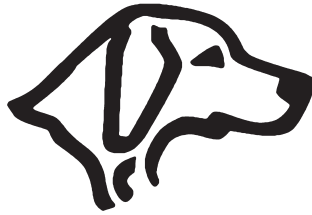




DEPENDENCY QUICK GUIDE



A DOGBOOK
FOR ATTORNEYS REPRESENTING
CHILDREN AND PARENTS

FOURTH EDITION



Judicial Council of California

Judicial Council of California
Center for Families, Children & the Courts

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Judicial Council of California (2024)

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FOURTH EDITION

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HOW TO USE THE *DEPENDENCY QUICK GUIDE*

The *Dependency Quick Guide* is intended to be used as a reference manual for attorneys representing parents and children in juvenile dependency proceedings. Its goal is to provide guidance and short answers to common problems that attorneys face. The book is designed for use in the trial courts; it is not meant to serve as a definitive work on juvenile dependency law.

The book is divided into three major parts: “Hearings,” “Fact Sheets,” and “Summaries of Seminal Cases.” The hearings section is organized by statutory hearing in procedural order. Each statutory hearing section contains checklists and black letter discussion and tips.

The checklists outline tasks to consider before, during, and after each dependency hearing. Readers should not consider the checklists to be rigid requirements, all of which must be complied with in every case. The checklists are guides to practice, not straightjackets.

You can find the tips by following the pointer’s nose (). And you can maneuver through the electronic version of the book easily: just click on the doghouse at the bottom of each page and you will return to the full table of contents.

The fact sheets are organized topically rather than procedurally and give additional information on complex areas of dependency practice. Their purpose is to give the practitioner a sufficient understanding of specific complex topics to provide a foundation for effective advocacy.

The case summaries give practitioners brief descriptions of the seminal cases that have shaped the practice of dependency law.

The guide is paginated by major sections: H for “Hearings,” F for “Fact Sheets,” and S for “Summaries of Seminal Cases.”

Please note that unless indicated otherwise, all citations are to the California Welfare and Institutions Code.

It is our hope that this manual is as useful in the courtroom as it is in the office. We welcome your comments and suggestions on ways we can improve this publication to better meet your needs.

AN EXPLANATION OF THE TITLE

Courtroom binders containing case law and reference materials have been a staple of civil and criminal litigators for generations. In California, several district attorney and public defender offices share the urban legend that one of their attorneys pasted a picture of his or her dog on the cover of the binder. For years, attorneys commonly referred to these binders as “dogbooks.”



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INITIAL / DETENTION

DETENTION HEARING CHECKLIST: CHILD'S ATTORNEY

BEFORE

- ☐ Review petition and supporting paperwork for sufficiency of petition, bases for detention, reasonable efforts/services, jurisdictional issues (other states or countries), efforts to place with relatives.
- ☐ Review petition and supporting paperwork for sufficiency of petition, bases for detention, reasonable efforts/services, jurisdictional issues (other states or countries), efforts to place with relatives.
- ☐ Analyze for existing or potential conflicts.
- ☐ Begin discussions/negotiation with other counsel.
- ☐ If the child is at the detention hearing, introduce self to client; explain role as counsel, confidentiality, privileges. (§ 317(f).)
- ☐ If the child is at the detention hearing, interview client in private in age-appropriate manner regarding relevant issues, realizing the child has just been separated from parents and may be traumatized (e.g., allegations, placement preferences, siblings, health issues, school of origin, early intervention services, special education services, pending exams, pending disciplinary actions, advanced placement status, extracurricular activities, graduation status, any pending delinquency matters, immigration status, Native American ancestry and possible Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) status, treatment in current placement, access to phone calls, and visits with parents and other important people).
- ☐ Interview nonparent relatives and interested persons present regarding allegations, visitation, placement options, Native American ancestry and possible ICWA status, Adoption and Safe Families Act (ASFA) timelines, and willingness to make educational decisions. Get relevant information on home environment, criminal background, need for funding. Assist with referral for CLETS (California Law Enforcement and Telecommunications System) and LiveScan.



- ☐ Formulate position on whether child should be detained, whether parent's right to make educational decisions should be limited, sufficiency of petition, and whether reasonable efforts (or in the case of a possible Indian child, active efforts) were made to prevent detention/placement.
- ☐ Evaluate need for testimony or mandatory one-day continuance. (§ 322.)

DURING

- ☐ Be aware of the law and applicable burdens of proof.
- ☐ Did the agency¹ meet its burdens (prima facie, reasonable efforts, nexus between allegations, and risk to child, etc.)?
- ☐ In the case of a possible Indian child when detention is recommended, has the agency met the "emergency removal requirements" or, alternatively, the "foster care placement" requirements of ICWA?
- ☐ Cite relevant case law when necessary.
- ☐ Request appropriate orders, such as those needed to facilitate:
 - ☐ Placement with relative or nonrelative extended family member.
 - ☐ Visitation with parents, relatives, and other appropriate persons.
 - ☐ Services for entire family.
 - ☐ Restraining orders. (§ 213.5.)
 - ☐ Crisis counseling (e.g., grief).
 - ☐ Necessary medical treatment.
 - ☐ Assessments (psychological, physical, educational, regional center).
 - ☐ School-related issues: parent's right to make educational decisions, placement near school of origin (Ed. Code, § 48853.5(e)), transportation to school of origin, tutoring, extracurricular activities (id., § 48850(a)(1)), 24-hour notice of placement change that affects school placement (Cal. Rules

¹ Throughout this guide, "agency" is a catchall phrase used to refer to all human services and child protection agencies/departments.



of Court, rule 5.651(e)), notice of disciplinary actions, and referral for assessments for early intervention and/or special education services. (Ed. Code, §§ 48850(a)(1), 48853.5(e); Cal. Rules of Court, rule 5.651(e).)

- ☐ Transportation funds (to facilitate visitation, school attendance, counseling).
- ☐ Special services (i.e., pregnancy/parenting, gay/lesbian/bisexual/transsexual youth).
- ☐ Special funding (Victim of Crimes, section 370, emergency needs of caretakers).
- ☐ Ensure court addresses
- ☐ Placement.
- ☐ Services for family (reunification if removed, maintenance if not).
- ☐ Parentage.
- ☐ Indian heritage (ICWA).
- ☐ Education rights. (§ 319(g); Cal. Rules of Court, rules 5.650–5.651.)
- ☐ Visitation with parents, siblings, and other appropriate persons.
- ☐ Any other specifically requested orders.
- ☐ Setting next hearing.

AFTER

- ☐ Consult with child to explain court rulings and answer questions.
- ☐ Send letter to caregiver with contact information and summary of court orders.
- ☐ File necessary forms/motions if pursuing rehearing, demurrer, or writ of mandate.
- ☐ Follow up with caregiver to ensure child is attending school of origin or enrolled in new school.
- ☐ In the case of an Indian child when there has been an “emergency removal and placement,” consider whether a change in circumstances may have ended the emergency circumstances.



DETENTION HEARING CHECKLIST: PARENT'S ATTORNEY

BEFORE

- ☐ Review petition and supporting paperwork for
 - ☐ Legal sufficiency of the allegations.
 - ☐ Timeliness of filing.
 - ☐ Notice. (§ 290.1.)
 - ☐ Reasonable efforts—or, if there is reason to believe the case involves an Indian child, active efforts—made to prevent/eliminate need for removal.
 - ☐ Potential jurisdictional issues.
 - ☐ Efforts to place with relatives.
- ☐ Analyze for existing or potential conflicts.
- ☐ Anticipate whether education issues will be present and how to maximize your client's participation in the child's education.
- ☐ Begin discussion/negotiation with other counsel.
- ☐ Introduce self to client; explain role as counsel and the focus of a detention hearing.
- ☐ Obtain basic information (contact addresses and numbers, parentage, relatives, tribal members).
- ☐ Encourage system buy-in when appropriate and address client's concerns.
- ☐ Impress upon the client the significance of these proceedings.
- ☐ Ask client about Native American ancestry and possible ICWA status. If applicable, explain the consequences and benefits of ICWA.
- ☐ Interview relatives and interested persons present regarding allegations, visitation, placement options, Native American ancestry and possible ICWA status, and ASFA timelines. Get relevant information on home environment, criminal background, need for funding. Assist with referral for CLETS and LiveScan.



- ☐ Formulate position on whether child should be detained, sufficiency of petition, whether reasonable efforts—or, if there is reason to know the child may be an Indian child, active efforts—were made to prevent detention/placement.
- ☐ If there is reason to know the child may be an Indian child, evaluate whether the agency has met the requirements for emergency removal of an Indian child.
- ☐ Evaluate need for testimony or mandatory one-day continuance. (§ 322.)

DURING

- ☐ Be aware of the law and applicable burdens of proof.
- ☐ Did the agency meet its burdens (prima facie, reasonable efforts, nexus between allegations and risk to the child, etc.)?
- ☐ If there is reason to know the case involves an Indian child, review the requirements for detention of an Indian child and ensure that the agency has met its burden either to justify the emergency removal or to comply with ICWA's foster care placement requirements.
- ☐ Select relevant case law to cite as needed.
- ☐ Request appropriate orders, such as those needed to facilitate:
 - ☐ Placement with a relative or nonrelative extended family member (NREFM).
 - ☐ Visitation with client, relatives, and other appropriate persons.
 - ☐ Services for entire family.
 - ☐ Restraining orders. (§ 213.5.)
- ☐ Ensure that court addresses
 - ☐ Placement.
 - ☐ Services for family (reunification if removed, maintenance if not).
 - ☐ Parentage.
 - ☐ Indian heritage (ICWA).
 - ☐ Visitation with parents, siblings, and other appropriate persons.



- ☐ Educational decisionmaking authority (ask the court to affirm your client's rights). (Cal. Rules of Court, rule 5.651(b)(1).)
- ☐ Any other specifically requested orders.
- ☐ Setting next hearings (including need for special interim hearings).
- ☐ Time waivers.

AFTER

- ☐ Consult with client to explain court rulings and reinforce client's ability to "fix the problems."
- ☐ Establish an action plan for client (e.g., get into services, get restraining order, clean up house).
- ☐ Provide contact information and next court date, and explain role of social worker.
- ☐ If there is reason to know the case involves an Indian child and the child has been removed from parental custody on an emergency basis (i.e., without full compliance with ICWA's foster care placement requirements: active efforts, qualified expert witness testimony, etc.), consider seeking return if circumstances change and the emergency that justified removal is resolved.
- ☐ File necessary forms/motions if pursuing rehearing, demurrer, or writ of mandate.



BLACK LETTER DISCUSSION

The initial hearing is the first hearing held after a petition is filed to declare a child a dependent of the juvenile court. (§ 315.) If the child has been taken into custody, this first hearing is called a detention hearing. At a detention hearing, the court determines whether the child should be released to the parent or remain detained. Additionally, counsel is appointed and the court makes certain inquiries and orders. The court has its first opportunity to review and assess evidence proffered by the social services agency and any evidence presented by the parties. (§ 319.)

CHILD TAKEN INTO PROTECTIVE CUSTODY

Under Welfare and Institutions Code section 305, children in need of protection can be taken into emergency protective custody. A peace officer, without a warrant, may take temporary custody of a child when the officer has reasonable cause to believe the child is described in section 300 and (1) is in immediate need of medical care, or (2) is in immediate danger of physical or sexual abuse, or (3) there is an immediate threat to the child's health and safety caused by the child's physical environment or by the fact that the child has been left unattended, or (4) the officer finds the child in the street or in a public place suffering from sickness or injury that requires treatment.

A peace officer, without a warrant, may take temporary custody of a hospitalized child if release of the child poses an immediate danger to the child—sometimes called a “hospital hold.” Section 309(b) applies to children under a doctor's care in a hospital or clinic when the child cannot be moved and the child appears to meet the requirements of section 300. Such children are in temporary custody and are turned over to CPS. A peace officer, without a warrant, may take temporary custody of a hospitalized child when release of the minor to parents poses an immediate danger to the child. (§ 305(b).)

When a child is taken into emergency custody, parents are notified. (§§ 307.4, 308(a).)



When a peace officer takes a child into temporary custody, the officer typically turns the child over to CPS. (§§ 306(a)(1), 307.) Section 309(a) provides that when a CPS social worker takes custody from a peace officer, the social worker must immediately investigate the situation. This investigation must include inquiring whether the child is or may be an Indian child. (§ 224.2(b).) If the social worker is able to return the child safely to parents, the social worker returns the child. The social worker retains custody of the child when there is no parent to care for the child or continued detention is a matter of urgent necessity to keep the child safe. In an emergency, a CPS social worker can place a detained child with a suitable relative. (§ 309(d), (e).) The relative must begin the family resource process to ensure the home is appropriate. (§ 309(d)(2).) Special considerations around placement apply if it is known or there is reason to know the child is an Indian child as defined by the Indian Child Welfare Act. (§ 309(d)(1).)

Section 305.6 focuses on hospitalized children for whom adoption is proposed. Section 305.6(a) authorizes a peace officer, without a warrant, to take temporary custody of a hospitalized child if release of the child to a prospective adoptive parent or adoption agency poses an immediate danger to the child's health or safety. Section 305.6(b)(1) focuses on hospitalized newborn children who test positive for illegal drugs or whose mother tests positive, and where adoption is in the works. In these circumstances, a peace officer needs a warrant to take a child into temporary custody.

Section 305 requires a peace officer taking a child into protective custody to have "reasonable cause to believe" the child meets the requirements of section 305. Does reasonable cause to believe equate with probable cause or with the lower standard of reasonable suspicion required for so-called *Terry* stops? In California, reasonable cause to believe is used interchangeably with probable cause. (*Carcamo v. Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department* (2021) 68 Cal. App.5th 608, 618.)

A CPS social worker may, without a warrant, take temporary custody of a child who has been declared a dependent child of the



juvenile court. (§ 306(a)(2).) Section 306(a)(2) also authorizes a CPS social worker, without a warrant, to take temporary custody of a child whom the social worker has reasonable cause to believe is neglected as neglect is defined in section 300(b) or (g), provided the social worker has reasonable cause to believe the child has an immediate need for medical care or is in immediate danger of physical or sexual abuse, or the child's physical environment poses an immediate threat to the child's health or safety. When CPS social workers remove siblings, efforts are made to keep the siblings together. (§ 306.5.)

The Welfare and Institutions Code sections dealing with temporary custody contain detailed provisions when the child is an Indian child.

When a CPS social worker decides it is necessary to take custody of a child, but the provisions for temporary custody described above are not used or do not apply, the social worker prepares a warrant to take the child into custody. The warrant is presented to a judge. If the judge signs the warrant, CPS, often accompanied by law enforcement, executes the warrant and takes the child into custody.

TIMING OF HEARING

When a child is taken into custody, the social worker must release the child unless a petition is filed in juvenile court within 48 hours after the child is taken into custody. Nonjudicial days do not count in the 48 hours. (§§ 311(a), 313(a).) When a child remains in custody and a petition is filed, the clerk of court sets a detention hearing. (§ 311(a), (b).) The detention hearing must be held as soon as possible, "but not later than the expiration of the next judicial day after a petition . . . has been filed." (§ 315.)

NOTICE

Advance notice and an opportunity to be heard are essential requirements of procedural due process. The U.S. Supreme Court wrote in *Fuentes v. Shevin* (1972) 407 U.S. 67, 80, "[T]he central meaning of procedural due process [is] clear: Parties whose rights are to be



affected are entitled to be heard; and in order that they may enjoy that right they must first be notified.” In *In re R.F.* (2021) 71 Cal.App.5th 459, 470, the Court of Appeal added, “There is no doubt that due process guarantees apply to dependency proceedings. . . . It is . . . fundamental that the right to notice and an opportunity to be heard must be granted at a meaningful time and in a meaningful manner. Due process requirements in the context of child dependency litigation have similarly focused principally on the right to a hearing and the right to notice. A meaningful hearing requires an opportunity to examine evidence and cross-examine witnesses, and hence a failure to provide parents with a copy of the social worker’s report, upon which the court will rely in coming to a decision, is a denial of due process.” Notice and an opportunity to be heard are themes that run the length and breadth of dependency proceedings. (See *In re Jayden G.* (2023) 88 Cal.App.5th 301.)

Notice of the date, time, and location of the detention hearing, with a copy of the petition, must be served as soon as possible after the petition is filed and no less than 24 hours in advance of the hearing. (§§ 290.1, 290.2.) If the whereabouts of the parent are unknown, the agency must exercise due diligence (i.e., conduct a good faith inquiry that is thorough and systematic) to locate and notice the parent. Failure to give notice to a parent of dependency proceedings violates due process and is “fatal” to the court’s jurisdiction. (*In re Claudia S.* (2005) 131 Cal.App.4th 236.) Insufficient notice means that the jurisdictional and subsequent findings are subject to reversal on appeal. (*In re Arlyne A.* (2000) 85 Cal.App.4th 591, 598–600.)

Dependency proceedings involve numerous court hearings, and the due process implications of proper notice loom large. The Supreme Court’s decision in *In re Christopher L.* (2022) 12 Cal.5th 1063 provides guidance regarding notice and the types of errors in notice that require reversal of a trial court decision. In *In re R.O.* (2022) 83 Cal.App.5th 586, 874, the Court of Appeal wrote, “Before a child is removed from his or her parent’s care, the parent has the fundamental right to adequate notice and the opportunity to be heard. . . . This right ‘has little, if any, value unless the parent is advised of



the nature of the hearing giving rise to that opportunity, including what will be decided therein. Only with adequate advisement can one choose to appear or not, to prepare or not, and to defend or not.” In *In re R.O.*, the juvenile court scheduled a “confirmation” or readiness hearing. “Mother” did not attend the confirmation hearing. Over the objection of Mother’s attorney, the court improperly converted the confirmation hearing into an uncontested jurisdictional hearing. The trial court’s error was not harmless. (See also *In re S.V.* (2022) 86 Cal.App.5th 1036; *In re J.R.* (2022) 82 Cal.App.5th 569, 572 [“Because parents have a fundamental liberty interest in the companionship, care, custody, and management of their children, the due process clause requires child welfare agencies to exercise reasonable diligence in attempting to locate and notify them of dependency proceedings.” The agency must leave no stone unturned to give notice to parents].)

COUNSEL FOR THE CHILD

1. Appointment

The court appoints counsel for the child absent a finding that the child would not benefit from counsel. To find that the child would not benefit, the court must find that the child understands the nature of the proceedings and is able to communicate and advocate effectively with the court, all counsel, and the professionals involved. (Cal. Rules of Court, rule 5.660(b).) Practically speaking, minor’s counsel is appointed in virtually all dependency cases. (*In re S.D.* (2002) 102 Cal.App.4th 560, 563.) Counsel may be any member of the bar, including a district attorney or public defender, so long as that attorney does not represent any party or county agency whose interests conflict with the child’s. (§ 317(c).) Attorneys for children must comply with the education and experience requirements and standards of representation stated in rule 5.660(d) of the California Rules of Court. Children’s counsel, as well as judicial officers and Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASAs) receive training on cultural competency and sensitivity relating to adequate care for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender youth in out-of-home placement. (§ 317(c)(5)(B)(i); Cal. Rules of Court, rule 5.660(d)(3)(A)(iii).)

2. Conflicts

If asked to represent several children in the same family, counsel should conduct a conflicts analysis, guidelines for which are provided in rule 5.660(c) of the California Rules of Court. The court may appoint one attorney to represent all siblings unless an actual conflict exists or there is a reasonable likelihood that an actual conflict will arise. (*Carroll v. Superior Court* (2002) 101 Cal.App.4th 1423; *In re Celine R.* (2003) 31 Cal.4th 45, 56–57; *In re Charlissee C.* (2008) 45 Cal.4th 145; Cal. Rules of Court, rule 5.660(c).) Counsel for the child may not accept the appointment if his or her firm previously represented a sibling and there is an actual conflict between the sibling and the new client. Counsel for the child also may not accept appointment for two or more siblings if there is an actual or potential conflict between the siblings. After accepting appointment, counsel may not continue to represent two or more siblings when an actual conflict arises between the siblings.

An actual conflict occurs when the lawyer would have to take directly adverse positions on a material factual and/or legal issue in order to advocate effectively for both clients. A potential conflict occurs when the specific circumstances of the case make it reasonably likely that an actual conflict will arise. Standing alone, the following circumstances do not necessarily constitute an actual conflict or likelihood of conflict: the siblings are of different ages, have only one parent in common, have different permanent plans or some appear more adoptable than others, express conflicting desires regarding nonmaterial issues, or give conflicting accounts of nonmaterial events. (Cal. Rules of Court, rule 5.660(c).)

Attorneys have a continuing duty to evaluate the interests of each sibling, and if an actual conflict arises, the attorney must notify the court and request to withdraw from representing some or all of the siblings. Potential conflicts that arise after appointment do not require complete withdrawal. The attorney may continue to represent one or more siblings so long as continued representation of these siblings will not prejudice the interests of those formerly represented,



and the attorney has not exchanged any confidential information with the former client(s) whose interests conflict with those of the remaining client(s). (*Ibid.*)

If an attorney requests to be relieved because of a conflict, the court may make an inquiry as to the appropriateness of the request in order to determine whether an actual conflict of interest exists.

However, the court may not require an attorney to disclose confidential communications. (*Ibid.*; *Aceves v. Superior Court* (1996) 51 Cal.App.4th 584.)

3. The Child's Representative

a. Child's Attorney

Counsel has the responsibility to represent “the child’s interests,” specifically to investigate the facts; interview, examine, and cross-examine witnesses; and make recommendations to the court regarding the child’s welfare. Counsel must interview children aged four and older and communicate the client’s wishes to the court. Counsel should also ensure that adequate ICWA inquiry has been completed as failure to fulfill ICWA inquiry requirements can negatively impact a child’s case. However, counsel may not advocate for return to a parent if, to the best of the attorney’s knowledge, return would pose a threat to the child’s safety and protection. (§ 317(e).) An attorney is more than a “mouthpiece” for the child. The Court of Appeal has concluded that a child’s attorney may advocate for a position contrary to that of the child’s stated wishes if evidence indicates that the result desired by the child would be unsafe. (*In re Alexis W.* (1999) 71 Cal.App.4th 28, 36; *In re Kristen B.* (2008) 163 Cal.App.4th 1535.)

Although not required to perform the duties of a social worker, counsel investigates the child’s interests beyond dependency and reports to the court any other interests that may need administrative or judicial intervention. (§ 317(e); Cal. Rules of Court, rule 5.66o(g).)



The child may need legal representation in nondependency proceedings—for example, when the child has been injured and has

a cognizable tort claim or has been denied early intervention services, education services, regional center services, or public benefits such as social security or state disability payments.

The attorney is the holder of the child's psychotherapist-client and physician-patient privilege unless the court finds the child is of sufficient age and maturity to give informed consent. (§ 317(f); also see Children's Rights fact sheet.)

b. CAPTA GAL

Under the federal Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA) and state law, every child who is the subject of dependency proceedings must be appointed a guardian ad litem (CAPTA GAL), who may be an attorney or a CASA volunteer. (42 U.S.C. § 5101 et seq.; § 326.5; Cal. Rules of Court, rule 5.662(c).) A CAPTA GAL obtains a firsthand understanding of the case and the child's needs and make recommendations to the court as to the child's best interest. (Cal. Rules of Court, rule 5.662(d).) The duties and responsibilities of an attorney serving as CAPTA GAL are the same as those for counsel for the child in dependency and are outlined in section 317(e) and rule 5.660 of the California Rules of Court. (See *id.*, rule 5.662(e).) The California Supreme Court held that the CAPTA GAL's responsibilities extend through appeal and include the duty to pursue an appeal or authorize appellate counsel to seek dismissal of an appeal when it is in the child's best interest. (*In re Josiah Z.* (2005) 36 Cal.4th 664, 680–681.)

SOCIAL WORKER'S REPORT

The social worker must submit a report for the detention hearing identifying

- Reasons for removal;
- Need for continued detention;
- Services already provided to the family;
- Any services available to prevent the need for further detention;
- Whether there is a previously noncustodial parent or relative willing and able to care for the child;



- Efforts that have been made and continue to be made to place the child with siblings or half-siblings who have also been detained;
- The person holding the education rights of the child and whether the court should temporarily limit the parent's or guardian's right to make educational decisions (§ 319(g)(1)–(3); Cal. Rules of Court, rule 6.651(b)(1)(D));
- Whether the child is enrolled in and attending the child's school of origin as defined in Education Code section 48853.5(e) (Cal. Rules of Court, rule 6.651(b)); and
- If the child is no longer attending the school of origin, whether the education rights holder decided that it was not in the best interest of the child to attend his or her school of origin (*id.*, rule 6.651(b)(1)(C)(i)).
- (§§ 306.5, 319; Cal. Rules of Court, rule 5.676.)

1. There are additional requirements if it is known, or there is reason to know, the child is an Indian child. (§ 319(d), (f)(2) & (i).)

(§§ 306.6, 319; Cal. Rules of Court, rule 5.676.)

At a detention hearing, the court can rely entirely on the social worker's report to reach a decision. (Cal. Rules of Court, rule 5.676(c).)

BURDEN OF PROOF AND STATUTORY ELEMENTS

1. Release or Continued Detention

After reviewing the social worker's report and any other evidence, the court *must* order the child released to the parent's custody unless the court finds that

- The petitioner has made a *prima facie* showing that the child falls within section 300;
- Continuance in the parent's physical custody is contrary to the child's welfare; *and*

Any of the following:



- There is substantial danger to the child’s physical health or the child is suffering from severe emotional damage, *and* there are no reasonable means to protect the child without removal;
- There is substantial evidence the parent is likely to flee with the child;
- The child left a previous court-ordered placement; or
- The child is unwilling to return home and has been physically or sexually abused by someone living there.

If it is known or there is reason to know the child is an Indian child, the court must also find that detention is necessary to prevent imminent physical damage or harm to the child. (§ 319(d); Cal. Rules of Court, rule 5.484(a).)

2. Prima Facie Case Defined

A prima facie case is made when the petitioner presents evidence sufficient to shift the burden of persuasion to the other party. (*In re Raymond G.* (1991) 230 Cal.App.3d 964, 972, citation omitted.) In the context of detention, the court determines whether the evidence in the social worker’s report would suffice to prove that the child was described by section 300. If not, the court must release the child. Section 321 and rule 5.674(e) prescribe a procedure for a party to request evidence of the petitioner’s prima facie case either at a rehearing or at an expedited jurisdiction hearing. In *In re M.C.* (2023) 88 Cal.App.5th 137, 149, the Court of Appeal explained, “The Department’s evidentiary burden at the detention hearing is ‘light.’”

3. Evidentiary Nature of Hearing

At the initial hearing, the court examines the parents and other persons with relevant knowledge and considers relevant evidence. (§ 319; Cal. Rules of Court, rule 5.674(a).) The parents, guardians, and child have a right to confront and cross-examine anyone examined by the court during the hearing and may assert the privilege against self-incrimination. (§ 311(b); Cal. Rules of Court, rule 5.674(c).) Parties have the right to cross-examine the preparer of any reports submitted to the court. (*Ibid.*)





Although it may not be common practice to present evidence at a detention hearing, counsel should consider doing so. Counsel may wish to challenge the credibility and overall sufficiency of the petitioner's evidence to establish a *prima facie* case that the child is described by section 300. But the *prima facie* case is only one element of the determination the child may continue to live safely in the parent's physical custody. Even if the petitioner makes the required *prima facie* showing, presentation of affirmative evidence that the child can be released without substantial risk, or that reasonable services are available to protect the child without removal, may persuade the court to release the child. The issue at this stage is not the truth of the allegations in the petition but whether there is a showing of risk of harm to the child sufficient to justify the child's continued detention.

COURT ORDERS, INQUIRIES, AND FINDINGS

1. Jurisdictional Issues

Subject matter jurisdiction for dependency proceedings (as well as all custody proceedings in California) is controlled by the Uniform Child Custody Jurisdiction and Enforcement Act (UCCJEA). (Fam. Code, § 3400 et seq.; *In re Stephanie M.* (1994) 7 Cal.4th 295, 310.) The purpose of the UCCJEA is to avoid interstate jurisdictional conflicts in custody issues, and failure to follow it may deprive a court of jurisdiction. Generally, a California dependency court has exclusive jurisdiction over an action if California was the child's home state, i.e., if the child lived in the state with a parent for at least the six months prior to filing of the petition. (Fam. Code, §§ 3402(g), 3421(a)(1), 3422.) Even if California is not the home state, a court may take temporary emergency jurisdiction if the child is present in the state and has been abandoned or needs protection from mistreatment or abuse. (*Id.*, § 3424(a).) Caution should be exercised when one or both parents reside outside the United States, as all proceedings are subject to reversal as void if service of notice is not proper under the Hague Service Convention. (*In re Jennifer O.*



(2010) 184 Cal.App.4th 539 [county agency must comply with the Hague Convention when serving parents in other countries with petition and notice of jurisdictional hearing]; *In re Alyssa F.* (2003) 112 Cal.App.4th 846; for further discussion of the UCCJEA, the Hague Conventions, and the Parental Kidnapping Prevention Act (PKPA), see Jurisdictional Issues fact sheet.)

If one or both parents are on active military duty, the Servicemembers Civil Relief Act (50 U.S.C. Appen. § 501 et seq.) applies. The parent is entitled to a 90-day stay of proceedings if military duty prevents his or her attendance at hearings. Special notice provisions apply. (See *In re Amber M.* (2010) 184 Cal.App.4th 1223; *In re A.R.* (2009) 170 Cal.App.4th 733.)

If the court knows or has reason to know the child is an Indian child, a tribal court may have exclusive or concurrent jurisdiction. Courts are required to determine an Indian child's residence and domicile to determine if a tribe may have exclusive jurisdiction. The court must also determine whether the Indian child has been or is under the jurisdiction of a tribal court. (25 U.S.C. § 1911; Welf. & Inst. Code, § 305.5.)



If there are indications that another state or country may be involved, the initial/detention hearing is the time to raise the issue and make appropriate requests of the court.

2. Reasonable Efforts (To Prevent or Eliminate the Need for Removal)

At detention, the court determines whether the agency made reasonable efforts, or in the case of an Indian child, active efforts, to prevent the need for the child's removal from the home and whether there are services that would obviate the need for further detention. Services include case management, counseling, emergency shelter care, emergency in-home caretakers, out-of-home respite care, teaching and demonstrating homemaking, parenting training, transportation, and referrals to public assistance (e.g., Medi-Cal, food stamps). (§ 319(f).) Different considerations apply in cases involving Indian children. (§§ 224.1(f); 306(f)(4).) In addition, *prior*



to removal, the social worker is required to consider whether a non-offending caregiver can provide for and protect the child and/or whether the alleged perpetrator will voluntarily leave and remain out of the home, thereby preventing the need for further detention. (§ 306(f)(3).)



Removal from parental custody should be the exception, not the rule. Under the Welfare and Institutions Code, not only must the social worker consider reasonable means to maintain the child safely in the home, but peace officers may not take a child into temporary custody absent imminent danger of physical or sexual abuse or an immediate threat to the child's health or safety. (§§ 305, 306(c).) The statutory scheme underlying dependency makes clear that detention should occur only in emergency situations.

3. Findings Necessary for Funding of Relative Caregivers/Title IV-E

Title IV-E of the Social Security Act sets out specific judicial findings and orders that must be made to ensure federal reimbursement to counties for the care of children in out-of-home placements. (42 U.S.C. § 672; see Funding and Rate Issues fact sheet.) At the initial detention hearing, the court must make the following findings for title IV-E eligibility:

- Continuance in the home of the parent or legal guardian is contrary to the child's welfare; and
- Temporary placement and care are vested with the child protective agency pending disposition.

These findings must be made in the first judicial determination in the case for a child detained with a relative to be eligible for federal foster care funding at the *Youakim* rate, which is significantly higher than that available under state funding. (*Miller v. Youakim* (1979) 440 U.S. 125.) If the proper language does not appear on the minute order, *Youakim* funding will be denied, and nunc pro tunc orders will not correct the problem. The findings above are also required by state law when the court orders a child detained. (§ 319(b), (c) & (e).





An omission of the proper findings from a minute order may be corrected only if the transcript shows they were in fact made on the record. Because the results of omitting the title IV-E findings are costly, it is best for everyone in the courtroom to ensure that the proper findings are made on the record at the initial hearing.



Federal law also links *Youakim* funding to a requirement that a finding must be made within 60 days from the date of removal that the agency exercised reasonable efforts to prevent or eliminate the need for removal. (45 C.F.R. § 1356.21(b)(1).) Given the additional window of time the agency has to elevate its efforts to the proper standard, a finding of “no reasonable efforts” at detention does not permanently preclude federal backing for relative foster care funds. Counsel for parents and children may wish to urge the court at detention to review the agency’s efforts and hold the agency to its statutory mandate.

4. Parentage Inquiry

The court makes inquiries as to the identity and whereabouts of any fathers, presumed, biological, or alleged (*In re A.H.* (2022) 84 Cal.App.5th 340, 349 (“There are three types of fathers in dependency law: presumed, biological and alleged”).) If the court is given sufficient information, the court may make determinations as to paternity status. (§ 316.2; Cal. Rules of Court, rule 5.635.) If a man claiming to be the father appears at the initial hearing, the parentage inquiry takes place at the hearing. The court asks questions regarding the mother’s marital status (past and present), any declarations of paternity, and qualifications as a presumed father under the criteria of Family Code section 7611, especially section 7611(d). In rare cases, an issue of maternity arises, e.g., when a child’s birth mother has a same-sex partner. (See Parentage fact sheet.)



Early determination of a child’s parentage is important because it may affect release and relative placement decisions. Only presumed parents are entitled to reunification services. (*In re A.H.*



(2022) 84 Cal.App.5th 340.) Because presumed parent status confers rights to custody, reunification services, and visitation, the court should not be too quick to enter such a finding.

5. Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA)

The court has an affirmative duty to ascertain whether a child who is the subject of the petition is an Indian child as defined in ICWA. (25 U.S.C. § 1901 et seq.) Under California law, information that gives the agency or court “reason to believe” that a child may be an Indian child under ICWA triggers a duty to conduct “further inquiry” including interviewing all available extended family members and consulting with tribes to determine the child’s status. If at any point the agency or court has information giving a “reason to know” the child is an Indian child, statutory notification requirements apply for all subsequent hearings unless and until the court properly determines that the act does not apply. (Cal. Rules of Court, rule 5.481; see fact sheet on ICWA.) A determination by a tribe that a child is not a member of, or eligible for membership in, the tribe is conclusive. (Welf. & Inst. Code, § 224.2(h).)

In addition to the noticing obligations imposed on the agency, when there is reason to know the case involves an Indian child, ICWA imposes a number of unique procedural and substantive requirements in all phases of a case in which a child is involuntarily removed from parental custody. For ICWA purposes, the detention hearing is an “emergency proceeding” (25 U.S.C. § 1922; 25 C.F.R. § 23.113) unless ICWA requirements for foster care placement—such as evidence of active efforts and the testimony of a qualified expert witness—have been provided at the detention hearing. Specific evidentiary requirements and judicial findings must be made to support the emergency removal and placement of an Indian child. (*Ibid.*) Importantly, no removal can take place except to prevent imminent physical damage or harm to the child. The court must make a finding on the record that the emergency removal or placement is necessary to prevent imminent physical damage or harm to the child and must promptly hold a hearing on whether the emergency



removal or placement continues to be necessary whenever new information indicates that the emergency has ended. An emergency removal may not generally last more than 30 days without a fully ICWA-compliant hearing, which includes a showing of active efforts and the testimony of a qualified expert witness.

6. Services to the Child and Family and Ancillary Orders

a. Family Maintenance/Preservation

If the court determines that a child can be safely returned to a parent with supportive services, it orders return and those services. Services include counseling, emergency shelter care, out-of-home respite care, emergency in-home caretakers, teaching and demonstrating homemaking, transportation, referrals to public assistance agencies, or return of the child to a nonoffending caregiver with orders limiting the abusive person's contact with the child. (§§ 306, 319(f); Cal. Rules of Court, rule 5.678(b).)

b. Family Reunification

If the child remains detained, the court, if appropriate, orders that services to the family be provided to assist in reunification. (§ 319(g).) Prompt initiation of services is important because the 18-month time limit for reunification is measured from the date of initial removal. Participation by a parent in services is not deemed an admission to the allegations and may not be used as evidence against the parent. (§ 16501.1.)

c. Child-Specific Services

The child's attorney should request that the court order services targeted to the child's specific needs. These could include crisis counseling; assessments (e.g., medical, psychological, developmental, educational); assistance in obtaining the child's belongings from the parental home; and assistance in ensuring that the child remains in his or her school of origin. If the holder of education rights finds that remaining in the school of origin is not in the child's best interest, he or she should ensure that the child is immediately enrolled in the new school and that the child's education records are transferred



within 48 hours. (§ 16501.1(c); Ed. Code, § 48853.5; Cal. Rules of Court, rule 5.651(e) & (f).)

d. Education Rights

Prior to disposition, the court may temporarily limit a parent's or guardian's right to make educational decisions. (§ 319(j).) If the court limits the parent's right to make educational decisions, the court order must specifically indicate that. The court appoints a responsible adult to serve as the child's educational representative, whether or not the child qualifies for special education or other educational services. All findings and orders relating to educational decision-making must be documented on Judicial Council form JV-535, *Findings and Orders Limiting Right to Make Educational Decisions for the Child, Appointing Educational Representative, and Determining Child's Educational Needs*. (§ 319; Cal. Rules of Court, rule 5.650.) The court should consider the following individuals as the child's educational representative: adult relative, nonrelative extended family member, foster parent, family friend, mentor, or CASA volunteer. The court may not appoint any individual who has a conflict of interest, including social workers, probation officers, group home staff, or an employee of the school district. (Ed. Code, § 56055.)

If the court is unable to locate a responsible adult to serve as educational representative for the child and the child either has been referred to the local educational agency (LEA) for special education services or has an individualized education program (IEP), the court must refer the child to the LEA for appointment of a "surrogate parent" using form JV 535, and, within 30 days, the LEA must make reasonable efforts to appoint a surrogate parent and communicate the information to the court on form JV-536. The surrogate parent makes decisions related to special education evaluation, eligibility, planning, and services. (Cal. Rules of Court, rule 5.650(a)–(f).)

If the court cannot identify a responsible adult to make education decisions for the child and the child does not qualify for special education, the court may make education decisions for the child with the input of any interested person. (§ 319(j)(2); Cal. Rules of Court, rule 5.650(a).)



e. Visitation

At the initial hearing, the court makes orders regarding visitation between the child and other persons, including the parents, siblings, and other relatives. (Cal. Rules of Court, rule 5.670(c).) Visitation orders are based on an assessment of whether contact pending the jurisdictional hearing would be beneficial or detrimental to the child, and may specify frequency and manner of contact as well as place any restrictions deemed necessary. As with placement, when siblings who are dependent upon each other are separated, it is critical to ensure they are afforded frequent visits.

f. Restraining Orders

From the time the petition is filed until the petition is dismissed or jurisdiction terminates, the court has the authority to issue restraining orders. (See *In re A.P.* (2024) 103 Cal. App.5th 1137; § 304; Cal. Rules of Court, rule 5.620(b).) Restraining orders may be issued to protect the child who is the subject of the dependency proceedings, any other child living in the household, or a parent, guardian, or caregiver regardless of whether the child currently resides with that person. The court may issue a temporary restraining order ex parte but must then set a noticed hearing within 20 days. (§ 213.5; Cal. Rules of Court, rule 5.630.) At that hearing, the court may issue a restraining order for up to three years; no court (other than a criminal court) may issue any orders contrary to the dependency restraining order. (Cal. Rules of Court, rule 5.630.)

POSSIBLE OUTCOMES

1. One-Day Continuance

If a parent, legal guardian, or child requests a one-day continuance of a detention hearing, the court must grant it. (§ 322; Cal. Rules of Court, rule 5.672.) Upon continuing the case, unless it orders the child's release to a parent, the court must find that continuance of the child in the parent's home is contrary to the child's welfare and detain the child in the interim. (§ 319(c).) Note that these findings must be made at the first appearance in order to preserve federal



funding entitlement. Temporary findings are reevaluated at the continued hearing and are not made with prejudice to any party. (Cal. Rules of Court, rule 5.672.)

2. Release to Parent

a. Insufficient Showing

The court must release the child to a parent absent findings that

- There has been a *prima facie* showing that the child falls within section 300;
- Continuance in the home is contrary to the child's welfare; and

Any of the following:

- There is substantial danger to the child's physical health or the child is suffering from severe emotional damage, *and* there are no reasonable means to protect the child without removal;
- There is substantial evidence the parent is likely to flee with the child;
- The child left a previous court-ordered placement;
- The child is unwilling to return home and was physically or sexually abused by someone living there; or

(§ 319; Cal. Rules of Court, rules 5.676, 5.678.)

- If there is reason to know the case involves an Indian child, there must also be a showing that the removal is necessary to prevent imminent physical damage or harm to the child. (25 U.S.C. § 1922.)



When deciding whether to release or detain a child, the court considers the facts alleged in the social worker's report to be true unless challenged. It may be critical to cross-examine the author of the report or put on additional relevant evidence (§§ 319(a), 321; see discussion of *prima facie* cases in the "Burden of Proof and Statutory Elements" section earlier in this black letter discussion.)




b. Services Are Available to Prevent the Need for Further Detention

The court must release the child to the parent and order that services be provided to ensure the safety and well-being of the child if it is shown that such services are available. Services to be considered include emergency shelter care, in-home caretakers, and referrals to public assistance. (§ 319(f)(1) & (2).)

c. Offending Caregiver Ordered Out of the Home

Prior to removal, the social worker is required to consider whether the child can safely remain in the home if the offending caregiver voluntarily moves out and remains out of the family home. (§ 306(b)(3).) This remains an option at detention, at which time the court may make orders for provision of supportive services and monitoring of the situation to ensure the child's safety. (§ 319(f)(1) & (2).)

 Restraining orders against the alleged offender may be useful in crafting a protective plan to allow the child to return to a parent's custody.

3. Detention From the Custodial Parent

Under section 319, upon detaining a child, the court orders that temporary care and custody of the child be vested in the agency. The court may then place the child in an emergency shelter, a licensed foster home, or the assessed home of a relative or a nonrelative extended family member. (§ 319(g) & (h); Cal. Rules of Court, rule 5.678(e).)

a. Release to a Noncustodial, Nonoffending Parent

A parent who was not living with the child at the time of removal may come forward at detention to seek to care for the child. Section 319 does not specifically address release to the home of a previously noncustodial parent. Rather, the statute discusses “removal from,” “continuance in,” or “return to” the home of the parent(s) from whom the child was detained. Prior to the detention hearing—upon taking the child into custody—the social worker is required to “immediately release the child to the custody of the child's parent,

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guardian, or responsible relative” unless there are no such persons, they are not willing to provide care for the child, or continued detention is necessary for the child’s protection. (§ 309.)

Release to a parent does not trigger the same statutory and regulatory restrictions that apply to placement with a relative, such as assessment of physical home requirements or criminal conviction limitations. (§ 361.2(a) & (e)(1).) Additionally, the Interstate Compact on the Placement of Children (ICPC) does not apply to release to a nonoffending parent residing in another state. (*In re Johnny S.* (1995) 40 Cal.App.4th 969; Cal. Rules of Court, rule 5.616(b)(1)(A).)

b. Detention With a Relative

Upon detaining a child, the court determines if there is a relative or a nonrelative extended family member (NREFM) who has been assessed by the agency and is willing and able to care for the child. A “relative” is defined as an adult related by blood, adoption, or affinity (via marriage) within the fifth degree of kinship, which includes stepparents, stepsiblings, all “great, great-great or grand” relatives, and the spouses of those persons, even if divorce or death ended the marriage. (§ 319(f).) Affinity exists between a person and the blood or adoptive kin of his or her spouse. (Cal. Rules of Court, rule 5.502(1).) All relatives should be considered, but preferential consideration for placement at detention must be given only to grandparents, aunts, uncles, or siblings of the child. (§ 319(f).) A NREFM is defined as “an adult caregiver who has an established familial relationship with a relative of the child, as defined in paragraph (2) of subdivision (c) of section 361.3, or a familial or mentoring relationship with the child” that has been verified by the agency. (§ 362.7.) In the case of an Indian child, special rules apply to who is considered a relative. Tribes may also approve homes for placement in lieu of the agency. Further, any placement of an Indian child must comply with ICWA placement preferences.



It is critical that the issue of who will serve as the caregiver is addressed as early as possible, and that efforts are made to place



the child with appropriate relatives or NREFMs. Reasons for this include minimization of the trauma of detention by releasing the child to familiar surroundings and people; access to siblings and extended family members, thereby allowing the child to maintain important relationships; consistency in placement and reduction of multiple moves; and, if efforts to reunify ultimately fail, promotion of permanency, given the statutory preferences favoring a permanent plan that allows a child to remain with existing caregivers to whom he or she is attached. (See § 366.26.)

c. Notice to Relatives and Relative Information Form

When a child is removed from the home, within 30 days the child's social worker must conduct an investigation to identify and locate the child's grandparents and other adult relatives. Once a relative is located, the social worker is required to provide written notification and inform the relative, in person or by telephone, of the child's removal and the options available to participate in the child's care and placement. The social worker is also required to provide adult relatives with a relative information form to provide information to the social worker and the court regarding the child's needs. At the detention hearing, the juvenile court should inquire as to the efforts made by the social worker to identify and locate relatives and require the social worker to provide any completed relative information forms to the court and all parties. (§ 309.)



When a child is removed from the parents' home, it is important that relatives are identified and assessed as soon as possible. The relative information form provides a process whereby able and willing relatives may seek placement of the child and/or become involved in the child's care.

(i) Assessment and Approval

Assessment and approval of placement are the responsibility of the agency, which also has a duty to make diligent efforts to locate and place the child with relatives. (§§ 361.3(a), 16000(a); Fam. Code, § 7950; see Relative Placements fact sheet.) If the case involves an Indian child, the child's tribe may be able to certify the home for placement.



(ii) Interstate Compact on the Placement of Children

If the potential caregiver lives in a state other than California, placement can be made only under the terms of the ICPC. An expedited or priority placement request can be made if the child is younger than two years old, is in an emergency shelter, or has previously spent a substantial amount of time in the home proposed for placement. (Fam. Code, § 7900 et seq.; Cal. Rules of Court, rule 5.616; see fact sheet on the ICPC; *In re D.P.* (2023) 92 Cal.App.5th 1282, 1287.) Rules governing the ICPC do not apply to presumed or biological parents. (See generally *In re C.B.* (2010) 190 Cal.App.4th 102.) The ICPC also does not apply when the case involves an Indian child, and the placement is occurring as part of transferring the case to a tribal court. (Fam. Code, § 7907.3.)



Investigation of the proposed home under the ICPC can take a long time to complete. If it appears to be in the child's best interest to make an interstate move, a request should be made as soon as possible to initiate the ICPC process.

d. Siblings

When children are detained, the social worker has a statutory obligation to place siblings and half-siblings together "to the extent that it is practical and appropriate." (§ 306.5.) If this is not done, the social worker must inform the court in the detention report of continuing efforts being made to place the children together or of any reasons why such efforts are not appropriate. (§ 16002.)



The child's counsel should assess the nature of the relationship between siblings, especially those who often have relied primarily on each other for support in the family home prior to detention. When closely bonded siblings have been separated, it is incumbent upon the child's attorney to draw the court's attention to the problem and request orders to facilitate their joint placement as soon as possible.



4. Alternatives to Jurisdiction

a. Informal Supervision

If the social worker determines that there is a probability the court will take jurisdiction but the conditions placing the child at risk may be ameliorated without court intervention, the agency may seek to dismiss the petition and proceed with a program of informal supervision of the child. This outcome requires the consent of the parent and does not preclude filing of a later petition if the family does not participate in and benefit from the services offered. (§ 301.) However, the agency may not dismiss a petition over the objection of the child's counsel. Instead, the agency must notify the parties and afford them the opportunity to be heard. (*Allen M. v. Superior Court* (1992) 6 Cal.App.4th 1069, 1074.)



At the time of the detention hearing, the agency will seldom be amenable to an immediate section 301 dismissal. However, if the case appears to be appropriate for this type of resolution, counsel can ask that the possibility be addressed in the report prepared for jurisdiction/disposition.

b. Dismissal

Once a petition is filed, the court may dismiss the petition if doing so is in the interests of justice and the minor's welfare, so long as neither the parent nor the minor is in need of treatment or rehabilitation. (§ 390.) Decisional law does not directly address the issue of whether the court may dismiss over the agency's objection; however, it is clear that dismissal requires consent of the child. The child is entitled to an evidentiary hearing at which the court has a duty to protect the child's welfare by determining whether dismissal is in the interests of justice. (See generally *Taylor M. v. Superior Court* (2003) 106 Cal.App.4th 97, 107.)

See *Los Angeles County Department of Children and Family Services v. Superior Court* (2008) 162 Cal.App.4th 1408. In this case, the court stated: "[I]n the ordinary course, section 390 is not an appropriate vehicle for summary dismissal at a detention hearing."





It will be the exceptional case in which a court feels that it has enough information to warrant a section 390 dismissal at the initial hearing.

SETTING THE NEXT HEARING

1. Rehearings

There are several scenarios under which a party can seek a rehearing of the court's decision regarding detention.

a. No Notice to the Parent

If the parent or guardian was not present and did not receive actual notice of the initial hearing, he or she may file an affidavit asserting lack of notice with the clerk of the court and the clerk must set the matter for a rehearing within 24 hours, excluding weekends and holidays. This hearing follows the same procedures as those set out for the initial detention hearing. A parent who received proper notice but failed to appear is not entitled to a rehearing absent a showing that his or her absence was due to good cause. (§ 321.)

b. A Rehearing on the Prima Facie Case

The child, parent, or guardian may request that a further hearing be set for presentation of evidence of the prima facie case. This rehearing must be set within three days excluding weekends and holidays, although the court may continue the matter for no more than five judicial days if a necessary witness is unavailable. The rehearing is conducted in the same procedural manner as the initial hearing. In the alternative, the court may set the matter for a contested adjudication within 10 court days. (§ 321; Cal. Rules of Court, rule 5.674(e).)

c. Matter Heard Initially by a Referee or Commissioner

Any party may apply for a rehearing within 10 days of service of a copy of an order made at a detention hearing by a referee or commissioner who is not sitting as a temporary judge. After reading the transcript, a judge of the juvenile court may grant or deny the application. Additionally, juvenile court judges may on their own motion order



a rehearing. All rehearings are conducted de novo before a judge of the juvenile court. (§§ 250, 252–254; Cal. Rules of Court, rule 5.542.)

2. Demurrer

A section 300 petition must allege specific conduct or circumstances that, if true, would demonstrate that the child is described by at least one of the subdivisions of section 300. A parent or child may challenge the sufficiency of the petition with a motion akin to a demurrer. (*In re Kaylee H.* (2012) 205 Cal.App.4th 92; *In re Alysha S.* (1996) 51 Cal.App.4th 393, 397; *In re Nicholas B.* (2001) 88 Cal.App.4th 1126, 1133.) Any party maintaining that the allegations do not state a cause of action must give notice of intent to file a demurrer at the initial/detention hearing. Generally, if the demurrer is sustained, the court must afford the agency “a timely opportunity” to amend the petition to cure its deficiencies.

In *In re B.H.* (2024) 103 Cal.App.5th 469, the Court of Appeal ruled that failure to raise objection at the earliest opportunity to the facial validity of a petition waives the right to raise the issue on appeal. The court disapproves older cases that held the contrary.

3. Prejurisdictional Settlement Conferences

Following the initial hearing, the case may be set for a pretrial resolution conference (PRC) (also called a settlement and status conference or pretrial readiness conference) at which the parties attempt to resolve the petition by reaching agreement as to amended language, placement of the child, and details of a dispositional case plan. Note that if the case involves an Indian child, it is important that the child’s tribe be included. Such an informal approach is in keeping with the Legislature’s intent that when issues of fact or law are not contested, dependency cases should be resolved quickly and through nonconfrontational means so as to maximize all parties’ cooperation with any dispositional orders the court may issue. (§ 350(a).) Such methods of resolution can protect a child from the stress of participating in a contested hearing and can ease the process of family reunification.



In courts where the local practice is to proceed to adjudication on the date set for the resolution conference if the parents do not appear, notice must clearly indicate that possibility. Without proper scheduling and notice of a jurisdictional hearing, the trial court cannot make jurisdictional findings at a resolution conference/PRC hearing. (*In re Wilford J.* (2005) 131 Cal.App.4th 742.) Dual PRC/jurisdictional hearings are permissible but only if the notice clearly states the nature of the scheduled hearings and the orders that may be made even if a party fails to appear.

4. Mediation

Parties may choose mediation. “Dependency mediation” is defined as “a confidential process conducted by specially trained, neutral third-party mediators who have no decision-making power.” (Cal. Rules of Court, rule 5.518(b)(1).) It is nonadversarial and focuses on child protection and safety with the goal of reaching a settlement that is mutually acceptable to all parties, including the tribe if the case involves an Indian child. The child has a right to participate accompanied by the child’s attorney. (*Id.*, rule 5.518(d)(2)(B).) Negotiations are confidential, and the mediator may not make any reports or recommendations to the court other than to lay out the terms of any agreement reached by the parties. (*Id.*, rule 5.518(c)(2)(D).)



To expedite resolution of the case, mediation can be set either on the same day as the resolution conference or with a backup trial date in the event the case does not settle.

5. Contested Adjudication

When a child has been ordered detained, a contested adjudication must take place within 15 court days of the detention order. Otherwise, the jurisdictional trial must occur within 30 days. (§ 334.) Hearings set under these statutory timelines are sometimes called no-time-waiver trials. A party is deemed to have waived the limits unless a no-time-waiver trial is requested or an objection is made to any requests for continuances. (*In re Richard H.* (1991) 234 Cal.App.3d 1351, 1362.)



If the time limits are waived, the code does not clearly set a maximum time limit for adjudication; however, the dispositional hearing should occur within 60 days of the child's detention absent exceptional circumstances and may in no case be delayed longer than six months after removal. (§ 352(b).) If the case involves an Indian child, the child cannot be detained longer than 30 days without holding a hearing that fulfills the requirements of the Indian Child Welfare Act unless the court makes the specific findings set out in section 319(e)(2). These timelines thus frame the outer limits for the jurisdictional hearing as well because it must occur before disposition. Note, however, that there appears to be no prescribed remedy if either the jurisdictional or the dispositional hearing is not held within the specified time limits. The appellate court specifically rejected the argument that such time limits are jurisdictional and that their violation requires dismissal of the case and release of the child, as such a result would defeat the underlying purpose of dependency proceedings—the protection of children. (*In re Richard H.*, *supra*, 234 Cal.App.3d at p. 1351.)



Counsel should be mindful of the potentially detrimental effects of delays in resolution caused by multiple continuances. Counsel can rely heavily on the code in arguing against a continuance, as none may be granted if contrary to the child's interests, and the court must “give substantial weight to a minor's need for prompt resolution of his or her custody status, the need to provide children with stable environments, and the damage to a minor of prolonged temporary placements.” (§ 352(a).)



JURISDICTION

JURISDICTION HEARING CHECKLIST: CHILD'S ATTORNEY

BEFORE

- ☐ Conduct independent investigation.
 - ☐ Conduct discovery—make informal requests and motion to compel if necessary. (Cal. Rules of Court, rule 5.546.)
 - ☐ Review documents—social services agency and police reports, social worker's notes, medical records.
 - ☐ Interview potential witnesses.
- ☐ Interview client in age-appropriate manner regarding
 - ☐ Accuracy and completeness of information in report.
 - ☐ Position as to truth of allegations.
 - ☐ Desired outcomes and wishes regarding direction of litigation.
- ☐ Counsel client in age-appropriate manner on alternative strategies and probable outcomes.
- ☐ Assess and formulate position on
 - ☐ Strength of social services agency's evidence supporting each allegation, especially whether there is a nexus between the alleged behavior and risk to the child.
 - ☐ Current situation and risk of harm to the child.
 - ☐ Need for contested adjudication.
 - ☐ Need for child's testimony, and if it should be in chambers. (§ 350(b).)
- ☐ If adjudication is to be contested,
 - ☐ Evaluate need for expert testimony.
 - ☐ Provide notice if the presumption in section 355.1 will be invoked. (*In re D.P.* (2014) 225 Cal.App.4th 898.)
 - ☐ Issue subpoenas.
 - ☐ Prep witnesses, including child client.



- ☐ Exchange witness lists with other counsel.
- ☐ File joint statement of issues, motions in limine, or trial briefs as required.
- ☐ If there is reason to know the child is an Indian child, communicate with the tribal ICWA representative to determine the tribe's position on the case.

DURING

- ☐ Be aware of law and applicable burdens of proof.
- ☐ If adjudication is contested,
 - ☐ Make appropriate objections on the record to preserve issues for appeal.
 - ☐ If the case involves an Indian child, be sure to preserve ICWA issues for appeal.
 - ☐ Consider motion to dismiss at conclusion of social services agency's case. (§ 350(c).)

Note: The child has the right to present evidence in support of the petition before the court rules on a section 350(c) motion. (*Allen M. v. Superior Court* (1992) 6 Cal.App.4th 1069.)

- ☐ At close of evidence, consider request to amend petition to conform to proof. (*In re Jessica C.* (2001) 93 Cal.App.4th 1027.)
- ☐ Advocate identified position in keeping with any additional evidence received.
- ☐ Request appropriate interim orders pending disposition.
 - ☐ Placement (e.g., release to parent, to relative, with siblings).
 - ☐ Services for child and/or family to ameliorate problems or facilitate return.
- ☐ Ensure court addresses setting next hearing—disposition must be within 60 days (never more than six months) of detention hearing. (§ 352(b).)

AFTER

- ☐ Consult with child to explain court rulings and answer questions.
- ☐ File necessary forms/motions if pursuing rehearing or extraordinary writ.



JURISDICTION HEARING CHECKLIST: PARENT'S ATTORNEY

BEFORE

- ☐ Conduct independent investigation.
 - ☐ Conduct discovery—make informal requests and motions to compel if necessary. (Cal. Rules of Court, rule 5.546.)
 - ☐ Subpoena records, including police reports and medical records if necessary.
 - ☐ Review all documents, including social worker's notes.
 - ☐ Interview potential witnesses.
- ☐ If client in custody, ensure that a transportation order is issued.
- ☐ Anticipate client's reaction and interview regarding
 - ☐ Accuracy and completeness of information in report.
 - ☐ Position as to truth of allegations.
 - ☐ Desired outcomes and wishes as to direction of litigation.
- ☐ Counsel client on alternative strategies and probable outcomes.
- ☐ Assess and formulate position on
 - ☐ Strength of social services agency's evidence supporting each allegation, especially whether there is a nexus between the alleged behavior and risk to the child.
 - ☐ Current situation and risk of harm to the child.
 - ☐ Whether any presumptions apply under section 355.1.
 - ☐ Need for contested adjudication.
 - ☐ Need for child's testimony (§ 350(b)) and client's wishes regarding this issue.
 - ☐ Whether child is an Indian child, and who may have further information.
- ☐ Negotiate with other counsel (are there combined jurisdiction and disposition issues?).
- ☐ If adjudication is to be contested,



- ☐ Evaluate need for expert testimony and physical evidence.
- ☐ Issue subpoenas.
- ☐ Prep all witnesses, including your client, for direct or cross-examination.
- ☐ Exchange witness lists with other counsel.
- ☐ File joint statement of issues, motions in limine, and applicable section 355 objections.
- ☐ File trial brief.
- ☐ Use pretrial hearing as opportunity to get input on your case from bench.
- ☐ Evaluate need to request a continuance. (§§ 352, 355(b)(2).)

DURING

- ☐ Be aware of law and applicable burdens of proof.
- ☐ Make appropriate objections on the record to preserve issues for appeal, including any ICWA issues, if applicable.
- ☐ Consider motion to dismiss after social services agency's and children's case. (§ 350(c).)
- ☐ At close of evidence, consider request to amend petition to conform to proof. (*In re Jessica C.* (2001) 93 Cal.App.4th 1027.)
- ☐ Request appropriate interim orders pending disposition (i.e., placement and services).
- ☐ Ensure court addresses setting next hearing—disposition must be within 60 days (never more than six months) of detention hearing. (§ 352(b).)

Note: Continuances may be granted only for good cause and never if contrary to the interests of the minor. (§ 352(a).)

AFTER

- ☐ Consult with client to explain court rulings and answer questions.
- ☐ File necessary forms/motions if pursuing rehearing or extraordinary writ.
- ☐ Set tentative deadlines with client for events to occur (begin services, increase visits).



BLACK LETTER DISCUSSION

The purpose of the jurisdictional hearing is to make a factual determination about whether the child has been abused or neglected as defined in section 300(a)–(j). Jurisdiction may exist based on the conduct of just one parent. (*In re M.C.* (2023) 88 Cal.App.5th 137.) The juvenile court takes jurisdiction over the child, not the parents. (*In re B.H.* (2024) 103 Cal.App.5th 469, 479; *In re A.J.* (2022) 77 Cal. App.5th 7, 14.) A finding of jurisdiction against one parent is good against both. (*Id.*)

In *In re M.C.*, *supra*, the Court of Appeal disapproved splitting jurisdiction, disposition, and review hearings between parents, that is, providing separate hearings for each parent. The Court of Appeal wrote, “[T]here is only one simultaneous adjudication of jurisdiction, and one simultaneous disposition. . . . Additionally, review hearings are to be held within certain timeframes based on the dates the minor was initially removed, detailed, or entered foster care. Thus, ‘splitting’ review hearings is also improper.” (Accord *In re A.J.* (2022) 77 Cal.App.5th 7 [“the practice of ‘splitting’ jurisdiction and/or disposition hearings, as was done here, by purporting to hold them separately ‘as to mother’ and ‘as to father,’ is unauthorized and erroneous.”].)

NOTICE

Notice at this stage of the proceedings is jurisdictional. If reasonable efforts to locate and notify the parent are not made, jurisdictional findings (and subsequent orders) may be subject to reversal. (See *In re Arlyne A.* (2000) 85 Cal.App.4th 591, 599.)

1. Content

Notice must contain the name of the child(ren) involved; the date, time, place, and nature of the hearing; the subdivisions of section 300 under which the petition has been filed; and a copy of the petition. It must also contain a statement that the court may proceed in the absence of the person notified, and that those notified have a



right to counsel but may be liable for a portion of the costs of legal representation and of the child's out-of-home placement. (§ 291(d).)

2. Persons and Entities Entitled to Notice

Notice must be provided to the parent or guardian, the child if aged 10 or older, attorneys of record, and dependent siblings and their caregivers and attorneys at least 5 days before the hearing if the child is detained and 10 days prior if not. If there is no parent residing in California or the whereabouts of both parents are unknown, notice must be served on the adult relative living nearest to the court. If there is reason to believe that an Indian child may be involved, notice of the hearing and the tribe's right to intervene must be served on any known Indian custodian and tribe at least 10 days before the hearing or, if unknown, on the Bureau of Indian Affairs at least 10 days before the hearing. (§§ 224.2, 291(a) & (c).) ICWA notice must be given on mandatory Judicial Council form ICWA-030 and comply with the requirements of section 224.3.

3. Method of Service

If the persons required to be noticed were present at the initial hearing and the child is detained, notice may be by personal service or by first-class mail. If they were not at the initial hearing, notice must be by personal service or certified mail, return receipt requested. If the child is not detained, notice may be by personal service or first-class mail. (§ 291(e).)

If the court and county permit, any person who has consented on Judicial Council form EFS-005-CV may be served by electronic mail in place of first-class mail. (*Ibid.*)

TIMING OF HEARING

If the child is detained, the hearing must be set within 15 court days of the date that the order for detention was made. If the child is not detained, the hearing must be held within 30 days of the date the petition was filed. (§ 334.) The time limits are considered waived if counsel did not invoke them at the detention hearing, and the



absence of an objection to an order continuing the hearing beyond these time frames is deemed consent to a continuance. (§ 352(c); see Initial/Detention black letter discussion.)



Hearings held within the time frames outlined in section 334 are sometimes referred to as no-time-waiver hearings. Such hearings are the exception. A continuance is often in the parties' best interest to allow sufficient time for a thorough investigation.

Although no outside limit is set for determining jurisdictional issues, the disposition hearing for a detained child must take place, absent exceptional circumstances, within 60 days of, and under no circumstances more than six months after, the detention hearing. (§ 352; Cal. Rules of Court, rule 5.550.) Because the jurisdiction hearing must occur before disposition, the statutes and decisional law controlling the latter also control the former.

The Court of Appeal has held that violation of the statutory timelines does not deprive the juvenile court of jurisdiction because such an outcome would run counter to the central goal of dependency law—the protection of children. (*In re Richard H.* (1991) 234 Cal.App.3d 1351.) However, the time constraints of section 352 should not be treated lightly and in cases of unwarranted delay juvenile courts have been directed to conduct jurisdiction and disposition hearings on a day-to-day basis until completed. (*Renee S. v. Superior Court* (1999) 76 Cal.App.4th 187; *Jeff M. v. Superior Court* (1997) 56 Cal.App.4th 1238.) Furthermore, the time limits of section 352 have been found to take precedence over an incarcerated parent's right under Penal Code section 2625 to be present at the jurisdictional hearing. (See *D.E. v. Superior Court* (2003) 111 Cal.App.4th 502.)

In cases where there is reason to know that the child is an Indian child, absent exceptional circumstances there must be a hearing with the full suite of ICWA protections, including evidence to support a finding of active efforts and the testimony of a qualified expert witness, within 30 days of the child's removal. (25 C.F.R. § 23.113(e).)



CONTINUANCES

A hearing to determine whether a child is described under section 300 may be continued for a number of reasons under several statutory bases.

1. Good Cause

Upon the request of any party, or the court's own motion, the court may continue the jurisdiction hearing beyond the section 334 time limits, although no continuance may be granted that is contrary to the interests of the child. In assessing the child's interests, the court must give substantial weight to

- The child's need for prompt resolution of his or her custody status;
- The need to provide the child with a stable environment;
- Damage to the child from prolonged temporary placements; and
- In a case involving an Indian child, the absence of an opinion from a qualified expert witness.

(§ 352(a) & (b); Cal. Rules of Court, rule 5.550(a).)

Continuances may be granted only on a showing of good cause and only for the time necessary. Standing alone, none of the following is considered good cause:

- Stipulation among counsel;
- Convenience of the parties;
- Pending resolution of a criminal law matter; or
- Failure of an alleged father to return a certified mail receipt of notice.

(§ 352(a); Cal. Rules of Court, rule 5.550(a).)

2. Social Worker's Late Report

The social worker's report must be provided to all parties or their counsel "within a reasonable time before the hearing." If this has not been done, the court may grant a party's request for a continuance of up to 10 days. (§ 355(b)(3).) As pointed out by the California Supreme



Court, the rights conferred under section 355 (to object to hearsay in the social study and subpoena witnesses whose statements are contained in the report) are meaningless if the report is not received a reasonable time in advance. (*In re Malinda S.* (1990) 51 Cal.3d 368, 385, fn. 21.)



A “reasonable time” is not defined under either the statutes or the case law. However, there is a good argument that it should be 10 days in advance of the hearing, which is the time required for service of reports for status review and section 366.26 hearings. (§§ 364.05, 366.05; Cal. Rules of Court, rule 5.727(c).) Unless a no-time-waiver hearing has been set, counsel should request that the court calendar a date for receipt of the report to allow enough time to file timely section 355 objections to hearsay, subpoena witnesses, and prepare clients for trial if necessary.

3. Unavailable Witness

Unless the child is detained, the court may continue the hearing an additional 10 days if it determines that a necessary witness who is currently unavailable will become available within the extended period. (§ 354.)

4. Appointment of Counsel

Prior to beginning the jurisdiction hearing, if the court determines that a party entitled to counsel desires representation but is unable to afford payment for services, the court must appoint counsel as required under section 317. The court may continue the matter for up to seven days to allow time for appointment of counsel, or to enable the attorney to become familiar with the case and prepare for the hearing. (§ 353.)

PRETRIAL DISCOVERY

The basic requirements for discovery are laid out in rule 5.546 of the California Rules of Court. The rule explicitly states that it is to be liberally construed to foster informal discovery. (Cal. Rules



of Court, rule 5.546(a).) The court retains inherent power to order production or limitation of disclosure on a showing of good cause. (*In re Dolly A.* (1986) 177 Cal.App.3d 195, 222; *Laurie S. v. Superior Court* (1994) 26 Cal.App.4th 195, 202.)

The social services agency has an ongoing, affirmative duty to disclose all evidence and information within its possession or control that is favorable to the parent or child. (Cal. Rules of Court, rule 5.546(c).) Promptly after filing the petition, the social services agency must provide or make available for copying to the parent and child all relevant police, arrest, and crime reports. (*Id.*, rule 5.546(b).) Upon a timely request, the social services agency must also disclose

- Any relevant probation reports relating to the child or parent;
- Records of statements, admissions, or conversations by the child, parent, or any alleged coparticipant;
- Names, addresses, and records of any statements or conversations with all persons interviewed in the process of the social service agency's investigation;
- Reports or statements of experts made regarding the pending matter, including results of physical or mental examinations and results of scientific tests, experiments, or comparisons;
- Photographs or physical evidence; and
- Records of prior felony convictions of intended witnesses. (*Id.*, rule 5.546(d).)

In addition, the social services agency must turn over all information in its possession regarding a detained child to the child's attorney within 30 days of a request. (§ 317(f).)

The parent is under an obligation to disclose any relevant material or information within the parent's possession or control upon a timely request by the social services agency. (Cal. Rules of Court, rule 5.546(e).) All items to which a party is entitled must be provided in time to "permit counsel to make beneficial use of them." (*Id.*, rule 5.546(g).)

The court may limit discovery, through barring access or excision of material, upon a showing of privilege or other good cause.



(*Id.*, rule 5.546(g) & (h).) The court may also impose sanctions for failure to comply with discovery, including dismissing the case, prohibiting the party who failed to disclose from introducing the undisclosed material into evidence, granting a continuance, or any other measure it deems proper. (*Id.*, rule 5.546(j).)

In cases involving an Indian child, the child's tribe also has a right of access to materials in the case. (25 U.S.C. § 1912(c), § 827(f).)



Counsel should not conduct a contested proceeding without first having reviewed the social worker's case notes. Though counsel may not access material that falls within attorney-client privilege or work product (and parents' attorneys may not view confidential placement information), the social worker's handwritten and typed notes (called Delivered Service Log, chronological notes, or Title XXs) are discoverable and should be reviewed.

BURDENS OF PROOF

1. Generally

The social services agency bears the burden to prove by a preponderance of the evidence that the allegations in the petition are true and that the child is therefore described by section 300. (§ 355(a); Cal. Rules of Court 5.684(f).)

2. Rebuttable Presumptions

Section 355.1 contains presumptions regarding physical and sexual abuse. Once established, a presumption under section 355.1(a) or (d) shifts the burden of producing evidence from the social services agency to the opposing party or parties. (*In re Esmeralda B.* (1992) 11 Cal.App.4th 1036, 1041.)

a. Injuries Not Ordinarily Sustained Absent Parental Neglect

A finding by the court, based on competent professional evidence, that a child's injuries or detrimental condition are not of the sort that would usually occur except as the result of the parent's unreasonable



or neglectful acts or omissions amounts to prima facie evidence that the child is described by section 300(a), (b), or (d). (§ 355.1(a).)

This presumption applies only when supported by expert testimony or other professional evidence. (*In re Esmeralda B.*, *supra*, 11 Cal.App.4th at p. 1041; see *In re E.H.* (2003) 108 Cal.App.4th 659, 670 [discusses when presumption is not necessary and court can sustain based on a “res ipsa loquitur” type of argument].) In *In re B.D.* (2024) 103 Cal.App.5th 315, evidence of a mother’s prenatal use of prescription pain medication not prescribed for her was not sufficient to trigger section 355.1. The baby had no indications of withdrawal and was healthy.

A party intending to rely on the presumption established by section 355.1 must give notice of the intent to the other parties.

b. Sexual Abuse by Parent or Other Adult in the Home

A finding by the court that the parent or any other person who resides with or has care or custody of the child has been (1) convicted in California or another state of a crime constituting sexual abuse as defined in Penal Code section 11165.1, (2) found to have committed sexual abuse in a prior dependency case in California or another state, or (3) convicted of a felony requiring registration as a sexual offender, amounts to prima facie evidence that the child is described by section 300 (a), (b), (c), or (d). (§ 355.1(d).)

This presumption applies to noncustodial as well as custodial parents and guardians. (*In re John S.* (2001) 88 Cal.App.4th 1140, 1145.)



These presumptions are rebuttable. The parent (or child) must counter the presumption by presenting evidence, including expert testimony, that, for example, the child’s injury could have occurred accidentally (see *In re Esmeralda B.*, *supra*, 11 Cal.App.4th at p. 1036) or the person in question’s status as a sex offender does not pose a risk to the child.



PROCEDURE

1. Child and Parent Missing and Whereabouts Unknown

Although the juvenile court may exercise emergency jurisdiction to make initial protective orders concerning a child whose whereabouts are unknown, it has no authority to proceed further or make any jurisdictional or dispositional findings as long as the whereabouts of the child and parent remain unknown. (See *In re Baby Boy M.* (2006) 141 Cal.App.4th 588; *In re Claudia S.* (2005) 131 Cal.App.4th 236, Appointment of Counsel.)

Prior to beginning the jurisdiction hearing, if the court determines that a party entitled to counsel desires representation but is unable to afford payment for services, the court appoints counsel as required under section 317. (§ 353; Cal. Rules of Court, rule 5.534(c) & (d).) The court is not required to appoint counsel for a parent who does not appear or request counsel. (*In re Ebony W.* (1996) 47 Cal. App.4th 1643, 1648.)

2. Parent's Right to Appear and Procedure in His or Her Absence

a. Generally

A parent is entitled to due process in dependency matters, which requires not only proper notice but also an opportunity to appear and be heard. (See *In re Stacy T.* (1997) 52 Cal.App.4th 1415, 1424.) A parent's failure to appear at the adjudication should not be treated as a "default." (*Id.* at p. 1422 [use of that term in regard to dependency proceedings is "inaccurate and misleading"].) Unless proper notice has been given that the court will make jurisdictional findings even in the party's absence, the court may not proceed with adjudication. (*In re Wilford J.* (2005) 131 Cal.App.4th 742, 753 [disapproving of the practice of setting and noticing a pretrial resolution conference (PRC) or settlement conference and proceeding to jurisdiction if a parent fails to appear].)



b. Incarcerated Parents

An incarcerated parent has a statutory right to be noticed of and to be present at any hearing in which the social services agency seeks to adjudicate the child as a dependent. If the court is informed that the parent wishes to be present, it must issue an order for the parent to be brought before the court. The proceeding to adjudicate a petition under section 300 should not go forward without the physical presence of the parent or of the parent's counsel unless the court has received a signed waiver of appearance. (Pen. Code, § 2625.) However, the time limits of section 352 have been found to take precedence over an incarcerated parent's right under Penal Code section 2625 to be present at the jurisdictional hearing. (See *D.E. v. Superior Court*, *supra*, 111 Cal.App.4th at p. 502.)

c. Remote Appearance

A party may request to appear remotely. Judicial Counsel form RA-025 can be used to request remote appearance. California Rules of Court, rule 3.672(i) deals with remote appearances in dependency cases.

3. Child's Participation

a. Presence

The child is a party entitled not only to notice but also to appear. If a child over 10 years of age is not present at the hearing, the court must ensure that notice was proper and inquire as to why the child is absent. (§§ 317.5(b), 349; Cal. Rules of Court, rules 5.530(b).)

If the child is present at the hearing, the court must allow the child, if the child so desires, to address the court and participate in the hearing. If the child is 10 years of age or older and not present at the hearing, the court must determine whether the child was properly notified of his or her right to attend the hearing. If the child was not properly notified or wants to be present and was not given the opportunity, the court must continue the hearing to allow the child to be present unless it finds that continuing the hearing is not in the child's best interest. (§ 349(c) & (d).)





Dependency cases are about the child, and it is important that children have the opportunity to participate in their court hearings.

b. Testimony

(i) Whether Can Be Compelled

Parents have the statutory right to use the subpoena process to compel the appearance and testimony of witnesses, as well as the right to cross-examine and confront witnesses. (§§ 311, 341; Cal. Rules of Court, rules 5.526(d), 5.534(g).) The court's refusal to allow a parent to call the child as a witness at the jurisdiction hearing has been found to violate due process. (See *In re Amy M.* (1991) 232 Cal.App.3d 849, 867.) Under certain circumstances, however, a child could be found unavailable to testify under Evidence Code section 240, but only if it is established through expert testimony that as a victim of a crime the child could not testify without suffering substantial trauma. (Evid. Code, § 240; see *In re Christina T.* (1986) 184 Cal.App.3d 630, 634.)

(ii) Competency

Under the Evidence Code, any person is qualified to testify as a witness regardless of age unless incapable of expressing himself or herself on the issues before the court or incapable of understanding the obligation to tell the truth. (Evid. Code, §§ 700, 701(a).) Before testifying, the child must be administered an oath or, if under the age of 10, may be asked to promise to tell the truth. (*Id.*, § 710.)

The bench officer's determination of competency will not be overturned on appeal absent an abuse of discretion. (*In re Amy M.*, *supra*, 232 Cal.App.3d at p. 857.) In dependency proceedings, the court may reserve its determination of competency until after direct examination has been conducted. (Evid. Code, § 701(b).)

A child whose testimony is generally "lucid, candid and consistent" can be found competent even if some of the statements are bizarre or even clearly the product of hallucinations. (*In re Amy M.*, *supra*, 232 Cal.App.3d at p. 858.) Inconsistencies in a child's testimony go to credibility, not competency. (*In re Katrina L.* (1988) 200 Cal.App.3d 1288, 1299.)





