



Wings Of The Future NFP

**Reunification Roadmap A Step-by-
Step Guide to Navigating the CPS Process**

Workbook

with Exercises, Checklists, and Templates



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Reunification Roadmap: How to Navigate the CPS System and Bring Your Child Home”

Introduction

- Why this book exists: giving parents clarity and direction in a confusing system.
- Understanding that CPS’s mission is to protect children, but mistakes, bias, and systemic issues exist.
- Hope and reality: it’s possible to get your child back, but it requires persistence, documentation, and compliance.

♦ Introduction (Expanded Section)

Why CPS Works the Way It Does

Child Protective Services (CPS) doesn’t exist in a vacuum — it is governed by federal and state laws. Federal funding ties directly to how states run CPS. This means the timelines and decisions often feel rushed or unfair, but they are shaped by law, not just individuals.

- **CAPTA (Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act, 1974):** Requires every state to investigate child abuse/neglect reports in exchange for federal funding.
- **ASFA (Adoption and Safe Families Act, 1997):** Requires states to seek permanent placements for children if they’ve been in foster care for 15 of the last 22 months. This law pressures caseworkers and judges to move fast.
- **ICWA (Indian Child Welfare Act, 1978):** Provides special protections for Native American children and families.

👉 **Why this matters to you:** If your case drags on, the court may feel forced by law to move toward adoption or guardianship. That’s why consistent progress and documentation are critical.

Chapter 1 – Understanding Child Protective Services

- What CPS is and why they intervene.
 - Common reasons for child removal (neglect, abuse, substance use, domestic violence, lack of supervision).
 - CPS roles: caseworkers, supervisors, attorneys, Guardian ad Litem, foster parents.
 - The difference between investigation, foster care placement, and court oversight.
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Chapter 2 – The Removal Process

- How removals happen (emergency removals, court-ordered removals).
 - What to expect during the first 24–72 hours.
 - Your rights during removal: right to know allegations, right to an attorney, right to visitation.
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Chapter 3 – Your Legal Rights as a Parent

- Right to be notified of hearings.
 - Right to participate in court proceedings.
 - Right to visitation (unless court restricts it).
 - Right to reunification services (in most cases).
 - When rights may be terminated (serious abuse, repeated failure to comply, time limits).
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Chapter 4 – The Court Process

- Emergency hearings (shelter care hearing).
 - Adjudication & disposition hearings (deciding if allegations are true).
 - Review hearings (every 6 months).
 - Permanency hearings (deciding long-term plan: reunification, adoption, guardianship).
 - Termination of Parental Rights (TPR) explained.
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Chapter 5 – Case Plans & Services

- What a case plan is and why it matters.

- Common requirements: parenting classes, therapy, substance abuse treatment, anger management, housing stability, employment.
 - How to work with caseworkers (even if you don't trust them).
 - How to ask for services you truly need (not just what's offered).
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Chapter 6 – Documentation is Your Best Friend

- Keeping a **parent binder**: court dates, caseworker contacts, visitation logs.
 - Requesting written communication instead of verbal only.
 - Documenting every effort you make toward reunification.
 - Why judges value documentation over emotions.
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Chapter 7 – Visitation: Building Bridges Back to Your Child

- Supervised vs. unsupervised visits.
 - Making the most of visits (bonding activities, consistency, staying positive).
 - Common mistakes during visitation (fighting with staff, talking badly about CPS).
 - Showing growth and stability through your behavior with your child.
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Chapter 8 – Working with Attorneys & Advocates

- Court-appointed attorney vs. hiring your own.
 - How to advocate for yourself if your lawyer isn't proactive.
 - The role of CASA (Court Appointed Special Advocate).
 - Finding community advocacy organizations.
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Chapter 9 – Barriers & How to Overcome Them

- Poverty vs. neglect (how to show the difference).
 - Mental health challenges.
 - Addiction recovery and relapse prevention.
 - Dealing with domestic violence histories.
 - Cultural and racial bias in CPS.
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Chapter 10 – Staying Strong Through the Process

