

# IT'S NOT JUST YOU



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You might have a lot going on right now. And it might be pretty confusing.

This book has some stuff to help you understand what's going on. There's information about:

- things that could happen next
- people you might see or talk to
- ways to figure out what you're feeling and how to feel better

This graphic novel has stories about Nishan and Lila—teens who've been through some things. Some of their experiences will be different than what you go through, but some might help.

There are lots of ways to ask for help and support.

You can keep this. Write in it, read it, whatever. Hopefully it helps.

No matter what, you should know you're not alone.

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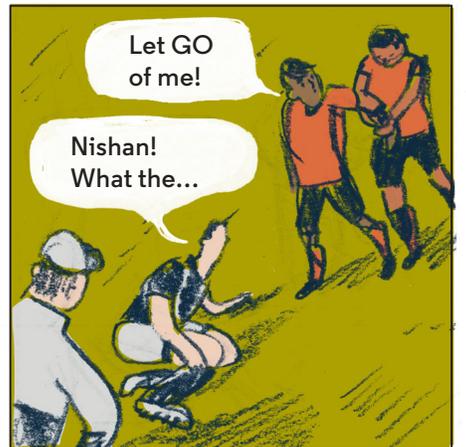
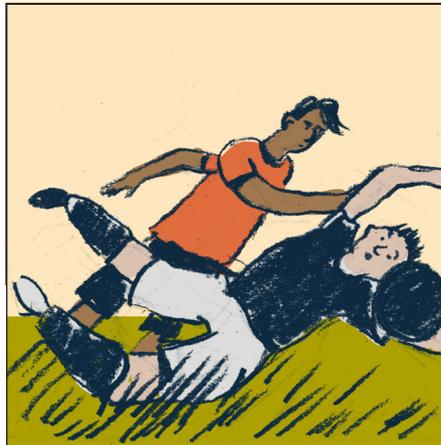
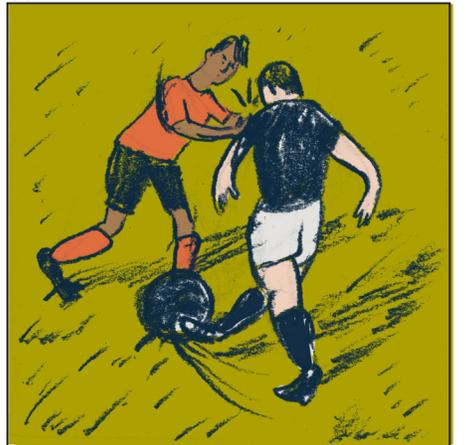
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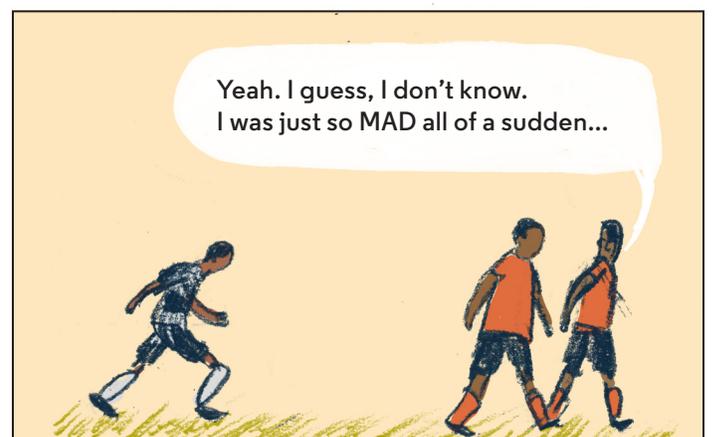
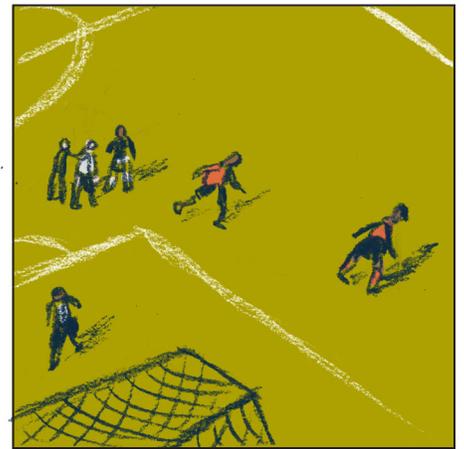
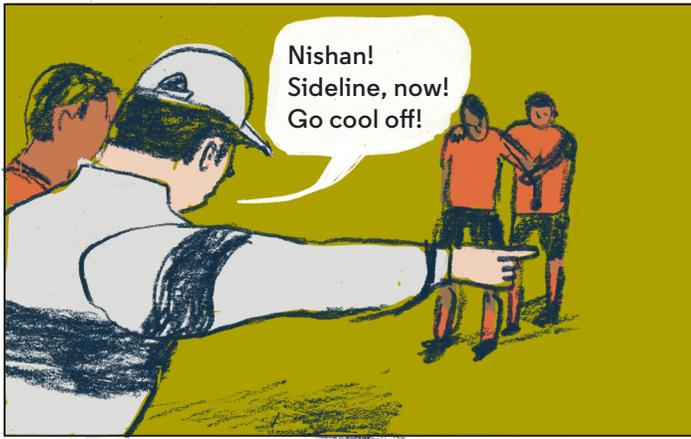


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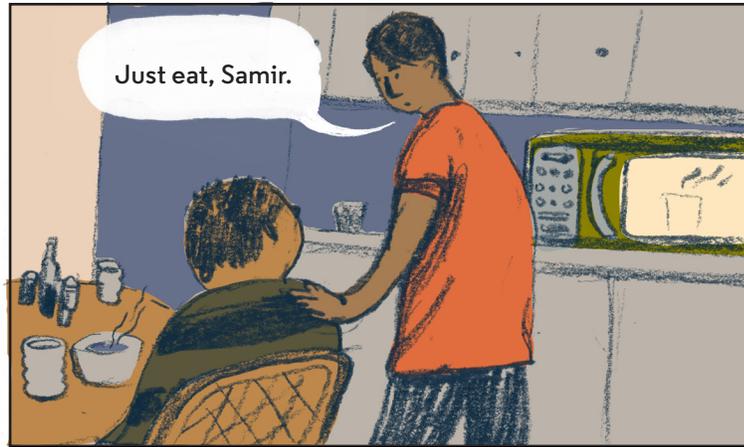
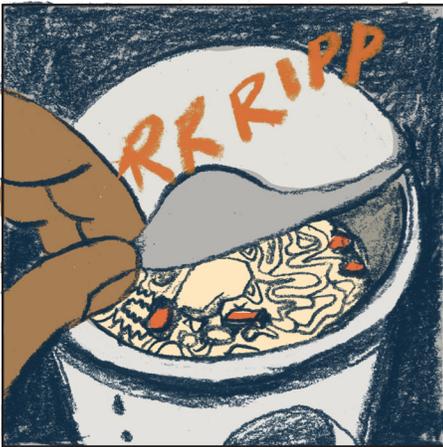


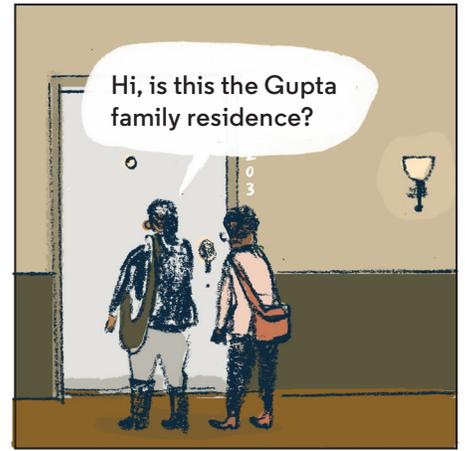
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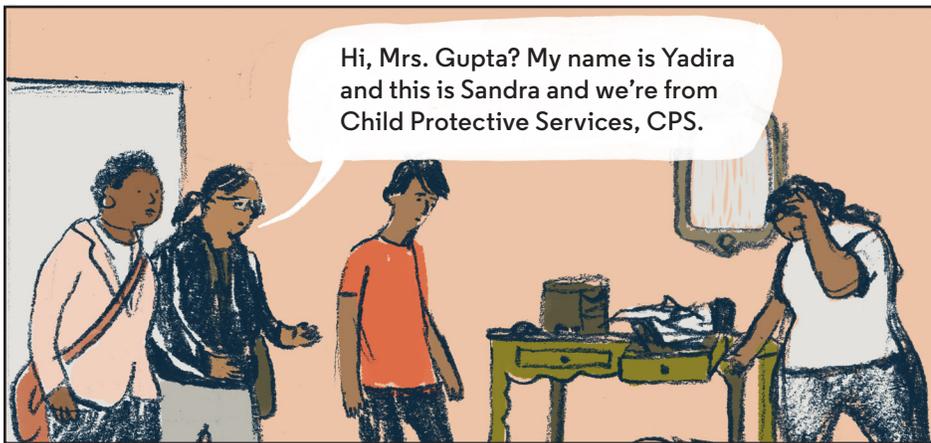


