

The Children's Court during COVID-19

An Easy Read booklet for parents



How to use this booklet



The Victorian Government Department of Families, Fairness and Housing (DFFH) wrote this booklet. When you see the word 'we', it means DFFH.



We wrote this booklet in an easy to read way. We use pictures to explain some ideas.

Bold

We wrote some important words in **bold**.

Not bold

This means the letters are thicker and darker.



We explain what these important words mean.

There is a list of these words on page 26.



This Easy Read booklet is a summary of another document.



You can ask for help to read this booklet. A friend, family member or support person may be able to help you.

What is in this booklet?

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Why did we give you this booklet?



We gave you this booklet because a **child protection worker** has visited your home to see if your child is safe.

A child protection worker:



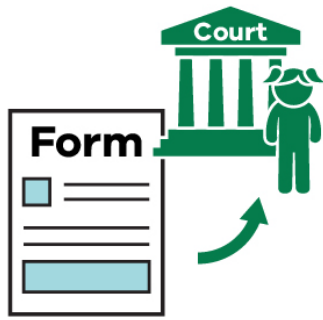
- works for the government



- talks to people to find out if a child is safe



- works to keep children safe.



The child protection worker has sent a form to the **Children's Court**.



The Children's Court is a place where legal decisions about a child can be made.



We call it a **case** when there is a legal problem about a child that goes to the Children's Court.



At the Children's Court, a **magistrate** will decide:

- if your child needs protection
- how to keep your child safe
- what your child needs.



A magistrate is an officer of the Children's Court who makes a decision about your child's case.

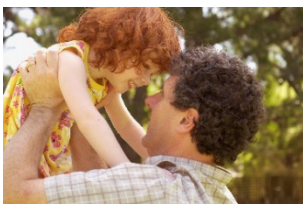
Where will your child live while the Children's Court makes a decision?



Some children can live at home while the Children's Court makes a decision about their case.



Sometimes children or parents need to move somewhere else.

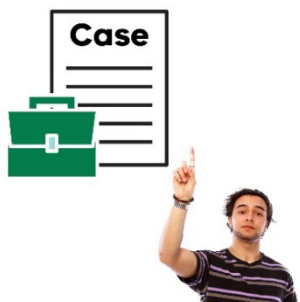


Sometimes, a child might live away from their home until the magistrate decides if they can live at home again.

When a child can live at home again, their case can:



- end



- keep going.



If your child must live away from home, a child protection worker will talk with you about a safe place where your child can live.



Your child might live with a:

- family member
- friend.



The child protection worker will have to work out if the home is safe for your child.



If there is no safe home for your child, they might go into **foster care**.

Foster care is when a child lives:



- in a home with a family you don't know
- with people who look after children who might not be safe.



You might be able to talk to your child while they live away from home.



You might be able to see them as well.

This might be part of a **court order**.



A court order is when a magistrate tells you what you must:

- do
- not do.

What if you want your child to live at home?



If you want your child to live with you, you need a **legal representative** who will talk to the Children's Court.



A legal representative is someone who can:

- give you legal support
- support you with legal decisions.



The Children's Court will decide if your child can live with you.



Because of COVID-19 the Children's Court has changed how it works.

COVID-19 is a virus that:



- can spread easily from one person to another person
- has affected many people around the world.

It is also called coronavirus.



You might not need to go to the Children's Court.



A legal representative might be able to go to the Children's Court for you in person.



The legal representative can also see what happens at the Children's Court on their computer.

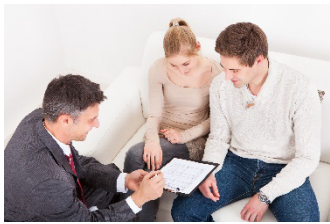


This means they might not have to go to the Children's Court in person.

Getting legal help



You might want legal help with your case.



You can get help from a legal representative.



You can get help from a legal service, such as Victoria Legal Aid (VLA).

You can call them on **1300 792 387**.



VLA is an organisation that can give you free:

- information about the law
- legal advice.



The Law Institute of Victoria may be able to help you find a legal representative.

You can call them on **(03) 9607 9311**.



You can also get help from a legal service in your local community.



If you are Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander, you might want to use an Aboriginal legal service.



