

Guardianships

Sometimes children have no mother or father to take care of them. This can happen if the parents are dead, or very sick, or in jail, or if they have drug or alcohol problems. There can be other reasons too. Another family member or a friend will need to take care of the children. This works best if a judge or master gives the friend or relative the legal right to act as the parent. When a judge or master picks someone else to care for children instead of their mother and father, that person is called a **guardian**. This plan is called a **guardianship**.

Like a parent, the guardian cares for the children until the mother and father can do it again or until the children grow up and don't need anyone to care for them. Like a parent, the guardian finds a home and a school for the children, provides food and clothes, and takes the children to the doctor when they are sick. The children are part of the guardian's family. The guardian also listens to them when they want to talk. The guardian makes them do their homework and helps them if they need it.



Parents who cannot care for their children may still love their children. If they are able to, the mother and father may visit or phone the children at the guardian's home or other places. If the parents get better, the judge may allow the parents to take care of the children again.

The judge or master watches the guardian to make sure the guardian is doing a good job. The parents, the children, and the guardian may see the judge or the master to talk about any help the children need.

I'm Being Adopted

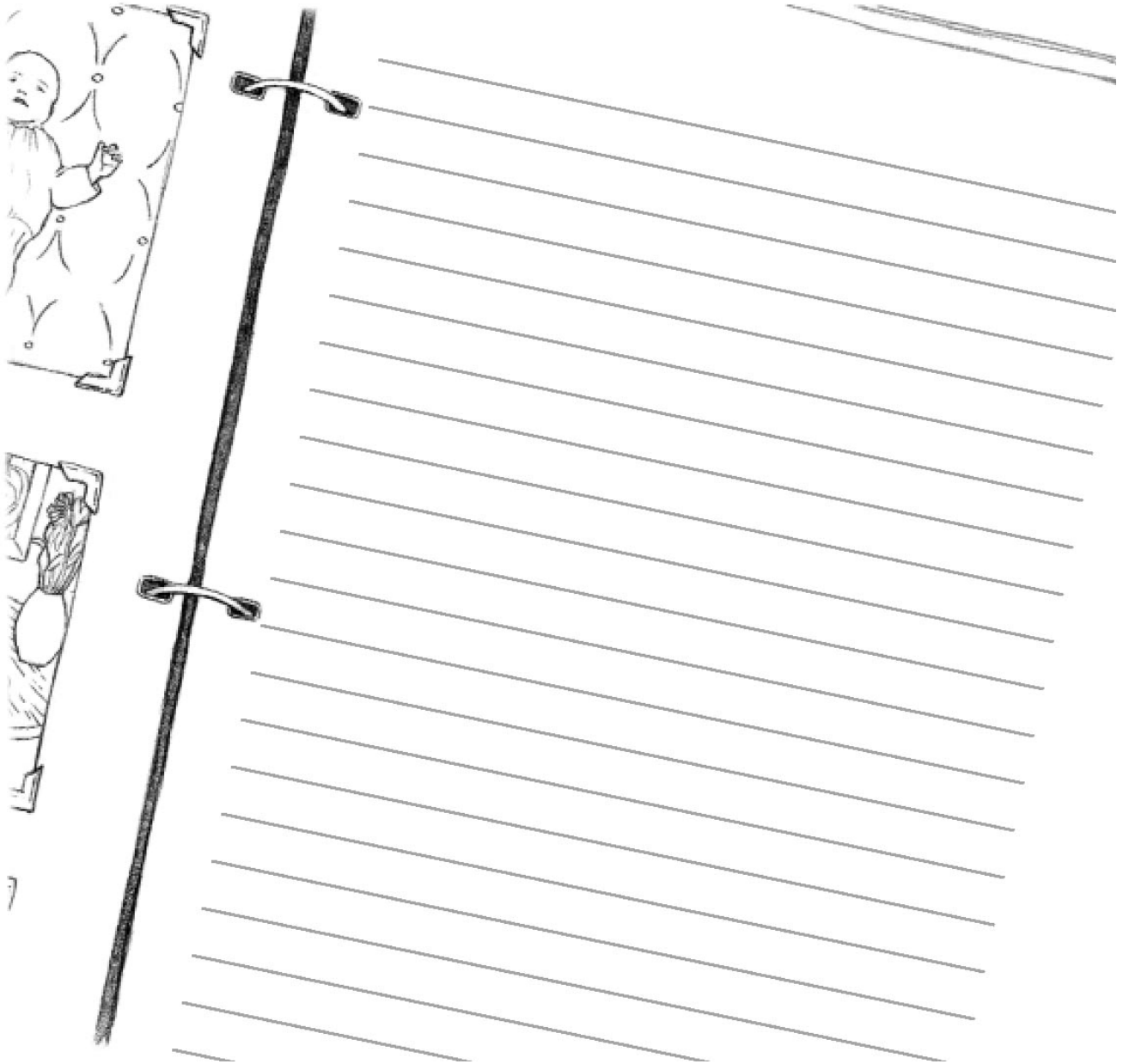
Adoption is the way a child legally becomes part of a new family. The judge or master decides if it is best for the child to be adopted. Before the judge or master makes this decision, a social worker will talk to the child. The social worker also meets the new parents and visits the new home. After adoption a child is a member of a new family. A new family can include brothers and sisters, grandparents, and aunts and uncles. As a member of the new family, the child has all the legal rights of a child born into that family.