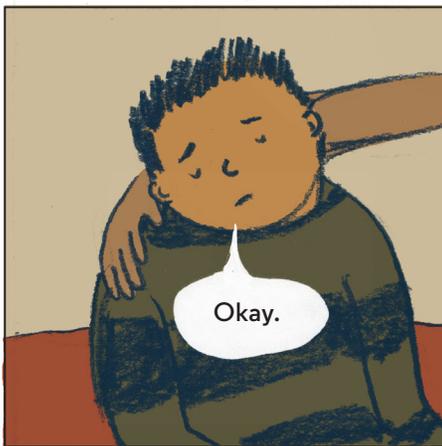
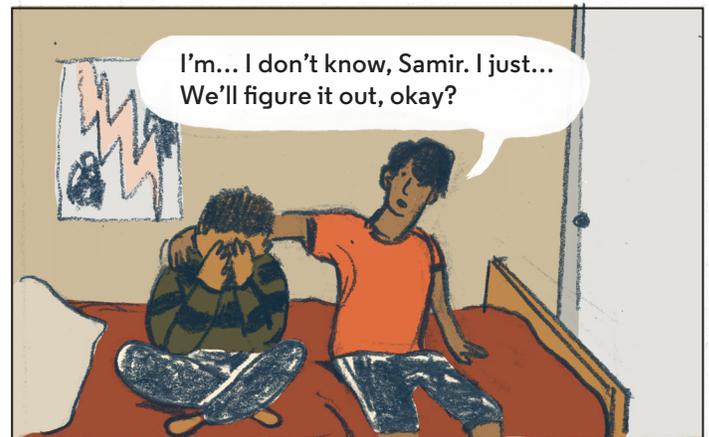
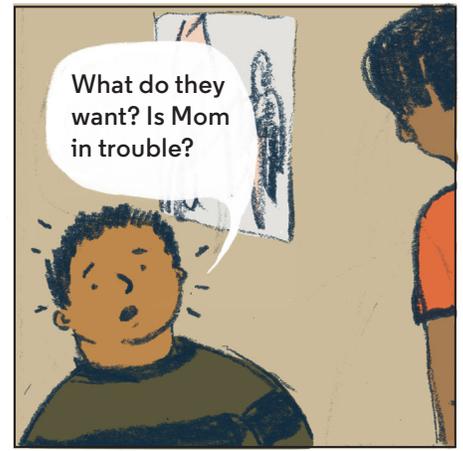


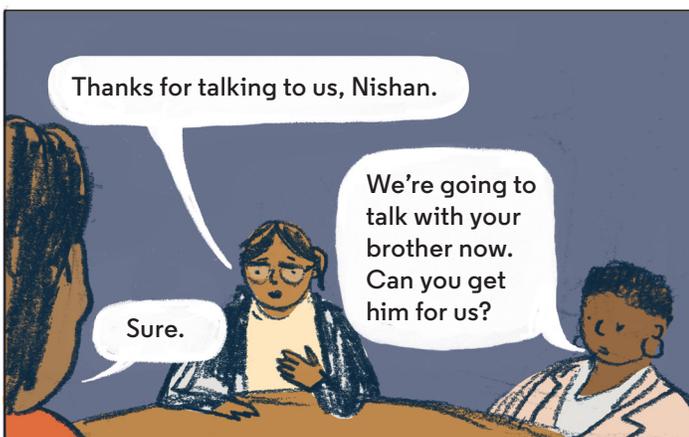


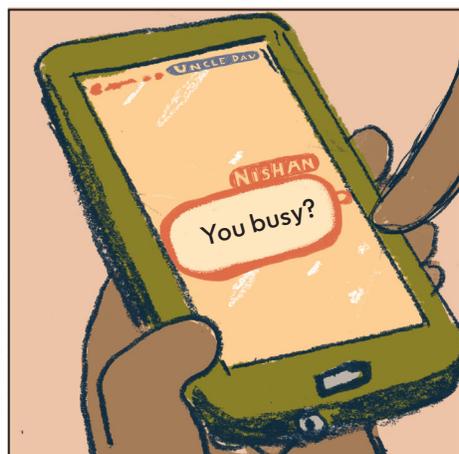
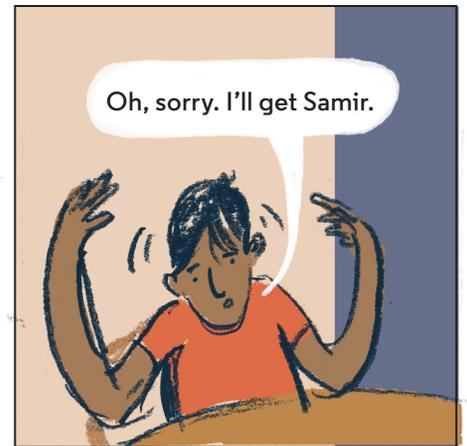
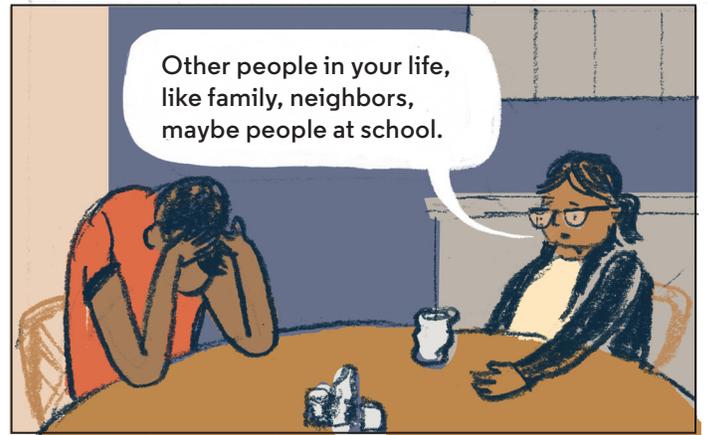


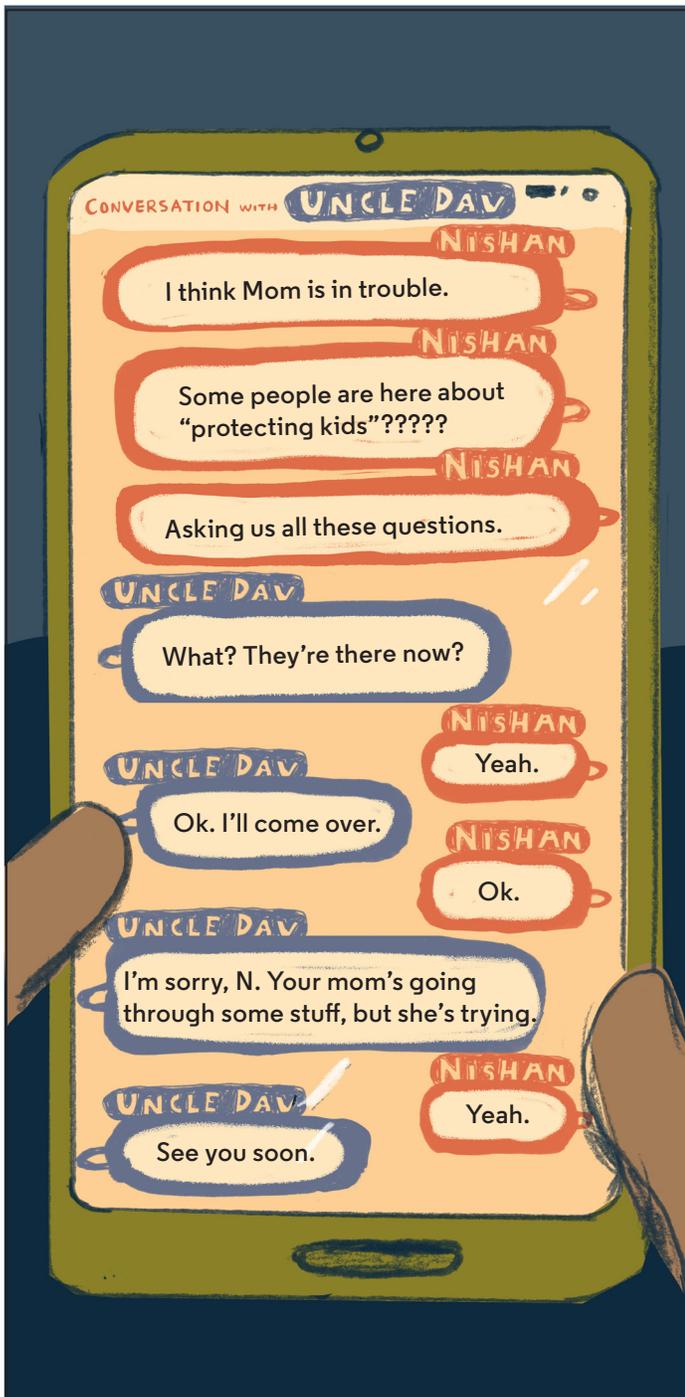














# WHAT'S GOING ON?

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Caseworkers came to Nishan's house to find out if he and his brother were safe. Most communities have an office whose job it is to keep kids safe and make sure their needs are met.

If someone tells them a kid is in danger, it's their job to figure out what's going on, which might be called an investigation. They do that by talking to the family and other people who are close to the family.