You can contact one of these legal services yourself or Victorian Legal Aid can help you get a legal representative from one of these services.



You can call the Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service.

1800 064 865

You can also call Djirra.

1800 105 303



Djirra used to be called the Aboriginal Family Violence Prevention and Legal Service Victoria.

Getting ready for Children's Court



You can get legal help before the Children's Court case.



This will help you decide if you want your own legal representative for the Children's Court case.



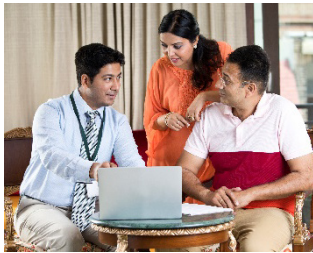
If you don't already have your own legal representative, Victoria Legal Aid (VLA) will organise one for you.



If you need an **interpreter** to help you, ask a children protection worker to get one for you.

You can also ask for a telephone interpreter if you don't need to go to court.

An interpreter is someone who:



- speaks your language
- helps you understand what someone is saying.

The interpreter will help you:



- understand what's happening in the Children's Court
- by telling you what is being said in the Children's Court
- tell everyone in the Children's Court what you are saying.

Does my child need to go?



Because of COVID-19, your child doesn't need to go to the Children's Court.

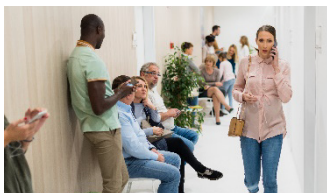


Children who are aged 10 years or older will have their own legal representative.



The child's legal representative will speak for them in the Children's Court.

What happens at Children's Court?



Because of COVID-19, there are limits to how many people can go to Children's Court.



You might not need to go to the Children's Court in person.



If you have your own legal representative, it's important that they can call you when they're:

- at the Children's Court in person
- watching what happens from their own computer.



If you don't have a phone, you need to find a different way for your legal representative to contact you.

You need to contact the Children's Court if you don't:



- want your own legal representative

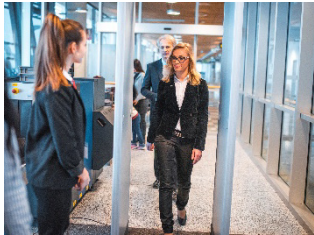


- have a phone or other way to talk to your legal representative.

If you need to go to Children's Court in person



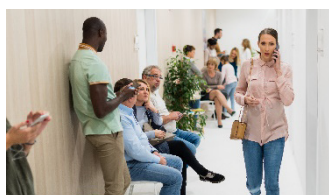
Because of COVID-19, you can't bring anyone with you to the Children's Court.



When you arrive at the Children's Court, you will go through the security screening.



When you get inside, you need to go to the court registry.



You might have to wait before your child's case starts.

The Children's Court can be very busy.



You should talk to your legal representative while you wait for your child's name to be called out.



When your child's name is called out, you can go inside the court room.



You will be able to talk to your legal representative on the phone.



If you are sick, you must not go to the Children's Court.



If you have a legal representative, you need to tell them you're sick.



Your legal representative will contact you by:

- phone
- video chat.

Inside the courtroom



Please:

- turn your phone off before you go in
- stay quiet
- follow the instructions of the court.

The Children's Court will want to hear about:



- your child's case
- your family life
- why the child protection worker thinks your child is not safe.



The Children's Court might ask you what you think about what the child protection worker says.



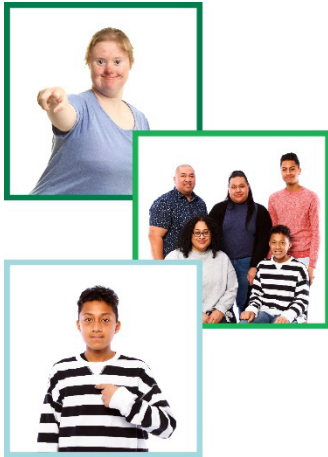
They will also ask your legal representative.



The Children's Court might ask your child what they think about what the child protection worker says.



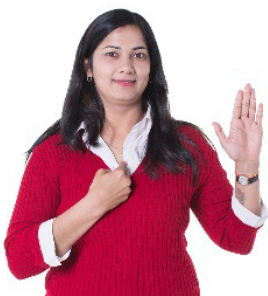
They will also ask your child's legal representative.