- Managing the emotional toll of separation.
 - Coping with shame, judgment, and fear.
 - Support systems: therapy, support groups, faith-based communities.
 - Self-care strategies to keep your focus and energy.
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Chapter 11 – Reunification and Beyond

- How reunification happens (trial home visits, monitoring, court closure).
 - Steps to ensure long-term stability once your child returns.
 - Breaking cycles: preventing re-entry into CPS.
 - Building a future with trust, stability, and healing.
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Chapter 12 – When Reunification Doesn't Happen

- Understanding Termination of Parental Rights (TPR).
 - Options: appeal, open adoption, kinship placement.
 - Healing and rebuilding your life if the court decides otherwise.
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Conclusion

- Key takeaways: compliance, documentation, advocacy, patience, and persistence.
 - Final encouragement: you are not powerless, and many parents *do* reunify successfully.
 - Resources list (hotlines, legal aid, advocacy groups, books, and websites).
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Appendices

- Sample case plan.
 - Parent documentation log template.
 - List of state-by-state CPS resources.
 - Key legal terms glossary.
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Chapter 1 – Understanding Child Protective Services

Guidance

Child Protective Services (CPS) exists to protect children from harm. While that's the mission, the reality is the system is complicated, overwhelming, and often feels stacked against parents. Understanding **who's who** and **how decisions are made** is the first step to getting your child back.

- **Caseworkers** investigate reports, manage your case plan, and report back to the court.
- **Supervisors** approve the caseworker's actions.
- **Guardian ad Litem (GAL) or Child's Attorney** represents your child's best interests in court.
- **Judges** make final decisions.
- **Foster Parents or Kinship Caregivers** provide temporary housing for your child.

If you don't know who is who, you'll get lost and miss chances to advocate for yourself.

◆ Chapter 1 Additions – Understanding CPS

Flow of a CPS Case (Typical Path)

Report → Investigation → Removal (if needed) → Case Plan → Court Hearings → Review Hearings → Permanency Decision (Reunification, Adoption, Guardianship).

Myth vs. Reality Box

- *Myth:* CPS can remove kids without cause.
- *Reality:* They must show imminent danger or have a court order.
- *Myth:* If I fight CPS, it makes me look guilty.
- *Reality:* Advocacy (with respect and documentation) actually shows the court you are engaged and proactive.

Case Example

Maria had her children removed after a neighbor reported neglect. She thought her caseworker was the person making the final decision. In reality, the judge was in charge, and the GAL had strong influence. Once Maria learned the roles, she started sending documentation to her

attorney (who presented it in court), rather than arguing endlessly with the caseworker. This shift changed her case outcome.

Checklist

- ☐ I know my caseworker's name and phone number.
 - ☐ I know my caseworker's supervisor's name.
 - ☐ I know who my child's attorney or GAL is.
 - ☐ I know my judge's name.
-

Exercise

Draw a diagram of your CPS "team." Put your name in the middle. Write everyone else's role around you with their names and phone numbers.

Template: Contact Log Sheet

Name

Date

Chapter 2 – The Removal Process

Guidance

The first 72 hours after removal are critical. CPS either removes with a court order, or in emergencies, without one (with a hearing quickly afterward). Expect a **shelter care hearing** where the judge decides if your child will remain in foster care or return home.

The system moves fast in the beginning. If you miss the first hearing, you miss your chance to argue for your child to come home.

Case Example

Tanya's kids were removed for alleged neglect. She didn't attend the shelter hearing because she didn't understand the notice. Her kids remained in foster care. Once she began attending every hearing, documenting housing improvements, and showing compliance, she slowly

regained credibility — but it cost her valuable time.

Checklist

- ☐ I attended the shelter care hearing.
 - ☐ I requested a lawyer immediately.
 - ☐ I asked CPS (in writing) what services I must complete.
 - ☐ I know the next court date.
-

Exercise

Timeline Your Case:

1. Date of removal: _____
 2. Shelter care hearing: _____
 3. Next review hearing: _____
 4. Permanency hearing: _____
-

Template: Timeline Sheet

Step	Date	Notes
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Removal

Shelter Care Hearing

Adjudication Hearing

Permanency Hearing

Chapter 3 – Your Legal Rights as a Parent

Guidance

Parents have rights. Many don't realize this and lose their case because they think CPS has unlimited power. **You have legal rights, but you must assert them.**

- Right to be notified of all hearings.
- Right to an attorney (court-appointed if you can't afford one).
- Right to regular visitation unless deemed unsafe.
- Right to reunification services.