At the end of the investigation, if the caseworkers think the kid is safe, they will close the case. If the caseworkers think the family needs more help, they will meet with them to figure out what kind of help they need.

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**Have you been in a similar situation to Nishan? If yes, how did you feel? If no, how do you think you would feel?**

**Nishan reached out to his uncle for support. Who do you reach out to when you need support?**

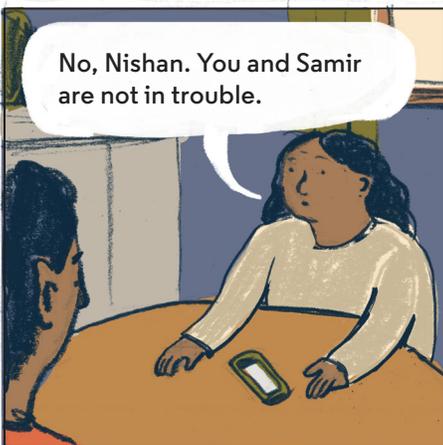


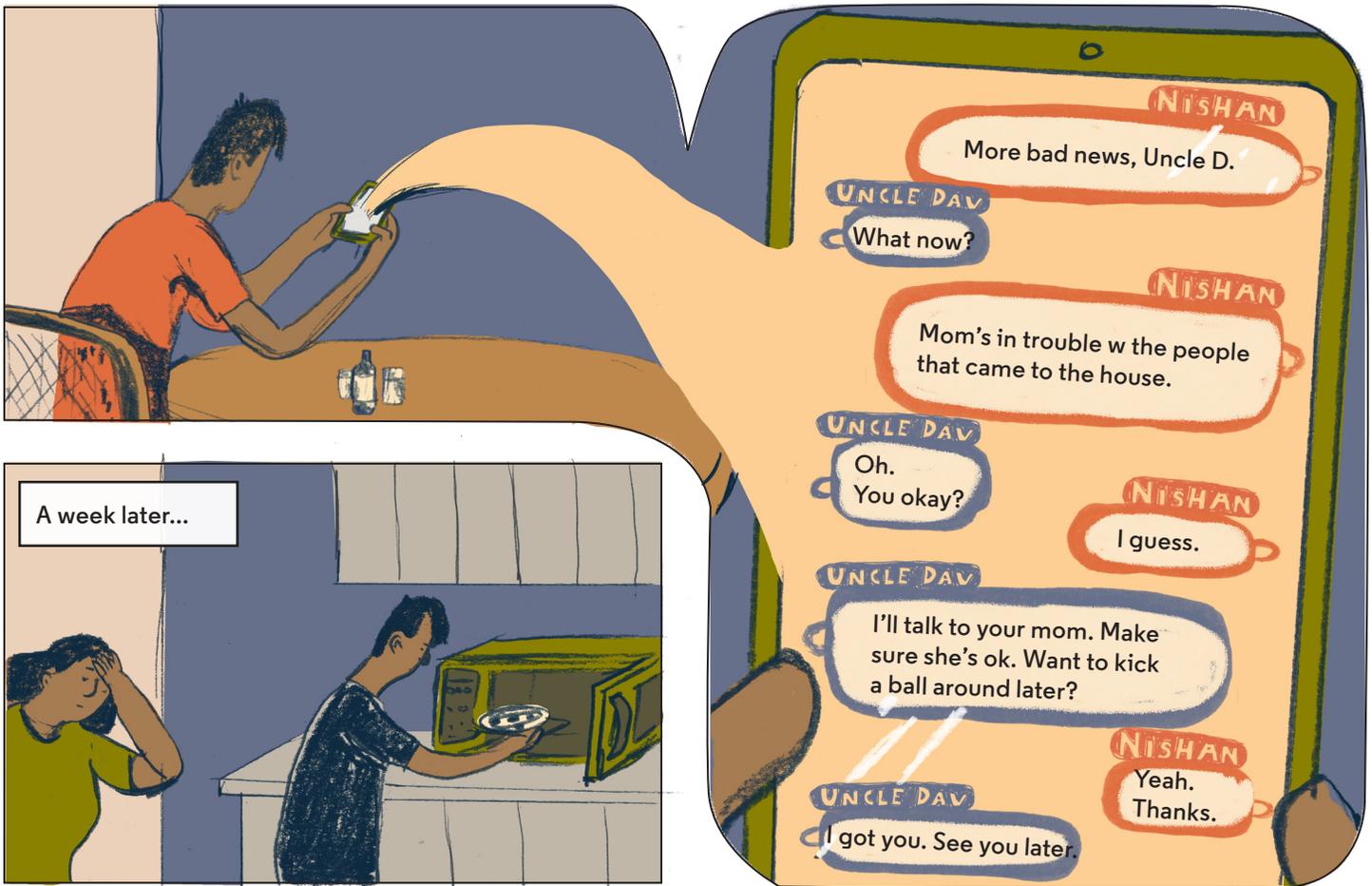
## **PART 2**

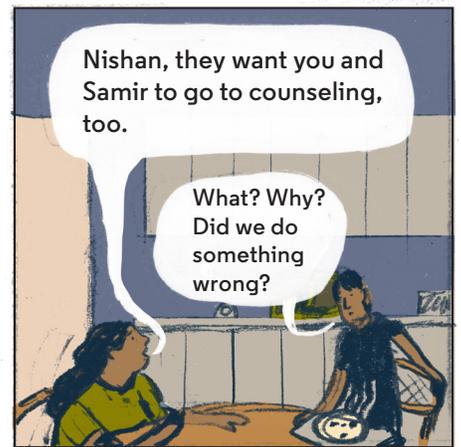
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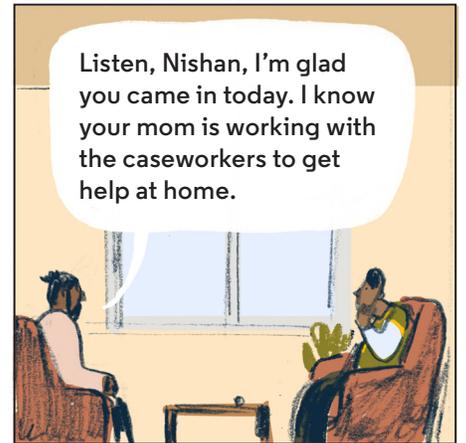
**Nishan Figures Out What's Next...**

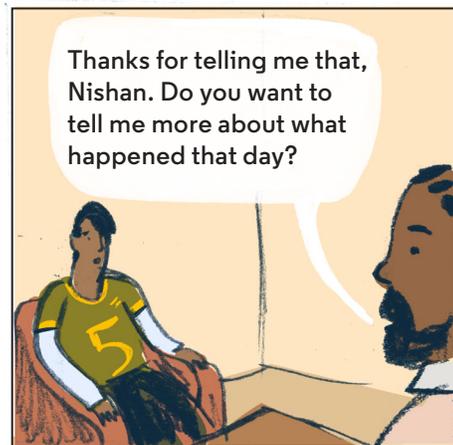
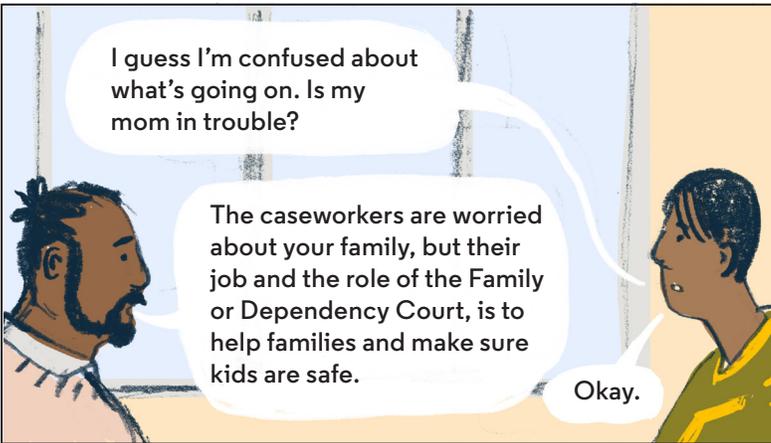
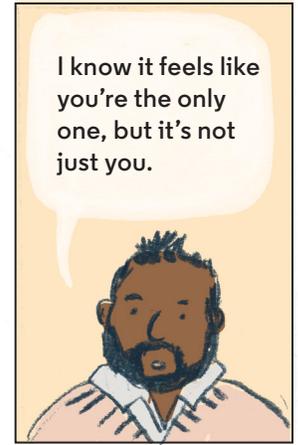


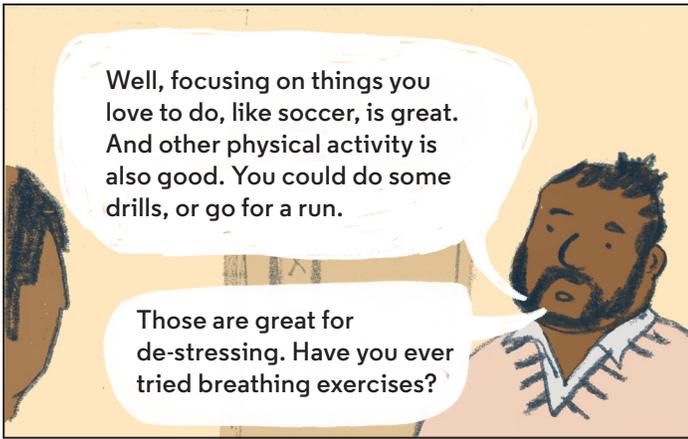












# TAKE A BREATH

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It may seem obvious, but taking deep breaths can help you feel calmer. You can do this anywhere. Try it the next time you're feeling stressed or overwhelmed.

