



Infant and Toddler Court



Co-Administered with the Family Intervention Court

Parent Handbook

WELCOME

Welcome to the Infant and Toddler Court (ITC) of Harris County, a co-administered program along with the Harris County Family Intervention Court. You have voluntarily elected to be part of the Infant and Toddler Court in Harris County. There are many benefits to participating in this program and taking advantage of the opportunities given to you through the enhanced parent-child services being offered in the ITC. This program is designed specifically for you and your child for the purpose of giving you every opportunity to create a safe and loving environment for your child to return to.

What is the Infant and Toddler Court?

The Infant and Toddler Court in Harris County is a unique problem-solving court docket specializing in cases referred by Child Protective Service (CPS) involving infants and toddlers aged zero to three. The ITC involves intensive case management, frequent monitoring, uses a team approach, all under the leadership of the judge, which promotes taking personal accountability, and the goal being to instill the confidence necessary to change the behaviors that have harmed you and your child and to make better decisions for you and your child in the future. Families are also involved in the process of devising solutions for the problems that led to abuse and neglect. CPS and the extended family will devise a case plan, or a course of action, that is tailored to meet the needs of the individual family.

The purpose of the ITC is to increase opportunities for infants and toddlers to be safe, have stable and nurturing permanent homes, receive services early on, in areas of, early childhood development, and physical and mental health. Secondary objectives of the ITC are to decrease the recurrence of abuse, support and encourage families, and decrease mental health, physical health and behavioral issues associated with abuse. Desired objectives of the ITC as they relate to you are:

- Increasing parent-child visitation
- Improving permanency, safety and well-being
- Preventing the cycle of abuse
- Preserving and supporting families where possible and providing links to needed services
- Increasing the level of ECI screening and services for all infants

MISSION

The purpose and mission of the Infant and Toddler Court is to achieve improved permanency, safety, and well-being outcomes for abused and neglected infants and toddlers and their families in Harris County; and to preserve and support families where possible.

The Docket

The Docket is under the supervision of Family District Court 247, presided over by the Honorable Judge Bonnie Hellums and Associate Judge Meca Walker. The case heard must be filed by Child Protective Services (CPS) in response to allegations of abuse/neglect where at least one child under the age of three has been removed from the parents with Temporary Managing Conservatorship being granted to CPS.

Requirements for eligibility in the program are:

- Parents in CPS cases must **ALWAYS** have reunification as a goal. The ITC is not a venue for adversarial cases.
- There is no prior history of CPS cases involving this child.
- Parents must be willing to participate in the program and have voluntarily agreed to have their cases adjudicated by the Infants and Toddlers Court Docket.
- The ITC Docket does not consider cases involving sexual abuse or criminal matters.
- Participants must not have a currently active mental disorder that would preclude participation in treatment (i.e., active psychosis, active suicidal ideation, active mania, etc.).
- Participants must not have current physical health problems that require ongoing medical care that interferes with treatment participation.

Components

The Infants and Toddlers Court team consists of:

- Judge
- Prosecutors representing the county
- Defense Attorney for parent
- Ad litem Attorney for child
- Infants and Toddlers Court Community Outreach Coordinator
- Administrative assistant/case manager
- Child Protective Services Staff
- Treatment/Service Representatives

Other possible services may include:

- Employment training/counseling/referral
- Physical health services
- Mental health services
- Parenting skills enhancement
- Anger management education
- Family Chemical Dependency education
- Social/life skills training
- Literacy training
- Transportation

THE ITC PROGRAM

Family Services

Family Conferencing

Family Conferencing is a decision making process that focuses on the philosophy of family focused services. The meetings involve family and relatives in the service planning process. The objectives of the conference are:

- To ensure the child's safety, permanence and well-being
 - To empower the child/family by encouraging involvement and decision in the ongoing quest for permanency
 - To identify and utilize resources within the family systems
 - To show compassion by trying to reduce trauma to children
 - To demonstrate greater respect for families by working towards the safety of their children
 - To make a commitment to more and better alternatives for safety to children at risk
 - To allow for customized services for the family and improve the integrity for the family plan
 - To move child welfare practice towards a design of services by families rather than practitioners
 - To generate better results by allowing for the inclusion of all family support systems in case planning and sharing of resources
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Early Childhood Intervention (ECI) Evaluation/Services

ECI provides evaluations, at no cost to families, to determine eligibility and the need for services. If your child has any type of developmental delay, it is crucial to begin working with him/or her as soon as possible, whether your child is placed with you or not. It is also important that you know as much as possible about your child's developmental needs. It is important that families and professionals work together as a team to plan appropriate services based on the unique strengths and needs of the child and family.

Research shows that growth and development are most rapid in the early years of life. The earlier problems are identified, the greater the chance of eliminating them. Early intervention responds to the critical needs of children and families by:

- promoting development and learning,
- providing support to families,
- coordinating services, and
- decreasing the need for costly special programs.

Parent-Child Relationship Assessment

With the one of the goals of the ITC being the strengthening of families, it is critical to know what areas you and your child/ren need to work on as well as identifying strengths for you to build on. A parent-child relationship assessment will allow trained clinicians to identify the strengths and weaknesses in your relationship with your child/ren. Because children experience the world from within the context of their relationship with you, the best way to assess their social-emotional functioning and well-being is to assess them in the context of their primary relationships. Relationship assessments include two procedures:

- One of these procedures will be an observation of you interacting with your child. You will be instructed to either complete some tasks with your child, or play with your child as you would at home
- The other procedure is an interview regarding themes/information regarding you and your child's history

Increased Visitation/Visit Coaching

One of the primary goals of the Harris County ITC is to increase visitation where possible for families. Frequent and consistent contact with your child is essential to maintain a strong and secure relationship. You will be asked to keep records of your visits with your child and share these with the team and Judge.