- Right to appeal decisions.



Case Example

Devon didn't know he was entitled to visitation. His kids went months without seeing him. When he finally asked his attorney to file a motion, visitation began weekly, which helped rebuild his case and his bond with his children.



Checklist

- ☐ I know my attorney's name and phone number.
- ☐ I have requested visitation in writing.
- ☐ I have asked for a copy of my case plan.
- ☐ I know how to file complaints if my rights are violated.



Exercise

Write a letter to your caseworker requesting visitation:

"Dear [Caseworker Name],

I am writing to request regular visitation with my child(ren), as is my legal right. I am committed to complying with all visitation rules and ask that you provide me with a schedule. Please respond in writing.

Sincerely,
[Your Name]"



Template: Visitation Request Log

Date	Who I Sent It To	Method (Email/Mail)	Response	Notes
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◆ Chapter 3 Additions – Your Legal Rights

Key Laws Shaping Your Case

- CAPTA: Every report must be investigated. Even if anonymous, CPS is legally bound to check it.
- ASFA: Judges must look for "permanency" within 12 months. If progress is slow, the law directs them to consider termination.

- **ICWA:** If you or your child are Native American, the tribe must be notified and involved in the case.

👉 **Why this matters to you:** Knowing the laws gives you leverage. You can ask your lawyer, “Is the state following ASFA timelines?” or “Have they considered ICWA requirements?”

Chapter 4 – The Court Process

Guidance

CPS cases are managed through the court system. If you don’t understand the hearings, you’ll feel powerless.

Types of Hearings:

1. **Shelter Care Hearing** – Within days of removal. Decides temporary placement.
2. **Adjudication Hearing** – Determines if allegations are true.
3. **Disposition Hearing** – Sets your case plan.
4. **Review Hearings** – Every 6 months. Judge checks progress.
5. **Permanency Hearing** – Decides long-term plan (reunification, adoption, guardianship).
6. **Termination of Parental Rights (TPR)** – Worst-case if services aren’t completed.

Case Example

Rosa skipped her adjudication hearing because she thought it wasn’t important. The judge ruled against her without hearing her side. She had to spend months undoing the damage.

Checklist

- ☐ I attend every hearing.
 - ☐ I arrive early and dress appropriately.
 - ☐ I bring documentation (service completion, housing proof, visitation logs).
 - ☐ I take notes during each hearing.
-

Exercise

Fill in the blanks:

- My next hearing is on: _____
 - The purpose of this hearing is: _____
 - My attorney's role at this hearing is to: _____
 - The judge wants to see: _____
-

Template: Court Date Tracker

Hearing Type Date What I Need to Bring Notes

◆ **Chapter 4 Additions – The Court Process**

Why Judges Trust Written Documentation

Judges review dozens of cases in a single day. They don't see every detail of your life. What they rely on most are:

- Caseworker reports
- Guardian ad Litem recommendations
- Service provider letters (therapists, class certificates, etc.)
- Your own submitted documentation

👉 If it's not written down, the judge will not consider it. This is why documentation logs and letters are your strongest tools.

Chapter 5 – Case Plans & Services

Guidance

Your **case plan** is the roadmap to reunification. It lists what CPS (and the court) expect you to complete before your child can return home. It might feel unfair or overwhelming, but completing the case plan is often the single biggest factor in winning your case.

Common services included in case plans:

- Parenting classes
- Therapy or counseling
- Substance abuse treatment/testing
- Anger management courses
- Housing stability verification
- Employment/job readiness

The key is not just to **complete** services, but to **document completion** and **demonstrate change**.

Case Example

Malik was told his case plan required “stable housing.” At first, he thought just having a place to live was enough. But his caseworker still marked it “incomplete” because he hadn’t shown proof. Once Malik brought in his lease, rent receipts, and photos of his safe home, the court marked that requirement resolved.

