

Tip Sheet: Your Role As The Advocate Or Support Worker

Does not matter if you are an advocate or support worker, it is always important that you listen to what the caseworkers are asking of the parent. The parent may be confused and distressed and might not be able to hear what is being said. Sometimes a parent will respond angrily and lash out.

- Stay safe – position yourself strategically so you are not accidentally hit. If you have an opportunity beforehand, assess whether the parent is someone who responds well to physical touch or space. Respond accordingly – give the parent a hug or suggest that they come for walk out in the fresh air.
- Retrieve any paperwork the caseworkers may give the parent.
- Talk in a calm voice to the parent. Provide the parent with clear instructions about what they need to do at this point (for example: “[Parent’s name] you and I need to pack a bag for [child’s name]”).
- Enable the caseworkers to leave. Where the removal is happening in the community the caseworkers will be keen to remove the child and themselves from the situation as quickly as possible. Now is not the time to engage the caseworkers in discussion. They will probably not be in a position to answer a lot of questions that you or the parent may wish to ask. For example: where the child is going, when the parent will see the child next, what day will the matter be before the Court?
- After the child has been removed, stay with the parent allowing them time to debrief. Just let them talk. Acknowledge their pain. Now is not the time to try and correct their views about, for example, the unfairness.
- After a while shift the conversation, helping the parent to think about what they need to do over the next few hours and days. It can help at this point to get them to physically move and do an activity – engage them in the physical activity of making a cup of tea or coffee or even pouring themselves a glass of water. This distraction or shift in activity will help them to transition into a different emotional space – to focus on the here and now.
- Before leaving the parent, ensure they are safe. Explore with the parent whether there is someone they can call to be with them at home or whether they can go to someone’s home. Help them initiate this call.
- If they prefer to be on their own, leave them an after-hours number or the number of [Life Line](#) which is 13 11 14.
- If you have good reason to suspect the parent may self-harm, or if the parent is expressing suicidal thoughts, contact the local mental health crisis team or take the parent to the nearest hospital emergency department for assessment.
- Lastly, ensure you are okay. Supporting a parent through such an experience is emotionally challenging even for experienced workers. Debrief with your line manager or a colleague immediately.
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