

What's Happening in Dependency Court?

An Activity Book for Children Going to Court in Pennsylvania

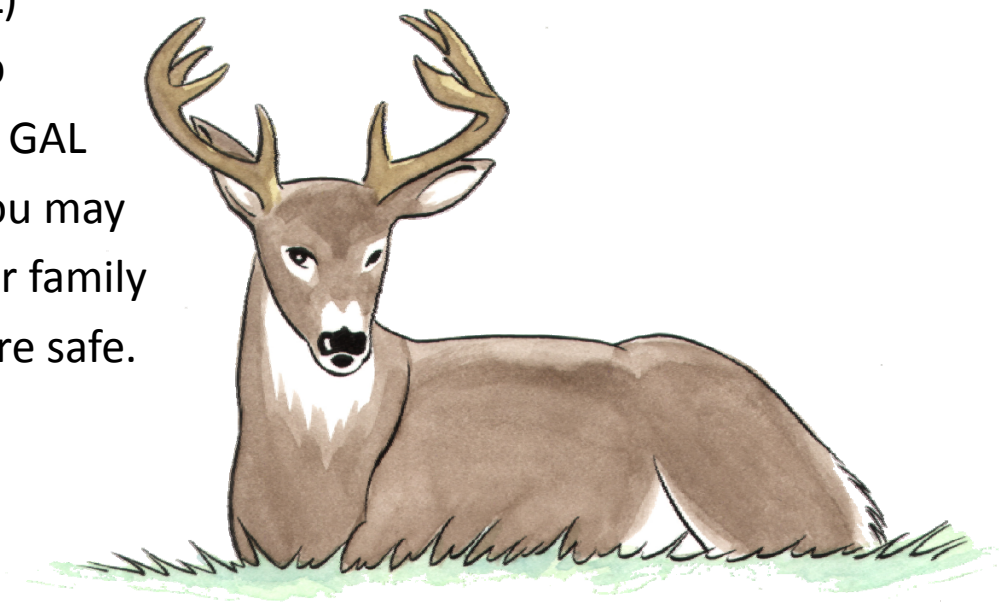


Why did I have to leave my home?

The main job of parents is to take care of their children. This is so important that there are laws to make sure that parents do this. This means they have to protect you from getting hurt, make sure you have food and clothes, take you to the doctor, make sure you go to school, and make sure your home is safe. If the judge decides that your mom or dad has not given you these things, has not been watching you or taking good care of you, you may have to go live somewhere else away from your home until the judge decides that your mom or dad can take care of you.

If you have to leave your home, there will be a lot of people by your side to help you. One is the judge who is a person who works very hard to figure out what is best for you and how to keep you safe. Another is your Guardian ad Litem (GAL) a special person who will meet with you and help the judge understand how to keep you safe. Your GAL is a good person to talk to about any problems you may be having. Your caseworker will help you and your family get the things you need and will make sure you are safe.

