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Advocacy League

# Real Risks to CRAs

## A PPAL Juvenile Justice Tip Sheet

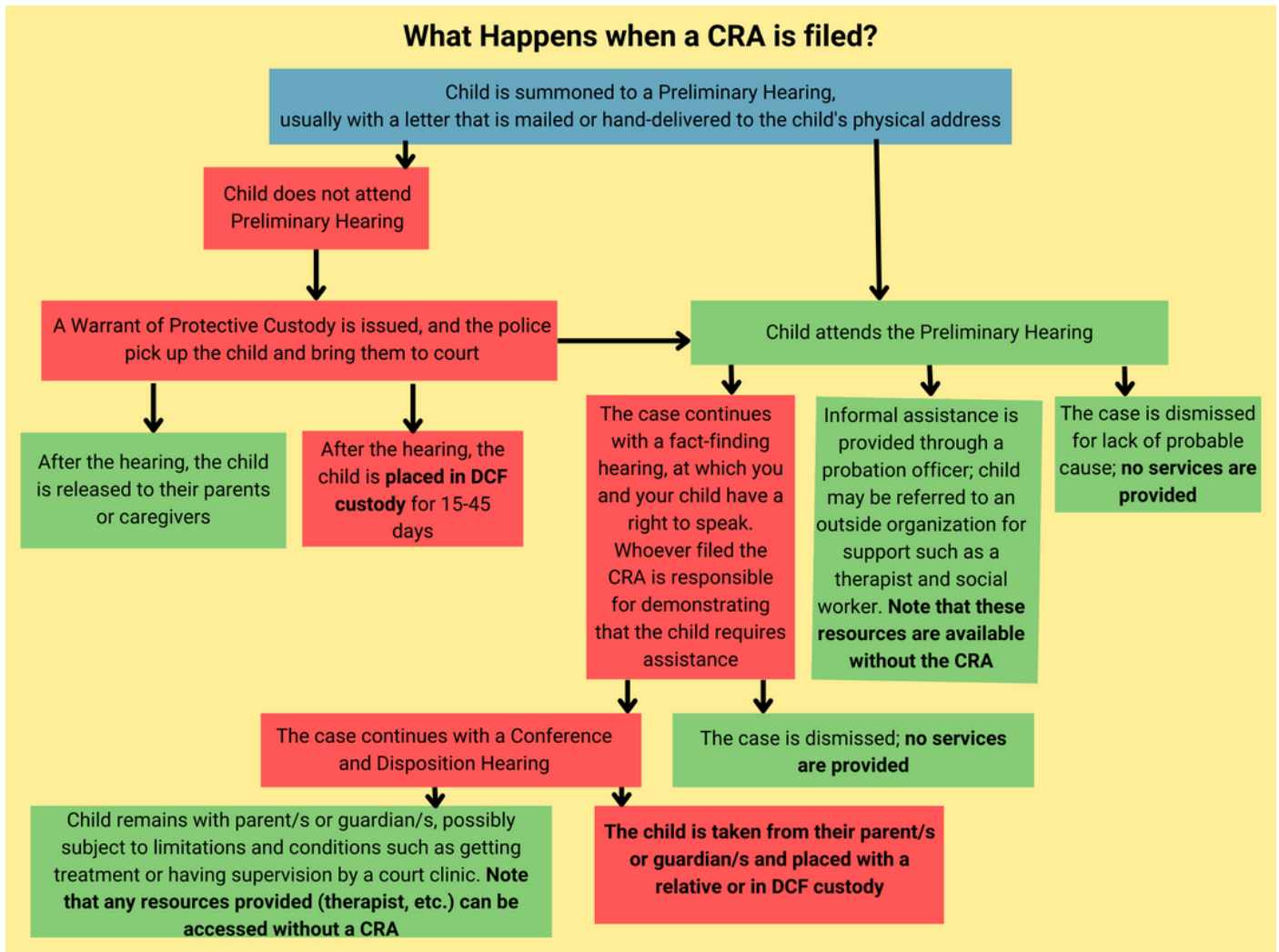
Sometimes the best parents and caregivers have CRAs filed on their child. Sometimes parents and caregivers are advised or pressured by schools, hospitals, and other places to file the CRA themselves. CRAs are often described as a way to access resources to support the child - but this is **not** how it usually turns out. **PPAL advises parents to stop, think, and ask for help before filing a CRA.**

### What is a CRA?

- A CRA, or "Child Requiring Assistance," is a case in which parents, guardians, or school officials ask the court to help supervise a child. **A CRA means court involvement.** CRAs **do not** offer any other pathways to services - if a CRA is filed for a child, the court will be involved in their life.
- A CRA can be filed by **a parent or guardian** or by **the school district the child attends.** Words you might hear connected to CRAs include "stubborn child" (a child who doesn't obey their parents or teachers) and "habitually truant" (a kid who often misses, avoids, or can't attend school).