Asking age-appropriate questions can substantially affect whether the child appears to be competent. Counsel should use simple words and short sentences and avoid questions using abstract concepts and questions about dates, times, distance, number of times an event occurred, and so forth. Children's attorneys should consider objecting to age-inappropriate questioning under Evidence Code section 765(b).

(iii) In-Chambers Testimony

The child may testify in chambers, outside the presence of the child's parent, so long as the parent's counsel is present and the court finds any of the following:

- Testimony in chambers is necessary to ensure truthful testimony;
- The child is likely to be intimidated by a formal courtroom setting; or
- The child is afraid to testify in the presence of his or her parent. (§ 350(b).)

The parent may have the child's in-chambers testimony read back by the court reporter. (§ 350(b).)

The court has the inherent power to devise ways to facilitate the child's testimony, including the use of closed circuit television as well as in-chambers testimony. (*In re Amber S.* (1993) 15 Cal.App.4th 1260, 1266–1267.)

Parent's counsel must be present in chambers during the child's testimony. (*In re Laura H.* (1992) 8 Cal.App.4th 1689, 1695–1696.) However, there is split authority on whether that right is considered waived for appellate purposes if no objection is raised during trial. (*Ibid.* [mere acquiescence is not equivalent to a knowing, personal waiver]; but see *In re Jamie R.* (2001) 90 Cal.App.4th 766, 771 [mother's silence waived her statutory right to have counsel present].)

4. Tribes Participation

An Indian child's tribe has a right to intervene in the case at any time. (Cal. Rules of Court, rule 5.534(e).) The tribe may be repre-



mented by an attorney but can also choose to be represented by a nonattorney. If the tribe chooses not to intervene, the tribe is still entitled to participate in the case and exercise the rights set out in California Rules of Court, rule 5.534(e). Notwithstanding any other provision, an Indian child's tribe has a right to participate by telephone or other remote means at no cost to the tribe. (§ 224.2 (k).)

5. Uncontested Hearings

A parent may waive a full hearing on the jurisdictional issues by admitting to the allegations in the petition (as pled or amended), pleading no contest, or submitting the determination to the court based on the information before it. (Cal. Rules of Court, rule 5.682(d).) The plea must be made personally by the parent. (*Id.*, rule 5.682(c).) The Judicial Council form *Waiver of Rights* (JV-190) must be signed by the parent and the parent's counsel, and the court must determine that the parent read the form, understood all of its provisions, and signed willingly. (*Arlena M. v. Superior Court* (2004) 121 Cal.App.4th 566, 570.) The parent must make an express personal waiver of his or her trial rights. (*In re Monique T.* (1992) 2 Cal. App.4th 1372, 1377.)

Upon accepting either a plea or a submission, the court must find and state on the record that it is satisfied that

- Notice is proper;
- Parent understands the nature of the allegations;
- Parent understands the possible consequences of his or her plea or submission;
- Parent has freely and voluntarily entered the plea or submission; and
- Parent has knowingly and voluntarily waived the right to
 - A trial on the issues;
 - Assert the privilege against self-incrimination;
 - Confront and cross-examine adverse witnesses; and



- Use the subpoena process to compel the attendance of witnesses on his or her behalf.

(Cal. Rules of Court, rule 5.682(d) & (e).)

Although use of the mediation process is encouraged (§ 350(a)(2)), the court is not bound by any mediated or negotiated resolution. (See *In re Jason E.* (1997) 53 Cal.App.4th 1540, 1545.)



Care must be taken to ensure that the parameters of stipulations or mediated agreements are clear in order to avoid potential problems with waiver upon appeal. (See *Rosa S. v. Superior Court* (2002) 100 Cal.App.4th 1181 [handwritten stipulation contained numerous interlineations and deletions, leaving unclear whether mother submitted on merely the report or also on the recommendations].)

a. Pleas—Admission or No Contest

Both an admission and a no-contest plea waive subsequent objection to the sufficiency of the petition. (*In re Tommy E.* (1992) 7 Cal. App.4th 1234, 1237.) However, even if the parent admits, the court must find that there is a factual basis for the admission. (Cal. Rules of Court, rule 5.682(e).)

b. Submissions

A party may submit the matter for the court's determination based on the information before the court, often simply on the social worker's report. (*Id.*, rule 5.682(d).) This does not waive the right to appeal the sufficiency of the evidence in support of jurisdiction. (See *In re Tommy E.*, *supra*, 7 Cal.App.4th at p. 1234.) However, submission on the report does waive appeal on the sufficiency of the petition itself. (See *In re Christopher C.* (2010) 182 Cal.App.4th 73; *In re David H.* (2008) 165 Cal.App.4th 1626; but see *In re Alysha S.* (1996) 51 Cal. App.4th 393, 397; see also the discussion on demurrers in "Setting the Next Hearing," in the Initial/Detention black letter discussion.)

After submission of the matter for the court's determination based on the social worker's report, argument as to the truth of the contents of the report is not appropriate. However, the court should hear argument on the import of the facts and whether they form a



sufficient legal basis to sustain jurisdiction. The court must weigh the evidence, and if it does not establish by a preponderance of evidence that the child is described under section 300, the petition should be dismissed.



Counsel must be careful to make it clear when the client is submitting only on the report (or other evidence before the court) and not on the social worker's recommendation. The latter waives a party's right to appeal jurisdictional issues. (*In re Richard K.* (1994) 25 Cal.App.4th 580, 589–590.)

6. Contested Hearings

a. Generally

The goal of dependency is to protect the child, not to punish a parent. (*In re La Shonda B.* (1979) 95 Cal.App.3d 593, 599.) The court may assume jurisdiction over a child regardless of whether the child was in the physical custody of only one or both parents. (§ 300.2.) The circumstances triggering the petition may involve the conduct of only one parent; however, a parent against whom no allegation has been filed has a right to contest whether the child should come within the court's jurisdiction.

The social services agency may not unilaterally dismiss a petition over the objection of the child. The child has a right to present evidence and require the court to determine whether the child is described under section 300. (*Allen M. v. Superior Court* (1992) 6 Cal.App.4th 1069, 1074; *Taylor M. v. Superior Court* (2003) 106 Cal. App.4th 97, 107.)

It is common for petitions to allege that a child meets the requirements of more than one form of maltreatment under section 300. In *In re J.N.* (2021) 62 Cal.App.5th 767, 774, the Court of Appeal wrote that when a petition alleges more than one ground for jurisdiction, a reviewing court can affirm the juvenile court's finding of jurisdiction if any of the statutory bases for jurisdiction enumerated in the petition is supported by substantial evidence.



b. Evidence

Admissibility of evidence is controlled by the Evidence Code as it applies to civil cases, with the exception of certain marital privileges and the procedures laid out in sections 355 and 355.1 pertaining to presumptions affecting the burden of production and hearsay. (Cal. Rules of Court, rule 5.684(b).)

(i) Social Worker's Report and Hearsay Contained Within It— Section 355

The social study (any written report provided by the social worker to the court and all parties), and hearsay contained within it, is admissible at a jurisdictional hearing under the “social study exception.” The only restrictions are that the social worker/preparer must be available for cross-examination and the parties must be given an opportunity to subpoena and cross-examine the witnesses whose statements are contained in the report. (§ 355(b); Cal. Rules of Court, rule 5.684(c).)

The court must permit cross-examination of all of the social workers who prepared reports submitted to the court if requested by parent's counsel, even if the parent is not present. (*In re Dolly D.* (1995) 41 Cal.App.4th 440, 445; *In re Stacy T.*, *supra*, 52 Cal.App.4th at p. 1425 [reiterating that there is no such thing as a “default” in dependency and that an absent parent retains the right to cross-examine the preparer of the social study through counsel].)

If a timely objection is made to specific hearsay in a report, the hearsay is admissible, but cannot be the sole basis of a jurisdictional finding unless any one of the following applies:

- It is otherwise admissible under any statutory or decisional exception;
- It was made by a child under 12 who is the subject of the hearing, and the statement is not shown to be unreliable because of fraud, deceit, or undue influence;
- It was made by a police officer, health practitioner, social worker, or teacher; or
- The declarant is available for cross-examination.

(§ 355(c)(1)(A)–(D).)



An objection to hearsay within a report is timely if it provides the party offering the hearsay time to arrange for hearsay declarants to appear in court. An objection on the eve of trial or during trial is not timely.

(ii) Child Dependency Hearsay Exception: *In re Cindy L.*

In *In re Cindy L.* (1997) 17 Cal.4th 15, the Supreme Court created a hearsay exception for out-of-court statements—the child dependency hearsay exception—for reliable hearsay statements of children in dependency cases. The exception requires

- All parties are notified of the intent to use the statements;
- There are sufficient surrounding indicia of reliability; and
- Either the child is available for cross-examination or evidence corroborates the statements.

(*In re Cindy L.* (1997) 17 Cal.4th 15, 29.)

To determine reliability, the court considers the totality of circumstances, including

- Spontaneity and consistency of repetition;
- Mental state of the child;
- Use of unexpected terminology based on the child’s age; and
- Lack of motive to fabricate on the part of the child.

(*In re Cindy L.*, supra, 17 Cal.4th at pp. 30–31.)

The Sixth Amendment right to confrontation does not apply to civil proceedings such as dependency and therefore does not bar admission and use of statements made by a child who is incompetent to testify. (*In re April C.* (2005) 131 Cal.App.4th 599, 611.)

The “social study exception” covers hearsay statements contained in the social worker’s reports. The child dependency hearsay exception created by *In re Cindy L.* can be used to admit children’s hearsay statement not mentioned in the social worker’s reports.

In addition to the social study exception and the child dependency hearsay exception, other hearsay exceptions can apply, such as excited utterances and the statement mind exception.

In situations where there are multiple levels of hearsay, a layer of hearsay is admissible only if the layer meets the requirements of a hearsay exception or is admissible for a nonhearsay purpose. (Evid. Code, § 1201; *People v. Arias* (1996) 13 Cal.4th 92, 149.)

(iii) Privilege Against Self-Incrimination

Any person called to testify in a dependency hearing may assert the privilege against self-incrimination. (Cal. Rules of Court, rules 5.548(a)); *In re Brenda M.* (2008) 160 Cal.App.4th 772; *In re Mark A.* (2007) 156 Cal.App.4th 1124.)

Welfare and Institutions Code section 355.1(f) provides: “Testimony by a parent, guardian, or other person who has the care or custody of the minor made the subject of a proceeding under Section 300 shall not be admissible as evidence in any other action or proceeding.” In *In re Mark A.* (2007) 145 Cal.App.4th 1124, 1134, the Court of Appeal ruled that section 355.1(f) does not provide both use and derivative use immunity for compelled testimony. Section 355.1(f) does not cover enough ground to satisfy the Fifth Amendment right against compelled self-incrimination. The court suggested that to overcome a Fifth Amendment refusal to answer questions, the party seeking answers should invoke California Rules of Court, rule 5.548(b). Under rule 5.548(d), in section 300 proceedings, the prosecuting attorney or the petitioner may make a written or oral request on the record that the judge order a witness to answer a question or produce evidence. The court grants use and derivative use immunity, and the witness can be compelled to testify.

(iv) Inapplicability of Certain Privileges

The privileges not to testify or to be called as a witness against a spouse and the confidential marital communication privilege, found in Evidence Code sections 970 and 980, do not apply in dependency proceedings. (Evid. Code, §§ 972, 986; Cal. Rules of Court, rule 5.684(d).)



(v) Expert Testimony/Documentary Evidence

Under section 730 of the Evidence Code, at any time before or during trial the court may appoint an expert to investigate, submit a report, and/or to testify. Expert testimony must be limited to opinion on subjects deemed to be sufficiently beyond common experience that the opinion will assist the trier of fact. (Evid. Code, § 801.) Expert testimony is typically needed to determine whether injuries were accidental or intentional. Also, expert testimony is helpful in cases of alleged failure to thrive as to whether a child's weight loss was due to a medical condition or purposeful starvation. (See *Laurie S. v. Superior Court* (1994) 26 Cal.App.4th 195, 202.) Expert testimony is required to establish the presumption under section 355.1(a) that a child's injury or detrimental condition would not have occurred absent unreasonable or neglectful conduct by the parent.

A parent may not be forced to undergo a psychological evaluation for adjudicatory purposes. (*Laurie S., supra*, 26 Cal.App.4th at p. 202 [at the prejurisdictional phase, allegations of a parent's mental illness do not justify such intrusive discovery].)

If the case involves an Indian child, no foster care placement order or termination of parental rights can be ordered without the evidence of a qualified expert witness as defined in federal and state law. (25 U.S.C. § 1912(e) & (f); §§ 224.6, 361(c)(6), 361.31(f), 361.7(c).)

(vi) Physician-Patient and Therapist-Patient Privilege

The physician-patient and psychotherapist-patient privileges defined in sections 994 and 1014 of the Evidence Code are applicable in dependency proceedings. However, parents may not claim privilege as to relevant medical or mental health records if they have put their medical or psychological condition at issue in the dependency case. (*In re R.R.* (2010) 187 Cal.App.4th 1264, 1278–1279.) Either the child if of sufficient age and maturity, or the child's counsel, holds the psychotherapist-client, physician-patient, and clergy-penitent privileges. If the child is over 12, there is a rebuttable presumption that the child is mature enough to decide whether to invoke or waive these privileges. (§ 317(f); see *In re S.A.* (2010) 182 Cal.App.4th 1128.)



The psychotherapist-patient privilege does not apply to court-ordered psychological examinations. (Evid. Code, § 1017; *In re Mark L.* (2001) 94 Cal.App.4th 573, 584.) Furthermore, the therapist-patient privilege is not absolute in dependency cases; it does not preclude disclosure of information relating to a child's participation and progress in therapy if disclosure is necessary for the court to make orders to ensure the child's welfare. (See *In re S.A.*, *supra*, 182 Cal. App.4th at pp. 1138–1139; *In re Kristina W.* (2001) 94 Cal.App.4th 521, 528; *In re Mark L.*, *supra*, 94 Cal.App.4th at p. 584.)

(vii) Evidence of Parent's Past Conduct—Character “In Issue”

Evidence of a parent's past conduct can be probative of current and future conditions, and thus relevant and admissible. (*In re J.N.* (2021) 62 Cal.App.5th 767, 765.) In *In re A.F.* (2016) 3 Cal.App.5th 283, 289, the Court of Appeal wrote, “Although there must be a present risk of harm to the minor, the juvenile court may consider past events to determine whether the child is presently in need of juvenile court protection. The California Supreme Court has observed that, depending upon the circumstances, a ‘past failure [can be] predictive of the future.’”

Evidence Code section 1101(a) sets forth the rule against character evidence, providing: “Evidence of a person's character or a trait of his or her character . . . is inadmissible when offered to prove his or her conduct on a specific occasion.” The rule against character evidence applies in civil and criminal cases.

In several types of civil cases, evidence of character is admissible. In such cases, character is said to be “in issue.” Thus, parental fitness (character) is in issue in family court child custody cases. (See *In re Dorothy I.* (1984) 162 Cal.App.3d 1154.) When a car owner entrusts the owner's car to a known dangerous driver—negligent entrustment—the driver's character as a menace behind the wheel is in issue.

One can argue that parental character is “in issue” in juvenile court dependency proceedings, opening the door for evidence of parental character. In a decision from the Indiana Court of Ap-



peals, *In re J.L.V., Jr.* (1996) 667 N.E.2d 186, 190 (Ind. Ct. App.), the court wrote, “Parents’ character is a material issue in the case as [CPS’s] petition alleged that J.V. Jr., was a [dependent child] pursuant to Indiana law.” In *In re Mark C.* (1992) 7 Cal.App.4th 433, the Court of Appeal examined “the nature of character evidence that may properly be allowed in dependency proceedings” (*Id.* at 435.) The court quoted the rule against character evidence¹⁶⁰ and then discussed “a recognized exception to this rule: where parental character itself is in issue in a dependency matter.” The Court of Appeal continued: “[I]n evaluating risk to the child at the jurisdictional hearing, the juvenile court may consider the propensities or predispositions of the parent (i.e., his or her character) in order to determine if he or she is likely to act in conformity therewith in the future toward another child. By enacting section 300, subdivision (j) [sibling petition] as an alternative basis for jurisdiction over a dependent child, the Legislature apparently intended to place the parent’s character in issue to some extent.” (*Id.* at 442.) To support its conclusion that character is in issue in certain dependency cases, the court in *In re Mark C.* cited Witkin on evidence. The 2022 supplement to the fifth edition of Witkin, *California Evidence*, § 47, Circumstantial Evidence, provides, “In a few situations, a party’s good or bad character is directly in issue under the substantive law and the pleadings.” Witkin cites dependency cases as an example of a “situation” where the rule against character evidence does not apply, rendering evidence of parental character admissible.

In *In re Dorothy I.* (1984) 162 Cal.App.3d 1154, 1159, the Court of Appeal wrote, “In our present case the character evidence is not being used to prove a charge of past conduct against appellant, but is being used in helping the court determine his predisposition toward future sexual abuse with the minor Dorothy. This type of character evidence is essential, when available, to aid the court in dependency actions, which are concerned with the future well-being of a minor.”

Evidence of a parent’s character can assist the court to determine safety going forward. In *In re F.V.* (2024) 100 Cal.App.5th 219, however, the Court of Appeal reminds us that “whatever a parent’s past



mistakes, jurisdiction is proper only upon a showing of substantial risk of future harm.” A parent’s past is proper when it sheds light on the future, not simply to tarnish character.

c. Motions to Dismiss

(i) Prior to Hearing

The social services agency may not dismiss a petition either unilaterally or upon stipulated agreement with the parent over the objection of the child’s counsel. The social services agency is required to show cause why the petition should be dismissed. (*Kimberly R. v. Superior Court* (2002) 96 Cal.App.4th 1067, 1077 [supplemental petitions under section 387 are to be treated in this regard the same as original petitions].) The court retains the responsibility to determine whether dismissal is in the interests of justice and the welfare of the child. (*Allen M.*, *supra*, 6 Cal.App.4th at p. 1074.)

(ii) On a Section 350(c) or Nonsuit Motion

At the close of presentation of evidence by the social services agency and the child, the court may, on its own motion or that of the parent or child, assess whether the burden of proof has been met. If the court finds that it has not, the petition must be dismissed and the child released from custody. If the motion is not granted, the parent and/or child may offer evidence without first having reserved the right to do so. (§ 350(c).)

The court may not dismiss the petition before taking evidence and testimony that the child wishes to offer. (*Guadalupe A. v. Superior Court* (1991) 234 Cal.App.3d 100, 106.) However, a parent has no right to oppose dismissal of a dependency petition against the other parent or to present further evidence if the court determines that a section 350(c) motion should be granted. (See *In re Eric H.* (1997) 54 Cal.App.4th 955.)



BASES FOR JURISDICTION

1. Generally

The express legislative intent is that section 300 should “not disrupt the family unnecessarily or intrude inappropriately into family life, prohibit the use of reasonable methods of parental discipline, or prescribe a particular method of parenting.” (§ 300.) Furthermore, any determination under section 300 involving a parent with a physical disability (such as blindness or deafness) must focus on whether the parent’s disability prevents the parent from exercising care and control. In addition, no child may be considered at risk of abuse or neglect based solely on the parent’s age or parent’s status as a dependent minor or foster child. (*Ibid.*)

2. Enumerated Bases for Jurisdiction

The court may take jurisdiction over a child if it finds by a preponderance of the evidence that the child falls within one of the descriptions enumerated in section 300(a)–(j). Most of these descriptions require a demonstration that the child has suffered harm or that there is a substantial risk that the child will suffer harm.

a. Section 300(a)—Serious Physical Harm Inflicted Nonaccidentally

The child has suffered, or there is a substantial risk that the child will suffer, serious physical harm inflicted by the parent nonaccidentally.

“Serious physical harm” does not include reasonable and age-appropriate spanking to the buttocks if there is no evidence of serious physical injury. “Substantial risk” may be based on

- The manner in which a less serious injury was inflicted;
- A history of repeated inflicted injuries to the child or siblings;
or
- A combination of the above and other acts by the parent indicative of risk.

(§ 300(a).)





At disposition, findings under this section can have serious implications as to whether family reunification services are provided if the child is found to have been severely physically abused or is removed from a parent for a second time because of physical or sexual abuse. (See § 361.5(b)(3), (6)–(7) & (c); see also Disposition black letter discussion.)

b. Section 300(b)—Serious Physical Harm or Illness

Section 300(b)(1): The child has suffered, or there is a substantial risk that the child will suffer, serious physical harm or illness as a result of

- (A) The failure or inability of the parent to adequately supervise or protect the child. In *In re R.T.* (2017) 3 Cal.5th 622, 624, the Supreme Court ruled that section 300(b)(1)(A) “authorizes dependency jurisdiction without a finding that a parent is at fault or blameworthy for [the] failure or inability to supervise or protect [a] child.” *In re R.T.* involved a 17-year-old minor who was beyond the control of her mother. The mother did nothing wrong, and the issue was whether parental fault is necessary to bring a child within section 300(b)(1)(A). Overruling contrary authority from the Court of Appeal, the Supreme Court ruled that section 300(b)(1)(A) does not require parental fault. The court wrote, “[T]he first clause of section 300(b)(1) does not require parental culpability.” (3 Cal.5th at p. 629.)
- (B) The willful or negligent failure of the parent to adequately protect the child from the person caring for the child.
- (C) The willful or negligent failure of the parent to provide adequate food, clothing, shelter, or medical treatment. The juvenile court has authority to consent to vaccinations for a child over parental objection. (*In re Matthew M.* (2023) 88 Cal. App.5th 1186.)
- (D) The parent’s inability to provide regular care for the child because of the parent’s mental illness, developmental disability, or substance abuse.

Section 300(b)(2): A child does not fall within section 300(b)(1) solely because of any of the following:



- (A) Homelessness or lack of emergency shelter for the family.
- (B) Failure of a parent to seek custody orders from family court. In *In re L.B.* (2023) 88 Cal.App.5th 402, 414, the Court of Appeal wrote: “[A] failure to obtain custody orders to protect a child from one parent whose behaviors place that child at risk is one factor that may be considered by the juvenile court in finding jurisdiction under subdivision (b), but it may not be the only factor, and, by itself, would likely be insufficient to support removal of the child from the other parent.”
- (C) Financial difficulty, including poverty, inability to obtain child-care, and inability to obtain clothing or repair the home.

Section 300(b)(3): When it is alleged that a parent willfully failed to provide adequate medical care or provided spiritual treatment through prayer, the juvenile court must give deference to the parent’s medical treatment, nontreatment, or spiritual treatment through prayer, and may only assume jurisdiction to protect the child from serious physical harm or illness.

Section 300(b)(4): The juvenile court has jurisdiction over commercially sexually exploited children, as follows:

- The child has been or is being sexually trafficked, as described in section 236.1 of the Penal Code; or
- The child receives food or shelter in exchange for, or is paid to perform, sexual acts described in section 236.1 or 11165.1 of the Penal Code, and whose parent failed or was unable to protect the child.

Domestic Violence and Section 300(b). In *In re L.O.* (2021) 67 Cal. App.5th 227, 238, the Court of Appeal wrote, “Exposure to domestic violence may support jurisdiction under subdivision (b)(1) of section 300. . . . Jurisdiction is appropriate since a minor can be put in a position of physical danger from this violence, since, for example, they could wander into the room where it was occurring and be accidentally hit by a thrown object, by a fist, arm, foot, or leg. . . . The court need not wait until a child is seriously abused or injured to assume jurisdiction and take steps necessary to protect the child. Past violent behavior in a relationship is the best predictor of future violence.”

(citations omitted). (See also, *In re L.B.* (2023) 88 Cal.App.5th 402.) At the same time, the Court of Appeal in *In re S.F.* (2023) 91 Cal. App.5th 696, 714, wrote, “Cases have made it abundantly clear that evidence of prior domestic violence between a mother and father, in and of itself, will not support jurisdiction under section 300, subdivision (b)(1).” In *In re S.F.*, the court concluded: “Before courts and agencies can exert jurisdiction under section 300, subdivision (b), there must be evidence indicating that the child is exposed to a substantial risk of serious physical harm or illness. Here, there is no substantial evidence of any “nexus” between the parents’ prior arguments, shoving, and texting, and substantial risk of serious injury to minor.” (*Id.* at 716–717).

c. Section 300(c)—Serious Emotional Damage

The child is suffering or is at substantial risk of suffering serious emotional damage, evidenced by severe anxiety, depression, withdrawal, or unreasonably aggressive behavior toward self or others as a result of the conduct of the parent, or the child has no parent capable of providing appropriate care. The court may not find that a child is described by this section if the parent’s willful failure to provide adequate mental health treatment is

- Based on a sincerely held religious belief; and
- A less intrusive judicial intervention is available.

Jurisdiction may not be taken under this subdivision absent evidence that the child is suffering or is at substantial risk of suffering, from severe anxiety, depression, withdrawal, or untoward aggressive behavior. See *In re D.B.* (2020) 48 Cal.App.5th 613; *In re K.S.* (2018) 244 Cal.App.4th 327. In *In re Brison C.* (2000) 81 Cal.App.4th 1373, a child’s aversion to his father was understandable in the context of the bitter custody battle between the parents, but did not rise to the level of severe emotional disturbance required under the statute.

In 2019, the American Professional Society on the Abuse of Children (APSAC) published Practice Guidelines on Psychological Maltreatment (PM), available on the APSAC website. The guidelines provide, “Of all forms of child maltreatment, PM is the most



common because it is embedded in or associated with every other type of maltreatment as well as existing in its own discrete forms.” (p. 2). While PM may be common, it is not easy to define. The APSAC guidelines define PM as “[A] repeated pattern or extreme incident(s) of caretaker behavior that thwart the child’s basic psychological needs (e.g., safety, socialization, emotional and social support, cognitive stimulation, respect) and convey a child is worthless, defective, damaged goods, unloved, unwanted, endangered, primarily useful in meeting another’s needs, and/or expendable.” (p. 3). The APSAC guidelines describe six types of PM that counsel may find useful in interpreting section 300(c):

- Spurning involves verbal and nonverbal acts that reject and degrade a child.
- Terrorizing is behavior that threatens to hurt, kill, abandon, or place a child in a dangerous situation.
- Exploiting/corrupting is conduct that encourages a child to develop inappropriate behaviors and attitudes such as self-destructive, antisocial, criminal, or deviant behaviors.
- Emotional unresponsiveness occurs when a parent ignores a child’s attempts and needs to interact, including failing to express affection, caring, and love for the child.
- Isolating is conduct that unreasonably denies a child opportunities to interact with peers and adults outside the home.

Mental health, medical, and educational neglect embodies conduct that ignores or refuses to provide necessary treatment for mental health, or medical and education needs.

The APSAC guidelines do not correlate directly with section 300. Nevertheless, the guidelines deepen understanding of psychological maltreatment.

d. Section 300(d)—Sexual Abuse

The child has been or there is substantial risk that the child will be sexually abused by a parent or a member of the household, or a parent has failed to adequately protect the child from sexual abuse when the parent knew or reasonably should have known that the



child was in danger of sexual abuse. “Sexual abuse” is defined in Penal Code section 11165.1 as

- Sexual assault—including but not limited to rape, statutory rape, incest, sodomy, lewd and lascivious acts, oral copulation, sexual penetration, and child molestation; or
- Sexual exploitation—including but not limited to the promotion or encouragement of prostitution or live performance of obscene sexual conduct, and depiction of a child engaged in obscene conduct.

A “member of the household” is defined as any person continually or frequently found in the same household as the child. (Cal. Rules of Court, rule 5.502(19).)

The Courts of Appeal have held that siblings of a sexually abused child, even if they are younger and/or of the opposite sex, may be at risk of future sexual abuse within the meaning of section 300(d) and (j) owing to the parent’s “aberrant sexual behavior.” (See *In re I.J.* (2013) 56 Cal.4th 766 [father’s sexual abuse of daughter placed sons at risk]; *In re Andy G.* (2010) 183 Cal.App.4th 1405, 1414; *In re P.A.* (2006) 144 Cal.App.4th 1339; *In re Karen R.* (2001) 95 Cal.App.4th 84, 89 [by forcibly raping daughter, father showed conduct so “sexually aberrant” that both male and female children were placed at substantial risk].)

The court does not need to compare risks or consult scientific authority before it makes the substantial risk determination and assumes jurisdiction over all the children of a sexual abuser. The court may consider the nature and severity of the abuse and other factors and then use its best judgment to determine whether the child’s siblings are at risk and take the steps necessary to protect the siblings. (*In re I.J.* (2013) 56 Cal.4th 766, 778–780 [citing *In re Karen R.*, *supra*, 95 Cal.App.4th at p. 91; disapproving *In re Alexis S.* (2012) 205 Cal.App.4th 48, *In re Maria R.* (2010) 185 Cal.App.4th 48, and *In re Rubisela E.* (2000) 85 Cal.App.4th 177].)

The appellate court has found that a parent’s nude photos of children engaged in sexual conduct fall within the Penal Code definition of “sexual exploitation” and justify dependency intervention



pursuant to section 300(d). (*In re Ulysses D.* (2004) 121 Cal.App.4th 1092, 1098.)

Risk to siblings must be examined on a case-by-case basis. The juvenile court is not “compelled . . . to assume jurisdiction over all the children whenever one child is sexually abused.” (*In re I.J.*, *supra*, 56 Cal.4th at p. 780; see Pen. Code, § 11165.1.)

At disposition, findings under this section can have serious implications regarding whether family reunification services are provided if the child is found to have been severely sexually abused or is removed from a parent for a second time because of physical or sexual abuse. (See § 361.5(b)(3), (6)–(7) & (c); see also Disposition black letter discussion.)

A true finding under section 300(d) is a basis for invoking the section 355.1(d) presumption in any subsequent petitions filed against the parent who committed the act of sexual abuse.

e. Section 300(e)—Severe Physical Abuse of a Child Under Age Five

A child under the age of five has suffered severe physical abuse inflicted by a parent or by any person known by the parent if, in the latter case, the parent knew or reasonably should have known that the person was physically abusing the child.

“Severe physical abuse” includes any of the following:

- A single act of abuse that causes physical trauma so severe that, if left untreated, it would cause death, permanent disfigurement, or permanent physical disability;
- A single act of sexual abuse that causes significant bleeding, deep bruising, or significant external or internal swelling;
- More than one act of physical abuse, each of which causes bleeding, deep bruising, significant external or internal swelling, bone fracture, or unconsciousness; or
- The willful, prolonged failure to provide adequate food.

A child may not be removed from the parent’s physical custody at disposition based solely on a finding of severe physical abuse unless severe physical abuse was alleged in the petition.



In most dependency cases, it is necessary to establish that a parent was responsible for a child's condition. Thus, section 300(a) authorizes jurisdiction when a *parent* inflicts serious physical harm. Section 300(b) requires proof of *parental* failure to protect. Jurisdiction under section 300(e) is different. When a young child suffers severe physical abuse within the meaning of section 300(e), it is not necessary to prove the identity of the abuser. In *J.J. v. Superior Court* (2022) 81 Cal.App.5th 447, 458, the Court of Appeal wrote, "Section 300, subdivision (e) [does] not require identification of the perpetrator." In *In re E.H.* (2003) 108 Cal.App.4th 659, 668–669, the Court of Appeal wrote, "Unlike criminal proceedings, where establishing the identity of the perpetrator is paramount the purpose of dependency proceedings was to fashion appropriate orders in the best interests of the child" In *In re Madison S.* (2017) 15 Cal.App.5th 308, 323–324, the Court of Appeal wrote, "[S]ubdivision (e) does not require identification of the perpetrator. . . . [T]he only requirement under subdivision (e) is that the parents 'reasonably should have known' the infant was being injured. . . . [W]here there is no identifiable perpetrator, only a cast of suspects, jurisdiction under subdivision (e) is not automatically ruled out. A finding may be supported by circumstantial evidence Otherwise, a family could stonewall the Department and its social workers concerning the origin of a child's injuries and escape a jurisdictional finding under subdivision (e)." (See also, *In re M.V.* (2022) 78 Cal.App.5th 944.)

Under section 300, the burden of proof to establish maltreatment is a preponderance of the evidence. (§ 355(a).) If the court takes jurisdiction over a child, the child cannot be removed from the physical custody of the parents unless the court finds by clear and convincing evidence that removal is necessary to protect the child from substantial danger to the child's physical health, safety, or well-being. (§ 361(c).) However, when a court takes jurisdiction over a child pursuant to section 300(e), the section 300(e) finding of severe abuse constitutes *prima facie* evidence that the child cannot live safely at home, dispensing with the need for evidence justifying removal. In *In re E.E.* (2020) 49 Cal.App.5th 195, 218, the Court of



Appeal wrote, “[T]he fact the court adjudicated the child a dependent under section 300, subdivision (e) serves as prima facie evidence that the child faces a substantial risk of physical harm in the parent’s custody and there are no reasonable means to protect the child short of removal.”



At disposition, findings under section 300(e) can have serious implications as to whether family reunification services are provided. A court can bypass services when jurisdiction rests on section 300(e). (§ 361.5(b)(5) & (c); see Disposition black letter discussion.)

f. Section 300(f)—Death of Another Child

The parent caused the death of another child through abuse or neglect. (See *In re I.I.* (2019) 42 Cal.App.5th 971; *In re Mia Z.* (2016) 246 Cal.App.4th 883.) The evidence of neglect required to sustain a section 300(f) allegation may include the parent’s or guardian’s breach of ordinary care and does not require criminal negligence. (*In re Ethan C.* (2012) 54 Cal.4th 610, 637; distinguishing *Patricia O. v. Superior Court* (1999) 69 Cal.App.4th 933.) When a parent’s negligence led to the tragedy of a child’s death, the dependency court may intervene for the safety and protection of children remaining in the parent’s custody, even if the parent’s lethal carelessness cannot necessarily be characterized as sufficiently “gross,” reckless, or culpable to be labeled “criminal.” (*In re Ethan C.*, *supra*, 54 Cal.4th at p. 636.) To sustain a section 300(f) allegation, the court is not required to make a finding that the child is currently at risk of harm. (*In re A.M.* (2010) 187 Cal.App.4th 1380, 1389.)



At disposition, findings under this section can have serious implications as to whether family reunification services are provided. (§ 361.5; see Disposition black letter discussion.) A true finding on a section 300(f) allegation will provide a basis for the court to take jurisdiction over subsequent children. Of course, the passage of time and changed circumstances can be argued to moderate dispositional orders for younger siblings.

g. Section 300(g)—Parent Is Unable or Unwilling to Care for Child

The child has been left without provision for support; has been voluntarily surrendered under the Safe Haven/Safe Surrender program (Health & Saf. Code, § 1255.7) and has not been reclaimed within 14 days; has a parent who is incarcerated or institutionalized and who cannot arrange for the care of the child; or the child lives with a relative or other person who is unable or unwilling to provide care or support for the child, the parent's whereabouts are unknown, and reasonably diligent efforts to locate the parent have failed. In *In re J.N.* (2021) 62 Cal.App.5th 767, the petition was based entirely on father's criminal history. There was no evidence father committed criminal acts that directly involved his child. The Court of Appeal held that the juvenile court's finding of jurisdiction was not supported by substantial evidence.

"There is no 'Go to jail, lose your child' rule in California." A parent need not have arranged for care of his or her child immediately upon incarceration; rather, the issue under section 300(g) is whether, as of the time of the jurisdiction hearing, the parent can make such arrangements. (*In re S.D.* (2002) 99 Cal.App.4th 1068, 1077–1078.) It is irrelevant whether the person chosen to provide care is suitable for the long term; section 300(g) requires only that the parent arrange adequately for the child's care. (*In re Monica C.* (1994) 31 Cal.App.4th 296, 305.)



Petitions may contain section 300(g) allegations when a parent's whereabouts are initially unknown. Counsel should ensure that such counts are dismissed when the parent is located. Additionally, at disposition, findings under this subdivision can have serious implications as to whether family reunification services are provided if the court finds that the child was willfully abandoned in a manner that constituted a serious danger to the child. (§ 361.5(b)(9) & (c); see Disposition black letter discussion.)

h. Section 300(h)—Child Freed for Adoption

The child has been freed by relinquishment or termination of parental rights from one or both parents for 12 months, and an adoption petition has not been granted.



i. Section 300(i)—Cruelty

The child has been subjected to an act or acts of cruelty by a parent or a member of the child's household, or a parent has failed to adequately protect the child from an act or acts of cruelty when the parent knew or reasonably should have known that the child was in danger of being subjected to cruel acts.

A "member of the household" is defined as any person continually or frequently found in the same household as the child. (Cal. Rules of Court, rule 5.502(22).)

In *In re D.C.* (2011) 195 Cal.App.4th 1010, mother had a history of mental illness and drug abuse. Mother put her disabled daughter over a fence and into a public fountain. Mother climbed the fence into the fountain and twice held the child under the water before a witness saved the child. Mother claimed she wanted God to cure the child. The child was taken into protective custody and a petition filed in juvenile court under section 300, subdivisions (b), (g), and (i). Mother claimed she did not commit an act of cruelty because she did not have malicious intent. The Court of Appeal wrote, "acts of cruelty" as that phrase is commonly understood within the dependency context . . . are intentional acts that directly and needlessly inflict extreme pain or distress. . . . [W]e think jurisdiction is appropriate under the direct-infliction of section 300, subdivision (i) where a parent intends to commit the act notwithstanding the absence of evidence that the parent actually intended to harm the child." (195 Cal.App.4th at pp. 1016–1017.)

j. Section 300(j)—Abuse of Sibling

The child's sibling has been abused or neglected as defined in section 300(a), (b), (d), (e), or (i), and there is substantial risk that the child will be abused or neglected as defined in any of those subdivisions.

In determining whether there is substantial risk to the child, the court considers

- The circumstances surrounding the abuse or neglect of the sibling;

- The age and gender of each child;
- The nature of the abuse or neglect of the sibling;
- The mental condition of the parent; and
- Any other probative factors.

The mere fact that an older sibling had been the subject of a sustained dependency petition four years earlier has been held insufficient to support jurisdiction under section 300(j). (*In re David M.*, *supra*, 134 Cal.App.4th 822.) Similarly, a true finding under section 300(j) is unwarranted where no evidence from the sibling's prior case is submitted and no showing is made linking the sibling's status as a dependent to any substantial risk posed to the child in question. (*In re Ricardo L.* (2003) 109 Cal.App.4th 552.) The doctrine of collateral estoppel prevents relitigation of the sibling's prior dependency adjudication. (*In re Joshua J.* (1995) 39 Cal.App.4th 984.)

See *In re Ma.V.* (2021) 64 Cal.App.5th 432 [evidence not sufficient to sustain sibling petition]; *In re D.B.* (2018) 26 Cal.App.5th 320 [substantial evidence supported juvenile court's finding that 18-month-old was dependent based on parents' use of corporal punishment of older sibling].

POSSIBLE OUTCOMES

1. Petition Dismissed—No Basis for Jurisdiction

If the court finds that the child is not described under any of the subdivisions of section 300, it must dismiss the petition and order that any child detained in out-of-home custody be released to the custody of the parent. (§ 356.)

2. A Finding That the Child Is Described by Section 300

a. Immediate Disposition

After finding that a child is described by section 300, the court may proceed directly to evidence on the appropriate disposition for the child. (§ 358(a).)



b. Continue the Disposition Hearing to a Later Date**(i) Discretionary**

The court may continue the disposition hearing on its own motion or that of the child so long as the social services agency is not recommending denial of family reunification services. If the child is detained, the continuance must not exceed 10 judicial days. (§ 358(a)(1).) If the child is not detained, the case may be continued for 30 days with an extension of 15 additional days allowable upon a finding of cause. (§ 358(a)(2).) In many courts, attorneys waive time and the disposition hearing is set beyond 10 days.

(ii) Mandatory

The court must continue the proceedings for a maximum of 30 days if the recommendation is to deny provision of family reunification services. During that time, the social worker must notify each parent of the recommendation and inform the parent that if no services are ordered, a permanency planning hearing under section 366.26 will be set at which parental rights may be terminated. (§ 358(a)(3).)



DISPOSITION

DISPOSITION HEARING CHECKLIST: CHILD'S ATTORNEY

BEFORE

- ☐ Interview client about desires and position on
 - ☐ Social services agency's recommendation.
 - ☐ Placement (with parent, previously noncustodial parent, relative, current caregiver).
 - ☐ Need for services (e.g., counseling, tutoring).
 - ☐ Visitation with parents, siblings, grandparents, and others.
- ☐ If the child is an Indian child, contact tribal representative to determine tribe's position on key issues such as placement.
- ☐ Assess and formulate position on
 - ☐ Current risk of substantial danger to child if in custody of one or both parents, i.e., need for removal from custody of parent(s).
 - ☐ Services and resources necessary to maintain child safely in parent's custody.
 - ☐ Preferred placement if removal is necessary.
 - ☐ Need for continued jurisdiction if child in custody of previously noncustodial parent.
 - ☐ Provision of family reunification services to one or both parents.
 - ☐ Education rights of the parents.
 - ☐ Whether child has full access to educational services, including any special education services.
 - ☐ Case plan and individualized services needed for family and child.
 - ☐ Sufficiency of court and agencies ICWA inquiry.

DURING

- ☐ Inform court of child's wishes—however, per section 317(e), must not advocate for return if return conflicts with the child's safety and protection.



- ☐ Advocate positions identified above in keeping with any additional evidence received.
- ☐ Request appropriate orders, such as
 - ☐ Limitation of parent's education rights and appointment of responsible adult to make education decisions. (§ 361; Ed. Code, § 56055; Cal. Rules of Court, rules 5.649–5.651.)
 - ☐ Case plan specific to the family and child. (§ 16501.1.)
 - ☐ Special services (e.g., regional center referral, necessary educational assessments or support to participate in extracurricular activities, counseling for sexual abuse victims).
 - ☐ Specific versus general placement order. (*In re Cynthia C.* (1997) 58 Cal.App.4th 1479; *In re Robert A.* (1992) 4 Cal. App.4th 174.)
- ☐ Ensure that court addresses
 - ☐ Placement.
 - ☐ Education rights.
 - ☐ Services for family (reunification if removed, maintenance if not).
 - ☐ Visitation with parents, siblings, grandparents, and other appropriate persons. (§§ 362.1, 362.2(h).)
 - ☐ Whether the social services agency has made reasonable efforts to prevent or eliminate the need for removal.
 - ☐ Setting the next hearing. (§§ 364, 366.21(e), 366.26.)
 - ☐ Sufficiency of ICWA inquiry.

AFTER

- ☐ Develop timeline of important dates and calendar reminders.
- ☐ Consult with child to explain court rulings and answer questions.
- ☐ Send letter to caregiver with contact information and summary of court orders.
- ☐ Follow up on assessments, special education services, enrollment in extracurricular activities.
- ☐ File necessary forms/motions if pursuing rehearing, appeal, or writ.



DISPOSITION HEARING CHECKLIST: PARENT'S ATTORNEY

BEFORE

- ☐ Review disposition report. Does it address items listed in section 358.1?
- ☐ Interview client and strategize regarding desires and position on
 - ☐ Social services agency's recommendation.
 - ☐ Placement (with client, previously noncustodial parent, relative, current caregiver).
 - ☐ Need for services, and whether they are reasonably tailored to client's needs.
 - ☐ Ability to substantially comply with case plan within allotted time.
 - ☐ Ability to participate in education decisions and needs.
 - ☐ Visitation with client, siblings, grandparents, and others.
- ☐ If case involves an Indian child,
 - ☐ Contact tribal representative to determine tribe's position on key issues, such as need for continued removal and appropriate placement.
 - ☐ Evaluate whether agency has met its burdens under ICWA, including providing active efforts.
 - ☐ Evaluate whether proposed qualified expert witness testimony is sufficient under ICWA standards.
- ☐ Assess and formulate position on
 - ☐ Current risk of substantial danger to child if in custody of one or both parents, i.e., need for removal from custody of parent(s).
 - ☐ What can be done to prevent/eliminate need for removal (services, change in living arrangement, etc.).
 - ☐ Alternatives short of removal. (§§ 301, 360(b).)
 - ☐ Need for continued jurisdiction if child in custody of previously noncustodial parent.



- ☐ Case plan/individualized services needed for family and children.
- ☐ Need for interim hearings.
- ☐ Is there a possibility of no services/bypass? (§ 361.5(b) or (e).) If so,
 - ☐ Learn position of other counsel.
 - ☐ Exercise right to 30-day continuance? (§ 358(a)(1).)
 - ☐ Prepare to address best interest exception. (§ 361.5(c).)
 - ☐ Review need for expert testimony.

DURING

- ☐ Advocate positions identified above in keeping with any additional evidence received.
- ☐ Be sure to make appropriate objections to preserve issues for appeal.
- ☐ If case involves an Indian child, preserve ICWA issues for appeal—specifically, the issues of meeting the ICWA detriment finding by clear and convincing evidence, compliance with active efforts requirement, placement preferences, and sufficiency of the qualified expert witness qualifications and testimony.
- ☐ Request appropriate orders, such as
 - ☐ Case plan specific to the family and children. (§ 16501.1.)
 - ☐ Special services (e.g., foreign language, geographical concerns).
 - ☐ Specific versus general placement order. (*In re Cynthia C.*, *supra*, 58 Cal.App.4th at p. 1479; *In re Robert A.*, *supra*, 4 Cal.App.4th at p. 174.)
- ☐ Ensure court addresses
 - ☐ Placement.
 - ☐ Services for family (reunification if removed, maintenance if not).
 - ☐ Visitation with client, siblings, grandparents, and other appropriate persons. (§§ 362.1, 362.2(h).)
 - ☐ Whether the social services agency has made reasonable efforts to prevent or eliminate the need for removal.



- ☐ Education rights (affirm client retains them unless limitation is necessary).
- ☐ Setting the next hearing. (§§ 364, 366.21(e), 366.26.)

AFTER

- ☐ Develop timeline of important dates and calendar reminders.
- ☐ Consult with client to explain court rulings and answer questions.
- ☐ Discuss interim objectives with client (when should services have begun, when should visitation increase, etc.), and invite client to contact you when appropriate.
- ☐ File necessary forms/motions if pursuing rehearing, appeal, or writ.



BLACK LETTER DISCUSSION

A dispositional hearing is held following a finding that a child is within the jurisdiction of the juvenile court pursuant to section 300. At the hearing, the court determines whether the child should be declared a dependent, and, if so, decisions are made regarding continued parental custody and control, placement and visitation, who may receive reunification services, and what services are appropriate. Disposition is also the time at which a petition seeking de facto parent status may first be heard. (See section on de facto parents in Caregivers fact sheet.)

TIMING OF HEARING

Although the jurisdictional and dispositional phases are bifurcated, the dispositional hearing may occur on the same day jurisdictional findings are made. Alternatively, the hearing may be continued, but for no more than 45 days if the child is not detained. If the child is detained, the hearing must take place within 30 days of adjudication if the social services agency is recommending that reunification services not be offered to one or both parents, and within 10 court days if provision of services is recommended. (§ 358.)

For a child who has been detained, absent exceptional circumstances, no continuance may be granted that would delay the dispositional hearing to a date more than 60 days after the detention hearing. Under no circumstances may disposition take place more than six months after the same date. (§ 352; Cal. Rules of Court, rule 5.550.) The Court of Appeal has held that violation of these timelines does not deprive the juvenile court of jurisdiction because such an outcome would run counter to the central goal of dependency law—the protection of children. (*In re Richard H.* (1991) 234 Cal.App.3d 1351.) However, case law also makes it clear that the time constraints of section 352 should not be treated lightly, and in cases of unwarranted delay, juvenile courts have been directed to conduct jurisdiction and disposition hearings on a day-to-day basis until completed. (*Renee S. v. Superior Court* (1999) 76 Cal.App.4th 187; *Jeff M. v. Su-*



perior Court (1997) 56 Cal.App.4th 1238.) The time limits of section 352 take precedence over an incarcerated parent’s right under Penal Code section 2625 to be present at the hearing. (See *D.E. v. Superior Court* (2003) 111 Cal.App.4th 502.)

If the case involves an Indian child, ICWA entitles parents to seek one 20-day continuance per “proceeding” to prepare. (25 U.S.C. § 1912; see ICWA fact sheet for explanation of “proceeding.”)



Counsel should carefully weigh the pros and cons of continuances during the early stages of a dependency action. Some delay may be beneficial—for example, if a parent is attempting to make alternative housing arrangements or produce enough clean drug tests to reassure the court that there is no need to order the child removed. However, the clock for reunification begins ticking upon the child’s detention, and a parent’s efforts to regain custody can be hampered if delays in court proceedings lead to delays in participation in programs and services.

NOTICE

Notice must be provided to the parent or guardian, the child if aged 10 or older, all attorneys of record, and any dependent siblings and their caregivers and attorneys. Furthermore, if there is reason to believe that an Indian child may be involved, notice of the action and the tribe’s right to intervene must be served on any known Indian custodian and tribe or, if unknown, on the Bureau of Indian Affairs. (§ 291; Cal. Rules of Court, rule 5.481(b).) ICWA notice must be given on mandatory Judicial Council form ICWA-030 and served by registered or certified mail, return receipt requested.

In non-ICWA cases, the manner of service and content of the notice is the same as that required for adjudication, including the time, date, place, and nature of the hearing and the potential consequences of failure to attend. (§ 291.) In addition, the parent must be noticed of any recommendation to deny reunification services and be informed that, if the court does not order services, a permanency hearing will be held at which parental rights could be terminated. (§ 361.5.)



SOCIAL WORKER'S REPORT

If the social worker's report (social study) is not distributed to all parties at least 48 hours before the disposition hearing, the court must grant a continuance at the request of any party who did not receive the report. (Cal. Rules of Court, rule 5.690(a)(2).) The report addresses numerous issues, including the following:

- Whether the social services agency has considered as a possible solution to the family's problems providing child welfare services (i.e., family preservation and family reunification services such as parenting classes) and whether the parents have been offered these services (§§ 358.1, 16500 et seq.);
- The basis for any recommendation to deny reunification services (Cal. Rules of Court, rule 5.695);
- A reunification case plan that is designed to identify and resolve problems so that the child can safely return to the family home (§§ 358, 358.1, 16501.1);
- The identified concurrent plan for the child should reunification fail, and the willingness of the caregiver to provide legal permanency if needed (§§ 358(b), 358.1(i));
- Whether the parents have been informed of their right to relinquish the child for adoption (§ 358.1(g));
- Recommendations regarding visitation with the parents, siblings, and grandparents (§ 358.1, 16501.1; Cal. Rules of Court, rule 5.690);
- A description of the relationship among dependent siblings, detailing the strength of existing bonds, the children's expressed desires to live with or visit each other, the social services agency's efforts to place separated siblings together, and the nature and frequency of visitation between any siblings placed apart (§§ 358.1, 16501.1);
- An assessment of the appropriateness of any relative placement (§§ 358.1(h), 361.3);
- If the case involves an Indian child, evidence to support a finding by clear and convincing evidence that continued custody by the parent is likely to result in serious emotional or physical



damage to the child, a finding of active efforts, discussion of how the proposed placement fits within the ICWA placement preferences and all efforts made to comply with the placement preferences, and discussions with the tribe regarding placement and concurrent planning (25 U.S.C. § 1912; §§ 361(d), 361.7; Cal. Rules of Court, rule 5.482(e));

- Identification of a responsible adult available to make educational decisions for the child, if recommending limitation of the parent's educational rights (§ 358.1(e)); and
- Specific information regarding the child's educational issues and needs, including achievement levels; discrepancies in achievement; physical, developmental, and mental health needs; early intervention or special education needs/plans; extracurricular participation; and other related issues. If the child is five years old or younger, the report must identify whether the child may be eligible for or is already receiving early intervention services from either the regional center or the local education agency. Also, the report must identify whether the parent's right to make education decisions has been limited and, if it is limited, the person who holds the child's education rights. (Cal. Rules of Court, rule 5.651(c).)



The report should not merely make conclusory statements but must detail specific measures that have been attempted, or explain why such measures are not available or not appropriate. This information goes directly to the determination the court must make under section 361(d), namely whether reasonable efforts—or in the case of an Indian child, active efforts—have been made to prevent or eliminate the need for removal from the parental home.

BURDENS OF PROOF

The social services agency must present clear and convincing evidence to support removal of a child from the custody of a parent with whom the child resided prior to the court's intervention. (§ 361(c); Cal. Rules of Court, rule 5.695(c); *In re Basilio T.* (1992) 4 Cal.App.4th 155, 169 ["heightened burden of proof is appropriate in light of the constitutionally protected rights of parents to the care, custody and management of the children"].) "Clear and convinc-



ing evidence” has been defined as that which “requires a high probability, such that the evidence is so clear as to leave no substantial doubt.” (*In re Isayah C.* (2004) 118 Cal.App.4th 684, 695.)

Clear and convincing evidence is required even if the child is to be placed with the other, previously noncustodial, parent. (*In re Katrina C.* (1988) 201 Cal.App.3d 540.) Similarly, a finding of detriment to the child sufficient to deny placement with a previously noncustodial parent must be based on clear and convincing evidence. (*In re Isayah C.*, *supra*, 118 Cal.App.4th at p. 700; see *In re Luke M.* (2003) 107 Cal.App.4th 1412, 1426 [the finding of detriment may be based on emotional harm the child is likely to suffer if separated from siblings and need not be related to any misconduct by the noncustodial parent].) The social services agency bears the burden of proof at the clear and convincing level if it seeks to deny reunification services to a parent. (§ 361.5(b); Cal. Rules of Court, rule 5.695(g).)

If the case involves an Indian child, the agency must make active efforts to provide remedial services and rehabilitative programs to prevent the breakup of the Indian family. The court must determine whether the agency has done so and, if so, whether those efforts proved unsuccessful. California Rules of Court, rule 5.485(c) describes active efforts to “include affirmative, active, thorough, and timely efforts intended primarily to maintain or reunite the child with his or her family, must be tailored to the facts and circumstances of the case, and must be consistent with the requirements of Welfare and Institutions Code section 224.1(f).” Active efforts must be documented in detail in the record (Cal. Rules of Court, rule 5.485(c)(1)), must be consistent with the prevailing social and cultural conditions and way of life of the child’s tribe (Cal. Rules of Court, rule 5.485(c)(2)), and must include pursuit of any steps necessary to secure tribal membership for the child (Cal. Rules of Court, rule 5.485(c)(3)).

When jurisdiction is taken under section 300(e), the finding of severe physical abuse constitutes prima evidence that the child cannot remain safely at home, and removal need not be supported by clear and convincing evidence.



PROCEDURAL AND EVIDENTIARY ISSUES

The social study and any hearsay contained within it is admissible as competent evidence at disposition. (§§ 28I, 358(b); *In re Keyonie R.* (1996) 42 Cal.App.4th 1569.) Testimony of the social worker is not a prerequisite to admission, although a party may request that the preparer be present for cross-examination. (§§ 28I, 358(b); *In re Corey A.* (1991) 227 Cal.App.3d 339.) Parties have the right to subpoena and cross-examine witnesses and to present relevant evidence. (§ 34I; Cal. Rules of Court, rules 5.526(d), 5.534(g), 5.690(b); see *In re Vanessa M.* (2006) 138 Cal.App.4th 1121, 1130–1132 [court may not punish parents for failure to appear at prior hearings by refusing to let them testify; due process mandates that a party be allowed to testify where credibility is at issue].)

Reports and/or testimony from an expert appointed under Evidence Code section 730 may be received on any relevant topic. Although orders for psychological evaluation of a parent are improper prior to adjudication, once allegations have been sustained, expert opinion may be needed to determine what services are needed to deal with the issues that led to dependency. (*Laurie S. v. Superior Court* (1994) 26 Cal.App.4th 195, 213.) In addition, expert opinions are permissible at disposition to determine whether a parent is capable of utilizing reunification services (§ 361.5(b)(2); *In re Christina A.* (1989) 213 Cal.App.3d 1073, 1076–1077) and whether services are likely to prevent the recurrence of abuse or neglect. (§ 361.5(c); *In re Elizabeth M.* (1991) 232 Cal.App.3d 553, 560.)

In cases involving an Indian child, testimony of a qualified expert witness establishing that continued custody of the child by the parent is likely to result in serious emotional or physical damage to the child is required as a condition of removal. This witness should have experience beyond that of the normal social worker, should understand the family structures of the child's specific tribe, and, under California law, may not be an employee of the agency seeking the order. (§ 224.6.) Be sure to review the requirements for qualified expert witness testimony set out in the ICWA information sheet,



and consider challenging the expert proposed by the agency or, if necessary, calling your own ICWA expert.



In some closely contested cases it may be advisable to independently retain an expert, to either rebut or bolster the anticipated testimony of a court-appointed expert.

POSSIBLE OUTCOMES

1. Court Declines Jurisdiction—Dismissal of Petition— Informal Supervision

The court has discretion to set aside the jurisdictional findings and dismiss the petition when the interests of justice and the welfare of the minor so require. (§ 390.) The court also has discretion, without declaring dependency, to order the social services agency to provide informal supervision for a period of 6 to 12 months. (§ 360(b); *In re Adam D.* (2010) 183 Cal.App.4th 1250, 1260–1261 [§ 360(b) order is not a dismissal but a type of disposition].) If, during the period of supervision, the family is unable or unwilling to cooperate with services, the social services agency may file a petition alleging that a previous petition was sustained and that informal supervision has been ineffective in ameliorating the need for services. At a hearing on that petition, the court may either dismiss the petition or set a new disposition hearing. (§ 360(c).)



Unlike dismissal under section 301, orders made under sections 390 and 360(b) do not require the social services agency's consent. An example of a situation in which a section 390 dismissal might be appropriate would be if, by the time of the disposition hearing, the offender no longer has access to the child victim (possibly as a result of incarceration) and the custodial parent has no need for services. Similarly, informal supervision might be appropriate in the same scenario if the nonoffending parent and/or child needs services for only a short period of time and has no need for judicial oversight.



2. Petition Sustained—Informal Supervision

If the court finds that the child is described under section 300, it may, without adjudicating the child to be a dependent, order the social services agency to provide services to keep the family together and place the child and parent under the supervision of the social worker for six months. (§ 360(b).) If the family is unwilling or unable to cooperate during the period of supervision, the social worker may file a petition alleging that a previous petition was sustained and the disposition was ineffective. After a hearing on the new petition, the court may dismiss the petition or order that a new disposition hearing be set. (§ 360(c).)



This may be an appropriate resolution in “close cases” in which the court does find a basis for jurisdiction but the current circumstances of the family do not seem to warrant full court oversight, merely services from and supervision by the social worker. Note also that this resolution, unlike informal supervision under section 301, does not require the consent of the social services agency; it can be unilaterally imposed by the court.

3. Establishment of Legal Guardianship (With or Without Taking Jurisdiction)

The court may enter an order establishing a legal guardianship either in addition to or in lieu of declaring the child a dependent as long as the parent and the child (if old enough to meaningfully comment) consent and the court finds that guardianship is in the child’s best interest. The parent must indicate that he or she does not want reunification services and understands that none will be provided. (§ 360(a); see *In re L.A.* (2009) 180 Cal.App.4th 413 [juvenile court may order § 360(a) guardianship where one parent consents and the other parent’s whereabouts are unknown; agency’s assessment report must include information on efforts to contact the absent parent].) A guardian may not be appointed until the court has read and considered the assessment required under section 361.5(g), which includes an analysis of the eligibility and appropriateness of the prospective



guardian. (§§ 360(a), 361.5(g), 16010(b).) Appointment of a guardian pursuant to section 360 is not subject to the criminal history restrictions and exemption requirements of section 361.4. (*In re Summer H.* (2006) 139 Cal.App.4th 1315, 1333–1334 [the inquiry under section 360 is “not whether the proposed guardian meets licensing requirements imposed on foster placements, but whether a plan for guardianship either developed or approved by the parent is in the child’s best interests”].)

If the case involves an Indian child, the option for the parent to consent to entry of an order establishing legal guardianship may be unavailable. Federal regulations set limitations on the use of parental consent to avoid ICWA requirements when there is a threat of removal by an agency. (See 25 C.F.R. § 23.2 for definitions of “Involuntary proceeding” and “Voluntary proceeding.”)

In *Dora V. v. Superior Court of Los Angeles County* (2024), the Court of Appeal wrote: “[T]he Legislature has created different statutory schemes and rights for legal guardians depending on whether they were appointed by the juvenile court or were appointed under the Probate Code before dependency proceedings commenced. . . . [O]nly legal guardians appointed under the Probate Code have the same right as parents to certain presumptions of reunification and reunification services after a child has been removed from their custody. By contrast, legal guardians appointed by the juvenile court . . . are not entitled to a presumption of reunification, and they may receive reunification services in the discretion of the juvenile court if it is in the best interest of the child.”



Although orders for guardianship may be made at the initial disposition hearing, a continuance is often needed because the assessment is not yet available. The additional time may prove beneficial to all parties by allowing adequate time to investigate and formulate a position on the question of whether continued jurisdiction is appropriate. For example, counsel may want to advocate that dependency be declared, guardianship be granted, and the case remain open because Kinship Guardianship Assistance Payment (Kin-GAP) fund-

ing will not be available until the child has been placed with the guardian for six consecutive months following the establishment of a dependency guardianship. (See Relative Placements fact sheet.)

4. Child Adjudicated a Dependent

Upon declaring the child to be a dependent, the court determines who will have custody of the child and what limitations, if any, on the parent's control are necessary to protect the child. (§§ 360, 361; Cal. Rules of Court, rule 5.695(a) & (b).) The court may permit the child to remain in the parent's custody with services provided by the social services agency or, if clear and convincing evidence dictates removal from the parent, order that the child be released to the noncustodial parent, or place the child under the care and custody of the social services agency. (§§ 361, 361.2, 362; Cal. Rules of Court, rule 5.695(a).)

a. Home of Parent (Supervision With Family Maintenance Services)

The court may allow a dependent child to remain in the custody of one or both parents while subject to the supervision of the social services agency. The parents can be required to participate in child welfare services, counseling, and educational programs, including parenting classes, and follow orders designed to ensure the child's regular attendance at school. (§ 362(b)–(d).)

The court may not order a child removed from the custody of a parent and then immediately return the child to the home for a “visit” or “trial placement.” Such orders are outside the court's jurisdiction because they are inconsistent with the requirement that removal only occur on clear and convincing evidence that there are no means short of removal to protect the child from substantial danger. (§ 361(c); *Savannah B. v. Superior Court* (2000) 81 Cal.App.4th 158, 161–162; *In re Andres G.* (1998) 64 Cal.App.4th 476, 483.)

b. Grounds for Removal From a Parent

Pursuant to section 361(c), removal of a child from the parent's physical custody requires clear and convincing evidence that at the time of the dispositional hearing any of the following conditions exist:



- I. There is or would be a substantial danger to the child's physical or emotional well-being if the child is returned to the custodial home and there are no reasonable means to protect without removal.

- **Substantial Danger**

The Court of Appeal has found that this standard, the most frequent basis for removal, “embodies an effort to shift the emphasis of the child dependency laws to maintaining children in their natural parent’s homes where it was safe to do so.” (*In re Jasmine G.* (2000) 82 Cal.App.4th 282, 288.) The danger to the child must be substantial. (See *Id.* at p. 290 [social worker’s belief that parents lacked proper parenting skills and understanding of child was insufficient to find substantial danger]; *In re Paul E.* (1995) 39 Cal.App.4th 996, 1005 [chronic messiness alone, unless it causes illness or injury, does not create a substantial danger].)

- **No Reasonable Means to Protect**

Removal also requires clear and convincing evidence that there are no reasonable means to protect the child if he or she is allowed to remain in the home. (§ 361(c)(1).) The court must consider, as a possible reasonable means to protect the child, the options of removal of the abusive person from the home or retention of custody by a nonoffending parent who has a viable plan to protect the child from future harm. (*Ibid.*) The court may not remove a child from a nonoffending parent absent clear and convincing evidence of a substantial risk of future physical harm to the child. (*In re Isayah C.*, *supra*, 118 Cal.App.4th at p. 698 [removal from temporarily incarcerated parent who had made an appropriate alternative plan for the child’s care was improper].) “[O]ut-of-home placement is not a proper means of hedging against the possibility of failed reunification efforts, or of securing parental cooperation with those efforts. It is a last resort, to be considered only when the child would be in danger if allowed to reside with the parent.” (*In re Henry V.* (2004) 119



Cal.App.4th 522, 525 [order of removal reversed where services were available and mother had been fully cooperative, but social worker wanted child removed to secure continued cooperation].)

2. The parent is unwilling to have physical custody of the child.
3. The child is suffering severe emotional damage, evidenced by extreme anxiety, depression, withdrawal, or untoward aggressive behavior directed at himself or others and there are no reasonable means to protect the child's emotional health without removal. (See *In re H.E.* (2008) 169 Cal.App.4th 710 [evidence sufficient to support removal under § 361(c)(3) when mother's repeated false allegations of sexual abuse by father caused severe emotional harm to child].)
4. The child or a sibling has been or is at substantial risk of sexual abuse by the parent, a member of the household, or a person known to the parent, *and* there are no reasonable means to protect the child without removal, *or* the child does not wish to return home.
5. The child has been left without support, an incarcerated or institutionalized parent cannot arrange for the care of the child, or a relative with whom the child was left is no longer willing or able to provide care and support and the whereabouts of the parent are unknown after reasonable location efforts have failed. (§ 361(c)(1)–(5).)

A finding of severe physical abuse under section 300(e) is *prima facie* evidence a child cannot remain safely at home.

c. Placement

When it is determined that a child's safety requires removal from the custodial parent, placement options include the home of a previously noncustodial parent, the home of an approved relative or nonrelative extended family member, a foster home, or a licensed community care facility. (§ 361.2.) Each of these placement types is required to comply with the resource family approval (RFA) process. If the court is considering placing a child in foster care, the child has the right to make a brief statement, although the court may disregard



the child's stated preferences. The child's right to express his or her views on placement is not limited to the initial dispositional decision but extends to all future hearings at which a change in placement or return to the parent is being considered. (§ 399.)

When the case involves an Indian child, ICWA placement preferences apply. (25 U.S.C. § 1915(b); § 361.31; Cal. Rules of Court, rules 5.482(e), 5.484(b).) There are specific requirements if the agency wishes the court to authorize a placement that deviates from these placement preferences. (§ 361.31.) See the ICWA fact sheet for more information on placement preferences.

When a child's placement or change in placement affects the child's right to attend his or her school of origin, the social worker or probation officer must notify the court, the child's attorney, and the educational representative/surrogate parent within 24 hours, excluding noncourt days, of the determination. The child's attorney or the holder of education rights may request a hearing by filing Judicial Council form JV-539, *Request for Hearing Regarding Child's Education*, no later than two court days after receipt of notice of the decision. The court, on its own motion, may direct the clerk to set a hearing. The hearing must be held within seven calendar days and, pending the result, the child has a right to remain in his or her current school. At the hearing, the court must determine whether the proposed placement meets the school-of-origin provision required by the McKinney-Vento Act and Assembly Bill 490 (Stats. 2003, ch. 862) and whether it is in the child's best interest. The court must make its findings and orders on form JV 538, *Findings and Orders Regarding Transfer From School of Origin* (Ed. Code, §§ 48853.5, 49069.5; Cal. Rules of Court, rule 5.651(e) & (f).)

(i) With a Previously Noncustodial Parent

If a parent who was not residing with the child at the time the events resulting in dependency occurred comes forward and requests custody, the court must release the child to that parent absent a finding by clear and convincing evidence that placement would be detrimental to the child's safety or physical or emotional well-being.



(§ 361.2(a); *In re John M.* (2006) 141 Cal.App.4th 1564, 1569–1570.) This is true regardless of whether the dependency petition contains any allegations concerning the noncustodial parent—i.e., whether the noncustodial parent is “offending” or “nonoffending.” (*In re V.F.* (2007) 157 Cal.App.4th 962, 969–970.) Detriment must be found by clear and convincing evidence. (*In re Marquis D.* (1995) 38 Cal. App.4th 1813, 1829.)

However, the detriment identified need not be based on the conduct of the noncustodial parent. (See *In re Luke M.*, *supra*, 107 Cal.App.4th at pp. 1425–1426 [court properly considered any factors that would cause detriment in denying placement with out-of-state father, including emotional trauma caused by disruption of sibling relationship].) A finding of detriment may not be solely based on a parent’s incarceration for a limited time if that parent has made a plan for care of the child by a suitable third party. (*In re Isayah C.*, *supra*, 118 Cal.App.4th at p. 700; *In re V.F.*, *supra*, 157 Cal.App.4th at p. 971.)

Compliance with the Interstate Compact on the Placement of Children (ICPC) is not required for placement with a parent residing in another state; however, nothing prevents use of an ICPC evaluation as an information-gathering tool to assess the possibility of detriment. (See Cal. Rules of Court, rule 5.616(g); *In re John M.*, *supra*, 141 Cal.App.4th at pp. 1572–1575.)

When a child is removed from a legal guardian, the parent is entitled to a hearing on the question of whether return of the child to parental custody under section 361.2 is appropriate. (See *In re Catherine H.* (2002) 102 Cal.App.4th 1284.)

Upon placing a child with a previously noncustodial parent, the court has the following options pursuant to section 361.2(b):

1. Terminate jurisdiction with an order awarding legal and physical custody to that parent, and provide reasonable visitation to the previously custodial parent. (§ 361.2(b)(1).)

The court’s analysis must involve a two-step process: first, it must determine if placement with the previously noncustodial



parent would be detrimental to the child, and, second, only after placing the child with that parent does the court turn to the separate question of whether there is a need for ongoing supervision necessitating continuing jurisdiction. (See *In re Austin P.* (2004) 118 Cal.App.4th 1124, 1134–1135.)

2. Continue jurisdiction with an order that the social services agency conduct a home visit within three months. Then, after considering the social worker's report on the visit and any concerns raised by the child's current caregiver, either terminate jurisdiction or retain it with supervision and services to either or both parents. (§ 361.2(b)(2).)
3. Continue jurisdiction and supervision with orders providing reunification services to the previously custodial parent, family maintenance services to the parent assuming custody, or both.
4. Section 361.5(b)(3) gives the court discretion to deny reunification services to the parent from whom the child was removed while providing services solely for the purposes of stabilizing a permanent home with the previously noncustodial parent. (See *In re Janee W.* (2006) 140 Cal.App.4th 1444, 1454–1455.)

(ii) With a Relative or Nonrelative Extended Family Member

Whenever a child is removed from parental custody, the care, custody, and control of the child are placed under the supervision of the social services agency. (§ 361.2.) Preferential consideration must be given to a relative's request for placement, meaning that such placements must be considered and investigated first. In *In re J.Y.* (2022) 76 Cal.App.5th 473, 477–478, the Court of Appeal explained, "Section 361.3 provides for preferential consideration of a relative's request for placement of a child with the relative early in the dependency proceedings, before the disposition order. . . . The relative placement preference also applies after disposition, if the child's placement must change."

Only grandparents and adult aunts, uncles, and siblings are entitled to preferential consideration for placement. (§ 361.3(c).) The preference continues to apply any time the child needs to be again



placed after disposition, so long as reunification services continue. (§§ 361.3(a) & (c), 366.26(k); see *Cesar V. v. Superior Court* (2001) 91 Cal.App.4th 1023.)

If the case involves an Indian child, ICWA placement preferences apply, and terms such as “extended family member” may have different meanings according to the laws or customs of the child’s tribe. Furthermore, the child’s tribe may provide for a different order of preference, may approve and license its own homes, and is entitled to be consulted on the issue of placement. (See the ICWA fact sheet.)

Although they do not receive preference for placement, nonrelative extended family members are generally treated the same as relative caregivers under the statutes controlling placement. (§ 362.7.) The social services agency is responsible for investigating and advising the court on the appropriateness of potential caregivers. The assessment must comply with the resource family approval process, which includes an in-home inspection to determine the physical safety of the home and a criminal history check of all the adults in the home, among other things. (See Relative Placements fact sheet for detailed discussion.)

It is important to locate and assess relatives and resolve issues concerning relative placement as early as possible in the case. Cases in which a child is placed in foster care at disposition and a relative later requests placement often present complex legal and factual issues and tension between the goals of preserving extended family ties and of ensuring continuity of care. (See Relative Placements fact sheet for detailed discussion.)

When the court orders a child removed from parents, the court may order the child into the custody of the Department of Social Services for suitable placement (general placement order). Alternatively, the court may order the child placed with a specific parent, relative, guardian, or friend (specific placement order). What is the procedure when department social workers decide it is necessary to change a child’s placement? If the court ordered the child placed with a specific parent, guardian, relative, or friend—specific placement order—section 387 requires the department to file a supple-



mental petition seeking a change in court order. On the other hand, if the court ordered the child into the custody of the department—general placement order—section 387 does not apply. (See *In re M.L.* (2012) 205 Cal.App.4th 210, 224 [relatives without formal placement order are not entitled to hearing regarding removal pursuant to section 387]; *In re Cynthia C.* (1997) 58 Cal.App.4th 1479, 1489.) With a general placement order, if the adult with whom the child was living wishes to contest removal of the child, the adult uses section 388 to contest the removal.

(iii) With a Sibling

There is a preference in dependency law to place children with siblings whenever possible, so long as joint placement is not detrimental to any of the children. The Legislature mandated that the social services agency make diligent efforts to ensure placement of siblings together and provide for frequent interaction when siblings are not together, or that it explain why such arrangements are not appropriate. (§§ 306.5, 361.2(j), 16002.)

(iv) In Foster Care

In order to facilitate reunification, foster care placement is normally in the parent's home county unless a child is placed with a relative. (§ 361.2(g)(1).) Especially in rural counties, placement in the parent's home county is not always possible, and in such cases, placement in a nearby county is allowed. (§ 361.2(g)(2).) A child may be placed in an out-of-state facility or group home only if requirements are met under section 361.21.

Children under the age of six may not be placed in a group home unless the court finds it necessary to allow an adequate assessment for planning purposes. If a group home placement is made for a young child, it cannot exceed 60 days unless the need for additional time has been documented and approved. (§ 319.2; see also § 361.2(e)(9)(A).)

d. Provision of Reunification Services

(i) Who Is Eligible

Access to family reunification services is not a right guaranteed by the Constitution but rather a benefit based on statutory provisions. (*In re Baby Boy H.* (1998) 63 Cal.App.4th 470, 475.) Pursuant to statute, if a child is removed, the court must order provision of reunification services to the mother and legally presumed father unless the child has been voluntarily relinquished, a section 360 guardianship has been entered, or one of the exceptions under section 361.5(b) has been established by clear and convincing evidence. The court has discretion to order services for a declared biological father on a finding of benefit to the child. (§ 361.5(a).)

If the case involves an Indian child, ICWA provides a basis to entitle the Indian parents or Indian custodian to services. (25 U.S.C. § 1912(d).)

If a child is returned to or allowed to remain with the formerly custodial parent at disposition, the court may, but is not required to, offer the other parent reunification services. (*In re Pedro Z.* (2010) 190 Cal.App.4th 12; *In re A.L.* (2010) 188 Cal.App.4th 138.) Likewise, if a child is placed with a formerly noncustodial parent under section 361.2, the court may, but is not required to, offer reunification services to the formerly custodial parent. (*In re Gabriel L.* (2009) 172 Cal.App.4th 644, 650.) However, if the noncustodial parent's request for custody is denied under section 361.2(a), then both the formerly custodial parent and the noncustodial parent are entitled to reunification services. (*In re Adrianna P.* (2008) 166 Cal.App.4th 44, 53–54.)

Incarcerated or institutionalized parents must be provided with reunification services unless the court finds by clear and convincing evidence that those services would be detrimental to the child. In determining detriment, the court must look at the child's age, bonding between parent and child, nature of the parent's crime or illness, length of the parent's sentence or nature of treatment, opinion of the child (if older than nine years), and degree of detriment if services are not provided. (§ 361.5(e).) Neither difficulty in providing services



nor low prospects of successful reunification excuse the requirement that the social services agency must make a good faith effort to provide services specially tailored to the family's circumstances. (*Mark N. v. Superior Court* (1998) 60 Cal.App.4th 996, 1010; see the section on incarcerated parents in the Parents' Rights Regarding GAL Appointments and Incarcerated Parents fact sheet.)

Guardians appointed by the probate court must be provided with reunification services pursuant to the same statutes that deal with parents. While the Court of Appeal has determined that guardians appointed by the juvenile court in conjunction with dependency proceedings have no such right, the juvenile court has the authority to order reunification services for a legal guardian if it determines that maintaining the legal guardianship is in the child's best interest. (*In re Z.C.* (2009) 178 Cal.App.4th 1271; § 366.3(b).) *In Dora V. v. Superior Court of Los Angeles County* (2024), the Court of Appeal wrote: "[T]he Legislature has created different statutory schemes and rights for legal guardians depending on whether they were appointed by the juvenile court or were appointed under the Probate Code before dependency proceedings commenced. . . . [O]nly legal guardians appointed under the Probate Code have the same right as parents to certain presumptions of reunification and reunification services after a child has been removed from their custody. By contrast, legal guardians appointed by the juvenile court . . . are not entitled to a presumption of reunification, and they may receive reunification services in the discretion of the juvenile court if it is in the best interest of the child."

The social worker's report addressing potential termination of the legal guardianship must identify recommended family maintenance or reunification services to maintain the legal guardianship and set forth a plan for providing those services. (§ 366.3(b); *In re Jessica C.* (2007) 151 Cal.App.4th 474.)



The court has discretion when ruling on a petition to terminate a dependency guardianship to request that the social services agency provide services through an informal supervision arrange-

ment (as in section 301) for the purpose of safely maintaining the child in the guardian's home. (§ 366.3(b); Cal. Rules of Court, rule 5.740(c); *In re Carlos E.* (2005) 129 Cal.App.4th 1408, 1418–1419; see “Termination of a Legal Guardianship” in the Motions for Modification black letter discussion.)

