IT'S NOT JUST YOU
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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PART 1

Nishan Acts Weird
Hey! Hey! That’s enough!
Let GO of me!
Hey! Hey! That’s enough!
Let GO of me!
Nishan! What the...
Nishan! Sideline, now! Go cool off!

Everybody else, let’s go! We got a game tomorrow!

What was that?

You trying to get kicked off the team?

What? He pushed me! I’m sick of that guy!

Yeah that happens all the time. I’ve never seen you blow up like that though. That’s the second time this week.

Yeah. I guess, I don’t know. I was just so MAD all of a sudden...
Yeah, well don’t pull that in our game tomorrow, man.

Yeah, get it together, bro.

If they only knew...

Later...

Samir, come eat!
Noodles, again? I don’t see you making me dinner!

I just miss when Mom cooked. And Dad was here...

Just eat, Samir.
Hi, is this the Gupta family residence?

My name is Yadira and this is Sandra, and we work for Child Protective Services, or CPS. Are your parents home?

Umm... yes?

It's just my mother. She's here.

Can we speak with her?
Can we come in?

Mom! Someone’s here for you.

Who is it?

Hi, Mrs. Gupta? My name is Yadira and this is Sandra and we’re from Child Protective Services, CPS.

What? Why are you here?

We’d like to ask you a few questions.

Nishan, go to your room with your brother.

Mrs. Gupta, we received a report about some concerns we’d like to talk to you about.
What's going on?
Who's mom talking to?

Some ladies. Don't worry about it.

What do they want? Is Mom in trouble?

I don't know. Do your homework, Samir. Don't worry about it.

Okay... Aren't you scared, Nishan?

I'm... I don't know, Samir. I just... We'll figure it out, okay?

Okay.

Hi, Nishan. Can we ask you a few questions?

Nishan, come to the kitchen. They need to talk to you now.

Why are you here?

We're caseworkers. Our job is to make sure that kids are safe and to help families.
When someone is worried about a kid, we go to their home to make sure everything is okay.

We’re here today because someone is worried about you and your brother being safe at home.

I’m sorry we have to come to your house like this, Nishan. We have to investigate every report we receive. We’re going to ask you some questions about you and your family. Okay?

I guess.

I’m sorry we have to come to your house like this, Nishan. We have to investigate every report we receive. We’re going to ask you some questions about you and your family. Okay?

Thanks for talking to us, Nishan. We’re going to talk with your brother now. Can you get him for us?

Sure.

We’re going to talk with your brother now. Can you get him for us?

Okay. But....what happens after that?

We have to talk to a few other people to help us understand what’s going on.
Like who?

Other people in your life, like family, neighbors, maybe people at school.

How embarassing!

Nishan?

Oh, sorry. I’ll get Samir.

You busy?

You busy?

What’s up?
I think Mom is in trouble.

Some people are here about “protecting kids”?????

Asking us all these questions.

What? They’re there now?

Ok.

Yeah.

Ok. I’ll come over.

Yeah.

I’m sorry, N. Your mom’s going through some stuff, but she’s trying.

See you soon.

The next day, at school...
You okay, Nishan?

Yeah, yeah. I’m fine.

Nishan?

I can’t believe she’s here! Everyone’s gonna know! This is so embarrassing!

Nishan!

Huh? What?

What’s wrong with you lately? You’re acting so weird.

Shut up!

Forget it. Come on, we’re gonna be late.

Whatever.
WHAT’S GOING ON?

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.

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

Nishan Figures Out What’s Next...
Hi, Mom

Shhh!!

Uh-huh, yes......
Okay..... What does “founded” mean?.....

Okay. I see..... Yes.....
Tuesday? Okay.....
Okay. Bye.

Who was that?

Those people that came here a few weeks ago.

I don’t know.

What did they want? Are they coming back?

They confuse me.

They said they finished the investigation and the report is “founded.”

What does that even mean?
I don’t know. I’m a bad mother!

I’m sorry, Nishan. You know it’s so hard without your father.

I know, Mom. But what happens now?

I have to go to a meeting with the caseworkers, the ones who came here. They said we’ll “talk about their concerns and next steps.”

No, Nishan. You and Samir are not in trouble.

They just need to make sure I’m taking care of you boys...

I know this is stressful, but try not to worry.

Okay, Mom.
Mom, don’t you have to leave for work?

Oh! Yes, I’m going to be late.

Bye...

More bad news, Uncle D.

What now?

Mom’s in trouble w the people that came to the house.

Oh. You okay?

I guess.

I’ll talk to your mom. Make sure she’s ok. Want to kick a ball around later?

Yeah.

Thanks.

A week later...

Hey, Mom. Everything ok?