Checklist

- ☐ I have a written copy of my case plan.
 - ☐ I understand each requirement clearly.
 - ☐ I have scheduled all services (classes, therapy, treatment).
 - ☐ I keep proof of completion for each requirement.
-

Exercise

Write your case plan goals in your own words. Example:

- “Parenting classes → Show I can safely and calmly parent my child.”
 - “Therapy → Work through my trauma and learn emotional regulation.”
 - “Stable housing → Provide a safe, permanent home.”
-

Template: Case Plan Progress Sheet

Case Plan Requirement	My Steps to Complete	Proof I Have	Status
Parenting Classes	Enrolled on 3/10	Attendance sheet	In Progress
Housing	Signed lease	Copy of lease	Complete

Chapter 6 – Documentation is Your Best Friend

Guidance

In CPS, **if it's not written down, it doesn't exist**. Judges and caseworkers rely on paperwork, not verbal promises. Good documentation shows you are consistent, responsible, and credible.

What to document:

- Every call, email, or text with CPS.
- Visitation dates, times, and activities.
- Service attendance (class sign-ins, certificates).
- Rent receipts, pay stubs, and bills.
- Any proof of positive steps forward.



Case Example

Latoya always showed up to visits, but her caseworker said she was inconsistent. Latoya pulled out her visitation log—signed by the visitation center staff—and presented it in court. The judge sided with her and ordered unsupervised visits.



Checklist

- ☐ I keep a parent binder or folder just for CPS.
- ☐ I log every phone call, text, or email.
- ☐ I keep all receipts, certificates, and proof of progress.
- ☐ I bring copies of documentation to court.



Exercise

Start a daily **Documentation Journal**. Each day, record at least one thing you did toward reunification (visit, class, phone call, therapy).



Templates

Communication Log

Date Person Contacted Role Method Notes

Visitation Log

| Date | Child's Name | Visit Type | Activity | Notes/Emotions |

◆ Chapter 6 Additions – Documentation

How Caseworkers Make Decisions

CPS workers use **risk assessment tools** that score your case based on safety, risk, and protective factors. If you don't provide proof of progress, their tool will often mark the risk as "not reduced."

Example:

- If your plan requires "stable housing," but you never submit proof, the caseworker's system will check "risk unresolved" even if you actually have housing.

👉 This is why your binder of proof (receipts, letters, logs) can literally change the numbers in their reports.

Chapter 7 – Visitation: Building Bridges Back to Your Child

Guidance

Visitation is more than "time with your child." It's your chance to **prove to the court** you're a safe, loving, and consistent parent. How you act during visits can directly impact whether reunification moves forward.

Tips for successful visitation:

- Show up early and prepared.
- Bring activities your child enjoys.
- Stay calm, even if staff are watching closely.
- Never argue with staff or speak negatively about CPS in front of your child.

Case Example

Andre made every visit count by bringing homework, books, and games. Instead of sitting silently, he engaged his child in positive, structured activities. The visitation supervisor reported strong bonding, which led to more visitation time.

Checklist

- ☐ I arrive early and prepared.
- ☐ I bring positive activities (games, books, snacks).
- ☐ I avoid negative conversations during visits.
- ☐ I show consistency and stability.

Exercise

Create a “Visit Plan” for your next three visits:

- Visit 1 → Activity: _____ / Snack: _____
- Visit 2 → Activity: _____ / Book: _____
- Visit 3 → Activity: _____ / Conversation Topic: _____

Template: Visitation Prep Checklist

Item	Ready?	Notes
Age-appropriate toy/game	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Book/story	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Healthy snack	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Conversation starter	<input type="checkbox"/>	

Chapter 8 – Working with Attorneys & Advocates

Guidance

Your attorney is supposed to represent your interests, but many parents feel abandoned by their lawyers. If your attorney is passive, **you must advocate for yourself**.

Other advocates who may support you:

- CASA (Court Appointed Special Advocate)
- Parent mentors (in some states)
- Nonprofit advocacy groups

Tip: Put all requests in writing so your lawyer can file them in court if needed.

