

**Henderson County Department of Social Services
FOSTER PARENT COURT REPORT**

*Youth(s) name:

Date placed in this foster home:

Information regarding youth(s) placement in your home:

Youth(s) progress made since placement in your home:

Specific behaviors of youth(s) which give you concern:

Your recommendation to the court regarding youth(s):

*NOTE: There is to be one Court Report per child or sibling group in your home. *Please print your comments.* This is an optional activity. You are encouraged, but not required, to complete this form. Incidents reported in this form should be as specific as possible, with dates and times included.

Signature of person completing this form: _____.

Date: _____

A Word on Court Report Forms

(excerpted from *The Henderson County Foster Parent Manual: Legal Information*, 2010)

Legal writing tips in general:

1. Know your audience: You are writing to the judge—a busy, impatient person who is accustomed to listening to concise recitations of legally significant facts and the arguments that can be logically drawn from them. A judge cherishes clarity and brevity, and focus on truly relevant things. A judge is wary of flattery, incompleteness, or anything that smacks of emotional manipulation.

2. Know your purposes and your goal in writing: When you write a report to the court in the context of a child abuse/neglect/dependency case, your purpose is to inform the court as to the following:

- A. Information regarding each child's placement in your home.
- B. Progress each child's has made since placement in your home.
- C. Specific behaviors of each child's which give you concern.
- D. Recommendation to the court regarding each child.

Your purpose in writing is **not** to justify why this child should never return home or stress why you should adopt this child. Your purpose in writing **is** to state the facts and express how the child is doing and lobby for resources that are not presently available to you. With your writing, you should demonstrate with examples of why you feel the child needs these resources. That is your goal.

3. Stay focused on your purpose in writing, and include only the information that is needed to achieve your purpose.

4. Be specific and concrete. Avoid words or phrases that have depleted meaning by overuse. The phrase "behavioral problems" has been used to describe everything from fidgeting to setting fires, and therefore it conveys very little. If little Bobby was suspended for cutting a classmate's pigtail off and calling the teacher a "bitch," then tell the court exactly that.. stay factual and focused, and don't pull any punches.

5. Don't waste time telling the court what it has already done. It is okay to paraphrase a prior court order. The focus should be on whether or not all parties involved have complied with the order, and not its actual language. If the judge needs to know the actual language of a prior order, s/he can look in the court file.

6. Listen to your writing. The best technique for improving the clarity of your writing is to read it aloud. Most of us have forgotten the specific rules of grammar. Our eyes gloss over problems as they move across the page, and make incomplete things whole.

- ▶ Spell-check does nothing but highlight those letter clusters it cannot recognize as words.
- ▶ Spell-check is not programmed to recognize terms of art in law, medicine or pharmacy.
- ▶ Spell-Check does not distinguish between homonyms.

Our ears, on the other hand, detect things that our eyes or computer can miss. You can hear flaws in a sentence's structure, like noun-verb agreement or shifts in tense, which you would probably never see. Also, by reading aloud, you hear the writer's voice as the reader will. You might be surprised that you sound a little snippy, or whiney, or pompous, or sarcastic when the words you have chosen are actually spoken. In reading aloud, you will also become aware of repetition—you may not see that you are using the same word over and over, but you will hear it. The final virtue of reading aloud is that it reveals sentences that are just plain too long. Any sentence that requires you to draw breath in the middle needs to be cut at least in half. A short simple sentence that fully expresses a single idea should always be your goal.

7. Context is everything.

A judge cannot be expected to remember each case's particulars, and will need some assistance in "getting up to speed". You need to help your judge by defining the procedural context of each case you report upon. You need to present your information in a manner that makes it easy for the judge to consider all of the factors that the statute requires the court to address at that moment in the life of that case.

8. Court reports are optional. If you choose to submit one please deliver it to child's social worker. You are encouraged to submit a new court report for every court date, especially if changes occurs in child's behavior.