I’m just tired. I had my meeting with the caseworkers after work today.

Oh...right. How was it?

It was okay...
You don’t sound okay.

Well, they want me to do a bunch of things. They call them “services.”

What’s that mean? Like community service?

Ah, no they’re different classes I have to do. To make sure that I know how to take care of you boys.

They want me to go to counseling to talk about my feelings and all the stress since your father...

Nishan, they want you and Samir to go to counseling, too.

What? Why? Did we do something wrong?

No, no. But I know this is hard for both of you, and I know about your fight at soccer, and...

What? I just had a bad day! Who told you?

Nishan. I think you should talk to the counselor. I asked them to help make appointments for you and Samir.

Okay... but Mom, how are you going to do the classes between your two jobs? What if you lose one?

I’ll figure it out, don’t worry.

Oh and Yadira is going to come check on things sometimes, okay? And Uncle Dav is going to be around more to help out.

Okay... My stomach hurts, I’m going to go lie down.
A few days later...

Hi, are you Nishan?

Yeah.

Nice to meet you. I’m James. Come in.

So you’re a soccer fan, huh? Do you play?

Huh? Oh, yeah. I’m on the team at school.

That’s great. How do you like school?

It’s fine.

Yeah, I think that’s pretty much how I always felt about school.

Listen, Nishan, I’m glad you came in today. I know your mom is working with the caseworkers to get help at home.

I want you to know that my job is to help you and give you space to talk about whatever you need to.

But I do know a little bit about the process your mom is going through, so if you have questions, I’m happy to try to answer them.
I don’t know if this will make you feel better, but you’re not the only kid going through this. Other kids are, too.

Really?

I know it feels like you’re the only one, but it’s not just you.

I guess I’m confused about what’s going on. Is my mom in trouble?

The caseworkers are worried about your family, but their job and the role of the Family or Dependency Court, is to help families and make sure kids are safe.

Okay.

So, how is soccer going?

Does he know?!

I’m just gonna tell him.

To be honest, it’s been bad. I can’t focus. I got into a fight a few weeks ago. I never do stuff like that! I just got so mad....

I know a lot is going on right now. Maybe it’s helpful to think about things you can do when you’re feeling overwhelmed or angry, to calm down and feel better.

Fine.

I know lot is going on right now. Maybe it’s helpful to think about things you can do when you’re feeling overwhelmed or angry, to calm down and feel better.

Thanks for telling me that, Nishan. Do you want to tell me more about what happened that day?

Yeah, sure.
Well, focusing on things you love to do, like soccer, is great. And other physical activity is also good. You could do some drills, or go for a run.

Those are great for de-stressing. Have you ever tried breathing exercises?

No. Does that stuff work?

It does. I actually use it a lot.

Here, let me show you and we can try it together.
TAKE A BREATHER

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.
This handout shows a few other things you can do, too. Do you like listening to music?

Yeah. Why?

Listening to your favorite music actually helps, too. Especially anything that relaxes you. I like listening to classical music but you should listen to whatever you like.

Huh. Okay.

I know you have to go now, but let’s set up a time to meet again next week. And here’s my number in case you need to reach me. Okay?

Thanks!
WHAT’S GOING ON?

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.

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
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...

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.

Oh, Lila. Your daddy needs help.

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

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...
Hey, none of this is your fault. You know that, right?

I guess.

And you won’t come back until things change.

Now let’s get packing.

Okay.

Anyway, I need someone to help me eat that special chocolate cake I made this morning...

You trying to fatten me up already?

You know me! Let’s go, honey.

Okay.
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.

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

Lila Talks It Out
A few days later...

Hi, Lila, how are you?

I’m okay.

I like that sweater. Great color!

Thanks, Ms. Lopez.

How was your week? Have you talked to your dad?

Oh, um... I’m at my grandma’s again.

How’s that?

It’s okay, actually.

Did you go on your own or did the caseworkers ask you to go?

The caseworkers. But it’s okay. I’m kind of glad.

Do you want to talk about what happened?

I guess so... I came home and his friends were there.
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.
Like try a little more, you know?!

I hope you know none of this is your fault, Lila.

No, I know. I feel like I try to help him and then he does stuff like that again.

How do you feel about being with your grandma?

It’s good. No drama... I can focus on my own stuff when I’m there.

Like what?

You know, things like getting my homework done or not being scared to bring friends over, you know?

That’s good. It’s important to get your mind off this for a little. Are you doing any of those coping techniques I told you about before?

Um...Can you go through them with me again? I forgot.

Sure, let’s try one together.
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.
You can do this with your whole body. I know it feels a little silly, but it helps release tension.

Did that help a little?
Kind of.