Slowly take a big breath in, counting 1 - 2 - 3 as you fill your stomach with air.



Then hold your breath while you count 1 - 2.

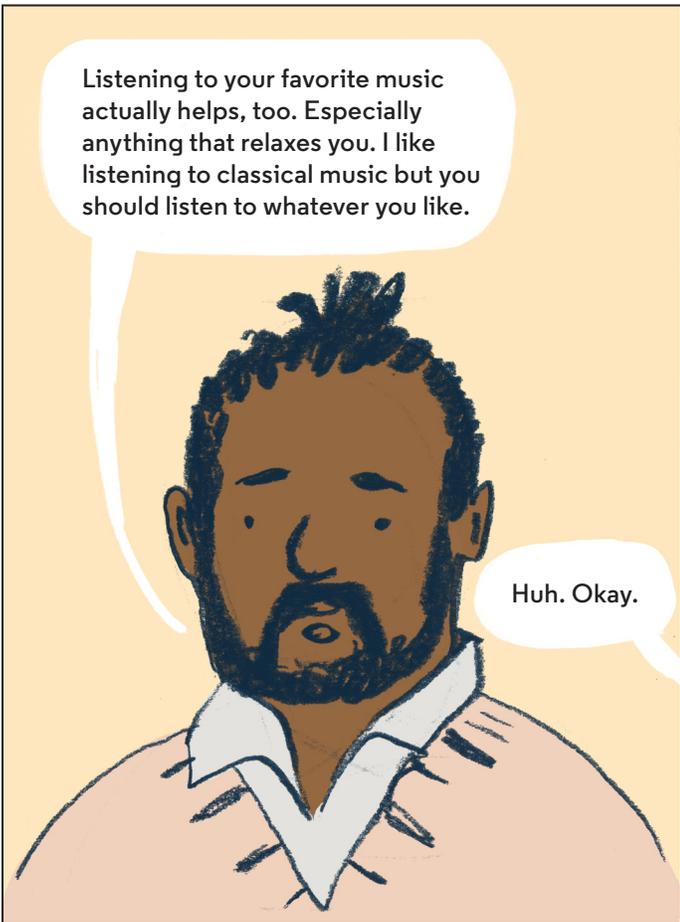


Then breathe out slowly and let out all the air, feeling your stomach empty out.

Repeat this three times.



If it helps, you can try closing your eyes while you breathe, or put your hand on your stomach to feel the breaths go in and out.



# WHAT'S GOING ON?

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In Nishan's story, the caseworkers started meeting with his mother. They offered her different kinds of "services" or help, and offered Nishan and Samir counseling.

Caseworkers will meet with a family to figure out what kind of help they need. That can mean taking classes, getting counseling to help manage feelings or stress, help with things at home, or other things.

The caseworkers will keep meeting with the family during this time to check in on how they're doing.

If they think the services helped and the home is safe, the case will be done. If the services are not helping or they think the home is still unsafe, the family may have to go to Family or Dependency Court to come up with a plan.

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**Nishan learned some new things to do when he felt stressed or overwhelmed. What do you usually do to help yourself feel better when you feel stressed?**

**James encouraged Nishan to focus on things he loves doing. What do you enjoy doing that makes you feel happy and strong?**



# **PART 3**



## **Lila Moves**



Let me help you, Lila. I brought an extra suitcase if you need it.



No, I'm okay, Grandma. I know how to pack, it's not like this is the first time I've had to move.

I'm sorry.. I know you don't want to leave your home. It's not easy.



Yeah....I just thought this was over.

I'm just glad the caseworkers said I could stay with you this time. That time in foster care...



Hey now, that's not happening this time. Let's not even think about that.



It's just that when the cops came to take him away...

Oh, Lila. Your daddy needs help.



He's going to have to take those parenting and anger management classes, and go to that rehab program, so hopefully you can come back when he's better.

I don't know, Grandma.

I'm not sure I even want to be here with him. It's so stressful. He scares me when he gets like that. He gets so mad at me...



# WHAT'S GOING ON?

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Lila had to leave her home and stay with her grandmother during her case.

If the caseworkers think a kid is not safe, then the kid has to stay somewhere else until it's safe to be at home again. This might be called a "removal."

Lila got to stay with her grandma. Other kids might stay with a family member, a friend of the family, or in foster care with another family, depending on their situation.

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**How would you feel if you were in Lila's place?**

**What do you think would be helpful for Lila? What would be helpful for you?**

# **PART 4**

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## **Lila Talks It Out**





I didn't really say anything to them because I know how they get...

I just went to my room.

But then they started yelling and fighting and it got out of hand.



Did you see anything?

No, I stayed in my room. I was scared, though. I thought they might... I just locked my door.



Then the police came...



I'm sorry you went through that. How are you feeling about it now?

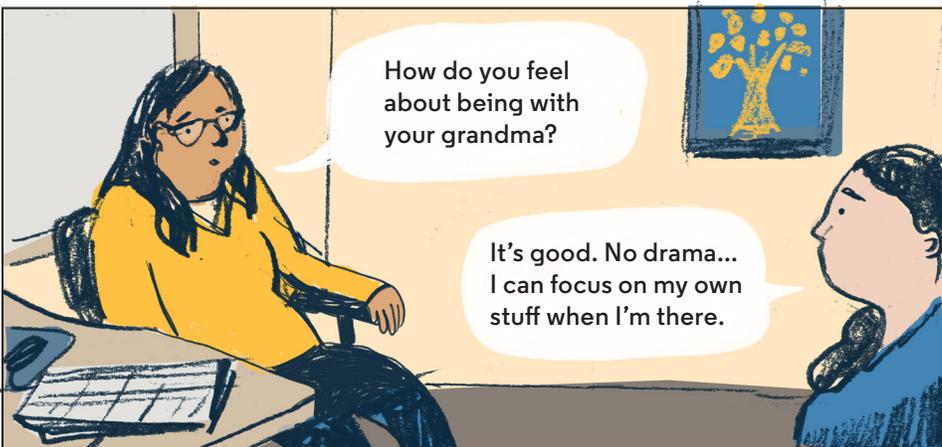
And then the caseworkers...



I don't know. Last time I felt like I was the one that set him off, you know? Like I started it. But this time...



I guess I'm mad that he did that. He's always saying that he doesn't want the caseworkers coming around anymore but then he can't get it together.



# MUSCLE SQUEEZE

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When people are stressed, their muscles can get really tight.



Try curling up and squeezing your toes, and holding for two counts. Then relax and shake them out.



Then, squeeze your feet for two counts. And relax. Then your legs. Your stomach. Your shoulders, arms, hands, and face.



Then squeeze your whole body at once for two counts. Then relax.



# WRITING OR DRAWING IT OUT

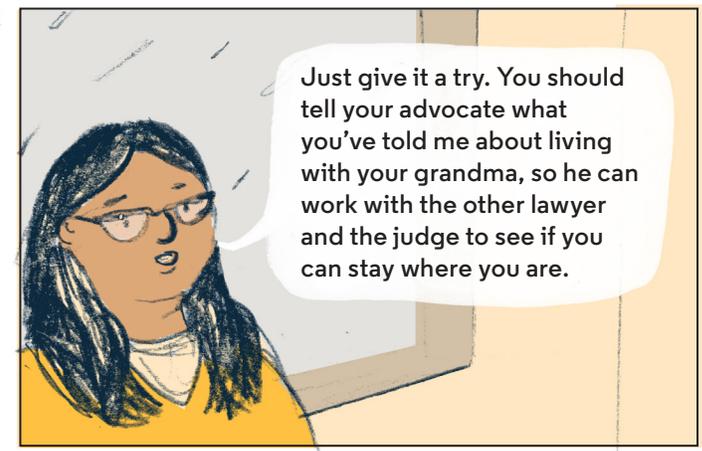
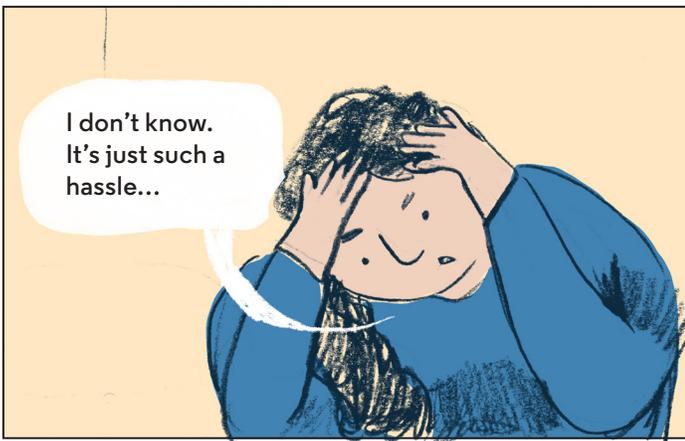
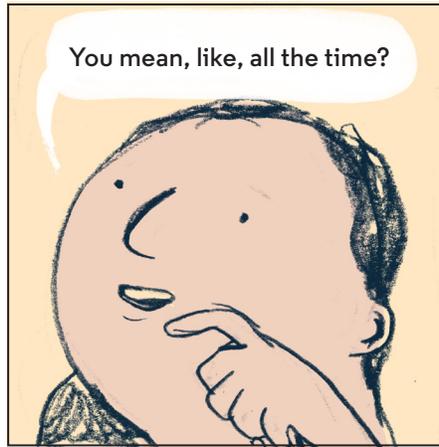
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Writing or drawing can be a way to process your thoughts and feelings and get them out so you can feel calmer.