The primary goal of visit coaching is to make each visit a good experience and enjoyable for both you and your child. A visit coach does this by:

- Playing an active support role before, during and after the visits
- Helping parents prepare activities for visits that will meet their children's needs
- Giving suggestions as the parents responds to events and emotions in the visit
- Helping parents plan to give their children their full attention at each visit
- Helping parents recognize and cope with the emotions they are experiencing
- Assist parents learn how to see their children's needs

The visit coach will work with you, building on your strengths and assisting you with weaknesses, on how to better understand the needs of your child. The activities during your visit coaching sessions will be tailored to your child's age and development. In most instances, coaches meet with you 15-30 minutes before each visit to review the child's needs to be met during that visit and to practice skills. After the visit, coaches will discuss with you what your thoughts on the visit were and what you may identify as things to work on for the next visit. A simple way to describe the goal of a visit coach is to help you in being able to answer the following questions:

What is my child.....telling me?
What is my child.....feeling?
What is my child.....seeing?
What is my child.....experiencing?

FIC/ITC Phases

You have already been given a handbook with the phases of the FIC in their entirety. The following chart is to describe how the additional components of the ITC will be combined with the requirements of the FIC. This is just to give you an idea how the above mentioned components will fit into the more defined phases of the FIC. The goals of the FIC have phase completion requirements; however, healing your relationship with your child is an ongoing process which can not be confined to any specific time frame.

Phase	Goals	Client Expectations	Phase Completion
Phase I 6 – 12 Weeks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Admitted to & actively participating in treatment • Completion of all assessments • Children’s needs assessed • Abstinence • Education/Vocation plan development • Discharge/housing plan development • ECI/developmental assessment for your child • Identify areas of strengths and weaknesses in your relationship with your child to work on • Build on/maintain the relationship between the parent and child/ren • Develop a visitation plan 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Weekly court appearances • Attend all treatment activities as scheduled • Donate all UA’s as directed • Negative drug tests • Keep all appointments • Appropriate and consistent visitations with children • Maintain satisfactory progress toward service plan(s) goals • Obtain a 12-Step sponsor • Participate in a parent/child relationship assessment • Active participation in visitation and visit coaching (if recommended) • Be knowledgeable about your child’s health and developmental outcomes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consistent court attendance • Completion of all required assessments • Consistent and appropriate visitations with children • Compliance with any sanctions • Compliance with all court orders • 6 weeks of consecutive clean drug tests • Team recommendation
Phase II 3 – 6 Months	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continued abstinence • Continued progress in treatment • Implementation of education/vocational plans • Development of relapse prevention plan • Progress toward stabilization of housing and job situations • Improvement in parenting skills • Improvement in interactions with children • Begin acknowledging the affect your child’s removal has had on them 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Court appearances every other week • Attend all treatment activities as scheduled • Attend all support group meetings as directed by treatment provider • Donate all UA’s as directed • Negative drug tests • Appropriate and consistent visitations with children • Maintain satisfactory progress toward service plan(s) goals • Actively engage in step work with 12-Step sponsor • Begin participating in any necessary parent/child interventions • Continue visiting and visit coaching 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consistent court attendance • Timely completion of all treatment assignments • Consistent and appropriate visitations with children • Compliance with any sanctions • Compliance with all court orders • Completion of relapse prevention plan • Appropriate support group attendance • Minimum of 8 weeks of consecutive clean drug tests • No more than 2 positive drug tests • Team recommendation

Phase	Goals	Client Expectations	Phase Completion
<p>Phase III</p> <p>3 – 6 Months</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continued abstinence • Continued progress in treatment • Continued progress in education/vocation plan • Stable housing arrangement • Active use of relapse prevention plan • Development of aftercare plan • Completion of formal structured treatment programs • Family re-unification takes place or is imminent • Continue strengthening your relationship with your child • Continue working on understanding the needs your child is trying to communicate to you and appropriate responses 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Monthly court appearances • Attend all treatment activities as scheduled • Successful discharge from formal treatment • Regular attendance at support group meetings • Ongoing, active step work with sponsor • Donate all UA's as directed • Clean drug tests • Appropriate and consistent visitations with children • Maintain satisfactory progress toward service plan(s) goals 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consistent court attendance • Timely completion of all treatment assignments • Initiation of aftercare plan • Consistent and appropriate visitations with children • Compliance with any sanctions • Compliance with all court orders • Appropriate support group attendance • Employment, or evidence of verifiable attempts (6/week) to find employment OR enrollment/attendance in education program • Minimum of 12 weeks of consecutive clean drug tests • No more than one positive drug test • Team recommendation
<p>Phase IV</p> <p>6 Months</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continued abstinence • Active participation in aftercare plan • Stable housing, employment, or educational status • Custody of children • Introduction to alumni mentoring program as mentor • Stability for you and your children 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Court appearances as required • Consistent attendance at support group meetings • Continued step work with sponsor • Completion of all service plan(s) goals • Donate all UA's as directed • Clean drug tests • Appropriate and consistent interactions with children 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consistent court attendance • Consistent and appropriate interactions with children • Compliance with any sanctions • Compliance with all court orders • Appropriate support group attendance • Demonstrated stability in housing, employment, and/or education program • No positive UA's • Minimum of 8 consecutive months of abstinence • Team recommendation