De facto parents do not have the same substantive rights as parents or guardians. In *In re B.S.* (2021) 65 Cal.App.5th 888, 895, the Court of appeal wrote: “De facto parents are not equated with biological parents or guardians for purposes of dependency proceedings and standing to participate does not give them all of the rights and preferences accorded such persons. De facto parent status does not give the de facto parent the right to reunification services, visitation, custody, or placement of the minor, or to any degree of independent control over the child's destiny whatsoever. De facto parent status merely provides a way for the de facto parent to stay involved in the dependency process and provide information to the court.” (citations omitted). (See *In re Jamie G.* (1987) 196 Cal.App.3d 675, 684; see the section on de facto parents in the Caregivers fact sheet.)

A petition to terminate a guardianship must be initiated under section 387, not section 388, when termination of the guardianship will result in foster care placement, which is a more restrictive placement for the child. (*In re Carlos E.*, *supra*, 129 Cal.App.4th at pp. 1418–1419; *In re Jessica C.*, *supra*, 151 Cal.App.4th at p. 477.)

(ii) Grounds to Deny Reunification Services—Bypass of Services

The norm is for the social services agency to provide reunification services to parents. (*In re Mary M.* (1999) 71 Cal.App.4th 483, 487.) However, federal and state law delineate “aggravated circumstances” in which “the general rule favoring reunification is replaced by a legislative assumption that offering services would be an unwise use of governmental resources.” (See 42 U.S.C. § 671(a); Welf. & Inst. Code, § 361.5(b)(1)–(17); *In re Baby Boy H.*, *supra*, 63 Cal.App.4th at p. 478.). The Court of Appeal in *In re T.R.* 87 Cal.App.5th 1140, 1148 discussed the importance of reunification services:

It is difficult, if not impossible, to exaggerate the importance of reunification in the dependency system. Because family preser-



vation is so important in the early stages of a dependency, the Legislature has applied to reunification services a statutory presumption and heightened standard of proof. Thus, when a child is removed from the custody of their parent, the juvenile court must provide the parent with reunification services *unless* it finds by clear and convincing evidence that the case falls within one of the 17 enumerated exceptions in section 361.5, subdivision (b), commonly called bypass provisions. If the court finds by clear and convincing evidence that a bypass provision applies, it must deny services unless a parent proves that services would be in the child's best interests. While the parent bears the burden of proof on that issue, the department bears the burden of proving the threshold issue of whether a bypass provision applies. (Citations omitted; emphasis in original.)

The following paragraphs of 361.5(b) lay out the statutory bases for denial of reunification services, typically called bypass.

1. Parent's whereabouts remain unknown after a diligent search.

If the parent's whereabouts become known within six months following denial of reunification services pursuant to this paragraph, however, the county social services agency must seek modification of the disposition orders and the court must order services to be provided as calculated from the date of initial removal. (§ 361.5(d); Cal. Rules of Court, rule 5.695(f)(8).) Furthermore, unlike the other bases for bypass, a finding under this paragraph does not give the court the discretion to set a section 366.26 hearing within 120 days of denial of reunification services. (§ 361.5(f); Cal. Rules of Court, rule 5.695(f)(8)–(13).)

2. Parent is suffering from a mental disability that renders the parent incapable of utilizing reunification services.

Reunification services may be denied to a parent suffering from a mental disability (as described in Family Code sections 7824, 7826, and 7827) if competent evidence from mental health professionals establishes that the parent is unlikely, even with services, to be able to care for the child. (§ 361.5(c)(1).) Findings

must be based on evidence from at least two experts, each of whom is either a psychiatrist or a psychologist with a doctoral degree in psychology and at least five years' postgraduate experience in the field. Failure to object to an expert's qualifications waives the issue on appeal. (*In re Joy M.* (2002) 99 Cal.App.4th 11, 17–18.) Case law conflicts on whether the experts must agree as to the parent's capacity to utilize services. (Compare *Curtis F. v. Superior Court* (2000) 80 Cal.App.4th 470, 474 with *In re Rebecca H.* (1991) 227 Cal.App.3d 825, 841.)

3. The child or a sibling was previously found to be a dependent because of physical or sexual abuse, was returned to the parent after a period of removal under section 361, and has once again been removed because of additional physical or sexual abuse.

Once the court finds the above to be true by clear and convincing evidence, reunification services may not be ordered unless the court finds by clear and convincing evidence that reunification is in the best interest of the child. (§ 361.5(c).) See *S.V. v. Superior Court* (2018) 28 Cal.App.5th 671, 677 [Section 361.5(b) (3) applied: “The statutory language does not specify that the additional abuse must have been inflicted on the child who is being removed, as opposed to a sibling.”]; *In re D.F.* (2009) 172 Cal.App.4th 538.

4. Parent caused the death of another child through abuse or neglect.

The Court of Appeal held that it was appropriate to find a parent “caused” the death of another child when the juvenile court found that mother's neglect in failing to protect her son from lethal abuse by her boyfriend rose to the level of criminal culpability. (*Patricia O. v. Superior Court* (1999) 69 Cal.App.4th 933, 942–943.)

Once the court finds section 361.5(b)(4) to be true by clear and convincing evidence, reunification services may not be ordered unless the court finds by clear and convincing evidence that reunification is in the best interest of the child. (§ 361.5(c).)

In determining whether reunification would be in the child's best interest, the court may consider the factors listed



in section 361.5(i), including the severity of the abuse to the deceased child, the emotional trauma suffered by the surviving sibling, and that child's wishes as to reunification. (*Patricia O., supra*, 69 Cal.App.4th at pp. 942–943.)

In addition, analysis of the surviving child's best interest must include not only the parent's efforts to ameliorate the causes of the dependency action but also the gravity of all the problems that led to court intervention, the child's need for stability and continuity, and the strength of the bonds between the surviving child, the parent, and the current caregiver. (*In re Ethan N.* (2004) 122 Cal.App.4th 55, 66–67.)

5. Current petition was sustained under section 300(e), in that the conduct of the parent resulted in severe physical abuse of the dependent child before the child's fifth birthday. (*Note*: "Severe physical abuse" is defined in section 300(e).)

The parent need not be identified as the perpetrator of the abuse; in fact, the identity of the abuser need not have been determined for purposes of section 300(e). In *J.J. v. Superior Court* (2022) 81 Cal.App.5th 447, 458, the Court of Appeal wrote that section 300(e) and 361.5(b)(5) do not require identification of the perpetrator. However, for a section 300(e) petition to be sustained against a parent who did not commit the abuse, there must be evidence that the parent "knew or reasonably should have known" of the abuse. (*L.Z. v. Superior Court* (2010) 188 Cal.App.4th 1285; *In re Kenneth M.* (2004) 123 Cal.App.4th 16, 21–22.)

In such cases, the court may not order reunification unless it finds, based on competent testimony, that the services are likely to prevent reabuse or continued neglect of the child or that failure to try reunification will be detrimental to the child because of a close and positive attachment between the parent and child. (§ 361.5(c)(3).) The social services agency has a statutory obligation to investigate and advise the court about whether reunification is likely to be successful and whether

the lack of an opportunity to reunify would be detrimental to the child. (*Ibid.*; *In re Rebekah R.* (1994) 27 Cal.App.4th 1638, 1652–1653 [order denying reunification services vacated because of social services agency’s failure to investigate and advise].) The social services agency need only make a reasonable prediction about the likelihood of success; it need not prove that services would not be successful. (*Raymond C. v. Superior Court* (1997) 55 Cal.App.4th 159, 163.)

6. Child was declared a dependent because of severe physical harm or sexual abuse to the child, a sibling, or half-sibling by a parent and because the court finds that it would not benefit the child to pursue reunification with the offending parent.

“Severe physical harm” and “severe sexual abuse” are defined in section 361.5(b)(6). In *In re T.R.* (2023) 87 Cal.App.5th 1140, the Court of Appeal held that evidence did not support bypassing services for a father who choked a child, pulled a sibling off a bed by the hair, and used a belt on children. The court wrote, “While we certainly don’t condone this kind of physical abuse, there is no evidence it resulted in any injuries to the girls, let alone serious injuries. For example, there is no evidence about how hard Randell touched the girls during any of the reported incidents, whether he caused any marks or bruises, or whether the girls felt pain. Without that kind of information, there is no basis from which to conclude Radell inflicted severe physical harm on his daughters and their half-sisters.”

Once the court finds the abuse true by clear and convincing evidence, reunification services may not be ordered unless the court finds by clear and convincing evidence that reunification is in the best interest of the child. (§ 361.5(c).) In making this determination, the court must consider all relevant information including the factors listed in section 361.5(i). (§ 361.5(i).) These factors include the following:

- The specific act or omission constituting the severe sexual abuse or severe physical harm;
- The circumstances surrounding the abuse;



- The severity of the emotional trauma suffered by the child or child's sibling;
- Any history of abuse of other children by the offending parent;
- The likelihood that the child may be safely returned to the parent within 12 months with no continuing supervision; and
- The child's desires as to reunification with the parent.

Section 361.5(b)(6) does not apply in cases where the parent was merely negligent, but it can apply where the parent caused the harm by acts of omission rather than commission or where parental misconduct is the only possible explanation for a child's injuries. (See *In re T.R.* (2023) 87 Cal.App.5th 1140, 1150 ["the record contains no evidence that Randell's corporal punishment resulted in serious harm to any of the girls."]; *Tyrone W. v. Superior Court* (2007) 151 Cal.App.4th 839 [if parent was merely negligent, § 361.5(b)(6) does not apply]; *Amber K. v. Superior Court* (2006) 146 Cal.App.4th 553 [§ 361.5(b)(6) applies to mother's knowledge and "implicit consent" to sexual abuse by father]; *Pablo S. v. Superior Court* (2002) 98 Cal.App.4th 292 [§ 361.5(b)(6) applies to parent's failure to seek medical treatment for child's broken leg].)

7. Parent has been denied reunification services for a sibling because of reabuse of the sibling (see § 361.5(b)(3)); severe physical abuse of the sibling when less than five years old (see § 361.5(b)(5)); or severe physical or sexual abuse of the sibling (see § 361.5(b)(6)).

Once the court finds the above to be true by clear and convincing evidence, reunification services may not be ordered unless the court also finds by clear and convincing evidence that reunification is in the best interest of the child. (§ 361.5(c).) In making this determination, the court must consider all relevant information. (See *In re Raul V.* (2022) 82 Cal.App.5th 290.)

The parent need not be identified as the perpetrator of the abuse. The identity of the abuser need be determined for this subsection to apply. It is only necessary that the parent or someone known to the parent physically abused the child, and the

parent “knew or reasonably should have known” of the abuse. (*In re Kenneth M.*, *supra*, 123 Cal.App.4th at pp. 21–22.)

8. The child was conceived as a result of incest or continuous sexual abuse of a child. (*Note:* This paragraph disqualifies only the perpetrator parent from receiving services, not the parent who was the victim of the incest or abuse.)

Once the court finds the above to be true by clear and convincing evidence, reunification services may not be ordered unless the court also finds by clear and convincing evidence that reunification is in the best interest of the child. (§ 361.5(c).)

9. The court found that the child was described by section 300(g); the parent willfully abandoned the child, thereby creating a serious danger to the child; or the child was voluntarily surrendered under the safe-haven/safe-surrender statute. (See Health & Saf. Code, § 1255.7; see also Safe Haven/Safe Surrender fact sheet.)

Once the court finds the above to be true by clear and convincing evidence, reunification services may not be ordered unless the court also finds by clear and convincing evidence that reunification is in the best interest of the child. (§ 361.5(c).)

10. The court ordered termination of reunification services for a sibling, and the parent has not subsequently made a reasonable effort to treat the problems leading to the sibling’s removal.

Once the court finds the above to be true by clear and convincing evidence, reunification services may not be ordered unless the court also finds by clear and convincing evidence that reunification is in the best interest of the child. (§ 361.5(c).)

This provision does not change the general policy that reunification remains the priority in dependency, and that a parent’s failure to reunify with a sibling should not “reflexively” lead to denial of services when a new case arises. (*In re Albert T.* (2006) 144 Cal.App.4th 207 [parent’s efforts to resolve problems that led to sibling’s removal may be reasonable even if unsuccessful; by making such efforts, parent has “earned the right to try” to reunify]; *Renee J. v. Superior Court* (2002) 96 Cal.



App.4th 1450, 1464 [proving “reasonable efforts to treat” does not require a showing that the problem has been “cured”].) The court must find by clear and convincing evidence that the parent did not make reasonable efforts to treat prior problems, not that efforts to reunify in the instant case would be “fruitless.” (*Cheryl P. v. Superior Court* (2006) 139 Cal.App.4th 87, 97.)

There is disagreement in the case law about whether a juvenile court may utilize this provision to deny family reunification services as to a child immediately after terminating family reunification services as to the sibling. The crux of the issue is whether the time frame during which the “subsequent efforts” must have taken place is measured from the date of the sibling’s removal from the parental home or from the date that reunification services for the sibling were terminated. (Compare *Cheryl P.*, *supra*, 139 Cal.App.4th at pp. 98–99 with *In re Harmony B.* (2005) 125 Cal.App.4th 831 [denial of services as to a child may occur on the same day as termination of services as to the sibling].)

11. Parental rights were terminated over a sibling *and* the parent has not subsequently made a reasonable effort to treat the problems leading to that sibling’s removal.

Once the court finds the above to be true by clear and convincing evidence, reunification services may not be ordered unless the court finds by clear and convincing evidence that reunification is in the best interest of the child. (§ 361.5(c).)

This provision applies even if parental rights were terminated based on the voluntary relinquishment of a sibling. (*In re Angelique C.* (2003) 113 Cal.App.4th 509.)

12. Parent was convicted of a violent felony as defined in Penal Code section 667.5(c).

Once the court finds this to be true by clear and convincing evidence, reunification services may not be ordered unless the court also finds by clear and convincing evidence that reunification is in the best interest of the child. (§ 361.5(c).)



See *In re Christopher L.* (2022) 12 Cal.5th 1063, 1078 [father had been convicted of robbery, a violent felony].

13. Parent has history of extensive, abusive, and chronic use of drugs or alcohol *and*
 - Resisted prior court-ordered treatment in the three preceding years; or
 - Failed or refused to comply with a treatment case plan at least two prior times.

Once the court finds the above to be true by clear and convincing evidence, reunification services may not be ordered unless the court also finds by clear and convincing evidence that reunification is in the best interest of the child.

Drug treatment ordered by a criminal court fulfills the statute; the program need not have been ordered as part of the dependency court case plan. (*In re Brian M.* (2000) 82 Cal. App.4th 1398.) However, completion of a drug rehabilitation program does not preclude denial of reunification services when the parent has repeatedly relapsed. (*Randi R. v. Superior Court* (1998) 64 Cal.App.4th 76.)

14. Parent waives reunification services.

Once the court finds the above to be true by clear and convincing evidence, reunification services may not be ordered unless the court also finds by clear and convincing evidence that reunification is in the best interest of the child. (§ 361.5(c).)

15. Parent abducted the child or a sibling from placement and refused to disclose the child's whereabouts or return the child.

Once the court finds the above to be true by clear and convincing evidence, reunification services may not be ordered unless the court also finds by clear and convincing evidence that reunification is in the best interest of the child.

16. Parent has been required to register as a sex offender.

Once the court finds the above to be true by clear and convincing evidence, reunification services may not be ordered un-



less the court also finds by clear and convincing evidence that reunification is in the best interest of the child. (*Ibid.*)

17. The parent participated in or permitted the sexual exploitation of the child.

Once the court finds the above to be true by clear and convincing evidence, reunification services may not be ordered unless the court also finds by clear and convincing evidence that reunification is in the best interest of the child. (*Ibid.*)

If the case involves an Indian child, the law is unclear about whether the standards for bypass apply to the active-efforts requirements of ICWA.

(iii) Time Limits on Provision of Services

For a child who was age three or older on the date the child was first removed from the parent's custody and placed in foster care, services must be provided during the period of time that begins with the dispositional hearing and ends 12 months after the child entered foster care. (§ 361.49.)

For a child who was under age three on the date the child was first removed from the parent's custody and placed in foster care, services must be provided during the six-month period of time from the date of the dispositional hearing, but not longer than 12 months from the date the child entered foster care.

A child, regardless of age, is deemed to have entered foster care on the earlier of (1) the date on which the jurisdictional hearing was held, or (2) 60 days after the child was initially removed from the parent's custody. (*In re Damian L.* (2023) 90 Cal.App.5th 357, 370.)

Despite the foregoing time limits, services can be extended up to 18 months if evidence at a 12-month review hearing establishes that the child is likely to be returned to parental custody within the extended period.

Services may be extended to 24 months from the date the child was initially removed from the parent, but only if the court finds that it is in the child's best interest and there is a substantial prob-

ability that the child will be returned to the parent, as described in section 366.22(b), within the extended period of time. (§ 361.5(a)(4); see *In re D.N.* (2020) 56 Cal.App.5th 741, 762.)

These time limits do not bar services to a parent who had received services and successfully reunified with the child in a previous dependency proceeding. (*Rosa S. v. Superior Court* (2002) 100 Cal.App.4th 1181, 1188–1189 [with termination of jurisdiction, the parent-child relationship returns to its former status, and in any new proceeding all the original statutory protections once again apply].) Similarly, reunification services must be provided at disposition on a supplemental or subsequent petition if a child is being removed from parental custody for the first time in an ongoing case, unless one of the exceptions under section 361.5(b) applies. (*In re Joel T.* (1999) 70 Cal.App.4th 263, 268.)

If a child was removed from a parent’s custody, returned, and then redetained, the time limits of section 361.5 are not tolled for the period of time the child was in the parental home. (§ 361.5(a)(3).) In other words, the case does not return to “square one” for purposes of reunification. Whether reunification is offered will be determined based on the section 361.5 criteria. The time limits will be calculated from the original disposition and date the child entered foster care. (*In re Carolyn R.* (1995) 41 Cal.App.4th 159, 165–166; see Subsequent and Supplemental Petitions black letter discussion.) The 6- and 12-month reunification periods stated in section 361.5(a)(1) describe mandatory time periods. Counsel may request early termination of reunification services during the mandatory period using the motion process detailed in section 388. (§ 361.5(a)(2).) However, a motion to terminate reunification services is not required before the 366.21(e) hearing for children three years of age or older if one of the following circumstances is proven: (1) the child was removed under section 300(g) and the whereabouts of the parent are still unknown, (2) the parent has not contacted and visited the child, or (3) the parent has been convicted of a felony that indicates parental unfitness. (*Ibid.*)





Given the short timelines, it is critical that attorneys for parents receiving reunification services counsel their clients to begin active participation in the case plan as soon as possible and to ensure that visits are consistent and frequent.

(iv) Case Plan With Tailored Services

The case plan has been identified by the Legislature as the “foundation and central unifying tool in child welfare services.” (§ 16501.1(a)(1).) It is intended to ensure the safety of the child and provide services, as appropriate, to improve conditions in the parent’s home, facilitate the child’s safe return or permanent placement, and meet the needs of the child while in foster care. (§ 16501.1(a)(2).) A written case plan is to be completed, considering the recommendations of the child and family team, within 60 days of initial removal or by the date of the disposition hearing, whichever is earlier. (§ 16501.1.)

The plan must describe the services provided, including those needed to maintain and strengthen relationships of any siblings placed apart. (§§ 16002, 16501.1.) The services identified in the case plan must be tailored to serve the particular needs of the family and, if out-of-home placement is used, should include provisions for frequent visitation, a vital component of all reunification plans. (See *In re Neil D.* (2007) 155 Cal.App.4th 219 [parent may be ordered into residential drug treatment program as part of case plan]; *In re Alvin R.* (2003) 108 Cal.App.4th 962, 972; see also Visitation fact sheet.)

The court may make all reasonable orders for the care, maintenance, and support of a child who has been adjudicated a dependent, including orders directing a parent to participate in counseling or educational programs such as parenting classes. Foster parents and relative caregivers may be directed to participate in programs deemed to be in the child’s best interest. (§ 362(a) & (c).)

5. Ancillary Orders and Other Issues

Upon declaring the child to be a dependent, the court may make “any and all” reasonable orders” for the child’s care, supervision, custody, maintenance, and support. (§ 362(a).)



a. Joinder

The court may join any individual receiving governmental funding, governmental agency, or private service provider that has failed to meet a legal obligation to provide services to the child. (§ 362(b); Cal. Rules of Court, rule 5.575; see *Southard v. Superior Court* (2000) 82 Cal.App.4th 729.) However, the court has no authority to order services until the joined party has been given notice and an opportunity to be heard, and the court has determined that the child is eligible for the services in question. (§ 362; Cal. Rules of Court, rule 5.575.)



Joinder can be an effective tool to gain cooperation by employing the court's power when agencies such as a regional center, the department of mental health, or the local school district fail to provide services.

b. Orders Involving a Parent

(i) Generally

After the court has taken jurisdiction, it may make any orders it finds to be in the child's best interest. Whether or not the child has been removed from parental custody, the court may direct the parent to participate in child welfare programs including counseling, parenting education, and any other programs it deems reasonably necessary to eliminate the conditions that resulted in dependency. The court may also make orders intended to ensure the child's regular attendance at school. (§ 362.)

The court may not order a nonoffending parent to participate in programs, including parenting, absent a showing that the parent or minor would benefit or that participation is necessary to avoid the risk of future neglect or abuse by another. (*In re Jasmine C.* (2003) 106 Cal.App.4th 177, 180; see *In re A.E.* (2008) 168 Cal.App.4th 1.)



Objections to any component of the case plan must be made at the trial level or may be considered waived for appellate purposes. (See *In re S.B.* (2004) 32 Cal.4th 1287, 1293; *In re Aaron B.* (1996) 46 Cal.App.4th 843, 846.) In addition, a challenge to dispositional



orders and/or the underlying jurisdictional findings must be filed within the statutory time limit of 60 days or res judicata may be invoked. (*In re Matthew C.* (1993) 6 Cal.4th 386, 393.)

(ii) Limits on a Parent's Educational or Developmental Services Decisionmaking Rights

The court may limit the parent's right to make decisions regarding the child's education and, if the child is developmentally disabled, developmental services. If the court limits the parent's right to make educational or developmental services decisions, it must specifically address those limits in the court order. The limits may not exceed those necessary to protect the child.

If the court limits the parent's education rights, the court appoints a responsible adult as the child's educational rights holder whether or not the child qualifies for special education or other educational services. The critical findings and orders about educational decisionmaking must be documented on Judicial Council form JV-535, *Orders Designating Educational Rights Holder*. (§ 361(a); Cal. Rules of Court, rules 5.502, 5.649–5.651.) The court should consider the following individuals as the child's educational rights holder: an adult relative, a nonrelative extended family member, a foster parent, a family friend, a mentor, or a CASA volunteer. The court may not appoint any individual who would have a conflict of interest, including a social worker, a probation officer, a group home staff member, or an employee of the school district. (Ed. Code, § 56055.) The educational rights holder holds all education rights normally held by the parent. See California Rules of Court, rule 5.650(f), for a list of the rights and responsibilities and rule 5.650(g) for the term of service.

If the court is unable to locate a responsible adult to serve as educational rights holder for the child and the child either has been referred to the local educational agency (LEA) for special education and related services or already has an individualized education program (IEP), the court refers the child to the LEA for appointment of a "surrogate parent" using form JV-535. Within 30 days, the LEA



must make reasonable efforts to appoint a surrogate parent and communicate the information to the court on form JV-536. The surrogate parent makes decisions related to special education evaluation, eligibility, planning, and services. (§ 361(a); Gov. Code, § 7579.5.)

If the court cannot identify a responsible adult to make education decisions for the child and the child does not qualify for special education, the court may make education decisions for the child with the input of any interested person. (§ 361(a)(3); Cal. Rules of Court, rule 5.650(a).)



The issue of education rights must be addressed at detention and disposition, even if only to make clear that the parent retains the right to make education decisions. If education rights were temporarily limited at detention, the court must make a permanent order at the disposition hearing if the limitation is still appropriate. Education rights should be addressed at each hearing and after each placement change if the foster parent is appointed the educational rights holder or the change affects school stability.

c. Orders Involving the Child

(i) Minor Parents

It is the goal of the Legislature to preserve families headed by minor parents who are themselves dependents. To do so, the court may order the social services agency to provide services specifically targeted at developing and maintaining the parent-child bond, such as child care or parenting and child development classes. Additionally, every effort must be made to place a minor parent with his or her child in a foster setting that is as family-like as possible, unless the court finds that placement together poses a risk to the child. (§ 16002.5.)

Section 301 authorizes the social worker to initiate a plan of informal services for a family in lieu of filing a petition. If a minor parent is a dependent, the minor dependent will have appointed counsel. An agreement pursuant to section 301 for informal supervision should not be undertaken until the parent has consulted with counsel. (§ 301(c).)



(ii) Drug Testing

Under the broad authority of the juvenile court to make orders for the care and treatment of dependent children under sections 202(a) and 362(a), the court may order the child to undergo drug testing if necessary to ensure the child's health, safety, and well-being. Drug testing that is properly limited does not violate a dependent child's constitutional right to privacy. (*Carmen M. v. Superior Court* (2006) 141 Cal.App.4th 478 [there was specific and documented justification for the order, and testing was properly limited in that it was part of an ongoing recovery program and could not be used for law enforcement purposes].)

(iii) Education

At the dispositional hearing and at all subsequent hearings, the juvenile court must address and determine the child's general and special educational needs, identify a plan for meeting those needs, and provide a clear, written statement on form JV-535 specifying the person who holds the education rights for the child. The court must make findings and orders regarding the child's needs and whether they are being met, and identify any services/assessments the child needs. (§ 362(a); Cal. Rules of Court, rule 5.651(b).) The court may restrict a parent from home schooling a child if the parent is judicially determined not to be fit, and the restriction on home schooling is necessary to protect the safety of the child. (*Jonathan L. v. Superior Court* (2008) 165 Cal.App.4th 1074.)

d. Visitation

(i) With a Parent

Visitation is a vital service in family reunification cases. (*In re Mark L.* (2001) 94 Cal.App.4th 573, 580; see Visitation fact sheet.) When a child is removed from the parent's custody and reunification services are granted, visitation between the parent and child must occur as frequently as possible, "consistent with the well-being of the child." (§ 362.1(a).) Although the frequency and duration of visits may be limited, and other conditions imposed if necessary to protect the child's emotional well-being, parent-child visitation may not be

denied unless it would “jeopardize the *safety* of the child.” (*In re C.C.* (2009) 172 Cal.App.4th 1481 [emphasis added].) If visitation is inconsistent with the well-being of a child, or would cause the child detriment, the court has discretion to deny visitation. Visitation can be denied or suspended on a finding of detriment to a child’s physical or emotional well-being. (*In re F.P.* (2021) 61 Cal.App.5th 966, 973.) Disputes over visitation may arise when a child does not want to visit and/or the child’s caregiver or therapist thinks visitation is harmful. (See Visitation fact sheet for detailed discussion.) The caregiver’s address may be kept confidential, and no visitation may jeopardize the child’s safety. (§ 362.1.)

Incarcerated and institutionalized parents are entitled to reunification services, including visitation, unless there is clear and convincing evidence that such services would be detrimental to the child. (§ 361.5(e)(1).)

An incarcerated or institutionalized parent should receive visitation “where appropriate.” (*Ibid.*) To deny visitation to an incarcerated parent, the court must find clear and convincing evidence of detriment to the child, and neither the age of the child alone nor any other single factor forms a sufficient basis for such a finding. (See *In re Dylan T.* (1998) 65 Cal.App.4th 765; see also sections on incarcerated parents in the Parents’ Rights and Visitation fact sheets.)

The juvenile court cannot delegate to therapists or social workers whether any visitation occurs. The Court of Appeal in *In re S.H.* (2003) 111 Cal.App.4th 310, 318 wrote, “The discretion to determine whether any visitation occurs at all ‘must remain with the court, not social workers and therapists, and certainly not with the children.’” Although the court is responsible for granting or denying visitation, mental health professionals can decide when a child is psychologically ready for visits. In *In re Chantal S.* (1996) 13 Cal.4th 196, the juvenile court ordered visitation between a minor and her father to begin when father’s therapist determined father had made sufficient progress. The Supreme Court rejected father’s argument that the visitation order delegated judicial authority over visitation to the therapist. The juvenile court’s order did not give the therapist discretion regarding



visitation. In *In re C.S.* (2022) 80 Cal.App.5th 631, the juvenile court ordered visits to occur and prescribed the frequency of visits. The therapist's only role was to decide when it was safe for visits to begin. It was reasonable for the child's therapist to make that decision.

(ii) With Siblings

If out-of-home placement is necessary, reunification services are ordered, and the child has siblings all of whom cannot be placed together, the court order provides for visitation between the child and any siblings, unless the court finds by clear and convincing evidence that sibling interaction is contrary to the safety or well-being of either child. (§§ 362.1, 16002(b).) The agency must make diligent efforts, described in the case plan, to provide for frequent and ongoing interaction among the siblings, unless the court finds by clear and convincing evidence that sibling interaction is contrary to the safety or well-being of either child. (§§ 362.1(a), 16002(b), 16501.1.) Even when no reunification services are offered and the case is set for a hearing under section 366.26, the court must consider the impact of sibling relationships on visitation and placement and make orders accordingly. (§§ 361.2(j), 362.1(b); see the Relative Placements and Visitation fact sheets.)

(iii) With Grandparents

Upon determining that a child must be removed from the parent's custody, the court must consider whether family ties and the child's best interest will be served by ordering visitation with grandparents. (§ 361.2.)



JUDICIAL REVIEW
OF PLACEMENT
WITH PARENT—FAMILY
MAINTENANCE CASES



JUDICIAL REVIEW OF PLACEMENT WITH PARENT CHECKLIST (§ 364): CHILD'S ATTORNEY

BEFORE

- ☐ Ensure that social worker's report was provided 10 days before hearing. (§ 364(b).)
- ☐ Ensure sufficiency of ongoing ICWA inquiries.
- ☐ Contact child to discuss in private child's
 - ☐ Progress in programs such as counseling and how things are going at home.
 - ☐ School progress and issues (grades, discipline, programs and activities).
 - ☐ Family's progress in eliminating the conditions or factors requiring court supervision.
 - ☐ Position on the social services agency's recommendation.
 - ☐ Needs and wishes regarding programs and services if jurisdiction continues.
 - ☐ Desires regarding custody and visitation if jurisdiction is terminated.
- ☐ Contact parent (after obtaining permission to do so from parent's counsel) regarding
 - ☐ Child's progress in programs.
 - ☐ Child's performance in school.
 - ☐ Any perceived need for continued services.
- ☐ Contact service providers such as teachers and therapists regarding
 - ☐ Opinions on child's well-being.
 - ☐ Need for continued court supervision and/or services.
- ☐ If case involves an Indian child, contact tribal representative regarding key issues such as services, active efforts, placement, and permanency planning.



- ☐ Formulate position on
 - ☐ Need for continued jurisdiction.
 - ☐ Custody issues, e.g., legal/physical custody, visitation, restraining orders.
 - ☐ Whether to request a contested hearing.

DURING

- ☐ Inform the court of the child's desires as to custody and visitation.
- ☐ If advocating for continued jurisdiction,
 - ☐ Request additional counseling for child and/or family, as necessary.
 - ☐ Ensure needed educational supports and rights are in place.
 - ☐ Request family preservation or stabilization services and/or funding, as needed.
 - ☐ Determine whether contested hearing is necessary.
- ☐ If advocating for termination of jurisdiction,
 - ☐ Request any appropriate custody orders.
 - ☐ Ensure visitation/no contact/restraining orders are in place or continue, as needed.
- ☐ Ensure the court
 - ☐ Terminates jurisdiction unless conditions exist that would justify original assumption of jurisdiction, or are likely to exist without continued supervision.
 - ☐ Orders additional services if jurisdiction continues, as needed.
 - ☐ Enters family law orders regarding custody and visitation, as needed.

AFTER

- ☐ Consult with child to explain court orders and rulings and answer questions.
- ☐ Ensure that the child knows what to do if problems arise in the future.
- ☐ File necessary forms/motions if pursuing an appeal or emergency writ.



JUDICIAL REVIEW OF PLACEMENT WITH PARENT CHECKLIST (§ 364): PARENT'S ATTORNEY

BEFORE

- ☐ Ascertain that social worker's report is provided 10 days before hearing. (§ 364(b).)
- ☐ Request and review delivered service logs/chronological notes, if necessary.
- ☐ Ensure all court-ordered programs and services were provided in a timely fashion.
- ☐ If the case involves an Indian child, ensure that services provided are culturally appropriate and affirmative in accordance with active-efforts requirements.
- ☐ Contact client to formulate hearing position and discuss his/her/their
 - ☐ Progress in programs such as counseling and how things are going.
 - ☐ Child's educational progress and issues (grades, discipline, programs and activities) and any perceived need for continued services.
 - ☐ Family's progress in eliminating the conditions or factors requiring court supervision.
 - ☐ Position on the social services agency's recommendation.
 - ☐ Needs and wishes regarding programs and services if jurisdiction continues.
 - ☐ Desires regarding custody and visitation if jurisdiction is terminated.
- ☐ Contact other counsel regarding their position on recommendations, and follow up as necessary.
- ☐ Contact service providers such as teachers, therapists, etc., regarding
 - ☐ Opinions on family's progress.
 - ☐ Need for continued court supervision and/or services.



- ☐ If case involves an Indian child, contact tribal representative to discuss any issues and determine tribe's position on key issues such as need for continued removal, whether active-efforts requirement has been met, whether placement conforms to ICWA preferences, and permanency planning.
- ☐ Formulate argument regarding
 - ☐ Need or lack thereof for continued jurisdiction.
 - ☐ Custody issues, e.g., legal/physical custody, visitation, restraining orders.
 - ☐ Whether mediation is necessary.
 - ☐ Whether education rights need to be restored or otherwise addressed.
 - ☐ Whether to request a contested hearing.
 - ☐ Whether existing service referrals will continue even if dependency is terminated.

DURING

- ☐ Inform the court of the positives and negatives.
- ☐ If advocating termination of jurisdiction,
 - ☐ Request any appropriate custody orders.
 - ☐ Ensure visitation/no contact/restraining orders continue.
- ☐ Ensure the court
 - ☐ Terminates jurisdiction, unless conditions exist that would justify original assumption of jurisdiction or are likely to exist without continued supervision.
 - ☐ Orders additional services if jurisdiction continues.
 - ☐ Enters family law orders regarding custody and visitation.

AFTER

- ☐ Consult with client to explain court orders and rulings and answer questions.
- ☐ File necessary forms/motions if pursuing an appeal or emergency writ.
- ☐ Ensure client has access to services as needed.



BLACK LETTER DISCUSSION— FAMILY MAINTENANCE

When the juvenile court orders that a dependent child remain at home, section 364 controls periodic review. The focus of a review hearing is whether the child's safety and well-being can be maintained in the parental home if court jurisdiction is terminated. The court closes the case unless conditions exist that would justify initial assumption of jurisdiction over the child or if such conditions would be likely to arise if supervision and services were discontinued. If the court finds that such conditions exist, the case remains open with services provided for another six months.

TIMING OF THE HEARING

Under the code, a case must be set for a review within six months of the date of the dispositional order retaining the child in the home of the parent and every six months thereafter for the duration of dependency jurisdiction. (§ 364(a); Cal. Rules of Court, rule 5.710(a) (2).) Additionally, a section 364 review should be held within six months after an order returning a child to the parental home under continuing jurisdiction and within every six months thereafter until jurisdiction is terminated.

NOTICE

Notice describing the type of hearing, any recommended changes in status or custody of the child, and a party's rights to be present, to have counsel, and to present evidence must be served between 15 and 30 days before the hearing. Service must be by personal service or by first-class or certified mail to the last known address of the mother, the father (presumed and any receiving services), a legal guardian, the child and dependent siblings if aged 10 or older (otherwise to their caregivers and attorneys), and all attorneys of record on the case. If there is reason to know that the child is an Indian child, notice on mandatory Judicial Council form ICWA-030 must also be given by registered mail (return receipt requested) to the Indian custodian and tribe, if known, or to the Bureau of Indian Affairs. (§§ 224.2, 292.)



RECEIPT OF SOCIAL WORKER'S REPORT

The social worker must prepare a report for the hearing addressing the services provided to, and the progress made by, the family in alleviating the initial problems that required the court's intervention. The report must contain a recommendation as to the need for further supervision and must be filed with the court and given to all parties at least 10 days before the review hearing. (§ 364(b).) Under section 364.05 (applicable to Los Angeles County only), if the report is not received as required, the hearing must be continued, absent the parties' express waiver. Absent waiver by all parties, the court may proceed only if it finds that the statutory presumption of prejudice is overcome by clear and convincing evidence. (§ 364.05; see *Judith P. v. Superior Court* (2002) 102 Cal.App.4th 535, 553–558.)

BURDEN OF PROOF AND STATUTORY ELEMENTS

If recommending continued jurisdiction, the agency carries the burden to show by a preponderance of evidence that conditions still exist that would justify initial assumption of jurisdiction under section 300 or that such conditions are likely to occur without continued supervision. The court terminates jurisdiction if the agency fails to meet the burden. The parent's failure to participate regularly in court-ordered programs is *prima facie* evidence that jurisdiction continues to be necessary. (§ 364(c); Cal. Rules of Court, rule 5.710(e)(1).)

OTHER PARENT RECEIVING FAMILY REUNIFICATION

1. Child Remained in the Home of One Parent

At least one appellate court has held that when a child is allowed to remain in the custody of one parent but is removed from the custody of the other parent who is ordered to vacate the familial home but to whom reunification services are provided, the six-month review is properly conducted under the procedures and standards of section 364 rather than those of section 366.21(e). Thus, the focus of the hearing is on whether conditions still exist that would initially justify jurisdiction and thereby necessitate further supervision. (*In re N.S.* (2002) 97 Cal.App.4th 167, 171–172.)



2. Child Was Placed With Previously Noncustodial Parent

There will be instances in which the court conducts a 6-, 12 , or 18-month review of reunification efforts while the child is living in the home of a previously noncustodial parent with whom he or she was placed pursuant to section 361.2. If the child was removed from the custodial parent and placed with the formerly noncustodial parent, then the review hearings are conducted pursuant to section 361.2(a)(3), not section 364. (*In re Janee W.* (2006) 140 Cal.App.4th 1444, 1451.) The court must determine, under section 361.2(b)(3), “which parent, if either, shall have custody of the child.” If the court determines at a review hearing that jurisdiction may be terminated with a family law order (FLO) granting custody to the previously noncustodial parent, the court need not inquire whether the previously custodial parent received reasonable reunification services. (*Id.* at p. 1455.) Similarly, if a child is initially detained from both parents but later placed with one parent, the court may then terminate reunification services for the other parent. (*In re Gabriel L.* (2009) 172 Cal.App.4th 644; but see *In re Calvin P.* (2009) 178 Cal.App.4th 958, 964 [if the court does order reunification services for one parent after returning the child to the other parent, the agency must provide reasonable services].)

The appellate court has held that resolution of such situations is strictly a custody determination with no prevailing presumptions—the court chooses which, if either, parent should be given custody based on analysis of the best interest of the child. The need for continued supervision and whether return to the original custodial parent would pose a substantial risk of detriment should be examined, as both are relevant to the issue of custody. (*In re Nicholas H.* (2003) 112 Cal.App.4th 251, 267–268.)

SCOPE OF EVIDENCE PRESENTED

Even if the problems leading to the court’s initial intervention have been resolved, the court must consider conditions that would form a separate basis for jurisdiction. The court may also hear evidence on issues other than the need for continuing supervision at the judicial

review. Because the juvenile court is given the power under section 362.4 to make orders as to visitation and custody when terminating jurisdiction, the appellate court has found that it is imperative that the court have the ability to hear all relevant evidence prior to making those orders. (*In re Michael W.* (1997) 54 Cal.App.4th 190, 195–196; *In re Roger S.* (1992) 4 Cal.App.4th 25, 30–31; but see *In re Elaine E.* (1990) 221 Cal.App.3d 809, 814.) Additionally, section 302(d) makes juvenile court exit orders “final” orders, not modifiable by the family court absent a significant change of circumstance; therefore, to deny parties the opportunity to present evidence on custody and visitation would deprive them of due process.

POSSIBLE OUTCOMES OF HEARING

1. Terminate Jurisdiction

The court terminates jurisdiction unless the agency proves by a preponderance of the evidence that conditions still exist that would justify initial assumption of jurisdiction under section 300 or that such conditions are likely to occur without continued supervision. (§ 364(c).)

2. Continue Jurisdiction

If the court continues jurisdiction with the child in the home of one or both parents, it orders family maintenance services tailored to assist the family in eliminating the conditions that require continued supervision. (§ 364(b); Cal. Rules of Court, rule 5.710(e).) The case should then be set for another judicial review within six months. (§ 364(d).)

3. Transfer Custody From One Parent to Another

If the child is living with a previously noncustodial parent who is receiving services, the court may transfer custody back to the parent from whom the child was initially detained if the court determines that is in the best interest of the child. (*In re Nicholas H.*, *supra*, 112 Cal.App.4th at pp. 267–268; see “When the Child Is Placed



With Previously Noncustodial Parent” in the Status Reviews black letter discussion.)

Removal of the child from the parental home to relative or foster care is not an option at a hearing conducted solely as a section 364 review. If seeking removal, the agency files a supplemental petition under section 342 or 387 recommending removal, which then triggers the procedures and protections provided by an initial detention hearing. (§§ 342, 387; Cal. Rules of Court, rule 5.565; see Subsequent and Supplemental Petitions black letter discussion.) Additionally, removal from the home of a parent can be sought under a section 388 petition, which requires a noticed hearing at which the petitioner has the burden to show by clear and convincing evidence that the same grounds for removal exist as those required at disposition under section 361(c). (§ 388; Cal. Rules of Court, rule 5.570(f); see Subsequent and Supplemental Petitions black letter discussion.)

FAMILY LAW EXIT ORDERS AND RESTRAINING ORDERS

Pursuant to section 362.4, the dependency court has the power to issue orders affecting custody and visitation upon terminating its jurisdiction over children who have not yet reached the age of 18 years. (See *In re N.M.* (2023) 88 Cal.App.5th 1090.) Physical and legal custody may be vested as sole or joint. Furthermore, the court may issue restraining or protective orders as provided for in section 213.5. These orders are filed with the superior court in any pending family court matters (such as dissolution, custody, or paternity cases) or can be the basis for opening a new file. Exit orders are binding and cannot be modified or terminated by the family court absent a showing of a significant change of circumstances. (§§ 302(d), 362.4; Cal. Rules of Court, rule 5.700.)

A parent must receive proper notice the court will make exit orders. (*In re R.F.* (2021) 71 Cal.App.5th 459, 473.) A parent with proper notice who fails to object to exit orders forfeits the issue on appeal. (*In re R.F.* (2021) 71 Cal.App.5th 459, 473.)

The Court of Appeal’s decision in *In re J.M.* (2023) 89 Cal. App.5th 95 provides useful information on exit orders. In *In re J.M.*, the juvenile court issued exit orders awarding mother sole physical custody of the children, with visitation for father; father appealed. The Court of Appeal affirmed, writing:

Section 362.4 governs the termination of juvenile court jurisdiction and related orders. The statute authorizes a juvenile court to make “exit orders” regarding custody and visitation upon terminating dependency jurisdiction over a child. These exit orders remain in effect until modified or terminated by a subsequent order of the superior court.

In making exit orders, the juvenile court must look at the best interests of the child The court must be guided by the totality of the circumstances and issue orders that are in the child’s best interests. . . .

The juvenile court has broad discretion to make custody and visitation orders when it terminates jurisdiction in a dependency case. . . .

Father argues the trial court erred in issuing the custody order without making a detriment finding as required by section 361

However, section 361 findings are required at the disposition stage of dependency proceedings. The statute does not apply to custody and visitation determinations made at a section 364 review hearing concurrent with the termination of juvenile court jurisdiction. . . .

Instead, section 362.4 governs the court’s authority to issue exit orders determining custody and visitation of a child when terminating jurisdiction in a section 364 hearing. Section 362.4 does not require a finding of detriment under any circumstances; as a result, courts have applied the best interest standard in determining appropriate custody and visitation exit orders at this stage.



CONINUING JURISDICTION

If the court determines that continued jurisdiction is necessary, it continues the case for another review in no more than six months. At that time, the same procedures are followed to decide whether the case should remain open. If retaining jurisdiction, the court orders continued services. (§ 364(d); Cal. Rules of Court, rule 5.710(e)(1).)



STATUS REVIEWS— FAMILY REUNIFICATION

STATUS REVIEWS CHECKLIST—FAMILY REUNIFICATION: CHILD’S ATTORNEY

BEFORE

- ☐ Ensure social worker’s report was provided 10 days before hearing. (§ 366.21(c).)
- ☐ Ensure all court-ordered programs and services were timely provided.
- ☐ If case involves an Indian child, check for culturally appropriate services and active efforts.
- ☐ Check for efforts to place siblings together.
- ☐ Contact child to discuss in private his or her position on
 - ☐ Social services agency’s recommendation.
 - ☐ Visitation during period of supervision (e.g., frequency, quality).
 - ☐ Feelings about placement (relationship with those in home, methods of discipline, house rules, ability to participate in age-appropriate activities, attitude of caregiver toward parent and caregiver’s cooperation with visitation and family phone calls).
- ☐ Progress in counseling or other programs.
- ☐ Progress in school (e.g., grades, need for tutoring, extracurricular activities).
- ☐ Health (generally, and any specific medical problems).
- ☐ Contact caregiver to discuss
 - ☐ Child’s behavior at home and in school, reactions to parent’s visits/phone calls.
 - ☐ Provision of services by the social services agency (funding, transportation, etc.).
- ☐ If case involves an Indian child, contact tribal representative to discuss position on key issues such as active efforts, placement, and permanency planning.
- ☐ Contact service providers such as teachers and therapists to discuss



- ☐ Opinions on child's well-being and progress.
- ☐ Risk of detriment if child is returned, recommended time-lines if not.
- ☐ Formulate position on
 - ☐ Return to the custody of the parent.
 - ☐ Continued provision of family reunification services if child is not returned.
 - ☐ Whether reasonable services were provided (to the child as well as the parent).
 - ☐ Termination of jurisdiction for child placed with previously noncustodial parent.
 - ☐ Whether parent's right to make education decisions should be restored or limited.
 - ☐ Whether child needs additional educational support.
 - ☐ Whether to request a contested hearing.

DURING

- ☐ Be aware of the law and applicable burdens of proof.
- ☐ Inform court of child's wishes—however, per section 317(e), must not advocate for return if it conflicts with the child's safety and protection.
- ☐ Inform court of independent investigation results and request appropriate orders.
- ☐ Request contested hearing (if appropriate or necessary).
- ☐ Ensure court addresses
 - ☐ Return (must unless doing so creates a substantial risk of detriment).
 - ☐ Whether reasonable services were provided.
 - ☐ Whether to continue services if not returning child.
 - ☐ Who holds education rights.
 - ☐ Whether the child's educational needs are being met.
 - ☐ If terminating services, whether to set a 366.26 permanency hearing.



AFTER

- ☐ Consult with child to explain court orders and rulings and answer questions.
- ☐ Send letter to caregiver (or parent—with counsel’s permission—if child returned) with contact information and update.
- ☐ File necessary forms/motions if pursuing an appeal, writ, rehearing, or emergency writ.



STATUS REVIEWS CHECKLIST—FAMILY REUNIFICATION: PARENT’S ATTORNEY

BEFORE

- ☐ Ensure social worker’s report was provided 10 days before hearing. (§ 366.21(c).)
- ☐ Request and review delivered service logs/chronological notes.
- ☐ Ensure all court-ordered programs and services were provided in a timely fashion.
- ☐ Review case plan ordered at last hearing.
- ☐ If case involves an Indian child, ensure that services meet ICWA active-efforts requirements.
- ☐ Check for efforts to place siblings together.
- ☐ If case involves an Indian child, check for efforts to meet ICWA placement preferences.
- ☐ Contact client to discuss possible outcomes and position on
 - ☐ Social services agency’s recommendation.
 - ☐ Frequency and quality of visitation.
 - ☐ Feelings about current caregiver.
 - ☐ Progress in services: Can client articulate what has been learned?
 - ☐ Any educational issues with children.
 - ☐ Contact with social worker.
- ☐ Contact caregiver, if appropriate, to discuss reunification and any other issues.
- ☐ Contact service providers to discuss
 - ☐ Opinions on client’s well-being and progress.
 - ☐ Any risk of detriment if child is returned or recommended timelines.
- ☐ If case involves an Indian child, contact the tribe for positions on key issues such as active efforts, placement, and permanency planning.



- ☐ Formulate position on
 - ☐ Return.
 - ☐ Continued provision of family reunification services if child is not returned (be sure to check the dates of the referrals).
 - ☐ If limited, whether education rights should be restored.
 - ☐ Whether reasonable services were provided (to the child as well as the parent).
 - ☐ Termination of jurisdiction for child placed with previously noncustodial parent.
 - ☐ Whether to request a contested hearing.
- ☐ If return will not occur, is placement with relative or NREFM possible?
- ☐ Are there grounds to terminate services? If so, be prepared to address or set for contest.
- ☐ Contact opposing counsel to discuss position and remove as much mystery from hearing as possible.

DURING

- ☐ Be aware of applicable law and burdens (“shall return” standard, regular participation and substantive progress, substantial probability of return, 366.21(g) criteria).
- ☐ Be sure to make necessary objections to preserve issues for appeal, including ICWA issues.
- ☐ Inform court of client’s wishes.
- ☐ Acknowledge positives and update court on client’s situation and progress in services.
- ☐ Request contested hearing (if appropriate or necessary).
- ☐ Ensure court addresses
 - ☐ Return (must unless doing so creates a substantial risk of detriment).
 - ☐ Whether reasonable services were provided.
 - ☐ Whether to continue services if not returning child.
 - ☐ Education rights.



- ☐ If setting a 366.26 hearing, request for bonding/attachment assessment.
- ☐ If terminating services, request continued visitation.

AFTER

- ☐ Consult with client to explain court orders and rulings and answer questions.
- ☐ File necessary forms/motions if pursuing an appeal, writ, rehearing or emergency writ.
- ☐ Set tentative deadlines for next steps (i.e., unsupervised visits in six weeks, meeting in four weeks, possible 388, etc.).



BLACK LETTER DISCUSSION— FAMILY REUNIFICATION

During reunification, when children are placed out of the parental home, the Welfare and Institutions Code requires that a status review be conducted by the court every six months from the date of disposition until the child is returned to parental care and custody or that reunification services be terminated and the section 366.26 hearing set. These hearings must address the safety of the child and the continuing necessity for placement, the reasonableness of the social services agency's efforts to return the child to a safe home and to finalize permanent placement should reunification fail, whether it is necessary to limit the parent's right to make educational decisions, and the status of relationships with dependent siblings (including efforts to place them together and visitation). (§ 366(a)(1)(A)–(E); Cal. Rules of Court, rules 5.710–5.722.) The court must review the parent's progress to determine whether the child can be returned (i.e., whether return poses a substantial risk of harm) and, if not, whether reunification services should be continued or terminated. (§§ 366.21(e) & (f), 366.22; Cal. Rules of Court, rules 5.710–5.722.)

TIME LIMITS FOR HOLDING REVIEW HEARINGS

1. Generally

The determination of which statute (and therefore which legal standard) is applicable at a review hearing is made based upon the time elapsed since the child's initial removal, not on the number of reviews a court has conducted after disposition. (*Denny H. v. Superior Court* (2005) 131 Cal.App.4th 1501.) For example, if disposition does not take place until one year after the child is detained, the section 366.21(f) hearing must be set no more than two months after the disposition so that it occurs 12 months from the date the child entered foster care. (§ 361.5(a)(1)(A).) As a result, the section 366.21(e) hearing is held either between the disposition and section 366.21(f) hearing or concurrently with the section 366.21(f) hearing. (§ 361.5(a)(1)(B).) If further reunification services are ordered, the section



366.22 hearing still takes place 18 months from the date of removal, and the section 366.25 hearing, if there is one, takes place 24 months from the date of removal. (§ 361.5(a)(3) & (4).)

2. For the 6-Month Review

Under section 366.21(e), the first status review hearing for a child in foster care must be held six months after the date of the dispositional hearing.

3. For the 12-Month Review

The 12-month review or permanency hearing must be held within 12 months of the date the child entered foster care as defined in section 361.5(c) (i.e., the date of the jurisdictional hearing or the date 60 days after removal, whichever is earlier). (§ 366.21(f); Cal. Rules of Court, rule 5.715(a).) Therefore, if jurisdiction and disposition were delayed and yet the section 366.21(e) hearing was set a full 6 months after disposition, the “12-month hearing” should occur less than 6 months after the “6-month hearing.”

4. For the 18-Month Hearing

The section 366.22 hearing must be held within 18 months of the initial removal of the child from the parent or guardian’s custody. (§ 366.22; Cal. Rules of Court, rule 5.720.) “Initial removal” is defined as the date on which the child was taken into custody by the social worker or deemed taken into custody when put under a hospital hold pursuant to section 309(b). (Cal. Rules of Court, rule 5.502(18).)

5. For the 24-Month Hearing

The section 366.25 hearing must be held within 24 months of the child’s initial removal from the parent’s or guardian’s custody. (§§ 366.22(b), 366.25; Cal. Rules of Court, rule 5.722.) Section 366.22(b), which allows the court to continue services to the 24-month date, applies to parents or guardians who are in a substance abuse treatment program and are making significant and consistent progress,



were recently discharged from institutionalization or incarceration, were recently discharged from the custody of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, or were a minor or nonminor parent at the time of the initial hearing and are making significant and consistent progress in establishing a safe home for the child.

NOTICE

Notice describing the type of hearing, any recommended changes in status or custody of the child, and a statement of the party's rights to be present, to have counsel, and to present evidence must be served between 15 and 30 days before the hearing. Service must be by personal service or first-class mail to the last known address of the mother, the father(s) (presumed and any receiving services), the legal guardians, the child and dependent siblings if aged 10 or older (otherwise to their caregivers and attorneys), the foster caregiver or agency, and all attorneys of record on the case. If there is reason to know that the child is an Indian child, notice on mandatory Judicial Council form ICWA-030, *Notice of Child Custody Proceeding for Indian Child*, must also be given by registered mail (return receipt requested) to the Indian custodian and tribe, if known, or to the Bureau of Indian Affairs. (§ 293; Cal. Rules of Court, rules 5.481(b), 5.524, 5.710.)



Defects in notice, or failure of the agency to transport a child or incarcerated client, may provide the good cause needed for a section 352 continuance to allow counsel additional time if necessary (e.g., to further investigate last-minute information) without revealing any concerns to the court and other parties.

SOCIAL WORKER'S REPORT

The social worker prepares a supplemental report for each of the status review hearings. The report describes the services offered to the family and the progress made by them, makes recommendations for court orders, and describes concurrent planning efforts for permanency in the event of failed reunification. If the case involves an Indian child, the report discusses consultation with the tribe on per-



manency planning and particularly the option of tribal customary adoption. (Cal. Rules of Court, rules 5.524(c), 5.710(b), 5.715(b).) The report addresses the criteria listed in section 366.1, such as whether the parent's educational rights should be limited and what efforts are being made to maintain sibling relationships. (§ 366.1.) A detailed status report on the child's behavioral, developmental, and educational needs, status, and plans is included, as outlined in California Rules of Court, rule 5.651(c), even if the child is not of school age.

The report is filed with the court and given to all parties at least 10 days before the review hearing. (§ 366.21(c); rules 5.708(b) (2), 5.710(a), 5.715(b), 5.720(a), 5.722(a).) Despite the clear language of the statutes and rules requiring service to all parties, reports are often late, sometimes on the day of the hearing itself. The appellate court has addressed this problem and held that the statutory requirement to provide the report at least 10 days in advance of the review hearing is mandatory. Furthermore, the court found that failure to provide the report as required violates due process as it deprives the parent and child of the opportunity to review and adequately prepare to counter the social worker's recommendations. As such, the court held that such a violation is per se reversible error absent either an express waiver or a continuance of the hearing. (*Judith P. v. Superior Court* (2002) 102 Cal.App.4th 535, 553–558.) Section 366.05 (applicable to Los Angeles County only) mandates a continuance of the review hearing if a report was not provided as specified absent an express waiver of all parties. Otherwise, the court may proceed only if it finds that the statutory presumption of prejudice is overcome by clear and convincing evidence. (§ 366.05.)



If in your client's best interest, consider not waiving the requirement that status review reports be provided to all parties and counsel at least 10 days before the hearing. As the court in *Judith P.* noted, the 10-day period affords counsel the opportunity not only to review the report and recommendations but also to gather evidence, subpoena witnesses, and consult with the client—in other words, to “meet the minimum standards of practice.” (*Judith P., supra*, 102 Cal.App.4th at p. 548.)



BURDENS OF PROOF AND STATUTORY ELEMENTS

At each review hearing during reunification, the court returns the child to the parent or guardian unless the agency proves by a preponderance of the evidence that return would create a substantial risk of detriment to the child. A parent's failure to participate regularly and make substantive progress in court-ordered programs is prima facie evidence of detriment. (§§ 366.21(e) & (f), 366.22(a); Cal. Rules of Court, rules 5.710(e), 5.715(c), 5.720(c).) A parent's poverty and/or lack of adequate housing has been found insufficient to meet the "substantial risk of harm" standard. (*In re Yvonne W.* (2008) 165 Cal.App.4th 1394; *In re P.C.* (2008) 165 Cal.App.4th 98; *In re G.S.R.* (2008) 159 Cal.App.4th 1202.)

The agency carries the burden to show that reasonable reunification services (or if the case involves an Indian child, active efforts) have been offered or provided. The standard of proof on this issue at the 6-, 12-, and 18-month hearings is statutorily set at clear and convincing evidence. (§§ 366.21(g)(2), 366.22(a)(3).) If the court finds at either the 6- or 12-month hearings that reasonable services have not been provided, it must order that services be provided until the next review. (§ 366.21(e) & (f).) The same issue at the 18-month hearing was the subject of a split in authority prior to the 2023 Supreme Court decision in *In re Michael G.* (2023) 14 Cal.5th 609, which found that while the dependency law does not categorically forbid courts from extending reunification services past 18 months, neither does it require them to do so in every case in which they find reasonable services were not offered in the most recent review period. But section 352 can be used as an "emergency escape valve" in extraordinary circumstances to continue services past 18 months if reasonable services were not provided.

To be reasonable, services must be individualized to meet the needs of the family. It will not do to prescribe cookie cutter services that have no reasonable connection to the needs of individuals. The Court of Appeals' decision in *In re M.C.* (2023) 88 Cal.App.5th 137 is instructive. The juvenile court, at the request of the department, or-



dered Father to submit to substance abuse testing when there was no evidence Father abused substances. The Court of Appeal lamented the trial court's "mechanical" approach to services, an approach that was not tied to the unique needs of the family.

REASONABLE SERVICES

The court makes a finding at each review hearing under section 366 as to whether the agency provided reasonable services (or if the case involves an Indian child, active efforts) to the parent or guardian. During the period that family reunification is in place, the reasonableness inquiry focuses on the sufficiency of the agency's services to aid in the safe return of the child to the parent's custody. The plan for reunification must be individually tailored to address the unique needs and circumstances of each family. Although services need not be perfect, the agency must show that it identified the problems resulting in removal, offered appropriate corrective services, and kept in contact with the parents and made reasonable efforts to assist them. The agency must provide services that accommodate a parent's special needs; however, the standard is not what might be provided in an ideal world but whether the services under the given circumstances were reasonable. (*In re Misako R.* (1991) 2 Cal.App.4th 538, 547; *Amanda H. v. Superior Court* (2008) 166 Cal.App.4th 1340 [caseworker must accurately inform parent of case plan requirements and maintain contact with service providers; agency cannot use its own failure to ensure that parent is enrolled in correct programs as reason to terminate reunification services]; *In re G.S.R.*, *supra*, 159 Cal.App.4th at p. 1202 [if a parent's inadequate housing is a barrier to reunification, agency must assist parent in finding housing].)

Visitation is a critical element of reunification and services must be provided to facilitate visits as frequently as possible. In cases in which family or conjoint therapy is a prerequisite to visitation, the agency must ensure that such therapy takes place.

Incarcerated parents must be provided with reasonable reunification services absent a showing under section 361.5(e) that efforts to reunify would be detrimental to the child. The agency must identify



services available to an institutionalized parent and assist in arranging them. Visitation should usually be a component of the case plan so long as distances involved are not excessive. (See Parents' Rights fact sheet.) For the court to determine what services are reasonable, the agency must document the services in the case plan that are available and the court must consider any barriers to the parent's access to services and his or her ability to maintain contact with the child. (§ 361.5(a)(2) & (3).)

The Legislature did not intend to automatically toll the timelines or extend reunification services to the 18- or 24-month date for incarcerated or institutionalized parents nor give these parents a free pass on compliance with their case plans. The barriers faced by these parents are just one of many factors the court must consider when deciding whether to continue services. (*A.H. v. Superior Court* (2010) 182 Cal.App.4th 1050.)



In determining whether reasonable services have been provided, it is often helpful to compare the date when services were ordered to the dates of referrals and to the dates that services actually became available to the parent or child.

TIME LIMITS ON REUNIFICATION

1. Child Under Three at Time of Removal

Services to reunify a parent or guardian with a child who was under the age of three years at the time of removal shall be provided for 6 months from the dispositional hearing but no more than 12 months from the date the child entered foster care. (§ 361.5(a)(1)(B).) (See *Sarah K. v. Superior Court* (2023) 87 Cal.App.5th 549.) To terminate services at six months, the court must find by clear and convincing evidence that the parent or guardian has failed to participate regularly and make substantive progress in court-ordered treatment. (§§ 361.5(a)(3)(C), 366.21(e)(3).) However, services must be extended if the court finds that the agency failed to provide reasonable services or if the court finds there is a substantial probability that the child

can be safely returned within the extended period. (§§ 361.5(a)(3), 366.21(e); Cal. Rules of Court, rule 5.710(f)(1)(E).)



Note that the court is not required to terminate reunification services at the six-month hearing even if the parent of a child under three has failed to participate regularly and make substantive progress in court-ordered programs. (§ 366.21(e); Cal. Rules of Court, rule 5.710(f)(1).) Under the statutory scheme, the court “may” make such a decision, and “may” is defined as permissive, i.e., discretionary. (Cal. Rules of Court, rule 1.5(b).) Therefore, if the court has the discretion to extend services for a parent who is noncompliant, it follows that the court may also extend services for a parent who is participating and making some progress but is not quite able to meet the standard of “substantial probability of return.”

If the county agency wishes to terminate reunification services in less than six months, it must file a petition under section 388(c) and show either that there is a change of circumstances or new evidence justifying a bypass of reunification services under section 361.5(b) or (e) or that the parent’s actions or inactions (such as failing to visit the child or to make progress on the case plan) have created a substantial likelihood that reunification will not occur. The court must take into account any special circumstances such as a parent’s incarceration, institutionalization, or participation in residential drug treatment and must find that reasonable services have been offered prior to granting a petition for early termination of reunification services.

2. Child Three or Older at Time of Removal

Parents and guardians of a child three or older at the time of removal are entitled to receive reunification services for 12 months from the date the child entered foster care. (§ 361.5(a)(1).) The six-month review for a child this age addresses whether the child can be returned to the physical custody of their parent or legal guardian. To remain out of the home, a finding by a preponderance of the evidence that return would create a substantial risk of detriment to the safety, protection, or physical or emotional well-being of the child is required. If the



child is ordered to remain out of the home, the court can take the opportunity to address whether additional services or changes to existing orders are needed. However, under certain circumstances the court has the discretion to terminate reunification at the six-month hearing and set a hearing under section 366.26. (§ 366.21(e); see “Possible Outcomes of Hearing” later in this black letter discussion.)

Reunification services must be extended beyond the 12-month limit if the court finds that the agency failed to provide reasonable services. Additionally, services must be extended if the court finds there is a substantial probability that the child can be safely returned within the extended period. (§§ 361.5(a)(3), 366.21(g)(1).)

3. 18- and 24-Month Outside Limits

In most cases, the maximum period for reunification services is capped at 18 months from the initial removal from the parent. (§§ 361.5(a)(3), 366.22.) “Initial removal” is defined as the date on which the child was taken into custody by the social worker or was placed on a hospital hold under section 309(b). (Cal. Rules of Court, rule 5.502(18).) This period may be exceeded only under “exceptional circumstances”; in such cases, the subsequent hearing is also conducted pursuant to section 366.22.

When a child is placed with a previously noncustodial parent, the 18-month time limit does not start running for the parent from whom the child was detained, unless the child is subsequently removed from both parents. (*In re A.C.* (2008) 169 Cal.App.4th 636.)

The 18-month reunification period may be extended for another six months, to a 24-month section 366.25 hearing, if the court finds by clear and convincing evidence that further reunification services are in the child’s best interest; the parent is making consistent progress in a substance abuse treatment program, or was recently discharged from incarceration, institutionalization, or the custody of the Department of Homeland Security, or was a minor or nonminor parent at the initial hearing and is making significant and consis-

tent progress in establishing a safe home for the child's return; and there is a substantial probability that the child will be safely returned within the extended period or that reasonable services were not provided. The section 366.25 hearing must be held within 24 months of the child's initial removal. (§§ 361.5(a)(4), 366.22(b).)

4. When Child Has Been Redetained From Parent

The 18-month time limit applies even if the child was in the physical custody of the parent for some period of time during the dependency case. In other words, statutory time limits are not tolled if a child is placed in the home of a parent at disposition or some later time but then is subsequently redetained. (§ 361.5(a)(3).) Thus, reunification efforts in an ongoing dependency case can be reinstated when a supplemental petition is sustained, but the duration of further reunification is circumscribed by section 361.5, which measures all time limits from the date of the child's initial removal. (*In re N.M.* (2003) 108 Cal.App.4th 845.)

WHEN CHILD IS PLACED WITH PREVIOUSLY NONCUSTODIAL PARENT

If the child was removed from the custodial parent and placed with the formerly noncustodial parent, then the review hearings are conducted pursuant to section 361.2(b)(3), not section 364. (*In re Janee W.* (2006) 140 Cal.App.4th 1444, 1451.) The court determines, under section 361.2(b)(3), "which parent, if either, shall have custody of the child." If the court determines at a review hearing that jurisdiction may be terminated with a family law order granting custody to the previously noncustodial parent, the court need not inquire whether the previously custodial parent received reasonable reunification services. (*Id.* at p. 1455.) Similarly, if a child is initially detained from both parents but later placed with one parent, the court may then terminate reunification services for the other parent. (*In re Gabriel L.* (2009) 172 Cal.App.4th 644.) If the court orders reunification services for the parent with whom the child is not placed, the services must be reasonable.



The appellate court has concluded that resolution of such situations is a custody determination with no prevailing presumptions—the juvenile court must choose which, if either, parent should be given custody based on analysis of the best interest of the child. The court found that sections 364, 366.21, and 366.22 were not controlling. However, the juvenile court should proceed with its determinations as to the need for continued supervision and the assessment of whether return to the original custodial parent would pose a substantial risk of detriment, as both are relevant to the issue of custody. (*In re Nicholas H.* (2003) 112 Cal.App.4th 251, 267.)



The child's attorney should have input into decisions made in these situations. Formulation of your position is a complex task based on consultation with the client, investigation of the living situation in the noncustodial parental home, assessment of the child's attachment to the previously custodial parent, as well as the progress of that parent in resolving the problems that caused removal, a realistic assessment and prognosis of the timeline and possibility for reunification, and analysis of the client's bonding to siblings and permanency needs.

POSSIBLE OUTCOMES OF HEARING

1. Return to the Parent or Guardian

At out-of-home review hearings, the legislative goal of family reunification is furthered by the requirement that the court “shall order the return of the child to the physical custody of his or her parent or legal guardian” absent a finding by a preponderance of the evidence that return would create a substantial risk of detriment to the child's well-being. (§ 366.21(e); Cal. Rules of Court, rule 5.710(e) (2) & (3).) If the child is returned home, the court will most likely continue the case for a section 364 review in six months and order family maintenance services to be provided in the interim. Even if the parent has already received the statutory maximum period of reunification services, the court may order family maintenance ser-

vices after returning the child to the parent's home. (*Bridget A. v. Superior Court* (2007) 148 Cal.App.4th 285.)



At a 6-month hearing under the California Rules of Court, the court may terminate jurisdiction upon return. (Cal. Rules of Court, rule 5.710(e)(2).) Practically speaking, however, the court will rarely be comfortable with cutting off all supervision immediately upon return. Also note that the California Rules of Court governing 12- and 18-month hearings do not address this possibility.

2. Continue Family Reunification Services

There are several circumstances under which the court either has the discretion to, or must, order continued provision of reunification services. These include the following:

a. Child With Previously Noncustodial Parent

Regardless of age, if the child is placed with a previously noncustodial parent under section 361.2, the court may continue services to one or both parents if it finds that continued jurisdiction is necessary. Note that under these circumstances the court may, in the alternative, return custody to the parent from whom the child was detained or terminate jurisdiction with a custody order to the previously noncustodial parent. (§ 361.2(b)(2); Cal. Rules of Court, rule 5.715(c)(2).)

b. No Reasonable Services

Regardless of the child's age, at a 6- or 12-month hearing the court must continue provision of reunification services to the next review if it finds that reasonable services were not provided. (§ 366.21(e) & (g)(I).)

c. Substantial Probability of Return

At a 6-month hearing, if a child was under the age of three at the time of removal or is a member of a sibling group as defined in section 361.5(a)(3), the court must order continued services to the next review date on finding that there is a substantial probability that the child *may* be returned within six months. (§ 366.21(e).)



At the 12-month hearing, the standard for continuing services is more restrictive: the court must find a substantial probability that the child *will* be returned within six months and that the parent meets all three criteria listed in section 366.21(g)(1)(A)–(C). (*M.V. v. Superior Court* (2008) 167 Cal.App.4th 166.) The Supreme Court, in *Tonya M. v. Superior Court* (2007) 42 Cal.4th 836 described the process as follows:

The dependency scheme sets up three distinct periods and three corresponding distinct escalating standards for the provision of reunification services to parents of children under the age of three. During the first period, which runs from roughly the jurisdictional hearing (§ 355) to the six-month review hearing (§ 366.21, subd. (e)), services are afforded essentially as a matter of right (§ 361.5, subd. (a)) unless the trial court makes one of a series of statutorily specified findings relating to parental mental disability, abandonment of the child, or other specific malfeasance. (§ 361.5, subd. (b).) During the second period, which runs from the six-month review hearing to the 12-month review hearing (§ 366.21, subd. (f)), a heightened showing is required to continue services. So long as reasonable services have in fact been provided, the juvenile court must find “a substantial probability” that the child may be safely returned to the parent within six months in order to continue services. (§ 366.21, subd. (e).) During the final period, which runs from the 12-month review hearing to the 18-month review hearing (§ 366.22), services are available only if the juvenile court finds specifically that the parent has “consistently and regularly contacted and visited with the child,” made “significant progress” on the problems that led to removal, and “demonstrated the capacity and ability both to complete the objectives of his or her treatment plan and to provide for the child’s safety, protection, physical and emotional well-being, and special needs.” (§ 366.21, subd. (g)(1)(A)–(C).) The effects of these shifting standards is to make services during these three periods first presumed, then possible, then disfavored. . . .

Given this scheme, the most logical interpretation is for the juvenile court at each step to consider for purposes of ordering services only probable developments in the period for which the services can be ordered. That is, the period for which services can be ordered and the period for which the impact of those services is to be prospectively evaluated should be coterminous. Thus, if at most four months remain until the next review hearing (i.e., the 12-month hearing or 18-month hearing), at most only four months of services can by law be ordered, and the juvenile court therefore should consider only what the impact of *those* four months of services would be on the parent and child, not whether another hypothetical two months of services beyond the next prospective hearing might have a different or additional impact. (42 Cal.4th at 845–846.)

d. Exceptional Circumstances / Special-Needs Parent

Section 366.22 gives the court three options at the 18-month review hearing: return the child to the parent, continue reunification services for six months to the 24-month review hearing if the criteria under section 366.22(b) are met, or terminate reunification services. Upon terminating reunification, the court must set a selection and implementation hearing unless there is clear and convincing evidence of a compelling reason that setting the hearing is not in the child's best interest because the child is not a proper subject for adoption, and no one is willing to accept guardianship at the time of the hearing. However, the juvenile court may circumvent (or at least delay) this decision by continuing the 366.22 hearing pursuant to section 352 and granting additional reunification services in the interim in the case of "exceptional circumstances." (*In re Michael G.* (2023) 14 Cal.5th 609; *In re D.N.* (2020) 56 Cal.App.5th at 743; *In re Elizabeth R.* (1995) 35 Cal.App.4th 1774.) This method of continuing the 18-month hearing and ordering reunification services until the continued date has also been employed by the court on a finding that the agency had previously failed to offer or provide reunification services. (*Mark N. v. Superior Court* (1998) 60 Cal.App.4th 996, 1017.)



3. Terminate Reunification and Set a 366.26 Hearing

At any of the review hearings, if the court does not return the child, continue reunification services, or order that the child remain in foster care with a permanent plan or, if the child is 16 years of age or older, be placed in a planned permanent living arrangement, the court must terminate reunification services and set a selection and implementation hearing under section 366.26. (§§ 366.21(g), 366.22, 366.25(a)(3); Cal. Rules of Court, rule 5.715(d)(3).) The court may terminate reunification services for one parent and continue reunification services for the other parent. (*In re Jesse W.* (2007) 157 Cal. App.4th 49.)

At a six-month hearing, the court *may* terminate reunification services and set a section 366.26 hearing in any of the following situations. Note that this outcome is discretionary, *not* mandatory, under the code. At review hearings concerning youth over 18, the youth's legal status as an adult is in itself a compelling reason not to hold a section 366.26 hearing. (§ 366.21(g)(3).)

a. Parent Noncompliant With Case Plan—Child Under Three

If the child was under the age of three at removal and the court finds by clear and convincing evidence that the parent or guardian failed to participate regularly and make substantial progress in court-ordered programs, services may be terminated. (§ 366.21(e); Cal. Rules of Court, rule 5.710(f)(1)(E).)

b. Parent Noncompliant With Case Plan—Sibling Group

If any member of a sibling group was under age three at removal, reunification for any or all of the children may be terminated for the purpose of maintaining the children together in a permanent home. This applies only to siblings who were simultaneously removed from the parental home and remain placed together. (§§ 361.5(a)(3), 366.21(e); see *W.P. v Superior Court* (2018) 20 Cal.App.5th 1196 (juvenile court's statutory power to limit services to six months for all siblings when one member of sibling group was three years of age or under at time of removal applies only when that sibling was placed



with older siblings for purpose of maintaining a permanent home).) The court considers many factors in making its decision, including the strength of the sibling bond, the detriment to each child if ties are broken, the likelihood of finding a permanent home for all, and the ages, wishes, and best interest of each child. (§ 366.21(e); Cal. Rules of Court, rule 5.710(g).)

c. Child Abandoned and Parent's Whereabouts Unknown

Regardless of the age of the child, the court may terminate services if a child was declared a dependent under section 300(g) because of abandonment and there is clear and convincing evidence that the parent's or guardian's whereabouts remain unknown or the parent has failed to contact and visit the child. (§ 366.21(e); Cal. Rules of Court, rule 5.710(f)(1)(A).)

d. Parent Has Failed to Visit for Six Months

On clear and convincing evidence that the parent or guardian failed to visit or contact the child within the last six months the court may set a 366.26 hearing and terminate reunification services. (§ 366.21(e); Cal. Rules of Court, rule 5.710(f)(1)(B).) Failure to contact and/or visit can be the sole basis for termination of reunification at this stage and does not require an initial jurisdictional finding of abandonment under section 300(g). (*Sara M. v. Superior Court* (2005) 36 Cal.4th 998.) The age of the child is irrelevant.

e. Parent Convicted of Certain Felonies

Clear and convincing evidence that the parent or guardian has been convicted of a felony indicating parental unfitness justifies termination of reunification services. (§ 366.21(e); Cal. Rules of Court, rule 5.710(f)(1)(C).) The age of the child is not taken into consideration.

f. Parent Is Deceased

Proof that the parent is deceased terminates reunification efforts involving a child of any age. (Cal. Rules of Court, rule 5.710(f)(1)(D).)



4. Order That the Child Remain in Foster Care

The court is not mandated to set a section 366.26 hearing if clear and convincing evidence exists of a compelling reason that it is in the child's best interest not to hold a section 366.26 hearing because the child is not a proper subject for adoption and no one is willing to accept legal guardianship as of the hearing date. The court order not to have a 366.26 hearing is made based on the child's current circumstances and does not preclude setting a section 366.26 hearing at a later date to consider a more permanent plan. (§ 366.21(g)(5); Cal. Rules of Court, rule 5.715(b).) The following two plan options do not necessitate the setting of a section 366.26 hearing: (1) foster care, where an adoptive family or legal guardian has not been identified; and (2) for children 16 years or older, another planned permanent living arrangement (APPLA). Long-term foster care is no longer recognized as a permanent plan for children in out-of-home care under either state or federal law, and APPLA is to be ordered as a permanent plan only for children aged 16 years and older or nonminor dependents (NMDs), and only when there is a compelling reason to determine that no other permanent plan is in the best interest of the child or nonminor dependent. For children who remain in foster care with a permanent plan and for children aged 16 years or older placed in APPLA, the court must make factual findings identifying the barriers to achieving the selected permanent plan. (§§ 366.21(g)(5)(A), 366.3(h)(1).)



At the review hearing for children 16 years and older with a permanent plan of another planned permanent living arrangement, the court makes factual findings identifying the barriers to achieving the permanent plan and the agency's efforts to address those barriers. The court asks the child about his or her desired permanency outcome. (§ 366.3(h)(2), 366.31(e)(10).)



Note that this outcome can, in some situations, be the best alternative for a child. It can be argued that the standard for finding that a child is "not a proper subject for adoption" is a more flexible



one than that required at a section 366.26 hearing at which the court must determine whether a child is “likely to be adopted,” although both findings must be shown by clear and convincing evidence. Remaining in foster care or (APPLA may be the only way to avoid termination of parental rights because once a child is found “likely to be adopted,” termination can be avoided only if one of the enumerated exceptions applies. If the case involves an Indian child, in addition to the possibility of tribal customary adoption under section 366.24, there are additional bases for finding that it is not in the child’s best interest to hold a section 366.26 hearing, including that the tribe has requested an alternative plan. (366.26(c)(1)(A), 366.26(c)(1)(B)(iv) & (vi).)