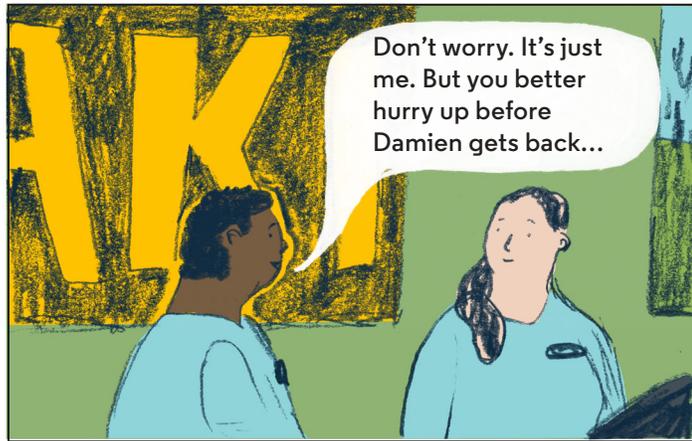
If there are things that are too hard to say out loud or there are too many things going through your mind, try writing them down, or just letting yourself draw what comes to mind. Set a timer for five or ten minutes, and just write or draw.

If you keep a journal, you can write or draw there. Or you can even write it as a letter. You don't have to share the letter with anyone. Just getting it all out can help you figure out how you feel.

Or you can write or draw in this space, if you want to.







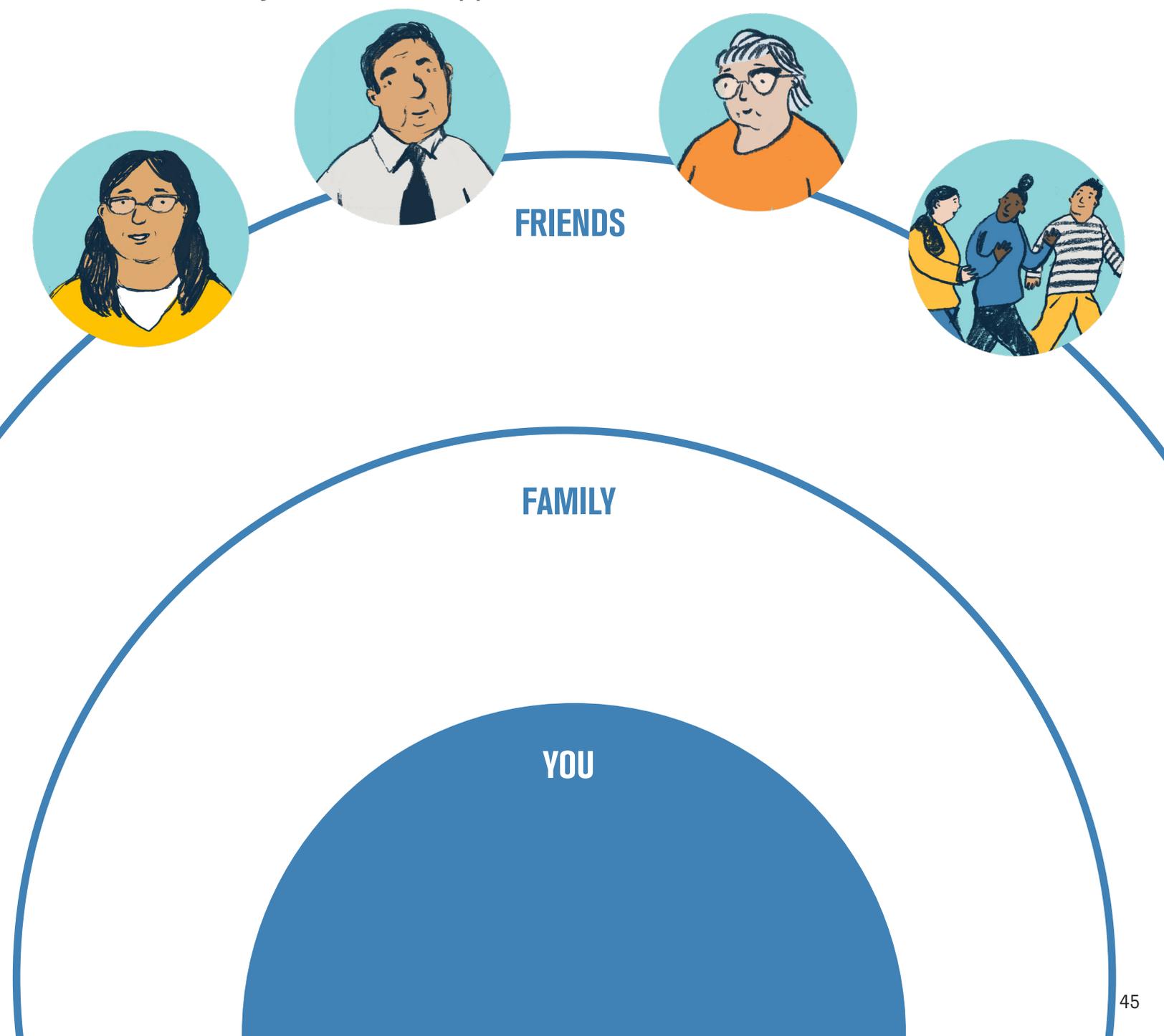
# SUPPORT CIRCLE

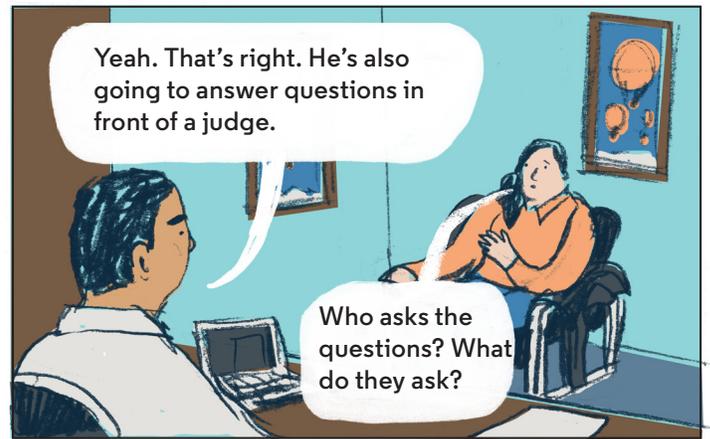
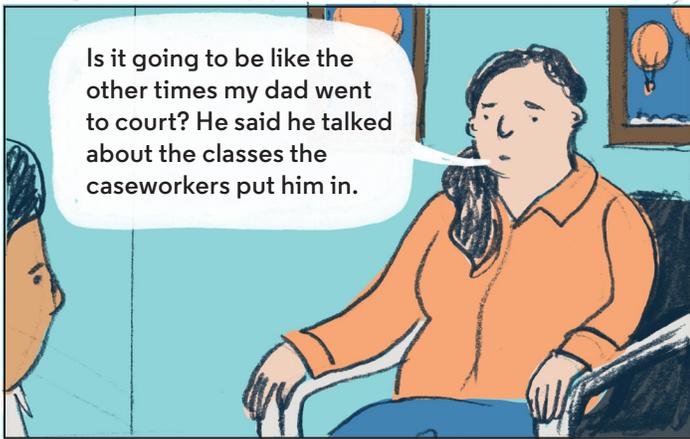
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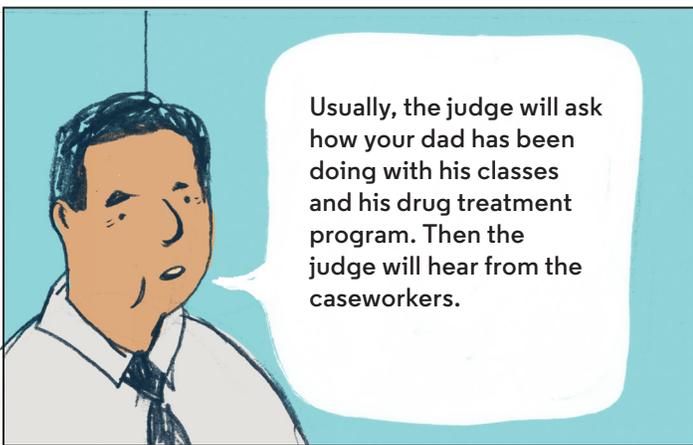
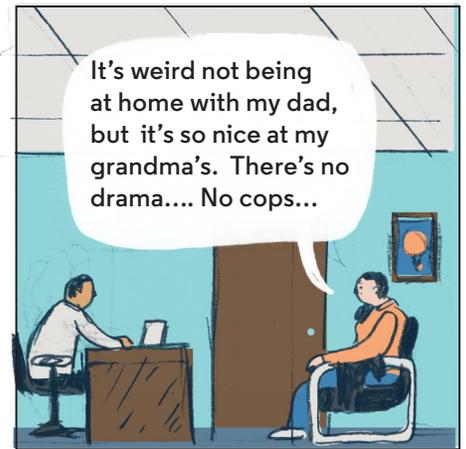
Lila had a lot of people in her life to support her. Her grandmother; her therapist, Ms. Lopez; her advocate, George; and even her co-worker all helped her in different ways.