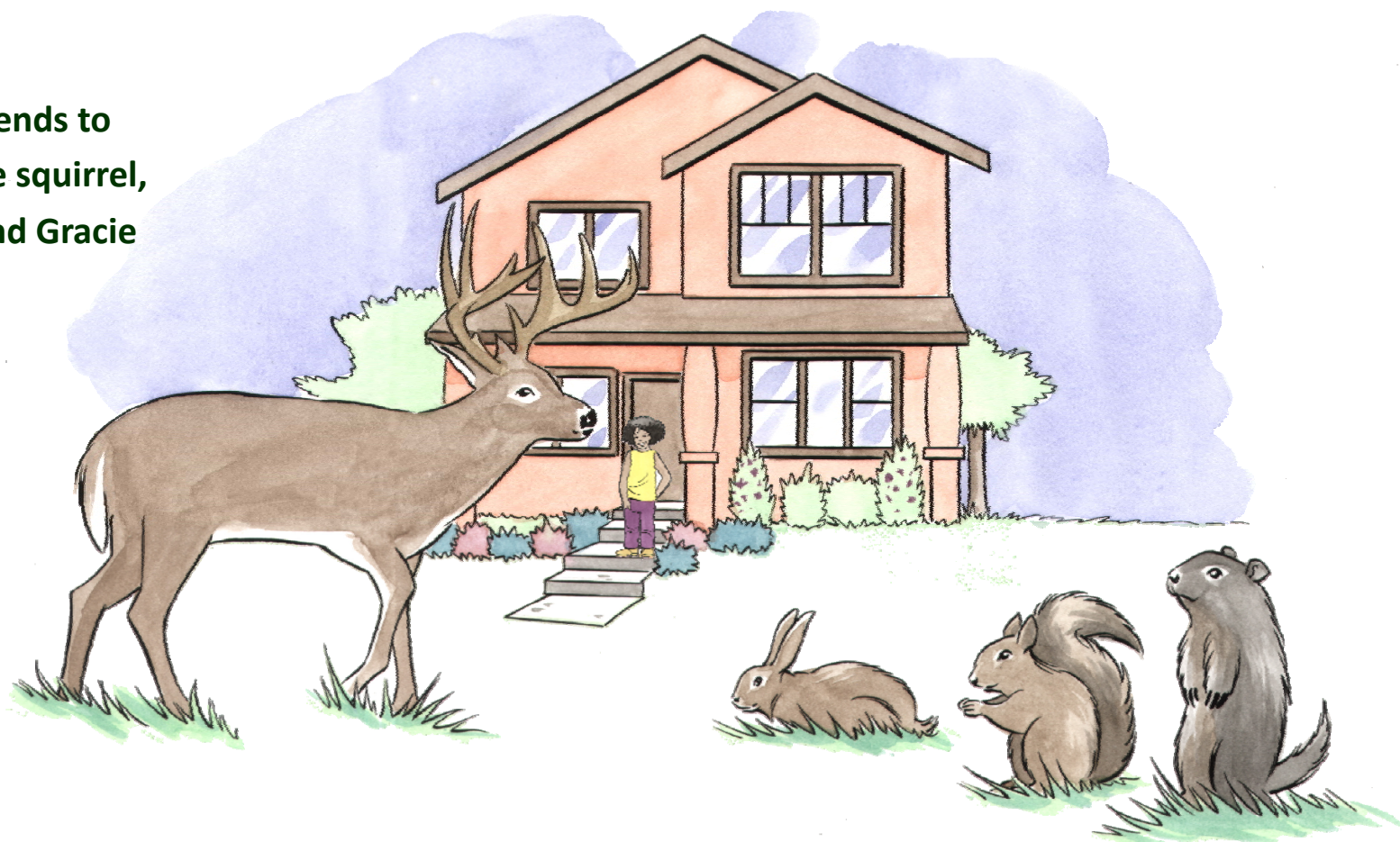
Dexter the White-Tailed Deer says: “Let me walk you through the steps!”



Where will I live now?

If a relative, such as your grandparent, aunt or uncle, or a family friend can take care of you, you might be able to live with them. If you know of a nice relative or other adult with whom you think you would like to stay, tell the people helping you. If there is no relative or family friend to take care of you, a nice, safe place will be found for you to stay. If you have any worries about where you are staying, call your caseworker or your GAL.

Dexter asked his friends to help. Meet Sally the squirrel, Benny the bunny and Gracie the groundhog.



Dexter and me

Color yourself and Dexter together!



Will I get to see my mom and dad?

Most of the time, you can see your mom or dad. Your judge or caseworker will let you know when, where, and how often you get to see them. These visits may be with just your mom or dad, but sometimes other people may be there too. As things get better, you may get to see them more often.



Will I get to see my brothers and sisters?

You should get to see and talk to your brothers and sisters, and most of the time you will be living in the same place with them. If you are not living with them, be sure to let someone know that seeing or talking with your brothers or sisters is important to you so they can tell the judge. If there is some reason why you cannot see your brothers and sisters, ask if you can talk to them another way, like on the phone or through email. The judge will think about your wishes and tell you when you get to visit and talk to your brothers or sisters.



Sally and Gracie say: "It's important to see each other."



Will I get to stay at my same school?