At or before the time reunification services are terminated, clarify who holds the right to make education decisions and ensure that the order assigning education rights (Judicial Council form JV-535) is executed. Some caregivers are forbidden to hold education rights. For example, group home staff are prohibited from holding education rights by both federal and state law because of conflict of interest. Also, a foster parent may be excluded from making education rights by court order.

To ensure that the child’s education needs are met, ask the court to make an order giving the education rights to a foster parent, relative caregiver, nonrelated extended family member, or CASA.

EXCEPTIONAL CIRCUMSTANCES JUSTIFYING EXTENDED REUNIFICATION

Reunification services may be extended beyond the 18-month limit under section 352 if the court finds that “exceptional circumstances” so warrant. (*In re Elizabeth R.*, *supra*, 35 Cal.App.4th at p. 1774; *In re Michael G.* (2023) 14 Cal.5th 609.) The *Elizabeth R.* court found that reasonable services had not been provided to a mentally ill mother who was institutionalized for much of the reunification period and who was denied visitation during that time. This “special-needs parent” had substantially complied with her reunification plan but needed more time for stabilization before her children could be



safely returned. The court reasoned that “section 366.22 was not designed to torpedo family preservation” and concluded that, under the unusual circumstances presented, the mother must be provided with additional services until the continued hearing date.

Exceptional circumstances sufficient to trigger the discretion to extend services are limited to intervening or external events that prohibit the parent’s completion of the reunification plan and do not include a parent’s own failings such as relapse. (*Andrea L. v. Superior Court* (1998) 64 Cal.App.4th 1377.)

EXTENDING REUNIFICATION FOR PARENTS RECENTLY RELEASED OR IN TREATMENT

Reunification services may be extended for six months beyond the 18-month hearing if the court finds by clear and convincing evidence that further reunification services are in the child’s best interest; the parent is making consistent progress in a substance abuse treatment program, was recently discharged from incarceration institutionalization, or the custody of the Department of Homeland Security, or was a minor parent or nonminor parent at the initial hearing and is making significant and consistent progress in establishing a safe home for the child’s return; and there is a substantial probability that the child will be safely returned within the extended period. This hearing, held pursuant to section 366.25, is called a subsequent permanency review hearing. (§§ 361.5(4), 366.22(b), 366.25.)

In *Michael G. v. Superior Court* (2023) 14 Cal.5th 609, the Supreme Court ruled that while the dependency law does not forbid courts from extending reunification services past 18 months, neither does the law require courts to do so in every case in which the court finds reasonable services were not offered in the most recent review period. Section 352 can be used as an “emergency escape valve” in extraordinary circumstances to continue services past 18 months if reasonable services were not provided.



SIBLING GROUP

A “sibling group” is defined as two or more children related to each other as full or half-siblings by blood, adoption, or affinity through a common biological or legal parent. (§ 361.5(a)(3).) Affinity is a relationship based on marriage connecting the blood or adoptive relatives of spouses. (Cal. Rules of Court, rule 5.502(i).)

At a six-month hearing, in determining whether to terminate reunification services and set a 366.26 hearing for one or more members of a sibling group, the court considers, and the social worker’s report addresses, the following factors:

- Whether the siblings were removed as a group;
- Whether the siblings were removed as a group;
- The closeness and strength of the sibling bond;
- The ages of the siblings;
- The appropriateness of maintaining the sibling group together;
- The detriment to the child if sibling ties are not maintained;
- The likelihood of finding a permanent home for the group;
- Whether the group is placed together in a preadoptive home;
- The wishes of each child; and
- The best interest of each member of the sibling group.

(Id., rule 5.710(g); *In re Abraham L.* (2003) 112 Cal.App.4th 9, 14.)



Remember that this outcome is discretionary and is not a “one-size-fits-all” resolution. Each child’s situation should be individually considered.

SUBSTANTIAL PROBABILITY OF RETURN

In order to find a substantial probability of return, the court must find that the parent or guardian has done all of the following:

- Consistently contacted and/or visited the child(ren);
- Made significant progress in resolving the problems that led to detention; and



- Demonstrated the capacity and ability to complete the case plan and to provide for the child's safety and medical, physical, and special needs.

(§ 366.21(g)(1); Cal. Rules of Court, rule 5.710(f)(1)(E).)

SUBSTANTIAL RISK OF DETRIMENT

“Substantial risk of detriment” is not statutorily defined. The Court of Appeal found that the phrase must be construed as imposing a fairly high standard. “It cannot mean merely that the parent in question is less than ideal, did not benefit from the reunification services as much as we might have hoped, or seems less capable than an available foster parent or other family member.” Rather the substantial risk must be shown to involve basic parenting concepts, such as a child's need for food, shelter, safety, health care, and education. (*David B.*, *supra*, 123 Cal.App.4th at pp. 789–790.) Furthermore, generalized criticism, such as that a parent failed to internalize therapeutic concepts, has been found to be “simply too vague to constitute substantial, credible evidence of detriment.” (*Blanca P. v. Superior Court* (1996) 45 Cal.App.4th 1738, 1751.)

The risk of detriment does not have to involve the same type of harm that resulted in the court's initial intervention. (*In re Joseph B.* (1996) 42 Cal.App.4th 890, 899.) Nor does a parent's compliance with the reunification plan necessarily entitle him or her to return of the child if the court finds that return would be detrimental. (*Constance K. v. Superior Court* (1998) 61 Cal.App.4th 689; *In re Dustin R.* (1997) 54 Cal.App.4th 1131.)

ONGOING CONCERNS

1. Educational Rights and Needs

At each review hearing, the court considers, and the social worker's report addresses, whether the parent's right to make education decisions for the child should be limited. (§ 366.1(e); Cal. Rules of Court, rule 5.650.) If the court does make such an order, the court appoints a responsible adult, pursuant to the criteria in section 361(a), to make



such decisions for the child. A “responsible adult” may be the foster parent or relative caregiver, a Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA), or another adult willing to take on the responsibility. (Ed. Code, § 56055; Cal. Rules of Court, rule 5.650.) The child’s attorney, social worker, and group home staff may *not* hold education rights. (See fact sheet on Education Laws, Rights, and Issues.)

The court considers, and the social worker’s report addresses, the child’s general and special education needs at every hearing. The social worker and the probation officer provide, to the extent available, an in-depth report on the child’s educational needs, services, and achievements, even if the child is not of school age. (Cal. Rules of Court, rule 5.651.)

2. Placement With Relatives

Following disposition, each time a new placement must be made for a child, the agency is required to give preferential consideration to a relative’s request for placement. (§ 361.3(d).) This preference persists, even after termination of reunification, up to the point when parental rights are severed. (*Cesar V. v. Superior Court* (2001) 91 Cal. App.4th 1023.) At the permanency hearing in which reunification services are terminated, and at every status review hearing thereafter until the child is adopted, the court must find that the agency made diligent efforts to locate an appropriate relative and that each relative whose name was submitted as a possible caregiver was evaluated. (Fam. Code, § 7950.)

When a relative voluntarily comes forward at a time when a new placement is not required, the relative is entitled to the preference and the court and the social worker are obligated to evaluate that relative. (*In re Joseph T.* (2008) 163 Cal.App.4th 787.) If the case involves an Indian child, then examination of whether placement is consistent with ICWA’s placement preferences must be ongoing.



3. Sibling Relationships

The code requires ongoing efforts to maintain and strengthen sibling relationships, specifically to place dependent siblings together unless the court determines that it is not in the best interest of one or more of the children. The agency has a continuing statutory duty to make diligent efforts to place siblings together and to facilitate frequent visits during the period they are separated. (§§ 366.1(f), 16002.)

4. Visitation

Parental visitation during reunification is critical and must be addressed at each review hearing. Furthermore, even once reunification is terminated, the parent or guardian must be allowed continued visitation unless there is a showing that it would be detrimental to the child. If appropriate, the court should also make visitation and other orders necessary to maintain the child's relationships with persons important to him or her. (§ 366.21(h); Cal. Rules of Court, rule 5.715(d)(4); see Visitation fact sheet.)

5. Transition to Independence

If the review hearing is the last review before the child turns 18, or if the hearing concerns a nonminor dependent, the court also addresses the goals and services described in the transitional independent living plan (TILP) and ensures that the youth is informed of the right either to seek termination of dependency under section 391 or to become or remain a nonminor dependent. (§ 366(a)(1)(F) & (f).) In addition, starting at the age of 14, the court makes a finding whether services needed to assist the child or nonminor dependent to make the transition from foster care to successful adulthood were provided. (§ 366.3(e)(10).)



See the Nonminor Dependents fact sheet for a thorough discussion of the court process and report requirements for NMDs, respectively.



SELECTION AND

IMPLEMENTATION

SELECTION AND IMPLEMENTATION CHECKLIST

(§ 366.26): CHILD’S ATTORNEY

BEFORE

- ☐ Ensure social worker’s report is provided 10 days before the hearing. (Cal. Rules of Court, rule 5.725(c).)
 - ☐ Interview child regarding
 - ☐ Desires as to placement and permanency plan.
 - ☐ Continued contact with parents, siblings, other relatives.
 - ☐ Position on social services agency’s recommendation.
 - ☐ Child’s wishes to be present or not at the hearing. (§ 366.26(h)(2).)
 - ☐ Discuss permanency options with caregiver including guardianship, open adoption, and postadoption sibling contact. (§ 366.29.)
 - ☐ If case involves an Indian child, discuss permanency options with tribe and consider whether and how the proposed placement fits within the ICWA placement.
 - ☐ Assess and formulate position on
 - ☐ Appropriate permanent plan.
 - ☐ Whether to set contested hearing on
 - ☐ Adoptability.
 - ☐ Difficulty in placing child.
 - ☐ Parental or sibling bond.
 - ☐ Appropriateness of guardianship.
 - ☐ Whether jurisdiction should terminate if plan is guardianship (Kin-GAP).
 - ☐ If contesting, prepare and proceed as for jurisdictional hearing.
- Note:* Section 355(b) does not apply.



DURING

- ☐ Inform court of the child's wishes. (§ 366.26(h)(1).)
- ☐ Advocate positions identified above in keeping with any additional evidence received.

Note: The proponent of a section 366.26(c)(1) exception carries the burden to prove the detrimental circumstances constituting a compelling reason not to terminate.

- ☐ Request court to make appropriate findings and orders for referrals (i.e., Special Immigrant Juvenile Status [SIJS] visa, regional center, IEP, etc.).
- ☐ Where appropriate, request that caregivers be designated as "prospective adoptive parents." (§ 366.26(n).)
- ☐ If parental rights terminated and not previously ordered, request court to place educational rights with caregivers or prospective adoptive parents.
- ☐ If legal guardianship is entered, request appropriate orders as to
 - ☐ Visitation with parents.
 - ☐ Termination of dependency jurisdiction. (§ 366.3.)

AFTER

- ☐ Consult with child to explain court rulings and answer questions.
- ☐ Where applicable, consider whether a postadoption contract agreement is appropriate. (§ 366.26(a), Fam. Code, § 8616.5.)
- ☐ Send letter to caregiver with contact information and summary of court orders.
- ☐ File necessary forms/motions if pursuing rehearing, appeal, or writ.



SELECTION AND IMPLEMENTATION CHECKLIST

(§ 366.26): PARENT'S ATTORNEY

BEFORE

- ☐ Ensure social worker's report is provided 10 days before the hearing. (Cal. Rules of Court, rule 5.725(c).)
- ☐ Review the social worker's report and if the social services agency recommends adoption, evaluate whether the adoption assessment is sufficient and complies with the statutory requirements. (§§ 361.5(g)(1), 366.21(i), 366.22(b), 366.25(b).) If not, consider objecting regarding the inadequacy of the report in meeting statutory requirements).
- ☐ Consider discussing permanency options with caregiver if appropriate. (§ 366.29.)
- ☐ If case involves an Indian child, consider discussing permanency options with tribe and consider whether transfer to tribal court is an appropriate possibility.
- ☐ Ensure client's presence if in custody.
- ☐ Was notice proper?
- ☐ Interview client regarding
 - ☐ Possibility of filing a section 388.
 - ☐ Continued contact with child.
 - ☐ Position on social services agency's recommendation.
 - ☐ Possible outcomes and posthearing remedies (e.g., future section 388, appeal, etc.).
 - ☐ Whether to set contested hearing.
- ☐ If contesting (section 355(b) does not apply),
 - ☐ Is further investigation regarding adoptability necessary?
 - ☐ Obtain delivered service logs and incident reports.
 - ☐ If case involves an Indian child, consider whether
 - ☐ Evidence justifies finding of active efforts.



- ☐ Tribe was consulted in formulation of permanent plan, including discussion of whether tribal customary adoption would be an appropriate plan.
- ☐ Proposed permanent plan complies with ICWA placement preferences.
- ☐ If child is specifically adoptable, obtain information on suitability of caregiver.
- ☐ Who can testify re one of the section 366.26(c)(1) exceptions?
- ☐ Is an expert necessary to testify or assist with preparing cross-examination?
- ☐ Negotiate/discuss hearing strategy with opposing counsel.
- ☐ If ICWA applies, is there an expert report? (Remember that the beyond-a-reasonable-doubt standard applies.) Review the report in detail. Remember that the qualified expert witness must testify in person unless all parties stipulate in writing to a written report in lieu of testimony, and the court must make a specific finding that the stipulation was voluntary, knowing, and intelligent. (§ 224.6(e).)

DURING

- ☐ Inform court of the client's wishes.
- ☐ Advocate positions identified above in keeping with any additional evidence received.

Note: The proponent of a section 366.26(c)(1) exception carries the burden to prove the detrimental circumstances constituting a compelling reason not to terminate.

- ☐ Request mediation to address postadoption contact.
- ☐ Enter all specific and general objections to preserve record, including objections regarding the adequacy of the adoption assessment contained in the social worker's report where applicable. If the case involves an Indian child, make a specific note of any ICWA objections such as to sufficiency of qualified expert witness testimony, showing of active efforts, and compliance with placement preferences.



- ☐ If a legal guardianship or a planned permanent living arrangement is entered, request appropriate orders as to
 - ☐ Visitation.
 - ☐ Termination of dependency jurisdiction. (§ 366.3.)
 - ☐ Continued services for child (parents may be able to avail themselves of these).

AFTER

- ☐ Evaluate client's state of mind. Is assistance needed?
- ☐ Consult with client to explain court rulings and answer questions.
- ☐ Where applicable, consider whether a postadoption contract agreement is appropriate. (§ 366.26(a); Fam. Code, § 8616.5.)
- ☐ File notice of appeal within 60 days after rendition of the judgment.
- ☐ If rights are not terminated, set timelines and future goals `



BLACK LETTER DISCUSSION

The hearing held pursuant to Welfare and Institutions Code section 366.26, is sometimes called a selection and implementation hearing but more commonly a “.26” (two-six) hearing. It is held after the denial or termination of family reunification efforts. The focus is no longer on reunification of the family as originally constituted but on determining and putting into effect the plan that will best provide the child with a stable and permanent home. The Supreme Court explained in *In re Caden C.* (2021) 11 Cal.5th 614, 630: “If the court cannot safely return a dependent child to a parent’s custody within statutory time limits, the court must set a hearing under section 366.26. At the section 366.26 hearing, the question before the court is decidedly not whether the parent may resume custody of the child. In fact, it is not permissible to order reunification at the section 366.26 hearing. Indeed, when the court orders the section 366.26 hearing, reunification services have been terminated, and the assumption is that the problems that led to the court taking jurisdiction have not been resolved. Instead, the goal at the section 366.26 hearing is specifically to select and implement a permanent plan for the child.”

In a given case, it can be proper to terminate parental rights to one child but not another. (*In re N.R.* (2023) 87 Cal.App.5th 1187.)

The juvenile court cannot terminate the parental rights of only one parent. California Rules of Court, rule 5.725(a)(1) provides: “The court may not terminate the rights of only one parent under section 366.26 unless that parent is the only surviving parent; or unless the rights of the other parent have been terminated by a California court of competent jurisdiction or by a court of another state under the statutes of that state; or unless the other parent has relinquished custody of the child to the welfare department.”



NOTICE AND SERVICE

1. Content

Notice must inform the recipient of the time, date, place, and nature of the hearing and indicate that the court will, at that time, select a plan of adoption, tribal customary adoption, guardianship, placement with a fit and willing relative, or remaining in foster care with a permanent plan. The notice must also contain the permanency recommendation, inform parties of their rights to appear and be represented by counsel, and, in cases involving an Indian child, be on mandatory Judicial Council form ICWA-030 and inform the parties of the tribe's right to intervene. (§ 294(e); Cal. Rules of Court, rule 5.534(e).)

2. Persons and Entities Entitled to Notice

Notice must be served on the mother, all presumed and alleged fathers, the child (if aged 10 or older), the caregivers and attorneys for any dependent siblings, dependent siblings (if aged 10 or older), grandparents whose addresses are known if the parent's whereabouts are unknown, all counsel of record, the child's present caregiver, any Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) volunteer, and any de facto parent. If the court has reason to know that an Indian child is involved, notice on mandatory Judicial Council form ICWA-030 must also be sent to any known tribes or Indian custodians; otherwise it should be sent to the Bureau of Indian Affairs. (§ 294; Cal. Rules of Court, rule 5.725(b).)

3. Method of Service

The accepted means of service varies depending on the identity of the recipient and such factors as the amount of information known about the recipient, that person's presence at prior hearings, and the recommendation for permanency. All formal notices under ICWA must be sent by registered or certified mail, return receipt requested.



a. Parent

Proper notice is critical at this stage of the proceedings. The parent has both a constitutional and a statutory right to notice, and failure to attempt to give notice as required is a structural defect requiring automatic reversal. (*In re Jasmine G.* (2005) 127 Cal.App.4th 1109, 1114–1116.)



The purpose of termination is not to punish a parent but to free a child for adoption. Rights may not be terminated for only one parent (unless the other is deceased or rights have already been relinquished or otherwise terminated); therefore the rights of the mother and any unknown, alleged, or presumed fathers must all be terminated. (Cal. Rules of Court, rule 5.725(f).) All parents, even those who are difficult to identify or locate, must be properly noticed to protect the integrity of the proceedings. Decisional law is rife with reversals based on inadequate notice under the Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA). (See, e.g., *In re Francisco W.* (2006) 139 Cal.App.4th 695, 704.)

b. Identity and Whereabouts Are Known

A parent who was present at the hearing at which the .26 hearing was scheduled and who was directed by the court to appear at the .26 hearing is deemed to have received actual notice. Subsequent notice need only be by first-class mail at the parent's usual residence or place, business, or by electronic service as described in section 212.5. (§ 294(f)(1).)

If the parent was not present when the hearing date was set, notice may be by personal service; certified mail, return receipt requested (so long as the social services agency receives a return receipt signed by the parent); or substitute service with follow-up by first-class mail. (§ 294(f)(2)–(5).) Notice by first-class mail to the parent's usual residence or business is sufficient if the recommendation is guardianship, placement with a fit and willing relative, or another planned permanent living arrangement. (§ 294(f)(6).)



c. Identity Known but Whereabouts Unknown

If the court determines that due diligence has been exercised, based on an affidavit filed with the court 75 days before the hearing, describing efforts to locate and serve the parent, and the recommendation is for guardianship, no further notice to the parent is required. If the recommendation is adoption, service may be

- On the parent's attorney by certified mail, return receipt requested; or
- By publication for four consecutive weeks if no attorney represents the parent.

In all cases in which the parent's whereabouts are unknown, notice must be served by first-class mail on the grandparents if their identities and addresses are known.

If the parent's address becomes known, notice must immediately be served as described under section 294(f)(2)–(6). (§ 294(f)(7).)

d. Identity and Whereabouts Unknown

If the court determines that efforts conducted with due diligence have been unsuccessful in identifying one or both parents, and no one has come forward claiming parentage, the court may dispense with notice. However, if the recommendation is for adoption, the court may order notice by publication (once a week for four consecutive weeks) if it determines that publication is likely to lead to actual notice of the parent. (§ 294(g).)

e. Due Diligence to Locate a Parent

Parental rights may not be terminated unless the social services agency has fulfilled its constitutional obligation to exercise due diligence in its efforts to notify the parent of the upcoming hearing. Reasonable or due diligence requires an inquiry conducted in good faith that is systematic and thorough. (*In re Megan P.* (2002) 102 Cal. App.4th 480, 489 [termination of parental rights reversed owing to insufficient efforts to locate father, who had been sending payments to the county's child support division for the entire time the case was before the dependency court].) Even where the affidavit appears sufficient, notice is invalid if the petitioning party has ignored the most



likely means of locating the parent. (*In re Arlyne A.* (2000) 85 Cal. App.4th 591, 599 [social services agency ignored relative's information about father's possible whereabouts].)

f. Child

Notice to the child may be by first-class mail. If it is known, or there is reason to know the case involves an Indian child, notice to the tribe must be by registered mail, return receipt requested. (§§ 224.1, 294; Cal. Rules of Court, rule 5.481(b).)

4. Time for Service

In most instances, service must be completed at least 45 days before the date of the hearing. For notice by mail, service is deemed complete 10 days after mailing. If an Indian child is involved, notice to the tribe, Indian custodian, or Bureau of Indian Affairs must be received at least 10 days prior to the hearing. If publication is ordered, it must be completed at least 30 days before the date of the .26 hearing. (§ 294(c).)

5. Notice for Continued Hearings

After an initial finding of proper notice has been made, subsequent notice for continued hearings under section 366.26 need only be made by first-class mail to the last known address or by any other means reasonably calculated to provide notice, or by electronic service as described by section 212.5, so long as the recommendation remains the same. If the recommendation is changed, notice must be served as required for the initial .26 hearing. (§ 294(d).)

TIMING OF HEARING

The .26 hearing must be set to occur within 120 days of the court's order denying or terminating reunification services. (§§ 361.5(f), 366.21(e) & (g), 366.22(a).)



CONTINUANCES

The court may continue a .26 hearing for no more than 30 days if necessary in order to appoint counsel or allow newly appointed counsel to become acquainted with the case. (§ 366.26(g).)

Additionally, the court may grant any party's request for a continuance so long as it is not contrary to the interests of the minor. Continuances can only be granted for good cause and only for the period of time necessary. (§ 352.)

ASSESSMENT / SOCIAL WORKER'S REPORT

Upon setting the matter for a .26 hearing, the court orders the social services agency to prepare an assessment that includes

- Current search efforts for absent parent(s);
- Review of the amount and nature of contact between the child and parent and other family members since the date of original placement;
- Evaluation of the child's medical, developmental, academic, mental, and emotional status;
- Preliminary assessment of the eligibility and commitment of any identified prospective adoptive parent, tribal customary adoptive parent, or guardian, including a check of criminal records and child abuse referral history;
- Duration and character of the relationship between the child and any identified prospective adoptive parent, tribal customary adoptive parent, or guardian and a statement from the child (if age and developmentally appropriate) concerning placement, adoption, or guardianship;
- Description of the efforts to be made to identify a prospective adoptive parent or guardian; and
- Analysis of the likelihood that the child will be adopted if parental rights are terminated.
- If the case involves an Indian child and tribal customary adoption is the recommended plan, an analysis and reasons for reaching the conclusion of whether the adoption would be det-



rimental to the child and whether the child cannot or should not return to the Indian parent or Indian custodian.

(§§ 361.5(g), 366.21(i).)

The agency report is provided to the court and all parents (and in the case of an Indian child, the tribe) at least 10 calendar days before the .26 hearing. In addition, a summary of the recommendations is provided to the current caregiver and any CASA volunteer. (Cal. Rules of Court, rule 5.725(c).)

BURDENS OF PROOF

The petitioner carries the burden to prove by clear and convincing evidence that the child is likely to be adopted. (§ 366.26(c)(1); Cal. Rules of Court, rule 5.725(d).) At the .26 hearing the focus is on the child, and the social services agency has no burden to show fault on the part of the parent. (*Cynthia D. v. Superior Court* (1993) 5 Cal.4th 242, 254 [by the time termination is considered, the danger to the child from parental unfitness has already been well established through prior judicial determinations that the evidence of detriment is clear and convincing].)

The Court of Appeal held that the rights of a noncustodial parent against whom no allegations were ever filed may not be terminated without a judicial finding of unfitness. (*In re Gladys L.* (2006) 141 Cal.App.4th 845, 848.) Several later cases held that a noncustodial parent's rights can be terminated even if the dependency petition did not contain, and/or the court did not sustain, any allegations against that parent, as long as the court made findings by clear and convincing evidence at the dispositional and review hearings that placing the child with that parent would be detrimental. (*In re A.S.* (2009) 180 Cal.App.4th 351, 360–361; *In re P.A.* (2007) 155 Cal. App.4th 1197, 1212.) In *In re G.S.R.* (2008) 159 Cal.App.4th 1202, the court reversed termination of the noncustodial parent's rights because he had visited regularly and maintained contact with the agency, and the only reason the children were not placed with him was his poverty and lack of housing. Similarly, in *In re S.S.* (2020) 55 Cal.App.5th 355, the court asked “whether a juvenile court may,



consistent with due process and the dependency statutes, terminate the parental rights of a noncustodial father who seeks custody even though the state detained and removed the child based only on allegations against the mother and the court found giving father custody would be detrimental based on problems arising from his poverty.” (55 Cal.App.5th at p. 359.) Answering in the negative, the court wrote, “The real problem with the trial court’s detriment finding is it was based on father’s poverty. . . . ‘[P]overty alone, even abject poverty resulting in homelessness, is not a valid basis for assertion of juvenile court jurisdiction Put differently, indigency, by itself, does not make one an unfit parent’ ” (*Id.* at 373.)

In *In re Serenity S.* (2020) 55 Cal.App.5th 355, 373, the Court of Appeal noted, “California’s dependency scheme no longer uses the term ‘parental unfitness,’ but instead requires the juvenile court make a finding that awarding custody of a dependent child to a parent would be detrimental to the child.”

Once adoptability has been established, the burden shifts to the party claiming that termination would be detrimental to the child to prove one of the exceptions enumerated under section 366.26(c)(1) by a preponderance of the evidence. (Cal. Rules of Court, rule 5.725(d); *In re Rachel M.* (2003) 113 Cal.App.4th 1289, 1295; *In re Thomas R.* (2006) 145 Cal.App.4th 726.) If the case involves an Indian child, the permanent plan must conform to the ICWA placement preferences. Furthermore, there are additional bases for justifying a permanent plan other than adoption or tribal customary adoption. (§§ 366.24, 366.26(c)(1).)

PROCEDURE

1. Appointment of Counsel

At the beginning of a .26 hearing, the court must appoint counsel for any dependent child not already represented unless it finds that the child would not benefit from representation. The court must also appoint counsel for any unrepresented parent who appears and is unable to afford counsel unless that right is knowingly and



intelligently waived. (§ 366.26(f).) The court may continue the proceedings for up to 30 days to allow any newly appointed counsel to become familiar with the case. (§ 366.26(g).)

2. Incarcerated Parent's Right to Appear

An incarcerated parent has the statutory right to be noticed of and to be present at any hearing in which the social services agency seeks to terminate his or her parental rights. If the court is informed that the parent wishes to be present, it must issue an order for the parent to be brought before the court. No proceeding to terminate parental rights may go forward without the physical presence of the parent or of the parent's counsel unless the court has received a signed waiver of appearance. (Pen. Code, § 2625.)

3. Child's Participation in the Proceedings

a. Presence and Opportunity to Be Heard

The child must be allowed to attend the hearing if the child or the child's counsel requests to do so or if so ordered by the court. If any child aged 10 or older is not present, the court must inquire as to whether notice was proper and why the child is not present. (§§ 349, 366.26(h)(2).)

The court must consider the wishes of the child and act in the child's best interest. (§ 366.26(h)(1).) When considering the child's wishes there is no requirement that direct statements be elicited from the child as to termination of parental rights, especially if such inquiry is inappropriate based on the child's age or mental state. (*In re Leo M.* (1993) 19 Cal.App.4th 1583, 1592.) The court need only attempt to explore the child's feelings as to the biological parents, any prospective adoptive parents, caregivers, and current living situation and to make inferences as to the child's wishes. (*In re Julian L.* (1998) 67 Cal.App.4th 204, 208.) The court is required to consider the child's wishes but is not required to follow them, except that the court may not terminate parental rights over the objection of a child aged 12 or older. (§ 366.26(c)(1)(B)(iii); see *In re Joshua G.* (2005) 129 Cal.App.4th 189.)



b. Testimony in Chambers

The child may testify in chambers, outside the presence of the child's parent, so long as the parent's counsel is present and the court finds any of the following:

- Testimony in chambers is necessary to ensure truthful testimony;
- The child is likely to be intimidated by a formal courtroom setting; or
- The child is afraid to testify in the presence of his or her parent.

4. Evidence

a. Right to Contested Hearing

An alleged father has no right to a contested .26 hearing. Due process for an alleged father requires only notice and an opportunity to elevate his paternity status prior to the .26 hearing. At the .26 hearing, neither paternity nor reunification is a cognizable issue. (*In re Christopher M.* (2003) 113 Cal.App.4th 155.)

Because the agency has the burden of proof regarding adoptability, parents have a due process right to a contested hearing in which they can conduct cross-examination and challenge the sufficiency of the evidence. The court cannot require parents to make an offer of proof in order to contest this issue. (*In re Thomas R.* (2006) 145 Cal. App.4th 726.)

However, parents do not have an unfettered right to a contested hearing to attempt to establish that one of the exceptions to termination applies. The court may require an offer of proof and deny full presentation of evidence and confrontation and cross-examination of witnesses if it determines that the evidence offered will not be relevant or have significant probative value. (*In re Earl L.* (2004) 121 Cal.App.4th 1050, 1053; *In re Tamika T.* (2002) 97 Cal.App.4th 1114, 1122.)

b. Hearsay in Assessments and Court Reports

Hearsay contained in reports submitted by the social services agency is admissible and is considered competent evidence on which the



court may base its findings. (*In re Keyonie R.* (1996) 42 Cal.App.4th 1569, 1572–1573; see Hearsay in Dependency Hearings fact sheet.) Due process does not require cross-examination of the social worker as a prerequisite to admissibility of the assessment report. (*In re Jeannette V.* (1998) 68 Cal.App.4th 811, 817.)

c. Bonding/Attachment Studies

The party opposing termination based on a closely bonded relationship may request a bonding study. The court has no sua sponte duty to order a bonding study. (*In re Richard C.* (1998) 68 Cal.App.4th 1191, 1195.) The contents of a bonding study arranged by a parent and conducted without the knowledge or consent of the court or child’s attorney is discoverable; its admissibility is not barred by the attorney work product rule nor the patient-psychotherapist privilege. (*In re Tabatha G.* (1996) 45 Cal.App.4th 1159, 1168.)

In *In re Caden C.* (2021) 11 Cal.5th 614, 632–633, the Supreme Court observed, “[O]ften expert psychologists who have observed the child and parent and can synthesize others’ observations will be an important source of information about the psychological importance of the [parental] relationship for the child.” In a footnote, the court added, “Trial courts should seriously consider, where requested and appropriate, allowing for a bonding study or other relevant expert testimony.” (Fn. 4.) The Court of Appeal in *In re M.V.* (2023) 87 Cal.App.5th 1155, discussed bonding studies. The court ordered a supplemental bonding study when the first study failed to address key issues before the juvenile court. The Court of Appeal wrote:

Bonding studies supply expert opinion about the psychological importance to the child of the relationship with his or her parent(s) to assist the court in determining whether “the child would benefit from continuing the relationship.” They are particularly informative in cases like *Caden C.*, in which the child was eight or nine years old and had a complex parental relationship with both positive and negative aspects. While “[t]here is no requirement in statutory or case law that a court must secure a bonding study as a condition precedent to” terminating

parental rights, the California Supreme Court has instructed juvenile courts to “seriously consider, where requested and appropriate, allowing for a bonding study or other relevant expert testimony.” . . . “The proper factors the study, at a minimum, should have considered recognizing that rarely do parent-child relationships conform to an entirely consistent pattern, are set out in *Caden*: 1) the age of the child; 2) the portion of the child’s life spent in the parent’s custody; 3) the positive or negative effect of interaction between the parent and the child; and 4) the child’s particular needs.” . . . Instead of studying M.V.’s relationship with her parents and the potential consequences to her of its loss, [the bonding evaluator] Crespo assessed the parents in extreme detail in ways that bore no discernable connection to the psychological importance to M.V. of her relationship with her parents.

A party is free to criticize the scope or competence of a bonding study. (*In re M.G.* (2022) 80 Cal.App.5th 836 [inadequate bonding study]).



Be mindful of how the terms “bonding” and “attachment” are used by social workers and experts opining about the parent-child relationship. These terms have multiple meanings, and each person may use the same term to represent something different. To avoid misuse and misapplication of these terms, ask the evaluator specific questions that focus on the relationship rather than overbroadly the “bond” or “attachment” such as seeking information about a description of the relationship between the parent and child, how the child would be affected by losing the parental relationship, whether the parent does or does not meet the child’s needs, etc.

5. Concurrent 388 Motion for Return or Resumption of Reunification

Once reunification services have been terminated and a case has been set for a .26 hearing, the focus of the court shifts to the child’s need for permanency and stability. Return to the parent is not an issue. In *In re Caden C.* (2021) 11 Cal.5th 614, 630, the Supreme



Court observed, “If the court cannot safely return a dependent child to a parent’s custody within statutory time limits, the court must set a hearing under section 366.26. At the section 366.26 hearing, the question before the court is decidedly not whether the parent may resume custody of the child. In fact, it is not permissible to order reunification at the section 366.26 hearing. Indeed, when the court orders the section 366.26 hearing, reunification service have been terminated, and the assumption is that the problems that led to the court taking jurisdiction have not been resolved. Instead, the goal at the section 366.26 hearing is specifically to select and implement a permanent plan for the child.”

When appropriate, a section 388 petition can provide a parent with an opportunity to present new evidence to the court before permanency decisions are made, and provide a balancing of the parent’s interest in reunification with the child’s need for stability and permanency. Issues and claims raised by a 388 petition requesting return of the child or resumption of reunification services should be decided before the .26 hearing is conducted. (*In re Marilyn H.* (1993) 5 Cal.4th 295, 309; *In re Lesly G.* (2008) 162 Cal.App.4th 904.)

If the court grants a 388 petition and orders resumption of reunification services, the .26 hearing should be taken off calendar and the next hearing set for and conducted under the standards of a section 366.22 review hearing—not as a continued .26 hearing. (See *In re Sean E.* (1992) 3 Cal.App.4th 1594, 1599 [the order for further reunification services implicitly conflicts with the findings necessary to set a section 366.26 hearing, and therefore the latter must be vacated]; see also the Status Reviews and Motions for Modification black letter discussions.)

6. Adoptability

In order to terminate parental rights, the court must first find by clear and convincing evidence that the child is likely to be adopted. A child need not already be placed with a caregiver who is willing to adopt or who has an approved adoption home study for the court

to make this finding, which is instead based on the age, health, and other characteristics of the child. (*In re R.C.* (2009) 169 Cal.App.4th 486; *In re I.I.* (2008) 168 Cal.App.4th 857; *In re Marina S.* (2005) 132 Cal.App.4th 158.) The fact that a caregiver is willing to adopt may be considered as evidence of the child’s adoptability. (*In re R.C.*, *supra*, 169 Cal.App.4th at p. 491; *In re I.I.*, *supra*, 168 Cal.App.4th at p. 870; *In re Helen W.* (2007) 150 Cal.App.4th 71.) The adoptability determination focuses on the child as an individual; any issues regarding the child’s attachment to siblings should be addressed under section 366.26(c)(1)(B)(v). (*In re I.I.*, *supra*, 168 Cal.App.4th at p. 872.)

The terms “general” and “specific” adoptability require explanation. General adoptability refers to children who are likely to find an adoptive home with a range of adoptive parents. Specific adoptability typically refers to an older child or a child with medical or psychological issues that may reduce the number of prospective adoptive parents. In *In re Mary C.* (2020) 48 Cal.App.5th 793, fn. 5, the Court of Appeal wrote, “There are unusual cases where a child, due to severe physical or mental needs, may be deemed adoptable based solely on the fact that a particular family wants to adopt the child (specific adoptability).” In *Mary C.*, biological parents hoping to avoid termination of their parental rights argued their two young children were not adoptable. The trial court and the Court of Appeal disagreed. The Court of Appeal stated that the issue of adoptability focuses on the child and whether it will be challenging to find adoptive parents. The Court wrote, “ ‘The [trial] court was not required to find the children ‘generally’ or ‘specifically’ adoptable. . . . It was required only to find by clear and convincing evidence that the children were ‘likely’ to be adopted within a reasonable time.’ ” The prospective adoptive parent had been caring for the children for quite a while. The Court of Appeal wrote, “Usually, the fact that a prospective adoptive parent has expressed interest in adopting the minor is evidence that the minor’s age, physical condition, mental state, and other matters relating to the child are not likely to dissuade individuals from adopting the minor.” (quoting *In re Sarah M.* (1994) 22 Cal.App.4th 1642, 1649–1650). The *Mary C.* court wrote, “The pres-



ence of a foster-adoptive family was evidence of adoptability. . . . The fact that the two little girls could form loving, trusting relationships with [the adoptive parent's partner] was evidence of adoptability.” (48 Cal.App.5th at p. 805.)

In *Mary C.* the biological parents sought to criticize the prospective adoptive parent. Rejecting this effort, the Court of Appeal wrote, “[A] section 366.26 hearing does not provide a forum for the minors’ parent to contest the ‘suitability’ of a prospective adoptive family. The issue of suitability is reserved for the subsequent adoption proceeding.” (*Id.* at 806–807). (See also *In re Valerie W.* (2008) 162 Cal.App.4th 1; *In re B.D.* (2008) 159 Cal.App.4th 1218; *In re Carl R.* (2005) 128 Cal.App.4th 1051.)

The social service agency has the burden to establish adoptability. Objections to the sufficiency of an adoption assessment report are generally waived if no objection is made in the trial court. (*In re Mary C.* (2020) 48 Cal.App.5th 793, 801; *In re Urayna L.* (1999) 75 Cal.App.4th 883.)

7. When Adoptability Is Established, the Court Considers Factors in § 366.26(c)(1)

Once a finding of adoptability is made by clear and convincing evidence, the court examines factors set forth in § 366.26(c)(1). Section (c)(1) sets forth factors that justify termination of parental rights. The factors are outlined below:

- Reunification services have been denied under section 361.5(b) or (e)(1);
- The parent’s whereabouts have been unknown for six months;
- The parent has failed to visit or contact the child for six months;
- The parent has been convicted of a felony indicating parental unfitness; or
- Reunification services have been terminated under section 366.21(e) or (f), section 366.22, or section 366.25.

When one or more of the foregoing factors is present for the adoptable child, the court must terminate parental rights unless one of the exceptions to termination set forth in section 366.26(c)(1)(A) or (B) applies. These exceptions to termination of parental rights are discussed *infra*.

8. Order of Preference to Provide Stable, Permanent Home

At the .26 hearing, the court reviews the social worker's report and receives relevant evidence offered by the parties. (§ 366.26(b).) When all evidence is considered, section 366.26(b) instructs the court to make findings and orders in the following order of preference: (1) terminate parental rights and order the child placed for adoption; (2) without terminating parental rights, order tribal customary adoption; (3) without terminating parental rights, appoint as guardians the relatives with whom the child is living; (4) for a child for whom adoption is probable but who is difficult to place for adoption, hold off on termination of parental rights for up to 180 days while an adoptive home is located; (5) without terminating parental rights, appoint a nonrelative guardian; (6) without terminating parental rights, place the child with a fit and willing relative; (7) without terminating parental rights, order the child to remain in foster care subject to 366.26(c). See also the "Retention in Foster Care With a Permanent Plan" section below for further information on the required findings when the child is ordered to remain in foster care.

If clear and convincing evidence establishes that the child is likely to be adopted, the court terminates parental rights and orders the child placed for adoption. (§ 366.26(c)(1); unless in a case involving an Indian child, the child's tribe has identified tribal customary adoption as the appropriate permanent plan.) The adoption takes place in juvenile court after the parents' appeal rights are exhausted.

A court order bypassing reunification services pursuant to § 361.5(b) or (e) constitutes sufficient evidence to terminate parental rights.



9. Exceptions to Termination of Parental Rights

If the child is found to be adoptable, the court terminates parental rights unless the court finds that one of the exceptions provided in section 366.26(c)(1)(A) or (B) applies. In *In re Caden C.* (2021) 11 Cal.5th 614, 630–631, the Supreme Court examined § 366.26(c)(1)(B) and explained, “[I]f the parent shows that termination would be detrimental to the child for at least one specifically enumerated reason [contained in § 366.26(c)(1)(B) or (4)(A)], the court should decline to terminate parental rights and select another permanent plan. . . . [T]he statutory exceptions merely permit the court, in exceptional circumstances, to choose an option other than adoption.”

a. Child Living with Relative Willing to be Guardian—Section 366.26(c)(1)(A)

This exception to termination of parental rights applies when a child is living with a relative who is unable or unwilling to adopt for reasons that do not include unwillingness to accept legal or financial responsibility for the child, and the relative is willing to provide permanency through legal guardianship.



Children’s attorneys should distinguish between relative caregivers who are genuinely committed to providing permanency for the child but who are unable or unwilling to adopt for reasons such as inability to obtain the consent of an absent spouse or respect for an older child’s wish to maintain legal ties to birth parents, versus relatives who are unwilling to adopt because they hope the parents will eventually reunify or they are not sure they can care for the child permanently.

b. Beneficial Parental Relationship Exception—Section 366.26(c)(1)(B)(i)

This exception is frequently litigated. The exception applies when the court concludes termination of parental rights would be detrimental to the child because the parents have maintained regular visitation and contact with the child and the child would benefit from continuing the relationship. (Cal Rules of Court, rule 5.725(e)(1)(B)(i).)



To meet this requirement, counsel must ensure that visitation continues after denial or termination of reunification services. Attorneys must impress upon their clients the importance of consistent visitation. Lack of visitation “will not only prejudice a parent’s interests at a section 366.26 hearing but may virtually assure the erosion (and termination) of any meaningful relationship between mother and child.” (*In re Precious J.* (1996) 42 Cal.App.4th 1463, 1480.)

The leading case on the beneficial parental relationship exception to termination of parental rights is *In re Caden C.* (2021), 11 Cal.5th 614, where the Supreme Court wrote:

From [W&I § 366.26(c)(1)(B)(i)] we readily discern three elements the parent must prove to establish the exception: (1) regular *visitation and contact*, and (2) a *relationship*, the continuation of which would *benefit* the child such that (3) the termination of parental rights would be *detrimental* to the child. . . . [T]he trial court must decide whether the harm from severing the child’s relationship with the parent outweighs the benefit to the child of placement in a new adoptive home. . . .

The first element – regular visitation and contact – is straightforward. The question is just whether “parents visit consistently”

As to the second element, courts assess whether “the child would benefit from continuing the relationship.” Again here, the focus is the child. And the relationship may be shaped by a slew of factors, such as “[t]he age of the child, the portion of the child’s life spent in the parent’s custody, the ‘positive’ or ‘negative’ effect of interaction between *parent* and child and the child’s particular needs.” . . . [C]ourts often consider how children feel about, interact with, look to, or talk about their parents. . . . [O]ften expert psychologists who have observed the child and parent and can synthesize others’ observations will be an important source



of information about the psychological importance of the relationship for the child.

Concerning the third element – whether “termination would be detrimental to the child due to” the relationship – the court must decide whether it would be harmful to the child to sever the relationship and choose adoption. Because terminating parental rights eliminates any legal basis for the parent or child to maintain the relationship, courts must assume that terminating parental rights terminates the relationship. . . . What courts need to determine, therefore, is how the child would be affected by losing the parental relationship – in effect what life would be like for the child in an adoptive home without the parent in the child’s life. . . .

In each case, then, the court acts in the child’s best interest in a specific way: it decides whether the harm of severing the relationship outweighs the security and the sense of belonging a new family would confer.

(11 Cal.5th at pp. 631–633 (emphasis in original).)

Discussing the three prongs of the beneficial parental relationship exception, the court in *In re G.H.* (2022) 84 Cal.App.5th 15, 26–27 (emphasis in original) wrote, “Father’s attempt to draw a strict line between the prongs of the benefit exception is without merit. They naturally inform and lead into each other. Whether a parent or parents’ regular *visitation and contact* (the first prong) builds a *relationship* that is *beneficial* to the child (the second prong) depends on the nature and quality of the visits. . . . The fact that the court lauded Father and Mother for maintaining a parental role with G.H. despite ‘limited time’ with him, ‘were appropriate with their child generally,’ and ‘attended to his emotional needs during their time with him, as well as his physical needs’ is not evidence that the court misapplied the benefit exception.” The quality of visits matters. In *In re G.H.* (2022) 84 Cal.App.5th 15, 25, the Court of Appeal wrote, “Friendly or affectionate visits are not enough.” In *In re Andrew M.* (2024) 102 Cal.App.5th 803, the Court of Appeal wrote: “The pa-



rental-benefit exception deals with the child’s relationship with the *parents*, and it is not appropriate to consider relationships with other family members in assessing this exception”

If, at the .26 hearing, a parent continues to struggle with the problem that led to dependency, the parent’s struggle is relevant. (*In re Caden C.*, *supra*, 11 Cal.5th 637). However, “[a] parent’s continued struggles with the issues leading to dependency are not a categorical bar to applying the [beneficial parental relationship] exception.” (*Id.*) In *In re Katherine J.* (2022) 75 Cal.App.5th 303, 309, the Court of Appeal wrote that *Caden C.* “does not prohibit the juvenile court from determining, as it did here, that the *negative impact* of father’s unresolved issues on Katherine were antithetical to the child of the beneficial parental relationship required by section 366.26.” (Emphasis in original.)

c. Child Aged 12 or Older Objects—Section 366.26(c)(1)(B)(ii)

The court must not terminate parental rights if a child aged 12 or older objects to termination. This is logical, given that no adoption can be finalized without the consent of the child aged 12 or older. (Fam. Code, § 8602.)



Although it is not dispositive, an objection by a younger child, especially one nearing the age of 12, should be put on the record.

d. Child Placed in a Residential Treatment Facility—Section 366.26(c)(1)(B)(iii)

Termination is deemed detrimental when the child is placed in a residential treatment facility, adoption is unlikely or undesirable, and continuation of parental rights will not prevent identification of a permanent family placement for the child if the parents cannot resume custody when residential care is no longer needed. This exception is invoked in rare situations involving children with severe disabilities who are institutionalized. Proceeding by this exception keeps open both the options of return to the parent and permanent placement at a later time. (*In re Jeremy S.* (2001) 89 Cal.App.4th 514 [overruled on other grounds by *In re Zeth S.* (2003) 31 Cal.4th 396, 413–414]; see *In re Ramone R.* (2005) 132 Cal.App.4th 1339.)



e. Child is Living with Foster Parent or Indian Custodian Who Is Unwilling or Unable to Adopt—Section 366.26(c)(1)(B)(iv)

This exception applies to a child living with a foster parent or Indian custodian who is unwilling or unable to adopt owing to exceptional circumstances, not including unwillingness to accept legal or financial responsibility for the child, but who is willing to provide a stable and permanent home and removal from the caregiver would be detrimental to the child's emotional well-being. This exception does not apply if

- The child is a member of a sibling group in which a sibling is under age six and the children are or should be permanently placed together; or
- The child is under age six.

f. Substantial Interference With a Child's Sibling Relationship—Section 366.26(c)(1)(B)(v)

Detriment to the child sufficient to bar termination of parental rights can be based on a finding that adoption would substantially interfere with a child's "long-standing sibling relationships that serve as 'anchors for dependent children whose lives are in turmoil.' The sibling relationship exception contains 'strong language creating a heavy burden for the party opposing adoption.' Factors for the court to consider include the nature and extent of the sibling relationship, whether the siblings were raised in the same home, whether they share a close bond and whether continued contact is in the child's best interests, as compared to the benefits of adoption. The court considers the best interests of the adoptive child, not the best interests of other siblings." (*In re Isaiah S.* (2016) 5 Cal.App.5th 428, 437–438.) Although section 366.26 does not contain a definition of "sibling," the term should be defined broadly to implement the Legislature's intent "to preserve, to the greatest extent possible, the relationships and contacts between siblings." (*In re Valerie A.* (2006) 139 Cal.App.4th 1519, 1520.)

A parent has standing to assert the exception as a party potentially directly aggrieved by the decision, as does the child who is



being considered for adoption. (See *In re Valerie A.* (2007) 152 Cal. App.4th 987, 999; *In re Hector A.* (2005) 125 Cal.App.4th 783, 791; *In re L.Y.L.* (2004) 101 Cal.App.4th 942, 951.) The party opposing adoption has a heavy burden. (*In re Isaiah S.* (2016) 5 Cal.App.5th 428, 437; *In re Daniel H.* (2002) 99 Cal.App.4th 804, 813.) “Factors for the court to consider include the nature and extent of the sibling relationship, whether the siblings were raised in the same home, whether they share a close bond and whether continued contact is in the child’s best interests, as compared to the benefits of adoption. The court considers the best interests of the adoptive child, not the best interests of other siblings.” (*In re Isaiah S.* (2016) 5 Cal.App.5th 428, 437–438.) Living together is not a required factor and is not determinative of the outcome of the analysis. (*In re Naomi P.* (2005) 132 Cal.App.4th 808, 824). Although the detriment is viewed only as it applies to the child who is the subject of the .26 hearing, not as to the sibling, the sibling’s close bond with the child for whom adoption is proposed may provide indirect evidence of the subject child’s best interest sufficient to support the exception. (*In re Naomi P.*, *supra*, 132 Cal.App.4th at p. 823 [testimony of three older siblings especially informative when the subject of the hearing was only three years old]; *In re Celine R.* (2003) 31 Cal.App.4th 45, 55 [sibling’s relationship may be relevant in assessing the effect of adoption on an adoptive child].)

In order to be entitled to appear and be heard at a child’s .26 hearing, a sibling files a petition under 388(b) seeking sibling recognition. The sibling need not demonstrate that he or she is likely to be successful in showing detriment to the child, but only that a sufficient sibling bond exists that the court should hear evidence about the relationship before making a permanency decision for the child. (*In re Hector A.*, *supra*, 125 Cal.App.4th at p. 793.) A child does not lose status as a sibling after being adopted. (*In re Valerie A.*, *supra*, 139 Cal.App.4th at pp. 1523–1524.)



**g. Substantial Interference With a Child’s Connection to a Tribal Community or Another Permanent Plan Identified by Tribe—
Section 366.26(c)(1)(B)(vii)**

If the case involves an Indian child, the permanent plan must conform to the ICWA placement preferences, or the court must find that there is good cause to deviate from the placement preferences. Section 366.26(c)(1)(B)(vi) permits the court not to terminate the parental rights of an Indian child if there is a compelling reason that termination of parental rights would not be in the child’s best interest, including, but not limited to, the following: (1) termination of parental rights would substantially interfere with the child’s connection to the tribal community or tribal membership rights; or (2) the child’s tribe has identified guardianship, placement with a fit and willing relative, tribal customary adoption, or another permanency plan for the child. Also, under section 366.26(c)(2)(B), a court may not terminate parental rights if the court has ordered tribal customary adoption pursuant to section 366.24.



No General “Best-Interest” Exception

The exceptions to termination of parental rights enumerated in section 366.26(c)(1)(A)–(D) are exclusive; there is no general “best-interest” exception. (*In re Josue G.* (2003) 106 Cal.App.4th 725, 734.) In situations where counsel believes that termination is not in a child’s best interest and no exception applies, a 388 motion is the appropriate method for raising a challenge. Of course, in order to be successful, the motion must demonstrate changed circumstances.

10. Reasonable Efforts or Services—Section 366.26(c)(2)(A)

The court may not terminate parental rights if it has found at each and every hearing at which it was required to address the issue that no reasonable efforts were made or that reasonable services were not offered or provided. (§ 366.26(c)(2)(A).) Orders terminating parental rights have been reversed when the appellate court found that the trial court erred in concluding that reasonable services had been provided when, in fact, there had been none. (See *In re Precious J.*, *supra*,



42 Cal.App.4th at p. 1463 [no reasonable services were provided owing to failure of social services to facilitate any visits for incarcerated mother]; *In re David D.* (1994) 28 Cal.App.4th 941, 953–954 [there is no meaningful difference between a case with no reunification plan and one in which a plan was developed but not effectuated; total lack of visitation amounted to a lack of reasonable services].)

A finding of no reasonable services between the 12- and 18-month hearing does not automatically entitle the parent to an extension of services and delay of the section 366.26 hearing. (See *Michael G. v. Superior Court* (2023) 14 Cal.5th 609 [A parent is *not* entitled to an automatic extension of reunification services after the 18-month period for services has elapsed, even if the court determines that the parent did not receive reasonable services for the preceding six months. The court *may* grant a continuance of the 366.26 hearing if it finds good cause, further services may be appropriate, and the child’s best interests are not adversely impacted by any delay for permanence].)

In cases involving an Indian child, there must be an active-efforts finding as well as testimony of a qualified expert witness. (§ 366.26(c)(2)(B).)

POSSIBLE OUTCOMES

1. Termination of Parental Rights and Referral for Adoption

If a child is found likely to be adopted and none of the enumerated exceptions is established, the court must terminate parental rights and place the child for adoption, unless the child is an Indian child, in which case tribal customary adoption is the likely outcome, if desired by the child’s tribe.

a. Rights of All Parents Must Be Terminated

Termination of parental rights take place simultaneously for all parents. The court may not terminate the rights of just one parent unless the other parent previously relinquished custody, had his or her parental rights terminated by another competent court, or is deceased. (Cal. Rules of Court, rule 5.725(a).) This is because the



stated purpose of termination is to free a child for adoption, and that cannot happen until the rights of all parents, including any alleged or unknown fathers, have been terminated. (*Id.*, rule 5.725(f).) It is procedural error for the court to terminate the mother's and father's rights in two separate hearings. (*In re Vincent S.* (2001) 92 Cal. App.4th 1090, 1093.)

b. Finality of Order

An order terminating parental rights is conclusive and binding on the child, parent(s), and any person notified under section 294. (§ 366.26(i)(1); Cal. Rules of Court, rule 5.725(e).) The juvenile court has no power to set aside or modify the termination order except under the very limited circumstances.

The court may reinstate parental rights upon a petition filed by a dependent child who has not yet been adopted three years after the date of the order terminating parental rights and for whom the court has determined that adoption is no longer the permanent plan goal. (§ 366.26(i)(3).) The petition for reinstatement may be filed before three years have elapsed if the agency responsible for adoptions stipulates that the child is no longer likely to be adopted. The child personally or through his or her counsel may file a section 388 petition seeking reinstatement; if the request appears to be in the child's best interest, the court sets a hearing to consider the matter. At that hearing, the court reinstates parental rights if it finds by clear and convincing evidence that the child is no longer likely to be adopted and that reinstatement of parental rights is in the child's best interest.

c. Adoptive Preference—Section 366.26(k)(2)

The adoption application of any current caregiver (who is a relative or a foster parent) must be given preference over other applications. This preference applies when it has been determined that the child has substantial ties to the caregiver and removal from that home would be seriously detrimental to the child's emotional well-being. "Preference" means that if the application is found satisfactory when processed, the caregiver's adoptive home study will be completed before any other applications are processed. (*In re Lauren R.* (2007) 148 Cal.App.4th 841.)



Section 366.26(k) does not differentiate between relative and foster caregivers. The focus is on the child’s current living situation at the time that parental rights are terminated, and the child’s need for stability and permanency is presumed to be best served by remaining in the current home if the caregiver is seeking adoption. (See *In re Sarah S.* (1996) 43 Cal.App.4th 274, 285 [by its plain language this subdivision overrides other statutory preferences for relative placement when the issue is placement for adoption].)

The current-caregiver preference should persist even if a caregiver indicated, prior to the court’s decision to terminate parental rights, a preference for guardianship. (*In re P.C.* (2006) 137 Cal. App.4th 279, 289–292 [disapproving of the social services agency’s practice of coercing caregivers into adopting, and clarifying that “the caregiver may seek an alternative permanency plan and also remain entitled to the statutory preference for caregiver adoption under section 366.26, subdivision (k)”].)

d. Posttermination Placement Changes

Section 366.26(n) provides procedural protections against removal of a child from the home of a person identified as a prospective adoptive parent. At the .26 or any subsequent hearing, the court may designate the current caregiver as a prospective adoptive parent if

- The child has lived with the caregiver for six months or more;
- The caregiver expresses a commitment to adoption; and
- The caregiver has taken at least one step to facilitate adoption.
- The steps for facilitating adoption may include, but are not limited to,
- Applying for or cooperating with an adoption home study;
- Being designated by the court or social services agency as the adoptive family;
- Requesting de facto parent status;
- Signing an adoptive placement agreement;
- Discussing a postadoption contact agreement;



- Working to overcome identified impediments to adoption; and
- Attending required classes for prospective adoptive parents.

(§ 366.26(n)(2).)

Except in emergency situations (immediate risk of physical or emotional harm), the child may not be removed from the prospective adoptive parent's home without prior notice. If either the child or the prospective adoptive parent files a petition objecting to the removal, the court must hold a hearing at which it will determine whether removal is justified based on a best-interest standard. (*In re Lauren R.* (2007) 148 Cal.App.4th 841, footnote 3 ["A prospective adoptive parent has the right to a hearing before SSA can remove a child from his or her home unless there is an immediate risk of harm to the child. The child shall not be removed unless the juvenile court finds removal is in the child's best interests."]; see Caregivers fact sheet.)

Prior to enactment of section 366.26(n), the county social services agency had sole discretion over all placements from the date of termination of parental rights until filing of the petition for adoption, and removals could be challenged only as an abuse of discretion. Under that standard, the court may not interfere with the county social service agency's placement decisions unless shown to be "patently absurd or unquestionably not in the minor's best interests." (*Dept. of Social Services v. Superior Court (Theodore D.)* (1997) 58 Cal.App.4th 721, 724–725; see Relative Placements fact sheet.)

2. Adoption Identified as Goal and Hearing Continued if Child Difficult to Place—Section 366.26(c)(3)

If the court finds that the child has a probability of adoption but is difficult to place and there is no identified prospective adoptive parent, it may continue the case for no more than 180 days to allow the social services agency to seek an adoptive family. The court may take this step only if it has determined that termination would not be detrimental to the child (i.e., that none of the 366.26(c)(1) exceptions applies). Under this option, parental rights stay intact for the time being but adoption is identified as the permanent goal.

The finding that a child has a probability of adoption must be proved by clear and convincing evidence. (*In re Ramone R.*, *supra*, 132 Cal.App.4th at p. 1351 [no evidence supported finding of probability of adoption for a special-needs child with several failed placements whose behaviors included head-banging and feces-smearing].)

During the 180-day period, in an effort to locate an adoptive family, the social services agency must contact other public and private adoption agencies and ask the child (if aged 10 or older) to identify persons important to him or her. At the continued hearing, the court does not readdress the issues already determined (such as inapplicability of the (c)(1)(A) or (B) exceptions) but is limited to either terminating parental rights or appointing a legal guardian. (§ 366.26(c)(3).)

A child can be designated as “difficult to place” only based on

- Membership in a sibling group;
- The presence of a diagnosed medical, physical, or mental handicap; or
- The child’s age (seven years or older).

(*Ibid.*)

Current placement in the same home is not required for children to qualify as members of a sibling group. (*In re Gabriel G.* (2005) 134 Cal.App.4th 1428, 1438.)



This provision can be effectively used to prevent termination of parental rights for a child who, because of special needs, might otherwise become a “legal orphan.” A finding that a child is difficult to place appropriately puts the pressure on the social services agency to prove through action that it can find an adoptive home for a child (or group of children) whose prospects for adoption seem limited.

3. Appoint a Guardian—Sections 366.26(b)(3) and (5)

If the court finds that adoption will not be in the child’s best interest because section 366.26(c)(1)(A) or (c)(1)(B)(i)–(vi) applies, section 366.26(b)(3) allows the court to appoint the current relative caregiver



as the child's guardian. If a relative guardian is not available, section 366.26(b)(5) allows the court to appoint a nonrelative guardian.

The court may base a guardianship order on a finding that reasonable reunification services were never provided or that the social services agency failed to find an adoptive home for a difficult-to-place child within the 180-day period.

Before entering an order of guardianship, the court must read and consider the guardianship assessment prepared pursuant to section 361.5(g), 366.21(i), or 366.22(c)(1). Legal guardianship must be considered before permanent placement with a fit and willing relative as long as it is in the child's best interest and a suitable guardian is available. (§ 366.26(b).)

With the consent of the social services agency, following termination of parental rights the court may appoint a guardian to serve until finalization of the adoption. (§ 366.26(j).)



Appointment of a guardian pending adoption may be an important advocacy option, especially in the case of a child with disabilities whose medical or educational needs may require someone with the legal authorization to make decisions and sign consent forms.

4. Placement With a Fit and Willing Relative—Section 366.26(b)(6)

The court must order a permanent plan of placement with a fit and willing relative if the child is living with an approved relative who is willing and capable of providing a stable and permanent environment, but unwilling to become a legal guardian. The child must not be removed from the home if the court finds that removal would be seriously detrimental to the child's emotional well-being because he or she has substantial psychological ties to the relative caretaker. (§ 366.26(c)(4)(B)(i).)

5. Retention in Foster Care With a Permanent Plan— Section 366.26(b)(7)

In the statutory scheme of dependency, the least-favored outcome is an order placing the child in foster care with a permanent plan of adoption, tribal customary adoption, guardianship, or placement with a fit and willing relative, or, for a child aged 16 years or older, another planned permanent living arrangement (APPLA). Such an order must be reviewed every six months under section 366.3. (§ 366.26(b)(7).) The social services agency must continue to actively seek permanency options other than foster care and ensure that the child is in the most family-like setting possible.

Ordering that the child remain in foster care or APPLA while the county attempts to achieve the permanent plan is disfavored because it does not provide the child with the security of a permanent, caring family setting. Continuum of Care Reform reemphasized the importance of achieving the permanency represented by adoption, guardianship, or placement with a fit and willing relative by requiring the county to identify the barriers to achieving permanence for children who remain in foster care and to discuss how those barriers are being addressed. (§ 16501.1(g)(15)(A).) The court is then required to identify those barriers at the section 366.26 hearing and subsequent status review hearings. (§§ 366.26(c)(4)(A), 366.3(h)(1).)

The child cannot be in two permanent plans simultaneously, so, when ordering that a child remain in foster care, the court must terminate any existing guardianships. (*In re Carrie W.* (2003) 110 Cal.App.4th 746, 760.)



The *In re Carrie W.* decision does not contradict the provision under section 366.26(j) allowing the court to appoint a guardian after termination of parental rights while adoption is pending, as in that instance there remains only one permanent plan—adoption. Guardianship is granted only as a temporary measure to expedite legal decisionmaking until the adoption can be finalized.

If the child's current caregiver is a nonrelative to whom the child has substantial psychological ties and is unwilling to be named



guardian but is willing and capable of providing a stable and permanent home, the child must not be removed if the court finds that removal would be seriously detrimental to the child's emotional well-being. (§ 366.26(c)(4)(B)(ii).)

If the court has ordered that the child remain in a planned permanent living arrangement with a relative caregiver, the court may authorize that relative to make decisions and provide legal consent for the child's medical care. (§ 366.27(a).) The court may also limit the parent's right to make educational decisions for the child and appoint the foster parent, relative caretaker, or nonrelative extended family member as the responsible adult authorized to do so. (§§ 361(a)(1)(E), 366.27(b); Ed. Code, § 56055; Cal. Rules of Court, rule 5.651.)

ANCILLARY ORDERS AND OTHER ISSUES

1. Visitation—Section 366.26(c)(4)(C)

If the court orders the child into a plan of guardianship, placement with a fit and willing relative, or foster care with another permanent plan, it must also enter orders for visitation with the parent unless it finds by a preponderance of the evidence that visitation would be detrimental to the child. (§ 366.26(c)(4)(C).) The court may not delegate authority to the guardian to determine whether visits will occur and, if authorizing visitation, must also make orders as to frequency and duration. (*In re M.R.* (2005) 132 Cal.App.4th 269, 274–275.)

2. Termination of Jurisdiction Under Legal Guardianship—Section 366.3(a)

Once a guardian is appointed, the court may either continue jurisdiction over the child as a dependent or terminate dependency jurisdiction while maintaining jurisdiction over the child as a ward of the legal guardianship as authorized under section 366.4. If a relative with whom the child has been placed for the prior six consecutive months is appointed guardian, the court must terminate dependency jurisdiction under the Kin-GAP program unless the guardian objects or exceptional circumstances exist. If dependency



jurisdiction is dismissed under these circumstances, the court retains jurisdiction over the child as a ward of the legal guardianship. (See Termination of Jurisdiction: Common Issues fact sheet.)

3. Designation of Prospective Adoptive Parent

The court can designate the current caregiver as a prospective adoptive parent if all the conditions of section 366.26(n) are satisfied.



If the caregiver qualifies, counsel should consider requesting this designation as soon as possible (i.e., at the first .26 hearing) to protect the child's placement. Note that the language of the statute does not require parental rights to have been terminated before this designation can be made. (See Caregivers: De Facto Parent, Prospective Adoptive Parent, and Nonrelative Extended Family Member fact sheet for detailed discussion.)

4. Orders Necessary for Referral to Special Immigrant Juvenile Status

Undocumented dependent children may petition federal immigration authorities for classification as a special immigrant juvenile (SIJ) if they meet requirements specified by federal law but determined under state law. If a child's petition for SIJS is approved, the child may remain in the United States and apply for adjustment to lawful permanent resident status. To be eligible even to file an SIJ petition, the child must first obtain a state juvenile court order that includes three findings or conclusions. (See 8 C.F.R. § 204.11; Code Civ. Proc., § 155.) If a person petitions the court to make SIJ findings, and evidence exists to support those findings, the court must issue the order. (Code Civ. Proc., § 155(b).) The evidence may be a declaration by the child who is the subject of the petition. (*Ibid.*)

The court's order must include all of the following findings, that the child was either

- Declared a dependent of the court; or
- Legally committed to, or placed under the custody of, a state agency or department, or an individual or entity appointed



by the court. The order must include the date on which the dependency, commitment, or custody was ordered;

- Reunification of the child with one or both of the child's parents was determined not to be viable because of abuse, neglect, abandonment, or a similar basis under California law. The order must include the date reunification was determined not to be viable; and
- It is not in the best interest of the child to be returned to the child's, or his or her parent's, previous country of nationality or country of last habitual residence.

Form JV-356, *Request for Special Immigrant Juvenile Findings*, and form JV-357, *Special Immigrant Juvenile Findings*, are mandatory forms to be used to comply with SIJS requirements. The court may make additional findings that are supported by evidence only if requested by a party.



Counsel for a child who was born in a foreign country and who is not a documented immigrant should request SIJS findings following the dispositional hearing if reunification services are not offered to at least one parent, after reunification services are terminated at a status review hearing or at the .26 hearing, and refer the child for assistance in filing an SIJS petition.



REVIEW OF

PERMANENT PLAN

REVIEW OF PERMANENT PLAN CHECKLIST (§ 366.3): CHILD'S ATTORNEY

BEFORE

- ☐ Review social worker's report to ensure that social services agency is
 - ☐ Providing all court-ordered services.
 - ☐ Facilitating visitation orders.
 - ☐ Making all efforts to ensure child is placed in a safe and permanent home.
 - ☐ Exercising due diligence to locate an appropriate relative for placement or evaluating relatives already submitted for placement.
 - ☐ Taking action to identify and maintain relationships with persons important to children 10 or older who have been out of home for six months or more.
 - ☐ Ensuring educational needs are being addressed and met (placement, achievement, etc.) and for children 16 or older, assistance with applications for postsecondary education including career and technical schools.
 - ☐ Ensuring children with disabilities receive appropriate services (special education, regional center, Department of Rehabilitation, etc.).
 - ☐ Actively involving the child in the case plan development and that the plan meets the child's needs, and that youth 12 or older had an opportunity to review, sign, and receive a copy of the case plan.
 - ☐ Submitting evidence and documentation under section 366.1(l) for a child in a short-term residential therapeutic program or community treatment facility.
 - ☐ Conducting Child and Family Team (CFT) meetings (section 16501).
- ☐ Contact child to discuss in private
 - ☐ Progress in school, counseling, or other programs.



- ☐ Feelings about current placement and any particular concerns or problems (placement preferences in general).
- ☐ Feelings about permanent plan and/or where applicable, approaching 18 years of age (e.g., extended foster care).
- ☐ Need for therapy or other means of emotional support.
- ☐ Desire to attend any religious services or activities.
- ☐ Participation in extracurricular, cultural, or social activities.
- ☐ For children 16 years or older, confirm that they received information, documents, and services listed in section 391.
- ☐ Visitation/contact with parent, siblings, and others.
- ☐ Preferences for a Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA).
- ☐ For a child 10 or older, ask whether the child wants to attend the hearing. If so, ensure the agency makes the appropriate arrangements and if not, request a continuance to enable the child to be present.
- ☐ Is there anything that the child wants you to convey to the court.
- ☐ Contact caregiver regarding
 - ☐ Any impediments to adoption or guardianship.
 - ☐ Provision of services to the child by the social services agency to meet any special needs.
 - ☐ Child's progress in school, counseling, and other programs.
- ☐ Consider termination of jurisdiction—is it in the child's best interest?
- ☐ Consider return to home of parent or reinstatement of reunification/parental rights.



DURING

- ☐ Inform court of the child's wishes and any identified needs.
- ☐ Object to termination of jurisdiction if not in child's best interest (e.g., if child is pursuing legalization through Special Immigrant Juvenile Status [SIJS], or Kin-GAP funding is not yet available).
- ☐ Request any appropriate orders (e.g., limitation of parent's education rights).
- ☐ Consider asking for hearing if it appears agency arbitrarily moved child.
- ☐ Ensure court addresses
 - ☐ Whether reasonable efforts were made to finalize permanent plan, including ongoing and intensive efforts for children in a planned permanent living arrangement.
 - ☐ Whether the agency is making reasonable efforts to locate a child who left placement (e.g., on runaway status or missing).
 - ☐ Child's particular educational, developmental, and mental health needs.
 - ☐ For children in another planned permanent living arrangement (APPLA)/foster care with a permanent plan,
 - ☐ The barriers to achieving the permanent plan (i.e., return home, adoption, tribal customary adoption, legal guardianship, placement with a fit and willing relative).
 - ☐ The child's placement preferences.
 - ☐ Reasons why APPLA is the best permanent plan and the compelling reasons why other permanent plans are not in the child's best interests.
 - ☐ Document unsuccessful efforts to place the youth with family members including utilizing social media to locate biological relatives (42 U.S.C. § 675a(a).)
 - ☐ Appropriateness of all permanent plans, including return to parent.
 - ☐ Reinstatement of reunification. (§ 366.3(e)(10).)
 - ☐ Continuing necessity and appropriateness of placement.



- ☐ Adequacy of services provided to the child.
- ☐ Sufficiency of efforts made to place siblings together and facilitate contact.
- ☐ Adequacy of efforts to identify and facilitate relationships with individuals important to children 10 years of age or older. (§ 366.3(e)(3).)
- ☐ Provision of services (e.g., Independent Living Program classes) for transition to successful adulthood for children 14 years of age or older. (§ 366.3(e)(10).)
- ☐ Whether to limit the parent's right to make education decisions.
- ☐ Whether setting a .26 hearing is in the child's best interest.

AFTER

- ☐ Consult with child to explain court orders and rulings and answer questions.
- ☐ Send letter to caregiver with contact information and update on orders and rulings.
- ☐ If in client's interest, file a 388 motion seeking change/modification of orders.
- ☐ File necessary forms/motions if pursuing appeal, writ, or emergency writ.



REVIEW OF PERMANENT PLAN CHECKLIST (§ 366.3): PARENT'S ATTORNEY

BEFORE

- ☐ Contact client to discuss
 - ☐ Current situation and progress in any programs or services.
 - ☐ Exercising due diligence to locate relatives for placement.
 - ☐ Visitation and contact, including sibling contact. (§ 16002(e).)
 - ☐ Updated contact information.
 - ☐ Appropriateness of current placement.
 - ☐ Availability of any relatives or nonrelative extended family members (NREFMs) for placement.
 - ☐ Input regarding the child's educational, physical, mental health (e.g., psychotropic medication), or developmental (e.g., regional center services) needs.
 - ☐ For a child that left placement (e.g., on runaway status), if the parent has had any contact with the child or knows about the child's whereabouts.
- ☐ Review social worker's report to ensure that social services agency is
 - ☐ Continuing contact with client and visitation as ordered.
 - ☐ Continuing contact with relatives and important people.
 - ☐ Making efforts to locate a permanent home.
 - ☐ Exercising due diligence to locate relatives for placement.
 - ☐ Providing necessary services to the child (including successful adulthood skills for a child 14 and older).
 - ☐ Noticing parent: Service no earlier than 30 days nor later than 15 days before hearing. (§ 295.)
- ☐ Contact caregiver, if appropriate, to discuss
 - ☐ Current contact with client and siblings and willingness to continue if jurisdiction terminated.
 - ☐ Whether guardianship is appropriate.



DURING

- ☐ Inform court of the client's wishes.
- ☐ Request whether client can avail self of any orders relating to the child's services (e.g., family therapy).
- ☐ Ensure court addresses
 - ☐ Continued contact and reunification possibilities. (§ 366.3(e).)
 - ☐ Whether reasonable efforts have been made to finalize permanent placement.
 - ☐ Exit orders if terminating jurisdiction prior to emancipation.
 - ☐ Section 391 requirements (if child has reached age of majority).

AFTER

- ☐ Consult with client to explain court orders and rulings and answer questions.
- ☐ Set timelines and future goals for client.
- ☐ File necessary forms/motions if pursuing an appeal or emergency writ.



BLACK LETTER DISCUSSION

As long as a child's case remains open under dependency jurisdiction, periodic reviews of the permanent plan (sometimes called permanency reviews) are conducted to assess the child's safety and the appropriateness of plans and services to effectuate permanency. (§ 366.3(d); Cal. Rules of Court, rule 5.740(b).) If the permanent plan is adoption or guardianship, the court must ensure that the plan is completed as expeditiously as possible. (§ 366.3(a)(1); Cal. Rules of Court, rule 5.740(a).) The Court of Appeal in *In re A.B.* (2022) 79 Cal.App.5th 906, 924 explained, "After the juvenile court has selected a permanent plan at the 366.26 hearing, it must conduct periodic reviews under section 366.3. If the permanent plan is either for adoption or guardianship, [§ 366.3] calls for the juvenile court to retain jurisdiction until either step is accomplished, and to review the child's status every six months to ensure that the plan is completed as expeditiously as possible. For all other children (i.e., those who have neither been ordered placed for adoption nor with a legal guardian), section 366.3 specifies that the status of the child shall be reviewed at least every six months in order to inquire into the progress made to provide a permanent home for the child which inquiry also shall consider the safety of the child."



Permanency reviews are intended to keep the case actively moving—to achieve a permanent plan, which can be adoption, tribal customary adoption, guardianship, return to the parent's custody, or placement with a fit and willing relative. While children 16 years of age or older may be in another planned permanent living arrangement, the agency must conduct ongoing and intensive efforts to finalize a permanent plan of either return home, adoption, tribal customary adoption, legal guardianship, or placement with a fit and willing relative (§§ 366.3(h), 16501.1(g)(15).) Attorneys carry a heavy responsibility to ensure that the child is not just "warehoused" and that all efforts are expended to get the child into a safe, loving, and permanent home.



TIMING AND SETTING OF REVIEW HEARINGS

A case review must be held at least once every six months following termination or denial of reunification services. (§ 366.3(a)(1); Cal. Rules of Court, rule 5.740(a) & (b).) Generally the review may be conducted by either a court or a local review board/administrative panel. However, the review must be before a court if

- The child has been freed and placed for adoption;
- The child, parent, or guardian requests court review;
- Twelve months have passed since an order that the child remain in foster care was made or since the last 366.26 hearing; or
- It has been 12 months since the last court review.

(§ 366.3(d); see *In re Dakota H.* (2005) 132 Cal.App.4th 212, 226.)

NOTICE

Notice must describe the type of hearing, any recommended changes in the child's status or custody, and any recommendation that a new section 366.26 hearing be set to select a more permanent plan. Notice must be served between 15 and 30 days before the hearing. Service must be by first-class mail to the last known address of the mother, the presumed father, the legal guardians, the child and dependent siblings if aged 10 or older (and their caregivers and attorneys), the child's caregiver (relative, foster parent, Indian custodian, foster family agency, or community care facility), and all attorneys of record in the case. If it is known or there is reason to know the child is an Indian child, notice must also be sent by registered mail (return receipt requested) to the Indian custodian and tribe if known or to the Bureau of Indian Affairs and must include a statement that the Indian custodian or tribe may intervene at any point in the proceedings. Parents whose rights have been terminated are not entitled to notice, nor are alleged fathers unless the social services agency is recommending that the court set a new section 366.26 hearing. (§ 295; Cal. Rules of Court, rule 5.740.)



BURDEN OF PROOF AND STATUTORY ELEMENTS

For a child who remains in foster care, continued care is presumed to be in the child's best interest unless a parent seeking further reunification proves by a preponderance of the evidence that further efforts at reunification are in the child's best alternative. (§ 366.3(f); Cal. Rules of Court, rule 5.740(b)(7).) The Court of Appeal held that this standard mirrors that required in a hearing on a section 388 petition, i.e., the parent carries the burden to show by a preponderance of the evidence that the requested change (resumption of reunification services) is in the child's best interest. (*Nahid H. v. Superior Court* (1997) 53 Cal.App.4th 1051, 1068, 1071.)

