If, after the caseworker meets with you, he or she discovers significant safety concerns, they may need to formally investigate this matter. If you would prefer not to be a part of the Alternative Response program, then the agency will need to investigate the child abuse and neglect report.

E. If your child is not in your custody:



- If your child (for whatever reason) cannot remain in your care and custody, a relative or non-relative may be considered for the care and custody of your child. If this is not possible, then foster care placement may be provided.

F. What are my rights?

- The right to be treated with dignity and respect.
- The right to have the information that you give held in confidence and only used by Children Services to provide assistance to you.
- The right to have your caseworker provide you with information in regards to community services which may benefit your family.
- The right to engage and participate in the development of your family's case plan and to receive a copy.
- The right to service in the least restrictive setting possible as defined in the case plan.
- The right to be informed of proposed or current services or therapies and possible alternatives.
- The right to consent to or refuse any service or therapy after an explanation of the consequences. A parent or legal guardian may consent to or refuse any service or therapy on behalf of a minor.



- The right to review progress on your case plan at any time.
- The right to freedom from unnecessary or excessive medication.
- The right to freedom from unnecessary restraint or seclusion.
- The right to participate in any appropriate and available agency services, unless there is a valid reason to deny and/or require other services. This shall be explained to you and written in the case service plan.
- The right to be informed of and refuse any unusual treatment procedures.
- The right to be advised of and refuse observation by techniques, such as one-way vision mirrors, tape recorders, televisions, movies or photographs.
- The right to be represented in any court hearing by an attorney appointed to you if you cannot afford one.
- The right to have the opportunity to consult with independent treatment specialists or legal counsel at one's own expense.
- The right to confidentiality of communications and of all identifying information except for the requirements of various funding and verifying sources and state or federal laws unless release of information is authorized by you, or by court order.
- The right to have access to review one's own records. A request for case file review must be submitted in writing to the agency attorney. Upon approval, a date/time will be scheduled for record review.
- The right to have access to review one's own treatment records. This request must be made directly to the treatment provider.
- The right to a clear explanation of how the agency may use and disclose your health information.
- The right to a history of non-routine health information disclosures more commonly used for residential placements.
- The right to consent before the agency shares your information for treatment, payment, and health care operations.
- The right to a review of any complaint you have concerning Children Services (see pages 15 – 16 for more information).
- The right to file a formal complaint with the agency or the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services (please see page 15).
- The right to be informed in advance of the reason(s) for stopping services and to be involved in planning for the consequences.

- The right to receive an explanation of the reasons for denial of services.
- The right not to be discriminated against on the basis of religion, race, color, creed, sex, nation origin, age, life-style, physical or mental handicap, developmental disability or inability to pay.
- The right to know the cost of services.
- The right to be fully informed of all rights.
- The right to exercise any and all rights without consequences or limitations on access to service.
- The right to have oral and written instructions for filing a grievance.
- The right to refuse participation in public performances, photos and research; refusal has no impact on current or future agency services.
- The right to access services, regardless of communication needs.

G. What are my responsibilities?

- To provide your child with his/her basic needs:
 - Safe housing free of physical hazards with basic utilities and furnishings.
 - Nutritious food.
 - Clothing and shoes adequate for the weather.
 - Caring for his/her hygiene needs.
 - Routine and emergency medical and dental care.
 - Providing any needed services to address any special needs (i.e., counseling, speech therapy, assessments, etc.).
 - Adequate supervision appropriate for his/her age or a responsible substitute caregiver.
 - Enrollment and regular school attendance in a traditional or approved alternative educational program.
 - Structure, discipline, and guidance in a non-abusive fashion.



- To ask questions of your caseworker if you do not understand.
- To work toward case plan goals in a timely fashion.
- To work with Children Services and to be available for casework scheduled home visits with you and your child.
- To treat your caseworker with the same respect as you would expect in return.

H. **Custody to Relative/Kin:**

If your child cannot live safely with you, the agency will try to place your child in the care of relatives or other people the child knows. If this placement occurs, the agency asks Mahoning County Juvenile Court to grant temporary or legal custody to the relative or non-relative. The agency will probably not be involved after the Court gives someone else custody. Visits between you and your child will be decided by the relative or non-relative and you.