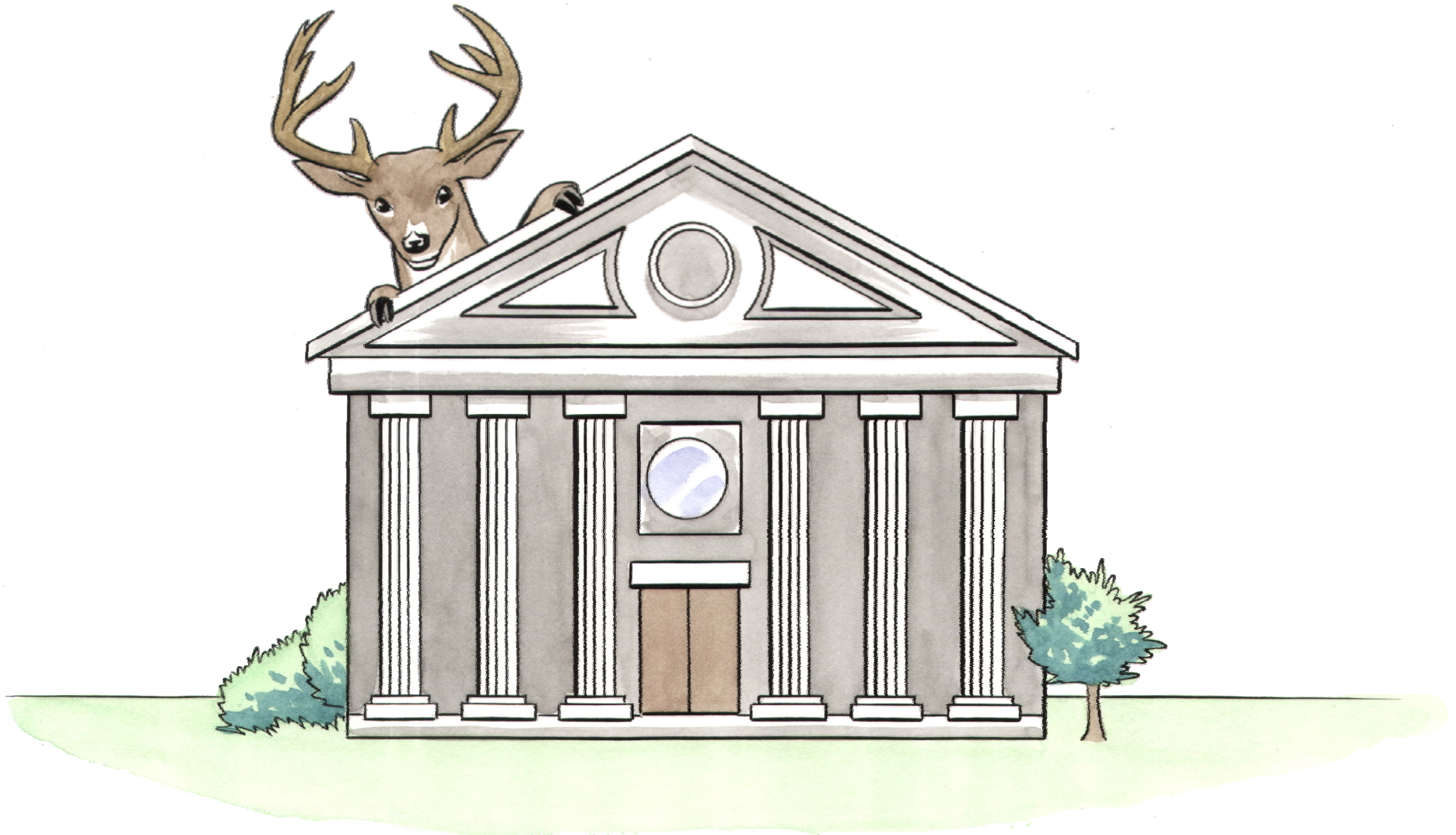
School is very important and everyone who is helping you knows how much it matters to you. Make sure to tell the people helping you if you want to stay in your same school. If you have any problems at school, be sure to tell the people helping you so they can get you what you need at school.



Dexter and his friends love going to school

Why do we keep going to court?

The judge wants to help you return home as soon as possible. If that is not possible, the judge wants to help you find a safe and happy place to live. The law requires the judge to hold court hearings so he or she can check on how everyone is doing.