Children become adoptable for many different reasons. Sometimes the birth parents are not able to raise the child. They may be too young. They may not be able to give the things a child needs to be happy and healthy. Sometimes the birth parents have died. If a birth parent is not able to raise their child, the court may be asked to legally end their rights as a parent. This is called a "**Termination of Parental Rights**" hearing. It is often referred to as a "**TPR.**" The judge is asked to make a decision as to who has the legal right to make decisions for the child.

People adopt children because they love children and want to bring a child into their family. Foster parents, a birth parent's family, or anyone else who wants to include a child in their family can adopt children.

Adoptions can involve all types of children and families. Children can be adopted at any age. Some are babies. Others are teenagers. Even adults can be adopted. Children can be adopted into a family of a different race or religion. Children with special abilities can be adopted. Children can even be adopted from other states or countries.





Write about someone you know who is adopted.
You can write about yourself if you are adopted, or you can make up a story.

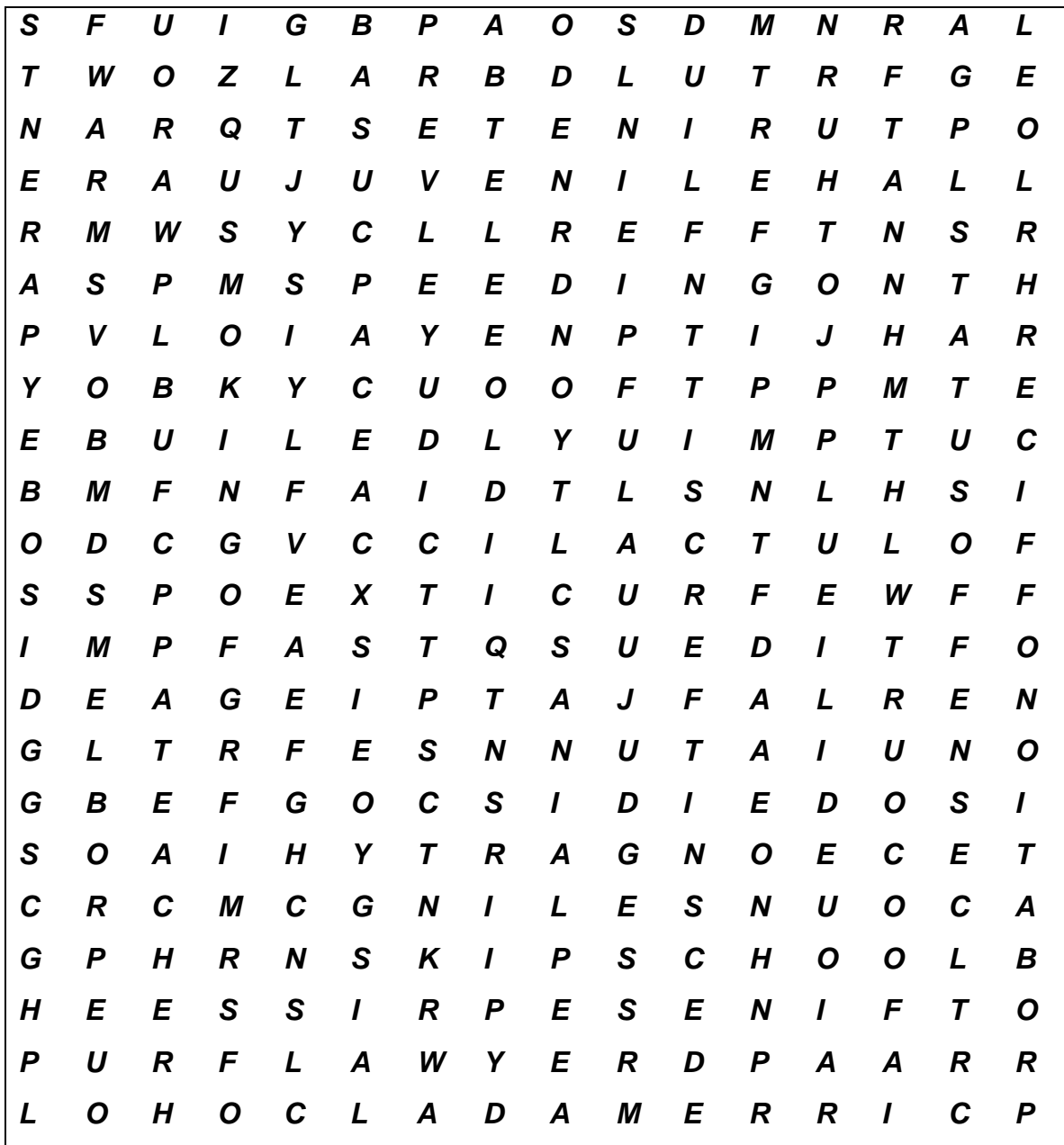
Special Laws For Children

