

# The Parent-Caseworker

## Relationship



### Information Guide for Parents

(Montréal Youth Centre – Users' Committee)



**Comité des usagers**  
du Centre jeunesse de Montréal



## A Word of Welcome

While some parents may get along well with their caseworker, others may have a difficult and strained relationship. We prepared this guide to provide parents with a few reminders in regard to this situation and to give them the information they need to improve their relationship with their caseworker.

If you still have questions after reading this guide, we invite you to get in touch with the Users' Committee.

If you have any questions about foster care in a facility operated by the Centre Jeunesse de Montréal Institut Universitaire, you may request the guide on foster care. We also recently published a legal guide containing useful information for parents on the legal process. Both guides are available from the Users' Committee.

To reach us: 514-356-4562

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## Acknowledgments

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- > Rehabilitation Services for Children and Girls
- > Rehabilitation Services for Boys
- > Southeast Sector Services
- > Northeast Sector Services
- > Administrative Services
- > Youth Protection
- > Communications
- > Access

We would also like thank the parents who shared their difficulties and concerns with us over the years. This guide was inspired by them and reflects some of their personal experiences.

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## An Intrusion in Your Life

As a parent, you are your child's primary caregiver. At times, you may need help or support with your parenting role. To provide this assistance, the Youth Protection Act (YPA) authorizes social workers to take the necessary action to protect your child. The caseworker works with you to improve problem situations and ensure that they do not reoccur.

It is very natural for you to feel upset when the Director of Youth Protection (DYP) comes into your life. You feel intruded upon when this happens and can think of nothing else. You experience a sense of helplessness, of being caught up in a whirlwind without knowing when it will all stop. In short, your life has been turned upside down.

You may also feel that you have less control over your life and that you are being judged, watched or analyzed. Because caseworkers can take action under the law, they represent a form of authority. It is normal to resent a stranger coming into your life and giving you parenting advice about your child. However, caseworkers are there to help correct a situation. You have to give them some space, even if it takes time.



## Strong Emotions

It is hard for parents to accept having a caseworker in their life or placing a child in foster care. Since you are responsible for your child and his/her protection, you might feel a sense of failure and/or tremendous guilt. This empty feeling can be compared to the grief felt at the loss of an ideal parent or child.

For example, it may take a long time to accept the fact that your child has been placed in foster care. You need to have strength and courage. It is natural for you to feel the following emotions:

- > You don't understand why this has happened to you.
- > You refuse to see things as they really are.
- > You feel angry.
- > You feel guilty.
- > You feel relieved and calm.
- > You feel despair.
- > You feel scared.

Whether or not you experience these and other emotions, you still need to talk to your caseworker to make sure he/she fully understands your state of mind. Caseworkers can't always guess what you are feeling. **Your caseworker is there to support you and help you through this difficult time.**



## Developing Mutual Trust

Since trust is crucial to any productive collaboration, it must be developed between you and your caseworker.

### Developing trust

You might have trouble trusting your caseworker. In most circumstances, parents don't choose to have a caseworker in their life. It puts them in a vulnerable situation. However, your caseworker has the knowledge and expertise that you need to help you through this difficult period.

Here are a few examples that indicate that you are starting to develop trust in your caseworker:

- > You welcome him/her into your home.
- > During a visit, you tell him/her about problems you are having with your child.
- > You are less reserved about discussing your feelings.
- > You give him/her your new address before you move.
- > You keep him/her up to date about what's going on in your life.

### Being trustworthy

Your caseworker will work with you to develop a trusting relationship. You can show that you are trustworthy by keeping your commitments and promises. Being **honest and truthful** is the best way to earn and keep your caseworker's trust. **Your behaviour and actions** should reflect your words and good will. Your caseworker is also responsible for applying these basic rules to show that you can trust him/her too.

**Trust isn't built in a day. It develops gradually as you realize that your caseworker is there to help your child and your family.**



## Some Good Attitudes

We would like to remind you of some attitudes that can enhance your relationship with your caseworker:

### Respect

Always be respectful. The tone of voice and type of language you use can either inspire respect or encourage disrespect. Remember that the person you're speaking to will tend to adopt the same attitude as you do. If you are aggressive, your caseworker may be less receptive to your expectations and concerns.

Do not harass your caseworker. Harassment is a form of recurrent and aggressive insistence that is unacceptable in a relationship. For example, your caseworker might not return your phone call because he/she is busy or out of the office. Leave him/her a message and wait until he/her returns your call.

Don't forget that your caseworker has his/her feelings too. You shouldn't accept a lack of respect on his/her part, nor should he/she accept it from you.

### Show interest

Show you are willing to cooperate by asking questions and listening to the answers. Take the time to hear your caseworker out. He can give you crucial information on how events are progressing.

Tell your caseworker about any important changes (change of partner, change of telephone number or address, etc.) or of any new event (something your child has done or said, etc.) in your life.



## Some Good Attitudes (continued)

### Get involved

Get involved in developing, implementing and reviewing the intervention plan. This is a contract signed by each of the parties (parents, youths age 14 years or over, caseworkers, and the foster care family, where applicable). It sets out improvement goals, indicates how to achieve them and determines the appropriate time frame. You must be aware of and agree with the intervention goals and methods in order to reach them. Make sure that you understand what is expected of you. If you have any questions, ask them!

Respect visiting rights, telephone call times, and agreements you have made with your caseworker. Regularly inquire about your child's progress.