I feel like...



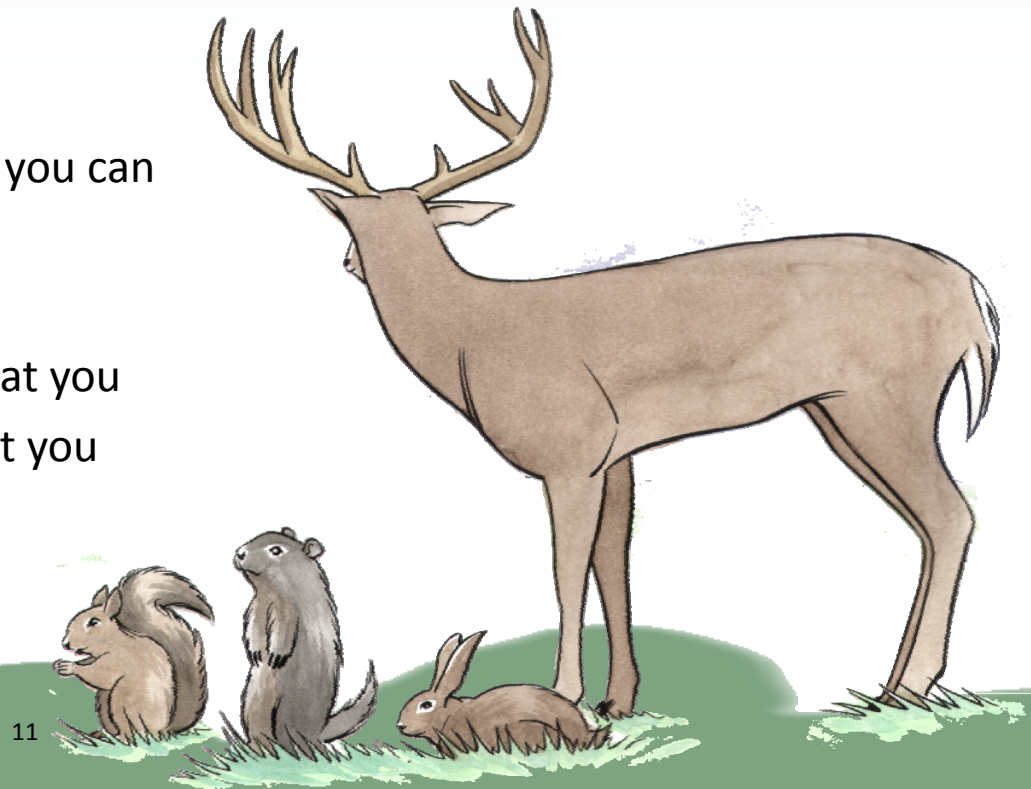
Can I go to court?

Yes! You will be told or sent a letter every time there is a court hearing. The judge will want to see you and make sure you are okay. You may want to tell the judge some things. Judges are good listeners.



What would I say to the judge?

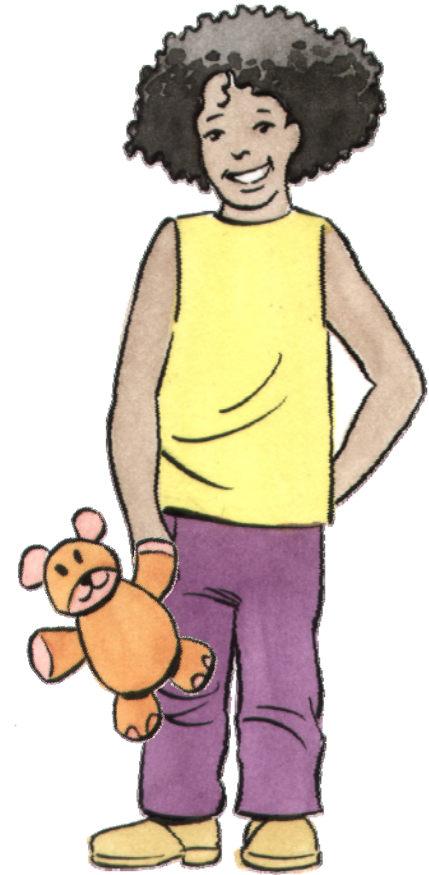
- If you want to talk to the judge, tell the people who are helping you. If you don't want to talk in court you can write a letter to the judge and the people helping you will give it to the judge or read it in court. You can tell your GAL what you want the judge to know and he or she will tell the judge.
- You know what you want. You can help the judge understand you and what you need. Going to court and talking to the judge is always a good thing for you to do. You can tell the judge about how you feel about going home and about where you are staying.
- If you are having a problem or are afraid, you can tell the judge about that too!
- Remember: You might not get exactly what you want, but the judge will think about what you have to say and do what is best for you.