At each permanency review for a child who remains in foster care, the court must consider all permanency planning options including return to the home of the parent. (§ 366.3(h); Cal. Rules of Court, rule 5.740(b)(7).) The social services agency need not continue to prove the parent unfit at each status review; rather, as at a section 388 hearing, the burden has shifted to the parent to prove changed circumstances and that return would be in the child's best interest. (See *In re Dakota H.*, *supra*, 132 Cal.App.4th at p. 226.)

Only on finding compelling reasons that return home, placement for adoption, appointment of a guardian, and placement with a fit and willing relative would not be appropriate permanency plans may a court order another planned permanent living arrangement for a child 16 years of age or older or continuation in foster care with a permanent plan for children under 16 years of age. The court must set a selection and implementation hearing unless it finds clear and convincing evidence of a compelling reason that doing so is not in the best interest of a child in foster care because the child is being returned to the home of a parent, the child is not a proper subject for adoption, or there is no one willing to accept legal guardianship. (§ 366.3(h).)

Each six-month review for a child in a placement other than with a guardian must address progress to provide a permanent home, the child's safety, and each of the following:



- Continuing necessity for and appropriateness of the placement;
- For a child placed in a short-term residential therapeutic program (STRTP) or community treatment facility, the continuing necessity for and appropriateness of this placement considering evidence and documentation submitted under section 366.1(l), and whether the child's needs can be met in a family-based setting;
- Identification of and actions to maintain relationships with individuals (other than siblings) important to a child aged 10 or older who has been in out-of-home placement for six months or longer;
- Continuing appropriateness of the child's permanent plan;
- Barriers to achieving the permanent plan and the county's efforts to address those barriers;
- Extent of agency's compliance with the plan and reasonableness of its efforts to finalize the permanent plan of return home, adoption, tribal customary adoption for an Indian child, legal guardianship, or placement with a fit and willing relative. For a child aged 16 or older whose permanent plan is another planned permanent living arrangement, this includes ongoing and intensive efforts to finalize the permanent plan;
- Whether parent's educational rights should be limited under section 361;
- Whether the child's educational, developmental, and mental health needs are being met;
- Adequacy of services to the child, including those required under section 391 for teens nearing emancipation;
- Extent of parent's progress in alleviating or mitigating problems necessitating foster care;
- Likely date child may be returned to a safe home or placed for adoption, guardianship, or another planned permanent arrangement;
- Whether the child has dependent siblings and if so
 - Nature of the relationship;



- Appropriateness of developing or maintaining the relationship;
- If not placed together, efforts to do so or why not appropriate, and the frequency of visits; and
- Impact of the sibling relationship on the child's placement and permanency planning;
- For children aged 14 and older and nonminor dependents, services to assist in the transition to successful adulthood; and
- For children aged 16 and older placed in another planned permanent living arrangement,
 - Discussion of the child's desired permanency outcome;
 - An explanation why another planned permanent living arrangement is the best permanency option for the child;
 - The compelling reasons why it is not in the best interest of the child to return home, be placed for adoption or tribal customary adoption, be placed with a legal guardian, or be placed with a fit and willing relative;
 - The ongoing and intensive efforts to achieve one of the other permanent plans;
 - Whether the caregiver is following the reasonable and prudent parent standard; and
 - Whether the child has access to age- and developmentally appropriate activities. (§ 366.3(h).)

(§ 366.3(e).)

Additionally, if parental rights have been terminated and adoptive placement has been ordered, or tribal customary adoption is being considered, the court must inquire about the status of the development of a voluntary postadoption sibling contact agreement, and the agency's report should address

- Child's present placement;
- Whether the child has been placed with a prospective adoptive parent and, if not, efforts to identify a prospective adoptive parent and progress in search for an adoptive placement;



- Whether the adoptive placement agreement has been signed and filed;
- If the child has not been adoptively placed, identification of and actions to maintain relationships with individuals (other than siblings) important to the child;
- Appropriateness of postadoptive sibling contact pursuant to section 366.29;
- Any impediments to adoption or adoptive placement; and
- Anticipated date of adoptive placement or finalization of the adoption.

(§ 366.3(g).)

Additionally, if parental rights have been terminated and adoptive placement has been ordered, or tribal customary adoption is being considered, the court must inquire about the status of the development of a voluntary postadoption sibling contact agreement, and the agency's report should address

- Child's present placement;
- Whether the child has been placed with a prospective adoptive parent and, if not, efforts to identify a prospective adoptive parent and progress in search for an adoptive placement;
- Whether the adoptive placement agreement has been signed and filed;
- If the child has not been adoptively placed, identification of and actions to maintain relationships with individuals (other than siblings) important to the child;
- Appropriateness of postadoptive sibling contact pursuant to section 366.29;
- Any impediments to adoption or adoptive placement; and
- Anticipated date of adoptive placement or finalization of the adoption.

(§ 366.3(g).)



CHILD APPROACHING MAJORITY AND NONMINOR DEPENDENTS

At the last review hearing before a foster child turns 18, the court must ensure all of the following:

- The child's case plans includes a plan for the child to satisfy one or more of the participation conditions described in section 11403(b), so that the child is eligible to remain in foster care as a nonminor dependent (NMD);
- The child has been informed of his or her right to seek termination of dependency jurisdiction; and
- The child has been informed of his or her right to have dependency reinstated under section 388(e).

(§ 366.31(a).)

At the last review hearing before a foster child turns 18 and at all review hearings concerning a nonminor dependent, the agency's report must address

- The minor's and NMD's plans to remain in foster care and plans to meet one or more of the participation conditions described in section 11403(b)(1)–(5);
- The social worker's efforts made and assistance provided to the child or NMD so that he or she will be able to meet the participation conditions; and
- Efforts made to comply with the requirements of section 391.

(§ 366.31.)

For nonminor dependents, the review hearing must be conducted in a way that respects the youth's status as a legal adult—focused on the goals and services described in the youth's transitional independent living case plan, as described in section 11400(y), including efforts made to maintain connections with caring and permanently committed adults—and attended, as appropriate, by additional participants invited by the NMD. (§ 366.31.)

The court must review the status of the NMD at least once every six months and must make the findings required in section 366.31(d) for an NMD whose case plan is continued reunification



services, or section 366.31(e) for an NMD who is no longer receiving court-ordered reunification services and is in a permanent plan of another planned permanent living arrangement. If the court is considering a permanent plan of adoption, it should proceed under section 366.31(f).



See the Nonminor Dependents fact sheet for a thorough discussion of the court process and report requirements for NMDs.

REASONABLE EFFORTS / SERVICES

After termination of reunification, the reviewing body must make a determination at each review as to the reasonableness of the social services agency's efforts to make and finalize a permanent plan. (§ 366.3(d)(2), (e) & (g)(12).) The focus of the review is to assess the agency's compliance with the child's case plan (i.e., the adequacy of services to the child) as well as the reasonableness of efforts to "return the child to a safe home" or otherwise finalize a permanent placement. (§ 366.3(e)(4) & (6).)



Minor's counsel should evaluate the services currently being provided to the child with special attention paid to the issues delineated in section 366.3(e) and (g) in light of the client's specific circumstances. If the child's needs are not being adequately met or new problems that require intervention have arisen, the case plan may need to be updated and a request made for appropriate services. Furthermore, if court-ordered services in the existing case plan have not been provided and informal attempts at resolution through the social worker have failed to resolve the deficiencies, counsel might consider requesting a contested hearing on the reasonableness of the agency's efforts.

RIGHT TO CONTEST

Unless parental rights have been terminated, a parent has a right to have notice of and participate in section 366.3 status review hearings. (§§ 295, 366.3(f); Cal. Rules of Court, rule 5.740(a).) The right to participate necessarily includes the right to challenge a proposed



order through presentation of testimony or other evidence, cross-examination of witnesses, and argument. (*In re Kelly D.* (2000) 82 Cal.App.4th 433, 439–440.) A parent has the right to have notice of and to contest any recommended changes, such as modifications to visitation. (*Id.* at p. 440.) The right to contest extends to challenges to the contents of the report and the appropriateness of continued foster care for the child. (*In re Josiah S.* (2002) 102 Cal.App.4th 403, 417.)

A parent does not, however, have the right to contest the court's decision that changed circumstances warrant the setting of a selection and implementation hearing under section 366.26. (See *San Diego County Dept. of Social Services v. Superior Court (Sylvia A.)* (1996) 13 Cal.4th 882, 891–892.) Nor is a parent necessarily entitled to a contested hearing on the issue of return; the court need only “consider” that option after accepting an offer of proof. (*Maricela C. v. Superior Court* (1998) 66 Cal.App.4th 1138, 1147.)

POSSIBLE OUTCOMES OF HEARING

1. Return Home

Both the Welfare and Institutions Code and the California Rules of Court make it clear that for a child who remains in foster care, the option of return to the parent's custody is on the table at a section 366.3 review. (§ 366.3(e)(4) & (7), (f); Cal. Rules of Court, rule 5.740(b)(7).) Section 366.3(h)(1) explicitly states that “the court shall consider all permanency planning options for the child including whether the child should be returned to the home of the parent.” Additionally, each six-month review must address the “extent of progress the parents or legal guardians have made toward alleviating or mitigating the causes necessitating placement in foster care.” (§ 366.3(e)(4).) However, the court need only “consider” return; a parent does not have the right to a contested hearing on the issue if the parent's offer of proof is found insufficient. (*Maricela C., supra*, 66 Cal.App.4th at p. 1147.)



2. Reinstate Reunification Services

Following termination of reunification services, return to the parent or guardian is no longer the focus of the court's proceedings. In fact, it is presumed that continued out-of-home care is in the best interest of the child unless the parent can show by a preponderance of evidence that reinstatement of reunification services is the child's best alternative. However, if the parent does successfully meet this standard, the court has the discretion to order resumption of reunification services for a period not to exceed six months. (§ 366.3(f); Cal. Rules of Court, rule 5.740(b)(7).)

3. Set a Section 366.26 Hearing

At the 12-month hearing for a child who remains in foster care, the court must set a section 366.26 hearing absent clear and convincing evidence that there is a compelling reason that such a hearing is not in the child's best interest. Compelling reasons include return of the child to the parent's home or a finding that the child is not the proper subject for adoption and there is no one to assume guardianship. (§ 366.3(h); Cal. Rules of Court, rule 5.740(b).)

At any section 366.3 review, the court may set a selection and implementation hearing *sua sponte* if it determines that circumstances have changed since the child was ordered to remain in foster care while the agency worked to achieve the selected permanent plan. (Cal. Rules of Court, rule 5.740(b)(5).) Additionally, the court may set a hearing to consider a more permanent plan on finding changed circumstances based on the request of any party (including the social services agency); the filing of a section 388 petition is not a prerequisite. (*Sylvia A.*, *supra*, 13 Cal.4th at pp. 891–892.) Neither a 388 petition nor a separate noticed hearing is necessary in order for the court to set a new selection and implementation hearing to consider change from guardianship to adoption. (See § 366.3(c); *In re Andrea R.* (1999) 75 Cal.App.4th 1093, 1106–1108.)



4. Terminate Jurisdiction

The court may not close the case of a child under age 18 absent return to a parent or finalization of guardianship or adoption. There are several circumstances, though, under which the court may terminate jurisdiction at a section 366.3 review, including the following:

a. Return to a Parent

Although this option is possible, rarely would a court be comfortable with releasing a child from foster care to a parent and then immediately terminating jurisdiction. The code does not specify the procedure to be followed when a child is returned to the parental home under section 366.3(e) and (f), but usually the court will at least want to maintain supervision and provide services for a period of time to ensure that the return is safe and successful. If jurisdiction is to be terminated, however, any appropriate exit or family law orders regarding custody and/or visitation should be made. (§ 362.4; see Termination of Jurisdiction: Common Issues fact sheet.)

b. Finalization of Adoption

The court must terminate jurisdiction upon finalization of adoption. (§ 366.3(a); Cal. Rules of Court, rules 5.730(g), 5.740(a)(3).)

c. Appointment of Legal Guardian

When a nonrelative is appointed legal guardian, the court has the discretion to continue dependency jurisdiction or to terminate the dependency case while retaining jurisdiction over the child as a ward of the legal guardianship. (§ 366.3(a); Cal. Rules of Court, rule 5.740(a)(4).) If a relative with whom the child has been placed for the preceding year is appointed guardian, the court must close the dependency case under the Kin-GAP funding program unless the guardian objects or the court finds exceptional circumstances. After closing the dependency case, the juvenile court retains jurisdiction of the child as a ward of the guardianship under section 366.4. (§ 366.3(a).)





Before the court terminates jurisdiction for a child in a legal guardianship, it is important for everyone involved to determine whether and how closing the case will affect the child's eligibility for funding and supportive services, especially if the child is receiving a special rate because of medical, emotional, or behavioral problems; and/or a childcare subsidy. (See discussion of Kin-GAP, Kin-GAP Plus, and federal subsidized guardianship program in fact sheets on funding and termination of jurisdiction.)

d. Placement With Fit and Willing Relative

If the child is placed with an approved relative who is not willing to become a legal guardian, the court must order that the child's permanent plan is placement with a fit and willing relative. (§§ 366.26(c)(4)(B), 366.3(h)(1).)

e. Options for Foster Youth Aged 18–21

Once a dependent youth reaches age 18, the youth may either request termination of dependency or remain in foster care as a nonminor dependent up to age 21.

Before terminating jurisdiction for a foster youth 18 or older, the court must conduct a hearing and ensure that the county agency has fulfilled all the requirements of section 391, including providing the youth with essential documents; assisting the youth in obtaining housing, employment and/or college or vocational education, and medical insurance and other benefits; and assisting the youth in maintaining relationships with relatives and other important persons in the youth's life. The JV-365 form, *Termination of Dependency Jurisdiction—Child Attaining Age of Majority* (essentially a checklist of the section 391 requirements), must be provided to the court, child, parent or guardian, and Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) at least 10 days before the hearing. (Cal. Rules of Court, rule 5.555(c)(4), 5.740(c).)



If the youth is an undocumented immigrant with a pending application for Special Immigrant Juvenile Status (SIJS) *do not allow*



jurisdiction to be terminated until legal permanent resident status has been granted. (See further discussion in Immigration fact sheet.)

5. Placement in Another Planned Permanent Living Arrangement

At the review for a child aged 16 or older who remains in foster care, the court may determine that the child should be placed in another planned permanent living arrangement (APPLA) only if it finds compelling evidence that neither return to the parent, nor adoption, nor legal guardianship, nor placement with a fit and willing relative is in the child's best interest. (§ 366.3(h).) The phrase "another planned permanent living arrangement" is not synonymous with "long-term foster care" and is an option that should be invoked rarely, when the best interests of children aged 16 and older dictate that other permanent plans are not in the child's best interest. The court must consider and address issues related to the appropriateness of the plan including

- Asking the child about the child's desired permanency outcome;
- Explaining why another planned permanent living arrangement is the best permanency plan for the child;
- Stating the compelling reasons why it is not in the best interest of the child to select one of the other permanent plans; and
- Identifying the barriers to achieving the permanent plan and the efforts made by the agency to address those barriers.

In addition, the agency has obligations. When a child is placed in another planned permanent living arrangement, the social study prepared by the agency must

- Include a description of the intensive and ongoing efforts to return the child home, place the child for adoption, or establish legal guardianship;
- Describe the steps taken to ensure that the caregiver is following the reasonable and prudent parent standard;
- Detail the steps taken to determine whether the child has regular, ongoing opportunities to engage in age- and developmentally appropriate activities; and



- List the efforts to find biological relatives, which includes using social media (§ 16501.1(g)(15)(C).)

6. Continue in Foster Care With a Permanent Plan Until Next Review

An order that a child remain in foster care with a permanent plan of adoption, tribal customary adoption, guardianship, or placement with a fit and willing relative can be made only if the court finds clear and convincing evidence of a compelling reason not to set an implementation and selection hearing. Compelling reasons may include a determination by the agency that it is unlikely that the child will be adopted or that one of the exceptions under section 366.26(c)(1) applies. (§ 366.3(h).) If the court does continue the child in foster care, it must continue supervision and set the case for a review within six months, at which time it (or the local review board) must address continuing efforts to return the child to the home or to finalize a permanent placement as well as all the criteria of section 366.3(e). (§ 366.3(d) & (e).) Two permanent plans cannot exist concurrently; therefore, an existing guardianship must be terminated once a child is ordered into foster care or another planned permanent living arrangement. (*In re Carrie W.* (2003) 110 Cal. App.4th 746, 760.)

For nonminor dependents, every six months the court must conduct review hearings focusing on the goals and services of the youth's transitional independent living case plan. (§ 366.31(c).)



Both federal and state legislators have recognized that foster care does not generally provide permanency but rather subjects a child to multiple placements and, all too often, release from the dependency system at the age of majority with no supportive relationships or structure on which to rely. (*In re Stuart S.* (2002) 104 Cal. App.4th 203, 207.) Counsel should pursue court orders and otherwise advocate to ensure that the agency meets its continuing duty to actively facilitate permanency, whether through return to a parent, guardianship, adoption, or placement with a fit and willing relative.

SUBSEQUENT AND SUPPLEMENTAL PETITIONS

BLACK LETTER DISCUSSION

Once the juvenile court has made a finding that a child is described by section 300, a subsequent petition under section 342 is used to allege new circumstances that may form a separate basis for jurisdiction. A section 387 supplemental petition seeks to change a dependent child's placement with that of a parent or relative to foster care by alleging that the previous disposition has been unsuccessful in the protection or rehabilitation of the child or that the relative's home is no longer appropriate.

Most statutory requirements and relevant appellate decisions are equally applicable to subsequent and supplemental petitions. Therefore, this discussion will initially address the shared standards and procedures and separately address only unique issues.

PROCEDURE, TIMING OF HEARINGS, AND NOTICE

Both subsequent and supplemental petitions are resolved through the same procedural process as that used for an original petition; all the same hearings (detention through disposition) should be held within all the same timelines. (§§ 342, 387(d) & (e); Cal. Rules of Court, rules 5.560(b), 5.565.) Notice requirements are also identical to those for an initial petition. (§ 297(a)(b); Cal. Rules of Court, rule 5.565(c).) As with an initial 300 petition, jurisdictional and dispositional issues must be addressed through a bifurcated hearing. (Cal. Rules of Court, rule 5.565(e); *In re Jonique W.* (1994) 26 Cal.App.4th 685, 691.)

TIME LIMITS ON REUNIFICATION

Following adjudication of the petition, the same rules govern the provision of reunification services at the dispositional hearing on supplemental and subsequent petitions. (*In re Barbara P.* (1994) 30 Cal.App.4th 926, 934.) Reunification services must be provided when a child is removed from parental custody for the first time unless circumstances in section 361.5(b) apply. (*In re Joel T.* (1999) 70 Cal.App.4th 263, 268.) Therefore, if the original dispositional order allowed an undetained child to remain in the parent's custody, receipt of family maintenance and/or preservation services in



the interim should not bar or reduce the duration of reunification services provided at the subsequent disposition. The timeline for reunification begins anew with the child's actual removal from the parent on the 342 or 387 petition. (See *In re A.C.* (2008) 169 Cal. App.4th 636, which states that the timelines do not start running when a previously noncustodial parent receives custody and family maintenance services pursuant to section 361.2, unless the child is later removed from the previously noncustodial parent.)

However, once they have begun to run, the time limits on reunification specified in section 361.5(a) are not tolled during periods of return to parental custody. (§ 361.5(a)(3)(B).) In other words, if at any time during the existing dependency case the court previously ordered the child removed from the parent's custody, the time limits for reunification are not reset upon re-removal. (*In re Barbara P.*, *supra*, 30 Cal.App.4th at p. 933; *In re Damian L.* (2023) 90 Cal. App.5th 357.) The timeline for reunification is measured from the date of initial detention, when the original petition was filed, even if the child was subsequently returned to the parent's custody at the original disposition. (*In re N.M.* (2003) 108 Cal.App.4th 845, 855.)

In cases involving a second removal, the question at disposition on the subsequent or supplemental petition becomes whether reunification services can still be offered and, if so, for what period of time. This determination centers on the length of time since the child was initially detained, whether the parents were offered and received reasonable services in the interim, and, if past the 12-month date, whether there is a substantial probability of return if services are extended to the 18-month limit. (Cal. Rules of Court, rule 5.565(f); *In re N.M.*, *supra*, 108 Cal.App.4th at p. 853; see "Time Limits on Reunification" in the Status Reviews black letter discussion.)

Note that the above constraints on reunification apply only to subsequent or supplemental petitions filed during an open dependency case. If a new section 300 petition is filed involving a child whose prior dependency case had been terminated after successful reunification, the parent is once again entitled to receive services to



reunify unless one of the section 361.5(b) criteria applies. (*Rosa S. v. Superior Court* (2002) 100 Cal.App.4th 1181, 1188.)

SECTION 342

The social services agency may file a subsequent petition at any time following a true finding on the allegations in an original 300 petition. The grounds for jurisdiction it states must be unrelated to those initially alleged. (§ 342; Cal. Rules of Court, rule 5.560(b).) The allegations must be new and must not concern facts or circumstances known to the agency at the time of the initial petition was adjudicated. Reasons for filing a subsequent petition when additional abuse comes to light might include the need for a different case plan offering targeted services or dispositional alternatives. Such a situation might arise, for example, if the sustained allegations involved only inappropriate discipline and the child later makes disclosures concerning sexual abuse. However, when there are facts supporting the filing of a subsequent petition, section 342 suggests that the filing of a section 342 petition may not be discretionary: “In any case in which a minor has been found to be a person described by Section 300 and the petitioner alleges new facts or circumstances, other than those under which the original petition was sustained, sufficient to state that the minor is a person described in Section 300, the petitioner *shall* file a subsequent petition.” (§ 342(a); italics added.)

STATUTORY ELEMENTS

The statutory elements and burdens of proof at each stage of the proceedings on a subsequent petition are the same as those initially required at detention, adjudication, and disposition. (§ 342(b); Cal. Rules of Court, rules 5.560(b), 5.565(e).)

SECTION 387

A section 387 supplemental petition is appropriately filed when a prior disposition has been unsuccessful in protecting or rehabilitating the child or the child’s placement with a relative is no longer appropriate under the criteria of section 361.3. (§ 387(b); Cal. Rules of Court, rule 5.560(c).) It also provides a vehicle for reinstatement

of dependency jurisdiction over former dependent youth who were declared 601 or 602 but whose delinquency status has subsequently been terminated. (§ 387(c).)

WHEN A PETITION IS NECESSARY/STANDING TO CHALLENGE REMOVAL

Much of the case law on section 387 centers on the issue of whether the social services agency must file a petition when seeking to change a child's placement and the related issue of whether the caregiver has standing to challenge removal of a child. Removal from a parent clearly requires filing of a petition and initiation of the attendant procedural protections. (§ 387; see *In re Paul E.* (1995) 39 Cal.App.4th 996, 1000, fn. 2.) Similarly, a petition to terminate a guardianship must be initiated under section 387, not section 388, when termination of the guardianship will result in removal from a relative's home to foster care, regardless of whether the court made a general or a specific placement order. (*In re Jessica C.* (2007) 151 Cal. App.4th 474.)

However, there is a split of authority on the issue of whether removal from a relative (or nonrelative extended family member) caregiver necessarily requires a petition under section 387. One position holds that if the juvenile court simply enters a "general placement" order at disposition (thereby placing the child in the "care and custody" of the agency), the agency has discretion to remove the child from a relative to a placement it deems more suitable; a supplemental petition is not necessary. Furthermore, the relative's status as a de facto parent does not confer a right to continued placement nor trigger the need for a petition or hearing. (*In re Cynthia C.* (1997) 58 Cal. App.4th 1479, 1481, 1490.) But two appellate districts have reached the opposite conclusion, finding that (1) removal from a custodial relative, especially one whose conduct is central to the question of placement, requires filing of a supplemental petition that the relative has standing to contest (*In re Jonique W.*, *supra*, 26 Cal.App.4th at p. 693); and (2) a relative caregiver recognized as a de facto parent has standing to challenge a section 387 petition. (*In re Joel H.* (1993) 19 Cal.App.4th 1185, 1196.) As rule 5.565(e) of the California Rules of



Court requires the court to bifurcate the jurisdiction and disposition hearings generated as a result of the 387 petition, the court must conduct a full disposition hearing once a 387 petition is sustained. (*In re H.G.* (2006) 146 Cal.App.4th 1.)



The safest way to ensure that a relative placement will be protected by the procedural requirements of section 387 is to ensure at the original disposition that the court makes a “specific placement” order with that relative, as authorized under *In re Robert A.* (1992) 4 Cal.App.4th 174, 189–190. (See Relative Placements fact sheet.)

Following termination of parental rights, the transfer of exclusive care and custody of the child to the social services agency “necessarily change[s] any previous placement order,” thereby dispensing with the need for a petition under section 387 for any subsequent changes of placement. (*In re A.O.* (2004) 120 Cal.App.4th 1054, 1061.) Removal in such situations would be subject only to judicial review of whether the agency’s actions constituted an abuse of discretion, unless the caregivers qualify as prospective adoptive parents (see tip below). (*Dept. of Social Services v. Superior Court (Theodore D.)* (1997) 58 Cal.App.4th 721, 724.) Nevertheless, the court retains the ultimate responsibility for a dependent child’s well-being and has a duty to ensure that the agency consider a child’s best interest when making posttermination placement changes, particularly when the child is removed from a long-term placement. (*In re Shirley K.* (2006) 140 Cal.App.4th 65.)



If a caregiver qualifies as a prospective adoptive parent under section 366.26(n), the agency must give notice of intent to remove, and a child or caregiver objecting to the new replacement is entitled to a hearing on the matter that will be decided under a best-interest standard. (§ 366.26(n); see Caregivers fact sheet.)

DISMISSAL OF PETITION

Once a supplemental petition has been filed, the agency may not unilaterally dismiss it if minor’s counsel objects. A hearing must be conducted at which the agency must show cause why the petition



should be dismissed, and the court must decide if dismissal is in the interests of justice and the child's welfare. (*Kimberly R. v. Superior Court* (2002) 96 Cal.App.4th 1067, 1077–1078.)

BURDENS OF PROOF AND STATUTORY ELEMENTS

The social services agency carries the burden to prove the allegations contained in the petition. (§ 387(b).) Removal from the home of a relative or nonrelative extended family member to a higher level of care (i.e., foster care, group home, or institution) requires proof by a preponderance of the evidence. (*In re Jonique W.*, *supra*, 26 Cal. App.4th at p. 691.) The agency must show either that the previous disposition has been ineffective in protecting or rehabilitating the child or that placement with a relative is no longer appropriate under the standards of section 361.3. (§ 387(b).) The statutory criteria for determining the appropriateness of a relative placement include, but are not limited to, factors such as

- The child's best interest (including special physical, psychological, educational, medical, or emotional needs);
- The wishes of the parent, relative, and child, if appropriate;
- Proximity to the parents to facilitate visitation and reunification;
- Placement of siblings in the same home, unless that placement is found to be contrary to the safety and well-being of any of the siblings, as provided in section 16002;
- The good moral character of the relative and other adults in the home in light of criminal and child abuse/neglect histories;
- The nature and duration of the relationship between the child and relative and the relative's desire to provide permanency if reunification fails;
- The ability of the relative to provide a safe, secure, and stable environment; and
- The safety of the relative's home, i.e., whether the home has been approved pursuant to section 309(d). (See § 361.3.)

Mere withdrawal of the agency's approval of an existing relative placement does not constitute sufficient evidence that the prior



disposition was ineffective or that the placement is no longer appropriate under section 361.3. (*In re Miguel E.* (2004) 120 Cal.App.4th 521, 547.) The court retains a duty to independently determine the appropriateness of a placement, and the agency does not have unfettered discretion to change court-ordered placements. (*Id.* at p. 542.)

REMOVAL FROM A PARENT

If the petition seeks to remove custody from a parent, the social services agency not only must present clear and convincing proof that the previous disposition has been ineffective in protecting the child, but it must also meet the original dispositional standard for removal under section 361. In other words, there must be clear and convincing evidence that there exists a substantial danger to the child's physical health and that there are no reasonable means to protect the child without removal from the parent's custody. (*In re Paul E.*, *supra*, 39 Cal.App.4th at pp. 1000–1001.) Failure to fully comply with the service plan alone does not constitute clear and convincing evidence of danger sufficient to support removal from the home of a parent. (*Id.* at p. 1004.) However, in cases where the child was removed from the parents at the original dispositional hearing and then was returned to a parent's home, and then was again removed pursuant to a section 387 petition, the removal standard of section 361(c)(1) does not apply; the court need only find that the home-of-parent order was not effective in protecting the child. (*In re A.O.* (2010) 185 Cal.App.4th 103, 111–112.) If the case involves an Indian child, the court will also have to meet the ICWA requirements for involuntary removal and foster care placement. (See ICWA information sheet.)



Beware of so-called nondetaining 387s in which the court is urged to sustain the allegations but allow the child to remain home, merely for the purpose of putting additional pressure on the parents. This practice is contrary to the intent as well as the explicit language of section 387, which should be utilized only when the agency can meet its burden by proving that removal from the parent or relative is necessary.



MOTIONS FOR

MODIFICATION



BLACK LETTER DISCUSSION

Once a child has been declared dependent or a guardianship has been ordered under section 360, a request to change, modify, or set aside any order of the court can be made in the form of a section 388 petition. A 388 petition may also be utilized to request termination of jurisdiction, recognition of a sibling relationship, or (under certain circumstances) reinstatement of parental rights. Petitions must be based on a change of circumstance or new evidence and demonstrate that the action requested serves the minor's best interest. A section 388 petition to change a court order is made on form JV-180.

WHEN A 388 PETITION MAY BE FILED AND WHEN NOT NECESSARY

A 388 petition can be filed only after the dispositional hearing, following a declaration of dependency or the entry of a guardianship under section 360.

Petitions under section 388 have been deemed the proper vehicle to challenge dispositional orders and the underlying jurisdictional findings when new admissible and credible evidence raises doubt about the validity of the findings. (See *In re Brandon C.* (1993) 19 Cal.App.4th 1168, 1171–1172 [writ of habeas corpus was denied because issues raised by recantation under the specific facts of the case are more properly addressed under a 388 motion].) Additionally, a due process challenge of the court's jurisdiction based on lack of notice may be properly pursued via a 388 petition. (*Ansley v. Superior Court* (1986) 185 Cal.App.3d 477, 487–488.) Section 388 provides the appropriate method in most instances for requesting modification of existing orders. (See *In re Lance V.* (2001) 90 Cal.App.4th 668 [an order changing mother's visitation without benefit of 388 petition, notice, or hearing was reversed as it violated due process].)

A 388 petition is not required to terminate a parent's right to make educational decisions because, under California Rules of Court, rule 5.651(b), the court must address at detention, disposition, and all subsequent hearings the question of who should hold educa-



tion rights for the child. If a hearing is not imminent, however, a 388 petition may be used to request that education rights be restored to the parent.

Certain circumstances do not require the filing of a 388 petition. For example, the court is statutorily empowered at any scheduled permanency review to set a section 366.26 hearing to select a more permanent plan; no 388 petition is needed. (§ 366.3; *San Diego County Department of Social Services v. Superior Court* (Sylvia A.) (1996) 13 Cal.4th 882, 891–892; *In re Andrea R.* (1999) 75 Cal.App.4th 1093, 1106–1108.)

Petitions under section 388 are the proper vehicle for a party to request that the court terminate reunification services before the statutorily mandated time frame has expired. (§ 388(c).) Additionally, although a 388 petition is the common vehicle for termination of a dependency guardianship (see next section), no petition or separate hearing is necessary if the guardian is notified of the recommendation and the issue is addressed in the context of a regularly scheduled hearing. (*In re Carrie W.* (2003) 110 Cal.App.4th 746, 756–757.)

WHO MAY FILE A 388 PETITION

The dependent child (either personally or through his or her attorney or guardian), the parent, or “other person having an interest in a child who is a dependent” may file a 388 petition seeking modification of a prior order or termination of the juvenile court’s jurisdiction. (§ 388(a); Cal. Rules of Court, rule 5.560(e).) Furthermore, “any person,” including the dependent child or a court-appointed guardian ad litem for the child, may file a 388 petition to assert a sibling relationship. (§ 388(b); Cal. Rules of Court, rule 5.560(e).)

Counsel should frequently revisit the circumstances in each case and actively pursue modifications via 388 petitions when the clients’ interests so dictate. In at least one instance, the Court of Appeal upheld a claim of ineffective assistance of counsel where parent’s counsel failed to file a 388 petition in a case that was a “clear winner.” (See *In re Eileen A.* (2000) 84 Cal.App.4th 1248 [overruled in part on other grounds by *In re Zeth S.* (2003) 31 Cal.4th 396, 413].)



The following considerations apply, depending on the identity of the petitioner.

1. Dependent Child

The court and child's attorney have a statutorily imposed duty to ensure that each dependent child is informed in a developmentally appropriate manner of his or her rights under section 388 and of the forms and procedures needed to pursue a petition for modification, termination of jurisdiction, or assertion of a sibling relationship. (§ 353.1.)

A child for whom parental rights have been terminated may use section 388 to petition the court for reinstatement of parental rights if

- The child has not yet been adopted more than three years after termination and the court has determined that adoption is no longer the permanent plan; or
- The California Department of Social Services or the licensed adoption agency responsible for the child stipulates that the child is no longer likely to be adopted, regardless of the length of time since the child was freed.

(§ 366.26(i)(2).)

2. Social Worker

The social worker may file a petition as long as the requested modification is not for a more restrictive level of custody. (Cal. Rules of Court, rule 5.560(e)(2).) In other words, pursuant to this rule of court, the services agency may not use a 388 petition to remove a child from the home of a parent or guardian, or to move a child from the home of a relative, to foster care.

3. Biological Parent After Termination of Parental Rights

A biological parent whose parental rights have been terminated is generally viewed as lacking standing to file a modification petition. Except for very narrow circumstances under which a child may petition for reinstatement of parental rights (see above), once the termi-



nation order has been issued the juvenile court has “no power to set aside, change, or modify it.” (§ 366.26(i).) Therefore, a petition filed by a biological parent seeking de facto status, visitation, increased contact, or even designation as an “individual . . . important to the child” pursuant to section 366.3(f) is viewed as a collateral attack on the termination that the court has no jurisdiction to entertain. (See *Amber R. v. Superior Court* (2006) 139 Cal.App.4th 897, 902–903.)

4. Any Person With an Interest

The standing conferred in section 388 to “any person with an interest” in the child has been found to be relatively broad in scope. It encompasses de facto parents as well as persons who have not been formally designated as such but who have a strong historical relationship with the child even if not currently serving as caregiver. (See *In re Hirenia C.* (1993) 18 Cal.App.4th 504, 514–516.) It would also include the child’s tribe, if the child were an Indian child.

5. Person Asserting a Sibling Relationship

A petition under section 388(b) to assert a sibling relationship is properly filed to request visitation or placement with or near the dependent child, to ask for consideration when the case plan or permanent plan of a dependent child is being devised, or to make any other request in the dependent child’s best interest. Anyone may file the petition, including the dependent child. In order to be considered a sibling for these purposes, a person must be related by blood, adoption, or affinity through a common legal or biological parent. (§ 388(b).) A child does not lose his or her status as a sibling under section 388 if he or she has been adopted. (*In re Valerie A.* (2006) 139 Cal.App.4th 1519, 1523–1524.) A sibling of a child for whom adoption is the proposed plan must file a petition under section 388(b) to be afforded the opportunity to appear at and participate in a section 366.26 hearing. However, as with all 388 petitions, such petitions should be construed liberally. The petitioning sibling need not show that the sibling’s position would prevail at the section 366.26 hearing in order to be granted the right to be heard as to the permanency



plan, but only that there is a sufficient bond with the child who is the subject of the hearing that “the best interests of that child require full consideration of the impact of interfering with that relationship.” (*In re Hector A.* (2005) 125 Cal.App.4th 783, 793–795.)

6. Former Foster Youth

Former foster youth for whom the court has ordered a trial period of independence under section 391 may petition the court to resume dependency jurisdiction if the youth is in a college, vocational, or job training program; is employed; or is disabled. (§§ 388(e), 11403.)

COURT’S OPTIONS ON RECEIPT OF PETITION

1. Deny, Without a Hearing

The petition must make a prima facie showing *both* that there are changed circumstances/new evidence *and* that the requested modification will be in the child’s best interest; if it fails to do so, the court may deny the petition without a hearing. (§ 388; Cal. Rules of Court, rule 5.570(b); *In re Zachary G.* (1999) 77 Cal.App.4th 799, 806–807.) The petitioner bears the burden of presenting a prima facie case, but the petition is to be liberally construed in favor of its sufficiency. (Cal. Rules of Court, rule 5.570(a); *In re Marilyn H.* (1993) 5 Cal.4th 295, 309–310.) A prima facie showing is made when the facts alleged, if supported by credible evidence, would sustain a favorable decision. (*In re Edward H.* (1996) 43 Cal.App.4th 584, 594.)

Mere conclusory statements, unsupported by declarations or other evidence, are insufficient to trigger a hearing. (*In re Anthony W.* (2001) 87 Cal.App.4th 246, 250.) However, the petitioner need only make a “probable cause” showing and is not required to establish that he or she would prevail on the petition in order to be entitled to a full hearing. (*In re Aljamie D.* (2000) 84 Cal.App.4th 424, 432–433.)



When filing a 388 petition, counsel should ensure that both prongs—changed circumstances and the child’s best interest—are



addressed in the petition and are sufficiently supported by attached evidence, such as negative drug tests, program completion certificates, and declarations from caregivers as to the consistency of visitation.

2. Grant, Without a Hearing

If all parties stipulate to the request, the court may grant the petition without conducting a hearing. (Cal. Rules of Court, rule 5.570(d).) The form JV-180 used to request a hearing under section 388 has boxes to check indicating which parties agree or disagree with requested changes in court orders. As well, form JV-180 allows the requesting party to indicate when it is unknown whether parties agree or disagree.

3. Set for Hearing

A hearing must be set if the petitioner makes a prima facie showing of changed circumstances/new evidence and that the proposed modification will be in the child's best interest, a contest appears likely, or the court desires additional evidence on the issues presented. (§ 388(c); Cal. Rules of Court, rule 5.570(d).)

TIME LIMITS FOR A HEARING ON THE PETITION

If a hearing is set on a 388 petition, it must take place within 30 calendar days after the filing of the petition. (*Ibid.*)

NOTICE

Notice of the date, time, and place of hearing and a copy of the 388 petition must be served by the court as soon as possible after the petition is filed, but no less than five days before the hearing is to take place. The following people are entitled to notice: the child, the child's social worker, the parent or legal guardian, any dependent siblings, their caregivers and attorneys, counsel of record for all parties, the child's Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) (if any), the child's caregiver, and the tribe of a dependent Indian child. (§§ 290.1, 290.2, 291, 297(c), 386, 388(c); Cal. Rules of Court, rules 5.524(e), 5.570(e).) No notice is required for a parent whose parental rights have been terminated. (§§ 290.1(b), 290.2(b), 291(b).) If the



child is in the home of the parent or guardian, notice may be by personal service or first-class mail. Otherwise, notice must be by personal service or certified mail, return receipt requested, except in cases involving an Indian child, which require service by registered mail, return receipt requested. (§ 291.)

CONDUCT OF A 388 HEARING

1. Burdens of Proof

The petitioner bears the burden of proof at a hearing on a 388 petition. (Cal. Rules of Court, rule 5.570(f).) Pursuant to rule 5.570(f), if the request is to remove a child from the child's home, clear and convincing evidence of the grounds required for removal under section 361(c) must be presented. A noncustodial parent may petition under section 388 to remove a child from the custodial parent's home but must present clear and convincing evidence in order to prevail. (*In re Victoria C.*, *supra*, 100 Cal.App.4th at p. 543.) Additionally, a petition seeking removal of a child to a more restrictive level of placement requires clear and convincing proof that the move is necessary to protect the child's physical or emotional well-being. (Cal. Rules of Court, rule 5.570(f).)

A petition seeking termination of guardianship, if granted, necessarily involves removal from a guardian. However, when such a request is made by a parent seeking return, the lesser standard of proof by a preponderance of the evidence has been found to be appropriate. (See *In re Michael D.* (1996) 51 Cal.App.4th 1074 [jurisdiction had been specifically retained to consider return; mother need only prove changed circumstances and child's best interest by a preponderance of the evidence].)

In order to grant a petition seeking reinstatement of parental rights, the court must find by clear and convincing evidence that the child is no longer likely to be adopted and that reinstatement of parental rights is in the child's best interest. (§ 366.26(i)(3).)

The standard required for all other changes sought is proof by a preponderance of the evidence that there has been a change of



circumstances or there is new evidence demonstrating that the proposed change is in the child's best interest. (Cal. Rules of Court, rule 5.570(f); *In re Jasmon O.* (1994) 8 Cal.4th 398, 415.) Neither statutes nor due process dictate a higher standard for requests to modify, or even terminate, visitation with a parent. (See *In re Manolito L.* (2001) 90 Cal.App.4th 753, 764.)

2. Right to a Full Evidentiary Hearing

In general, the court has discretion to conduct a 388 hearing by declaration and other written evidence, by live testimony, or both. However, if the petitioner and/or an opposing party has a due process right to confront and cross-examine witnesses or if the requested modification is for removal from the home of a parent or to a more restrictive level of placement, the hearing must be conducted as a full evidentiary hearing under the rules governing disposition. (Cal. Rules of Court, rule 5.570(f).)



A child, parent, or any interested party may file a 388 petition seeking the child's removal from a parent or move to a more restrictive level of placement. However, counsel should consider challenging any attempt by the social services agency to use a 388 petition to do so, as rule 5.560(e) of the California Rules of Court specifically prohibits the social worker from filing a 388 petition to move a child to a "more restricted level of custody." When the social services agency seeks to remove the child from a parent, a guardian, or a specific court-ordered placement in an open dependency case, the proper vehicle is a section 342 or 387 petition, both of which provide the parent or guardian, and the child, with the same due process protections afforded in original section 300 filings. (See Subsequent and Supplemental Petitions black letter discussion.)

Due process in the dependency context centers on notice and the right to be heard, which are meaningful only if an opportunity to examine evidence and cross-examine witnesses is provided. The discretion to conduct a hearing only by declaration under rule 5.570(f) is "not absolute and does not override due process consider-



ations.” (*In re Matthew P.* (1999) 71 Cal.App.4th 841, 851 [de facto parents/former caregivers had due process right to a full hearing allowing cross-examination of the social worker who prepared the reports].) Also, when there is a clear conflict as to the credibility of various sources, it is an abuse of discretion for the court to deny the petitioner an opportunity for testimony and cross-examination. (See *In re Clifton V.* (2001) 93 Cal.App.4th 1400, 1405.)

3. Changed Circumstances or New Evidence

The change need not relate to the dependent child but can be based on a change in the petitioner’s circumstances. (*In re Daijah T.* (2000) 83 Cal.App.4th 666, 674 [court improperly denied a mother’s 388 petition as it did not show change of circumstances although she had successfully reunified with child’s three siblings].) In analyzing the adequacy of changed circumstances, the court should consider such factors as the following:

- The nature of the change;
- The ease by which the change could be accomplished; and
- The reason the change was not made earlier in the history of the dependency matter.

(*In re Kimberly F.* (1997) 56 Cal.App.4th 519, 531.)

Denial of a 388 petition is proper where circumstances are merely “changing” rather than “changed.” (*In re Carl R.* (2005) 128 Cal.App.4th 1051, 1072; *In re Casey D.* (1999) 70 Cal.App.4th 38, 47 [denial is appropriate especially if granting the requested modification would delay permanency for a child whose parent has repeatedly failed to reunify].)

A 388 petition may also be based on new evidence rather than changed circumstances. However, because of the importance of finality in dependency cases, courts are likely to construe the term “new evidence” narrowly, excluding any evidence that a party could have obtained at the time of trial. (*In re H.S.* (2010) 188 Cal.App.4th 103, 109–110 [“new” expert opinion based on evidence available at time of trial is not “new evidence” within the meaning of § 388].)

4. Best Interest

There is no statutory definition of “best interest.” However, decisional law does provide guidance for cases in which the parent has filed a 388 petition to regain custody of the child. Under those circumstances, a best-interest analysis may not be based on a simple comparison of the parent’s and current caregiver’s households and the socioeconomic opportunities they each provide. Appropriate factors to be examined span a wide range, including

- The gravity of the initial problem leading to dependency;
- Reasons why the problem was not resolved in a timely manner; and
- The comparative strengths of the bonds between the child and both the parent and current caregiver.

(*In re Kimberly F.*, *supra*, 56 Cal.App.4th at p. 531.)

In cases involving Indian children, other factors should be considered, including ties with the tribal community and maintenance of culture. Under California law, there is a presumption that it is in the best interest of an Indian child to maintain the child’s connection to the tribal community, and live in a home that upholds the prevailing social and cultural standards of the child’s Indian community. (224(a)(2), 16001.9(a)(1).)

CONSIDERATIONS WHEN A .26 HEARING IS PENDING

Once reunification services have been terminated and a case has been set for a hearing under section 366.26, the focus of the court shifts to the child’s need for permanency and stability. Section 388 petitions provide the parent with an “escape mechanism” to put new evidence before the court at any time before the 366.26 hearing. However, a parent seeking to “revive the reunification issue” at this point in the proceedings bears the burden of rebutting the presumption that continued out-of-home care is in the child’s best interest. (*In re Marilyn H.*, *supra*, 5 Cal.4th at p. 309; *In re I.B.* (2020) 53 Cal.App.5th 133.) Procedurally, the issues and claims raised in a 388 petition requesting return or resumption of reunification should



be considered and decided before the section 366.26 hearing. (*Ibid.*) If the court grants the petition and orders resumption of reunification services, the section 366.26 hearing should be taken off calendar and the next hearing set for and conducted under the standards of a section 366.22 review hearing—not as a continued section 366.26 hearing. (*In re Sean E.* (1992) 3 Cal.App.4th 1594, 1599 [the order for further reunification services implicitly conflicts with the findings necessary to set a section 366.26 hearing, and therefore the latter must be vacated]; see Status Review black letter discussion.) If the case involves an Indian child and the section 366.26 hearing is pending, consider whether a transfer to tribal court is appropriate.

TERMINATION OF A LEGAL GUARDIANSHIP

A 388 petition is the proper vehicle by which to request termination of a legal guardianship established either by prior order of the juvenile court or by the probate court. (§§ 366.3(b), 728; Cal. Rules of Court, rule 5.740(c); *In re Carlos E.* (2005) 129 Cal.App.4th 1408, 1421; *In re Merrick V.* (2004) 122 Cal.App.4th 235, 251.) The petition may be filed in the county in which the guardianship was established or any county with current dependency jurisdiction. The petitioner must serve notice at least 15 court days before the hearing on the social services agency, guardian, child (if aged 10 or older), any parents whose rights have not been terminated, and the court. (Cal. Rules of Court, rule 5.740(c).)

The social services agency must prepare a report for the hearing addressing whether the guardianship could remain intact with the child safely in the guardian's home if services were provided to the child or guardian and, if so, identifying the services needed and a plan for providing them. (§ 366.3(b).)

As with all other section 388 petitions, the petitioner carries the burden of proof. The level of proof required to terminate a guardianship depends on the identity of the petitioner. A parent concurrently seeking return of the child need only provide proof by a preponderance of the evidence that there is a change in circumstances and that the request for termination of the guardianship is in the

child's best interest. (*In re Michael D.*, *supra*, 51 Cal.App.4th at pp. 1086–1087.) However, the social services agency must present clear and convincing evidence that termination is in the child's best interest. (*In re Alicia O.* (1995) 33 Cal.App.4th 176, 183 [citing rule 5.570(f), which requires the clear-and-convincing standard for removal to a more restrictive level of placement, often as the result of termination of guardianship].)

Following the hearing on the petition, the court may (1) deny the petition to terminate, (2) deny the petition but request that the social services agency provide services to the child and guardian under informal supervision pursuant to section 301, or (3) terminate the guardianship. (Cal. Rules of Court, rule 5.740(c).) However, the juvenile court has the authority to order reunification services for a legal guardian if it determines that maintaining the legal guardianship is in the child's best interest. (§ 366.3(b); *In re Z.C.* (2009) 178 Cal.App.4th 1271.) The social worker's report must, in addition to addressing potential termination of the legal guardianship, identify any recommended family maintenance or reunification services to maintain the legal guardianship and set forth a plan for providing those services. (§ 366.3(b); *In re Jessica C.* (2007) 151 Cal.App.4th 47.)

If the guardianship is terminated, the court may resume jurisdiction and set a section 366.26 hearing within 60 days to consider a new permanent plan for the child. The parent may be considered for further reunification services or even as a custodial alternative, but only if the parent proves by a preponderance of the evidence that reunification is the best alternative for the child. (§ 366.3(b); Cal. Rules of Court, rule 5.740(c).)

A guardian appointed by the juvenile court does not have the same rights as one appointed under the Probate Code, and there is no requirement that reunification services be offered prior to termination of a dependency guardianship. (*In re Carlos E.*, *supra*, 129 Cal.App.4th at pp. 1418–1419; *In re Alicia O.*, *supra*, 33 Cal.App.4th at p. 181.) Probate guardians have greater rights and are entitled to reunification services under section 361.5(a) on an original 300 petition if the guardianship remains intact at disposition. However, section



728 authorizes the juvenile court to terminate a probate guardianship at any stage of the proceedings in a dependency case, including detention and jurisdiction, thereby potentially derailing access to reunification services for a former guardian. (See *In re Merrick V.*, supra, 122 Cal.App.4th at pp. 250–253.)





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ADOPTION

TYPES OF ADOPTION

In California there are eight types of adoption: (1) adoption from juvenile court dependency proceedings; (2) independent adoption in which a child—often a baby—is placed in an adoptive home by the child’s natural parent or parents (Fam. Code, § 8524); (3) agency adoption in which a child is relinquished to an adoption agency (agency selects adoptive parents and places the child with the parents (Fam. Code, § 8506)); (4) stepparent adoption in which the spouse of a child’s biological parent adopts a stepchild (Fam. Code, § 8548); (5) intercountry adoption (Fam. Code, § 8527); (6) adoption of an adult, typically for purposes of inheritance (Fam. Code, § 9300(a)); (7) tribal customary adoption (Welf. & Inst. Code, § 366.24); and (8) adoption arising out of Probate Code guardianship.

This Fact sheet focuses on adoption growing out of juvenile court dependency proceedings.

PARENTAL RIGHTS

1. Relinquishment by Parents

Either or both birth parents may relinquish a child for adoption at any time during dependency proceedings. (Fam. Code, § 8700(i).) Relinquishment requires a signed statement before two witnesses and an official of the adoption agency. (*Id.*, § 8700(a).) Both parents must consent to the adoption unless there is no presumed father or one or both parents have failed to support or communicate with the child for a year or more. (*Id.*, §§ 8604, 8605.)

Relinquishment becomes final 10 days after the documents are filed by the agency and can be rescinded only if one or both birth parents and the agency agree. (*Id.*, § 8700(e).) However, if the birth parents made a “designated relinquishment” naming specific adoptive parents and the agency does not place the child with those parents, the birth parents must be notified and have 30 days to rescind the relinquishment. (*Id.*, § 8700(g); see *In re R.S.* (2009) 179 Cal.



App.4th 1137.) In a case involving an Indian child, special ICWA requirements apply to the relinquishment.

2. Termination of Parental Rights

In California, termination of parental rights occurs at the conclusion of a selection and implementation hearing held pursuant to section 366.26. (See Selection and Implementation in Hearings chapter.) At the first review hearing following termination of parental rights, the court must inquire into the status of the development of a voluntary postadoption sibling contact agreement. (§ 366.3(e)(9)(A)(ii).)

If, following termination of parental rights, a child is not adopted within three years from the date parental rights were terminated (or sooner, if the social services agency stipulates that the child is no longer likely to be adopted), the child may petition for reinstatement of parental rights. (§ 366.26(i)(3).) The court must reinstate parental rights if it finds by clear and convincing evidence that the child is no longer likely to be adopted and reinstatement is in the child's best interest.

PLACEMENT FOR ADOPTION

1. Placement With Agency; Court's Jurisdiction

After the birth parents have relinquished the child or parental rights have been terminated, the court places the child for adoption with the agency (this can be either the state adoption agency or the social services agency, depending on whether the particular county has an adoption unit). The court retains jurisdiction until the adoption petition is granted. Until the adoption is granted, the court reviews the status of the child every six months "to ensure that the adoption . . . is completed as expeditiously as possible." (§ 366.3(a)(1).)

The agency has "exclusive custody and control of the child" until adoption is granted, and the court's role is limited to reviewing adoptive placement decisions for abuse of discretion. (§ 366.26(j); Fam. Code, § 8704(a); see *In re Shirley K.* (2006) 140 Cal.App.4th 65.) No one other than the prospective adoptive parents with whom



the agency has placed the child can file a petition to adopt the child. (Fam. Code, § 8704(b).) However, there are some limits on the agency's discretion:

Indian Child Welfare Act placement preferences—In a case involving an Indian child, any adoptive placement must comply with the placement preferences found in 25 U.S.C. § 1915(a), which in order of preference are (1) a member of the child's extended family, (2) other members of the Indian child's tribe, or (3) other Indian families.

Caregiver preference (§ 366.26(k))—Adoption by a relative or nonrelative who has cared for the child is the preferred placement if the agency “determines that the child has substantial emotional ties to the relative caregiver or foster parent and removal from the relative caregiver or foster parent would be seriously detrimental to the child's emotional well-being.” This preference means that the caregiver's application for adoption and home study must be processed before anyone else's. As soon as the child is placed for adoption, the caregiver preference applies. (*In re Lauren R.* (2007) 148 Cal.App.4th 841.)

Prospective adoptive parents (§ 366.26(n))—The court, at or after the section 366.26 hearing, is allowed to designate the child's current caregivers as “prospective adoptive parents” if they have cared for the child at least six months and have taken at least “one step to facilitate the adoption process” (e.g., applying for a home study, signing an adoptive placement agreement, working to overcome impediments to adoption).

Prospective adoptive parents have a right to a hearing if the county agency seeks to remove the child, at which hearing the court determines whether removal is in the child's best interest.



The “best-interest” standard for removal from a prospective adoptive parent is less deferential than the abuse-of-discretion standard that otherwise applies to court review of an agency's adoptive placement decision. Attorneys should consider requesting designation of caregivers as prospective adoptive parents.



Removal after adoption petition is filed (Fam. Code, § 8704(b))—After an adoption petition has been filed, the agency may remove the child from the prospective adoptive parents only with court approval and must submit an affidavit explaining the reasons for its refusal to consent to the adoption. The court may still order the adoption if it finds that the agency’s refusal to consent is not in the child’s best interest.

2. Requirements for Adoption

The adoptive parent must be at least 10 years older than the child, unless the adoptive parent is a stepparent, a sibling, an aunt or uncle, or a first cousin (or a spouse of one of these relatives), and the court finds the adoption is in the child’s best interest. (*Id.*, § 8601.) A prospective adoptive parent who is married must obtain his or her spouse’s consent to adoption. (*Id.*, § 8603.)

Race, color, national origin, or the fact that the prospective adoptive parent lives in another county or another state may not be a basis for delay or denial of adoptive placement. (*Id.*, § 8708.) However, the child’s religious background may be considered in the adoptive placement decision. (*Id.*, § 8709.)

Prospective adoptive parents must be fingerprinted and have a criminal background check. Having a criminal record does not automatically disqualify a person from becoming an adoptive parent. However, the agency may not place a dependent child with anyone who has a criminal conviction unless a waiver is obtained as required by section 361.4. Even if a waiver is obtained, the agency may still consider the criminal record in deciding whether to approve the adoption home study. (*Id.*, § 8712.) An absolute statutory bar to placement approval because of a criminal conviction can be unconstitutional if the individual has a parental relationship with the child. (*In re C.P.* (2020) 47 Cal.App.5th 17.)

The agency must inform prospective adoptive parents of the family background, medical history, and any known special needs of the child. (*Id.*, §§ 8706, 8733.)



3. Adoption Assessment/Home Study

The agency must prepare, and the court must read and consider, a report meeting the requirements of Family Code section 8715. If the prospective adoptive parent is a foster parent or relative caregiver with whom the child has lived for at least six months, a simplified home study process under Family Code section 8730 may be used instead.

The home study process is governed by state regulations set forth in the *Adoptions Users Manual* (Cal. Dept. of Social Services, 2001), section 35180 et seq., and includes interviews; review of criminal and child abuse/neglect records, medical exams, and references; employment/income verification; review of school and health records of the adoptive parents' other children; and assessment of parenting abilities and the physical safety of the home.



If the adoption agency denies approval of a home study and the child's attorney believes the adoptive placement is in the child's best interest, the child's attorney should consider the following strategies:

- Encourage the caregiver to request an administrative grievance hearing;
- If the caregiver qualifies as a prospective adoptive parent under section 366.26(n), request a hearing if the agency plans to remove the child;
- If an adoption petition has already been filed, set a hearing under Family Code section 8704(b) and ask the court to order the adoption over the agency's objection; and/or
- Ask the court not to terminate parental rights until the issue of home study approval is resolved.

4. Adoption Procedure

After a petition for adoption is filed, the court sets a hearing and proceeds with the adoption after the birth parents' appeal rights are exhausted. (§ 366.26(b)(1).)



Adoption proceedings for dependent children may be held in juvenile court, or the prospective adoptive parents may file a petition for adoption in another court. (§ 366.26(e).) Adoption proceedings are private. (Fam. Code, § 8611.) The standard for granting an adoption petition is whether “the interest of the child will be promoted by the adoption.” (*Id.*, § 8612.)

Before the adoption finalization hearing, the prospective adoptive parents must sign an adoptive placement agreement, execute a postadoption contact agreement if applicable, and have an attorney prepare and file an adoption petition.

POSTADOPTION AGREEMENTS AND FINANCIAL SUPPORT

1. Postadoption Contact Agreements

Pursuant to a postadoption contact agreement, the court may include provisions for postadoptive contact with siblings, birth parents, and/or other relatives in the final adoption order. (§§ 366.29, 16002; Fam. Code, § 8616.5.) Postadoption contact agreements can be negotiated either before or after the section 366.26 hearing.

Postadoption contact is voluntary, and prospective adoptive parents cannot be compelled to agree to it. However, with regard to siblings, agencies must “encourage prospective adoptive parents to make a plan for facilitating post-adoptive contact.” (§ 16002(e)(3).)

Children 12 and older must agree to any postadoption contact agreement, or the court must find that the agreement is in the child’s best interest. Dependent children have the right to be represented by an attorney for purposes of consent to postadoption contact agreements. (Fam. Code, § 8616.5(d).)

Postadoption contact agreements must be filed with the adoption petition, and the agency’s report must address whether the agreement was entered into voluntarily and whether it is in the child’s best interest. (*Id.*, § 8715.)

Enforcement of postadoption contact agreements is limited. Noncompliance does not invalidate the adoption or provide a ba-



sis for orders changing custody of the child. (§ 366.29; Fam. Code, § 8616.5(e).) Sibling contact agreements do not limit the adoptive parents' right to move, and adoptive parents can terminate sibling contact if they determine that it poses a threat to the health, safety, or well-being of the adopted child. (§ 366.29(a) & (b).) Postadoption contact agreements may be modified or terminated if all parties agree or if the court finds a substantial change of circumstances that necessitates a modification or termination to serve the child's best interest. (Fam. Code, § 8616.5(h).)

The court that grants an adoption retains jurisdiction to enforce postadoption contact agreements. Parties must participate in mediation before seeking enforcement. The court may order compliance only if it finds that enforcing the agreement is in the child's best interest. (§ 366.29(c); Fam. Code, § 8616.5(f).)

2. Postadoption Benefits and Support

Adoptive parents of dependent children are eligible for the Adoption Assistance Program (AAP). (See §§ 16115–16125.) The payment rate is determined on a case-by-case basis but generally is equivalent to the foster care rate. Adopted dependent children remain eligible for Medi-Cal regardless of the adoptive parents' income. Adoptive parents remain eligible for AAP benefits even if they move out of county or out of state.

Adoptive parents are also eligible for postadoption support services such as respite care, counseling/therapy, and facilitation of postadoption contact. (§ 16124.)

ADOPTION OF INDIAN CHILD

Adoption of an Indian child involves additional requirements and special procedures. (Fam. Code, §§ 8606.5 [consent], 8616.5 [postadoption contact agreements], 8619 [information about child's Indian ancestry], 8619.5 [reinstatement of parental rights], 8620 [relinquishment, procedures, notices].)

Also, section 366.26 provides an additional permanency planning option for Indian children: tribal or customary adoption. “Tribal customary adoption” means “adoption by and through the tribal custom, traditions or law of an Indian child’s tribe. Termination of parental rights is not required to effect the tribal customary adoption.” (§ 366.24(a).) See ICWA fact sheet for additional details.



CAREGIVERS: DE FACTO PARENT, PROSPECTIVE ADOPTIVE PARENT (PAP), NONRELATIVE EXTENDED FAMILY MEMBER (NREFM)

Welfare and Institutions Code section 362.04(a)(1) defines “care-giver” as “any licensed certified foster parent, approved relative care-giver, or approved nonrelative extended family member, or approved resource family.”

Caregivers, are authorized to make certain decisions for the dependent children in their care under the “reasonable and prudent parent” standard. See Welfare and Institutions Code sections 362.04 and 362.05.

DE FACTO PARENT

1. Criteria for De Facto Status

A de facto parent is a person who for a substantial period of time has assumed the day-to-day role of parent by fulfilling the child’s physical and psychological needs for care and affection. (Cal. Rules of Court, rule 5.502(10); *In re B.G.* (1974) 11 Cal.3d 679, 692.)

Determination of de facto status is based on the above criteria and other relevant factors, such as whether the applicant (1) has “psychologically bonded” with the child and the child with applicant, (2) possesses unique information regarding the child, (3) has regularly attended court hearings, and (4) is subject to future proceedings that may permanently foreclose contact with the child. (*In re Patricia L.* (1992) 9 Cal.App.4th 61, 66–67.)

Any adult who is found to have caused substantial physical or sexual harm to the child forfeits the opportunity to attain de facto parent status. (*In re Kiesha E.* (1993) 6 Cal.4th 68, 82.) However, where de facto status is already established, an isolated incident of

misconduct by the de facto parent does not require the court to terminate this status. (*In re D.R.* (2010) 185 Cal.App.4th 852, 861–862.)

2. Rights and Role of a De Facto Parent in Dependency Proceedings

Recognition by the court of de facto status gives a present or previous custodian standing to participate as a party at disposition and any hearings thereafter to “assert and protect their own interest in the companionship, care, custody and management of the child.” (*In re B.G.*, *supra*, 11 Cal.3d at p. 693; see Cal. Rules of Court, rule 5.534(e).)

A de facto parent is entitled to procedural due process protections to protect his or her interests, including the right to be present, to be represented by counsel, and to present evidence. (Cal. Rules of Court, rule 5.534(e); *In re Jonique W.* (1994) 26 Cal.App.4th 685, 693; *In re Matthew P.* (1999) 71 Cal.App.4th 841, 850.)

However, the role of de facto parents is limited in dependency, and de facto parents are not afforded the same substantive rights as parents or guardians. In *In re B.S.* (2021) 65 Cal.App.5th 888, 895, the Court of Appeal wrote: “De facto parents are not equated with biological parents or guardians for purposes of dependency proceedings and standing to participate does not give them all of the rights and preferences accorded such persons. De facto parent status does not give the de facto parent the right to reunification services, visitation, custody, or placement of the minor, or to any degree of independent control over the child’s destiny whatsoever. De facto parent status merely provides a way for the de facto parent to stay involved in the dependency process and provide information to the court.” (citations omitted). It is improper for the court to consider the closeness of the bond between the child and a de facto parent in determining whether the parent’s reunification services should be terminated. (*Rita L. v. Superior Court* (2005) 128 Cal.App.4th 495, 508.)

3. Standing and Appeals Involving De Facto Status

The individual seeking de facto parent status has the right to appeal denial of that status, but other parties, including the child, do not. (*In re Crystal J.* (2001) 92 Cal.App.4th 186, 192.)



There appears to be a split of authority regarding whether de facto parents have standing to appeal removal of a child from their long-term care. (Compare *In re P.L.* (2005) 134 Cal.App.4th 1357, 1361 and *In re D.P.* (2023) 92 Cal.App.5th 1282.)

In order to terminate de facto status, a 388 petition must be filed. The petitioner must show by a preponderance of the evidence that as a result of changed circumstances the conditions supporting the status no longer exist. (*In re Brittany K.* (2005) 127 Cal.App.4th 1497, 1514; see *In re D.R.*, *supra*, 185 Cal.App.4th at p. 852.)

PROSPECTIVE ADOPTIVE PARENT (§ 366.26(N))

At the section 366.26 or any subsequent hearing, the court may designate the current caregiver as a prospective adoptive parent if

- The child has lived with the caregiver for six months or more;
- The caregiver expresses a commitment to adopt; and
- The caregiver has taken at least one step to facilitate adoption, which can include, but is not limited to,
 - Applying for or cooperating with an adoption home study;
 - Being designated by the court or social services agency as the adoptive family;
 - Requesting de facto parent status;
 - Signing an adoptive placement agreement;
 - Discussing a postadoption contact agreement;
 - Working to overcome identified impediments to adoption; or
 - Attending required classes for prospective adoptive parents.

Except in emergency situations (immediate risk of physical or emotional harm), the child may not be removed from the prospective adoptive parent's home without prior notice. The notice is provided on form JV-323, *Notice of Intent to Remove*. (See *In re R.F.* (2023) 94 Cal.App.5th 718.)

Notice of an anticipated move must be given to the court, the prospective adoptive parent (or caregiver who would qualify as such

at the time of the proposed removal), the child’s attorney, and the child if aged 10 or older.

Any of the persons noticed may file a petition objecting to the removal, and the court must set a hearing within five court days, or the court may set the hearing on its own motion, at which it must determine the following:

- Whether the caregiver meets the above criteria, if he or she has not previously been designated the prospective adoptive parent; and
- Whether removal from the prospective caregiver would be in the child’s best interest.

Designation as a prospective adoptive parent does not confer party status or standing to object to any other of the social services agency’s actions, unless the caregiver was also declared a de facto parent prior to the notice of removal.

Any order made following a noticed hearing is reviewable only by extraordinary writ. (§ 366.28(b).)

Caregivers have the right to a hearing at which they can present evidence and argument on whether they should be granted prospective adoptive parent status. (*In re R.F.* (2023) 94 Cal.App.5th 718; *In re Wayne F.* (2006) 145 Cal.App.4th 1331.)



Prior to enactment of section 366.26(b) in 2006, the social services agency had sole discretion over placements posttermination of parental rights, and removals could be challenged only as an abuse of discretion. (*Dept. of Social Services v. Superior Court (Theodore D.)* (1997) 58 Cal.App.4th 721, 741.) Section 366.26(n) does not cover caregivers who do not meet the criteria as prospective adoptive parents. Such caregivers are treated under the *Theodore D.* standard.

NONRELATIVE EXTENDED FAMILY MEMBER

Welfare and Institutions Code section 362.7 defines “nonrelative extended family member” as “an adult caregiver who has an established familial relationship with a relative of the child, as defined in paragraph (2) of subdivision (c) of Section 361.3, or a familial or



mentoring relationship with the child. . . . The parties may include relatives of the child, teachers, medical professionals, clergy, neighbors, and family friends.”

CAREGIVER’S DECISIONMAKING AS A “PRUDENT PARENT”

“Caregivers” is defined as licensed foster parents or approved relative and nonrelative extended family members (NREFMs). (§ 362.04(a)(1).)

Caregivers may exercise their judgment as a reasonable and prudent parent—that is, they may make careful and sensible parental decisions that maintain the child’s health, safety, and best interest. (§ 362.05(c)(1).)

They may use this standard in selecting and utilizing babysitters for short-term needs (no more than 24 hours). Babysitters need not comply with social services agency regulations regarding health screening or CPR training. (§ 362.04(b), (c) & (e).)

All dependent children are entitled to participate in age-appropriate social and extracurricular activities. Caregivers and group home staff must use the reasonable-and-prudent-parent standard in deciding whether to give permission for a child in their care to participate in such activities, which (in keeping with the babysitting statute) can include short-term or overnight stays at another location. (§ 362.05.)

It is the caregiver who is authorized to make these normal day-to-day decisions for the dependent child, and the social worker should not substitute his or her judgment for that of the caregiver.

Babysitters and other persons chosen by the caregiver to provide short-term supervision of the child are exempt from criminal records check requirements. (Health & Saf. Code, § 1522(b)(3).)



The stated intent of these “quality-of-life” statutes is to expand dependent children’s access to age-appropriate activities so that they may have as normal a childhood as possible. Caregivers using the reasonable and prudent parent standard have the statutory au-

thority to consent to such activities as sleepovers, school field trips, and sports activities. Note, however, that the other side of the coin—responsibility for a foster child’s actions while participating in an activity—is not addressed in the statutes and may be an additional factor for the caregiver to consider in making decisions as the reasonable and prudent parent.



CHILD ABUSE CENTRAL INDEX

The Department of Justice maintains the Child Abuse Central Index (CACI). The statutes creating the index are part of the Child Abuse and Neglect Reporting Act. (Pen. Code, § 11167 et seq.) Substantiated cases of abuse and severe neglect are reported to the Department of Justice for inclusion in the CACI. (Pen. Code, § 11169.) A person listed on the CACI may be restricted from obtaining employment in certain fields, such as health care and child care. (See *In re D.P.* (2023) 14 Cal.5th 266, 278.)

Penal Code section 11169 codifies the due process right of a person listed on the CACI to challenge his or her listing by requesting an administrative hearing. A person listed in the CACI may appeal the agency's decision by writ of mandate. Such hearings are heard de novo and are reviewed for substantial evidence. (*Gonzalez v. Santa Clara County Dept. of Social Services* (2014) 223 Cal.App.4th 72, 96.) The court will consider whether the agency proceeded without or in excess of its jurisdiction, whether the hearing was fair, and whether there was prejudicial abuse of discretion. (Code Civ. Proc., § 1094.5(b).)

Penal Code section 11170 requires that the index be continually updated and not contain any reports that are determined to be unsubstantiated. The department is responsible for ensuring that the CACI accurately reflects the report it receives from the submitting agency.



CHILDREN'S RIGHTS

CONSTITUTIONAL RIGHTS OF DEPENDENT CHILDREN

Independent of the constitutional interests of their parents, children have constitutional interests in dependency proceedings.

Family relationships—Children have a constitutional interest in their family relationships. (*In re Emmanuel R.* (2001) 94 Cal. App.4th 452.)

Protection and stability—Children have a constitutional interest in protection from abuse and neglect and in a stable and permanent placement. The turning point at which this interest may outweigh the interests of the parents is reached no later than 18 months after removal from the home. (*In re Manolito L.* (2001) 90 Cal.App.4th 753; *In re Jasmon O.* (1994) 8 Cal.4th 398.)

STATUTORY RIGHTS OF DEPENDENT CHILDREN

California law also entitles children to the following:

Right to make telephone calls when detained (§ 308)—No more than one hour after a peace officer or social worker takes a minor into custody, except where physically impossible, a minor who is 10 or older must be allowed to make at least two telephone calls: one call completed to the minor's parent or guardian and one call completed to the minor's attorney.

Right to counsel (§ 317(c))—The dependency court must appoint counsel for the child unless the court finds that the child would not benefit from having counsel (and the court must state on the record the reasons for such a finding).

Privilege; confidentiality of health and mental health information (§ 317(f))—A dependent child or the child's attorney may invoke the doctor-patient, therapist-client, and clergy-penitent privileges. If the child is over 12, there is a rebuttable presumption that the child is mature enough to decide whether to invoke or waive these privileges. (See *In re S.A.* (2010) 182 Cal.App.4th 1128.)



Children's health and mental health records are protected by federal and state confidentiality laws; however, these laws allow health and mental health providers to share information with county agency caseworkers and caregivers for purposes of coordinating care. (§ 5328.04; Civ. Code, § 56.103.) However, psychotherapy notes and information related to treatment that the minor consented to or could have consented to on their own behalf cannot be disclosed. (Civ. Code, § 56.103(e), (h)(2); §§ 5328.04(a), (f) & (h).)

Right to participate in hearings (§ 349)—Dependent children have the right to be present at all hearings and to address the court and otherwise participate. If a child 10 or older is not present, the court must inquire as to whether the child had notice of the hearing and why the child is not present, and it must continue the hearing if the child wishes to be present but was not given the opportunity to attend.

Extracurricular activities (§ 362.05)—A dependent child is entitled to participate in age-appropriate extracurricular, enrichment, and social activities.

Confidentiality of juvenile case files (§ 827)—Only certain persons (including the child; the child's attorney, parents, or guardians; the social services agency; court personnel; and other attorneys involved in the case) can inspect a child's dependency case file or otherwise obtain information about the contents of the file. (See § 827(a)(1)(A)–(P) for complete list of authorized persons.) Note that the right to access a file does not automatically entitle the viewer to copy or disseminate information from the file absent express court authorization to do so. (*Gina S. v. Marin County Dept. of Social Services* (2005) 133 Cal.App.4th 1074, 1078.)

Foster children's "bill of rights" (§ 16001.9(a))—The rights of children in foster care are enumerated in section 16001.9(a) and include those related to privacy, medical treatment, and visitation.

RIGHTS REGARDING CONSENT TO HEALTH CARE

By statute, minors can access certain health and mental health care services without parental consent. Also, minors have the right under



the California Constitution to consent to abortion. These rights apply to dependent children as well as to the general population.

Mental health treatment (Fam. Code, § 6924(b); Health & Saf. Code § 124260)—Two statutes permit a minor to consent to mental health treatment. A minor may consent to treatment if they meet either criteria:

Family Code section 6924(b): A minor who is 12 or older may consent to mental health treatment counseling or residential shelter services if:

- The minor, in the opinion of the attending professional, is mature enough to participate in the services; and
- The minor would present a danger of serious harm to self or to others without the services or is an alleged victim of incest or child abuse.

Health and Safety Code section 124260: A minor who is 12 years of age or older may consent to outpatient mental health treatment or counseling services if, in the opinion of the attending professional person, the minor is mature enough to participate intelligently in the mental health treatment or counseling services. If services are being provided by licensed interns or trainees, there may be obligations to consult with a supervisor regarding provision of minor consent care.

Prevention or treatment of pregnancy (§ 6925)—A minor may consent to medical care related to the prevention or treatment of pregnancy (including contraception and prenatal care but not including sterilization).

Abortion—A minor who is capable of informed consent has a constitutional right to consent to an abortion without parental notice or approval. (*American Academy of Pediatrics v. Lungren* (1997) 16 Cal.4th 307.

Treatment for sexually transmitted diseases (Fam. Code, § 6926(a))—A minor who is 12 or older may consent to medical care related to the diagnosis or treatment of sexually transmitted diseases.

Treatment for victims of rape (*Id.*, § 6927)—A minor who is 12 or older and who is alleged to have been raped may consent to medical care related to the diagnosis or treatment of the condition and the collection of medical evidence with regard to the alleged rape.



EDUCATION LAWS, RIGHTS, AND ISSUES

Ensuring that a dependent child's educational needs are met is an important factor in the child's overall well-being and is the responsibility of everyone involved in the dependency process, including attorneys, caregivers, parents, social workers, and the court.

EDUCATION RIGHTS/DECISIONMAKING AUTHORITY

A child under the age of 18 years needs an adult to make education decisions. Knowing which adult has the legal authority to make these decisions is important for children who are eligible for (or need to be assessed for) special education services. (§§ 319(g), 361; Ed. Code, § 56055; Gov. Code, § 7579.5.) Under rule 5.651 of the California Rules of Court, the court must address, starting at detention and at every subsequent hearing, whether the parent's or guardian's education rights should be limited and given to another person. If the court gives the right to make education decisions to someone other than the parent, the court must provide a clear statement of the order on Judicial Council form JV-535. The court should consider appointing a relative, nonrelated extended family member, mentor, CASA, or community volunteer as the responsible adult. (*Note:* Under rule 5.502(13), this person is also referred to as an educational representative.) However, an individual with a conflict of interest, such as a social worker, group home staff member, probation officer, or therapist, may not be appointed. (20 U.S.C. § 1415(b)(2)(A); 34 C.F.R. § 300.519(d)(2)(i); Cal. Rules of Court, rule 5.650(c).)

1. Who Holds Education Rights

a. Parents or Legal Guardians

Parents or legal guardians have the right to make education decisions *unless* their education rights have been limited. The juvenile court has the discretion to limit a parent's education rights if that is necessary to meet the child's education needs. If the parent's education rights are limited, the court may reinstate the right to make education decisions at a later date. (See §§ 319(g), 361, 366.1(e); Ed. Code, § 56055; Gov. Code, § 7579.5; Cal. Rules of Court, rule 5.651.)





Ensuring that a parent's right to make education decisions remains intact can be an important part of the reunification process. Often the parent can use this as an opportunity to remain involved in important decisions and demonstrate to the court that he or she is committed to resolving the issues that resulted in the child's removal from his or her care and is actively working toward reunification.