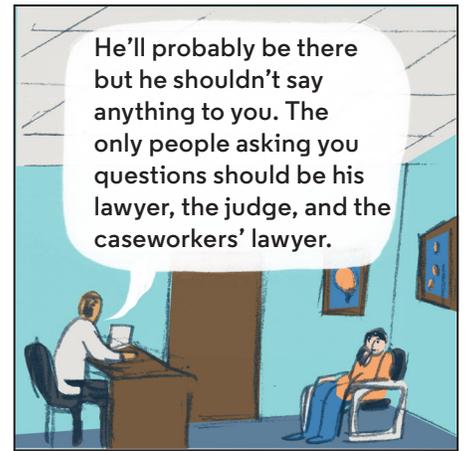
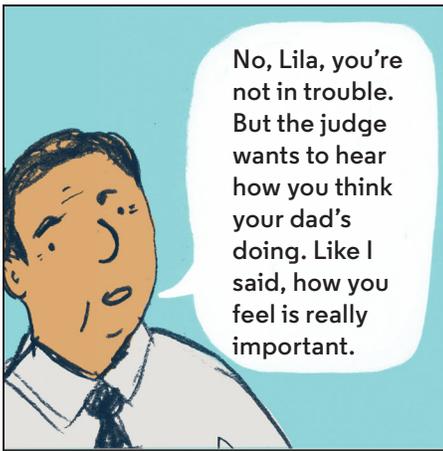
It can be helpful to remind yourself of the people in your life who you can ask for help.

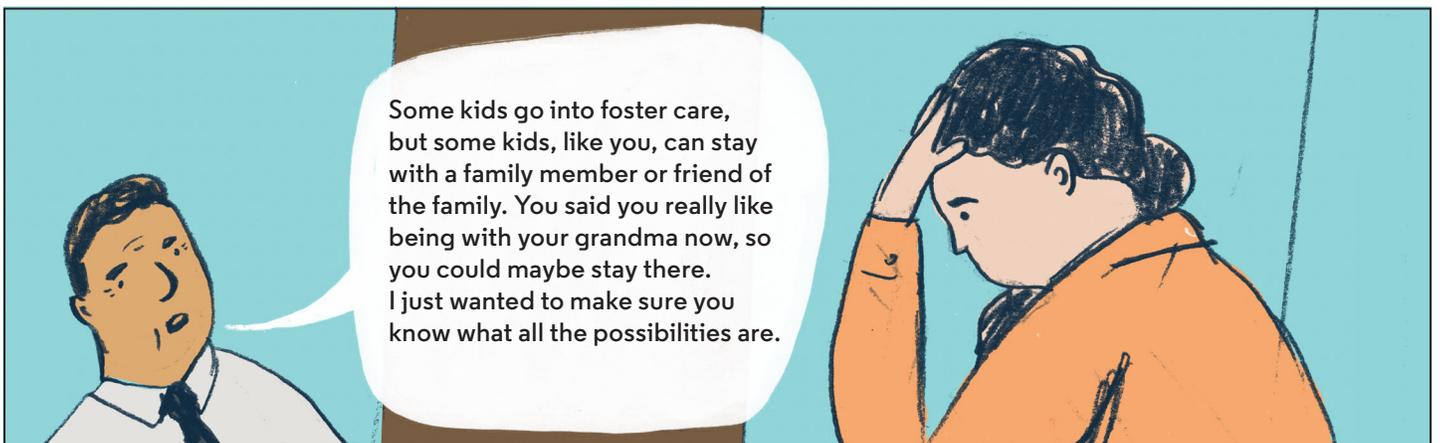
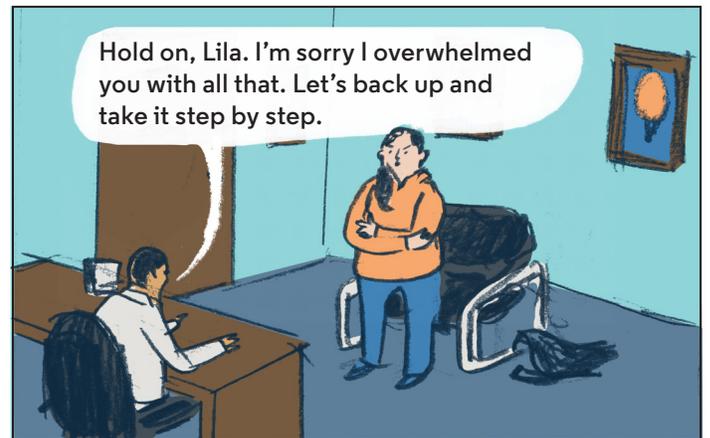
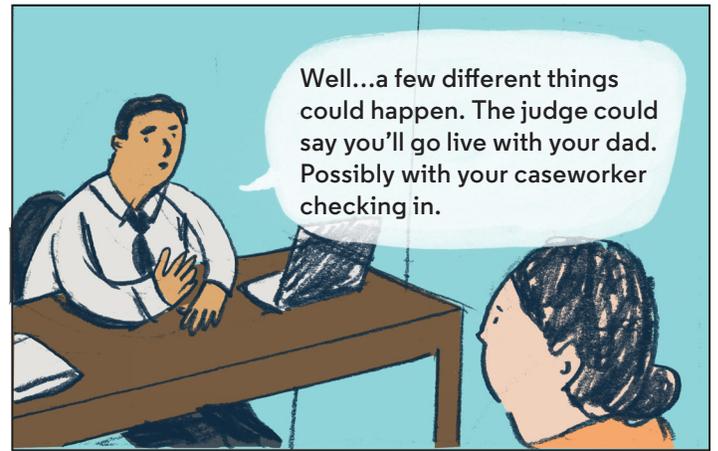
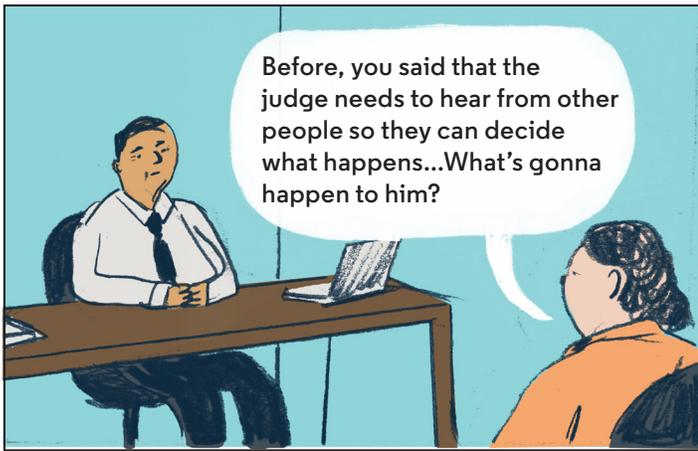
Who is in your circle of support?

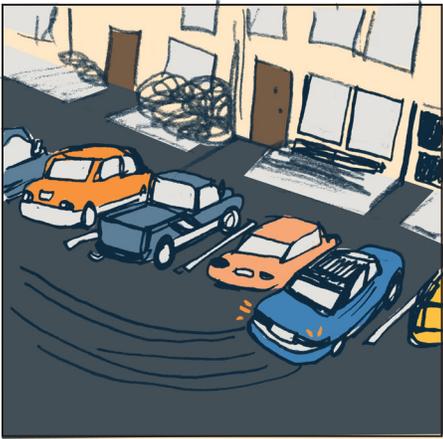
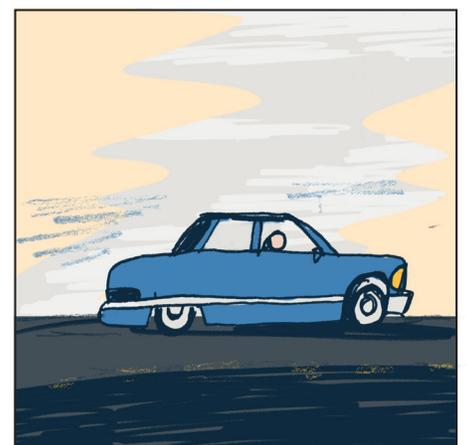




