

# What's Happening in Court?

An Activity Book for Children  
Who Are Going to Court  
in Wisconsin



# Welcome from the Supreme Court

Dear Families and Teachers:

Every day, all over the state, children come to our courthouses for all sorts of reasons. Going to court can be scary for adults as well as for children.

We want to make the experience of going to court easier on children by helping them to understand the process. This booklet explains what happens in court, who works here, and what the rules are. The booklet is for children ages 6 to 9 to use with help from a parent, teacher, or attorney.

We hope you and your children enjoy the book and learn from it.

Sincerely yours,

**The Wisconsin Supreme Court**

---

Written in 1999 by the legal staff of the California Office of the General Counsel, Administrative Office of the Courts, ***What's Happening in Court?*** was illustrated by San Francisco artists Andrew DeWitt and Robert Gutierrez and was produced by the dedicated staff of the AOC. The project was made possible by the generous support of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, with additional funding from the Foundation of the State Bar of California. We appreciate the California court system giving us permission to adapt the California book for Wisconsin.

This booklet was tailored for the Wisconsin courts by Judge Daniel T. Dillon, Rock County Circuit Court; Judge Benjamin D. Proctor, Eau Claire County Circuit Court; Judge Stuart A. Schwartz, Dane County Circuit Court; Brita Rekve, Eau Claire County Department of Human Services; and Assistant Corporation Counsel Timothy J. Sullivan, Eau Claire County. The booklet was reviewed and tested by students and teachers at St. John Vianney School in Janesville, Wisconsin (Judi Dillon, principal). New graphics and layout were provided by Susan Kummer and Jim Good of Madison.

For additional copies or more information about the book, please call Anna Yarish at (608) 266-1298, send e-mail to [anna.yarish@wicourts.gov](mailto:anna.yarish@wicourts.gov), or write:

Wisconsin Supreme Court  
Attn: Anna Yarish  
P.O. Box 1688  
Madison, WI 53701-1688



# What's in This Book?

On My Way to Court. . . . . 2

Why Am I Here? . . . . . 4

Who Are the People in Court? . . . . . 6

How Should I Act in Court? . . . . . 10

I Am a Witness. . . . . 12

What Is CHIPS? . . . . . 14

Who Is in the Courtroom? . . . . . 17

Mental Health Hearings. . . . . 18

Courthouse Rooms to Decorate . . . . . 20

Family Court . . . . . 22

Guardianships . . . . . 28

I'm Being Adopted . . . . . 30

Answer Key . . . . . 31

Facts About Me . . . . . 32

Some Important Information . . . . . inside back cover

About This Book . . . . . back cover

# On My Way to Court

These are the rules of the game:

Be the first player to get to the courthouse by following one of the paths.

1-4 players can play.

Use coins, paperclips, or erasers as game pieces.

Drop 3 extra coins on a flat surface.

Count the number of heads and move ahead that number.

If there are 1 head and 2 tails, move forward 1 space.

If there are 2 heads and 1 tail, move forward 2 spaces.

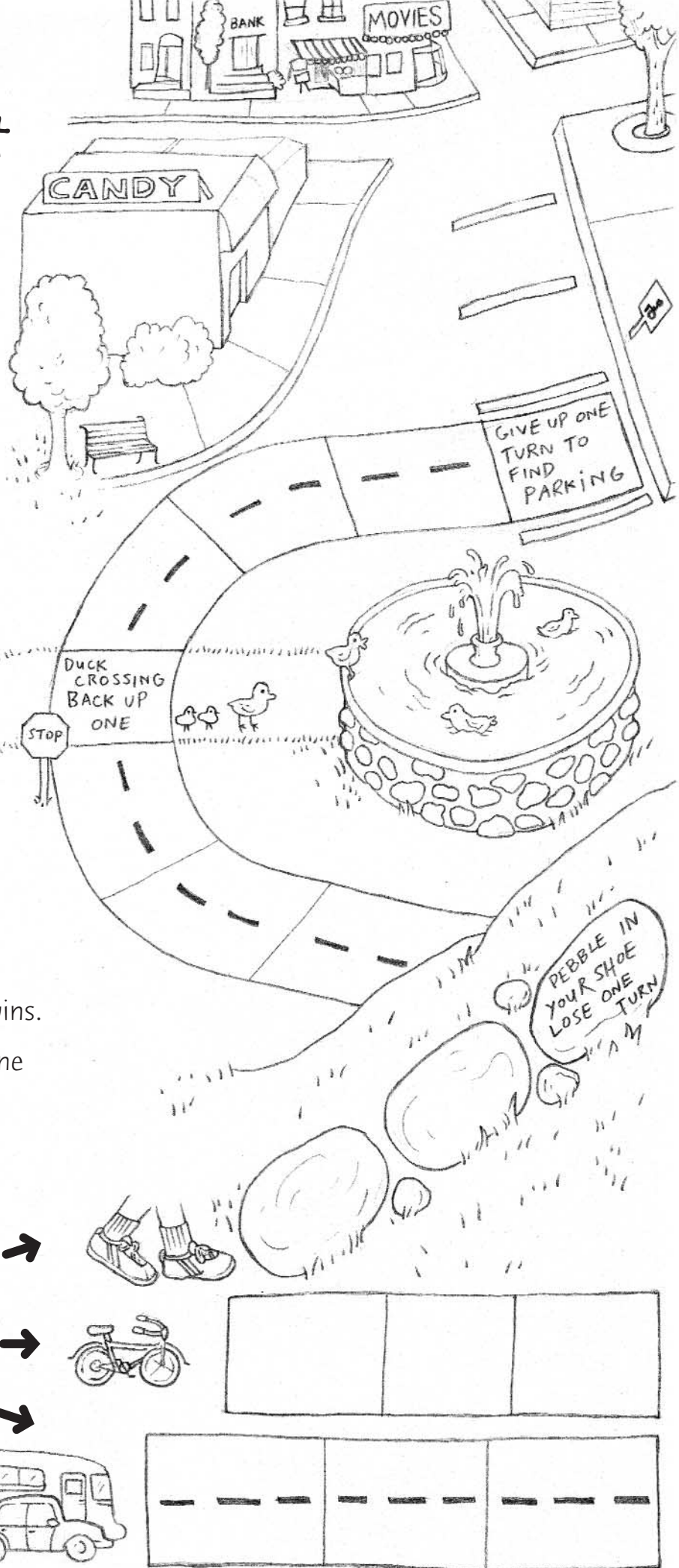
If there are 3 heads and no tails, move forward 3 spaces.