### What Happens when a CRA is filed?





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### Should I file for a CRA on my child?

- **No.**
- A CRA can lead to a parent losing the right to make decisions about their child, to DCF (the Department of Children and Families) getting involved in their life, and to a **potential loss of custody**.
- A CRA gets your child **into the court system** - and it can be **hard to get them out**.
- With few exceptions, **all the help a child might get through a CRA can also be accessed without a CRA**.
- Juvenile courts sometimes treat kids of color differently from white kids. **If you are the parent or caregiver of a child of color, be particularly careful about getting them involved with the courts due to racial and ethnic disparities.**



### What can I do instead of filing a CRA?

- **Call your health insurance company** and ask what services might help your child. For mental health needs, ask about wrap-around services, known specifically as [CBHI](#) (when covered by MassHealth) or [BHCA](#) (when covered by private insurance). Other possible services include an intensive outpatient program and/or a partial hospitalization program.
- **Find mentors** - For your child, try to find someone who has experienced themselves what the child is going through. Your local YMCA, Boys and Girls Club, and Big Brothers/Big Sisters program can help. So can a “therapeutic mentor,” one of the services available through CBHI/BHCA (mentioned above). You can also find a mentor for yourself, such as a Family Partner (also through CBHI/BHCA) or a Family Support Specialist, like those at PPAL.
- Remember that **parents are the experts on their child’s needs**. Parents have a wealth of information regarding their child’s strengths, challenges, history, and past treatments. They are also able to ensure that their children receive culturally appropriate care and treatment.
- **Reach out to PPAL!** Our "Juvenile Justice Basics" [training](#) helps parents learn about the dangers of getting kids involved with the courts. We also offer free one-to-one advice and can connect you with all kinds of support for both you and your child. Find us at [ppal.net](http://ppal.net), email us at [info@ppal.net](mailto:info@ppal.net), or call us at (866) 815-8122.





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### What if someone else files a CRA on my child?

- **Seek help!** PPAL can support you and your child, especially if mental health is involved. PPAL can also connect you with legal support.
- **Learn about the court process.** You'll need to know the dangers of getting kids involved with the courts, and how to act once you are there. PPAL's tip sheet on ["What to Expect When you Bring Your Child to Court"](#) can help.
- **Learn to communicate to the court the positive steps you are taking at home.** In other words, share what you've been doing to help your child. For example, you could talk about your work with PPAL, any counseling your family is doing, sibling support groups the other children in your home are attending, and so on. If your child has been unable to attend school, point out what they are doing during the school day, including any restrictions on the use of electronics. If you need help finding steps to take, reach out to PPAL!



### Know your rights and your child's rights!

- **If your child has Native American / American Indian heritage, notify the Clerk magistrate's office** the first time you are in court. If you lose custody of your child, their tribe must be notified, and every effort must be made to place your child with relatives or other members of the tribe.
- If you cannot afford an attorney for your child, **one will be appointed to represent your child at no cost. An attorney will be appointed to represent you, also free of charge, if the judge considers removing the child from your custody.**
- **You have the right to attend all court hearings.** You have the right to a language interpreter and/or a sign language interpreter if you do not speak or understand English. You have the right to have another court review the decisions a Juvenile Court judge makes on your case.
- **Watch out for racial and ethnic disparities in court.** According to *The Sentencing Project*, **Black youth are more than four times as likely to be detained** or committed in juvenile facilities as their white peers (nationwide data collected in October 2019). And national data show that **Black youths and other youths of color are more likely than white youths to be arrested, referred to court, and placed outside of their homes** (for example, in detention or in a foster care placement) after sentencing (Hockenberry and Puzzanchera, 2020; Sickmund, Sladky, and Kang, 2021).



DO YOU  
KNOW  
YOUR  
RIGHTS?