Really, any kind of physical activity can help, like taking a walk, jumping around, dancing.

But if you don’t feel like doing something physical, you can try writing instead.

That sounds like homework.

Ha! Kind of, but it’s homework that helps you feel better, so maybe worth it?

I guess.
WRITING OR DRAWING IT OUT

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.
I can give you some other ideas next week. But for now, try those and see if they help next time you feel overwhelmed.

You mean, like, all the time?

Any time you need.

By the way, have you met with your advocate yet?

No.

Are you going to?

I don't know. It's just such a hassle...

Lila, I know you've been in and out of these systems before, but an advocate can really help you understand what's going on and help the other adults understand what you need.

Yeah.

I guess my dad is going to court now, so maybe I should talk to someone.

Just give it a try. You should tell your advocate what you've told me about living with your grandma, so he can work with the other lawyer and the judge to see if you can stay where you are.
Oh, right. Okay. I’ll call him.

Hmm...okay, I’ll think about it... I gotta get to work but see you next week.

Grandma? What’s up? Is everything okay?

Lila, your advocate George called for you.

Oh yeah? What did he say?

He wants to talk to you about your dad’s upcoming hearing.

What? What hearing?

Great. Oh, before you go, I wanted to invite you to a group I run for young people going through similar stuff. It can help to talk to people not involved with your case. And people who are the same age as you. Plus, there’s pizza...

Okay. See you next week, Lila!
“The thing I told you the other day. When your dad goes to court?”

“Ohhh yeah, right.”

“You should call him back so you can set up an appointment.”

“Yeah, yeah. I will. I gotta get back to work, now.”

“Lila – I know you. You better do it now. I want to see an appointment on your calendar when you get home or no dessert for you.”

“Uggg. Fine, I’ll do it now… it’s not worth missing out on your pie.”

“Don’t worry. It’s just me. But you better hurry up before Damien gets back…”

“Yeah, I’m almost done. Just have to make a quick call.”

“Are you calling a dinosaur? Who even uses the phone like that anymore?”

“My grandma. That’s who.”

“Sounds fun. See you on the floor.”

“Hi, George? It’s Lila.”
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?
Two weeks later…

Lila, hi! Sorry I’m running late. Things are a little hectic right now.

It’s okay. I just got here.

Great. Lila, the reason why I wanted to see you today is because—

...of my dad’s hearing?

Yeah. That’s right. He’s also going to answer questions in front of a judge.

Yeah, exactly. So you know about it. Do you have questions about it?

Is it going to be like the other times my dad went to court? He said he talked about the classes the caseworkers put him in.

Yeah. That’s right. He’s also going to answer questions in front of a judge.

Who asks the questions? What do they ask?

It’ll mostly be the judge or the caseworkers’ lawyer asking.

They’ll ask about whether he’s following the caseworkers’ recommendations for services and classes. At the end, the judge will decide what happens next. That means they’ll also be talking about whether or not you’ll go back home.
What if I wanna stay with my grandma?

I get that. Well, it’s up to the judge, but he or she will want to know what you think, too.

They do care. They have to consider a lot of things, and one of those is what you think.

I know it’s hard to trust that it will work this time, but we’ve got to try, right?

They didn’t care last time!

But the judge wants to hear from you, too.

They’re weird not being at home with my dad, but it’s so nice at my grandma’s. There’s no drama.... No cops...

Wait, what? I have to go to court? I didn’t have to go before! Why now? Did I do something wrong?

Why? They don’t care what I think!

Why? They don’t care what I think!

It’s weird not being at home with my dad, but it’s so nice at my grandma’s. There’s no drama.... No cops...

Wait, what? I have to go to court? I didn’t have to go before! Why now? Did I do something wrong?

Usually, the judge will ask how your dad has been doing with his classes and his drug treatment program. Then the judge will hear from the caseworkers.

But the judge wants to hear from you, too.
No, Lila, you’re not in trouble. But the judge wants to hear how you think your dad’s doing. Like I said, how you feel is really important.

Oh. Will my dad be there? Will I have to say that in front of him?

He’ll probably be there but he shouldn’t say anything to you. The only people asking you questions should be his lawyer, the judge, and the caseworkers’ lawyer.

Oh.

Are you okay? Want to take a break?

I’m fine! But why do I have to go to court?!

Okay. I get it. This is not easy. Let’s take a break.

Sorry. Yeah. I’m stressed out.

Okay.

How does that sound?

Yeah. Okay.

I know. Well, my job is to help you. We can walk through what’s going to happen in court, and how you can get ready so it’s less scary.

And I can help you tell the court what you want to have happen, like if you want to stay with your grandma.

Okay.
Before, you said that the judge needs to hear from other people so they can decide what happens... What's gonna happen to him?