If there are no heads and 3 tails, do not move.

When you land on a space, follow the instructions on that space.

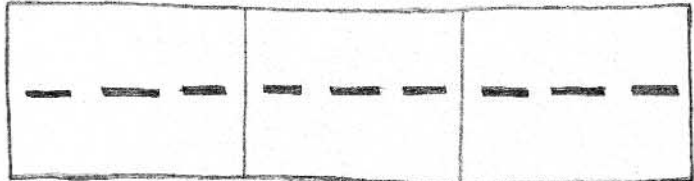
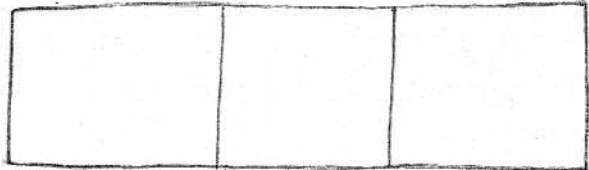
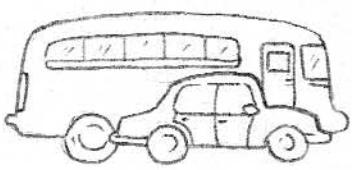
The first player to get to the courthouse wins.

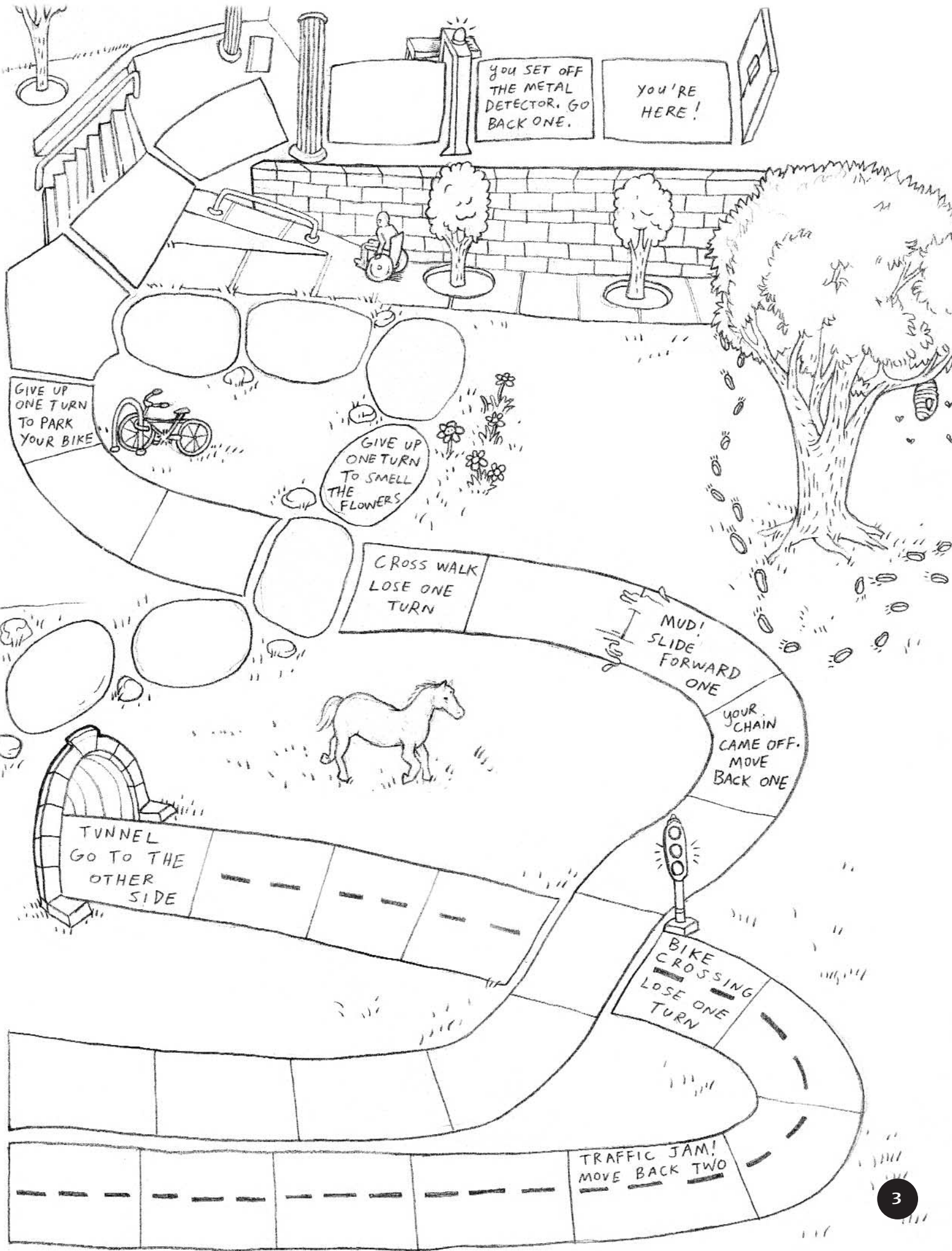
At the end of the game, make sure everyone gets his or her game pieces back.