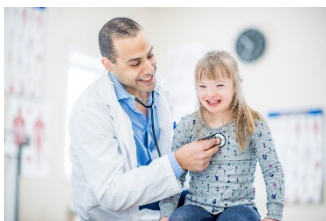
The Children's Court might get reports about:

- your child
- other members of your family
- you.

These reports might be from:



- the child protection worker

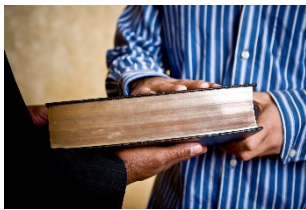


- other people who know you and your child, such as a doctor.



The Children's Court might ask these people if they think your child is safe.

If you talk about your child's case in the Children's Court, you must:



- tell the truth



- answer questions from people who know and understand the law



- ask for help if you don't understand what people say.



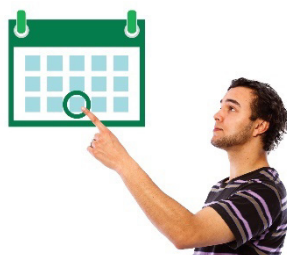
You must call the magistrate:

- 'Your Honour'
- 'Madame'
- 'Sir'.

Going to the Children's Court more than once



You might have to go to the Children's Court more than once.

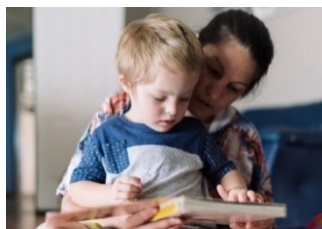


The Children's Court can ask you to come back on another day.

In the meantime, the Children's Court will decide if your child can stay:



- at home with you



- at the home of a family member or friend



- in a place picked by the Children's Court, like foster care.



This will be until the next time you go to the Children's Court.

When you go to the Children's Court in the future



Everyone must agree about what is right for your child, including:

- you
- the Children's Court
- the child protection worker
- your child.



If you can't agree, the magistrate will decide what is right for your child.

If the magistrate decides your child is safe, then:



- your child's case will end



- contact between your family and the child protection worker will stop.

If the magistrate believes your child is not safe, they will say:



- what your child needs



- how to keep your child safe.



The magistrate will explain why they made their decision.

If you don't understand their reasons, you can talk to:



- your legal representative



- a child protection worker.



If you do not agree with the magistrate's decision, you can ask for the decision to change.

We call this an **appeal**.



You can talk to your legal representative about an appeal.

Word list

This list explains what the **bold** words in this document mean.



Appeal

When you ask for a decision to change, we call it an appeal.



Case

We call it a case when there is a legal problem about a child that goes to the Children's Court.

Child protection worker

A child protection worker:



- works for the government
- talks to people who think a child might need protection
- works with families to keep children safe.



Children's Court

The Children's Court is a place where legal decisions about a child are made.



Court order

A court order is when a magistrate tells you what you must:

- do
- not do.

COVID-19

COVID-19 is a virus that:



- can spread easily from one person to another person
- has affected many people around the world.

Foster care

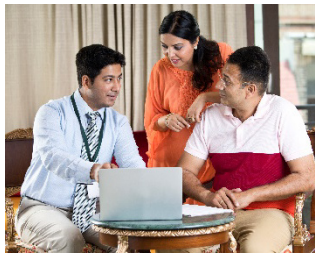


Foster care is when a child lives:

- in a home with a family you don't know
- with people who look after children who might not be safe.

Interpreter

An interpreter is someone who:



- speaks your language
- helps you understand what someone is saying.



Legal representative

A legal representative is someone who can:

- give you legal advice
- support you with legal decisions.



Magistrate

A magistrate is an officer of the Children's Court who makes a decision about your child's case.

Contact information



The child protection worker's name is:



Their phone number is:



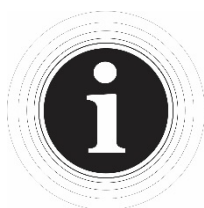
Their email address is:



The child protection worker's manager is:



Their phone number is:



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