If no relatives or non-relatives can be identified and your child is dependent or at risk/in danger, the agency will take custody of your child. This can occur in the following ways:

I. **If your child is under Court Supervision or in the custody of Mahoning County Children Services (Types of Custody):**

- **Court Ordered Protective Supervision (COPS):** In some instances the agency may feel the parent/guardian is not providing adequately for the child, but the child is not in immediate danger. Therefore, the agency may request and the court may grant an order of protective supervision. Protective supervision means the court permits an abused, neglected, dependent, unruly, or delinquent child to remain in the custody of the parent/guardian and stay in the home subject to any conditions and limitations upon the child, the child's parents, guardian or any other person the court prescribes, including supervision as directed by the court for the protection of the child. This order makes the case plan a legal document and requires the parties to the plan (particularly the parent and the agency) to abide by that plan.
- **Juvenile Rule 6:** This law gives a police officer the ability to remove a child and place that child with the agency if the officer believes the child is in immediate danger. This type of custody allows the agency to hold the child until the next Court day, or you sign a Voluntary Agreement for Custody.
- **Voluntary Agreement for Custody:** This type of custody is a voluntary agreement between you and the agency, allowing the agency to care for your child while you correct problems which caused your child to be at risk. This agreement is filed with Mahoning County Juvenile Court for Temporary Custody to be granted to Mahoning County Children Services.

- **Temporary Custody:** This type of custody is given to the agency by the Juvenile Court in cases where the agency is able to show the Court that your child would be in danger in his/her own home. This custody is only temporary until you correct problems which caused your child to be at risk, and you will visit regularly with your child while he/she is out of your care. This custody is reviewed at least once every three (3) months and reviewed by the Court at the end of one year. ***If your child is unable to return home or to relative/kin at the end of one year, the agency must ask the Court for Permanent Custody.***
- **Legal Custody:** Legal Custody is also a term frequently used in child welfare. It means a legal status that vests in the custodian the right to have physical care and control of the child and to determine where and with whom the child shall live, and the right and duty to protect, train, and discipline the child and to provide the child with food, shelter, education, and medical care, all subject to any residual parental rights, privileges, and responsibilities. An individual granted legal custody shall exercise the rights and responsibilities personally unless otherwise authorized by any section of the Revised Code or by the court.
- **Permanent Custody:** This type of custody means your child is removed from you *forever*. You will no longer have any contact with or control over what happens to your child. Your child will be placed for adoption, have his/her name changed, and have all connections with you ended.

J. Law states that the court may require the agency to file for permanent custody of a child prior to the 12 month period for any of the following reasons:

1. If the parent has failed to provide medical treatment and/or food for the child when the parent clearly has the capability to do so.
2. If the parent has placed the child at risk of abuse, neglect or dependency two or more times due to alcohol/drug/substance abuse, and refused to cooperate in treatment two or more times after the court has ordered treatment.
3. If the parent has been convicted of or pled guilty to crimes against children, including: aggravated murder, murder, voluntary manslaughter, manslaughter, felonious assault, aggravated assault, assault, child endangering, sexual battery, sexual corruption of a minor, gross sexual imposition, or sexual imposition.
4. If a parent's rights have been terminated involuntarily of another child.
5. If the parent has failed to visit or maintain contact for more than 90 days, the child is considered an abandoned child.



NOTE: If you feel that any of the previous laws may affect you, it is advisable for you to speak with your attorney or Legal Aid for clarification and further legal advice.