Write down or draw a picture of what you want to tell the judge:

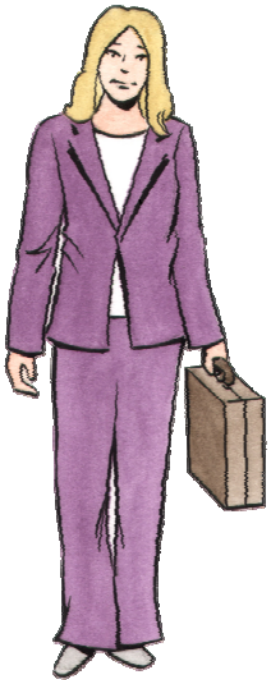
How should I act in court?

- It's ok to be nervous.
- It's ok to bring special things with you like a doll or teddy bear.
- There may be other people the judge needs to talk to before you. You may need to be patient and wait.
- You can read a book or draw a picture while you wait.
- When your hearing starts, call the judge "Your Honor" or "Judge." That is what people call the judge.
- If you don't understand something, say that you don't understand. It's the job of people in the courtroom to make sure you understand. Someone in the courtroom will help you understand.
- If you want to tell the judge something you can, judges want to hear what you think.
- If you need something, tell the judge, judges want to hear about things that you need.
- If you have any questions, ask them, people in the court are there to help you.

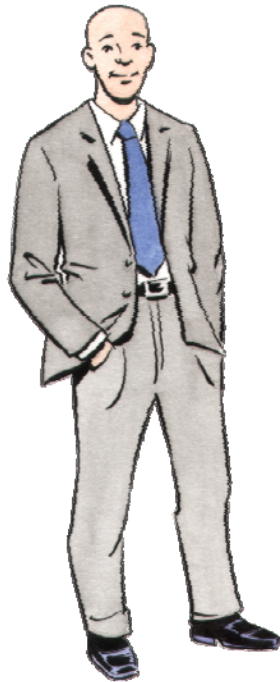


Who else will be in the courtroom?

There may be a lot of people in the courtroom during your hearing. You will probably see the judge, attorneys, your GAL, your caseworker, and your mom or dad. A clerk will also be in the courtroom to keep track of what's going on and help the judge with the paperwork. A sheriff might be there to keep the courtroom safe for everyone—he or she will usually be wearing a uniform that looks like a police officer.



