



TPR CLIENT RELATIONSHIP BUILDING

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BUILDING AND MAINTAINING A RELATIONSHIP

The case is about the client and their family.

- It is not about...the judge, the lawyer, the prosecuting attorney, the foster parents, witnesses, or other family members.

The focus of parent representation should be on the client, their family, and their goals. But how do you figure out what they are?

- Client-centered
- Flexible, yet directed and guided
- Adaptable to the client's style of communication, abilities, and setting
- Meet where it is convenient for the client.
- Think about barriers as well as retraumatizing clients.

WE ARE DEALING WITH LIVING, BREATHING HUMAN BEINGS AT RISK OF PERMANENTLY LOSING THEIR CONNECTION TO A LIVING BREATHING HUMAN BEING



GOALS

Build trust, confidence and rapport

Gather relevant information from client

Communicate relevant information to client

These are your initial goals, but what barriers might arise? Are these your client's goals for your first meeting? How do you deal with meeting these goals in real-life parent defense?

BUILDING TRUST, CONFIDENCE, AND RAPPORT

Explain your role and obligations (attorney client privilege, confidentiality, boundaries, etc.)

Listen, listen, listen.

Understand client's perspective

Show concern, empathy and respect.

Answer your client's questions.

Map out plan for representation

Timely, competent and diligent communication with clients.

GATHERING RELEVANT INFORMATION

When representing parents, what is relevant information? Do you define this or does your client?

Arguably, all information is relevant.

Get your client's story, not just about the petition and circumstances leading to child welfare involvement.

Use a client interview form or other form of documentation.

Use information gathered to develop trial and case strategy **WITH** your client.

THINGS TO COVER IN INITIAL AND ONGOING CLIENT INTERVIEWS

Client's family and how they entered the system

Client's version of events

History of CHIPS case or underlying family case

Potential adoptive resources, or alternatives to adoption

Understanding of prior court involvement



COMMUNICATING RELEVANT INFORMATION

1. The petition/the grounds IN UNDERSTANDABLE words
2. Case process (consider mapping out the process, drawing pictures, reaching clients in the best way they can communicate/learn)
3. Legal options (substitution of judge, court/bench v. jury trial, involuntary v. voluntary, stipulation to grounds, choice to testify)
4. What the process might look like at each stage and how they may feel

HOW DO YOU MEET YOUR CLIENT WHERE THEY ARE?

Distrust of outsiders, including attorney who is "part of the system"

Trauma histories (created perhaps simply by involvement in an involuntary TPR)

Stretched thin, lots of obligations, may not know how to organize their life

Intellectual and emotional disabilities

Mental health concerns

Drug abuse histories