K. If your child is in foster care:

- If your child is in foster care more than a few days, a hearing will be scheduled at the Mahoning County Juvenile Court located at 300 East Scott Street in Youngstown, Ohio 44505; telephone: (330) 740-2244, extension 6400.
- Plan to attend **all** court hearings for they concern both you and your child.
- You have the right to be represented by a lawyer. If you cannot afford one, let the court know. You may be appointed a lawyer.
- The judge or magistrate may appoint a lawyer or citizen volunteer for your child, called a CASA or “**Court Appointed Special Advocate**” as the Guardian ad Litem. The Guardian ad Litem’s job is to tell the court what he or she believes to be in your child’s best interest.
- My lawyer is: _____
- Telephone: _____
- My child’s lawyer or CASA is: _____
- Foster care is intended to be a temporary situation. The goal is for your family to be reunified upon successful completion of your case plan. Your caseworker will encourage and support you in your case plan efforts. While your child is in foster care, you may be involved in programs through Children Services or you may be referred to other community agencies in order to meet your family’s needs and case plan goals. Whatever your specific case plan requires, it is **very important** that you begin the court ordered changes **quickly**.
- Although the agency holds temporary custody of your child, you will still be consulted on important matters such as serious medical treatment/surgeries that your child may require. Therefore, it is very important for you to keep your caseworker informed of your address and phone number or of a contact person who may reach you in an emergency.
- It is also very important for your child to feel comfortable as he/she experiences foster care. Therefore, it is critical that you, the caseworker and foster parent work cooperatively to parent your child and to meet his/her needs.

L. Foster Care Visitation:

Visitation with your child on a **regular** basis while he/she is in foster care is **very important!** Questions most frequently asked by families about visitation are listed below.



1. Where will I visit?

The place your visit occurs will depend upon your case plan. It may occur at the Hope House Visitation Center located at 660 West Earle Avenue in Youngstown or in the Children Services offices and begin with an orientation meeting. As you progress on your case plan, visits may take place at the home of a relative or in your own home.

If you visit in a visitation room, it will look much like a living room with a sofa or chairs and toys and games or books. We encourage you to spend this time doing something with your child. Since child love to play games, make things, or read books, all of these activities will be available for you and your child.

Sometimes, you may want to ask your child to bring homework or a project with him/her so that you can work on this together during your visit.



2. Who will be there?

You and your child or children will be in the visitation room. Sometimes a caseworker may be in the room with you. Sometimes, if the caseworker is not in the room, he or she may be monitoring the visit through a two-way window located in some of the rooms. Sometimes, other people may watch your visit such as a lawyer or Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA).

We have supervised visits in the office in order to monitor the visits to make sure the visit is a good experience. The monitor may also help if you and your child are having some problems.

3. Who can visit?

It is very important that your child spends this visitation time with you. ***The single most important thing you can do for your child while he or she is in foster care is visit regularly.***

For this reason, relatives who have not lived with the child or friends should not take time away from you and your child. If other relatives want to visit, ask your caseworker ahead of time. There may be some exceptions to this rule and those will be explained to you by your caseworker.

4. What if I can't make a visit?

If you cannot make a scheduled visit, or if you will be late, please call and let us know as far in advance as you can. You should ask for your caseworker, the supervisor, or the program administrator (in that order) to let someone know so the visit can be canceled. It is much easier to cancel a visit than to disappoint a child who is here waiting for his/her parent.

If you do not come to your scheduled visit 15 minutes after the visit was to start, and we have not heard from you, we will assume you are not coming and return your child to the foster home. If you are late, the visit still cannot go past the set stopping time because other visits are held in the rooms and transportation aides must pick up other people for their visits on time.

If a parent does not visit and has more than one child in different foster placements, visitation will be arranged specifically for those brothers/sisters.

5. Reasons why a visit may be terminated:

- < If you use inappropriate language with staff in the office or with your child.
- < If you have been drinking/using drugs or are otherwise acting inappropriately.
- < If you are threatening to a staff member or to the child.
- < There are additional rules for visitation at each facility; these rules will be reviewed with you prior to initial visitation.

6. What shall I bring to visits?

Please don't feel that you have to bring something for your child each time you visit. Visits are for your ***special time together*** and not for your child to look for presents.

You may bring pictures or other special things to share with your child.



7. How can I help my child at visitation?

Because we have worked with many children in foster care, we know the kinds of things which make visitation positive:

- **Be positive.** Ask about school and other activities. Talk about what your child does for fun in the foster home. Let the child know that it is okay to like the people in the foster home. That will help him/her to feel better about his/her placement in foster care and help him/her adjust.