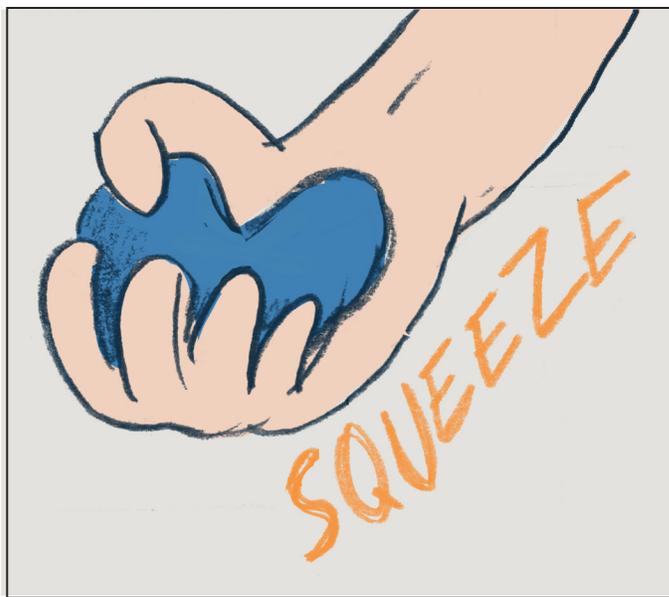
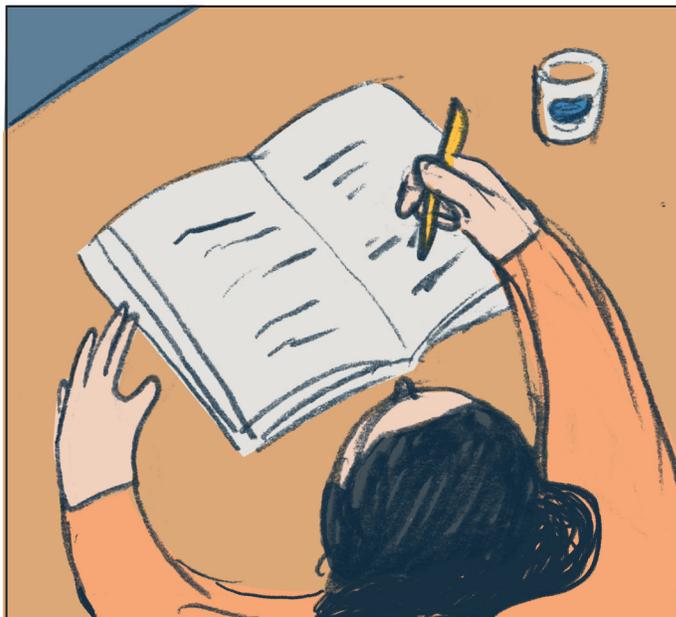








The next few weeks were pretty normal...



And then it was time to get ready for court...



Hi, Lila! Oh and you must be Grandma. It's great to meet you.

It's nice to meet you as well.



Today we're going to run through what testifying will be like.



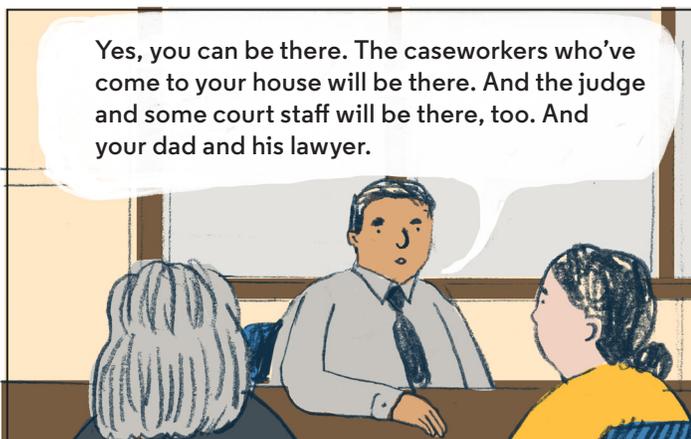
First off, I want you to remember that you won't be alone. I'll be there with you.



Who else will be in the room with her? Can I be there?



Yes, you can be there. The caseworkers who've come to your house will be there. And the judge and some court staff will be there, too. And your dad and his lawyer.



Actually, we can go look at the courtroom now if you want.

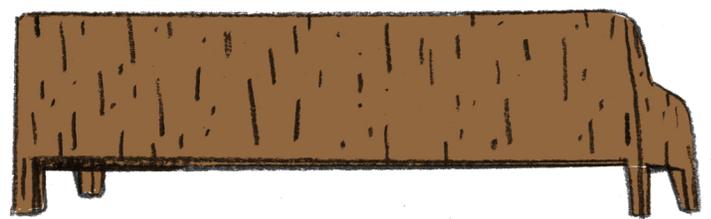
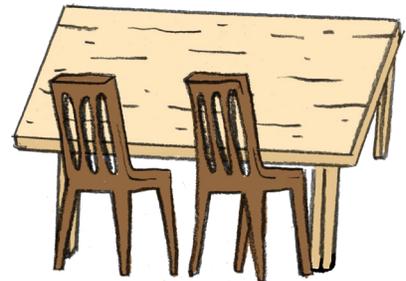
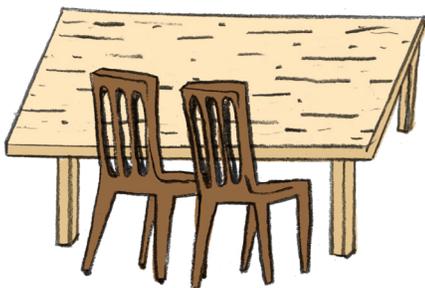
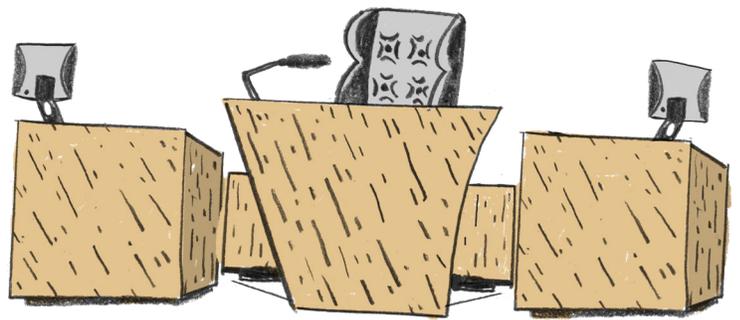


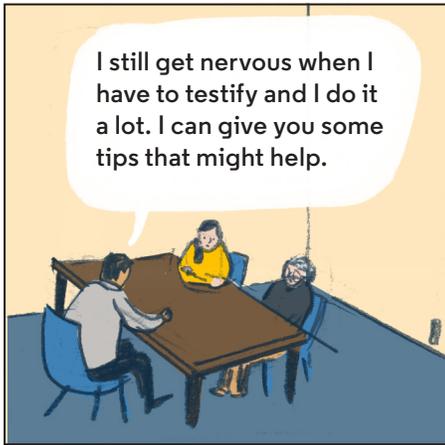
# PICTURING COURT

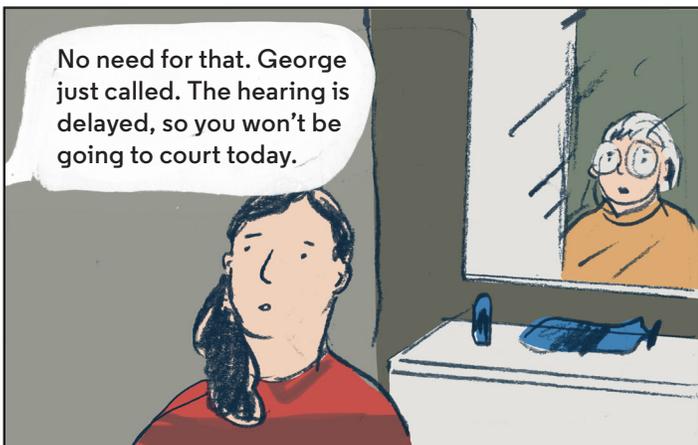
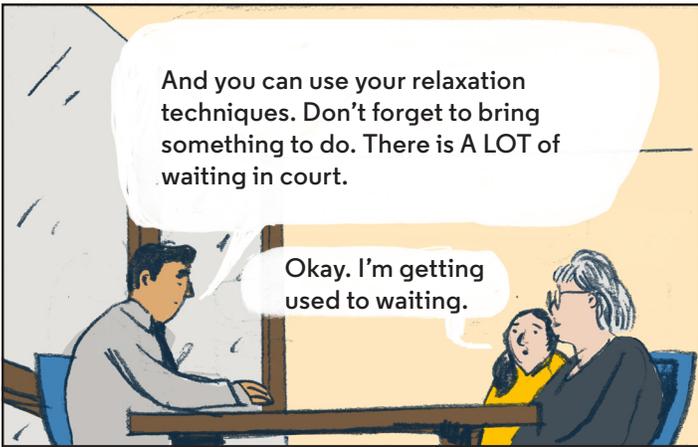
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George took Lila and her grandmother to see the courtroom, and told her who all the people in the room would be and where they would sit.