Case Example

Sheila’s attorney wasn’t pushing for more visitation. She wrote down her request, gave it to her lawyer, and asked him to file it with the court. He did, and she was granted extended visits. Without that written request, nothing would have changed.

✓ Checklist

- ☐ I know my attorney's contact info.
 - ☐ I prepare questions before each meeting.
 - ☐ I put important requests in writing.
 - ☐ I ask my lawyer to file motions if needed.
-

Exercise

Write three questions to ask your lawyer at your next meeting:

1. _____
 2. _____
 3. _____
-

Template: Attorney Meeting Notes

Date	Question	Lawyer's Answer	Next Step
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Chapter 9 – Barriers & Solutions

Guidance

Every CPS case has barriers — the reasons your child was removed. To reunify, you must **identify barriers, show progress, and provide proof**. Judges don't just want to hear that you've changed; they want to see evidence.

Common barriers:

- Poverty mistaken as neglect
- Mental health struggles
- Addiction or recovery challenges
- Domestic violence history
- Racial or cultural bias in the system

The key: Don't argue about the unfairness — **demonstrate solutions**.

Case Example

Felicia's children were removed for “neglect” because her home had no utilities. CPS treated it as abuse. With the help of a legal aid advocate,

Felicia proved it was a poverty issue. She got community assistance, restored utilities, and provided receipts in court. Her case plan requirement was marked complete.

Checklist

- ☐ I know the specific reason(s) my child was removed.
 - ☐ I have listed barriers in my own words.
 - ☐ I have identified at least one concrete step for each barrier.
 - ☐ I am gathering proof of progress.
-

Exercise

Write down your top barrier:

- Barrier: _____
 - What CPS sees: _____
 - My solution: _____
 - Proof I can provide: _____
-

Template: Barrier-Solution Action Plan

Barrier	My Action	Proof I Will Show	Status
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Chapter 10 – Staying Strong Through the Process

Guidance

CPS cases take months or even years. The process is exhausting, and many parents give up out of frustration. Staying mentally, emotionally, and spiritually strong is essential.

Ways to stay strong:

- Build a support network (family, friends, church, support groups).
 - Take care of your health (sleep, food, exercise, stress management).
 - Use therapy, journaling, or prayer for emotional release.
 - Remember: every hearing and every visit is another chance to show growth.
-

Case Example

John was overwhelmed and close to giving up. He joined a parent support group for families involved with CPS. The group gave him motivation and accountability. He completed his case plan and reunited with his children in less than a year.

Checklist

- ☐ I have at least one trusted support person.
 - ☐ I participate in therapy, groups, or faith support.
 - ☐ I practice stress-reducing activities daily.
 - ☐ I remind myself of my “why” when I feel discouraged.
-

Exercise

Create a Self-Care Plan:

- Daily → _____
 - Weekly → _____
 - Monthly → _____
-

Template: Support Network Sheet

Person	Relationship	How They Can Support Me	Contact Info
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Chapter 11 – Reunification and Beyond

Guidance

Reunification doesn’t happen overnight. It’s usually gradual:

1. **Supervised Visits** →
2. **Unsupervised Visits** →
3. **Overnight Visits** →
4. **Trial Home Placement** →
5. **Case Closure**

To succeed, you must show stability in housing, income, parenting, and emotional regulation. Judges want to see not only that you’ve completed services but also that your lifestyle supports your child long-term.



Case Example

Carla was granted trial reunification. She kept her home clean, attended therapy, and showed stable employment. After six months of consistent progress, the judge closed her case and her children were officially home.



Checklist

- ☐ I have stable housing.
 - ☐ I have stable income or financial support.
 - ☐ I have safe childcare or family support.
 - ☐ I have completed all services.
-



Exercise

Write your **Reunification Readiness Plan**:

- My housing situation: _____
 - My income/job situation: _____
 - My childcare/back-up support: _____
 - My ongoing therapy/support plan: _____
-



Template: Home Safety & Stability Checklist

Requirement	Proof I Have	Notes
Stable Housing	Lease, utility bills	
Employment/Income	Pay stubs	
Safe Environment	Photos, inspection report	



Chapter 12 – When Reunification Doesn't Happen



Guidance

Sometimes, despite your efforts, the court may move toward **Termination of Parental Rights (TPR)**. This doesn't mean your story ends here — but it does mean you must prepare for other outcomes.