- Do structure your child's behavior. Running about the halls or destruction of property is, of course, not acceptable. If you need assistance, please see your caseworker. Child safety is important. It is also important that you share the responsibility with your child by putting the room back in order before you leave.
- **Relax.** This is a special time for you and your child. **Enjoy it!**
- Do not say anything bad about the foster parent or the foster home in front of your child. If you have a complaint or a question, we want to help you! So, wait until the visit is over and then talk it over with your caseworker.
- Don't talk about your problems with your child. He/She cannot do anything about those problems and your child will worry about you.
- Sometimes child cry when the visit is over. If this happens, assure the child that you love him/her and will see him/her again and leave quickly. Long good-byes can make it more painful for everyone.



M. Visitation Room Use:

The purpose of visitation is to provide parents and child an opportunity to spend time with each other. As such, you are provided with a clean, comfortable room in which to visit, and games, toys and books that may be signed out and used during your visit.

This is your time to enjoy your child, and the following visitation rules will assist in making your visit a positive, successful one!

Visitation Room Rules:

1. Cell phone usage prohibited during visits.
2. There will be no swearing or cursing.
3. No fighting or aggressive behavior.
4. No damaging or destroying of furniture (breaking, cutting, throwing).
5. No writing or coloring on the walls, chairs, floor, furniture, etc.
6. No food or drink permitted. If there is a special occasion like a birthday, let your caseworker know in advance and a room will be provided.
7. All toys and games must be put away properly; and all toys and games that were signed out must be returned.
8. The visitation room **must be cleaned** by child/parent(s) after each visit and **before** leaving the visitation area.



***Failure to follow these rules
may result in the termination of the visit.***

**Mahoning County Children Services
Policy for Reviewing Complaints and Appeals
5101:2-5-13 (A) (6)**

This policy has been developed in accordance with OAC Rule 5101:2-33-20 and 5101:2-5-13 and may be used for **(1) complaints** regarding the provision of services from parents, custodians, legal guardians, kinship caregivers, foster caregivers, applicants or providers of approved adult supervised living arrangements, and children; and **(2) report disposition appeals** by alleged perpetrators who disagree with the agency's report disposition of a report of child abuse or neglect.

Upon request, a written copy of the grievance policy will be sent within three (3) working days of the request.

Complaints must be filed in writing within fourteen (14) days of the incident or decision which caused the complaint. The complaint must be filed by the person directly affected by this decision. A complaint form can be obtained from the agency.

If a person is hearing or visually impaired, or has limited English proficiency, Mahoning County Children Services will arrange for the provision of any required communication services to accommodate the individual's hearing, visual, or language needs.

(1) Complaints will be addressed as follows:

Submit your complaint in writing to the agency Director. This can be done at any time, but must be done at a maximum of fourteen (14) days from the time of the incident/decision that caused the complaint. The complaint will be referred to a Review Agent who has had no involvement with the case. A review and response by the Review Agent will be issued in ten (10) working days.

Documentation of the complaint review process shall be entered in the case file.

(2) Appeal

The right to **appeal a case disposition** shall be provided in writing to alleged perpetrators at notification of the case disposition along with the method for doing so.

The alleged perpetrator of child abuse or neglect has the right to appeal the case disposition. The appeal must be submitted, in writing, to the Executive Director of Children Services, within fourteen (14) days upon receipt of notification. The case will be reviewed by an Administrator who has no direct involvement with the assessment/investigation of the incident or approval of the report disposition, and the ability to overturn the decision. The Administrator shall facilitate the report disposition appeal review/hearing. Consideration will be given to the totality of the information including the assessment/investigation information contained in the case record as well as any information provided by the PCSA and the appellant. The alleged perpetrator will be informed as to the results of the appeal within thirty (30) days of receipt of the request. Should there be a hearing, visual, or language problem, the appropriate translators will process the information to the alleged perpetrator.

When an appeal of a disposition of child abuse or neglect is reviewed and the original disposition is changed, the Statewide Automated Child Welfare Information System (SACWIS) database shall be provided with updated information by the Director or his/her designee. Principals of the report shall be notified in writing if the disposition is changed.