Well... a few different things could happen. The judge could say you'll go live with your dad. Possibly with your caseworker checking in.

Like before?

Or, they could set some rules that your dad would have to follow for you to go home. You'd stay at your grandma's until those rules are met, or the judge could place you in foster care, or wi—

Whoa, wait, what?! You're telling me I could go into foster care? I can't just stay with my grandma? Is this because I'm not eighteen—

Some kids go into foster care, but some kids, like you, can stay with a family member or friend of the family. You said you really like being with your grandma now, so you could maybe stay there. I just wanted to make sure you know what all the possibilities are.

Hold on, Lila. I'm sorry I overwhelmed you with all that. Let's back up and take it step by step.
Okay good. Ugh, I feel sick.

Okay. Thanks.

Sure. That's what I'm here for.

Look, we have time before you have to go to court. Let's take a break for now, and next time we can walk through what happens in detail, okay?

Okay.

And in the mean time, call me if you have a question or just want to talk about this, okay?

Ugh, I feel sick.

Hi! How was your meeting?

Grandma.... I don't want to do this! I just want to stay with you!
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.
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.
What kind of questions will they ask me?

They’ll be about living with your dad and what it’s like with your grandma.

I still get nervous when I have to testify and I do it a lot. I can give you some tips that might help.

But I’ve talked about it so many times already. I’ve talked to you, my therapist, the caseworkers… and it’s not like I can ever forget what happened.

I know, but I want you to feel as comfortable as possible.

You can just say that. They’re going to ask you to tell the truth and if you forget or need a second to remember, you can say that. It’s the truth.

Okay. What if I get confused or don’t understand?

Same thing. Just say that. And if it’s too overwhelming, you can ask for a break.

Okay…
And you can use your relaxation techniques. Don’t forget to bring something to do. There is A LOT of waiting in court.

Okay. I’m getting used to waiting.

Oh, I know just the cake to make!

I think you’ll do great, Lila. I’ll see you at court then? Call me if you need anything in the meantime.

Thanks.

A few weeks later...

Lila!!

Let’s go home. This is all a lot to think about.

Coming! I’m almost ready.

No need for that. George just called. The hearing is delayed, so you won’t be going to court today.

What? What’d he say? I’ve been thinking about it all weekend—I couldn’t sleep!
I’m sorry, Lila. George said that it happens all the time...I guess this means you’ll have more time to get ready.

I guess...it’s just more time I have to think about this. I’m kinda glad I don’t have to do it but I was hoping to get it over with. I feel like I spent all this time for nothing.

It wasn’t for nothing. This is important. It’s about your life.

I know. I just want my life to be normal.

What?? I thought they’d reschedule for next week. That’s so long from now!

George said the new date is September 18th.

Okay. More waiting...

George said that was the next date that worked for everyone.

It’s finally September....

Okay, Lila, your grandma is going to go in now.
We're ready for you now, Lila.
I'll stay out here with you and the court officer will come get us when it's time, okay?

My name is Lila Beltran. I'm 16 years old.
When did you come home that night?

I don’t know what to say!

Okay, I can look at George...

Can you repeat the question?

When will this be over?
You handled all those questions really well and spoke up when you said you didn’t remember. How do you feel?

Ugh. Glad it’s over.

You did great. I’m so proud. I know that was not easy.
If the judge feels like he's made enough progress, then he may try to have you live with him again. But we'll check in with you and your grandma, too, before anything happens. I'll keep advocating for what you want.

A week later...

Hey Lila, I just heard from the judge.

What did he say?

Well... after hearing from everyone, he decided that you'll be staying with your grandma for now.

Your dad will have to do some more programs and will have a couple more hearings to check in. But if things don’t get better, I think the caseworkers will push to figure out your “permanency plan.”

If the judge feels like he’s made enough progress, then he may try to have you live with him again. But we’ll check in with you and your grandma, too, before anything happens. I’ll keep advocating for what you want.

What’s that?

It’s basically their way of saying that staying at your grandma’s right now is a temporary answer, and they’ll want to figure out where you will live permanently.

Oh. I get that. Can I stay with my grandma permanently?
It's an option. But you and your grandma should talk about that more. And your dad might fight it. But we can ask for that.

I guess things could change with Dad...

No. It's not. You've been through a lot. But you've been so strong.

Your therapist might be good to talk to about this, too, you know?

You don't have to decide now, but either way, talk to your grandma. Make sure it would work for both of you, okay?

Okay. None of this is easy.

Think about what you want to ask for. If you want to talk about it more, call or text me.

Okay. Thanks.

Yeah. I guess I've got some stuff to figure out.
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:
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.

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

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.
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

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

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