Sometimes children do things that would be OK for an adult to do but not for a child. Although an adult may drive a car, stay out all night, and drink alcohol, a child may not. A child may not drive until age 16, may not smoke cigarettes, and may not drink alcohol until age 21. If you are a child and you do these things, they are called **status offenses**. That means you are breaking the law just because of your age.

Children do things that are status offenses for many reasons. For example, some children have problems that never seem to go away. These children feel sad, alone, and angry. They may feel so angry and alone that they always disobey their parents, never go to school, or even run away from home. But because of their age it is against the law for children to do these things. Children can get help with these feelings. They can see a school counselor, a person at their church, synagogue, or mosque, or any adult they trust to talk to about their feelings.



Usually status offenders are allowed to go home, but if you are detained you can call a lawyer, your parents, or someone else to help you.



Circle these words when you find them. The words may be horizontal, vertical, diagonal or backwards:

ALCOHOL
SPEEDING
OFFICER
TEACHER
JUDGE
CURFEW
TRUANCY
SMOKING

DISOBEY PARENTS
ASSAULT
STATUS OFFENSE
GRAFFITI
COURT
LAWYER
SKIP SCHOOL

POLICE
DUI (driving under Influence)
PROBLEMS
COUNSELING
JUVENILE
RESTITUTION
URINE TEST

Answers on page 35.

Did I Do Something Wrong?