Attorney



Attorney



Guardian ad Litem

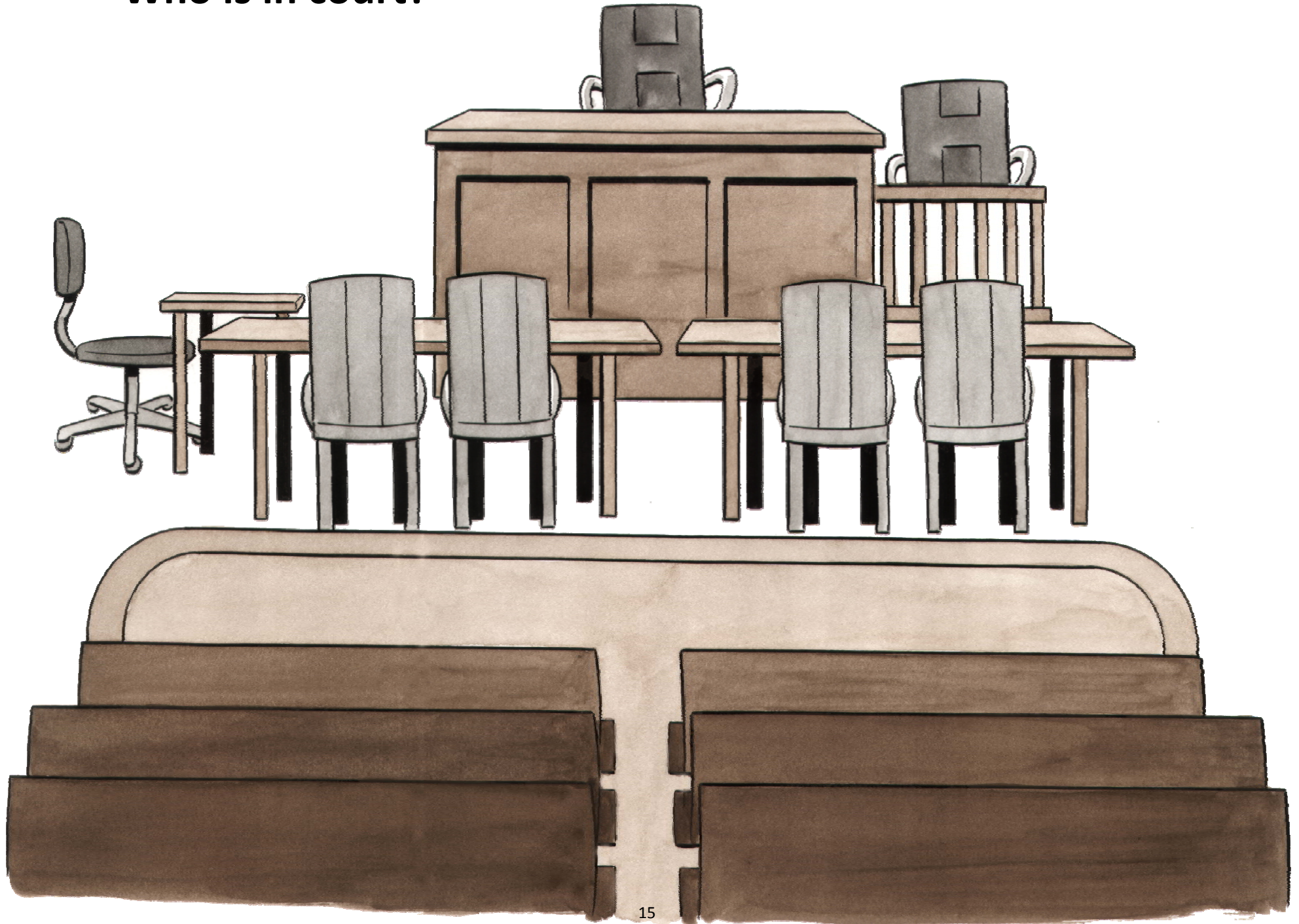


Caseworker



Sheriff

Who is in court?



When will I know what is going to happen to me?

The judge has to give your mom or dad time to do some things before you can go home. The judge needs your mom or dad and the people who are helping you to attend court from time to time. It is called a hearing when all those people get together and talk to the judge. In the hearing, the judge listens to everyone to learn how things are going with you and with your mom or dad.

The judge has to decide what should happen and if or when you should go home. Usually the judge will tell everyone in the courtroom what will happen next at the end of the hearing. If you don't understand what the judge decides, there are lots of people who can help you understand.