If a parent's whereabouts are unknown, a restraining order has been issued against the parent, or the parent is unwilling or unable to make education decisions, child's counsel should consider asking the court to limit the parent's education rights. A request to limit education rights might also be appropriate when a parent's problems (such as mental health or substance abuse issues) are so severe that the parent is unable to make responsible decisions. Each situation should be evaluated on a case-by-case basis.

b. Responsible Adults

When the court limits a parent's right to make education decisions, it must appoint a responsible adult to make them. (§ 361; Cal. Rules of Court, rules 5.650, 5.651.) Judges should consider appointing relatives, nonrelated extended family members, caregivers, mentors, CASAs, and community volunteers as educational representatives. (*Id.*, rule 5.650(c).) The representative holds all the education rights normally held by parents. (See *Id.*, rule 5.650(e) & (f), for a list of rights.) The person holds this responsibility until the court restores the parent's or guardian's education rights, a guardian/conservator is appointed, the child turns 18 years old, another person is appointed, or the child is placed in a planned permanent living arrangement and the court appoints the caregiver as the educational representative. (§§ 361(a), 726(b); Ed. Code, § 56055; Cal. Rules of Court, rule 5.650(e)(2) & (g).)

c. Surrogate Parents

If the court is unable to identify an educational representative and the child is eligible for (or needs to be assessed for) special education services, the court uses Judicial Council form JV-535 to request that



the school district in which the child resides appoint a surrogate parent within 30 days. (Cal. Rules of Court, rule 5.650(d).) The role of the surrogate parent is to represent the student with exceptional needs in all matters relating to identification, assessment, instructional planning and development, and educational placement, as well as to review revisions of the individualized education program (IEP). The surrogate parent may not be an employee of the California Department of Education, the school district, or any other agency involved in educating or caring for the child. He or she must have knowledge and skills to ensure adequate representation. The school district must provide training before appointment, and the surrogate parent must meet with the child at least once. (20 U.S.C. § 1415; 34 C.F.R. § 300.519; Gov. Code, § 7579.5.) County social workers, probation officers, or employees of a group home or any other agency that is responsible for the care or education of a child cannot be appointed surrogate parents. These individuals may not consent to services prescribed by IEPs. (20 U.S.C. § 1415; 34 C.F.R. § 300.519; Gov. Code, § 7579.5.)

d. Age of Majority

A student has the right to make his or her own education decisions once reaching the age of majority (18) unless deemed incompetent by the court under state law. (§ 361(a)(1); Ed. Code, § 56041.5.)

2. Court Orders Affecting a Child's Education

a. General

Under California Rules of Court, rule 5.651(c), the court has broad responsibility for the education of dependent children, and the social study report must include information on a broad range of educational issues. At every hearing, the child's attorney should review the educational information and identify a plan for meeting the child's needs, including whether the parent or guardian should be the holder of education rights; whether the child is attending his or her school of origin and, if not, whether the school placement is in compliance with the McKinney-Vento Act and state law (see "Transfer



and Enrollment Issues,” following); whether the child is attending a comprehensive, regular public school or private school; whether the child was immediately enrolled and the education records transferred promptly to the new school; whether the child’s educational, physical, mental health, or developmental needs are being met; whether the child has the opportunity to participate in developmentally appropriate extracurricular and social activities; whether the child needs to be assessed for early intervention or special education services; and so forth. (§§ 361, 726; Ed. Code, §§ 46069, 48850, 48853, 48853.5, 49076; Cal. Rules of Court, rules 5.650, 5.651.)

b. Detention

At the initial hearing, the court must consider whether the parent’s or guardian’s education rights should be limited. If the court limits these rights, even temporarily, it must identify the educational representative on Judicial Council form JV-535. (§§ 319, 726(b); Cal. Rules of Court, rules 5.650(a), 5.651(b).) This order expires at disposition or dismissal of the petition. Any right to limit education rights must therefore be readdressed at disposition. (§ 319(g)(3).)

c. Disposition and Beyond

At the disposition hearing and all subsequent hearings, the court addresses the educational rights of the child and determines who will hold those rights. If the court limits the parent’s right to make education decisions for the child, it documents the order on Judicial Council form JV-535. (§§ 361(a), 726(b); Cal. Rules of Court, rule 5.651(b).) If the court cannot identify an educational representative and the child does not qualify for special education, the court may make education decisions for the child with the input of any interested person. (§§ 319(g)(2), 361(a); Cal. Rules of Court, rule 5.650(a).)

TRANSFER AND ENROLLMENT ISSUES

1. McKinney-Vento

The McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act (42 U.S.C. § 11431 et seq.) allows homeless children to



- Remain in the school they attended prior to becoming homeless (their school of origin) until the end of the school year and for the duration of their homelessness; and
- Immediately enroll in school even if lacking the usual requirements.

Children covered by McKinney-Vento are entitled to transportation to and from school. The definition of “homeless” includes children “awaiting foster care placement.” (*Id.*, § 11434a.)

2. Assembly Bill 490 – Education Code Section 48850 et seq.

California Assembly Bill 490 (Stats. 2003, ch. 862) provides foster youth with a series of rights related to education that are in keeping with and build on the federal McKinney-Vento legislation. Under AB 490,

- Foster youth are entitled to remain in their school of origin for the duration of the school year when their placement changes and when remaining in the same school is in the child’s best interest (Ed. Code, § 48853.5(f)(1));
- If jurisdiction of the court is terminated before the end of an academic year, a child has a right to remain in the school of origin for the remainder of the school year, or if in high school, through graduation (*id.*, § 48853.5(f)(3)(A));
- When a foster child is subject to a change in school placement, the new school must immediately enroll the child even if the child has outstanding fees, fines, textbooks, or other items or money due to the school last attended or is unable to produce the records or clothing normally required for enrollment (*id.*, § 48853.5(f)(8)(B));
- Foster youth must be placed in the least restrictive academic placement and attend a mainstream public school unless the child has an IEP requiring placement outside the public school or the person who holds education rights determines it is in the child’s best interest to be placed in another educational program (*id.*, § 48853);



- The new school and old school must ensure that school records are transferred within two days of the child's checking out of the old school and into the new school (*id.*, § 48853.5(8)(c));
- Grades of a foster child may not be lowered because of absences from school owing to a change in placement, attendance at a court hearing, or other court-related activity (*id.*, § 49069.5(h));
- Local education agencies must calculate and award all full and partial course credit to pupils in foster care who transfer between schools (*id.*, §§ 49069.5, 51225.2);
- Each public school district and county office of education must accept, for credit, full or partial coursework satisfactorily completed by a student while attending a public school, juvenile court school, or nonpublic, nonsectarian school or agency (*id.*, § 48645.5); and
- Every local education agency must have an educational liaison for foster children (foster care liaison) (*id.*, § 48853.5), and child's counsel must provide his or her contact information to the educational liaison at least once per year (Welf. & Inst. Code, § 317(e)(4)).

Charter schools may be exempt from most laws governing school districts; however, if a charter school is a participating member of a special education local plan area (SELPA), it must comply with foster children's education rights and must provide special education services. (*Wells v. One2One Learning Foundation* (2006) 141 P.3d 225, 249.)

3. Change of School and Residency

If a proposed change in placement would cause a foster child to be removed from his or her school of origin, the social worker must notify the court, the child's attorney, the educational representative, or the surrogate parent within 24 hours, excluding nonjudicial days. If the child has a disability and an active IEP, then at least 10 days' notice is required before change in placement. After receipt of the notice, the child's attorney must discuss the proposed move with the child and the education rights holder. The child's attorney or



the educational representative may request a hearing, using Judicial Council form JV-539, no later than 2 court days after receipt of the notice. A hearing must be scheduled within 7 calendar days after the notice is filed. The court must determine whether the placement change affecting the school of origin is in the child's best interest. (Cal. Rules of Court, rule 5.651(e) & (f).)

Under federal and state law, a foster child has a right to a meaningful education, including access to the academic resources, services, and extracurricular and enrichment activities available to all students. A foster child who changes residences pursuant to a court order or decision of a child welfare worker must be immediately deemed to meet all residency requirements for participation in interscholastic sports or other extracurricular activities. (42 U.S.C. § 11301; Ed. Code, § 48850.)



Unlike McKinney-Vento, AB 490 does not contain a transportation mandate. The court and all parties should therefore determine whether the child is “awaiting foster care,” living in emergency shelters, or otherwise “homeless” as defined in McKinney-Vento. If McKinney-Vento does not apply, parties should discuss alternative transportation options, including the possibility of bus passes for older students. Another option to support the educational stability of foster children is to request that reasonable transportation costs to a child's school of origin be included in the caregiver's foster care maintenance payment. Under the federal Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008, the local child welfare agency may apply federal funds to cover education-related transportation costs for children in foster care. It expands the definition of “foster care maintenance payments” to include reasonable transportation to a child's school of origin. (Pub.L. No. 10-351, § 204.)

Counsel who believe that a school district is not complying with AB 490 provisions should begin by contacting the school district's foster care and/or homeless liaison. These liaisons are often very effective at resolving disagreements and educating school staff as to the legal



mandates affecting foster youth. The contact information for state and county foster care liaisons is available at www.cde.ca.gov/ls/pf/fy/ab490contacts.asp.

4. High School Graduation

Students in foster care who transfer between schools any time after the completion of their second year of high school are exempt from local school district graduation requirements that exceed state graduation requirements unless the school district finds that a student is reasonably able to complete the school district's graduation requirements in time to graduate from high school by the end of the student's fourth year of high school. The school district must determine if the student is reasonably able to complete the school district's graduation requirements within the pupil's fifth year of high school, and if so, the school district must take specified actions, including permitting the pupil to stay in school for a fifth year to complete the graduation requirements. The school district may use the student's credits earned to date or the length of the student's school enrollment to determine whether the student is in the third or fourth year of high school, whichever would qualify the student for the exemption. (Ed. Code, § 51225.1.)

Several programs are available to assist foster youth with college applications, housing during college, and financial support. For example, California Community College Tuition Assistance provides virtually free tuition for foster youth. Chafee Education and Training Vouchers offers up to \$5,000 per year to foster youth if they were in the foster care system on or after their 16th birthdays.

Some California state college campuses have designed local programs for former foster youth, including year-round housing during school breaks and summer sessions. A variety of scholarship programs specific to foster youth are available at California State University and University of California campuses throughout California. These programs go by different names: Guardian Scholars, Renaissance Scholars, CME Society, and Promise Scholars.



Many private, nonprofit organizations, such as United Friends of Children, provide scholarships and postsecondary support to foster youth. Other grants for low-income students, including foster youth, include Cal Grants and the Board of Governors Grant.



To be eligible for the variety of financial assistance programs available for college, a foster youth must apply for Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) through the U.S. Department of Education at <https://studentaid.gov/>. Encourage a foster youth to apply early, before the March deadline, to meet early admissions deadlines and ensure funds are available. With proof that the youth is or was a dependent or ward of the juvenile court system, the fee to apply for federal student aid will be waived. A letter of eligibility should be available from the youth's social worker, minor's counsel, or probation officer. Prior to closing the case, advise the youth to ask for this letter documenting his or her status as a foster youth and the dates the case was opened and closed.



More information on specific financial aid, on-campus support programs, and participating campuses can be found at www.ilponline.org and www.cacollegepathways.org. For scholarship opportunities, direct the youth to www.fastweb.com.

5. Nonpublic School Enrollment

There is a presumption that a foster youth will be placed in a mainstream public school unless the youth has an IEP requiring placement outside the public school or the person who holds education rights determines that placement in another educational program is in the child's best interest. (*Id.*, § 48853.) If the educational representative makes a unilateral decision to place a foster youth in a nonpublic school (NPS), the school district may not be obligated to fund the placement. A student must not be placed in a special class or an NPS unless the severity of the disability is such that education in a regular class with the use of supplementary aids and services cannot be achieved satisfactorily. (*Id.*, § 56040.1.) The youth must



have an IEP and be assessed for special education services prior to placement in a nonpublic school. (*Id.*, §§ 56342.1, 56320.)

A group home may *not* condition residential placement on attendance at a nonpublic school or a school that is agency owned or operated or associated with the home. (*Id.*, § 56366.9; Health & Saf. Code, § 1501.1(b).) A licensed children's institution or nonpublic, nonsectarian school or agency may not require as a condition of placement that it have educational authority for a child. (Ed. Code, § 48854.)

6. School Discipline

Foster youth are disproportionately subjected to school disciplinary actions, specifically suspensions and expulsions regulated by Education Code section 48900 et seq. Grounds for suspension or expulsion must be based on an act prohibited by the Education Code and a connection to the school. Generally, a student may not be suspended for more than 5 consecutive school days or 20 nonsequential school days within a school year. (*Id.*, §§ 48911(a), 48903(a).) Students have a right to notice and a hearing prior to an expulsion, a right to be educated while expelled, a right to appeal an expulsion, and a right to a reinstatement hearing when the expulsion period is over. (*Id.*, §§ 48918, 48919, 48922.)

Students with IEPs have different rights regarding school discipline. (*Id.*, § 48915.5.)



If the foster youth has a history of behavioral problems that are leading to disciplinary actions at school, the parent, educational representative, social worker, probation officer, or child's attorney should request a Student Success Team meeting to put positive interventions in place before the behavior results in multiple suspensions and/or expulsion.

The child's counsel and social worker must be notified of a recommendation for discretionary expulsion. (*Id.*, § 48853.5(d).) They must be invited to a meeting at which the school will consider and



request to extend an expulsion or suspension because it determined that the child poses a danger and, for a child with exceptional needs, to participate in an IEP team meeting that will make a recommendation to change the child's placement due to an act warranting discretionary expulsion. (*Id.*, §§ 48911(g); 48915.5(d).)

7. Records

The social worker or tribal organization with legal responsibility for the care and protection of the child may disclose student records or personally identifiable information included in those records to those engaged in addressing the child's educational needs, if the recipient is authorized by the agency or organization to receive the disclosure and the information requested is directly related to the assistance provided by that individual or entity. (*Id.*, § 49076(a)(1)(N).)

SPECIAL EDUCATION

Under both federal and state law, school districts and special education local plans (SELPA) have a duty to "child find"—i.e., actively and systematically identify, locate, and assess children with exceptional needs who may be entitled to special education services. Failure to do so may entitle the child to compensatory education. (20 U.S.C. § 1412; Ed. Code, § 56301.)

Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (29 U.S.C. § 701 et seq.) provides services to students who have a physical or mental disability that substantially impairs a major life activity. Examples of qualifying disabilities are asthma, allergies, diabetes, attention deficit disorder, and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder. If the child qualifies, the school district must prepare a plan that outlines special services, accommodations, and modifications that will be implemented to assist the child. (34 C.F.R. § 104.3(j).) Each district will have its own section 504 policy. Generally, a district may develop and implement a 504 plan with or without a parent's consent, and there are few procedural safeguards.

Special education under the Individuals With Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) (20 U.S.C. § 1400 et seq.) is a system of services

and supports designed to meet the specific learning needs of a child with a disability who is between the ages of 3 and 22 years. (Ed. Code, § 56031.) If a parent, educational representative, or other provider believes a child has a disability, he or she may request in writing that the school district conduct an assessment. (Cal. Code Regs., tit. 5, § 3021.) The school district must submit a proposed assessment plan to the holder of education rights within 15 calendar days of receipt of the written request. (Ed. Code, § 56321(a).) The education rights holder has 15 calendar days to provide written consent to the proposed assessment plan. (*Id.*, §§ 56321, 56381(f).) The school district has 60 calendar days (not including summer vacation or school breaks of more than 5 days) from receipt of the written consent to the assessment to complete the assessment and hold the initial IEP team meeting. (*Id.*, §§ 56344(a), 56043(c).)

Convening a Student Success Team may be a step toward determining whether a student needs special education services, but it is not mandatory to convene one prior to formally assessing the child for special education. After a special education assessment, if the child is found eligible for special education services, the school district is required to provide a FAP in the least restrictive environment, in the form of an IEP and related services that the child needs in order to access education. (20 U.S.C. § 1401; 34 C.F.R. § 300.17; Cal. Code Regs., tit. 5, § 3001; Ed. Code, § 56000.) Related services can include, but are not limited to, transportation; psychological services; physical, speech, and occupational therapy; and assistive technology. (*Id.*, § 56363.)

If a child is found eligible for special education at the initial IEP team meeting, then an IEP document and plan are developed. The written IEP should include long- and short-term goals and objectives, accommodations and modifications, related services, behavioral plans, placement information, and transition plans for a youth 16 years old. (20 U.S.C. § 1414(d); Cal. Code Regs. tit. 5, § 3042(b); Ed. Code, §§ 56345.1, 56043(g)(1).) When a school district makes an offer of FAPE, the holder of education rights may consent in whole or in part or dissent. Any parts of the IEP to which the education



rights holder has not consented may become the basis for a due process fair hearing. (20 U.S.C. § 1415; Ed. Code, § 56346.) Once the holder of education rights consents to the offer of FAPE, the child's progress in meeting goals and service needs will be reviewed annually, or more frequently upon request, by the IEP team. Every three years, the child will be reassessed to determine whether he or she continues to qualify for special education services. (*Id.*, §§ 56343, 56043, 56381.)

School districts are solely responsible for ensuring that students with disabilities receive special education and related services. Assembly Bill 114 transferred responsibility and funding for educationally related mental health services—including residential services and wraparound services needed for the child to benefit from the FAPE—from county mental health and child welfare agencies to education. (Assem. Bill 114; Stats. 2011, ch. 43.) AB 114 eliminated all statutes and regulations related to Assembly Bill 3632. (Stats. 1984, ch. 1747.)

In *Timothy O. v. Paso Robles Unified Sch. Dist.* (2016) 822 F.3d 1105, the court found that a school district had noticed that a child may have a disorder on the autism spectrum and had an affirmative obligation to formally assess the child for autism and all areas of that disability, as required by the IDEA. The school psychologist's informal observations and subjective staff member opinions did not relieve the school district of this responsibility or satisfy the formal-assessment requirement. The school district's failure to assess the child for autism violated the IDEA's procedural requirements and deprived the child of FAPE.

If a child under age five has a disability or is suspected of having a disability, he or she may qualify for early intervention services. For a child under age three, assessment and services are provided through regional centers. For a child between the ages of three and five years, early intervention services are provided by the school district in which the child resides. (Ed. Code, § 56001.)





Advise the holder of education rights to insist that all promises made by the school district are recorded in the IEP document. This document is a contract between the school district and the holder of educational rights, and a promise not in writing may not be enforceable. If the holder of education rights disagrees with the services offered by the school district or thinks the offer is not FAPE, he or she should not sign the document at the meeting but instead take the document home to review it, consult with an education advocate, and consider a response, which may include a request for a different school placement, more or different services, modifications, and/or accommodations. The holder of education rights may file for a due process fair hearing if he or she does not consent to all or part of the IEP.



Under section 317(e), the child's attorney has a duty to investigate legal interests that the child may have outside the scope of the dependency proceedings and to report to the court any interests that may need to be protected in other administrative or judicial proceedings. This duty applies to special education rights as well as tort claims and other causes of action. A child client may need education advocacy or legal representation in IEP meetings, due process hearings, and/or disciplinary hearings. The child's attorney must take steps to secure education support. Possible options may be direct representation on an education matter or a referral to a community education advocacy group, a nonprofit law firm focusing on low-income families, or a pro bono education attorney for the child.



If possible, attorneys should attend IEP meetings and/or assist the parents and caregivers with referrals to advocates or attorneys who specialize in special education law. Some counties have protocols for matching cases that require the assistance of an attorney with an attorney who specializes in education law.



FOSTER YOUTH LIAISON

Every county has a Foster Youth Services (FYS) Liaison. FYS programs ensure that health and school records are obtained and that students receive appropriate school placements and education-based services (such as tutoring, counseling, and supplementary vocational and independent living services). For more information, visit www.cde.ca.gov/ls/pf/fy/ab490contacts.asp.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

For additional information regarding education-related legal issues and rights that affect foster youth—covering such topics as AB 490, education decisionmaking, special education, nonpublic schools, school discipline, and special education discipline—see the Judicial Council of California’s Special Education Rights for Children and Families pamphlet, available at www.courts.ca.gov/documents/SPED.pdf.





BACK TO TOC

NONMINOR DEPENDENTS

In *In re Leon E.* (2022) 74 Cal.App.5th 222, 229, the Court of Appeal wrote, “A nonminor dependent is a foster child who has attained the age of 18, is under the care and responsibility of the child welfare department, and is participating in a TILCP [transitional independent living case plan].” An excellent summary of the program for nonminor dependents is found in *In re Jonathan C.M.* (2023) 91 Cal. App.5th 1039, where the court notes that the program is often called AB 12.

A social worker’s written court report is integral to the court’s oversight of a dependent child or a nonminor dependent (NMD). The report informs the court about a multitude of issues regarding the child or NMD and serves as the basis of the court’s findings and orders, helping the court make informed decisions regarding a child’s or NMD’s safety, permanency, well-being, and successful transition to living independently as an adult.

CHILD APPROACHING MAJORITY (RULE 5.707)

At the last review hearing before a child turns 18 years of age, or at the dispositional hearing held under section 360, if no review hearing will be set before the child turns 18, in addition to complying with other statutory and rule requirements applicable to the report prepared by the social worker for the hearing, the report must document the following:

- The child’s plans to remain under juvenile court jurisdiction as an NMD, including the criteria in Welfare and Institutions Code section 11403(b) that he or she plans to meet;²

² An otherwise eligible nonminor must meet one or more of the following conditions to receive extended foster care benefits: (1) complete secondary education or a program leading to an equivalent credential, (2) enroll in an institution that provides postsecondary or vocational education, (3) participate in a program or activity designed to promote or remove barriers to employment, (4) be employed for at least 80 hours per month, or (5) be incapable of doing any of the activities in (1)–(4) because of a medical condition.



- The efforts made by the social worker to help the child meet one or more of the criteria in section 11403(b);
- For an Indian child to whom the Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) applies, his or her plans to continue to be considered an Indian child for the purposes of the ongoing application of ICWA to him or her as an NMD;
- Whether the child has applied for title XVI Supplemental Security Income (SSI) benefits and, if so, the status of any pending application, and if such an application is pending, whether it will be in the child's best interest to continue juvenile court jurisdiction until a final decision is issued to ensure that the child receives continued assistance with the application process;

The social worker must also submit the child's transitional independent living case plan (TILCP), which must include (1) the individualized plan for the child to satisfy one or more of the criteria in section 11403(b), and the child's anticipated placement as specified in section 11402; and (2) the child's alternate plan for his or her transition to independence, including housing, education, employment, and a support system in the event the child does not remain under juvenile court jurisdiction after reaching the age of 18.

NMD STATUS REVIEW (RULE 5.903)

A status review hearing for an NMD must occur at least once every six months. The social worker must submit a report to the court that includes information regarding

- The continuing necessity for the NMD's placement, and the facts supporting the conclusion reached;
- The appropriateness of the NMD's current foster care placement;
- The NMD's plans to remain under juvenile court jurisdiction, including the section 11403(b) eligibility criteria that he or she meets for status as an NMD;
- The efforts made by the social worker to help the nonminor meet the section 11403(b) eligibility criteria for status as an NMD;



- Verification that the NMD was provided with the information, documents, and services required under section 391(e);
- How and when the TILCP was developed, including the nature and extent of the NMD's participation in its development, and for the NMD who has elected to have ICWA continue to apply, the extent of consultation with the tribal representative;
- The efforts made by the social worker to comply with the NMD's TILCP, including efforts to finalize the permanent plan and prepare the NMD for independence;
- Progress made toward meeting the TILCP goals, and the need for any modifications to help the NMD attain the goals;
- The efforts made by the social worker to establish and maintain relationships between the NMD and individuals who are important to the NMD, including caring and committed adults who can serve as lifelong connections; and
- The efforts made by the social worker, as required in section 366(a)(1)(D), to establish or maintain the NMD's relationship with his or her siblings who are under the juvenile court's jurisdiction.

The social worker must also submit with his or her report the TILCP. At least 10 calendar days before the hearing, the social worker must file with the court the report prepared for the hearing and the TILCP and provide copies of the report and other documents to the NMD, all attorneys of record, and, for the NMD who has elected to have ICWA apply, the tribal representative.

TERMINATION OF JURISDICTION (RULE 5.555)

At any hearing to terminate the jurisdiction of the juvenile court over an NMD or a dependent of the court who is a nonminor and subject to an order for a foster care placement, in addition to all other statutory and rule requirements applicable to the report prepared for any hearing during which the termination of the court's jurisdiction will be considered, the social worker must include the following:



- Whether remaining under juvenile court jurisdiction is in the nonminor's best interest, and the facts supporting that conclusion;
- The specific criteria in section 11403(b) met by the nonminor that make him or her eligible to remain under juvenile court jurisdiction as an NMD;
- For a nonminor to whom ICWA applies, when and how the nonminor was provided with information about the right to continue to be considered an Indian child for the purposes of applying ICWA to him or her as a nonminor;
- Whether the nonminor has applied for SSI benefits and, if so, the status of any pending in-progress application, and whether remaining under juvenile court jurisdiction until a final decision has been issued is in the nonminor's best interests;
- Whether the nonminor has applied for SIJS or other application for legal residency and, if so, the status of any pending in-progress application, and whether an active juvenile court case is required for that application;
- When and how the nonminor was provided with information about the potential benefits of remaining under juvenile court jurisdiction as an NMD, and the social worker's assessment of the nonminor's understanding of those benefits;
- When and how the nonminor was informed that if juvenile court jurisdiction is terminated, the court maintains general jurisdiction over him or her for the purpose of resuming jurisdiction, and that the nonminor has the right to file a request to return to foster care and juvenile court jurisdiction as an NMD until the nonminor's 21st birthday;
- When and how the nonminor was informed that if juvenile court jurisdiction is continued, he or she has the right to have that jurisdiction terminated;
- For a nonminor who is not present at the hearing,
 - Documentation of the nonminor's statement that he or she did not wish to appear in court for the scheduled hearing;
 - or



- Documentation of the reasonable efforts made to locate the nonminor whose current location is unknown; and
- Verification that the nonminor was provided with the information, documents, and services required under section 391(e).

The social worker must file with the report a completed *Termination of Juvenile Court Jurisdiction—Nonminor* (form JV-365), as well as the nonminor's TILCP (when recommending continuation of juvenile court jurisdiction), most recent transitional independent living plan (TILP), and completed 90-day transition plan.

At least 10 calendar days before the hearing, the social worker must file the report and all documents with the court and must provide copies of the report and other documents to the nonminor, the nonminor's parents, and all attorneys of record. If the nonminor is an NMD, the social worker is not required to provide copies of the report and other documents to the NMD's parents.

RESUMPTION OF JUVENILE COURT JURISDICTION (RULE 5.906)

At least two court days before the hearing on a nonminor's *Request to Return to Juvenile Court Jurisdiction and Foster Care* (form JV-466), the social worker or Indian tribal agency caseworker must file the report and any supporting documentation with the court and provide a copy to the nonminor and to his or her attorney of record. The social worker or tribal caseworker must submit a report to the court that includes

- Confirmation that the nonminor was previously under juvenile court jurisdiction subject to an order for foster care placement when he or she turned 18 years old, and that he or she has not attained 21 years of age or is eligible to petition the court to resume jurisdiction under section 388.1;
- The condition or conditions under section 11403(b) that the nonminor intends to satisfy;
- The social worker's or tribal caseworker's opinion about whether continuing in a foster care placement is in the nonminor's best interest, and a recommendation about the assump-



tion or resumption of juvenile court jurisdiction over the nonminor as an NMD;

- Whether the nonminor and the placing agency have entered into a reentry agreement for placement in a supervised setting under the placement and care responsibility of the placing agency;
- The type of placement recommended, if the request to return to juvenile court jurisdiction and foster care is granted; and
- If the type of placement recommended is a setting where minor dependents also reside, the results of the background check of the nonminor under section 16504.5.
 - The background check is required only if a minor dependent resides in the placement under consideration for the nonminor.
 - A criminal conviction is not a bar to a return to foster care and the resumption of juvenile court jurisdiction over the nonminor as an NMD.

CONCLUSION

The California Fostering Connections to Success Act made extensive policy and program changes to improve the well-being of and outcomes for children in the foster care system. The transition of a young person from foster care to successful adulthood is difficult and complex. It must be carefully planned and closely monitored. Thorough court reports are an essential component of this process and can help ensure that the nonminor dependent receives the array of services and support necessary for success.



FUNDING AND RATE ISSUES

The availability of funding is often a critical factor for relatives or other persons interested in providing care for a child who has been removed from the custody of his or her parent. All foster children should be eligible for some type of funding; however, the type of funding, amount, and source depend on a number of factors.

ELIGIBILITY FOR FEDERAL FUNDING

1. Requirements

a. Generally

Several requirements must be met for a child to be considered eligible for federal funding. Generally a child is eligible if, during the month a voluntary placement agreement (VPA) was signed or the dependency petition was filed, the home of the parent, guardian, or relative from whose custody the child was removed met federal poverty guidelines (i.e., was eligible for federal assistance under the 1996 standards for Aid to Families with Dependent Children [AFDC], which continues to be used for qualification under CalWORKS).

b. Children in Voluntary Placements

Federal funding is available for children in out-of-home placements under a VPA if the above criteria are met. However, this funding is limited to six months; if the child is initially removed on a VPA, the social services agency must file a dependency petition within 180 days of the date the VPA was signed to secure continued funding for children who are not returned to the parent's custody.



If funding is denied because the social services agency failed to file a petition within the specified time limit, urge the caregiver to appeal through a request for an administrative fair hearing. The caregiver and, ultimately, the child should not suffer because the county did not follow the required protocol.



c. Title IV-E

In addition, in order for the caregiver to be federally eligible under title IV-E of the Social Security Act, in the first court order authorizing removal of the child from the home, including on all protective custody warrants issued by the court, the finding that “continuance in the home is contrary to the child’s welfare” must be made. If this finding is not made at the first court order authorizing removal, the child will not be eligible for title IV-E funding for the entire foster care episode subsequent to that removal. (45 C.F.R. § 1356.21(c).) The court must make the following findings at the initial hearing on detention:

- Continuance in the home of the parent or legal guardian is contrary to the child’s welfare;
- Temporary placement and care are vested with the social services agency pending disposition; and
- The social services agency has made reasonable efforts to prevent or eliminate the need for removal.



If the proper language does not appear in the minute order from *the first hearing*, federal funding will be denied. A deficiency may be corrected if the transcript shows the words were in fact stated on the record but inadvertently left out of the minute order. However, an attempt to add the language at a later time with a nunc pro tunc order will not fix the problem. Because the results of omitting the title IV-E findings are so costly, it is best for all in the courtroom to ensure that the proper findings are made at the proper time.

Additionally, within 60 days of the child’s removal, the court must find that reasonable efforts were made to prevent or eliminate the need for removal. (45 C.F.R. § 1356.21(b)(1).) Every six months under California state law and every 12 months from the date the child entered foster care under federal law, the court is required to consider whether the social services agency made reasonable efforts to return the child home or finalize the permanent plan. These findings are necessary for continued eligibility of federal funding while the child is in a foster care placement. (45 C.F.R. § 1356.21.)



d. Federal Funding for Congregate Care Placements

Following implementation of the Family First Prevention Services Act, each placement of a child or nonminor dependent in a short-term residential therapeutic program or community treatment facility must be reviewed by the court under section 361.22 and 42 United States Code section 675a. To be eligible for federal funding, the child must be assessed by a qualified individual who recommends such placement and approved by the court no later than 60 days from the start of the placement. (§ 361.22; 42 U.S.C. § 675a.) The deputy director or director of the county child welfare department must approve continued placements longer than 12 months or 18 nonconsecutive months, or more than 6 consecutive or nonconsecutive months for a child younger than 13. (§ 16501.1(d)(2)(E); 42 U.S.C. § 675a(c)(5).)

2. Disqualifying Criteria or Circumstances

Federal funding is *not* available if

- The child is undocumented;
- The parent from whom the child was removed resides in the same home (unless the youth is a nonminor dependent living in the family home as a Supervised Independent Living Placement (SILP)); or
- The child is 18 or older and the court has terminated jurisdiction. Federal funding can be extended to age 19 if the youth is still in high school and is expected to graduate before his or her 19th birthday, or, starting in January 2012, funding can continue until age 21 if the youth meets the criteria to be considered a nonminor dependent under section 11403.



Loss of federal funding is not a legitimate basis for terminating jurisdiction. The juvenile court can maintain jurisdiction until a youth reaches age 21, and, if the court does so, the county must provide funding after federal eligibility ends. Jurisdiction may be terminated only when it is in a dependent youth's best interest; the



county's fiscal concerns do not take precedence. (See *In re Tamika C.* (2005) 131 Cal.App.4th 1153; see also Termination of Jurisdiction: Common Issues fact sheet.)

TYPES OF FUNDING

1. Aid to Families with Dependent Children—Foster Care (AFDC-FC)

Although the AFDC program no longer exists as a general welfare program, federal foster care funds are referred to as AFDC-FC and are provided to children who are federally eligible and living with a nonrelative. The level of funding is at either the basic rate or a higher, specialized-care increment depending on the individual child's needs.

2. Youakim

The Supreme Court in *Youakim v. Miller* (1976) 425 U.S. 231 held that federal foster care funds could not be withheld from a federally eligible child simply because the child was placed with a relative. “*Youakim*” is now the shorthand term used for federal foster funds paid to a relative caregiver. Funding may be paid at either the basic rate or a specialized-care increment, depending on whether the child has special needs.

3. State Foster Care

These funds are paid for dependent children who are placed with nonrelatives and are not federally eligible. The funding rates, including specialized rates, are the same as those paid under AFDC-FC and *Youakim*.

4. County Foster Care

When federal, state, and other funds are not available, the county in whose care and custody a dependent child has been placed should be responsible for paying for the child's care. This situation may arise in several circumstances, such as when an undocumented foster youth is awaiting approval of his or her application for Special Immigrant



Juvenile Status (SIJS) or when federal foster funds are terminated owing to the youth's age but the court determines that continued jurisdiction is in the dependent's best interest.



These situations are often covered under social services agency policy that will vary from county to county. Each case must therefore be individually assessed and arguments made to the court in terms of local policy and the child's particular circumstances.

5. CalWorks

CalWORKS is the State of California's welfare program that took the place of, and is still sometimes referred to as, AFDC. Most dependent children who are not federally eligible should be eligible for CalWORKS. A relative who qualifies under the income guidelines may also receive assistance but will need to meet all the program's work requirements and be bound by its time limits. The income of the caregiver is irrelevant if the application is filed for the child only under a Non-Needy Relative Caregiver Grant. CalWORKS payment rates are significantly lower than those under *Youakim*, and funding is not determined on a per-child basis; instead a smaller increment is added for each additional child.

6. Kinship Guardianship Assistance Payment (Kin-GAP)

The Kin-GAP program provides ongoing funding and Medi-Cal coverage to children in relative guardianships after dependency jurisdiction is terminated. Funding continues until the child turns 18, or, if the youth is on track to graduate from high school by age 19, until age 19. Also, starting in January 2012, Kin-GAP funding is available for nonminor dependents aged 18–21. (§ 11386(h).) Starting in 2010, a federal kinship guardianship assistance program replaced the state Kin-GAP program for federally eligible children. (§ 11385 et seq.) Funding rates under the federal program are to be negotiated in each case in light of the individual child's needs, rather than limited to the basic foster care rate. (§ 11387(a).)



To be eligible,

- A child must have lived with the caregiver for at least the six consecutive months immediately prior to termination of jurisdiction under the program;
- A legal guardianship must have been established by the juvenile court; and
- Dependency jurisdiction must have been terminated after the two prior conditions were met.

Previously, payments were capped at the basic foster care rate. However, the Kin-GAP Plus Program, effective October 1, 2006, extends eligibility for Kin-GAP to delinquent youth and provides a clothing allowance as well as continued payment of specialized-care increments to children who qualified for higher levels of funding before termination of jurisdiction.



Kin-GAP funding is available regardless of the prior source of funding and even if the caregiver previously received no funds at all. Children's counsel should make sure before jurisdiction is terminated that the required form (SOC 369, *Agency-Relative Guardianship Disclosure*) disclosing current and future funding rates has been filed with the court and reflects the correct amounts.



The six-month period of placement may not be required when a Kin-GAP guardianship is terminated and a successor guardian is appointed, if the successor guardian is also a kinship guardian who was named in the kinship guardianship assistance agreement or an amendment to the agreement, and the reason for appointment of a successor guardian is the death or incapacity of the kinship guardian. (§ 11386(i).)

7. Adoption Assistance Program (AAP)

The AAP is intended to encourage adoptions by providing a continuing funding stream to help families care for children they have adopted. It provides funding for all foster children, regardless of whether any funding was previously available, from the time the



prospective adoptive parents sign the adoptive placement agreement until the child's 18th birthday. The rate will be determined prior to finalization and should be the basic rate at a minimum and equivalent to the appropriate specialized-care increment if the child is disabled.



AAP rates are negotiable, and caregivers should be encouraged to educate themselves about the program and seek the maximum available amounts.



Children with disabilities receiving Adoption Assistance Program (AAP) benefits or placed in home-based foster care settings including with relatives or NREFMs, may be eligible to receive In-Home Supportive Services (IHSS) if they are otherwise eligible.

8. Supplemental Security Income (SSI)

This is a federal program administered through the Social Security Administration designed to provide funding to low-income children (regardless of their dependency status) who suffer from strictly defined physical or mental disabilities. Although SSI payments are generally higher than basic rates, they are significantly lower than specialized-care increments. Counties are authorized to designate themselves as the payee for dependent children receiving SSI in order to recoup costs for the children's care while placed in foster care. (§ 11401.6.) County agencies are also required to screen foster youth who are nearing emancipation for SSI eligibility. (§ 13757.) Children's attorneys should ensure that this screening is completed and an SSI application is processed, if appropriate, before jurisdiction is terminated. SSI benefits can provide a crucial source of income and Medi-Cal coverage for young adults with disabilities.



For children with severe disabilities that are likely to persist into adulthood, it is very important to ensure that an SSI application and an evaluation have been completed before the child's 18th birthday, as lifelong eligibility is based on identification of the disability during childhood.



9. Survivor's Benefits

This program is also administered by the Social Security Administration and is available regardless of dependency status. It provides funds for the children of deceased parents who paid Social Security taxes while alive. The amount of payment is proportional to the deceased parent's earnings. The child's income from survivor benefits may impact federal or CalWORKS eligibility.

10. Cash Assistance Program for Immigrants

Children (regardless of dependency or foster care status) who are undocumented or have been legal residents of the United States for less than nine years are eligible for this federal program. The payments are significantly lower than those available through any of the foster care funding streams. (See Immigration fact sheet.)

FUNDING RATES

1. Basic Rates

The basic rate is the monthly amount paid under AFDC-FC, Youa-kim, and AAP for children who do not qualify for specialized-care increments. The payment increases as the child grows older. Note that some counties (e.g., Los Angeles, Marin, Orange, and Santa Clara) distribute funding at rates higher than the standard amounts. Detailed information on rates is available from the California Department of Social Services and updated periodically at <https://www.cdss.ca.gov/inforesources/foster-care/foster-care-audits-and-rates/foster-care-rate-setting>.

2. Specialized-Care Increments

Higher amounts of funding are available for children with special medical needs or severe emotional/behavioral problems. The diagnosis and need for additional care must be documented, and the caregiver may need to fulfill certain training requirements in order to continue to provide for the child. For foster children with developmental disabilities who qualify for regional center services,



a special “dual-agency rate” may be available. Currently, only 55 of the 58 counties have specialized-care systems, and each has its own procedures.

3. Infant Child Supplement

This funding is a statutorily authorized payment that is made on a monthly basis to the caregivers of a dependent parent whose non-dependent child resides in the same placement. The monies are intended to offset some of the extra costs of care for the infant. The supplement remains available even after the parent’s dependency case has been terminated under Kin-GAP.



The social services agency should promptly send the caregiver a notice of action describing any approval, denial, or change in eligibility or funding. If funding is denied (or decreased) and the caregiver wants to contest the action, it is critical that the caregiver be advised to file within 90 days a request for an administrative fair hearing. Caregivers may begin this process by calling the California Department of Child Support Services’ State Hearing Support Section at 800-952-5253.



Funding is a very complex and constantly changing topic that is subject to federal, state, and county procedural requirements. This fact sheet is intended only as a general guide to alert dependency practitioners to issues that may become problematic. When problems do arise, current policy should be clarified utilizing state and county agency websites, and legal assistance should be sought from local experts in public assistance law.





BACK TO TOC

HEARSAY IN DEPENDENCY HEARINGS

SOCIAL STUDY EXCEPTION—SECTION 355

All hearsay that is contained in the “social study” (any written report provided by the social worker to the court and all parties) is admissible at a jurisdictional hearing so long as the social worker/preparer is made available for cross-examination and parties have an opportunity to subpoena and cross-examine the witnesses whose statements are contained in the report. (§ 355(b); see *In re Malinda S.* (1990) 51 Cal.3d 368, 382–383.)

However, if a timely objection is made to specific hearsay in a report, that hearsay evidence cannot be the sole basis of any jurisdictional finding unless any one of the following applies:

- It is otherwise admissible under another statutory or decisional exception;
- It was made by a child under 12 who is the subject of the hearing, and the statement is not shown to be unreliable because of fraud, deceit, or undue influence;
- It was made by a police officer, health practitioner, social worker, or teacher; or
- The declarant is available for cross-examination.

(§ 355(c)(1)(A)–(D).)



Remember that even a timely objection will not exclude hearsay. The statement will still be admitted under the social study exception, but the court may not exclusively rely on it to sustain any allegations unless one of the section 355(c)(1) criteria is established.

At all hearings after jurisdiction, the social study is admissible regardless of the availability of the preparer for cross-examination. (See *Andrea L. v. Superior Court* (1998) 64 Cal.App.4th 1377, 1387; *In re Corey A.* (1991) 227 Cal.App.3d 339, 346–347.)



The right to confront and cross-examine the preparer of any report admitted into evidence applies at all hearings, as does the



right to subpoena the preparer or any witness whose statements are contained in a social study. (§ 355(d); see *In re Matthew P.* (1999) 71 Cal.App.4th 841, 849.)

Following jurisdiction, the social study is not only admissible but also any hearsay within it is considered evidence competent to solely support the court's determinations. (*In re Keyonie R.* (1996) 42 Cal.App.4th 1569, 1572–1573.)



The “social study exception” only covers hearsay statements contained in the social services agency's reports. Other hearsay is still inadmissible unless an objection is countered with a valid exception. However, if no objection is made, the statement will come in as evidence and the issue is waived for appellate purposes.

“CHILD HEARSAY,” OR “CHILD DEPENDENCY,” EXCEPTION

The “child hearsay,” or “child dependency,” exception to the hearsay rule allows admission of out-of-court statements made by a child who is subject to dependency proceedings, regardless of whether the child is competent to testify, so long as

- All parties are notified of the intent to use the statements;
- There are sufficient surrounding indicia of reliability; and
- Either the child is available for cross-examination or evidence corroborates the child's statements.

(*In re Cindy L.* (1997) 17 Cal.4th 15, 29.)

The statements of a child found incompetent to testify because he or she is unable to distinguish between truth and falsehood (i.e., “truth incompetent”) are admissible under section 355 but may not be exclusively relied upon as a basis for jurisdiction unless the court finds that the time, content, and circumstances of the statements provide sufficient indicia of reliability. (*In re Lucero L.* (2000) 22 Cal.4th 1227, 1242–1243, 1247–1248.)

The court should consider a number of factors in determining the reliability of statements made by a child unavailable for cross-examination, including the following:



- Spontaneity and consistency of repetition;
- The mental state of the child;
- Use of unexpected terminology based on the child's age; and
- Child's lack of motive to fabricate.

(*In re Cindy L.*, *supra*, 17 Cal.4th at pp. 30–31.)

The Sixth Amendment right to confrontation does not apply to civil proceedings such as dependency and therefore does not bar the admission and use of statements made by a child who is incompetent to testify. (*In re April C.* (2005) 131 Cal.App.4th 599, 611.)



The decisional “child hearsay/dependency” exception was created prior to the amendment of section 355 that created the “social study” exception. Although the *Lucero L.* court concluded that corroboration is no longer required for admissibility of statements within a social study, it did not reject the child dependency exception itself. In fact, the court spoke favorably of and relied heavily on the underlying rationale in reaching its conclusions. Therefore, if a party seeks to introduce hearsay from a source other than the social study, the *Cindy L.* criteria should be argued in determining admissibility.



The opponent of hearsay under section 355(c)(1)(B) has the burden to show that the statement is inadmissible as a product of fraud, deceit, or undue influence. But if the proponent (usually the petitioner) of a statement by a witness unavailable for cross-examination does not establish its reliability, the court may not exclusively rely on that information in making its jurisdictional findings. (*In re Lucero L.*, *supra*, 22 Cal.4th at pp. 1248–1249.)



In situations where there are multiple levels of hearsay, the multiple hearsay is admissible only if each hearsay layer separately meets the requirements of a hearsay exception. (*People v. Arias* (1996) 13 Cal.4th 92, 149.) However, a statement within the scope of an exception to the hearsay rule is not inadmissible on the ground that the evidence of such statement is hearsay, if the hearsay evidence consists of one or more statements that each meet the requirements of an exception to the hearsay rule. (Evid. Code, § 1201.)





BACK TO TOC

IMMIGRATION

A child's immigration status is irrelevant to the applicability of dependency law. However, whether the child or parent is legally present in the United States can significantly impact that individual's access to public services and therefore can have an ancillary effect on the ability to comply with the requirements of a reunification case plan or with a family's ability to provide a healthy, safe, and stable home environment.



Immigration law is complex and subject to frequent change. This fact sheet is intended as a general guideline only. The practitioner should contact an expert on immigration law for assistance.

Counsel should make sure to be aware of any custody and other prior judicial determinations made in countries or states outside California that may affect the dependency court's jurisdiction. (See the Uniform Child Custody Jurisdiction and Enforcement Act and the Hague Convention on International Child Abduction sections of the Jurisdictional Issues fact sheet, below.)



The court should inform noncitizen parents and children that they can seek the assistance of the consulate of their country of nationality. In many cases, the consulate can be a tremendous resource—for example, by assisting with access to services, locating and evaluating relatives for potential placement, or providing document translation. Counsel should inquire whether the client's country has a memorandum of understanding outlining the relationship between the court, the country, and the consulate on issues relating to immigrant families.

PATHS TO DOCUMENTED STATUS

1. SIJ Status

Special Immigrant Juvenile Status (SIJS; 8 U.S.C. § 1101(a)(27)(J)) provides a mechanism for a dependent child to obtain permanent



resident status (i.e., a “green card”) under certain circumstances. In order to be eligible, the child must

- Be younger than 21 years old and unmarried at the time of filing of the petition;
- Be physically present in the United States;
- Be declared a dependent or committed to or placed in the custody of a state agency or department, or an individual or entity by the juvenile court (which may include delinquency family, or probate court (see 8 C.F.R. § 204.11));
- Be the subject of a finding by the juvenile court that “reunification with one or both of the immigrant’s parents is not viable due to abuse, neglect, abandonment, or a similar basis found under state law”;
- Be the subject of a finding by the juvenile court that it is not in the child’s best interest to be returned to the country of origin;
- Obtain consent from the Secretary of Homeland Security to be classified as a special immigrant juvenile (see 8 C.F.R. § 204.11(b)(5)); and
- Continue to be under the jurisdiction of the juvenile court unless that jurisdiction was terminated solely because of the child’s age.

A federal petition for classification as a special immigrant juvenile (SIJ) may be filed by the child or anyone acting on the child’s behalf (e.g., the social worker). Documentation of the child’s dependency status and the court’s relevant findings must be submitted in support of the petition.



It is critical that the juvenile court case remain open until the child has filed the federal petition for SIJS and, in many cases, until the SIJ petition and the green card application have been adjudicated. The process can take a long time to complete, so counsel should pursue this option as soon as the potential need arises and requisite findings have been made.





The appropriate documents for filing for SIJS are available at www.uscis.gov. Numerous documents must be submitted for a child who qualifies for SIJS, including, but not limited to, form I-360 (*Petition for Amerasian, Widow(er), or Special Immigrant*), form I-485 (*Application to Register Permanent Residence or Adjust Status*), and supporting documents. Practitioners should seek help whenever possible, especially if the child has a criminal history, dependency is terminating soon, or the child is about to turn 21.

2. VAWA

Under the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) (8 U.S.C. § 1154), the undocumented spouse or child of an abusive U.S. citizen or lawful permanent resident may apply for immigrant status with no need for cooperation from the abuser. If the application is approved, the applicant will first be given “deferred action” (see next section) and employment authorization until he or she can apply for a green card. “Abuse” is defined under VAWA as battery or “extreme cruelty” and need not be physical in nature but can also include psychological or emotional abuse. Any “credible evidence” is sufficient to demonstrate the abuse. (*Id.*, § 1154(a)(1)(J).) Thus, eligibility is likely to be supported by the sustained allegations of abuse or neglect or even police or hospital reports generated in connection with the dependency case. The sex of the applicant is irrelevant. Furthermore, the applicant need not personally have been the victim of the domestic violence so long as the applicant’s parent or child qualifies under VAWA because of abuse. More information is available at www.hud.gov/vawa.

3. U Visa

The U Visa program (*Id.*, § 1101(a)(15)(U)) allows a victim of specified serious crimes who has suffered substantial physical or mental abuse to obtain a nonimmigrant visa and ultimately to apply for a green card if they are being helpful or are likely to be helpful in the investigation or prosecution of the crime; this requires signed certi-



fication from a law enforcement official that the crime occurred in the United States or violated U.S. laws. (See 8 C.F.R. § 214.14.) The applicant is permitted to remain lawfully in the United States. If the victim is under age 21, the parents, unmarried siblings under age 18, and a spouse and children of that person are also admissible under this program, as are the spouse and children of an applicant victim who is older than 21 years.

4. Other

Some additional programs may provide the means for a client (either child or adult) to obtain legal status; these include the following:

- Asylum for those who fear persecution in their native country based on their race, religion, nationality, political views, or membership in a disfavored social group (such as LGBTQ+ members or victims of domestic violence);
- Temporary Protected Status (TPS), which provides temporary permission to stay and work in the United States for citizens from specified countries that have suffered devastating natural disasters, civil wars, or other nonpermanent disruptive situations (a list of countries designated for TPS is available at <https://www.uscis.gov/humanitarian/temporary-protected-status>;
- Family-based visas, which may be available based on a familial relationship to a U.S. citizen or lawful permanent resident; and
- T visas (*id.*, § 1101(a)(15)(T)) for victims of international human trafficking, for children who have been brought to the United States for purposes of prostitution, child labor, or other forms of unlawful exploitation. Information on T visas is available at <https://www.uscis.gov/humanitarian/victims-of-human-trafficking-t-nonimmigrant-status>.



Again, given the complexity of immigration law, it is recommended that dependency counsel consider referral to or consultation with outside counsel.



ACCESS TO PUBLIC BENEFITS

1. Generally

Dependent children who have been placed in foster care should be covered for all their needs (health, housing, education, etc.) regardless of their immigration status. The information below primarily becomes an issue of concern for both parents and children if the dependent child has been returned to or remains in the home of the parent.

In 1996, Congress enacted the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRA) (*id.*, § 1601 et seq.), which restricted access to public benefits for immigrants deemed “not qualified,” which generally includes all undocumented persons. Under the PRA, any immigrant who is “not qualified” is ineligible for most federal, state, or local benefits, including welfare, health, postsecondary education, food assistance, or similar benefit. (*Id.*, §§ 1611 [federal], 1621 [state or local].) However, the PRA does include limited exceptions. (See *id.*, § 1621(b) & (c).) The PRA also permits a state to provide for the eligibility of otherwise ineligible immigrants for any state or local benefit by enactment of a state law after August 22, 1996. (*Id.*, § 1621(d).) California has enacted, and continues to enact, statutes conferring eligibility for specific state and local benefits on undocumented persons over the past 20 years.

2. Education

A state may not deny public elementary and secondary school education to a child on the basis of immigration status. (*Plyer v. Doe* (1982) 457 U.S. 202; *League of United Latin American Citizens v. Wilson* (C.D.Cal. 1995) 908 F.Supp. 755, 785.) However, as noted above, public benefits, such as financial aid relating to postsecondary education, are prohibited for immigrants who are “not qualified.” Currently undocumented immigrants who sign an affidavit stating they are in the process of pursuing legalization or will do so as “soon as eligible” qualify for in-state tuition at California public colleges and universities. (Assem. Bill 540; Stats. 2001, ch. 81.)



3. Health Benefits

Undocumented adults are generally ineligible for full-scope Medi-Cal as well as for the Healthy Families program. They are eligible, however, for emergency Medi-Cal (which includes labor and delivery), Medi-Cal prenatal care, and Medi-Cal long-term (i.e., nursing home) care. Undocumented children are also generally ineligible for Medi-Cal, but they are eligible for the Child Health and Disability Program which provides preventive health screenings, immunizations, and temporary (two-month maximum), full-scope Medi-Cal.

4. Funding and Income Assistance

Persons who are “not qualified” immigrants are generally ineligible for support from General Assistance, Supplemental Security Income, CalWORKS/CalLearn, or CalFRESH (food stamps). However, immigration status is irrelevant to eligibility for the Women, Infants and Children (WIC) program as well as for school lunch and breakfast programs.



Assistance in this complex, ever-changing area of law is available from several resources, including the following:

Immigrant Legal Resource Center
1663 Mission St., Ste. 602
San Francisco, CA 94103
www.ilrc.org

National Immigration Law Center
3450 Wilshire Blvd. #108-62
Los Angeles, CA 90010
www.nilc.org

Public Counsel
Immigrants' Rights Project
610 South Ardmore Ave.
Los Angeles, CA 90005
www.publiccounsel.org/practice_areas/immigrant_rights



INDIAN CHILD WELFARE ACT

The Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) was passed by the United States Congress in 1978 to “protect the best interests of Indian children and to promote the stability and security of Indian tribes and families.” (25 U.S.C. § 1902.) The ICWA recognizes that “the tribe has an interest in the child which is distinct from but on a parity with the interest of the parents.” (*Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians v. Holyfield* (1989) 490 U.S. 30, 52.) The ICWA presumes it is in the child’s best interest to retain tribal ties and cultural heritage and in the tribe’s interest to preserve future generations, a most important resource. (*In re Desiree F.* (2000) 83 Cal.App.4th 460, 469.) In *Haaland v. Brackeen* (2023) 599 U.S. 255, the Supreme Court upheld the constitutionality of the Indian Children Welfare Act.

The Code of Federal Regulations (25 C.F.R. § 23.2) defines “Indian” as any person who is a member of an Indian tribe, or who is an Alaska Native and a member of a Regional Corporation. The regulations define “Indian child” as an unmarried person under age 18 who is a member or citizen of an Indian tribe or who is eligible for membership or citizenship in an Indian tribe and is the biological child of a member/citizen of an Indian tribe. An “Indian custodian” is an Indian who has legal custody of an Indian child under tribal law or custom or under applicable state law. The Indian tribe of which the child may be a member determines whether the child is a member of the tribe. (25 C.F.R. § 23.108(a).) A state court may not substitute its own determination regarding a child’s membership in a tribe. (25 C.F.R. § 23.108(b).)

In 2006, the California Legislature passed Senate Bill 678 to mandate compliance with ICWA in all California Indian child custody proceedings. In *In re Dezi C.* (2024) 16 Cal.5th 1112, the Supreme Court referred to this legislation as Cal-ICWA. The Center for Families, Children & the Courts, within the Judicial Council, gathers in one online location the following ICWA materials: (1) ICWA provisions in the Welfare and Institutions Code, (2) ICWA provisions in the Family Code, (3) ICWA provisions in the Probate Code, (4)



ICWA rules of court, (5) ICWA Federal Code of Regulations, and (6) Federal Bureau of Indian Affairs Guidelines for State Courts and Agencies in Indian Child Custody Proceedings. (Go to the “ICWA Laws, Regulations & Rules” page of the California Courts website.)

ICWA applies to certain probate court guardianship and conservatorship proceedings involving Indian children. (See Prob. Code, § 1459.5.) Children can be adopted out of probate guardianship, and when the child is an Indian child, ICWA must be considered. (Prob. Code, § 1516.5.)

Indian children and parents are involved in proceedings governed by the Family Code (e.g., divorce). The ICWA term “Indian child custody proceeding” does not include proceedings under the Family Code unless the proceeding involves a petition to declare an Indian child free from the custody or control of a parent (terminate parental rights) or to grant custody of an Indian child to a person other than a parent, over the parent’s objection. (Fam. Code, § 170(c).) ICWA does not control Family Court child custody litigation between Indian parents. ICWA can apply when an Indian child is adopted under provisions of the Family Code. (See Fam. Code, § 8606.5.)

ICWA requires that in all dependency cases the court and the child welfare agency inquire about the possible Indian status of the child. (Cal. Rule of Court 5.481(a)). This duty of inquiry continues throughout the life of the case as new sources of information such as extended family members become available to the court and agency.

During the first court appearance by a parent, the court must (1) ask each participant present whether the participant knows or has reason to know the child is an Indian child, (2) instruct the parties to inform the court if they subsequently receive information that provides reason to know the child is an Indian child, and (3) order the parent to complete the Parental Notification of Indian Status (form ICWA-020). (Cal. Rules of Court, rule 5.481(a)(2).)

“Reason to know” a child is an Indian child is addressed in rule 5.481(b). (See also 25 C.F.R. § 23.107.) When it is known or there is



reason to know an Indian child is involved, the Department of Social Services sends notice to the parent and the child's tribe on form ICWA-030, Notice of Child Custody Proceeding for Indian Child.

If ICWA does not apply, the court may make that finding on the record. (25 C.F.R. § 23.111; § 224.2(i)(2); Cal. Rules of Court, rule 5.482(c)(1).)

Where evidence suggests that a child is an Indian child within the meaning of ICWA, the court and agency are required to conduct "further inquiry" to determine the child's status. Further inquiry includes interviewing all available extended family members to create a family tree back to the child's great grandparents and providing this information to any tribes the child and family may be affiliated with. If at any point the court or agency has information including someone telling them the child is an Indian child, that the child or parents live on an Indian reservation, that the child is now or ever was under the jurisdiction of a tribal court, or either parent or the child has an identification card indicating membership in a tribe, then this gives the court "reason to know" the child is an Indian child. When the court has "reason to know," in addition to the various substantive and procedural requirements discussed below, notice of the proceedings must be sent to the child's tribe or tribes so they may participate in the proceedings. ICWA confers on tribes the right to intervene at any point in state court dependency proceedings. (25 U.S.C. § 1911(c).) Section 224.4 provides, "The Indian child's tribe and Indian custodian have the right to intervene at any point in an Indian child custody proceeding." Proper notice to a child's tribe is essential to the tribe's ability to intervene: "Of course, the tribe's right to assert jurisdiction over the proceeding or to intervene in it is meaningless if the tribe has no notice that the action is pending." (*In re Junious M.* (1983) 144 Cal.App.3d 786, 790–791.) "Notice ensures the tribe will be afforded the opportunity to assert its rights under the [ICWA] irrespective of the position of the parents, Indian custodian or state agencies." (*In re Kahlen W.* (1991) 233 Cal.App.3d 1414, 1421.)



Failure to inquire about Indian status and give appropriate notice to the child's tribe or tribes of child welfare proceedings can result in invalidation of the proceedings. (25 U.S.C. § 1914; § 224(e); Cal. Rules of Court, rule 5.486.) Further, when a case is subject to ICWA, both the child and the parents are entitled to different, culturally appropriate services that may be available only to Native Americans. It is incumbent on both the minor's and parent's attorneys to ensure that the ICWA inquiry occurs at the outset of a case and ICWA notice is given where required.

In *In re Dezi C.* (2024) 16 Cal.5th 1112, the issue presented to the Supreme Court was "whether a child welfare agency's failure to make the statutorily required initial inquiry under California's heightened ICWA requirements constitutes reversible error." (16 Cal.5th at 1125.) The court ruled "that an inadequate Cal-ICWA inquiry requires conditional reversal of the juvenile court's order terminating parental rights with directions to the agency to conduct an adequate inquiry, supported by record documentation." (16 Cal.5th at 1125.) The court held that on conditional reversal, the Department of Social Services must make additional inquiry efforts consistent with its duties under ICWA. The juvenile court then holds a hearing to determine whether, in view of the additional inquiry, ICWA applies. If the juvenile court determines ICWA does not apply, the judgment may stand. On the other hand, if the juvenile court determines ICWA applies, the judgment must be reversed and further proceedings held in conformity with ICWA.

The *In re Dezi C.* court wrote:

[Welfare and Institutions Code] Section 224 codifies and expands on ICWA's duty of inquiry to determine whether a child is an Indian child. Agencies and juvenile courts have "an affirmative and continuing duty" in every dependency proceeding to determine whether ICWA applies by inquiring whether a child is or may be an Indian child (§ 224.2, subd. (a).) This "duty to inquire begins with the initial contact, including, but not limited to, asking the party reporting child abuse or neglect whether the party has any information that the child may be an Indian child." . . .



While this duty of inquiry is sometimes referred to as the initial duty of inquiry, this is a bit of a misnomer, as the duty “continues throughout the dependency proceeding.”

In *In re Kenneth D.* (2024) 16 Cal.5th 1087, the Supreme Court wrote: “The question here is, when the required initial inquiry was inadequate, may an appellate court consider *postjudgment* evidence to conclude the effort was harmless? We hold that, absent exceptional circumstances, a reviewing court may not generally consider postjudgment evidence to conclude the effort was harmless. The sufficiency of an ICWA inquiry must generally be determined by the juvenile court in the first instance.”

When a dependency case involves an Indian child, ICWA imposes substantive requirements that are different from those imposed under the Welfare and Institutions Code for non-Indian children. (See 25 U.S.C. §§ 1901–1963; 25 C.F.R. § 23; *Guidelines for Implementing the Indian Child Welfare Act*,³ §§ 224–224.6, 305.5, 306.6, 361(c)(6), 361.7, 361.31, 366.24, 366.26(a)(2), 366.26(c)(1)(A), 366.26(c)(1)(B)(iv) & (vi), 366.26(c)(2)(B); Cal. Rules of Court, rules 5.480–5.487.)

ELIGIBILITY

1. Definitions

An Indian child is an unmarried person under the age of 18 years who is a member of an Indian tribe or is eligible for membership in an Indian tribe and is the biological child of a tribal member. An Indian custodian is any Indian person who has legal custody of an Indian child under tribal law or custom or state law or has temporary physical care, custody, and control of an Indian child whose parent(s) have transferred custody to that person. (25 U.S.C. § 1903(4) & (6); Welf. & Inst. Code, § 224.1.) “Indian child” in section 224.1(b) includes a youth up to the age of 21 who remains a dependent of the court unless the youth elects otherwise.

³ Bureau of Indian Affairs, *Guidelines for Implementing the Indian Child Welfare Act* (Dec. 2016), <https://www.bia.gov/sites/default/files/dup/assets/bia/ois/pdf/idc2-056831.pdf>.



2. Determination of Status

A determination by a tribe, or by the Bureau of Indian Affairs (absent a determination by a tribe to the contrary), that a child is or is not a member of a tribe or that the child is eligible for membership in the tribe is conclusive. (25 U.S.C. § 1911(d); § 224.2(h).) A child does not need to be “enrolled” or eligible for enrollment unless the tribe itself states that enrollment is a prerequisite for membership. (§ 224.2(h).)



Attorneys for parents and children should, whenever appropriate, contact the tribal representative directly. Counsel can assist by providing the tribe with information necessary to establish eligibility, ensure that the parent and Indian child have access to proper services and funding, and relay the party’s preferences as to placement. The California Department of Social Services maintains an ICWA webpage that can be accessed at www.cdss.ca.gov/inforesources/icwa-hotline/resources. You can also find tribal contact information at www.bia.gov and information on tracing Indian ancestry at <https://www.bia.gov/guide/tracing-american-indian-and-alaska-native-ai-an-ancestry>.

PROCEDURE

1. Definitions

ICWA defines the cases to which it applies as “child custody proceeding[s],” including foster care placement, termination of parental rights, preadoptive placement, and adoptive placement. (25 U.S.C. § 1903.) Federal regulations state that an emergency proceeding is not a child custody proceeding. (25 C.F.R. § 23.2(i).) In California, an initial detention hearing in juvenile court is an “emergency proceeding” as that term is defined in ICWA. (§ 224.1(l).) A dependency case may produce several “child custody proceedings.” (25 C.F.R. § 23.2.)

Whenever a child is involuntarily removed from parental custody and there is “reason to know” that the child is an Indian child, ICWA applies. (*Guidelines for Implementing the Indian Child Welfare*



Act, B.2, at page 13.) Each phase of a California child welfare case involving an Indian child will be a different “child custody proceeding” subject to specific ICWA requirements as the case progresses.

2. Inquiry

The court and the social services agency have an affirmative, ongoing duty to inquire whether a child for whom a dependency petition has been or may be filed may be an Indian child. The agency’s duty of inquiry begins at the first contact with a family. (§ 244.2 (a).) Before or at a parent’s first appearance before the court on a dependency matter, the parent must be ordered to complete form ICWA-020 (*Parental Notification of Indian Status*) as to possible Indian ancestry and the child’s parents or any relative’s membership in an Indian tribe. At the first appearance, the court must also ask each participant present whether they have information and instruct them to inform the court if they subsequently receive any information that the child is an Indian child. (Cal. Rules of Court, rule 5.481(a).) The court and agency have an ongoing duty to make inquiry of extended family members and relatives throughout the life of the case. If this inquiry results in the agency or the court having reason to believe that the child is an Indian child, then the agency is required to conduct further inquiry as defined in Welfare and Institutions Code section 224.2(e). If at any point the court or agency have reason to know the child is an Indian child, then the court must treat the child as an Indian child and complete and send ICWA notice using Judicial Council form ICWA 030, *Notice of Child Custody Proceeding for Indian Child*, in accordance with section 224.3. In addition, federal regulations require the agency to use “. . . due diligence to identify and work with all of the Tribes of which there is reason to know the child may be a member (or eligible for membership), to verify whether the child is in fact a member . . .” (25 C.F.R. § 23.107.) Evidence of this due diligence must be presented to the court.



3. Jurisdiction and Transfer

a. Full Faith and Credit

Full faith and credit must be afforded to all public acts, records, and judicial proceedings of any Indian tribe. (25 U.S.C. § 1911(d).)

b. Exclusive Jurisdiction

If the Indian child resides or is domiciled on a reservation that exercises exclusive jurisdiction, or the child is already a ward of a tribal court, the dependency petition must be dismissed. (§ 305.5; Cal. Rules of Court, rule 5.483.)

c. Temporary Emergency Jurisdiction

The juvenile court may exercise temporary emergency jurisdiction even when a tribe has exclusive jurisdiction if the child is temporarily off the reservation and there is an immediate threat of serious physical harm to the child. Specific evidentiary and procedural requirements apply to such emergency removals. (25 C.F.R. § 23.113; 319(b), (d), (3)(2), (f)(2) & (i).) Temporary emergency custody must terminate “immediately when the removal or placement is no longer necessary to prevent imminent physical damage or harm to the child,” and in any case within 30 days unless the court determines, based on clear and convincing evidence, including the testimony of a qualified expert witness, that restoring the child to the parent or Indian custodian is likely to cause serious physical damage to the child, the court has been unable to transfer the child to the jurisdiction of a tribal court, and initiating a nonemergency “child-custody proceeding” as defined in 25 Code of Federal Regulations part 23.2 has not been possible. (§ 305.5(f); 25 C.F.R. § 23.113.) If an Indian child is detained under section 319 and any party believes that circumstances have changed and the child’s removal is no longer necessary to prevent imminent physical damage or harm to the child, the party may make an ex parte request prior to disposition to have the child returned. (§ 319.4; Cal. Rules of Court, rule 5.484.)

d. Concurrent Jurisdiction

If the Indian child is not residing or domiciled on a reservation that exercises exclusive jurisdiction, the tribe, parent, or Indian custodian



may petition the court to transfer the proceedings to the tribe. The juvenile court must transfer the case absent good cause not to do so. Either parent may object to the transfer, or the tribe may decline the transfer; in the latter instance, the juvenile court retaining jurisdiction must continue to comply with ICWA requirements. (25 U.S.C. § 1911(b); 25 C.F.R. §§ 23.115–23.119; § 305.5(b).)

e. Transfer

At the request of the tribe, parent, or Indian custodian, the juvenile court must transfer the case to tribal court, absent good cause not to transfer. Federal regulations and California statutory law limit the basis for good cause not to transfer. Either parent objecting to the transfer or the tribe declining the transfer constitutes good cause. Other factors may provide the court with discretion to find good cause; however, federal regulations prohibit consideration of some factors. (25 C.F.R. § 23.118(c).) The right to request a transfer to tribal court attaches to each ICWA “proceeding” before termination of parental rights. Therefore, transfer can be sought during the emergency proceeding, foster care, and termination of parental rights phases of the case. (25 U.S.C. § 1911; 25 C.F.R. §§ 23.115–23.119; § 305.5; Cal. Rules of Court, rule 5.483.)



Attorneys for parents should consult with their clients and the tribe to determine whether tribal court jurisdiction would be more beneficial to the clients. This consideration should be made at all stages, but particularly if the parent is facing termination of parental rights. Note that once parental rights have been terminated, the ICWA transfer provisions no longer apply.

4. Rights

a. To Intervene

An Indian custodian and the Indian child’s tribe have the right to intervene orally or in writing at any point in the dependency proceeding. (Cal. Rules of Court, rule 5.482(d).)



b. To Counsel

Indigent parents and Indian custodians have the right to court-appointed counsel in a “removal, placement or termination proceeding.” (25 U.S.C. § 1912(b); see § 224.2(a)(5)(G)(v).)

c. To Access Case Information

If an Indian child’s tribe has intervened in the child’s case, the child’s tribal representative may inspect the court file and receive a copy of the file without a court order. (§ 827(f).)

5. Notice

Whenever there is reason to know that an Indian child is involved in a dependency proceeding, the social services agency must send notice on mandatory Judicial Council form ICWA-030, *Notice of Child Custody Proceeding for Indian Child*, of any upcoming proceedings to the parent; to the Indian custodian, all tribes of which the child may be a member or in which he or she may be eligible for membership; and, if no tribe can be identified, to the Bureau of Indian Affairs. Notice must be as complete and accurate as reasonably possible. The agency has an affirmative and continuing duty to interview available family members and others to obtain the information necessary to complete the notice. (§ 224.2(a).) The obligation to send notice continues until, and if, it is determined that the child is not an Indian child. The juvenile court may determine that ICWA does not apply if, 60 days after notice has been sent, no determinative response has been received from any of the parties notified. Notice must be sent by registered mail with a return receipt requested, and the return receipts must be lodged in the court file. The requirement to send notice, like the requirement to conduct inquiry, attaches to each distinct ICWA proceeding, of which there may be several as a case progresses. (25 C.F.R. § 23.2, definition of child custody proceeding (2); *Guidelines for Implementing the Indian Child Welfare Act*, D.10.)



6. Burdens and Standards

a. Burden of Proof

The burdens of proof required both to remove a child from a parent's custody and to terminate parental rights are higher than those required under the Welfare and Institutions Code for non-Indian children:

Clear and convincing evidence that continued custody with the parent or Indian custodian is likely to cause serious emotional or physical damage, including the testimony of a qualified expert witness, is required to place a child in foster care and to order a guardianship. (See § 224.6 for information on qualified expert witnesses.)

In order for the court to terminate parental rights, proof must be beyond a reasonable doubt and include testimony of a qualified expert witness that continued custody with the parent or Indian custodian is likely to cause serious emotional or physical damage. (*Note:* See 25 U.S.C. § 1912(e) & (f); 25 C.F.R. § 23.121; § 224.6; Cal. Rules of Court, rule 5.486.)



It is almost always in a parent's best interest to make all efforts to establish the applicability of the ICWA so that proceedings are conducted under the heightened burdens described above.

b. Qualified Expert Witness Testimony

In order to place an Indian child into foster care, enter an order of guardianship, or terminate parental rights, the court must require and rule on the testimony from a qualified expert witness that continued custody with the parent or Indian custodian is likely to cause serious emotional or physical damage. Persons most likely to be considered experts include members of the tribe or lay or professional persons with substantial education and experience in Indian social and cultural standards. (§ 224(c).) An expert witness must not be a member of the child welfare agency recommending foster care placement. (25 U.S.C. § 1912(e) & (f); 25 C.F.R. § 23.122; § 224.6.)



The court may accept a declaration or affidavit from a qualified expert witness (QEW) in lieu of live testimony only if the parties stipulate in writing and the court is satisfied that the stipulation has been made knowingly, intelligently, and voluntarily. (§ 224.6.) The central question that QEW testimony must address is whether continued custody of the child by the parent or Indian custodian is likely to result in serious emotional or physical damage to the child. (25 U.S.C. § 1912(e) & (f).)

c. Active Efforts

In order to remove from the custody of or terminate the parental rights of a parent of an Indian child, the juvenile court must find that active efforts were made to provide remedial services and rehabilitative programs designed to prevent the breakup of the Indian family and that these efforts were unsuccessful. (§ 361.7.) Active efforts must include attempts to utilize available resources offered by the extended family, the tribe, Indian social services agencies, and individual Indian caregivers. The court must also take into account the prevailing social and cultural conditions of the Indian child's tribe. (§ 361.7; Cal. Rules of Court, rule 5.484(c).)

Although the term “active efforts” is not defined in the ICWA, federal regulations define “active efforts” as

affirmative, active, thorough, and timely efforts intended primarily to maintain or reunite an Indian child with his or her family. Where an agency is involved in the child-custody proceeding, active efforts must involve assisting the parent or parents or Indian custodian through the steps of a case plan and with accessing or developing the resources necessary to satisfy the case plan. To the maximum extent possible, active efforts should be provided in a manner consistent with the prevailing social and cultural conditions and way of life of the Indian child's Tribe and should be conducted in partnership with the Indian child and the Indian child's parents, extended family members, Indian custodians, and Tribe.

(25 C.F.R. § 23.2)



The regulations set out specific examples of what can constitute active efforts. (25 C.F.R. § 23.2.) Section 361.7(b) requires that active efforts be made “in a manner that takes into account the prevailing social and cultural values, conditions, and way of life of the Indian child’s tribe” and that efforts “utilize the available resources of the Indian child’s extended family, tribe, tribal and other Indian social service agencies, and individual Indian caregiver service providers.”

7. Special Considerations

a. Placement Preferences: 25 U.S.C. § 1915; Welf. & Inst. Code, § 361.31

ICWA establishes placement preferences when Indian children are removed from parents and when Indian children are adopted. As 25 Code of Federal Regulations part 23.129 provides: “In any preadoptive, adoptive, or foster-care placement of an Indian child, the placement preferences specified in § 23.130 and § 23.131 apply.”

When an Indian child is removed from parental custody, the child must be placed in the least restrictive setting that most approximates a family situation, and in which the child’s special needs can be met. The child must be placed within reasonable proximity to the child’s home, again taking into account the child’s special needs. (361.31(b); Cal. Rules of Court, rule 5.485(b)(1).) Upon removal, placement preferences apply in the following descending priority order:

1. A member of the Indian child’s extended family as defined in section 1903 of IWCA.
2. A foster home licensed, approved, or specified by the child’s tribe.
3. An Indian foster home licensed or approved by an authorized non-Indian licensing authority.
4. A children’s institution approved by an Indian tribe or operated by an Indian organization that offers a program suitable to meet the Indian child’s needs.

(§ 361.31(b); Cal. Rules of Court, rule 5.484(b).)



When an Indian child is to be adopted, section 361.31(c) sets forth the order of preference in descending priority order:

1. A member of the Indian child's extended family as defined in section 1903 of ICWA.
2. Other members or citizens of the child's tribe.
3. Another Indian family.

A child's tribe can establish a different order of preference in removal and adoption cases. (§ 361.31(d).) When a child is of sufficient age, the child's preference is considered. (§ 361.31(e).)

When a party seeks departure from the ICWA preference order, the party has the burden of proving by clear and convincing evidence that there is good cause for a departure. (25 C.F.R. § 23.132; Welf. & Inst. Code, § 361.31(i).) A departure can be requested by one or both parents or the child. (§ 361.31(j)(1), (2).) A departure may be warranted to maintain a sibling attachment. (§ 361.31(j)(3).) A departure may be appropriate to meet a child's extraordinary physical or psychological needs. (§ 361.31(j)(4).) Departure may be needed when there is no suitable placement under the preference scheme. (§ 361.31(j)(5).) The placement order cannot be departed from due to the socioeconomic status of a placement relative. (§ 361.31(k).) Nor can the preferences yield when the only evidence is that a child is bonded to adults caring for the child. (§ 361.31(l).)

When an Indian child's placement changes, the placement preferences must be followed. (Cal. Rules of Court, rule 5.482(e), 5.485(b)(4).)

The federal regulations (25 C.F.R. §§ 23.129–23.132) and guidelines (*Guidelines for Implementing the Indian Child Welfare Act*, H.2–H.5) address the requirements for an agency to actively seek out placements within the placement preferences and document these efforts, and for the court to make a finding if the placement does not conform to the placement preferences. The regulations also limit the factors that the court can consider in allowing a placement that deviates from the placement preferences. In addition, rule 5.482 of the California Rules of Court requires that “any person or court



involved in the placement of an Indian child must use the services of the Indian child's tribe, whenever available through the tribe in seeking to secure placement within the order of placement preference specified in rule 5.484."



Designation as a foster home "licensed or approved by the Indian child's tribe" does not necessarily require that the caregivers be members of the tribe. The tribe may alter these placement preferences, and approval of a home can be sought through a tribal representative at any time in the proceedings.

b. Tribal Customary Adoption

Dependent Indian children who are unable to reunify with their parents may be eligible for adoption through the tribe's laws, traditions, and customs without the parental rights of the child's biological parents being terminated. This option, known as tribal customary adoption, is implemented through sections 366.24 and 366.26.



INTERSTATE COMPACT ON THE PLACEMENT OF CHILDREN

The Interstate Compact on the Placement of Children (ICPC) is an agreement among member territories and states, including California, that governs “sending, bringing or causing any child to be sent or brought into a receiving state for placement in foster care or as a preliminary to a possible adoption.” (Fam. Code, § 7901, art. 3(b).) The purpose of the ICPC is to facilitate cooperation between jurisdictions for the placement and ongoing supervision of children who are dependents or wards of the court, and it details the procedures that must be followed in making out-of-state placements in such situations.