Children can get into big trouble if they disobey the law. If a **police officer** believes that you have broken the law, the officer could arrest you. The officer will ask you questions and decide if you can go home or if you have to go to a juvenile detention center. Even if you get to go home, later you may have to talk to a probation officer about what happened. A **probation officer** may decide that you have to defend your case in juvenile court.

At the **juvenile detention facility**, the doors are locked. Usually children have to stay there until a judge or master says they can leave.

If you ever get arrested, the first thing to remember is to get some **HELP!** You need to talk to a lawyer about what happened. Your lawyer will help you talk to the police and everyone else who wants to ask you questions. You have the right to call a lawyer right away if you are locked up. Call the **public defender** if you don't already have a lawyer. You don't have to answer any questions until you have talked with your lawyer.



There are different kinds of crimes. Some are much more serious than others are. **Felony** crimes are more serious than **misdemeanor** crimes. Some crimes can be either a misdemeanor or felony, depending how bad the behavior was. A fistfight is one example. If you get into a fistfight you could be charged with assault in the second degree, which is a misdemeanor. If you really hurt someone badly in a fistfight, you could be charged with first-degree assault, which is a felony.

If you have to go to court to defend your case, don't be afraid to talk to your lawyer. There may be a trial where a judge, or a master, hears both sides of the story and then decides if you are guilty. If the judge or master decides that you are guilty, and the crime is not very serious, you might be put on probation. Then you would have to be on probation and do what the judge or master and probation officer say.

If the crime is serious or you have been in trouble before, you could be forced to live away from home or even be locked up. Your family can usually visit you if you cannot live at home for a while. You and your family may even go to counseling together to understand how to improve your behavior.

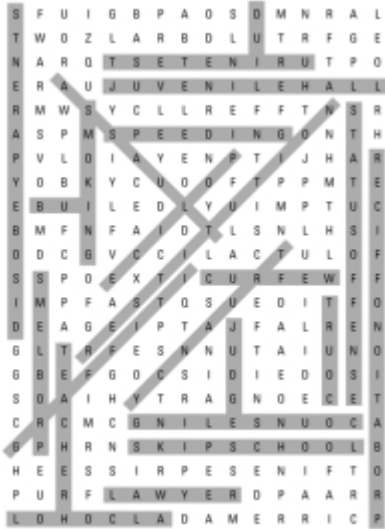
The length of time you spend locked up may depend, in part, on the seriousness of your crime. You can be locked up in a detention center until you are 21 years old. There are some crimes that are so serious that you may be charged as an adult for committing them. If you are charged as an adult, you may be sentenced to go to adult jail.



No matter what, even if you do get into trouble, remember it's never too late to change yourself for the better. **Don't ever give up on yourself!**

ANSWER KEY

FIND-A-WORD



Family Court Crossword Puzzle



Who Are the People in Court?

Witnesses: These people come to court to tell the truth and talk about what they have seen or heard.

Court Reporter: This person types everything that is said in court into a machine.

Clerk: This person organizes all the papers and keeps track of the judge's decisions.

Interpreter: This person translates what is said in court.

Judge: This person's job is to make decisions and make sure that everyone follows the rules in court.

Lawyers: These people give advice and talk in court for the people who have disagreements.

Bailiff: This person keeps order in the courtroom and usually wears a uniform.

Jurors: These people listen to both sides of a disagreement in court and then decide who wins.

What's Wrong With This Picture?

Looking at the picture from left to right, top to bottom: fiery torch on the wall, lawyer wearing shorts in court, judge holding balloon, no papers or files on the judge's desk, no flag pole, witness chewing gum and blowing a bubble, court reporter playing video game, chess set on desk, clerk asleep, no papers or files on clerk's desk, lawyer with feet on table, lawyer not wearing shoes, food on lawyer's table, picket fence in courtroom. People in audience are eating, reading a newspaper, talking during the proceeding, knitting, and not wearing shoes.