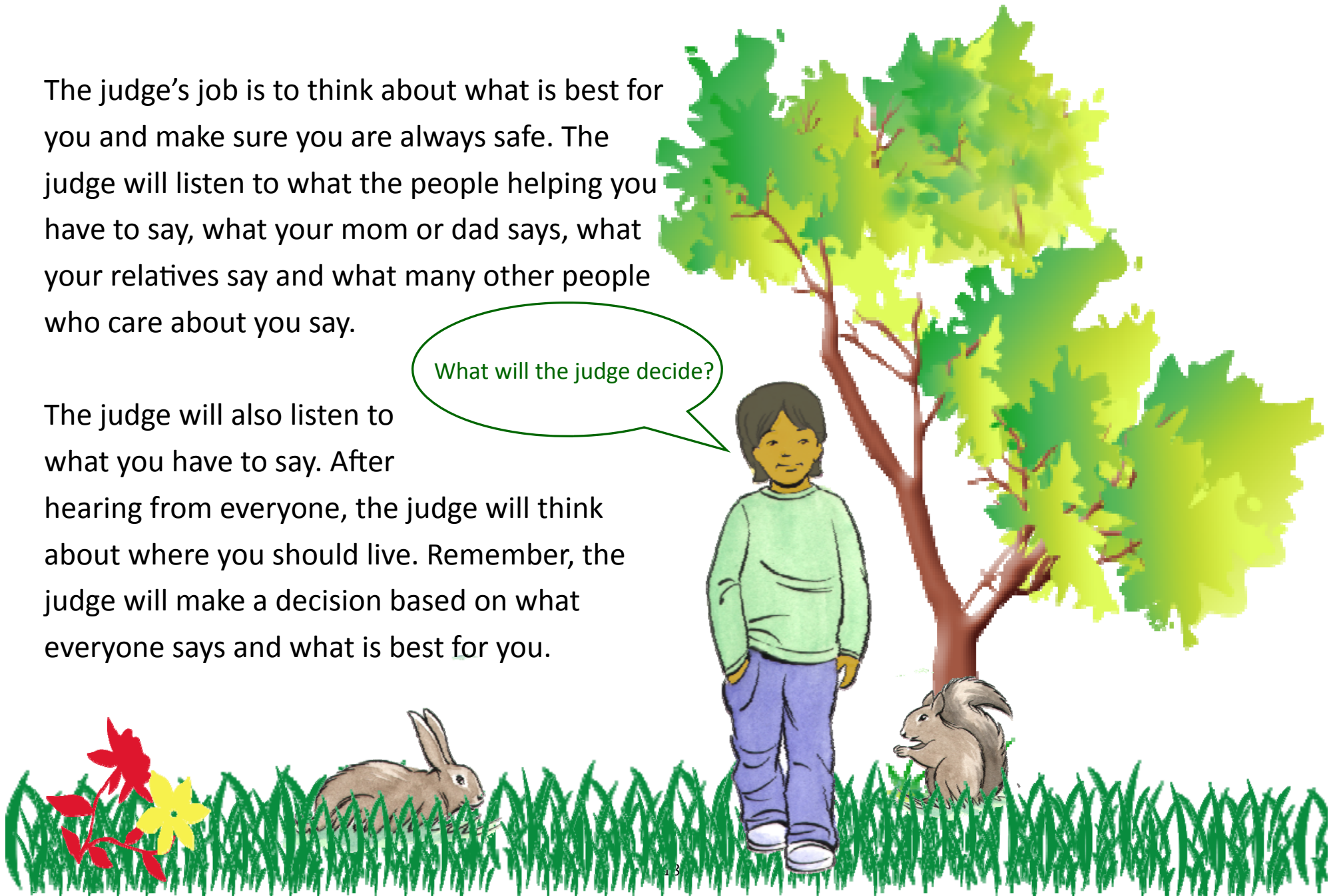
Who is important to you and who do you like to spend time with?

How does the judge decide if I should go home?

The judge's job is to think about what is best for you and make sure you are always safe. The judge will listen to what the people helping you have to say, what your mom or dad says, what your relatives say and what many other people who care about you say.

What will the judge decide?

The judge will also listen to what you have to say. After hearing from everyone, the judge will think about where you should live. Remember, the judge will make a decision based on what everyone says and what is best for you.





About this Book

What's Happening In Dependency Court?



This book is intended for children who are in court for their dependency hearings. It aims to introduce children to the dependency court process, the people who work in the judicial system, and the vocabulary that surrounds judicial proceedings. It is meant to be used as a teaching tool that may foster conversations between children and adults about the dependency court system and as an activity book that gives children who are in court something to do while they wait. This book is not intended to give or substitute for legal advice.

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The Office of Children & Families in the Courts is pleased to have created this publication, which was made possible through federal funding from the Dependency Court Improvement Program. Special thanks to the Florida Office of Court Improvement for permission to use their storybook *"What's Happening in Dependency Court"* as a model for this book.