APPLICABILITY

1. Generally

The ICPC applies to the placement of any dependent child in any other state, the District of Columbia, or the U.S. Virgin Islands. (Cal. Rules of Court, rule 5.616(a).) It applies to placement with relatives, nonrelatives, legal guardians, residential facilities, group homes, and treatment facilities. (*Id.*, rule 5.616(b).) However, it does not apply when the court is transferring jurisdiction of a case to a tribal court. (Fam. Code, § 7907.3.)

2. Distinction Between Visit and Placement

An order authorizing a visit that is for a period longer than 30 days, that is indeterminate in length, or that extends beyond the end of a school vacation is considered a placement and therefore is subject to the ICPC. (Cal. Rules of Court, rule 5.616(b)(1)(B).)



Although true short-term visits are not controlled by the ICPC, assistance from the receiving state’s ICPC unit may be helpful in facilitating visits—for example, by conducting background checks or courtesy visits.



3. Previously Noncustodial Parent

The ICPC does not apply to placement outside California with a previously noncustodial parent. (*Id.*, rule 5.616(b)(1)(A), (g). See Fam. Code, § 7901, art. 8.)

Although compliance with the ICPC is not required for placement with an out-of-state parent, nothing in the ICPC prevents the use of an ICPC evaluation as a method of gathering information about a parent before the court makes a finding under section 361.2 regarding whether placement with the previously noncustodial parent would be detrimental to the child. (*In re John M.* (2006) 141 Cal.App.4th 1564, 1572.) However, an unfavorable recommendation by the receiving jurisdiction may not be the sole basis for denial of placement, absent other evidence establishing detriment.



The attorney for a nonoffending parent from another state will want to gather as much evidence as possible (such as home photos, work history, letters from employers or clergy) to present to the child's attorney, social worker, and court so that the court can make informed decisions on the child's placement in the parent's custody and termination of jurisdiction.

PROCEDURE

1. Requirements

Prior to placing a child in another state, the sending jurisdiction must notify the designated receiving jurisdiction of the intention to place the child out of state. (Fam. Code, § 7901, art. 3(b); Cal. Rules of Court, rule 5.616(d).) A child may not be sent to the new caregivers until the receiving jurisdiction has responded in writing that it has determined that the placement is not contrary to the child's best interest. (Fam. Code, § 7901, art. 3(d); Cal. Rules of Court, rule 5.616(d)(2).)



It can be argued that because a child is merely “detained” and not “placed” prior to disposition, an ICPC may not be initi-



ated until the court makes the dispositional orders removing the child from the custodial parent and placing the child in foster care. However, this is a subtle distinction, and especially given that ICPC assessments can take months to complete, counsel may want to request an ICPC referral from the court as soon as the issue of out-of-state placement arises.

2. Priority Placements

Expedited placement procedures require express findings by the court that

- The child is a dependent removed from and no longer residing in the home of a parent and now being considered for placement in another state with a stepparent, grandparent, adult aunt or uncle, adult sibling, or legal guardian, and
 - The child has become unexpectedly dependent due to the sudden or recent incarceration, incapacitation, or death of a parent or guardian;
 - The child is four years of age or younger;
 - The child is part of a group of siblings who will be placed together, where one or more of the siblings is 4 years of age or younger;
 - The child to be placed, or any of the child's siblings in a sibling group to be placed, has a substantial relationship with the proposed placement resource (see Cal. Code Regs., tit. 7, § 5(c)); or
 - The child is in an emergency placement.

(*Id.*, rule 5.616(h).)

The procedure for submitting an expedited placement request and for seeking assistance from the receiving jurisdiction in the case of a delayed response (including references to the required forms and a detailed timeline of the process) can be found in rule 5.616(h).



Counsel must keep close watch on the time limits for ICPC compliance and approach the court for assistance if the receiving



state does not respond in a timely manner. A <https://icpcstatepages.org/> for each of the member jurisdictions and their contact information as well as additional ICPC resources are available online at <https://aphsa.org/AAICPC/Resources.aspx>.



JURISDICTIONAL ISSUES

UNIFORM CHILD CUSTODY JURISDICTION AND ENFORCEMENT ACT

The Uniform Child Custody Jurisdiction and Enforcement Act (UCCJEA) governs subject matter jurisdiction in child custody—including dependency—cases. (Fam. Code, §§ 3400–3465.)

1. Purpose

The purpose of the UCCJEA is to avoid jurisdictional competition between states, to promote interstate cooperation so that custody orders are made in the state that can best decide the issue in the child's interests, to discourage continuing custody conflicts, to deter child abductions, to avoid relitigation of another state's custody decisions, and to facilitate enforcement of custody decrees. (See *In re Joseph D.* (1993) 19 Cal.App.4th 678, 686–687 (discussing former UCCJA).)

2. Applicability

California has jurisdiction over a child who is the subject of a dependency petition if the child has lived in California with a parent for the six consecutive months immediately before the petition was filed *and* there have not been any prior out-of-state custody proceedings involving the child. However, if another state or country has made a “child custody determination” prior to commencement of the California dependency proceedings, or if the child has lived in California for less than six months at the time dependency proceedings are initiated, the California court may be prohibited from exercising jurisdiction, except for temporary emergency jurisdiction. Note that tribes are treated as states for the purposes of the UCCJEA. (Fam. Code, § 3404.)

Under the UCCJEA, a California court has jurisdiction to make an *initial* child custody determination if any of the following are true:

a. Home State

California is the child's "home state" on the date that proceedings are commenced, or it was the child's home state within six months prior to commencement of the proceeding and the child is absent from California but a parent or person acting as a parent continues to live in California. (*Id.*, § 3421(a)(1); see *id.*, § 3402(g) for definition of "home state.") Home state jurisdiction may be found where a parent is homeless. (*In re S.W.* (2007) 148 Cal.App.4th 1501.) Home state jurisdiction has priority over all other bases for jurisdiction under the UCCJEA.

b. Significant Connection

No court of another state has home state jurisdiction as described above, or a court of the child's home state has declined to exercise jurisdiction because California is the more convenient forum (Fam. Code, § 3427), or a party has engaged in unjustifiable conduct (*id.*, § 3428), *and* both of the following are true:

- The child and at least one parent or person acting as a parent have a significant connection with California, other than mere physical presence; *and*
- Substantial evidence is available in California concerning the child's care, protection, training, and personal relationships. (See *In re Baby Boy M.* (2006) 141 Cal.App.4th 588 [juvenile court did not have jurisdiction where mother gave baby to father shortly after birth and father said he was leaving California, and there was no evidence available in California as to child's current circumstances].)

(Fam. Code., § 3421(a)(2).)

c. State With Jurisdiction Has Declined to Exercise It Because of Inconvenient Forum or Unjustifiable Conduct

All courts having jurisdiction under a or b above have declined to exercise jurisdiction because California is the more appropriate forum under Family Code section 3427 or 3428. (*Id.*, § 3421(a)(3).)



d. Default

No court of any other state would have jurisdiction under a, b, or c above. (*Id.*, § 3421(a)(4).)



Physical presence of, or personal jurisdiction over, a parent or child is neither necessary nor sufficient to make a child custody determination. (*Id.*, § 3421(c); but see “Temporary Emergency Jurisdiction,” below). Also, California does not have to enforce a custody order that was not made in substantial compliance with UCCJEA standards (i.e., without notice and an opportunity to be heard). (See Fam. Code, §§ 3425(b), 3443(a); *In re Nada R.* (2001) 89 Cal.App.4th 1166, 1175–1176.)

3. Temporary Emergency Jurisdiction

Even if a California court does not have jurisdiction to make a child custody determination under the conditions described above, it does have temporary emergency jurisdiction if a child is present in California *and* has either been abandoned or it is necessary in an emergency to protect the child because the child, a sibling, or a parent has been subjected to or threatened with mistreatment or abuse. (Fam. Code, § 3424(a); see *A.H. v. Superior Court* (2023) 89 Cal.App.5th 504; *In re Jaheim B.* (2006) 169 Cal.App.4th 1343 [court may exercise temporary emergency jurisdiction where child is present and needs protection from abuse or neglect].)

The status of any orders made under temporary emergency jurisdiction and the actions that the California juvenile court must subsequently take are determined by whether there are existing custody orders or proceedings in another jurisdiction.

a. Previous Custody Order or Proceedings Commenced in Another State

If another state previously made a child custody determination or if a child custody proceeding is commenced in a state having jurisdiction, any protective order issued by the California court is temporary and must specify an expiration date. The temporary order remains in effect only until an order is obtained from the state having juris-



diction or until the California order expires, whichever occurs first. (Fam. Code, § 3424(c).) In addition, the California court must immediately communicate with the court having jurisdiction to determine how best to resolve the emergency. (*Id.*, § 3424(d).)

b. No Previous Custody Order and Proceedings Not Commenced in State With Jurisdiction

If there is no previous child custody determination and no child custody proceeding has been commenced in a state having jurisdiction, any custody order made by the California court remains in effect until an order is obtained from a state having jurisdiction. If a child custody proceeding is not commenced in a state having jurisdiction and California later becomes the child's home state, then the California custody order becomes a permanent child custody determination if the order so provides. (*Id.*, § 3424(b).)



If there is a previous out-of-state custody order, the court should not proceed with the jurisdictional hearing unless the court of the state with jurisdiction has agreed to cede jurisdiction to California. (See *In re C.T.* (2002) 100 Cal.App.4th 101, 109.)

PARENTAL KIDNAPPING PREVENTION ACT


The federal Parental Kidnapping Prevention Act (PKPA) requires states to give full faith and credit to another state's custody determination so long as it is consistent with the provisions of the PKPA—that is, the state that made the determination had jurisdiction over the custody matter under its own law and one of five specified conditions exists. (See 28 U.S.C. § 1738A(c).) While the PKPA preempts state law, it does not provide for federal court jurisdiction over custody disputes; thus, it is up to state courts to construe and apply the PKPA to decide which state has jurisdiction. (*Thompson v. Thompson* (1988) 484 U.S. 174, 187.) If a California court has jurisdiction under the UCCJEA, conflict with the PKPA is unlikely because the two acts are consistent. Like the UCCJEA, the PKPA contains an emergency jurisdiction provision. (28 U.S.C. § 1738A(c)(2)(C).)



HAGUE CONVENTION ON INTERNATIONAL CHILD ABDUCTION

The Hague Convention on International Child Abduction, implemented in the United States by the International Child Abduction Remedies Act, governs jurisdiction in international custody disputes involving participating countries. (42 U.S.C. § 11601 et seq.) It provides procedures and remedies for return of a child wrongfully removed from, or retained in a country other than, the child's place of habitual residence. (See *id.*, § 11601(a)(4).) Several affirmative defenses are available to a parent who opposes return of a child, including "grave risk" of physical or psychological harm to the child if returned. (See *id.*, § 11603(e)(2); *Gaudin v. Remis* (2005) 415 F.3d 1028.) State courts and United States district courts have concurrent jurisdiction over Hague Convention actions. (42 U.S.C. § 11603(a).)

Under section 361.2, California dependency courts have the authority to place a child with a parent in another country but first must consider whether any orders necessary to ensure the child's safety and well-being will be enforceable in that country. (*In re Karla C.* (2010) 186 Cal.App.4th 1236.)

 Complex jurisdictional and practical issues may arise when one or both parents reside outside the United States. Parents should not be denied the opportunity to reunify with their children simply because they reside outside the United States; however, even if the children are placed in another country, the court has a duty to ensure their safety and well-being. Children's and parents' attorneys should explicitly address jurisdictional and enforcement issues and consider contacting the consulate and/or child welfare agency of the parent's home country for assistance. For more information on the UCCJEA and PKPA, see 2 Kirkland et al., *California Family Law Practice and Procedure* (2d ed. 2005) *Jurisdiction to Determine Custody and Visitation*, section 32.20 et seq. For information on the Hague Convention, see *Special Remedies for Enforcement of Custody and Visitation Orders*, in volume 4 at section 142.50 et seq.



INTERCOUNTY TRANSFERS

Rule 5.612 of the California Rules of Court provides guidelines for when a case is transferred from one county to another. On receipt and filing of a certified copy of a transfer order, the receiving court must accept jurisdiction of the case. The clerk of the receiving court must immediately place the transferred case on the court calendar for a transfer-in hearing. (Cal. Rules of Court, rule 5.612(a).)

If the receiving court disagrees with the findings underlying the transfer order, its remedy is to accept transfer and either appeal the transfer order or order a transfer-out hearing, which must be a separate hearing from the transfer-in hearing and must consider the best interest of the child. (*In re R.D.* (2008) 163 Cal.App.4th 679.)



It is important that the receiving court consider whether the child's best interest will be served by transfer of the case back to the sending court. If a transfer-out hearing is ordered, the transferring court is required to make findings not only as to the child's county of residence as defined by section 17.1 but also as to whether the transfer is in the child's best interest. (*In re R.D.*, *supra*, 163 Cal. App.4th at p. 679.) To determine what is in the child's best interest, the receiving court should consider which county can best monitor the child's well-being and placement and provide appropriate services. If the receiving court believes that a later change of circumstances or additional facts indicate that the child does not reside in the receiving county, a transfer-out hearing must be held under rules 5.610 and 5.570. The court may direct the child welfare agency or the probation department to seek a modification of orders under section 388 or 778 and under rule 5.570. (Cal. Rules of Court, rule 5.612(f).)



PARENTAGE

In *In re A.H.* (2022) 84 Cal.App.5th 340, 363–364 (emphasis in original), the Court of Appeal wrote, “[J]uvenile courts have a duty to determine a child’s parentage at the earliest opportunity Rule 5.635 imposes a continuing duty on the juvenile court to inquire about parentage *at every hearing* from the very beginning of a dependency case until the question of parentage has been resolved.”

Establishing parentage establishes familial ties and history, ethnic heritage, and a child’s identity. Parentage is necessary for obtaining family health history and identifying relatives (e.g., for placement). As noted by one appellate court, “The relationship of a natural parent to her children is a vital human relationship which has far-reaching implications for the growth and development of the child.” (*In re T.M.R.* (1974) 41 Cal.App.3d 694, 703.) There are fundamental rights and liberty interests evoked in the parent-child relationship that can only be exercised through establishing parentage.

TYPES OF PARENTAGE

The law governing parentage is found in California’s Uniform Parentage Act (UPA), located in the Family Code, beginning at section 7600. In juvenile court, there are three categories of parentage: presumed, biological, and alleged. (*In re A.H.* (2022) 84 Cal.App.5th 340, 349.)

In most cases there is no question about motherhood. Giving birth establishes parentage unless the woman who gives birth is a surrogate. Family Code section 7960(f) defines “surrogate” as a woman who bears and carries a child for another through medically assisted reproduction and pursuant to a written agreement. . . .”

Some children have two mothers or two fathers. Beginning in 2013, it became possible in California for a child to have more than two parents. Family Code section 7612(c) provides in part, “In an appropriate action, a court may find that more than two persons with a claim to parentage . . . are parents if the court finds that recognizing only two parents would be detrimental to the child.”



(See Fam. Code, § 7601(c); *In re Donovan L., Jr.* (2016) 244 Cal. App.4th 1075.) In *M.M. v. D.V.* (2021) 66 Cal.App.5th 733, the Court of Appeal wrote that section 7612(c) “allows a court to recognize three parents only in ‘rare cases’ where a child truly has more than two parents.”

If a couple was married when a child was born, the child is presumed to be their child. (Fam. Code, § 7540(a).) Of course, not all children born during wedlock are biologically related to the married couple, and the UPA grapples with this reality. (Fam. Code, §§ 7540(b), 7541.) In juvenile court, it often happens that adults are not married, and when this happens it is necessary to determine the father.

1. Alleged Father

In *In re A.H.* (2022) 84 Cal.App.5th 340, 350, the Court of Appeal wrote, “[A]n alleged father is man who may be a child’s father but has not yet established either presumed father status or biological paternity.” A man is an alleged father if he appears at a dependency hearing and claims to be the child’s father or if he is named by the child’s mother as the father. The court in *In re A.H.* explained:

Alleged fathers have fewer rights and, unlike presumed fathers, are not entitled to custody, reunification services, or visitation.
...

An alleged father has no rights in a dependency case other than the right to step forward and to seek to establish his paternity of the child.

... [A]n alleged father’s rights (and/or corresponding duties on the part of the state), fall into essentially four categories: (1) the right to notice of the proceedings and of certain hearings . . . ; (2) the right to notice of their rights as an alleged father and the steps necessary to elevate their status to that of a presumed father . . . ; (3) the court’s corresponding duty to inquire into an individual’s possible parentage through various extrinsic sources apart from the individual’s own self-reporting . . . ; and (4) if



the whereabouts of an alleged father are unknown, the state's constitutional duty to exercise reasonable diligence to find him, so that he may be given proper notice of the proceedings. . . . In addition, and relatedly, if an alleged father's parental rights are at stake, he may be entitled to appointed counsel on request if he cannot afford private counsel. . . .

At bottom, an alleged father has a constitutionally protected due process right to be given notice and an opportunity to appear, to assert a position, and to attempt to change [his] paternity status.

An alleged father can file with the court a form JV-505, *Statement Regarding Parentage*, to begin the process of establishing paternity. (See *In re A.K.* (2024) 99 Cal.App.5th 252 [“Generally, there are three basic types of fathers in dependency law: presumed, biological, and alleged.”].)

2. Biological Father

A man is a biological father if his paternity is proved by a paternity test but he has not achieved presumed father status. (*In re Zacharia D.* (1993) 6 Cal.4th 435, 499, fn. 15.) This category includes persons adjudicated to be fathers in a prior family law or child support case, either on the basis of paternity tests or by default. (*In re E.O.* (2010) 182 Cal.App.4th 722, 727–728 [paternity judgment establishes biological paternity only, not presumed father status].) If a man appears at a dependency hearing and requests a finding of paternity on form JV-505, the court determines whether he is the biological father by ordering a paternity test. (Cal. Rules of Court, rule 5.635(e); see *In re Baby Boy V.* (2006) 140 Cal.App.4th 1108.)



The court has the discretion to order paternity tests if in the child's best interest—for example, to create a basis for placement with paternal relatives or to resolve competing claims to biological paternity. However, biological paternity is neither necessary nor sufficient to establish presumed father status.



3. Kelsey S. Father

A biological father who does not qualify as a presumed father can file an action seeking to establish that he is what is typically called a *Kelsey S.* father. (*Adoption of Kelsey S.* (1992) 1 Cal.4th 816 [child's mother would not let father have contact with the child]; *In re Andrew L.* (2004) 122 Cal.App.4th 178 [father's repeated efforts to establish paternity were thwarted by the social worker].) To qualify as a *Kelsey S.* father of a child, a man must do all he can do to assume the responsibilities of parenthood—financial and otherwise—before and after the child is born.

4. Presumed Father (Fam. Code, §§ 7540, 7570, 7611 (d))

In *In re A.H.* (2022) 84 Cal.App.5th 340, 349, the Court of Appeal stated, “Presumed parent status, which is the equivalent of a legal parent ranks the highest. It confers all the rights afforded to parents in dependency proceedings, including, standing, the appointment of counsel, and reunification services. Presumed parentage is determined under the Uniform Parentage Act Under that framework, biological fatherhood does not, in and of itself, qualify a man for presumed father status.” Under the UPA, a man qualifies as a presumed father under any of the following circumstances:

1. He was married to the child's mother at the time of the child's birth (or the child was born within 300 days of separation) (Fam. Code, § 7540);
2. He married the child's mother after the child's birth and either is named on the child's birth certificate or has a voluntary or court-ordered child support obligation (*id.*, § 7611(c));
3. He received the child into his home and openly held out the child as his natural child (*id.*, § 7611(d)); or
4. He and the mother have signed a voluntary declaration of parentage under Family Code section 7570 et seq. When a voluntary declaration of parentage is filed with the Department of Child Support Services, the declaration has the same legal effect as a judgment of paternity.



Each of these presumptions can be rebutted under certain circumstances:

- Number 1 above can be rebutted only if the husband is proved not to be the biological father, by paternity tests requested within two years of the child's birth. (*Id.*, § 7541.)
- Numbers 2 and 3 may be rebutted by “clear and convincing evidence” that the facts giving rise to the presumption are untrue. (*Id.*, § 7612(a).)
- Number 4 can be rebutted if either parent rescinds the voluntary declaration within 60 days of its execution as outlined in section 7575 or after this time period expires, within two years of the declaration's effective date upon a showing of fraud, duress, or material mistake of fact under section 7576. A man who believes he is the biological father has standing in dependency proceedings to seek a paternity test and move to set aside another man's voluntary declaration of paternity. (*In re J.L.* (2008) 159 Cal.App.4th 1010 [superseded in part by statute as stated in *In re Alexander P.* (2016) 4 Cal.App.5th 475, 486].)

If two or more persons claim presumed parent status under Family Code section 7610 and/or section 7611, the court must decide which claim “is founded on the weightier considerations of policy and logic.” (Fam. Code, § 7612(b).)



Presumed father status under section 7611(d) can be established only if a man has held himself out to the community as the child's natural father; it does not apply to stepfathers, uncles, grandparents, or other persons who may have functioned in a parental role but have not claimed to be the child's father. (*In re Jose C.* (2010) 188 Cal.App.4th 147, 162–163.) Attorneys may want to seek de facto parent status for such persons instead.



Family Code section 7613(b) precludes a sperm donor from establishing paternity based only on his biological connection to the child, unless there is a written agreement between the donor and the woman. A sperm donor who has established a familial relationship with the child and demonstrated a commitment to the child and the



child's welfare can be found to be a presumed parent under section 7611(d), even though he could not establish paternity based on his biological connection to the child. (*Jason P. v. Danielle S.* (2014) 226 Cal.App.4th 167, 176; distinguished from *K.M. v. E.G.* (2005) 37 Cal.4th 130 and *Steven S. v. Deborah D.* (2005) 127 Cal.App.4th 319.)

Family Code section 7611(d) seeks to further a two-parent familial arrangement that has already been developed. A parent's commitment to parenting as a single parent, in part established by mother conceiving through artificial insemination through an anonymous sperm donor, does not control a parentage determination. The question to be determined is whether a two-parent relationship has in fact been developed with the child. If it has, the interests of the child in maintaining the second parental relationship can take precedence over one parent's claimed desire to raise the child alone. (*R.M. v. T.A.* (2015) 233 Cal.App.4th 760, 763–782; citing *Jason P.*, *supra*, 226 Cal.App.4th at p. 178.) In this case, the court looked to petitioner's pre- and postnatal efforts and behavior, which included petitioner's attendance at prenatal appointments, presence at the birth and initial postnatal testing, regular cross-county visits mother arranged with petitioner during the first two years of the child's life, petitioner naming the child as the primary beneficiary on his life insurance policy, both mother and child referring to petitioner as "Daddy," and the fact that mother gave birth to petitioner's biological child when child was two years old.

5. Presumed Mother

Although paternity issues arise frequently, issues of maternity may arise in dependency cases. A woman other than the child's birth mother may be found to be a presumed mother if she is or was the birth mother's domestic partner or she has lived with the child and held herself out as the child's mother. (See *Elisa B. v. Superior Court* (2005) 37 Cal.4th 108; *Charisma R. v. Kristina S.* (2009) 175 Cal. App.4th 361, partially overruled on other grounds by *Reid v. Google, Inc.* (2010) 50 Cal.4th 512, 532.)



SUMMARY OF RIGHTS BASED ON PARENTAGE

- **Alleged fathers** have the right to notice of dependency hearings and an opportunity to show that they should be granted presumed father status. (§ 316.2(b); Cal. Rules of Court, rule 5.635(g); *In re Alyssa F.* (2003) 112 Cal.App.4th 846, 855.) They have no right to custody or reunification services. (See *In re Zacharia D.*, *supra*, 6 Cal.4th at p. 435.)
- **Biological fathers** have the right to notice of dependency hearings and must be afforded an opportunity to show that they should be granted presumed father status. The court has discretion to grant services if to do so is in the child's best interest. (*In re Raphael P.* (2002) 97 Cal.App.4th 716, 726.)
- **Kelsey S. fathers** have the right to notice of dependency hearings and an opportunity to show that they should be granted presumed father status. (*Adoption of Kelsey S.*, *supra*, 1 Cal.4th at p. 816.) The court must give a Kelsey S. father a fair opportunity to develop a relationship with the child and to fulfill parental responsibilities. Denying a Kelsey S. father visitation and other reunification services has been found to violate due process and the dependency statutory scheme. (See *In re Julia U.* (1988) 64 Cal.App.4th 532.)
- **Presumed fathers** are afforded full standing in dependency actions as well as all constitutional and statutory rights and protections provided to "parents" under the Welfare and Institutions Code. (See §§ 311, 317, 319, 361.2, 366.21, 366.22, 366.26, 366.3; *In re Jesusa V.* (2004) 32 Cal.4th 588, 610.) The primary purpose for seeking presumed status in dependency matters is that presumed fathers have the right to reunification services and to custody. (*In re Jerry P.* (2002) 95 Cal.App.4th 793, 804.) A request for recognition as a presumed father may be brought by filing a section 388 petition. (*In re Zacharia D.*, *supra*, 6 Cal.4th at p. 442, fn. 5.)



Relatives of presumed fathers and biological fathers (but not alleged fathers) have the right to preferential consideration for placement of a child. (§ 361.3(c)(2); see *In re D.P.* (2023) 92 Cal.App.5th 1282, 1291; Relative Placements fact sheet.)





BACK TO TOC

PARENTS' RIGHTS REGARDING GAL APPOINTMENTS AND INCARCERATED PARENTS

GAL APPOINTMENTS FOR MENTALLY INCOMPETENT PARENTS

A guardian ad litem (GAL) is a person appointed by the court to protect the rights of an incompetent person. (See *In re Samuel A.* (2021) 69 Cal.App.5th 67.) The GAL serves as the party's representative and controls the litigation but may not waive fundamental rights (such as the right to trial) unless there is a significant benefit to the party from doing so. (*In re Christina B.* (1993) 19 Cal.App.4th 1441, 1454.) A GAL should be appointed for a parent in a dependency case if the parent cannot understand the nature or consequences of the proceedings and is unable to assist counsel in case preparation. (Code Civ. Proc., § 372; Pen. Code, § 1367; see *In re James F.* (2008) 42 Cal.4th 901.) A GAL should not be appointed because a parent is difficult or uncooperative but not incompetent due to a mental health disorder or developmental disability. (*In re Samuel A.*, *supra*, 69 Cal.App.5th at 83.)

Due process requires either the parent's consent or a hearing to determine whether the parent is incompetent before the juvenile court can appoint a GAL, but a court's error in the procedure used to appoint a guardian ad litem does not always require reversal; rather, it is subject to harmless error analysis. (*In re James F.*, *supra*, 42 Cal.4th at p. 911.) At the hearing, the court should explain to the parent what a GAL is and give the parent an opportunity to be heard on the issue. The court should appoint a GAL only if the preponderance of the evidence shows that the parent has a mental impairment and that the parent does not understand the nature of the case or cannot meaningfully assist counsel. Minor parents are not required to have GALs in dependency proceedings solely because they are minors; their competency is determined by the same standard applicable to adult parents. (Code Civ. Proc., § 372(c)(1)(B).)





Counsel should consider the extent to which the client's case could be compromised by appointment of a GAL, as the parent's mental health and competency may factor into the court's and other counsel's positions on the allegations, reunification services, and the safety of return.



If a parent's counsel thinks a GAL should be appointed, counsel may ask the parent to consent (although it is unclear whether a parent who needs a GAL would be competent to give informed consent) or ask the court to set a hearing. (See *In re Sara D.* (2001) 87 Cal.App.4th 661.) Counsel may request that the court hold a closed hearing, that all documents related to the hearing be sealed, and/or that the hearing be conducted in front of another bench officer when the issues of competency coincide with the allegations to be adjudicated. The court may raise the issue sua sponte, and any party (including minor's counsel) may bring the issue to the court's attention.

INCARCERATED AND INSTITUTIONALIZED PARENTS

1. Presence at Hearings

The Penal Code requires that incarcerated parents and their counsel be present for adjudications and hearings set under section 366.26 to terminate parental rights. The court must grant a continuance if the incarcerated parent is not brought to the hearing, unless he or she has waived the right to be present. (Pen. Code, § 2625(d); see *In re Jesusa V.* (2004) 32 Cal.4th 588.) If a parent waives his or her right to physical presence at a hearing under Penal Code section 2625(d), or if the court does not order the parent's physical presence, it has discretion to allow a parent to participate in hearings via videoconferencing if available or teleconferencing in the absence of videoconferencing. (Pen. Code, § 2625(g).) Physical presence is preferred over these alternatives. (Pen. Code, § 2625(g).)

Penal Code section 2625(d) does not apply to

- Adjudication of a section 300(g) or (h) petition (Pen. Code, § 2625(d));



- A parent incarcerated out of state or in a federal prison or on death row (*In re Maria S.* (1998) 60 Cal.App.4th 1309, 1312–1313); and
- Hearings other than adjudication or termination of parental rights—these may be held in the absence of an incarcerated parent so long as the parent’s counsel is present; however, the court has the discretion to order the incarcerated parent to be present under Penal Code section 2625(e).

If a continuance to allow the incarcerated parent to be present would cause the adjudication to occur more than six months after detention, then the child’s right to prompt resolution of the case under section 352(b) prevails over the parent’s right to be present under Penal Code section 2625. (See *D.E. v. Superior Court* (2003) 111 Cal. App.4th 502.)

2. Jurisdictional Allegations

Under section 300(g), the court may declare a child a dependent if a parent is incarcerated or institutionalized and “cannot arrange for the care of the child.” However, in order for the court to do so, the social services agency must prove that the parent cannot make an appropriate plan for the child’s care—not just that the parent has not yet done so. (See *In re S.D.* (2002) 99 Cal.App.4th 1068.)

3. Custody, Visitation, and Services

The Court of Appeal stated, “There is no ‘Go to jail, lose your child’ rule in California.” (*In re J.N.* (2021) 62 Cal.App.5th 767.) Section 300(g) is applicable only if an incarcerated parent is unable to arrange for the child’s care. (*In re S.D.*, *supra*, 99 Cal.App.4th at p. 1077.) If a nonoffending parent is incarcerated, institutionalized, detained by the United States Department of Homeland Security, or deported, the court may not remove the child from that parent’s custody unless (1) the parent is unable to arrange for the care of the child, or (2) the parent would not be able to protect the child from future physical harm. (§ 361(c); *In re Isayah C.* (2004) 118 Cal. App.4th 684.)

Reunification services must be provided to an incarcerated parent unless the court finds by clear and convincing evidence that such services would be detrimental to the child. (§ 361.5(e).) In making this finding, the court must consider the

- Age of the child;
- Degree of parent-child bonding;
- Nature of the parent's crime or illness;
- Length of the sentence or the nature and duration of the parent's treatment;
- Potential detriment to the child if services are not offered;
- Views of the child, if 10 or older; and
- The likelihood of the parent's discharge from incarceration or institutionalization within the reunification time limitations.

The social services agency must make a "good faith" effort to provide services unique to each family's needs and specially tailored to fit its circumstances. Neither difficulty in providing services nor low prospects of successful reunification excuses the duty to provide reasonable services. In light of this, the social services agency must identify services available to an institutionalized parent and assist in facilitating them. (*Mark N. v. Superior Court* (1998) 60 Cal.App.4th 996, 1010, 1014–1015, superseded in part by amendments to § 366.22 as stated in *Earl L. v. Superior Court* (2011) 199 Cal.App.4th 1490; *id.* at § 1504.) In determining the content of reasonable services, the court must consider the particular barriers to an incarcerated, institutionalized, detained, or deported parent's access to court-mandated services and ability to maintain contact with his or her child, and must document this information in the child's case plan. (§§ 361.5(e), 366.21(e) & (f), 366.22.) A parent's case plan must also include information about the parent's incarceration, detainment, or deportation throughout the dependency proceeding to determine what reasonable services should be offered to the parent. (§ 16501.1.)

Services to an incarcerated, institutionalized, detained, or deported parent may include, for example,



- Providing services to relatives, extended family members, or foster caregivers;
- Counseling, parenting classes, or vocational training if available in the institution;
- Allowing the parent to call the child collect;
- Transporting the child for visits; and
- Arranging visitation. (See § 361.5(e)(1).)

The Welfare and Institutions Code provides for visitation between an incarcerated parent and the child “when appropriate.” (§ 361.5(e)(1).) The court must find clear and convincing evidence of detriment in order to deny services under 361.5(e)(1), which includes visitation and neither the age of the child alone nor any other single factor forms a sufficient basis for such a finding absent a further showing of detriment. (See *In re Dylan T.* (1998) 65 Cal.App.4th 765.)

Reunification services may be extended for 6 months beyond the 18-month hearing if the court finds by clear and convincing evidence that further reunification services are in the child’s best interest; the parent is making consistent progress in a substance abuse treatment program or was recently discharged from incarceration institutionalization, or the custody of the United States Department of Homeland Security and is making significant and consistent progress in establishing a safe home for the child’s return; and there is a substantial probability that the child will be safely returned within the extended period or that reasonable services were not provided. (§§ 361.5(a)(4), 366.22(b), 366.25.)



Visitation must be a component of the case plan, as it is vital to the reunification process. Reunification services may be deemed inadequate if there has been no visitation arranged by the social services agency for a parent incarcerated within a reasonable distance of the child’s placement. (See *In re Precious J.* (1996) 42 Cal.App.4th 1463, 1477–1479.) Note that videoconference or teleconference does not replace in-person family visits between incarcerated parents and their children under Penal Code section 2625(g).

Penal Code sections 1174 et seq. and 3410 et seq. govern the community treatment program that allows some convicted parents to be released to a private treatment facility in which their children under the age of six can also reside. If the parent wants to participate in this program, the juvenile court must determine whether the parent's participation is in the child's best interest and will meet the needs of both the parent and the child. (§ 361.5(e)(3).)



PREGNANT AND PARENTING TEENS

Children's attorneys must protect dependent teens' statutory and constitutional rights to sexual and reproductive health care and information as well as teen parents' dual rights as dependents and parents.

SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH CARE FOR FOSTER YOUTH

All minors, including dependents, may obtain confidential medical care related to the prevention or treatment of pregnancy, including contraception and prenatal care (but not sterilization), without a parent's or other adult's consent or notification. (Fam. Code, § 6925.) Children aged 12 or older can consent to confidential medical care related to diagnosis and treatment of sexually transmitted diseases. (*Id.*, § 6926(a).)



Children's attorneys should become familiar with the county agency's policies regarding reproductive health care and referrals to health clinics and should consider discussing with all clients aged 12 and older whether they need information or access to sexual and reproductive health care. Whether or not a client is currently sexually active, by asking these questions and providing information children's attorneys can help ensure that dependent youth take appropriate health and safety precautions if and when they do become sexually active.

If an attorney's personal beliefs regarding sexual activity, contraception, and/or abortion would prevent the attorney from discussing these issues with a teen client or from zealously advocating for the client's rights regarding sexual and reproductive health care, the attorney should consider withdrawing from representation.

PREGNANT FOSTER YOUTH

1. Options for Pregnant Foster Youth

A dependent youth who becomes pregnant has the same options as all other pregnant women: she may carry the child to term and raise the child, arrange for the child to be adopted after birth, or have an



abortion. The pregnant youth has the sole right to make decisions regarding her pregnancy, and if she is capable of informed consent, has a constitutional right to obtain an abortion without parental or court approval or notice. (See *American Academy of Pediatrics v. Lungren* (1997) 16 Cal.4th 307.) If a pregnant teen wants to carry the pregnancy to term but have the child raised by someone else, the attorney should assist in making a plan for guardianship or adoption early in the pregnancy.

2. Pregnancy and Postbirth Plan

If a teen client decides to carry a pregnancy to term, her attorney can assist with the various issues implicated by the pregnancy, such as

- Prenatal care;
- Delivery/birth plan;
- Postbirth placement for the parent and child;
- Visiting nurse program;
- Health care for the baby;
- Child care to enable the teen parent to attend school and/or work;
- Funding for the baby, including child support; and
- Custodial and visitation arrangements with the other parent.



Attorneys who represent fathers of teen mothers need to make themselves aware of potential criminal and civil consequences for their clients and advise accordingly.

3. Education Rights

Schools may not discriminate against or exclude any student from educational programs or activities on the basis of a student's pregnancy, childbirth, or recovery from these conditions. (20 U.S.C. § 1681; 34 C.F.R. § 106.40; 5 Cal. Code Regs., tit. 22, § 4950; Ed. Code, § 230.) Pregnant and parenting students have the right to remain in their regular or current school programs, including



honors and magnet programs, special education placements, and extracurricular and athletic activities. (34 C.F.R. § 106.4(a)(2); Ed. Code, § 230.) Students may not be expelled, suspended, or otherwise excluded from programs or current school placement based on pregnancy, childbirth, or parental status. (34 C.F.R. § 106.4(a)(2); Ed. Code, § 230.)

PARENTING FOSTER YOUTH

1. Rights as a Foster Child; Rights as a Parent

A child whose parent is a dependent may not be found to be at risk of abuse or neglect solely because of the parent's age, dependent status, or foster care status. (§ 300(j).) The county agency must place dependent teen parents and their children together in as family-like a setting as possible, unless the court determines that placement together poses a risk to the children. (§ 16002.5.)

The county agency must facilitate contact between the teen parent and child and the child's other parent if such contact is in the child's best interest. (§ 16002.5(d).) Also, the court must make orders regarding visitation between the teen's child, the teen parent, the child's other parent, and appropriate family members unless the court finds by clear and convincing evidence that such visitation would be detrimental to the teen parent. (§ 362.1(a)(3).)

2. Placement and Funding

The Welfare and Institutions Code includes special provisions intended to allow dependent teens and their children to live together in foster homes and to support the development of teen parents' ability to care for their children independently.

a. Infant/Child Supplement

This monthly payment to caregivers (relatives, foster parents, and group homes) of a dependent teen parent whose child resides in the same placement is intended to offset the extra costs of the child's care. The supplement remains available even if the teen parent's case is closed under Kin-GAP. (§ 11465.)

b. Whole Family Foster Home (WFFH)

In these specialized foster homes, the teen parent and child live together with a caregiver who has special training and is expected to assist the teen parent in developing the skills necessary to provide a safe, stable, and permanent home for his or her child. In a WFFH the caregiver receives the basic Aid to Families with Dependent Children–Foster Care (AFDC–FC) rate for the teen parent’s child. The AFDC–FC rate is greater than the infant/child supplement. (§§ 11400(t), 11465, 16004.5.) Any foster parent or relative caregiver can obtain WFFH certification and qualify for the higher rate. The supplement remains available to relative caregivers who were receiving the higher rate at the time the teen parent’s case was closed under Kin-GAP. Nonminor dependents may remain in a WFFH until age 21. (§ 11465(d)(6).)

There is also a financial incentive for caregivers of teens and their nondependent babies placed in WFFHs who together develop a Shared Responsibility Plan (see below). (§ 16501.25.)

c. Shared Responsibility Plan

The shared responsibility plan is an agreement between the dependent teen parent and his or her caregiver detailing the duties, rights, and responsibilities each has with regard to the teen parent’s nondependent child. The agreement covers responsibilities such as feeding, clothing, hygiene, purchases of supplies, health care, and transportation. (*Ibid.*)

3. Mental Health Care and Parenting Support

If a teen parent experiences serious changes in mood, emotional affect, or behavior during pregnancy or after birth, the attorney may consider requesting an evaluation for perinatal or postpartum depression. The attorney should weigh whether this evaluation could potentially raise issues that could lead to a removal. Prompt and appropriate care is essential to diagnose and treat these common disorders and prevent the teen’s condition from being misinterpreted as an inability to parent.



Children's attorneys should also consider helping teen parents enroll in age-appropriate parenting classes or referring them to the Adolescent Family Life Program, a state program providing social services and support for pregnant and parenting teens. (See <https://www.cdph.ca.gov/Programs/CFH/DMCAH/AFLP/Pages/default.aspx>)

4. Social Services Intervention

If the social services agency becomes concerned about the care that a dependent teen parent is providing to his or her child, the agency may want the teen to agree to voluntary family maintenance or voluntary family reunification services under section 301. The agency may not ask a teen parent to sign a voluntary services contract without first allowing the teen to consult with his or her attorney. (§ 301(c).)

If the county agency files a dependency petition regarding the teen parent's child, the teen parent has the same rights to family preservation and reunification services that adult parents have. (§ 16002.5.) When reunification services are offered, the court must consider, at the 18-month review hearing, the progress made and take into account the barriers faced by the parenting teen. If the teen parent is making significant and consistent progress in establishing a safe home for the child's return, the court may offer additional reunification services, not to exceed 24 months from the date the child was removed from the teen parent. (§ 366.22.)

The teen parent has the same right to counsel and to participate in the dependency proceedings that an adult parent has. The court may not appoint a guardian ad litem (GAL) for a teen parent unless the court makes the same findings necessary to appoint a GAL for an adult parent: that the parent is unable to understand the nature of the proceedings or to assist counsel in preparing the case. (§ 326.7.)

When representing a teen client who is both a dependent and a parent, the attorney must ensure that the client's rights as both a foster child and a parent are protected and must monitor the teen client's development as a parent to reduce the risk that a dependency petition is filed regarding the teen parent's child.



In situations where an attorney is representing a minor parent, California's hybrid model of child representation can occasionally conflict with the duty to zealously advocate for a client's stated interest. Such conflicts must resolve on a case-by-case basis, and attorneys are encouraged to seek consultation.



PSYCHOTROPIC MEDICATION ORDERS

Several Judicial Council forms are available to ask for an order to give (or continue giving) psychotropic medication to a child who is a ward or dependent of the juvenile court and living in an out-of-home placement or foster care, as defined in Welfare and Institutions Code section 727.4. Local forms may be used to provide additional information to the court.

Required Forms

1. JV-220, *Application for Psychotropic Medication*
2. JV-220(A), *Physician's Statement—Attachment*
3. JV-220(B), *Physician's Request to Continue Medication—Attachment*
4. JV-221, *Proof of Notice of Application*
5. JV-223, *Order on Application for Psychotropic Medication*
6. JV-224, *County Report on Psychotropic Medication*

Optional Forms

1. JV-218, *Child's Opinion About the Medicine*
2. JV-219, *Statement About Medicine Prescribed*
3. JV-222, *Input on Application for Psychotropic Medication*

Exception: These forms are **not** required if

- The child lives in an out-of-home facility not considered foster care, as defined by section 727.4, unless a local court rule requires it; or
- A previous court order gives the child's parent(s) the authority to approve or refuse the medication. (§ 369.5(a)(1); see Cal. Rules of Court, rule 5.640(e).)



REQUIRED FORMS

1. Form JV-220, Application for Psychotropic Medication

This form, the *Application*, gives the court basic information about the child and his or her living situation. It also provides contact information for the child's social worker or probation officer.

This form is usually completed by the social worker or probation officer, but is sometimes completed by the prescribing physician, his or her staff, or the child's caregiver.

Whoever completes the form must identify himself or herself by name and by signing the form. If the prescribing physician completes this form, she or he must also complete and sign form JV-220(A) or form JV-220(B). (See below.)

2. Form JV-220(A), Physician's Statement—Attachment

This form is used to ask the court for a new order. The prescribing doctor fills out this form and gives it to the person who files the *Application* (form JV-220).

This form provides a record of the child's medical history, diagnosis, and previous treatments, as well as information about the child's previous experience with psychotropic medications. The doctor will list his or her reasons for recommending the psychotropic medications.

Emergencies: A child may *not* receive psychotropic medication without a court order except in an emergency.

- A doctor may administer the medication on an emergency basis.
- To qualify as an emergency, the doctor must find that the child's mental condition requires immediate medication to protect the child or others from serious harm or significant suffering, and that waiting for the court's authorization would put the child or others at risk.
- After a doctor administers emergency medication, she or he has two days at most to ask for the court's authorization.



3. Form JV-220(B), Physician's Request to Continue Medication—Attachment

Form JV-220(B) is a shorter version of form JV-220(A). It may be used only by the same doctor who filled out the most recent form JV 220(A) if the doctor is prescribing the same medication with the same maximum dosage.

The prescribing doctor fills out this form and gives it to the person who is filing the *Application* (form JV-220).

4. Form JV-221, Proof of Notice of Application

This form shows the court that all parties with a right to receive notice were served a copy of the *Application* and attachments, according to rule 5.640 of the California Rules of Court.

- The person(s) in charge of notice must fill out and sign this form.
- Local county practice and local rules of court determine the procedures for the provision of notice, except as otherwise provided in rule 5.640.
- A separate signature line is provided on pages 2 and 3 of the form to accommodate those courts in which the provision of notice is shared between agencies. This sharing occurs when local practices or local court rules require the child welfare services agency to provide notice to the parent or legal guardian and caregiver, and the juvenile court clerk's office to provide notice to the attorneys and CASA volunteer.
- If one department does all the required noticing, only one signature is required, on page 3 of the form.
- The person(s) in charge of service should use the fastest method of service available so that people can be served on time. E-notice can be used only if the person or people to be e-served agree to it. (Code Civ. Proc., § 1010.6.)

5. Form JV-223, Order on Application for Psychotropic Medication

This form lists the court's findings and orders about the child's psychotropic medications.



- The agency or person who filed the *Application* must provide to the child's caregiver a copy of the court order approving or denying the *Application*.
- The copy of the order must be provided (in person or by mail) within two days of when the order is made.
- If the court approves the *Application*, the copy of the order must include the last two pages of form JV 220(A) or form JV-220(B) and all of the medication information sheets (medication monographs) that were attached to form JV-220(A) or form JV 220(B).
- If the child's placement is changed, the social worker or probation officer must provide the new caregiver with a copy of the order, the last two pages of form JV 220(A) or form JV-220(B), and all of the medication information sheets (medication monographs) that were attached to form JV 220(A) or form JV-220(B).

6. Form JV-224, County Report on Psychotropic Medication

The social worker or probation officer must complete and file this form before each progress review.

- It has information that the court must review, including the caregiver's and child's observations about the medicine's effectiveness and side effects, information on medication management appointments and other follow-up appointments with medical practitioners, and information on the delivery of other mental health treatments.
- This form must be filed at least 10 calendar days before the progress review hearing. If the progress review is scheduled for the same time as a status review hearing, the form must be attached to and filed with the court report.

OPTIONAL FORMS

1. Form JV-218, Child's Opinion About the Medicine

The child may use this form to tell the judge about himself or herself and his or her opinion about the medicine.



The child may ask someone he or she trusts for help with the form.



The child does not have to use form JV-218. The child may tell the judge how he or she feels in person at the hearing; by letter; or through his or her social worker, probation officer, lawyer, or CASA.

2. Form JV-219, Statement About Medicine Prescribed

The parent, caregiver, CASA, or Indian tribe may use this form to tell the court how they feel about the *Application* and the effectiveness and side effects of the medicine.

- This form must be filed within four court days of receipt of the notice of an *Application*, or before any status review hearing or medication progress review hearing.
- This form is not the only way for the parent, caregiver, CASA, or tribe to provide information to the court. The parent, caregiver, CASA, or tribe can also provide input on the medication by letter; by talking to the judge at the court hearing; or through the social worker, probation officer, attorney of record, or CASA.
- A CASA can also file a report under local rule.

3. Form JV-222, Input on Application for Psychotropic Medication

This form may be used when the parent or guardian, attorney of record for a parent or guardian, child, child's attorney, child's Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA) guardian ad litem, or Indian child's tribe does not agree that the child should take the recommended psychotropic medication. This form may also be used to provide input to the court.

SETTING OF HEARING AND NOTICE

The court will decide about the child's psychotropic medication after reading the *Application*, its attachments, and all statements filed on time. The court is not required to set a hearing if a statement opposed to medication is filed.



If the court does set the matter for a hearing, the juvenile court clerk must provide notice of the date, time, and location of the hearing to the parents or legal guardians and their attorneys; the child, if 12 years of age or older; the child's attorney, current caregiver, social worker, CAPTA guardian ad litem, and CASA, if any; the social worker's attorney; and the Indian child's tribe at least two court days before the hearing date.

In delinquency matters, the clerk also must provide notice to the child, regardless of his or her age; the child's probation officer; and the district attorney.



RELATIVE PLACEMENTS

Whenever a child must be removed from the family home, placement should be sought with relatives or other persons whom the child knows and is comfortable with in order to minimize the trauma of removal, to maintain consistency and routine (such as attendance at the same school or church or with the same therapist), and to encourage visitation and strengthen ties with parents, siblings, and extended family members.

DEFINITIONS

1. Relative

In the context of serving as a placement resource for a dependent child, a “relative” is defined as an adult related by blood, adoption, or affinity within the fifth degree of kinship, including stepparents, stepsiblings, and all “great, great-great, or grand” relatives and the spouses of those persons, even if divorce or death ended the marriage. (§§ 319(f), 361.3(c)(2); Cal. Rules of Court, rule 5.502(i).) (See *In re D.P.* (2023) 92 Cal.App.5th 1282.) Affinity exists between a person and the blood or adoptive kin of that person’s spouse. (Cal. Rules of Court, rule 5.502(i).) Note that if the case involves an Indian child, who counts as a relative may be defined by the law or custom of the child’s tribe. (25 U.S.C. § 1903.)

2. Nonrelative Extended Family Members

A nonrelative extended family member (NREFM) is defined as “an adult caregiver who has an established familial relationship with a relative of the child, as defined in paragraph (2) of subdivision (c) of Section 361.3, or a familial or mentoring relationship with the child” that has been verified by the social services agency. (§ 362.7.) A NREFM is treated as a relative in virtually all aspects of assessment and determination as to the appropriateness of placement.



PREFERENCE FOR PLACEMENT WITH RELATIVES

1. Generally

It is the stated intent of the California Legislature to “preserve and strengthen a child’s family ties whenever possible.” (§ 202(a).) When “a child is removed from the physical custody of his or her parents, preferential consideration shall be given whenever possible to the placement of the child with the relative. (§ 361.3(a).) (See *In re N.J.* (2024) 104 Cal.App.5th 96.) Relatives are not guaranteed placement. In *In re D.P.* (2023) 92 Cal.App.5th 1282, 1291, the Court of Appeal explained: “The section 361.3 relative placement preference requires ‘preferential consideration’ be given to a relative’s request for placement of a dependent child. Preferential consideration means that the relative seeking placement shall be the first placement to be considered and investigated. Preferential consideration does not create an evidentiary presumption in favor of a relative, but merely places the relative at the head of the line when the court is determining which placement is in the child’s best interests. The statute expresses a command that relatives be assessed and *considered* favorably subject to the juvenile court’s consideration of the suitability of the relative’s home and the best interests of the child. But this command is not a guarantee of relative placement.” (Citations omitted; emphasis in original.)

The meaning of “relative” is found in § 361.3(c)(2): “‘Relative’ means an adult who is related to the child by blood, adoption, or affinity within the fifth degree of kinship, including stepparents, stepsiblings, and all relatives whose status is preceded by the words ‘great,’ ‘great-great,’ or ‘grand,’ or the spouse of any of these persons even if the marriage was terminated by death or dissolution.” (See *In re D.P.* (2023) 92 Cal.App.5th 1282.) A social services agency and a juvenile court erred when they disregarded the statutory mandate by not considering if relative placement was appropriate under the applicable statutory standards. (§ 361.3; *In re R.T.* (2015) 232 Cal. App.4th 1284, 1297, 1300–1301.) If the case involves an Indian child, specific placement preferences under ICWA must be followed.



2. Prior to Disposition

When a child is removed from the home, the child's social worker, within 30 days, must conduct an investigation to identify and locate the child's grandparents and other adult relatives. Once a relative is located, the social worker is required to provide written notice and explain in person or by telephone that the child has been removed and the options available to participate in the child's care and placement. The social worker is also required to give adult relatives a relative information form (form JV-285) that they can use to provide information to the social worker and the court regarding the child's needs. At the detention hearing, the juvenile court should inquire as to the efforts made by the social worker to identify and locate relatives. The social worker is required to provide any completed relative information forms to the court and all parties. (§ 309.)

If an able and available relative, or nonrelative extended family member, is available and requests temporary placement of the child pending the detention hearing, or after the detention hearing and pending the disposition hearing, the child welfare agency is required to initiate an assessment of the relative's or nonrelative extended family member's suitability. (*Ibid.*) When considering whether the placement with the relative is appropriate, the social worker must consider the placement of siblings and half-siblings in the same home, unless that placement would be contrary to the safety and well-being of any of the siblings. A social worker is not limited from placing a child in the home of an appropriate relative or a nonrelative extended family member pending the consideration of other relatives who have requested preferential consideration. (§ 361.3.) The court may authorize the placement of a child on a temporary basis in the home of a relative regardless of the status of any criminal record exemption or resource family approval if the court finds that the placement does not pose a risk to the health and safety of the child. (§ 309.)



When a child is removed from the parents' home, it is important that relatives are identified and assessed for placement as soon as possible. The relative information form (form JV-285) pro-



vides a process whereby able and willing relatives may seek placement of the child or become involved in the child's care. If relatives come forward but no relative information form is completed by the time of the detention hearing, counsel should request that any forms that are subsequently received be attached to the jurisdiction report. Also, counsel should encourage appropriate relatives and NREFMs to visit the child as frequently as possible.

3. At Disposition

Once a child has been declared a dependent and it has been determined that out-of-home placement is necessary, placement should be with relatives (taking into consideration the proximity of the parents and access to visitation) unless such placement is shown not to be in the child's best interest. The social services agency has the duty to make diligent efforts to locate and place the child with an appropriate relative. (Fam. Code, § 7950.) Upon removal of a child from parental custody, preferential consideration must be given to relatives who request placement. (§ 361.3(a).) "Preferential consideration" means that the relative seeking placement must be the first to be considered and investigated. However, as at the initial hearing, preferential consideration is given only to grandparents and adult aunts, uncles, and siblings. (§ 361.3(c).)



The court must exercise its independent judgment in determining whether a relative placement is appropriate; it may not merely defer to the recommendation of the social worker. (*In re Stephanie M.* (1994) 7 Cal.4th 295, 320.) Section 361.3 expressly requires the court to give favorable consideration to an assessed relative and to make its own determination based on the suitability of the home and the child's best interest. (See *Cesar V. v. Superior Court* (2001) 91 Cal.App.4th 1023.)

4. After Disposition

Following disposition, at any time when a child needs a change in placement, the county agency must again comply with section



361.3(a) by locating and assessing any and all available relatives. (*In re Joseph T.* (2008) 163 Cal.App.4th 787.) A relative should not be excluded from consideration because the child had previously been removed from his or her care or because the relative was involved in a prior dependency case. (*In re Antonio G.* (2007) 159 Cal.App.4th 369; *Cesar V.*, *supra*, 91 Cal.App.4th at p. 1032.)

If a relative comes forward at a time when the child does not need a new placement, the preference still applies and the county agency must still evaluate that relative for placement, but the preference may be overridden if moving the child to the relative's home would not be in the child's best interest. (*In re Joseph T.*, *supra*, 163 Cal.App.4th at p. 814.)

However, when reunification services are terminated and a selection and implementation hearing is set, the relative preference no longer applies. Instead, the child's current caretaker is entitled to preferential consideration under section 366.26(k), whether or not the caretaker is a relative. (*In re Lauren R.* (2007) 148 Cal.App.4th 841.) (See *Amber G. v. Superior Court* (2022) 86 Cal.App.5th 465, 492 ["section 361.3 does not apply after termination of parental rights."].)

Before any child can be ordered to remain in foster care with a permanent plan of adoption, tribal customary adoption, guardianship, or placement with it and a willing relative, the court must find that the social services agency has made diligent efforts to locate an appropriate relative placement and that each relative whose name has been submitted as a possible caregiver has been evaluated. (Fam. Code, § 7950(a)(1).)

PLACEMENT

1. Appropriateness

Under section 361.3(a), the social worker must determine whether a relative being considered as a placement resource is appropriate based on (but not limited to) consideration of all of the following factors:

- Child's best interest, including individual physical, medical, educational, psychological, or emotional needs;



- Wishes of the parent, relative, and child;
- Placement of siblings in the same home;
- Good moral character (based on a review of prior history of violent criminal acts or child abuse) of the relative and all other adults in the home;
- Nature and duration of the relationship between the child and relative;
- Relative's desire to care for the child;
- Safety of the relative's home; and
- Ability of the relative to provide a safe, secure, and stable home and the necessities of life; to exercise proper care and control of the child; to arrange safe and appropriate child care if needed; to protect the child from the child's parents; to facilitate court-ordered reunification efforts, visitation with other relatives, and implementation of the case plan; and to provide legal permanence if reunification fails.

However, neither inability to facilitate implementation of the case plan nor inability to provide legal permanence may be the sole basis for denying placement with a relative. (§ 361.3(a).)



Counsel speaking to relatives seeking placement must keep in mind the possibility that reunification may not occur. Regardless of the stage of the proceedings or the legal permanent plan (if determined), relatives must consider providing emotional permanence and a stable home for the child. If a relative insists that placement in his or her home is only temporary, counsel must carefully weigh whether such a placement would be in the child's best interest.

2. Assessment

All potential caregivers must be assessed by the social services agency before a child can be placed in the home. This is both a federal requirement under the Adoption and Safe Families Act (ASFA) and is mandated by state law. (See § 361.4.) Relatives are assessed for placement using the resource family approval process.



3. Possible Court Orders

a. Conditional Placement

The court may conditionally place a child with a relative upon receiving criminal clearances from CLETS and the Department of Justice while awaiting receipt of the FBI federal records, so long as all adults in the household sign statements that they have no criminal history. Placement may subsequently be terminated if results reveal undisclosed criminal convictions. (§ 309.)

b. When a Member of the Household Has a Criminal Record

If the results of the CLETS or LiveScan show a criminal conviction for anything other than a minor traffic violation, a child may not be placed in the home unless and until the social services agency grants a criminal conviction exemption (sometimes called a waiver). (§ 361.4; Health & Saf. Code, § 1522(g); *Los Angeles County Department of Children and Family Services v. Superior Court (Richard A.)* (2001) 87 Cal.App.4th 1161 [the restrictions under section 361.4(d)(2) are mandatory, and the court may not place a child in a home in which a person has a conviction unless an exemption has been granted].) The juvenile court may, however, set a hearing to determine whether the agency has abused its discretion by failing to seek or by denying an exemption. (*In re Esperanza C.* (2008) 165 Cal.App.4th 1042; *In re Jullian B.* (2000) 82 Cal.App.4th 1337.)

An exemption is granted based on substantial and convincing evidence that the prospective caregiver (or other person in the home with a criminal record) is of such good character as to justify the exemption. An exemption is needed even if the conviction has been expunged or set aside pursuant to Penal Code section 1203.4 or 1203.4(a). (Health & Saf. Code, § 1522(f)(1); *Los Angeles County Dept. of Children & Family Services v. Superior Court (Cheryl M.)* (2003) 112 Cal.App.4th 509.) Some serious felonies are nonexemptible, such as felony domestic violence; rape and other sex offenses; crimes of violence such as murder, manslaughter, and robbery; and crimes against children. (Health & Saf. Code, § 1522(g)(1)(C).) Felony convictions

for assault, battery, or drug-related offenses are nonexemptible for five years after the date of conviction. (*Ibid.*) Most nonviolent felony offenses and almost all misdemeanor offenses are exemptible.

The criminal history restrictions apply only to actual convictions, not arrests, and only to adult criminal convictions, not juvenile delinquency adjudications. Also, the prohibition against placing a child with a person who has a criminal history for which no exemption has been obtained is inapplicable to a guardianship granted at disposition under section 360(a). (*In re Summer H.* (2006) 139 Cal. App.4th 1315.)



The statutes and regulations governing criminal history restrictions and exemptions are extremely complex, and county agency caseworkers may be mistaken in believing that an offense is nonexemptible or may deny an exemption request without engaging in a thorough, individualized assessment of the relative's character and the child's best interest. Children's attorneys should make an independent assessment of whether an exemption can and should be granted, and should consider setting an abuse-of-discretion hearing to challenge the agency's denial of, or refusal to seek, an exemption for an otherwise appropriate relative.

c. In Other Situations Lacking Agency Approval

The court may order a child placed in a home despite lack of approval so long as the social service agency's denial is not based on a criminal conviction. The juvenile court has a duty to make an independent placement decision under section 361.3; it cannot merely defer to the social worker's recommendation. (*In re N.V.* (2010) 189 Cal.App.4th 25, 30; *Cesar V.*, *supra*, 91 Cal.App.4th at p. 1023.) Relatives who are denied placement approval by the county agency may pursue an administrative grievance process. This remedy is separate from the dependency court's duty to make an independent placement decision in light of the child's best interest and need not be exhausted prior to a contested hearing on the placement issue. (*In re N.V.*, *supra*, 189 Cal.App.4th at pp. 30–31.)





Although the court clearly has the power to make a specific placement order over the objection of the county, counsel should be aware that placement without the approval of the social services agency can negatively affect funding and render the family ineligible for federal relative foster care funds (otherwise known as *Youakim* or AFDC-FC).

d. When Relative Lives in Another State or Country

If the potential caregiver lives in a state other than California, the placement process must comply with the Interstate Compact on the Placement of Children (ICPC). (Fam. Code, § 7901; Cal. Rules of Court, rule 5.616; see fact sheet on the ICPC.) However, the ICPC does not apply to release to a previously noncustodial parent living in another state. (*In re John M.* (2006) 141 Cal.App.4th 1564, 1574–1575; see fact sheet on the ICPC.)

The court may place a child with relatives outside the United States as long as there is substantial compliance with criminal background checks and other section 309 assessment requirements. (*In re Sabrina H.* (2007) 149 Cal.App.4th 1403.)

Placement of a child outside the United States is further restricted by Assembly Bill 2209 (Stats. 2012, ch. 144). A child may not be placed outside the United States before the court finding that the placement is in the best interest of the child, except as required by federal law or treaty. The party or agency requesting this placement carries the burden of proof and must show, by clear and convincing evidence, that placement outside the United States is in the best interest of the child. When making this determination, the court must consider the following:

- Placement with a relative;
- Placement of siblings in the same home;
- Amount and nature of any contact between the child and the potential guardian or caretaker;
- Physical and medical needs of the child;



- Psychological and emotional needs of the child;
- Social, cultural, and educational needs of the child; and
- Specific desires of any dependent child who is 12 years of age or older.

If the court finds by clear and convincing evidence that placement outside the United States is in the child's best interest, the court may issue an order authorizing the social worker to make a placement outside the United States. The child may not leave the United States before the issuance of said order. (§§ 361.2(f), 366(d), 16010.6(b).)



The child may not be sent to a placement in another state unless and until the requirements of the ICPC have been met. This is often a cumbersome and time-consuming process, so a referral should be made as soon as an out-of-state placement resource is identified.

REMOVAL FROM A RELATIVE PLACEMENT

1. While Parental Rights Are Still Intact

a. Generally

Under certain circumstances the social services agency must file a petition under section 387 when it removes a child from a relative's home, including when the child was specifically ordered by the court to be placed in that home. There is a split of authority as to whether removal from a general placement requires judicial review. (See *In re Cynthia C.* (1997) 58 Cal.App.4th 1479 [no 387 petition is needed]; but see *In re Jonique W.* (1994) 26 Cal.App.4th 685 [a petition is necessary especially where the custodial relative's conduct is at issue]; *In re Joel H.* (1993) 19 Cal.App.4th 1185 [relative de facto parent is entitled to challenge removal]; see also Subsequent and Supplemental Petitions black letter discussion.)

b. Special Versus General Placement Orders

An order at disposition simply placing the child in the care and custody of the social services agency is deemed a general placement order that, in most circumstances, gives the agency the discretion



to make placement changes without bringing the issue before the court. However, the court has the authority to order the agency to place a child in a specific home, thereby triggering procedural protections for the placement. (See *In re Robert A.* (1992) 4 Cal.App.4th 174, 189 [“Although the court does not make a direct placement order itself, it does have the power to instruct the (social services agency) to make a particular out-of-home placement of a particular dependent child”].)



A “specific placement” order is often preferable to one generally placing the child in the custody of the social services agency. Removal from the former requires that the county file a supplemental petition under section 387.

c. When Agency Withdraws Approval of Caregiver or Home

The prohibitions in section 361.4 involving a prospective caregiver’s criminal history apply only to initial placement, *not* to removal from an existing placement. Neither a conviction after placement has been made nor delayed recognition of an existing record requires removal from a caregiver; the court has the discretion to allow the child to remain in the home and a duty to make an independent decision. (*Cheryl M.*, *supra*, 112 Cal.App.4th at p. 519.) Furthermore, removal is not mandated from a court-ordered placement merely because the social services agency withdraws its approval of the relative’s home. (*In re Miguel E.* (2004) 120 Cal.App.4th 521 [the agency does not have absolute authority to change placements, and its approval is only one of the factors that the court considers in reviewing the continuing appropriateness of a placement].)

However, a caregiver’s physical move into a different house triggers a new assessment and approval process. Furthermore, the court does not have the discretion to allow a child to remain with a caregiver if anyone in the new home has a criminal conviction unless the social services agency grants an exemption. (*Los Angeles County Dept. of Children and Family Services v. Superior Court (Sencere P.)* (2005) 126 Cal.App.4th 144.)



SAFE HAVEN / SAFE SURRENDER

The purpose of the safe-haven/safe-surrender law is to save the lives of newborn infants who otherwise might be abandoned and left to die. It does so by (1) decriminalizing the voluntary “surrender” of such children and (2) guaranteeing parental anonymity.

STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS (HEALTH & SAF. CODE, § 1255.7)

The baby must be 72 hours old or younger and voluntarily surrendered to personnel on duty at a designated safe-surrender site (most often a hospital) by a parent or person having lawful custody.

“Lawful custody” means that physical custody is accepted from a person believed in good faith to be the infant’s parent and to have the express intent of surrendering the child. (Health & Saf. Code, § 1255.7(j).)

CONFIDENTIALITY AND ANONYMITY ARE KEY

- The child is identified only by an ankle bracelet that bears a confidential code.
- Although site personnel attempt to provide a medical questionnaire, it may be declined, filled out at the site, or anonymously mailed in, and it must not require any identifying information about the child, parent, or surrendering party. (*Id.*, § 1255.7(b)(3).)
- Any identifying information received is confidential and must not be further disclosed by either site personnel or the social services agency. (*Id.*, § 1255.7(d)(2) & (k).)
- Identifying information must be redacted from any medical information provided by site personnel to the social services agency. (*Id.*, § 1255.7(d)(2).)
- The agency must not reveal information identifying the parent or surrendering party to state and national abduction and missing children agencies, although the child’s identifying information (e.g., physical description) must be conveyed to those agencies. (*Id.*, § 1255.7(e).)



- All such information is exempt from disclosure under the California Public Records Act. (*Id.*, § 1255.7(d)(2) & (k).)

PROCEDURE

- The case should be filed in juvenile court as a “g” count, which specifically covers situations in which “the child has been . . . voluntarily surrendered pursuant to Section 1255.7 of the Health and Safety Code.” (§ 300(g).)
- The petition should preserve the anonymity of the child and parent(s), referencing the child only as “Baby Boy/Girl Doe” and the parents only as “John/Jane Doe.”
- At disposition, no reunification should be provided and the court should set a 366.26 hearing within 120 days. (§ 361.5(b)(9) & (f).)



SIBLINGS

NOTICE AND PROCEDURAL RIGHTS

The caregiver of a dependent child, the child's attorney, and the child, if 10 or older, have the right to receive notice of any separate dependency proceedings regarding a sibling. (§§ 290.1–295.)

Any person, including a dependent child, can petition the court to assert a sibling relationship and request visitation, placement, or consideration of the sibling relationship when the court is determining the case plan or permanent plan. (§ 388(b).)

Children's attorneys have the right to notice of any change in placement that would result in separation of siblings currently placed together. Notice must be given 10 days in advance unless exigent circumstances exist. (§ 16010.6(b).)

DEFINITION OF "SIBLING"

"Sibling" is defined as "a person related to the identified child by blood, adoption, or affinity through a common legal or biological parent" in sections 362.1(c), 388, and 16002(g). This definition includes half-siblings and adoptive siblings.



Other provisions of the Welfare and Institutions Code refer to "siblings" without further explanation. There is a strong argument that, for consistency, all Welfare and Institutions Code provisions concerning siblings should apply to all children who are described by the above definition.

REPRESENTATION OF A SIBLING GROUP

Prior to accepting appointment for a group of two or more siblings, attorneys must not only conduct routine conflict checks but also be mindful of potential conflicts before speaking with any potential clients. Upon appointment to represent a sibling set, attorneys should review the initial detention report and any other available documents to identify potential conflicts. Common examples include



situations where one sibling is alleged to have abused another sibling or one sibling has accused another of lying.

If a potential conflict is apparent, the attorney should carefully consider which sibling to interview first in order to preserve the ability to represent at least one of the siblings. In general, the attorney should start by interviewing any children whose statements are *not* included in the detention report, to determine whether these siblings' statements agree or conflict with those included in the detention report.



Attorneys for other parties may file a motion to disqualify an attorney who represents multiple siblings on grounds of conflict of interest. Before taking this step, however, attorneys should attempt to resolve the issue in a less adversarial manner and also consider the drawbacks of a successful motion, including the delay caused when a new attorney needs to become familiar with the case.

SIBLING PLACEMENT

Whenever a child is detained, the child welfare agency “shall, to the extent that it is practical and appropriate, place the minor together with any siblings or half-siblings who are also detained” or explain in the detention report why the siblings are not placed together. (§ 306.5.)

Child welfare agencies must make “diligent efforts” to place siblings together and otherwise “develop and maintain sibling relationships” unless the court finds by clear and convincing evidence that sibling interaction is detrimental to the child or children. (§ 16002(a) & (b).)



Counsel should independently investigate claims that placement of siblings together would be detrimental. The shortage of foster homes for large sibling sets may be a legitimate reason to separate siblings temporarily, but this should not relieve an agency of its obligation to continue to search for an appropriate home, including consideration of noncustodial parents and relatives (both local and out-of-state) as well as foster homes. A detriment finding should always be revisited at subsequent hearings.



In deciding whether to place the dependent child with a relative, the court must consider whether placement of siblings and half-siblings in that same home is in the best interest of each of the children. (§ 361.3(a)(4).) Also, adult siblings are included in the relative placement preference. (§ 361.4(c)(2).)



Sometimes the best advocacy one can do for a parent or child client is to work for safe placement with an appropriate caregiver. Independent, appropriate conversations are essential to ensure a caregiver's understanding of the process as well as the other case-related issues.

If at least one child in a sibling group is under three years old at the time of removal, then “for purposes of placing and maintaining a sibling group together in a permanent home should reunification efforts fail,” reunification services as to all children in the sibling group may be limited to six months. (§ 361.5(a)(3).)



Limiting reunification services under section 361.5(a) is discretionary, not mandatory.

SIBLING VISITATION

When siblings are not placed together, any order placing a child in foster care must include provisions for sibling visitation unless the court finds by clear and convincing evidence that sibling interaction is contrary to the safety or well-being of either child. (§ 362.1(a)(2).)

ONGOING CONSIDERATION OF SIBLING ISSUES

County child welfare agencies must address sibling issues in all court reports, and courts must consider sibling issues at all review hearings. These issues include

- The nature of the sibling relationships (including whether the children were raised together, shared common experiences, or have a close bond; whether they express a desire to visit or live together; and whether ongoing sibling contact is in their best interest);
- The appropriateness of developing or maintaining these relationships;



- If siblings are not placed together, why not, and what efforts are being made to place siblings together or why such efforts would be contrary to the safety and well-being of any of the siblings;
- The nature and frequency of sibling visits, or if visits have been suspended, whether there is a continuing need to suspend sibling interaction; and
- The impact of sibling relationships on placement and permanency planning.

(§ 358.1(d) [social studies and evaluations], § 361.2 [dispositional hearing], § 366(a)(1)(D) [review hearings], § 366.1(f) [supplemental court reports], § 366.3(e)(9) [permanency review hearings], § 16002(b) & (c) [review of sibling placement, visitation, and suspension of sibling visitation].)



Ongoing contact with child clients and the agency will help ensure that these issues are addressed in reports and help avoid delays and continuances.

TERMINATION OF PARENTAL RIGHTS, ADOPTION, AND POSTADOPTION CONTACT

At the selection and implementation (§ 366.26) hearing, the court may find a “compelling reason” that termination of parental rights and adoption would be detrimental to the child if there would be “substantial interference with a child’s sibling relationship.” This determination must take into account whether the siblings were raised together, whether they shared common experiences or have close bonds, and whether ongoing sibling contact is in the child’s best interest as compared to the benefit of legal permanency through adoption. (§ 366.26(c)(1)(E).)

This exception applies even if the sibling has already been adopted. (*In re Valerie A.* (2006) 139 Cal.App.4th 1519.) The juvenile court may find the exception applicable when a child *either* has shared significant experiences with a sibling in the past *or* currently has a strong bond with a sibling. (*In re Valerie A.* (2007) 152 Cal. App.4th 987, 1008–1009.)



Membership in a sibling group is a basis for a finding that children are adoptable but “difficult to place” for adoption, which allows the court to identify adoption as the permanent plan but delay termination of parental rights for up to 180 days to allow the agency to find an adoptive home. (§ 366.26(c)(3).)

If the court terminates parental rights, the court must consider ordering sibling visitation pending finalization of adoption and termination of jurisdiction. (*In re Clifton B.* (2000) 81 Cal.App.4th 415, 427.)

County child welfare agencies must facilitate postadoption sibling contact by giving prospective adoptive parents information about the child’s siblings and encouraging continued sibling contact. With the adoptive parents’ consent, the court may include provisions for postadoption sibling contact in the adoption order. (§§ 366.29, 16002(e).) Such provisions have no effect on the continuing validity of the adoption and do not limit the adoptive parents’ right to move away. Also, the adoptive parents may terminate the sibling contact if they determine that it poses a threat to the health, safety, or well-being of the adopted child. Subject to these limitations, the juvenile court has continuing jurisdiction to enforce post-adoption sibling contact provisions under section 366.29(c).

When the court terminates jurisdiction over a foster youth who is 18 or older, the youth must be given information about the whereabouts of any dependent siblings unless sibling contact would jeopardize the safety or welfare of the dependent siblings. (§ 391(b)(1).) Family Code section 9205 also provides a process for siblings to locate each other after one or both has been adopted.



Children’s attorneys have an ongoing duty to ensure that siblings have opportunities for meaningful contact, even if placed apart and even after one or more siblings reaches adulthood. Many former foster youth report that their most harmful experience in the foster care system was being separated from and losing contact with their siblings.



BACK TO TOC

TERMINATION OF JURISDICTION: COMMON ISSUES

The court may terminate jurisdiction at several stages of the proceedings and under a number of varying scenarios. Some of the more common issues encountered (and pitfalls to be aware of) are covered below. Note that for cases involving an Indian child, jurisdiction can be terminated when the case is determined to be under the exclusive jurisdiction of or transferred to a tribal court. (25 U.S.C. § 1911; 25 C.F.R. §§ 23.110, 23.115–23.119.)

CUSTODY TO ONE OR BOTH PARENTS

Whenever the court terminates jurisdiction over a child younger than 18 years, the court may enter protective orders (as provided under § 213.5) and/or orders regarding custody and visitation. (§ 726.5; Cal. Rules of Court, rule 5.700.) Orders issued upon termination must be made on Judicial Council form JV-200 (*Custody Order—Juvenile—Final Judgment*) and must be filed in any existing dissolution or paternity proceedings or may serve as the sole basis for opening a file for such a proceeding. (§ 362.4(a).) Each parent has a right to notice of the intent to terminate jurisdiction and a right to be heard as to the proposed custody and visitation orders. (§§ 386, 388; Cal. Rules of Court, rules 5.565(c), 5.570(g), 5.524(e)—(f); *In re Kelley L.* (1998) 64 Cal.App.4th 1279; *In re Michael W.* (1997) 54 Cal.App.4th 190; but see *In re Elaine E.* (1990) 221 Cal.App.3d 809.) In *In re J.M.* (2023) 89 Cal.App.5th 95, 112, the Court of Appeal wrote, “Section 362.4 governs the termination of juvenile court jurisdiction and related orders. The statute authorizes a juvenile court to make ‘exit orders’ regarding custody and visitation upon terminating dependency jurisdiction over a child. These exit orders remain in effect until modified or terminated by a subsequent order of the superior court. In making exit orders, the juvenile court must look at the best interests of the child. The court must be guided by the totality of the circumstances and issue orders that are in the child’s best interests.” When making exit orders, the court specifies the amount of visita-



tion granted to the noncustodial parent, but may leave it up to the parents to arrange the time, place, and manner of visitation. (*In re T.H.* (2010) 190 Cal.App.4th 1119, 1123.)

Juvenile court custody orders (sometimes called exit orders, family law orders, or FLOs) are final orders and will continue until they are modified or terminated by a superior court. (§ 362.4(b).) Such visitation and custody orders may not be subsequently modified unless the court finds both that there is a significant change of circumstances and that the suggested modification is in the child's best interest. (§ 302(d); *In re Marriage of David and Martha M.* (2006) 140 Cal.App.4th 96.)



Given the difficulty of modifying juvenile court custody orders after the fact (and the reality that most clients will be attempting to do so pro per), attorneys should carefully craft the document with the client's long-range, as well as short-term, goals in mind.

SITUATIONS IN WHICH TERMINATION IS IMPROPER

Jurisdiction must not be terminated for a minor under the age of 18 who is in foster care or APPLA, even if the child refuses services and is habitually absent from placement without permission (i.e., AWOL). (See *In re Natasha H.* (1996) 46 Cal.App.4th 1151; see also *In re Rosalinda C.* (1993) 16 Cal.App.4th 273 [termination of jurisdiction improper where minors were in long-term placement, not guardianship, with relative in a foreign country].) Additionally, the court must not terminate jurisdiction over a minor whose whereabouts are unknown. (*In re Jean B.* (2000) 84 Cal.App.4th 1443 [the proper procedure was to issue a protective custody warrant for the child and arrest warrants for the absconding parent, set the matter for periodic review, and take no further judicial action].)



Although the court should not enter dispositional or other orders when the child is missing, the social services agency has an affirmative obligation to continue search efforts and counsel should be ready to address any new developments in the case.