Possible paths forward:

- Appeal (if errors occurred in your case).
- Kinship placement (child lives with a relative).
- Open adoption (maintain some contact).
- Personal healing (so you can rebuild your life and relationships, even if CPS doesn't return your child).

Case Example

Marcus lost his parental rights after repeated setbacks. But he worked with the adoptive parents to establish an open adoption agreement. While not the outcome he hoped for, it allowed him to remain in his child's life.

Checklist

- ☐ I understand my rights to appeal.
- ☐ I know if kinship placement is an option.
- ☐ I know if open adoption is an option.
- ☐ I am building a personal healing plan, no matter the outcome.

Exercise

Write a "Plan B" if reunification does not happen:

- If appeal is possible, I will _____
- If kinship placement is possible, I will _____
- If open adoption is possible, I will _____
- For my healing, I will _____

Template: Alternate Path Planning

Option What It Means My Steps Notes

Conclusion

- Reunification is possible, but it requires **compliance, persistence, and proof**.
- Remember: CPS isn't the final authority — **judges decide**.
- Your role is to **stay consistent, show change, and never give up**.

Appendices

Appendix A: Sample Letters

Visitation Request Letter

(already shown in Chapter 3 — formatted for easy use).

Service Completion Update Letter

“Dear [Caseworker],

I am writing to inform you that I have completed [service]. Please find attached documentation as proof. Kindly update my case plan and confirm in writing.

Sincerely, [Your Name]”

Appendix B: Documentation Logs

- Communication Log
 - Visitation Log
 - Court Tracker
 - Case Plan Progress Sheet
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Appendix C: Court Preparation Worksheet

- Next court date: _____
 - Purpose of hearing: _____
 - Documents I need: _____
 - Questions for attorney: _____
-

Appendix D: Glossary of CPS Terms

- **TPR:** Termination of Parental Rights
 - **GAL:** Guardian ad Litem
 - **Adjudication:** Court decision on whether allegations are true
 - **Disposition:** Court order setting case plan requirements
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Appendix E: Resources List

- **National Parent Helpline:** 1-855-427-2736
- **Child Welfare Information Gateway:** childwelfare.gov

- **Legal Aid Offices:** (Texas and California)
- **Parent Advocacy Groups:** (CA and TX)

New Appendix F – Deeper Dive into CPS

1. **Flowchart of CPS Process** (visual: Report → Investigation → Removal → Hearings → Permanency).
2. **Federal Law Overview:** CAPTA, ASFA, ICWA.
3. **Acronyms Parents Hear in Court:** TPR, GAL, CASA, ASFA, CAPTA, ICWA.
4. **CPS Worker Perspective:** Workers often carry 20–40 cases. They may not ignore you on purpose, but overwork causes delays. This means you must be proactive in following up.
5. **FAQ for Parents:**
 - *Can I refuse services?* You can, but it signals non-cooperation and the court may use it against you.
 - *Why are visits supervised at first?* It's a standard safety precaution until the court sees progress.
 - *Why do I need so much documentation?* Because the court sees paper as proof, not just promises.

Letting Go of Control in the CPS Process

When you are dealing with Child Protective Services (CPS), one of the hardest things to face is the feeling that your life — and your child's life — is in someone else's hands. It is natural to feel fear, anger, and frustration when you cannot control what CPS, the court, or even your child's foster placement is doing.

The brain craves a sense of control because it reduces uncertainty and helps the nervous system feel safe. When you don't feel in control, your brain interprets this as danger, and the **amygdala** (the fear center of your brain) goes into overdrive. This is when you may notice fight, flight, or freeze reactions:

- Fight: Arguing with caseworkers, snapping at loved ones, or resisting everything asked of you.
- Flight: Wanting to avoid meetings, skip hearings, or give up completely.
- Freeze: Feeling paralyzed, hopeless, and unable to take the next step.

But here's the good news: You *can* retrain your brain and nervous system to find calm in the middle of uncertainty.

