



Family Preparedness Planning and Caregiving Options for Families Facing Separation

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Families may face unexpected separations due to emergencies, illness, incarceration, or immigration enforcement. Planning ahead helps protect children's safety, stability, and access to school and health care. This summary explains practical planning steps and caregiving options available to families in California, regardless of immigration status.

Family Preparedness Planning

A **Family Preparedness Plan** helps parents decide who will care for their children and what information caregivers may need if a parent is suddenly unavailable. Planning ahead can reduce stress and confusion for all families and help children remain safe, housed, and connected to school and health care. Any family can develop a family preparedness plan. However, families who have open cases in the Juvenile Court may have more limited choices than families who do not have an open Juvenile Court case. Families who have open cases in the Juvenile Court should contact their court-appointed counsel.

Key steps for Family Preparedness Planning include:

- Choosing trusted caregivers,
- Gathering important documents (like immunization and other medical records), and
- Updating emergency contacts at schools and child care programs.

Families can use **"Creating a Family Plan: A Workbook for Immigrant Parents"** (available in English, Spanish, and Chinese from [Public Counsel](#)) to guide this process. The workbook is not legal advice; families with questions are encouraged to speak with an attorney.

School and child care coordination is essential. Families should regularly update their emergency contact information, list multiple trusted adults, and provide multiple ways to reach each contact.

Caregiving Options During Separation If There is NOT an Open Juvenile Court Case

Caregiver's Authorization Affidavit

A **Caregiver's Authorization Affidavit** is a simple, court-free form that allows a trusted adult caring for a child in their home to:

- Enroll the child in school,
- Consent to school-related medical care (such as physicals and immunizations), and
- Participate in school activities.
- **Relatives may also consent to a broad range of medical and dental care.**

Important features:

- No court, judge, or notarization required.
- No parent signature required.
- Does not transfer custody or parental rights, so a parent may reunify with the child in the future.
- Valid regardless of immigration status.
- Effective while the child lives with the caregiver.

Caregivers must be 18 or older and sign under penalty of perjury that the child lives with them. Updated Caregiver's Authorization Affidavits (effective 1/1/26) are available on the Alliance for Children's Rights [website](#); older versions remain legally valid if information has not changed.

Probate Guardianship

A **Probate Guardianship** is a formal court process that gives a guardian full legal and physical custody of a child. While a probate guardianship is in place, parents' rights are suspended.

Key points:

- Requires filing paperwork and attending court hearings.
- The court investigates and decides what is in the child's best interest.
- Guardians are responsible for all aspects of the child's care.
- No temporary option – rights are transferred from the parent to the Guardian.
- May involve fees, although fee waivers are available.
- May trigger child welfare involvement in some cases.

Parents may nominate a guardian, but court approval is required. Guardianship is more permanent and complex than a Caregiver's Authorization Affidavit and should be considered with legal advice.

Choosing the Right Option for Your Family

- **Caregiver's Authorization Affidavit:** Best for short- or medium-term caregiving without court involvement; preserves parental rights so a parent can reunify with their child in the future.
- **Probate Guardianship:** Best when long-term or permanent care is needed because a parent does not plan to reunify with their child; involves court oversight and custody transfer.

Legal Support

Families who **do not** have an open Juvenile Court case are strongly encouraged to consult an attorney to understand their rights and options.

- **Los Angeles County:** Parents or potential caregivers can contact Public Counsel at (213) 385-2977, Alliance for Children's Rights at (213) 368-6010, or Bet Tzedek at (323) 939-0506 for guardianship assistance. Public Counsel also assists families who plan to reunify with their children.
- **Other California counties:** Families can find local legal aid through the [State Bar of California](#).

Children and parents with an open Juvenile Court case are encouraged to consult their court-appointed attorney to understand their rights and options, including creating a plan for how to contact their attorney if they are detained, ensuring that they have ongoing visitation while detained, and preparing and implementing a reunification plan out of the country if that is their preference.

- **Los Angeles County:** Children can contact their court-appointed counsel at [Children's Law Center of California](#). Parents can contact their court-appointed counsel at [Los Angeles Dependency Lawyers](#) (LADL).
- **Other California counties:** Children and parents can contact their court-appointed counsel.

Planning ahead empowers families, supports caregivers, and helps children remain safe, stable, and connected —no matter what challenges arise.

Additional information on these options for families who do not have an open Juvenile Court case is available on the [Alliance for Children's Rights website](#) and the [Public Counsel website](#).