**Don't be afraid to ask any questions you might have. Your caseworker is there to answer your questions and keep you informed of events to come.**



## Your Opinion Is Important

Our opinions often differ from the opinions of others. It is natural for you to disagree with your caseworker's decision, intervention or statement. It is important for you to express your disagreement to your caseworker. In this way, you don't let your dissatisfaction build up to an explosion when you reach your breaking point. Here are some tips on how to express yourself effectively and make yourself understood:

### Choose the right moment

It's best to wait for the right moment before talking to your caseworker. Don't try to talk to him when he is swamped or when you might be interrupted by a phone call during a visit. Instead, make an appointment to meet in a neutral environment such as a conference room.

### Express yourself calmly

You can express your dissatisfaction or viewpoint without flying into a rage (there's no point in being aggressive). You have the right to be angry and express yourself, but you should always be respectful.

The Users' Committee can provide support if you need to present your viewpoint to your caseworker. A representative can accompany you to a clarification meeting and help you express yourself without influencing the intervention in one way or another. The Users' Committee can offer you empathy, guidance and communication support.



## Your Opinion Is Important (continued)

### **Suggest alternatives**

If you're not comfortable with the intervention method your caseworker suggests, discuss it with him/her and work to find an alternative plan. Together, you can find a solution that is acceptable to both parties. To help you remember the points you want to discuss with your caseworker, jot your ideas down on paper. That way you won't forget to mention the issues that are causing you concern.

### **Expressing dissatisfaction**

When you think you're not receiving proper service, you can ask your caseworker about it and present facts supporting your point of view. You can then both discuss your needs and ways to improve the service you are receiving.

**Your caseworker's purpose is to offer services to improve your situation. However, you should remember that there are limits to his/her availability and resources.**



## A Question of Responsibility

While your caseworker is mandated to protect your child, there are some decisions that he/she is not authorized to make. These decisions come under the authority of a judge in the Youth Division of the court.

When presenting his case in court, a caseworker can submit recommendations to the judge. Only the judge has the authority to order the following:

- > Maintain the child at home
- > Therapy
- > No contact between parent and child
- > Mandatory foster care in a rehabilitation center, group home or foster family
- > Placement for adoption purposes

Following an order, the caseworker ensures that the judge's decision is carried out.





## Important Facts to Remember

We hope that you will refer to this guide throughout the course of the intervention and that it will enhance your relationship with your caseworker. In closing, we would like to remind you of three vital facts you should always remember:

- > **Parents have the primary responsibility for their child.**
- > **It is important to give your caseworker any information that can help you.**
- > **Always keep your child's best interest in mind.**

If you have any questions, we invite you to contact the Users' Committee. We will be happy to provide answers and support you throughout your experience.



## Some Useful Resources

The Users' Committee of the Centre Jeunesse de Montréal Institut Universitaire

The mandate of the Users' Committee is to defend, protect and uphold the rights of youth and their parents. We can help you research information on your rights and obligations, support you if you are dissatisfied with an aspect of the services you are receiving, and help you as you carry out your obligations and requirements.

In addition, we hold monthly meetings for parents who wish to help improve the quality of services offered by the Centre Jeunesse de Montréal Institut Universitaire and to represent and defend the interests of users.

To reach us: 514-356-4562

### **"Trans-Parents" support group**

The Users' Committee offers a support group for parents receiving services from the Centre Jeunesse de Montréal Institut Universitaire who would like to talk to parents in similar situations or who need a break. Theme nights are organized to provide information on topics such as drug addiction and communicating with adolescents. The Trans-Parents support group holds weekly meetings in the evening.

For registration or more information: 514-356-4562





## Some Useful Resources (continued)

### **The Local Service Quality and Complaints Commissioner**

Parents or adolescents who are dissatisfied with the services they are receiving can register their complaint with the Local Service Quality and Complaints Commissioner. A counsellor is available to receive their written or verbal complaint. Complaints are processed within a maximum of 45 days. Recourse is available if the outcome of the complaint process is unsatisfactory.

For further information or to file a complaint: 514-593-3600

**If your caseworker is not fulfilling his/her ethical obligations, speak to him/her or his/her program manager. You may ask for a copy of the code of ethics.**

### **CASEWORKER**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone: \_\_\_\_\_

### **PROGRAM MANAGER**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone: \_\_\_\_\_

**If the situation is not remedied, you may contact the Users' Committee or the Local Service Quality and Complaints Commissioner to file a complaint.**

Users' Committee of the Centre Jeunesse de Montréal Institut Universitaire: 514-356-4562

Local Service Quality and Complaints Commissioner:

514-593-3600

## APPENDIX Code of ethics

Caseworkers are required to comply with a code of ethics. The code describes the conduct expected of the caseworker in his dealings with parents and youth:

In his/her **interactions with youth**, the caseworker must:

- > Respect and protect the child.
- > Give the child the information that concerns him/her.
- > Encourage the involvement of child and his/her parents.
- > Comply with confidentiality rules respecting information on the child and his/her family.
- > Establish goals and intervention measures with the child and his/her parents.

In his/her **interactions with parents**, the caseworker must:

- > Maintain contact with parents and keep them informed and involved in the intervention.
- > Ensure that he/she does not take the place of the parents but allows them to continue their responsibilities (for example, taking their child to medical appointments, parent-teacher meetings, etc.).

## Notes

Do you often have trouble remembering **important dates** such as appointments to review the intervention plan or when to visit your child? You can note this information right here:

### CASEWORKER

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone: \_\_\_\_\_

**Date of orientation table:** \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Dates of intervention plan updates:**

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Date(s) for parental visits:**

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Deadline for the court-ordered measure (or voluntary measure):**

\_\_\_\_\_



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