The Science of Control

When you focus on controlling what is truly within your power, you activate your **prefrontal cortex** — the part of your brain responsible for:

- Logical thinking
- Planning
- Emotional regulation

This creates balance and reduces the overactivation of the amygdala. In other words, when you shift from “trying to control everything” to “controlling what's actually mine,” you help your brain move out of fear and back into calm.

Practicing acceptance of the things outside of your control sends a powerful safety signal to your nervous system. This shifts you from a **stress state (sympathetic nervous system: fight/flight/freeze)** into a **regulated state (parasympathetic nervous system: rest-and-digest)**.

How This Helps in the CPS Journey

When you release what you cannot control (such as CPS timelines, other people's actions, or the judge's mood that day) and focus on what you *can* control (your behavior, your documentation, your presence at hearings), you:

- Reduce emotional reactivity
- Think more clearly in court or meetings
- Build credibility through consistent action
- Protect your mental and spiritual health

This is not about giving up. It's about empowering yourself to pour energy into what truly makes a difference.

Self-Empathy & Regulation Exercises

Use these exercises alongside your CPS workbook to calm your nervous system and reclaim inner strength:

1. Self-Empathy Statement

Place a hand over your heart and say:

"I see that you're feeling anxious. I'm here for you. It's okay to not have control over everything."

2. Grounding Breath

Inhale for **4 counts**, hold for **4 counts**, exhale for **6 counts**.

Each breath tells your body: *"I am safe right now."*

3. Circle of Control Visualization

Imagine a circle around you.

- Inside the circle: what you can influence (your actions, your words, your choices).
- Outside the circle: what you cannot control (court decisions, CPS reports, others' opinions).
Release what's outside into God's care, trusting that you do not need to carry it.

4. Compassionate Reframing

Gently remind yourself: *"Other people's actions are shaped by their own experiences. I am only responsible for my own responses."*

5. Daily Gratitude Check

Write down **3 things you are grateful for each day**. Gratitude re-anchors your mind in safety, possibility, and hope.

Reflection Prompt

Think about one area of your CPS case that feels heavy because it's outside of your control. Write it down.

Now ask yourself: *"What part of this situation can I influence today?"*

Release the rest into God's hands.

Serenity Prayer Reflection Worksheet with Neuroscience on Control & Empathy Practices

Instructions: Read the Serenity Prayer slowly. Then, in each column, write down your own real-life examples. Be honest with yourself—this is for your personal clarity and growth.

*God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, The courage to change the things I can,
And the wisdom to know the difference.*

Things I Need God to Help Me Accept (Situations, people, or realities outside my control)	Things I Need the Power to Change (My actions, thoughts, behaviors, choices)	Things I Need God to Give Me the Wisdom to Know (Situations I’m unsure about)
Example: Other people’s choices or mistakes	Example: My daily self-care habits	Example: Whether to stay in or leave a difficult the relationships

The Neuroscience Behind Control

The brain craves a sense of control because it reduces uncertainty and helps the nervous system feel safe. When you focus on controlling what is truly within your power, you activate the prefrontal cortex, the area responsible for logical thinking, planning, and emotional regulation. This reduces the overactivation of the amygdala—the brain's fear center—which can trigger fight, flight, or freeze responses. Practicing acceptance of uncontrollable factors signals safety to the nervous system, shifting you from a stress (sympathetic) state into a regulated, rest-and-digest (parasympathetic) state.

Empathy Exercises to Pair with This Worksheet

1. **Self-Empathy Statement:** Place a hand over your heart and say, 'I see that you're feeling anxious. I'm here for you. It's okay to not have control over everything.'
2. **Grounding Breath:** Inhale for 4 counts, hold for 4, exhale for 6—reminding your body you are safe.
3. **Circle of Control Visualization:** Imagine a circle around you. Inside are the things you can influence; outside are the things you cannot. Release what's outside into God's care.
4. **Compassionate Reframing:** Gently remind yourself that other people's actions are shaped by their own experiences, and you are only responsible for your own responses.
5. **Daily Gratitude Check:** Write down 3 things you are grateful for to re-anchor in positivity and calm.