YOUTH WHO AGE OUT

Once a dependent child who is the subject of an out-of-home-placement order reaches age 18, he/she/they may either request that dependency be terminated or, in some circumstances, remain in foster care as a nonminor dependent up to age 21. If the youth requests termination of jurisdiction, the court holds a hearing under section 391(d) and rule 5.555(b)(1). If the court terminates jurisdiction, it retains general jurisdiction under section 303(b) to allow the youth to petition under section 388(e) to request to resume juvenile court jurisdiction and reenter foster care. (§§ 303(b), 391(e).)

During the 90-day period before a foster child turns 18, the county agency must work with the child to prepare an individualized 90-day transition plan addressing the child's options for housing, health insurance, education, employment, support services, and mentoring; a power of attorney for health care; and information regarding the advance health care directive form. (§ 16501.1(g)(16)(B).) Children's attorneys should ensure that jurisdiction is not terminated until the 90-day transition plans have been developed and should review the plans with their clients to ensure that they are adequate and realistic. Foster youth moving to independence should be informed that they are eligible for food stamps under a special state program. (§ 18901.4.)

Also, county agencies are required to request annual credit checks for all foster youth between ages 14 and 18, and if a credit check indicates that a youth may have been a victim of identity theft, refer the youth for services to address the issue. (§ 10618.6(a)(1).) Foster youth are especially vulnerable to identity theft because of their frequent moves, exposure to numerous related and unrelated adults, and lack of adult protection and support. Children's attorneys should ensure that the credit check is conducted and any identity theft issues are resolved before jurisdiction is terminated.

At the last review hearing before a foster child turns 18, the court must ensure that the child

- Has a case plan that includes a plan for the child to satisfy one or more of the participation conditions described in section



11403(b) so that the child is eligible to remain in foster care as a nonminor dependent (NMD);

- Has been informed of his or her right to seek termination of dependency jurisdiction pursuant to section 391, and understands the potential benefits of continued dependency; and
- Has been informed of his or her right to have dependency reinstated under section 388(e), and understands the potential benefits of continued dependency.

(§ 366.31(a).)

At the last review hearing before a foster child turns 18, and at all review hearings concerning nonminor dependents, the agency's report must address

- The minor's or NMD's plans to remain in foster care and meet one or more of the participation conditions described in section 11403(b)(1)–(5) to continue to receive AFDC-FC benefits as an NMD;
- The social worker or probation officer's efforts made and assistance provided to the child or NMD so that he/she/they will be able to meet the participation conditions;
- Efforts made to comply with the requirements of section 391(e)(2); and
- For a child or NMD whose placement in a short-term residential therapeutic program (STRTP) has been reviewed and approved on and after October 1, 2021, and for a child or NMD whose placement in a community treatment facility has been reviewed and approved on and after July 1, 2022, the report prepared for the review shall also include evidence of the following pursuant to section 361.22:
 - (A) Ongoing assessment of the strengths and needs of the child or NMD continues to support the determination that the needs of the child or NMD cannot be met by family members or in another family-based setting, placement in a STRTP or community treatment facility continues to provide the most effective and appropriate care setting in the least restrictive environment, and placement is consis-



tent with the short- and long-term mental and behavioral health goals and permanency plan for the child or NMD.

- (B) Documentation of the child or NMD's specific treatment or service needs that will be met in the placement and the length of time the child or NMD is expected to need the treatment or services. For a Medi-Cal beneficiary, the determination of services and expected length of time for those services funded by Medi-Cal shall be based upon medical necessity and on all other state and federal Medi-Cal requirements, and shall be reflected in the documentation.
- (C) Documentation of the intensive and ongoing efforts made by the child welfare department, consistent with the child or NMD's permanency plan, to prepare the child or NMD to return home or to be placed with a fit and willing relative, a legal guardian, an adoptive parent, in a resource family home, a tribally approved home, or in another appropriate family-based setting, or, in the case of a NMD, in a supervised independent living setting.

(§§ 366.31(b), 361.22(c)–(e).)

1. Provision of Required Services and Documents

Whenever termination is recommended for a youth who has reached the age of majority, under section 391(b), (d), and (h), the social services agency must do the following:

- Ensure that the youth is present in court, unless the youth does not wish to appear, or that reasonable, diligent efforts to locate the youth are documented; and
- Submit a report verifying that the following information, documents, and services have been provided to the youth:
 - Written information on the case, including any known information regarding the NMD's Indian heritage or tribal connections, family and placement history; any photographs of the NMD or the family of the NMD in the possession of the county welfare department (other than forensic photographs); the whereabouts of any dependent siblings (unless that information would jeopardize the sib-



ling); directions on how to access the dependency file under section 827; the written 90-day transition plan prepared pursuant to section 16501.1; and the date on which the jurisdiction of the juvenile court would be terminated;

- Documents, including social security card, certified birth certificate, driver's license or identification card, health and education summary described in section 16010(a) (including Medi-Cal Benefits ID card, and written notice that youth exiting foster care at 18 years of age or older are eligible for Medi-Cal until they reach 26 years of age, regardless of income, and are not required to submit an application), an advance health care directive form, a Judicial Council form for filing a section 388(e) petition, written information notifying the minor or NMD that they may be eligible for CalFresh benefits and where to apply, and, if applicable, death certificates of parents and/or proof of citizenship or legal residency;
- If the report recommends continuing dependency jurisdiction as being in the NMD's best interest, it must include a recommended transitional independent living case plan for the NMD;
- If the report recommends termination of the court's jurisdiction, it must include documentation of reasonable efforts made by the department to provide the NMD with the assistance needed to meet or maintain eligibility as a NMD, as defined in section 11403(b)(1)–(5);
- If the NMD has indicated that they do not want dependency jurisdiction to continue, the report shall address the manner in which the NMD was advised of their options, including the benefits of remaining in foster care, and of their right to reenter foster care and to file a petition pursuant to section 388(e) to resume dependency jurisdiction prior to attaining 21 years of age;
- Assistance in accessing the Independent Living Aftercare Program in the NMD's county of residence, and, upon the NMD's request, assistance in completing a voluntary reentry agreement for care and placement pursuant to section



11400(z) and in filing a petition pursuant to section 388(e) to resume dependency jurisdiction;

- Assistance in applying for continued and uninterrupted enrollment in Medi-Cal or other health insurance for eligible NMDs pursuant to section 14005.28 or 14005.285;
- Assistance with referrals to transitional housing or assistance in securing other housing, including whether the referral or assistance has resulted in housing being secured for the NMD, and, if not, what, if any, different or additional assistance the department has provided that is intended to secure housing, the duration of housing, if known, and information describing additional referrals, assistance, or services provided by county departments or agencies other than the county welfare department that are intended to prevent the NMD from becoming homeless if jurisdiction is terminated pursuant to this section;
- Assistance with obtaining employment or other financial support, and written notice of any financial literacy programs or other available resources provided through the county or other community organizations to help the youth obtain financial literacy skills, including, but not limited to, banking, credit card debt, student loan debt, credit scores, credit history, and personal savings;
- Assistance in applying to and obtaining financial aid for college or vocational training and a letter verifying dependency status for purposes of federal and state financial aid eligibility, and written notice that a current or former dependent child who is or has been in foster care is granted a preference for student assistant or internship positions with state agencies pursuant to Government Code section 18220, or with participating county agencies pursuant to Government Code section 31000.11, until the child attains 26 years of age; and
- Assistance in maintaining relationships with individuals important to the youth.





Former foster youth are extremely vulnerable to homelessness and poverty as they often have been involuntarily estranged from their families and therefore lack extended family as a system of support to fall back on when times get hard. Therefore, before jurisdiction is terminated, counsel must ensure that the social services agency has provided all the assistance required under section 391 and that the youth is as well prepared as possible for life outside the dependency system.

2. When the Child May be Eligible for Immigration Relief



Be careful if a federal petition for classification of an undocumented dependent as a special immigrant juvenile (SIJ) is pending. A petitioner must generally remain under juvenile court jurisdiction when the SIJ petition is filed and when it is adjudicated. However, termination of jurisdiction solely because a child has been adopted, placed in a legal guardianship, or has reached his or her 18th birthday does not invalidate an otherwise sufficient SIJ petition. (8 C.F.R. § 204.11(c)(3)(ii).) As long as the juvenile court made SIJ findings when it held jurisdiction and the petition is filed before the child turns 21 years old, the federal government will not deny the petition on the ground that the child is no longer under the court's jurisdiction. However, if the child may be eligible for SIJ classification and the court has not yet made SIJ findings, *do not* submit to termination of jurisdiction until the court has made those findings. (See Immigration fact sheet for more detailed discussion.)

TERMINATING DEPENDENCY JURISDICTION UNDER LEGAL GUARDIANSHIP

Once a legal guardianship has been established, the court may either continue supervision or terminate court jurisdiction while maintaining jurisdiction over the child as a ward of the guardianship as authorized under section 366.4. (§ 366.4(a).) If the child's needs change after jurisdiction is terminated, such that additional services and supports are needed to ensure the child's safety, well-being, and/



or successful transition to adulthood, a section 388 petition to reinstate dependency jurisdiction may be filed at any time before the child turns 18. (*In re D.R.* (2007) 155 Cal.App.4th 480, 486-487.)

1. With a Nonrelative Guardian

When jurisdiction is terminated with a nonrelative guardian, the child remains eligible for funding and is supervised by a social worker. However, if the dependency case is closed before the child's eighth birthday, the child will not be eligible for services from the California Department of Social Services' Independent Living Program (ILP). (§ 10609.45(b).)



There is talk of remedying this gap in services. Practitioners can look for updates on the ILP website: www.ilponline.org. In the meantime, since termination of jurisdiction is discretionary, the child's counsel may want to advocate for keeping the case open until the child turns 16 in order to ensure the availability of this benefit.

2. With a Relative Guardian—Kin-GAP and Kin-GAP Plus

Under section 366.3, the court should terminate dependency jurisdiction over a child in a relative guardianship who is eligible for the Kinship Guardianship Assistance Payment (Kin-GAP) program, unless the guardian objects or the court finds that exceptional circumstances require that the case remain open. (§ 366.3(a).) Kin-GAP is a California state program that provides a continuing funding stream and other support for qualified families after dependency jurisdiction has terminated. (§ 366.21(j).) Children whose cases are closed under the Kin-GAP program are eligible for ILP services.

A federal kinship guardianship assistance program replacing the state Kin-GAP program for federally eligible children was initiated in 2010. Funding rates under the federal program are to be negotiated in each case, in light of the individual child's needs, rather than limited to the foster care rate.



a. Eligibility

In order to qualify for benefits under Kin-GAP,

- The child has been removed from his/her/their home pursuant to a voluntary placement agreement, or as a result of judicial determination, including being adjudged a dependent child of the court, pursuant to section 300, or a ward of the court, pursuant to section 601 or 602, to the effect that continuation in the home would be contrary to the welfare of the child (§ 11368(a)(1));
- The child must have been eligible for federal foster care maintenance payments while residing with the caregiver for at least six consecutive months in the approved home of the prospective relative guardian while under the jurisdiction of the juvenile court or a voluntary placement agreement (§ 11368(a)(2)); and
- Dependency jurisdiction must be terminated. (§ 11368(e).)

b. Benefits

Under the Kin-GAP Plus program, caregivers are not limited to the basic foster care rate but can receive specialized-care increments for children who have medical, developmental, behavioral, or emotional problems as well as the same annual clothing allowance provided to foster children. (See Funding and Rate Issues fact sheet for more detailed information.)

Children in Kin-GAP care will continue to be provided with Medi-Cal health coverage and have access to the ILP program no matter what their age when jurisdiction terminates.



VISITATION

PARENT-CHILD VISITATION

The focus of dependency law is on preservation of the family as well as on the protection and safety of the child. (§ 300.2.) When a child has been removed from the home, visitation is vital to maintaining family ties.



Modification of existing visitation orders must be pursued via a section 388 petition. Changes made without providing notice and an opportunity to be heard violate due process. (*In re Lance V.* (2001) 90 Cal.App.4th 668, 677.)

1. When Child Is Placed With Previously Noncustodial Parent

When the court removes a child from a parent at disposition and places the child with a previously noncustodial parent, the court may make a visitation order regarding the parent from whom the child was removed. (§ 361.2.) If the court terminates jurisdiction, any juvenile court orders made at the time as to custody and visitation may not subsequently be modified in family court unless there is a showing that there has been a significant change of circumstances and that the request is in the child's best interest. (§ 302(d).)



Given the relative finality of such "exit" orders, counsel should ensure that future interests are as well protected as possible. Willful violations of such orders by either parent may also lead to additional agency involvement.

2. When Reunification Services Are Offered

Visitation is an essential component of any reunification plan. (*In re Alvin R.* (2003) 108 Cal.App.4th 962.) Any order placing a child in foster care and ordering reunification services must provide for visitation between the parent/guardian and child that is "as frequent as possible, consistent with the well-being of the child." (§ 362.1(a)(1)(A).) Although the frequency and duration of visits can be limited



and other conditions imposed if necessary to protect the child's emotional well-being, parent-child visitation may not be denied entirely unless it would "jeopardize the *safety* of the child." (*In re C.C.* (2009) 172 Cal.App.4th 1481, emphasis added.) Disputes over visitation may arise when a child does not want to visit or the child's caregiver, social worker, or therapist thinks visitation is harmful. The court may order visitation in a therapeutic setting, may condition visitation on the parent's and/or child's satisfactory progress in therapy, etc., but may not delegate visitation decisions entirely to the child's caregiver, group home, social worker, or therapist or to the children themselves. (*In re Kyle E.* (2010) 185 Cal.App.4th 1130, 1134–1135; *In re James R.* (2007) 153 Cal.App.4th 413, 436; *In re Hunter S.* (2006) 142 Cal.App.4th 1497, 1505.)

a. Social Services Agency's Role

The social worker must address any barriers to visitation (such as the child's need for therapy before visitation begins). (*In re Alvin R.*, *supra*, 108 Cal.App.4th at p. 962.)

b. Incarcerated Parents

Visitation must be provided to an incarcerated parent "where appropriate." (§ 361.5(e)(1)(C).) Denial may not be based solely on the child's age or any other single factor but must be based on clear and convincing evidence that visitation would be detrimental to the child. (*In re Dylan T.* (1998) 65 Cal.App.4th 765, 774.) Reunification services may be found inadequate if no visitation is arranged for an incarcerated parent who is located within a reasonable distance from the child. (*In re Precious J.* (1996) 42 Cal.App.4th 1463, 1476.)

It is the Legislature's policy to encourage the reunification of families of incarcerated parents by easing the difficulties incarcerated parents encounter in maintaining contact with their children. Thus, when the court is exercising its discretion to continue or terminate reunification services, the court should consider, among other factors, the parent's inability to have contact with the child because he or she is incarcerated. (*S.T. v. Superior Court* (2009) 177



Cal.App.4th 1009, 1016–1017.) Specifically, section 361.5 requires the court to consider the special circumstances of an incarcerated parent when determining whether to extend reunification services, including the parent’s ability and good faith efforts to maintain contact with the child. Sections 366.21(e) and (f) and 366.22 also require the court to take into account the incarcerated parent’s ability to maintain contact with the child when considering the efforts or progress demonstrated by the parent in reunification and the extent to which the parent availed him or herself of services provided when determining whether return would be detrimental.

3. When Reunification Services Are Not Offered

Even if reunification services are denied under 361.5(b) or (e)(1), the juvenile court has the discretion to allow ongoing contact unless it finds that visitation would be detrimental to the child. (§ 361.5(f).)

4. When a Section 366.26 Hearing Is Pending

Upon denying or terminating reunification services and setting a section 366.26 hearing, the court must continue to allow visitation unless it finds that visitation would be detrimental to the child. (§ 366.21(h).)



Whenever reunification efforts are denied or terminated, counsel should consider advocating for continued visitation in order to leave the door open for possible 388 petitions or challenges to termination of parental rights under the (c)(1)(A) exception. Consistent visitation is required for a successful showing in the latter case and is a key element in establishing the “best-interest” standard for the former.

5. After Section 366.26 Hearing

a. If Parental Rights Have Been Terminated

Adoptive parents, birth parents, and/or other relatives may voluntarily enter into postadoption contact agreements pursuant to Family Code section 8616.5, which also includes provisions for mediation,



modification, and termination as well as limited court enforcement of such agreements.

b. When Parental Rights Remain Intact

Upon selection of a permanent plan of legal guardianship, placement with a fit and willing relative, or an order that the child remain in foster care, the court must make an order for continued visitation unless it finds by a preponderance of the evidence that visitation would be detrimental to the child. The court may not delegate to a legal guardian the decision of whether to allow visits, although it may leave the time, place, and manner of visits to the guardian's discretion. (§ 366.26(c)(4)(C); *In re Rebecca S.* (2010) 181 Cal.App.4th 1310; *In re M.R.* (2005) 132 Cal.App.4th 269, 274.)

GRANDPARENT VISITATION

Upon removing a child from the child's parents under section 361, the court must consider "whether the family ties and best interests of the child will be served by granting visitation rights to the child's grandparents" and, if so, must make specific orders for grandparent visitation. (§ 361.2(h).) However, grandparents, even if appointed de facto parents, have no constitutionally protected right to visit their dependent grandchildren. (*Miller v. California Dept. of Social Services* (2004) 355 F.3d 1172.)

SIBLING VISITATION

Any order placing a child in foster care must include provisions for visitation between the child and a dependent sibling unless the court finds by clear and convincing evidence that sibling interaction is contrary to the safety or well-being of either child. (§§ 361.2(j), 16002(b); *In re S.M.* (2004) 118 Cal.App.4th 1108.)

Sibling contact is an ongoing issue subject to juvenile court review throughout the dependency proceedings. (*In re Asia L.* (2003), 107 Cal.App.4th 498.)

Any person, including the dependent child, may petition the court to assert a sibling relationship and request visitation with a dependent child. (§ 388(b).)



The social services agency must facilitate postadoption sibling contact by giving prospective adoptive parents information about the child's siblings and encouraging continued sibling contact. With the adoptive parents' consent, the court may include in the adoption order provisions for postadoption sibling contact. (§§ 366.29, 16002.)



Such provisions have no effect on the continuing validity of the adoption and do not limit the adoptive parents' right to move within or outside the state. Also, the adoptive parents may terminate the sibling contact if they later determine that it poses a threat to the health, safety, or well-being of the adopted child. In other words, the enforceability of these agreements is questionable.

GENERAL CONSTRAINTS

No visitation order may jeopardize the safety of the child. (§ 362.1(a)(1)(B); see *Los Angeles County Department of Children and Family Services v. Superior Court* (Ethan G.) (2006) 145 Cal.App.4th 692 [order allowing parent in sex abuse case to live in home on condition that all contact with child would be monitored was abuse of discretion].)

To protect the safety of the child, the court may craft visitation orders in a manner that keeps the child's address confidential. (§ 362.1(a)(1)(B).)

If a parent has been convicted of first degree murder of the child's other parent, the court may order unsupervised visitation only if the court finds there is "no risk to the child's health, safety, and welfare." (§ 362.1(a)(1)(A); Fam. Code, § 3030.)

The court may not order unsupervised visits in which the person to be visited or anyone in his or her household is required to register as a sex offender as a result of a crime against a child, unless the court finds visits pose "no significant risk to the child." (*Ibid.*, § 3030.)

If visitation is ordered in a case in which a restraining order has been issued, the order must specify the time, day, place, and manner of transfer as designed to protect the child from exposure



to domestic violence and to ensure the safety of all family members. (§ 213.5(l); Fam. Code, § 6323(c) & (d).)



In keeping with their clients' wishes, minors' and parents' attorneys should not only focus on whether visitation with parents, siblings, other relatives, and significant others should occur but also consider seeking new orders or filing a 388 petition to modify existing court orders on a wide range of visitation issues, such as frequency and duration, scheduling, location, supervision, and contact outside of visits (e.g., phone calls, mail, attendance at school or sports events). It is important to maintain all existing relationships whenever possible.





SUMMARIES OF SEMINAL CASES

Summaries of Seminal Cases S-3

SUMMARIES OF SEMINAL CASES

A case is designated as seminal on the basis of its impact on daily practice and the frequency of its citation in the appellate courts. To read the full opinions of the cases summarized here, and to access hundreds of additional dependency-related case summaries, please visit the California Courts Juvenile Portal (JCART) at <https://jcart.courts.ca.gov/user/login?destination=/>. You need an account to access this site. Please contact jcart@jud.ca.gov for assistance.

DETENTION HEARINGS

1. *Los Angeles County Department of Children and Family Services v. Superior Court* (2008) 162 Cal.App.4th 1408

A juvenile court may not dismiss a dependency petition at the detention hearing.

At the detention hearing, the trial court sua sponte dismissed a petition alleging domestic violence. The agency filed a writ challenging the decision to dismiss the petition and return the minor to her mother. The court granted the writ petition and held that, barring exceptional circumstances not present here, the juvenile court had no authority to dismiss a dependency petition at the detention hearing. The statutory scheme envisions that the sufficiency of evidence will be addressed at the adjudication hearing, not at the detention hearing. Even if the petition had been insufficient on its face, there was no compelling reason that the issue demanded resolution without formal notice and a full opportunity to be heard.

JURISDICTIONAL HEARINGS

1. *In re D.P.* (2023) 14 Cal.5th 266

Even when an appeal of a jurisdictional finding is moot because a juvenile court's dependency jurisdiction has terminated, a court may exercise discretionary review. Because a jurisdictional finding may have serious consequences such as those stemming from a report to the Child Abuse Central Index (CACI), it is important for a court to weigh the appropriateness of exercising discretionary review.



Parents brought their infant son to the hospital due to his excessive crying, and a chest x-ray revealed a single healing rib fracture. When a dependency petition was filed on behalf of the infant and his older sister, a juvenile court found no evidence of deliberate or unreasonable acts or omissions by the parents, but did find that the parents' neglectful acts endangered the infant. The parents appealed the jurisdictional finding. While the appeal was pending, parents completed their case plan, and the juvenile court terminated its jurisdiction. The appellate court dismissed the appeal as moot. The California Supreme Court reversed the dismissal and remanded the matter. Discretionary review is particularly important in the dependency context. The expeditious nature of dependency proceedings and the length of the appellate process makes appeals in dependency proceedings particularly prone to mootness issues. A jurisdictional finding could impact future dependency or family law proceedings and could be particularly stigmatizing, depending on the nature of the allegations.

2. In re Christopher L. (2022) 12 Cal.5th 1063

While it is error for a juvenile court to proceed with a jurisdiction and disposition hearing in a dependency case without an incarcerated parent's presence and without the appointment of counsel for that parent, it is not reversible per se.

The minor was born with drugs in his system and a dependency petition was filed on behalf of the minor and his sibling. The father, incarcerated at the time of the dependency proceedings, was determined to be the minor's presumed father. Neither parent appeared at the jurisdiction/disposition hearing, where the court bypassed the parents for reunification services under section 361.5. The father was appointed counsel approximately six months later. At the 366.26 hearing, the father appeared via telephone, and his counsel objected to termination of parental rights but presented no evidence. Parental rights were terminated. The juvenile court erred by denying the father an attorney at the jurisdiction/disposition hearing and for failing to comply with Penal Code section 2625 to address the parent's



presence at the hearing. However, the error was not “structural error” that would mandate reversal of the orders. The absence of parental counsel from one stage of the proceedings does not make the entire dependency proceeding fundamentally unfair. Counsel had a legal mechanism to challenge the prior order via a section 388 motion or an Ansley motion to challenge proper notice. The errors in the proceedings must be balanced against the child’s need for permanency and prompt resolution.

3. *In re R.T.* (2017) 3 Cal.5th 622

The Supreme Court affirmed the Court of Appeals finding that jurisdiction under section 300(b)(1) does not require a finding that a parent was neglectful or in some way to blame for the failure or inability to adequately supervise or protect his or her child. The requirement of a finding of parental unfitness and neglect to establish jurisdiction under section 300(b)(1) created by *In re Precious D.* (2010) 189 Cal.App.4th 1251 and *In re Rocco M.* (1991) 1 Cal.App.4th 814 is disapproved.

At the age of 14, the minor began running away for days at a time and the mother was unable to control her behavior. Mother arranged for her to live with her grandparents, but neither could they manage her behavior because she struggled with anger management issues (and it was reported she threw a chair at the grandmother). After years of no progress on these issues, the dependency court found that 17 year old R.T. was at substantial risk of serious physical harm or illness, as a result of the failure or inability of mother to adequately supervise or protect her under section 300(b)(1). Whether it was the child’s pattern of incorrigible behavior or the mother’s inability to supervise or protect the minor that initiated the cyclical pattern of conflict and running away does not matter. The basis for jurisdiction under 300(b)(1) is whether the child is at substantial risk of serious physical harm or illness, and substantial evidence supports the trial court’s finding that she was.

4. *Gonzalez v. Santa Clara County Dept. of Social Services* (2014) 223 Cal.App.4th 72

A parent accused of child abuse for purposes of reporting under the Child Abuse and Neglect Reporting Act may rely on the same disciplinary privilege that limits a parent's criminal culpability and civil liability. The use of a wooden spoon to administer a spanking did not necessarily exceed the bounds of reasonable parental discipline, though the visible bruises nearly approached the outer limit for the damage to be tolerated.

A successful assertion of the parental disciplinary privilege requires three elements: (1) a genuine disciplinary motive, (2) a reasonable occasion for discipline, and (3) a disciplinary measure reasonable in kind and degree. There was no evidence of any other reason for mother's actions. The visible markings did not compel a finding of abuse because there were no grounds to show that the parent intended to inflict bruises, knew her conduct would do so, or should have known that bruises were likely to result from the amount of force applied and the method of its application. In the case, the court found the bruises were accidental, caused without intent, and so could not be enough by themselves to sustain a finding that the spanking amounted to reportable child abuse.

5. *In re John M.* (2013) 217 Cal.App.4th 410

Despite the minor's absence during incidents of domestic violence and reckless driving, the history and pattern of domestic violence would have placed the minor's physical and emotional well-being in immediate danger if he were returned to his parents. The parents presented a very real risk to the minor's physical and emotional health.

The parents' verbal and physical domestic violence was severe, including reckless driving with mother in the car, which caused injuries to mother's face and head and resulted in father's incarceration. Mother's unknown whereabouts did not reduce the risk to minor because father could engage in angry and violent behavior toward the minor without mother being present.



6. *In re Marquis H.* (2013) 212 Cal.App.4th 718

Section 300(a) applies to a child when the allegations of abuse arise from the parents' seriously physically abusing their own grandchildren, though direct abuse to the child was not alleged. Section 300(a) does not prohibit the court from exercising jurisdiction over a child whose parents had severely physically abused their own grandchildren who were also living in the home and under their exclusive care.

7. *In re Noe F.* (2013) 213 Cal.App.4th 358

Where the mother had identified two suitable relative placements, her incarceration, without more, did not establish that the mother could not arrange care for the minor and it could not provide a basis for jurisdiction under section 300(b). The court's finding that father was nonoffending, and its placement order with father, was in error because the court failed to make the finding required by section 361.2.

8. *In re T.V.* (2013) 217 Cal.App.4th 126

A child's absence at the time of the domestic violence incident identified in the petition does not preclude a finding that the domestic violence between the parents was ongoing and likely to continue, placing the minor at substantial risk of physical harm.

The parents had a lengthy history of domestic violence of which the minor was aware—often requiring police intervention, including the father's felony convictions for spousal abuse and mother's restraining orders against him. The petition could be read broadly to show that the parents' violent conduct identified in the petition constituted a failure to protect T.V. from the substantial risk of encountering the violence and suffering serious physical harm or illness from their violence.

9. *In re Destiny S.* (2012) 210 Cal.App.4th 999

Though section 300.2 provides that a home environment free from the negative effects of substance abuse is required for the safety,

protection, and physical and emotional well-being of the child, for a child to come under the jurisdiction of the court under section 300(b), the court must find that the negative effects were the sort likely to result in serious physical harm.

The minor's prior history of arriving late to school, the mother's positive test for methamphetamine and marijuana after the detention hearing and while the minor was placed with the mother, and any risk of second-hand smoke from mother's illegal drug use was insufficient to establish jurisdiction under section 300(b). Here, the mother had subsequently tested clean for over two months, and there was no evidence that the 11-year-old minor was under a current risk of serious physical harm.

10. *In re M.L.* (2012) 210 Cal.App.4th 1457

Mother's denial of the petition allegations and disclosure of portions of her psychotherapy records did not waive her psychotherapist-patient privilege and did not make her psychiatric records disclosable or admissible. No statutory or case-based exception warrants disclosure or admissibility of confidential psychiatric records simply because the department would otherwise be unable to meet its burden of proof without the disclosure.

The court erred in failing to conduct an in-camera review of mother's psychotherapist records to determine if disclosing the records to the department, in whole or in part, was even appropriate or necessary. To the extent that disclosure of the entirety of the documents to the department was appropriate, the court erred in permitting the department to include both the records themselves and the content of those records in the department's reports in the trial record without any further evaluation. Mother's disclosure was not clearly voluntary, and at best, mother's revelations would warrant confirmation of the number of times she had been treated, the condition for which she had been treated, and the medication she was on.



11. *In re Andy G.* (2010) 183 Cal.App.4th 1405

There was sufficient evidence of risk to a young male child where the father sexually abused the child's older female half-siblings.

The trial court adjudged a father's two-year-old son a dependent child, refused to release the child to the father, and ordered the father to attend sexual abuse counseling for perpetrators. Father challenged the jurisdictional and dispositional orders, asserting that the evidence was insufficient to support the court's jurisdictional findings as to the boy and that the boy should be released to his custody. The court rejected the father's sufficiency of evidence challenge, holding that there was sufficient evidence to support the trial court's finding that the child was at risk of sexual abuse based on the father's sexual abuse of the child's 12- and 14-year-old half-sisters.

12. *In re J.N.* (2010) 181 Cal.App.4th 1010

A single episode of parental conduct is insufficient to bring children within the juvenile court's jurisdiction when there is no current risk of harm.

The children sustained injuries from a vehicle accident resulting from intoxicated father's driving. Trial court adjudged the children dependents of the court under section 300(b), ordered them returned home to the care and custody of mother on a case plan of family maintenance services, and removed them from the father's physical custody. Parents appealed, arguing lack of evidence at the time of the jurisdictional hearing that the children were at substantial risk of serious physical harm. The court agreed that in order for it to exercise jurisdiction, substantial evidence must show current risk of harm. If dependency jurisdiction were based on a single incident resulting in physical harm absent current risk, then a juvenile court could take jurisdiction but would be required to immediately terminate the dependency under the final sentence of section 300(b).



13. *In re E.H.* (2003) 108 Cal.App.4th 659

In order for the court to sustain petitions pursuant to section 300(e), the identity of the perpetrator of the physical abuse need not be known.

The trial court determined that because the parents did not identify the perpetrator of the injuries to the child over whom they had exclusive custody, a 300(e) petition could not be sustained.

The social services agency appealed, and the court reversed, finding that the child suffered severe physical abuse and was never out of the custody of either the mother or the father; thus, they reasonably should have known who inflicted the child's injuries. The statutory requirement was not whether the mother or father actually knew that the child was injured by someone else but whether they should have reasonably known.

14. *In re S.D.* (2002) 99 Cal.App.4th 1068

When an incarcerated parent made arrangements for an appropriate caregiver for her child, the social services agency did not meet its burden of proof under section 300(g) that she was unable to arrange for the care of her child.

Mother appealed from an order terminating her parental rights, although the trial court held that because she was not effectively represented at the jurisdictional hearing, the issue of the 300(g) petition was appealable. The Court of Appeal reversed, finding that in order to sustain the petition pursuant to 300(g), the trial court must find that neither parent is available to take custody because of their incarceration and that neither parent will be able to arrange for the child's care during the remainder of their incarceration. Such inability to arrange for care is the key fact that allows the court to take jurisdiction over the child of an incarcerated parent when there are no other grounds for doing so.



15. *In re Janet T.* (2001) 93 Cal.App.4th 377

Neither the section 300(b) petition nor the reports alleged sufficient facts to support the conclusion that the children were currently at a substantial risk of serious physical injury or illness because of the mother's problems.

Mother appealed the trial court's ruling sustaining petitions based on her failure to ensure regular school attendance and her numerous mental and emotional problems. The court reversed the trial court's decision in that none of the conditions noted existed at the time of the hearing on the petition and none of the sustained allegations claimed that any of the concerning events were the result of, or caused by, the mother's mental and emotional problems. Before courts and agencies can exert jurisdiction under section 300(b), there must be evidence indicating that the child is exposed to a substantial risk of serious physical harm or illness.

16. *In re Nicholas B.* (2001) 88 Cal.App.4th 1126

At the time of the jurisdictional hearing, a section 300(b) petition must allege specific facts that there is a current substantial risk that the child will suffer serious physical harm as a result of a parent's inability to supervise or protect him or her. There must be evidence that the child is exposed to a substantial risk of physical harm or illness.

One of the allegations involved an isolated incident of the mother's striking the child. Information in the report indicated ongoing inappropriate physical discipline by the father, but it was not pled in the allegations. The court held that there was no evidence that the acts of physical abuse would continue in the future. The facts failed to demonstrate present or future risk of physical harm. The evidence was also insufficient to sustain a petition under 300(b) alleging that the minor was suffering emotional injury when there was no evidence to support that any emotional trauma was caused by the parents' conduct. The court reversed the order sustaining the petitions.



17. *In re Brison C.* (2000) 81 Cal.App.4th 1373

In order to sustain a petition for jurisdiction under section 300(c), the court must have evidence that the minor is suffering serious emotional harm caused by the parent's conduct.

A nine-year-old boy was the focus of a battle between his divorcing parents, and the case had been litigated extensively in family court. Parents appealed an order sustaining petitions under section 300(c), and the trial court's orders were reversed and remanded to the family law court. The court held that there was no substantial evidence showing that the boy was seriously emotionally damaged or that he was in danger of becoming so unless jurisdiction was assumed. In the absence of other indications of severe anxiety or depression, the child's aversion to his father was insufficient to support a finding that he was emotionally disturbed to such a degree that he would come within the jurisdiction of section 300.

18. *In re Rocco M.* (1991) 1 Cal.App.4th 814 (but see *In re R.T.* (2017) 3 Cal.5th 622, discussed above)

In order to sustain a petition under section 300(b), the court must find evidence of a substantial danger to the physical health of the minor. While evidence of past conduct may be probative of current conditions, the court must find circumstances at the time of the hearing that subject the minor to the defined risk of harm.

Mother appealed a ruling sustaining a section 300(b) petition, based on general failure to supervise the child because of the mother's drug use, one instance of physical abuse of the child by a caregiver, and the minor's having been neglected as an infant. The Court of Appeal upheld the trial court's jurisdiction only on the grounds that mother subjected the child to a substantial risk of harm that he would ingest hazardous drugs and thus suffer serious harm. The court did not uphold sustaining the section 300(b) petition based on any of the other facts in support because they did not demonstrate a substantial danger to the child.



19. *In re Malinda S.* (1990) 51 Cal.3d 368

To establish jurisdiction under section 300, the trial court can consider a social study prepared by the social services agency as non-hearsay and it can admit it as evidence. Section 355 creates two standards: one governing admissibility and another establishing the level of proof sufficient to support a jurisdictional determination.

Social studies meet the burden of proof required under section 355 and constitute competent evidence. For a report to be admissible, due process requires that each party (1) be given a copy of the report, (2) be given an opportunity to cross-examine the investigative officer and to subpoena and examine persons whose hearsay statements are contained in the report, and (3) be permitted to introduce evidence by way of rebuttal.

DISPOSITIONAL HEARINGS

1. *A.A. v. Superior Court* (2012) 209 Cal.App.4th 237

Under a family maintenance order, the child's placement was with the mother. There was no court order requiring her to remain in California. When the mother moved with the child to Arizona, she did not willfully or otherwise remove him from his "placement" within the meaning of section 361.5(b)(15), and the court erred in denying reunification services under this provision.

2. *In re Destiny S.* (2012) 210 Cal.App.4th 999

Parental substance abuse, in itself, cannot be the basis for 300(b) jurisdiction; there must be a current risk of serious physical harm to the child.

The minor came to the attention of the authorities because of an allegation of sexual abuse. When this turned out to be untrue, the agency filed a 300(b) petition with allegations of drug use by the mother. The mother admitted using drugs and tested positive for drugs early in the case, but she had tested negative for three months by the time of the jurisdiction and dispositional hearing. The ap-



pellate court reversed the juvenile court's finding of jurisdiction because there was no evidence of current risk of physical harm to the minor as a result of the mother's drug use.

3. *In re Gabriel K.* (2012) 203 Cal.App.4th 188

The denial of reunification services under section 361.5(b)(10) is not limited to the siblings of a minor with whom a parent has previously failed to reunify; under section 361.5(b)(10), reunification services may be denied to a parent if reunification services were terminated in a previous case involving that minor.

The court upheld the denial of reunification services for mother in relation to her child, a minor with whom she had previously failed to reunify. Just as the Legislature did not intend for the juvenile court to be required to offer a parent reunification services for a sibling after the parent failed to reunify with a minor in an earlier dependency proceeding, the Legislature did not intend that the parent be offered services for the minor, if the parent had failed to reunify with that child in an earlier proceeding.

4. *In re C.C.* (2009) 172 Cal.App.4th 1481

If a parent is receiving family reunification services for a child, the court may terminate visitation between that parent and child only if the court finds that such visits would "pose a threat to the child's safety." A finding of detriment is an insufficient basis upon which to deny visits.

Supervised visits were unsuccessful because of child's anger and unwillingness to visit his mother as well as confrontations between mother and child. At the dispositional hearing, based on a detriment finding, the trial court ordered all visits stopped. Mother appealed. The court held that the order denying visitation was not supported by the necessary finding that visitation would jeopardize the child's safety; it was based on a finding that further visitation would be detrimental, which is not the correct standard. Visitation is a critical component of reunification; it may be denied during the reunifica-



tion process based only on the safety of the child, not the best interest of or detriment to the child. No evidence in the record indicated that the mother posed a threat to the child's physical safety during monitored visitation in a therapeutic setting. However, if the parent is no longer in reunification, then the decision about whether to allow visits is based on whether such visits are detrimental to the child.

5. *In re Austin P.* (2004) 118 Cal.App.4th 1124

When the court orders placement with a nonoffending parent pursuant to section 361.2, jurisdiction may not be terminated unless there is no longer a need for ongoing supervision.

Claiming that there was no evidence of detriment to his son, a father appealed a decision by the lower court placing his son with him but continuing jurisdiction. The Court of Appeal affirmed the decision, holding that, absent a showing of detriment, section 361.2 requires a court only to temporarily place a child with a nonoffending parent, not to award custody and terminate jurisdiction. Once the child is placed, the determination to continue jurisdiction is within the court's discretion based on whether conditions necessitate continued supervision.

6. *In re Henry V.* (2004) 119 Cal.App.4th 522

In order to remove a child from a parent at the dispositional phase of the proceeding, the court must find by clear and convincing evidence that there is substantial danger to the child and that there are no reasonable alternatives to out-of-home placement.

Mother appealed the order removing her child after the court sustained an allegation of a single occurrence of physical abuse by the mother. The court reversed and remanded. Neither the agency nor the trial court considered the single event of physical abuse to be an obstacle to reunification in the near future, but the social worker thought removal would be helpful to secure the mother's cooperation with reunification services. The social worker's suggestion that out-of-home placement would be useful to secure the mother's



further cooperation was not a proper consideration. The statutory grounds for removing a child from parental custody are exclusive, and a mother's fundamental right to the custody of her child is not a bargaining chip.

7. *In re Isayah C.* (2004) 118 Cal.App.4th 684

A parent may have custody of a child, in a legal sense, even while delegating the day-to-day care of that child to a third party for a limited period of time.

Father appealed an order denying him placement of his son while he was incarcerated even though he had made plans for relatives to care for the child while he was serving a short jail sentence. The court reversed, holding that section 361.2 required the court to legally place with the nonoffending father, even if he was incarcerated, so long as he was able to arrange for care with relatives during his relatively short incarceration, and that incarceration alone did not constitute a showing of detriment sufficient to deny placement.

8. *In re Luke M.* (2003) 107 Cal.App.4th 1412

In assessing whether to place with a noncustodial, nonoffending parent under section 361.2, the court can consider the child's relationship to siblings in determining whether the placement will be detrimental.

Father appealed after he had requested placement as a nonoffending parent, and the court placed the child with the paternal aunt and uncle instead. The court affirmed the decision, indicating that the importance of keeping siblings together is an appropriate factor for the court to consider in determining detriment for purposes of its placement decisions.

REVIEW HEARINGS

1. *In re Michael G.* (2023) 14 Cal.5th 609

A parent is not entitled to an automatic extension of reunification services after the statutory 18-month period for services has elapsed,



even if the juvenile court determines that the parent did not receive reasonable services from the child welfare agency for the preceding six months. The court may grant a continuance of the selection and implementation hearing under section 366.26 if the court finds good cause, further services may be appropriate, and the child's best interests are not adversely impacted by any delay in permanence.

The child welfare agency provided the father, Michael, reasonable services for the first 12 months but did not provide reasonable services during the six months preceding the 18-month review hearing. Michael participated in services and maintained regular telephonic visits with his daughter, A.G., only during the six months prior to the 12-month review. The juvenile court declined to order additional services, citing inconsistent visits with A.G. and uneven progress in services, and set a section 366.26 hearing. In this case, reasonable services had been provided for 12 months, and extending services would be unproductive since the father had not maintained consistent contact with A.G. and failed to make consistent progress in this case plan.

2. *M.V. v. Superior Court* (2008) 167 Cal.App.4th 166

The 6-month review and 12-month permanency hearings present distinct inquiries; the standard at the 6-month hearing is whether there is a substantial probability that the child “may be returned,” which differs from the “will be returned” standard at the 12-month hearing. At the 6-month hearing the trial court is not required to make the findings specified in section 366.21(g)(1) and has discretion to consider other evidence.

At the 6-month review hearing regarding a two-year-old child, trial court terminated mother's reunification services and set a section 366.26 hearing. Mother challenged the court's finding of “substantial probability” and petitioned for a writ of mandate directing the trial court to vacate its order and issue a new and different order continuing reunification services. The writ was granted. The trial court erred in applying the 12-month hearing standard to a 6-month



review. The factual findings necessary at a 12-month hearing to support a substantial probability determination that the child will be returned to the parent are not required at a 6-month hearing. At the 6-month review, the trial court has discretion to continue the case and not set a 366.26 hearing. It also has discretion to consider other evidence beyond the three factors specified in section 366.21(g)(1), including extenuating circumstances. If, however, at the 6-month hearing the trial court finds a substantial probability that the child may be reunited with the parent, the trial court lacks discretion to schedule a 366.26 hearing and instead must continue reunification services until the 12-month review.

3. *Tonya M. v. Superior Court* (2007) 42 Cal.4th 836

In determining whether to continue or terminate services at the 6-month review hearing, the court must consider the likelihood of reunification within the period of time that remains until the 12-month review hearing, even if it is less than 6 months.

After termination of her reunification services at the 6-month review hearing and the setting of a section 366.26 hearing, mother filed a writ petition. She challenged the period of time that the trial court considered in determining whether there was a substantial probability that the child could be returned. She argued that the court should have considered a full 6-month period from the conclusion of the 6-month review hearing. The Court of Appeal denied the writ petition, and mother petitioned for review. The Supreme Court affirmed the judgment of the Court of Appeal, holding that the trial court correctly considered the likelihood of reunification during the time that remained until a potential 12-month review hearing, not the next 6-month period.

4. *David B. v. Superior Court* (2006) 140 Cal.App.4th 772

A parent has a due process right to a contested review hearing unfettered by the prerequisite of an offer of proof.



Father appealed the lower court's decision that he was not entitled to a contested 18-month review hearing and an opportunity to cross-examine the social worker. The court reversed, indicating that a parent does have a due process right to cross-examine the preparer of the evidence in dependency proceedings, wherein the preparer bears the burden of proof. Rather than it being a fishing expedition, as the social services agency suggested, the contested hearing is the recognized method by which the parent can test the adverse evidence.

5. *Sara M. v. Superior Court* (2005) 36 Cal.4th 998

Section 366.21(e) permits the court to terminate reunification services whenever it finds by clear and convincing evidence that a parent has failed to contact or visit a child for six months after the beginning of reunification services, regardless of whether jurisdiction was asserted under section 300(g).

Mother appealed the court's termination of her reunification services for failure to visit her children in the six months prior to the status review hearing. The court's decision was affirmed. The mother made no apparent effort to visit her children even after she was engaged in her reunification plan, and although the petition was not sustained on the basis of abandonment under section 300(g), the court was within its discretion to terminate her reunification.

6. *David B. v. Superior Court* (2004) 123 Cal.App.4th 768

Absent a showing of substantial risk of detriment, the court, at a status review hearing, may not terminate reunification services and set a selection and implementation hearing.

The court reversed the lower court's orders, determining that father's desire to inquire about parenting skills did not constitute a substantial risk of detriment, and that if the social services agency considered his living situation to be the only bar to return, it had failed to provide him reasonable services to remedy that living situation and therefore had to provide further reunification services. The

issue at a status review hearing is whether placing the child in the parent's care represents some danger to the child's physical or emotional well-being. The court indicated that the parents who come through the dependency system are typically in need of quite a bit of help, stating, "We have to not lose sight of our mandate to preserve families, and look for passing grades, not straight A's."

7. *In re Alvin R.* (2003) 108 Cal.App.4th 962

At a 12-month review hearing, the court reversed the trial court's order terminating father's reunification services because the social services agency had failed to provide him with reasonable services.

Father appealed the lower court's order in that he had completed the entirety of his case plan and the agency had failed to arrange for conjoint therapy between the minor and the father. Because of the lack of conjoint therapy, visitation never occurred, and return was not considered a safe option. The Court of Appeal determined that the lack of visits denied father any meaningful opportunity at reunification and that return could not be accomplished without visitation. The court ordered a further review hearing and ordered the social services agency to provide reasonable services to the father.

8. *Judith P. v. Superior Court* (2002) 102 Cal.App.4th 535

Ten days prior to the hearing date, parties are entitled to receive the status report prepared by the social services agency for review hearings. Failure to provide timely service of such a report constitutes a denial of due process, compelling reversal of the trial court's order.

Mother appealed an order terminating her reunification services at a review hearing, saying that she did not receive the status report in time and was denied a continuance to adequately respond to it. The decision was reversed, as failure to provide the report in time or to allow a continuance for the mother denied her both reasonable notice of the issues raised by the report and a reasonable opportunity to prepare to rebut the evidence contained in it.



9. *Constance K. v. Superior Court* (1998) 61 Cal.App.4th 689

At an 18-month hearing, reunification services can be terminated despite the mother's regular participation in services when there is a substantial risk to the children if they are returned to her care because of her inability to safely parent them.

Mother appealed an order terminating her reunification services, claiming that her regular participation in her reunification plan entitled her to more services. She had never been the full-time caregiver of all the children and had often asked for relief because she could not handle their needs. As a result, the mother's weekend visits had been unsuccessful and had often been cut short. The court affirmed the lower court's order, which relied heavily on expert opinion that despite her participation, the mother was overwhelmed by caring for her children and could not care for them safely.

10. *In re Precious J.* (1996) 42 Cal.App.4th 1463

Where the social services agency failed to provide visitation to an incarcerated parent, the court found that the agency did not facilitate or provide reasonable reunification services.

Mother appealed an order terminating her parental rights, and the court reversed the order terminating her services and setting an implementation hearing per section 366.26. There was no evidence before the lower court that the social services agency provided the incarcerated parent with any services or even attempted to provide visitation. The court determined that services had not been reasonable and ordered the lower court to develop a further reunification plan and set a further review hearing per section 366.22.

11. *In re Elizabeth R.* (1995) 35 Cal.App.4th 1774

At an 18-month review hearing, the court can continue the hearing pursuant to section 352 beyond the statutory time frame if extraordinary circumstances exist. The Court of Appeal held that the juvenile court mistakenly believed that it was required to set the case for a selection and implementation hearing per section 366.26, even when extraordinary circumstances existed.



Appellant mother sought review of an order that terminated her parental rights even though her serious mental health condition had dramatically improved and would have allowed her to successfully participate in further reunification services. The court held that the juvenile dependency system is mandated to accommodate the special needs of disabled and incarcerated parents. The trial court could have continued the 18-month hearing provided it was not contrary to the interests of the minor.

SELECTION AND IMPLEMENTATION (SECTION 366.26) HEARINGS

1. *In re Caden C.* (2021) 11 Cal.5th 614

When the “parental-benefit” exception applies, it is not in the best interest of the child to terminate parental rights, and the court should select a permanent plan other than adoption. A parent’s failure to comply with the case plan (i.e., continued drug or mental health issues, etc.) is not a bar to application of the “parental benefit” exception to defeat termination of parental rights.

The minor was removed from his mother’s care due to her mental health and substance abuse issues, returned to his mother’s care, and removed again when she relapsed. The trial court found that the minor was likely to be adopted, but the mother had established the “parental-benefit” exception to termination of parental rights. The appellate court found that long-term foster care posed substantial risk of further destabilizing the minor and would rob the minor of a stable and permanent home. At a second 366.26 hearing, the mother’s parental rights were terminated. The California Supreme Court held that the “parental-benefit” exception is established by a preponderance of evidence of the following: (1) the parent’s regular visitation with the child, (2) a significant and positive parent-child relationship that would continue to benefit the child, and (3) termination of parental rights would be detrimental to the child. The “parental-benefit” exception applies when a child cannot be in a parent’s custody but severing the parent-child relationship would be harmful for the child, even when balanced against the benefits of a



permanent adoptive home. The parent's lack of progress in ameliorating the issues that led to dependency does not defeat the exception because the parent's lack of progress is considered insufficient only for the child's return to the parent's custody.

2. *In re A.R.* (2021) 11 Cal.5th 234

When a court-appointed attorney neglects to file timely notice of an appeal of an order terminating parental rights, the parent may file a petition for habeas corpus based on denial of effective counsel. To prevail, the parent must show that they would have filed a timely appeal absent attorney error. They must also demonstrate diligence in seeking relief from default within a reasonable time, considering the child's interest in finality and permanence.

After the juvenile court terminated the mother's parental rights, the mother asked her attorney to file a notice of appeal. The attorney filed the notice four days after the 60-day filing period had elapsed. The appellate attorney filed an opening brief on the merits and applied for relief from default, which the appellate court denied as untimely. The mother then filed a habeas corpus petition, which was also denied. The California Supreme Court reversed the appellate court's denial of the habeas petition. Termination of parental rights is among the most severe forms of state action and has significant procedural protections, including the right to effective counsel and the right to appeal. When denial of the right to competent counsel threatens the right of appeal, the appropriate remedy is a petition for habeas corpus.

3. *In re P.C.* (2008) 165 Cal.App.4th 98

Poverty alone—even when it results in homelessness or less-than-ideal housing arrangements—is not a sufficient ground to deprive a mother of parental rights.

Children were placed in a foster home based on allegations of abuse and domestic violence. Mother followed through with reunification services but remained homeless. Based on this instability,



children were placed in the home of a prospective adoptive family. The trial court found the children to be adoptable and terminated parental rights. The Court of Appeal reversed the termination of parental rights. Inability to find housing because of poverty is not a valid basis for juvenile court jurisdiction. The mother did not receive adequate assistance from the social worker in obtaining low-income housing. Because the mother had complied with the entire reunification plan and there were no objections to returning the children to her other than her inability to obtain housing, the case was reversed and remanded for a determination of whether she could obtain housing and whether there were any remaining barriers, other than poverty, to reunification.

4. *In re Fernando M.* (2006) 138 Cal.App.4th 529

Where there is a significant relationship with a relative caregiver and evidence that it would be detrimental to remove the children from the relative's home, an exception under section 366.26(c)(1)(D) exists.

An exceptional circumstance did exist where the grandmother was unwilling to adopt the children because a spousal waiver would have been necessary. There was no dispute in the evidence that removing Fernando from the grandmother's home would deprive him of the stability and intimacy he had developed in his daily associations with her and his siblings, and there was no evidence that severing those ties would not detrimentally affect his well-being. While the Legislature has expressed a preference for adoption over other permanent plans, this preference is overridden if one of the exceptions enumerated in section 366.26(c)(1) is found to apply.

5. *In re Celine R.* (2003) 31 Cal.4th 45

An exception to adoption exists under section 366.26(c)(1)(E) only if the court finds that severance of the sibling bond would be detrimental to the child who is the subject of adoption, not merely that it would be detrimental to a sibling.



The court upheld an order terminating the mother's parental rights over the appeal of minor's counsel because the evidence suggested that Celine's siblings would suffer if their relationship were severed, but there was no evidence that Celine, who was the subject of the adoption proceeding, would suffer detriment if the sibling relationship were not continued.

6. *In re Brandon C.* (1999) 71 Cal.App.4th 1530

Where the strength and quality of the natural parent-child relationship with a positive emotional attachment is sufficient, grounds to deny severance of parental rights through adoption under section 366.26(c)(1)(A) exist.

The court upheld the trial court's order that guardianship was the appropriate permanent plan in that the evidence of benefit of continued contact with the natural parent was sufficient to support the court's decision. The court determined that the benefit of continued contact between mother and children must be considered in the context of the very limited visitation the mother was permitted to have. The mother presented sufficient evidence of regular and consistent visitation with the boys that maintained a close bond between them, such that there was evidence of benefit sufficient to support the court's decision to order guardianship.

7. *In re Autumn H.* (1994) 27 Cal.App.4th 567

At a section 366.26 hearing, a court must order adoption as the permanent plan for a child unless the court finds evidence that an exception to adoption exists.

The court affirmed the trial court's order terminating mother's parental rights in that she had not shown sufficient evidence pursuant to section 366.26(c)(1)(A). In the dependency scheme, the "benefit from continuing the parent/child relationship" exception means that that relationship promotes the well-being of the child to such a degree as to outweigh the well-being the child would gain in a permanent home with new, adoptive parents. If severing the natural



parent-child relationship would greatly deprive the child of a substantial, positive emotional attachment such that the child would be greatly harmed, the preference for adoption is overcome and the natural parent's rights are not terminated. Severing father's relationship to Autumn was not detrimental because the relationship was one of friends, not of parent and child.

8. *In re Marilyn H.* (1993) 5 Cal.4th 295

At a section 366.26 hearing, the court properly limited appellant mother's contested hearing by denying her the opportunity to present evidence of a change of circumstance that would mandate return.

At a section 366.26 hearing, the issue of return to a parent is no longer a consideration for a court that must determine the most appropriate permanent plan for the child. Mother's due process was not violated in that the code mandates a shift in focus from reunification with the parent to the child's need for stability and permanence. Mother could have filed a section 388 petition at any point before the court made orders pursuant to 366.26, and her due process right to present evidence as to changed circumstance was protected in this way.

REVIEWS OF PERMANENT PLANS

1. *In re R.N.* (2009) 178 Cal.App.4th 557

When a successor guardian is to be appointed pursuant to section 366.3, the dependency court must provide notice to the parents, provide them with an opportunity to be considered as the child's guardians, and consider whether reunification services should be offered to them, without requiring that they file a 388 petition.

Child's grandparents were appointed as guardians in 1996. The aunt filed a section 388 petition seeking to become the child's guardian after the grandparents' death. The aunt was appointed successor guardian, and a separate order summarily denied father's subsequent 388 petition challenging the appointment. The father appealed the order appointing the successor guardian, contending that under sec-



tion 366.3, he was entitled to be considered as the child's guardian and to be provided reunification services. The court held that the father was entitled to be considered as the child's guardian and was eligible to receive services without a requirement that he file his own section 388 petition. The order appointing child's aunt as the successor guardian and the separate order denying father's 388 petition were reversed.

2. *In re Kelly D.* (2000) 82 Cal.App.4th 433

At a review hearing wherein a modification of a parent's visitation is recommended, the parent has a right to testify and submit evidence, cross-examine adverse witnesses, and argue his or her case.

Father appealed an order denying him a contested postpermanency status review to challenge a proposed modification in his visitation. The court reversed the lower court's decision, saying that the father had a right to receive notice of any substantive proposed modifications in a reasonable amount of time in advance of the hearing, and that appellant had the right to testify and otherwise submit evidence, cross-examine adverse witnesses, and argue the case.

SUPPLEMENTAL PETITIONS

1. *In re Paul E.* (1995) 39 Cal.App.4th 996

When a supplemental petition seeking to remove a minor from a parent's custody pursuant to section 387 is filed, the safeguards afforded to parents by section 361 apply.

The court reversed the lower court's decision removing the children from the parents. When the child is being removed from the parent's home based on a section 387 petition, the court still has to have clear and convincing evidence of substantial risk of harm to the child to warrant removal.



CAREGIVERS/DE FACTO PARENTS

1. *Cesar V. v. Superior Court* (2001) 91 Cal.App.4th 1023

The relative placement preference applies when a new placement becomes necessary after reunification services are terminated but before parental rights are terminated.

Parents appealed an order that refused to place their children with their grandmother. The court reversed and held that the juvenile court has the power and the duty to make an independent placement decision under section 361.3 when the children have to be moved. The court must hold a hearing to determine the suitability of placing the children with a relative who requests placement, pursuant to section 361.3.

2. *In re Joel H.* (1993) 19 Cal.App.4th 1185

De facto parent has standing to appeal order granting agency's section 387 petition and removing children but is not entitled to appointed counsel on appeal.

The children were removed from their parents and placed with a great-aunt and -uncle. Reunification services were terminated, and the court chose adoption as the children's permanent plan. The county agency then received reports of abuse by the great-aunt and -uncle and filed a section 387 petition to remove the children and change the permanent plan. Trial court granted the section 387 petition, and the great-aunt appealed. The court reversed, holding that the appeal was not moot, even though while the appeal was pending the children were returned to mother and the dependency case was dismissed. The great-aunt's interests in future contact with the children and in being considered as a placement if they were ever detained again were adversely affected by the juvenile court's ruling. Great-aunt had standing as a de facto parent to appeal. She was an aggrieved party because the juvenile court's ruling adversely affected her interest in a relationship with the children. Great-aunt was not, however, entitled to appointed counsel on appeal.



CONTINUANCES

1. *Jeff M. v. Superior Court* (1997) 56 Cal.App.4th 1238

When a jurisdictional trial has been continued excessively, the Court of Appeal can order the trial court to conduct trial every court day, all day, without further continuances except for good cause until the trial is concluded and the matter is fully adjudicated.

Father filed a writ requesting an order for the court to conduct the trial on a day-to-day basis until completed. Court congestion alone is not good cause to continue the trial when balanced with the minor's need for prompt resolution of his or her custody status.

CHILDREN'S RIGHTS

1. *Guardianship of Saul* (2022) 13 Cal.5th 827

Under California Code of Civil Procedure section 155, when a court considers a petition for Special Immigrant Juvenile (SIJ) status, the focus should be on the viability of reunification with the parent in the foreign country, including whether the child would be harmed if returned to live with the parent. The court must also determine whether returning to the country of origin would be in the child's best interest. The court must grant the SIJ petition if a preponderance of the evidence establishes the facts in the petition, and the child's declaration alone is sufficient to establish the predicate facts for SIJ status.

While Saul lived in El Salvador with his parents, he was repeatedly approached by gang members and threatened if he did not join them or pay them "protection money." Against his parents' wishes, Saul came to California to live with a relative who later became his guardian. He pursued his education and did well in California. He petitioned the probate court to issue the predicate findings needed to support an application to the federal government for SIJ status, which allows qualifying immigrants under 21 years of age to seek lawful permanent residence. The probate court denied his petition, concluding that Saul could not establish that reunification with



his parents was not viable due to abuse, neglect, or abandonment. However, the probate court declined to determine whether it was in Saul's best interest to return to El Salvador. The appellate court affirmed the probate court's orders. The California Supreme Court reversed the appellate court's judgment and remanded the matter. Saul would face substantial risk of serious physical harm as a result of his parents' failure or inability to adequately protect him. Returning to El Salvador would be detrimental to Saul's health, safety, and welfare and therefore contrary to Saul's best interest.

2. *In re Tamika C.* (2005) 131 Cal.App.4th 1153

Terminating dependency to relieve a social services agency of its financial obligation after a dependent reaches the age of 19 is not a sufficient basis for termination of the child's dependency and does not comply with requirements of section 391.

The child appealed an order terminating her dependency before she graduated from high school and before her 19th birthday. The order was reversed in that the agency had turned the burden of proof on its head. The fact that a child turns 18 does not mandate that court jurisdiction be terminated. If a child's funding is dependent on continued jurisdiction, the agency bears the burden of showing that exceptional circumstances exist if the agency seeks to terminate the court's jurisdiction.

COUNSEL FOR THE CHILD

1. *In re Kristen B.* (2008) 163 Cal.App.4th 1535

Child's attorney must advocate for the child's best interest, even if that goes against child's stated desires.

When interviewed, Kristen told social workers and family members that her mother's boyfriend had sexually abused her. All found the 14-year-old to be credible, and she was detained. Kristen then recanted the allegation of abuse. On direct examination, Kristen's attorney questioned her about her recantation. The trial court found Kristen's allegations of abuse, and not her recantation, to be



credible. Mother appealed, citing ineffective assistance of minor's counsel. The court affirmed, holding that section 317 requires the child's attorney to advocate for the child's protection, safety, and physical and emotional well-being, even if it conflicts with child's stated desires. Kristen's attorney clearly informed the court of the conflict between Kristen's wishes and what the attorney believed was in Kristen's best interest. Mother's contention of ineffective assistance was unfounded.

2. *In re Celine R.* (2003) 31 Cal.4th 45

At the time of initial appointment, counsel can accept appointment for multiple siblings unless an actual conflict of interest exists or unless it appears from circumstances specific to the case that it is reasonably likely that an actual conflict will arise.

Counsel for siblings sought review of an order terminating parental rights based on the sibling exception in section 366.26(c)(1) (E). Minors' counsel accepted appointment for multiple siblings at detention. After termination of reunification services, the younger two siblings were referred for a permanent plan of adoption while the older sibling was not. When the permanent plans were recommended, minors' counsel indicated a conflict; however, the trial court denied appointment of separate counsel. The court upheld the order terminating parental rights but, in assessing the issue of appointment of a single attorney to represent multiple siblings with potentially different permanent plans, determined that any error in not appointing separate counsel was harmless.

PARENT'S RIGHTS

1. *Perez v. Torres-Hernandez* (2016) 1 Cal.App.5th 389

In considering a request for renewal of a Domestic Violence Restraining Order (DVRO), the court must consider whether the protected party has a reasonable fear of future abuse. Reasonable fear of abuse can be based on the fear that serious bodily injury will be inflicted on another person and need not be based on actual violence.

Perez filed for and was granted a DVRO in 2010 based on physical and emotional abuse by Torres-Hernandez. Before the expiration of the DVRO, Perez sought to have the restraining order permanently extended based on Torres-Hernandez's repeated violations of the order and his physical abuse against their children. The trial court denied Perez's requested extension, holding that occasional harassing phone calls and physical abuse of the children did not sufficiently prove continued abuse to support extension of the order.

The trial court erred in denying the renewal. The Domestic Violence Prevention Act (DVPA) provides that a DVRO may be renewed without a showing of any further abuse since issuance of the original order. Nor must there be a showing of "violence or the actual infliction of violence on an individual" to renew the DVRO. The DVPA contains a much broader definition of abuse that includes behaviors that are annoying and harassing. Here, Perez testified that Torres-Hernandez's phone calls and text messages made her feel fearful and helpless, and given the history of abuse, her feelings were reasonable. The court also erred when it held that the abuse of the couple's children was irrelevant in determining whether to extend the DVRO. The definition of abuse in the DVPA includes the fear that serious bodily injury could be inflicted on another person. In addition, it was relevant in this case because Perez was seeking to include her children in the requested DVRO.

2. *In re Nolan W.* (2009) 45 Cal.4th 1217

Juvenile court may not use its contempt power to incarcerate a parent solely for the parent's failure to satisfy aspects of a voluntary reunification case plan.

Juvenile court terminated mother's reunification services, cited her for contempt, and ordered her to spend 300 days in custody for her failure to participate in an intensive substance abuse case management and treatment program. The Supreme Court held that while a juvenile court has the power to order a parent to participate in substance abuse treatment as part of a reunification plan, it may



not issue contempt sanctions as punishment solely because the parent failed to satisfy a reunification condition.

3. *In re James F.* (2008) 42 Cal.4th 901

Before appointing a guardian ad litem (GAL) for a parent, the juvenile court must hold an informal hearing at which the parent has an opportunity to be heard and other procedural safeguards are in place. If the court appoints a GAL without the parent's consent, the record must contain substantial evidence of the parent's incompetence. However, an error in the court's procedure for appointing a GAL is subject to a harmless error analysis.

The trial court appointed a GAL for the father but failed to explain the role of a GAL adequately or to provide the father with a meaningful opportunity to be heard in opposition to the appointment. The California Supreme Court granted review to determine whether the juvenile court's error in the procedure used to appoint the GAL required automatic reversal of the order terminating the father's parental rights. The court concluded that such an error is a trial error subject to a harmless error analysis rather than a structural defect requiring reversal. Any errors in the GAL appointment process in this case caused father no actual prejudice. All the evidence pointed to the conclusion that the father was incompetent and in need of a GAL and would likely have consented to the appointment.

4. *In re Jesusa V.* (2004) 32 Cal.4th 588

A biological tie does not trump a familial bond where juvenile court finds two presumed fathers. The juvenile court's error in proceeding at a jurisdictional hearing without having the incarcerated biological father present is subject to a harmless error analysis.

The Supreme Court held that a presumption of fatherhood under Family Code section 7611 is not necessarily rebutted by evidence of a biological tie, and the trial court must determine whether the case is an appropriate one in which to permit rebuttal. Furthermore, an incarcerated parent's presence in court is required only when

that parent's parental rights will be terminated or the dependency of the prisoner's child will be adjudicated; a hearing to determine presumed father status did not require the parent's presence in court. A prisoner does not have a constitutional right to personally attend every dependency hearing. Violation of the Penal Code section requiring prisoners to be transported to court under certain circumstances is subject to the harmless error test.

HEARSAY IN DEPENDENCY PROCEEDINGS

1. *In re Lucero L.* (2000) 22 Cal.4th 1227

The statements of a child found incompetent to testify because of his or her inability to distinguish between truth and falsehood are admissible under section 355 but may not be exclusively relied upon as a basis for jurisdiction unless the court finds that the time, content, and circumstances of the statements provide sufficient indicia of reliability.

Father appealed a judgment sustaining petition that he had molested his daughter based on hearsay statements made by her. The daughter could not at the time of testimony distinguish between the truth and a lie. The court affirmed the lower court's decision; given the consistency over a considerable period of time of the child's statements, the court found them to be reliable. In determining the statements to be reliable, the court did not also have to find the statements to have been corroborated.

2. *In re Cindy L.* (1997) 17 Cal.4th 15

The "child hearsay" or "child dependency" exception to the hearsay rule allows admission of out-of-court statements made by a child who is subject to dependency proceedings, regardless of whether the child is competent to testify, so long as all parties are notified of the intent to use the statements, there are sufficient surrounding indicia of reliability, and the child is either available for cross-examination or evidence corroborates the statements. The court should consider a number of factors in determining reliability, including spontane-



ity and consistency of repetition, the mental state of the child, use of unexpected terminology based on the child's age, and the child's lack of motive to fabricate.

Father appealed a decision of the lower court sustaining petition based in part on its consideration of out-of-court statements of a young child who would not otherwise be a legally competent witness. The court affirmed the decision, indicating that although the child was unavailable to be cross-examined, her statements were corroborated by a physical examination that indicated sexual abuse and were therefore reliable.

INTERSTATE COMPACT ON THE PLACEMENT OF CHILDREN

1. *In re C.B.* (2010) 188 Cal.App.4th 1024

The Interstate Compact on the Placement of Children (ICPC) does not apply to out-of-state placement with a parent.

Children were removed primarily because of mother's substance abuse and placed with father on the condition that he not live with their mother. The agency argued that the juvenile court could not place children out of state with father unless it complied with the ICPC. The court authorized father to leave California with his children. Agency appealed. The court held that the ICPC did not apply here regardless of whether father was the offending or nonoffending parent. California cases consistently hold that the ICPC does *not* apply to an out-of-state placement with a parent. The court made clear that statewide rules and regulations that purportedly make the ICPC apply to this situation are invalid. The court also asserted that lack of uniformity with laws of other states creates dysfunction and that a multistate legislative response may be required.

2. *In re Emmanuel R.* (2001) 94 Cal.App.4th 452

A juvenile court can allow a temporary visit with a parent in another state even if that parent has not been approved for placement pursuant to the ICPC. The court affirmed the trial court's order allowing a visit with a father for summer and Christmas holidays even though



the father's home was not approved for placement. The ICPC does not bar a court-approved visitation with a parent in that ICPC approval is not required for a simple visit and the compact differentiates between visits of short duration and placements of longer duration. The court found that the visits were in the minor's best interest.

INDIAN CHILD WELFARE ACT

1. *In re Dezi C.* (2024) 16 Cal.5th 1112

In *In re Dezi C.* (2024) 16 Cal.5th 1112, the issue presented to the Supreme Court was “whether a child welfare agency’s failure to make the statutorily required initial inquiry under California’s heightened ICWA requirements constitutes reversible error.” (16 Cal.5th at 1125.) The court ruled “that an inadequate Cal-ICWA inquiry requires conditional reversal of the juvenile court’s order terminating parental rights with directions to the agency to conduct an adequate inquiry, supported by record documentation.” (16 Cal.5th at 1125.) The court held that on conditional reversal, the Department of Social Services must make additional inquiry efforts consistent with its duties under ICWA. The juvenile court then holds a hearing to determine whether, in view of the additional inquiry, ICWA applies. If the juvenile court determines ICWA does not apply, the judgment may stand. On the other hand, if the juvenile court determines ICWA applies, the judgment must be reversed and further proceedings held in conformity with ICWA.

The *In re Dezi C.* court wrote:

[Welfare and Institutions Code] Section 224 codifies and expands on ICWA’s duty of inquiry to determine whether a child is an Indian child. Agencies and juvenile courts have “an affirmative and continuing duty” in every dependency proceeding to determine whether ICWA applies by inquiring whether a child is or may be an Indian child (§ 224.2, subd. (a).) This “duty to inquire begins with the initial contact, including, but not limited to, asking the party reporting child abuse or neglect whether the party has any information that the child may be an Indian child.” . . .



While this duty of inquiry is sometimes referred to as the initial duty of inquiry, this is a bit of a misnomer, as the duty “continues throughout the dependency proceeding.”

2. *In re Abbigail A.* (2016) 1 Cal.5th 83

The legislative intent of Senate Bill 678 (Stats. 2006, ch. 838), which incorporated ICWA into the Welfare and Institutions Code, was to increase compliance with ICWA; it was not intended to extend the application of ICWA to cases involving children who do not meet the definition of Indian children.

3. *In re Isaiah W.* (2016) 1 Cal.5th 1

The juvenile court has a duty to inquire whether a child is an Indian child at the proceeding to terminate parental rights, even if the court previously found no reason to know the child was an Indian child at the proceeding placing the child in foster care.

In the proceeding placing newborn Isaiah W. in foster care, the juvenile court concluded there was no reason to know Isaiah was an Indian child and found ICWA inapplicable. Isaiah’s mother did not appeal the order placing Isaiah in foster care. More than a year later, mother appealed the order terminating parental rights, citing the court’s failure to order the Los Angeles County Department of Children and Family Services to comply with ICWA’s notice requirements. The Supreme Court granted review to decide whether a parent who does not bring a timely appeal from a juvenile court order that subsumes a finding of ICWA’s inapplicability may challenge such a finding in the course of appealing a subsequent order terminating parental rights. The majority opinion found that because the juvenile court had “an affirmative and continuing duty to inquire whether a child . . . is or may be an Indian child in all dependency proceedings,” the mother was not foreclosed from raising the issue on appeal from the order terminating her parental rights. (§ 224.3(a).)



4. *In re W.B.* (2012) 55 Cal.4th 30

ICWA notice and other substantive provisions apply in delinquency cases that are based on criminal conduct if the court (1) sets a hearing to terminate parental rights; or (2) makes a foster care placement or contemplates such a placement, and makes a specific finding that the placement is based entirely on conditions within the home and not in part on the child's criminal conduct. ICWA inquiry must be made in all juvenile wardship proceedings in which the child is in foster care or at risk of entering foster care, but notice and other substantive ICWA requirements do not apply when that child is detained or adjudicated for conduct that would be a crime if committed by an adult, and the child does not require removal based on concerns about harmful conditions in the home.

5. *Dwayne P. v. Superior Court* (2002) 103 Cal.App.4th 247

When parents indicated that the children may have Indian heritage, the notice requirement under ICWA was triggered. The parents' failure to appeal the ICWA notice issue following the dispositional hearing did not constitute a waiver of their right to appeal later in the case.

Early in the case, parents indicated that their children might be Indian, but, because of lack of specific information, the trial court found at the time of the jurisdictional and dispositional hearing that ICWA did not apply. Parents did not appeal. At the 12-month hearing, after reunification services were terminated and a section 366.26 hearing was set, parents filed a writ petition asserting improper notice under ICWA. The court held that ICWA notice requirements apply even when the children's Indian status is uncertain. The requirements are triggered when the court has "reason to believe" the children may be Indian. The trial court's failure to ensure compliance with those requirements was prejudicial error. Furthermore, the parents' failure to raise the issue at the time of jurisdiction and disposition did not constitute waiver of their right to appeal. The court's duty to ensure proper notice is an ongoing duty that contin-



ues until proper notice is given. An error in not giving notice is of a continuing nature and may be challenged at any time during the dependency proceedings.

6. *Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians v. Holyfield* (1989) 490 U.S. 30

Indian children born outside the reservation are considered to be domiciled on the reservation if their parents live there. Under the Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) a tribal court has exclusive jurisdiction over children domiciled on its reservation.

Twin babies, who were born off the reservation, were voluntarily relinquished for adoption by their Indian parents, who resided on the Choctaw reservation. The adoptive parents were non-Indians, and the adoption was finalized in a Mississippi state court. The tribe moved to vacate the adoption on the grounds that ICWA provided the tribe with exclusive jurisdiction over the children. The Mississippi Supreme Court affirmed the state court adoption. The United States Supreme Court reversed, finding, first, that Congress did not intend for the word “domicile” in ICWA to be defined by each state court. Second, the court held that a child’s domicile is that of his or her parent or parents. Where the child is found or relinquished does not play a role in determining domicile. The purposes of ICWA would be undermined if parents could avoid the tribe’s jurisdiction simply by temporarily leaving the reservation prior to giving birth.

PARENTAGE

1. *In re Donovan L.* (2016) 244 Cal.App.4th 1075

Family Code section 7612(c), which allows the court to find that a child has more than two parents, applies when there is an existing, rather than potential, relationship between a child and a possible third parent.

Mother and her husband appealed from the juvenile court’s disposition order finding that the child had three parents under Family Code section 7612(c). The general rule is that the man who achieves conclusively presumed father status based on marriage during an



earlier dependency action defeats any parentage claim by the biological father. However, Family Code section 7612(c) allows courts to recognize that a child can have more than two parents if limiting the child to only two parents would be detrimental to the child. The legislative history of the statute indicates that this statute is applicable in rare cases. Here, the juvenile court noted that no relationship existed between the biological father and the child; thus, it was erroneous to apply section 7612(c) to the case.

2. *Martinez v. Vaziri* (2016) 246 Cal.App.4th 373

Under Family Code section 7612(c), a meaningful evaluation of detriment to the child “must include a realistic assessment of those parents’ respective roles in providing care and support for the child” and should not be limited to an assessment of the child’s living arrangement.

One purpose of the Uniform Parentage Act (UPA), and the intent of Family Code section 7612(c), is to allow courts to find that a child has more than two parents in situations where it would be detrimental to the child to find otherwise. Here, it was erroneous for the trial court to narrowly interpret “stable placement” as the child’s living arrangement because it is the child’s relationship with the presumed parent that must be considered, not just the living arrangement. The facts established that the petitioner had an existing parent-child relationship with the child and therefore the trial court failed to consider all relevant factors when it determined detriment to the child. The UPA seeks to protect existing relationships, which the petitioner had in this case.

3. *In re Nicholas H.* (2002) 28 Cal.4th 56

A parent can qualify as the presumed father under Family Code section 7611(d) even if he is not the child’s biological father. The lower court’s decision denying the nonbiological father presumed status was reversed.



When the mother was pregnant with the child, she moved in with the parent. The parent was not the biological father, but both mother and the parent wanted the parent to act as the child's father. The parent participated in the child's birth, was listed on the birth certificate, and provided a home for the mother and the child for several years. The court held that where there is no competing presumption or party seeking to become the child's father, the social relationship is more important than actual biology in determining the presumption. Given the strong social policy in favor of preserving the ongoing father-and-child relationship, the conflict should be weighed in favor of granting presumed status. The court held that the constitutional protection afforded biological fathers under *Adoption of Kelsey S.* extends to men who are not biological fathers but meet the other criteria for presumed father status. The presumption created by Family Code section 7611(d) can be rebutted only by clear and convincing evidence.

4. *Adoption of Kelsey S.* (1992) 1 Cal.4th 816

The court may not unilaterally preclude the child's biological father from becoming a presumed father by just considering best interest. The court recognized the significance of the biological relationship and held that terminating his parental rights with just a best-interest analysis violated the father's constitutional rights.

The father of a child born out of wedlock sought custody of his child. Two days after the birth of the child, the father filed an action to establish paternity. The father then sought to stop the mother from proceeding with her plans for adoption of the child and sought to have custody as the preferential placement. The parental relationship of a biological father is worthy of constitutional protection if the father has demonstrated a commitment to parental responsibility. In such a case, the court can terminate parental rights only on a showing that by clear and convincing evidence the father is unfit; otherwise the father is allowed to withhold his consent to adoption. The matter was reversed.





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