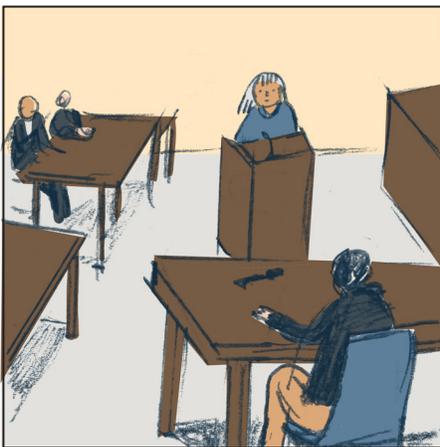
Your courtroom might look different than Lila's. You can ask someone working on your case to use the drawing below to show you who will be where if you have to go to court.





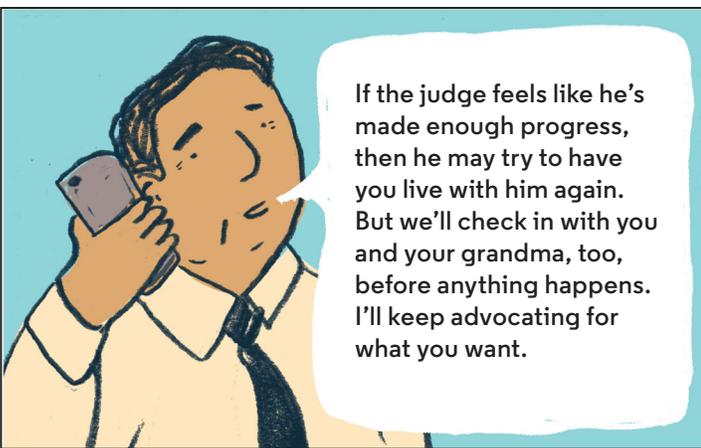
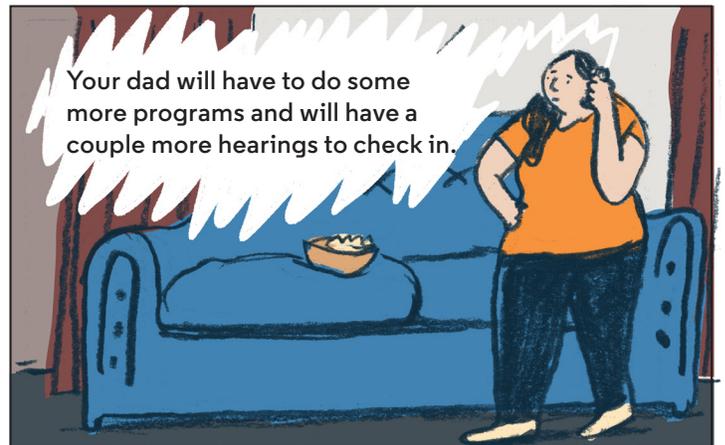
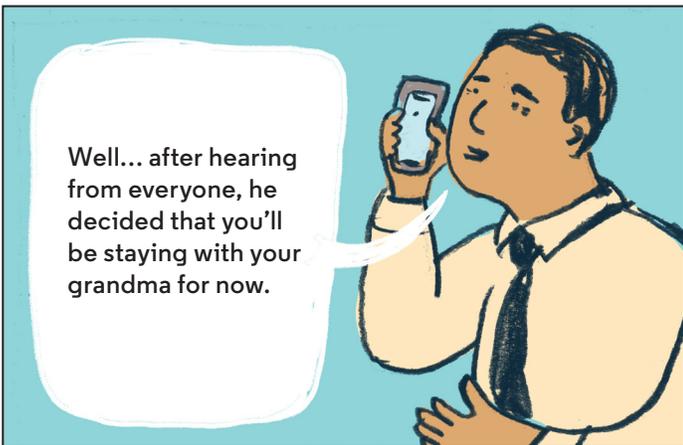


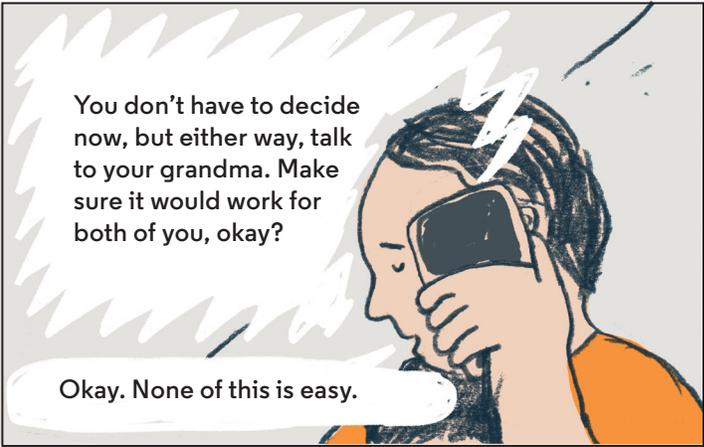












# PLANNING YOUR COURT DAY

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George showed Lila different things she could do to feel less nervous, and some things she could do to get ready for court.

George also encouraged Lila to make a plan for her day at court. If you have to testify, you can use this page to plan for your day in court. It can help you feel calmer and more confident.

## Getting ready

- Try to get lots of sleep the night before.
- Try to eat something before you go to court. It will help you feel better and have the energy to get through it.
- You don't have to dress up, but wear something a little nicer than usual if you can. Wear something that makes you feel good.
- You'll probably spend a lot of time waiting, so bring something to read, play, or do while you wait.
- If you have a special object that helps you feel calm, bring it with you.

## Getting nervous

If you feel nervous, try one of these things:

- Try to picture how you want to react if different things happen. It may sound silly, but picturing things can help you feel calmer.
- Try taking deep breaths in and out a few times. It really helps!
- Tighten your muscles and then relax them. Do this a few times.
- If you can, take a walk or move your body to get rid of some of your extra energy. You can also try walking really fast for a few seconds, then taking a deep breath and walking really slowly for a few seconds, then going fast then slow, fast then slow a few more times.
- If you have a special prayer or song that is important to you, try saying or singing it, either out loud, or in your head.

## Getting support

- Think about who can help you work out how you're feeling and who can help you in court.
- Is there an advocate, friend, or family member who can come to court? If so, you can look at them if you get nervous.

## Getting through it

- It can feel good to do something you like when it's over, like watch a movie, eat a favorite meal, or spend time with a friend. Think of something you can look forward to.

**If you want, you can use the list above to help you make your own plan for your day in court.**

Things I will do to get ready:

If I get nervous, I will:

I will talk about how I feel with:

After, I will do something like:

# WHAT'S GOING ON?

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Lila is living with her grandmother while her dad continues with the services that the court required and tries to make home safer.

When a kid can't live at home like Lila, the court will keep checking in on the parent or guardian to make sure they are working towards making home safer. They will also check in on the kid and make sure they have everything they need to be healthy.

They will also work towards a "permanency plan" so the kid isn't in a temporary situation for too long. That could mean working towards getting the kid home, or making sure they have another safe place to live for good.

The process can take a long time, even years. The court will consider what the parent or guardian wants and what the kid wants, but will also have to consider other things going on in their lives and their situation.

The whole process is over either when the court thinks it's safe for the kid to go home again or they have another permanent place to live.

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**If you had to be away from home for a while, what would be important for you to have or to do?**

# AFTERWORD

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Nishan and Lila's stories show some of the things that can happen in the child protection and Family or Dependency Court system. Your experience might be different than theirs because a lot of different things can happen. But the more you know, the more ready you'll be and the more power you'll have to ask questions and to ask for what you want and need.

You can have a voice in what happens. Don't be afraid to ask for help, to ask questions, and to find out what rights you have in court.

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The Center for Court Innovation’s Child Witness Materials Project is a collaborative effort between the Center for Court Innovation and the Center for Urban Pedagogy, and is supported by cooperative agreement #2016-VF-GX-K011, awarded by the U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Office for Victims of Crime. The opinions, findings, and conclusions or recommendations expressed in this document are those of the contributors and do not necessarily represent the official position or policies of the U.S. Department of Justice.

The Center for Court Innovation works to create a more effective and humane justice system by performing original research and helping launch reforms around the world.

[www.courtinnovation.org](http://www.courtinnovation.org)

The Center for Urban Pedagogy is a nonprofit organization that uses the power of design and art to increase meaningful civic engagement, in partnership with historically marginalized communities.

[www.welcometoCUP.org](http://www.welcometoCUP.org)

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The Center for Court Innovation is grateful to the project partners and stakeholders; and the children, caregivers, and justice system practitioners all over the country who contributed to the development of this product.

NCJ 300649

The Office for Victims of Crime is committed to enhancing the Nation’s capacity to assist crime victims and to providing leadership in changing attitudes, policies, and practices to promote justice and healing for all victims of crime.

[www.ovc.ojp.gov](http://www.ovc.ojp.gov)

The Office of Justice Programs is a federal agency that provides federal leadership, grants, training, technical assistance, and other resources to improve the Nation’s capacity to prevent and reduce crime, assist victims, and enhance the rule of law by strengthening the criminal and juvenile justice systems. Its six program offices—the Bureau of Justice Assistance, the Bureau of Justice Statistics, the National Institute of Justice, the Office for Victims of Crime, the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, and the Office of Sex Offender Sentencing, Monitoring, Apprehending, Registering, and Tracking—support state and local crime-fighting efforts, fund thousands of victim service programs, help communities manage sex offenders, address the needs of youth in the system and children in danger, and provide vital research and data.



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