

# Team Members: Their Roles and Obligations

Please note: The individuals and professionals listed below are bound by rules and expectations of confidentiality.

## Birth Parent

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The child's biological parent. The birth parent is a primary team member. Obligations may include:

- participation in family visits with their child
- participation in trainings, counseling, or services as ordered by the court
- observation of timelines and expectations as outlined by the court

## Foster Parent

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A resource parent who is trained and licensed by the local Child Protective Service (CPS) agency. The foster parent serves as a primary team member and is the child's legal guardian, acting in behalf of the court. Foster parents are expected to provide a supportive home atmosphere and supervision of the foster child in their care. Family practices need to be reasonable and appropriate with daily exposure to healthy, regular routines and activities. *Foster parents are mandated by law to report suspected abuse or neglect.*

Obligations may include:

- mentoring birth parents during visits with the child (after having been trained to be effective coaches)
- sharing information about the child in their care with the birth parents
- transporting the child to and from therapy sessions, appointments and visits with birth parents
- occasional contacts with CPS workers, guardians ad litem or CASA volunteers, etc.

## Intake Caseworker

A social worker with local CPS. Takes reports of abuse and neglect allegations and is involved in abuse and neglect investigations.

Obligations may include:

- screening in-coming referrals regarding child abuse or neglect
- interviewing caller to determine validity of information
- investigating allegations
- collecting information to determine the need for protection
- interviewing collateral sources (teachers, school personnel, babysitters, etc.)
- performing risk assessment
- prioritizing calls and determining timelines
- initiating interventions to afford protection
- providing referrals to other agency departments or initiating custody proceedings

## Agency Foster Care Worker

Usually a social worker working for CPS whose principal duties include protecting the child and providing support to foster parents. Caseworkers are knowledgeable about the child, the courts, and community resources and connect the foster family with resources they and the child need.

Obligations may include:

- working with ongoing caseworkers to coordinate visits, services, etc.
- licensing and re-licensing foster parents
- providing training for foster and adoptive parent applicants
- conducting home studies

## Ongoing Caseworker

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A member of the child's primary team, this professional manages the case plan once the initial court hearing has made a determination regarding the custody of the child. The ongoing caseworker maintains regular contact with both the biological and foster family and the child in care, and is the team member most responsible for developing a plan for safety and permanence for the child.

Obligations may include:

- completing and revising the Family Risk Assessment
- participating in family case conferences
- corresponding with parents, court and other professionals to provide progress reports, etc. in keeping with the case plan
- participating in administrative and court review of the case plan
- providing in-home support services, resource linkage and referral and social service intervention to family and children
- maintaining regular contact with the family and the child
- conducting regular reviews of family case plan, identifying progress and barriers to progress
- participating in court proceedings
- coordinating foster family home visits with foster care workers
- providing services to children in foster and kinship care homes

## Adoption Caseworker

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Usually a social worker who may work for public or private adoption agencies. They conduct educational classes and adoption home studies for prospective adoptive parents. They also help parents get their pre-adoption certification. Obligations may include:

- providing post-placement counseling and support to help families adjust to the changes in their lives as a result of the adoption.

## Court Judge

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The judge or magistrate who determines whether the children should be in the custody of the parents, a relative, or the child protection agency. Judges are members of the child's secondary team and are responsible for monitoring and promoting the well-being of children on their case loads. It is understood that court judges are the ultimate authorities in foster care cases.

Obligations may include:

- issuing orders to CPS workers and birth family members regarding services, timelines and expectations of parents that result in successful reunifications insuring children and youth in foster care receive the support to which they are entitled
- reviewing case planning and requirements
- ordering concurrent alternatives when reunification appears unrealistic (i.e. long-term foster care, adoption)
- temporarily or permanently taking away the parents' rights in order to protect the child from neglect and abuse

## Guardian Ad Litem (GAL)

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A person appointed by the court and specially trained to protect the interests of a minor and to serve as a spokesperson for the child for the duration of the case. This is typically a lawyer or may be a Court Appointed Special Advocate (see below) volunteer whose role is to make recommendations regarding the best interests of the child. The primary responsibility is to be an advocate in the court for the child's best interest. The GAL is the only person, other than the judge, whose exclusive interest is the child.

Roles include:

- investigator – to ferret out all of the relevant facts
- advocate – to insure that the Court, CPS personnel and legal counsel fulfill their obligation as to the child in a timely manner
- monitor – of all court orders, to insure compliance by all parties and to bring to the court's attention any change in circumstances that may require a modification of the court order

Obligations include:

- adhering to the strictest rules of confidentiality
- being a party to all legal proceedings involving the child
- insuring that the Court or Judge has all relevant information about the child

## CASA Volunteer

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A Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) volunteer who is trained to make recommendations to the court regarding the best interests of the child. In many jurisdictions the CASA and guardian ad litem are one and the same.

Obligations may include:

- monitoring the child's case to verify facts and to determine whether the judge's orders are being carried out
- assuring the child's best interests are being represented at every stage of the case
- participating in planning and/or treatment team meetings involving the case
- verifying information and providing written reports to the court prior to hearings
- attending court hearings
- making written recommendations on what is the best decision for the child
- acting as the child's advocate in recommending or monitoring educational, medical, therapeutic, etc. services

## Mental Health Counselor

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A therapist who works with children, birth parents, or an entire family. Some counselors specialize in attachment and foster/adoptive issues.

Obligations may include:

- performing assessments and evaluations essential to treatment planning which
  - may include screening, triage, referral for services
  - may be done for specific purposes including court-ordered evaluations, assessment for CPS or possible foster care placement
- performing custody evaluations for courts, psychological services (intellectual, behavioral testing)
- medication management, office based mental health therapy, educational supports for families, and skills training
- participating in case planning and case management
- providing family support services

## Special Education Teacher

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A teacher who provides special educational accommodations and instruction for a child with disabilities. This professional is a member of the child's secondary team. The child's Individualized Education Plan (IEP) specifically states what services will be provided and the role of adults in the child's life including teachers, parents, foster parents, and social welfare workers. Special education services may complement foster care court objectives. A special education teacher aware of these objectives could address them in the student's IEP and daily interactions at school.

Obligations may include:

- engaging the foster parents and informing them of their roles in school related matters
- encouraging the foster child's self-determinations and involving him/her in the IEP process, especially at the secondary level
- insuring all team members are aware of and utilize available resources within the school and community to meet the child's needs
- suggesting and utilizing alternative forms of communication to facilitate collaboration with busy case workers

## Physician

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Usually a family practitioner, pediatrician, or other medical specialist. This individual provides initial health screenings, well child examinations, immunizations and routine health care for the child and is considered a member of the child's secondary team.

Obligations may include:

- providing developmental assessments
- making referrals to specialists as needed
- helping parents and foster parents identify behaviors in children and youth that may indicate a mental health issue
- providing mental health screening, case management and support services