Circle on the game all the objects that you saw on your way to court today. If you saw a horse, then circle the horse. If what you saw today is not here, draw a picture of it on the game.

**Start Here**





YOU SET OFF THE METAL DETECTOR. GO BACK ONE.

YOU'RE HERE!

GIVE UP ONE TURN TO PARK YOUR BIKE

GIVE UP ONE TURN TO SMELL THE FLOWERS

CROSS WALK LOSE ONE TURN

MUD! SLIDE FORWARD ONE

YOUR CHAIN CAME OFF. MOVE BACK ONE

TUNNEL GO TO THE OTHER SIDE

BIKE CROSSING LOSE ONE TURN

TRAFFIC JAM! MOVE BACK TWO

# Why Am I Here?

Check the box that tells why you are at court today, then color the pictures.

I am at court today with

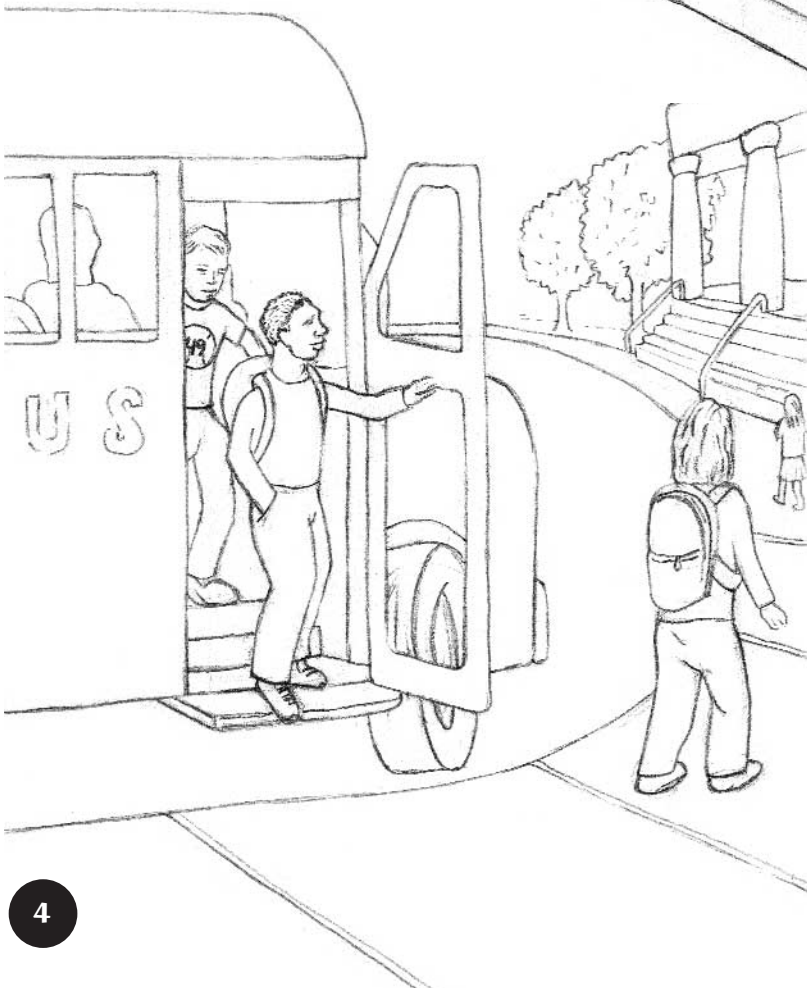
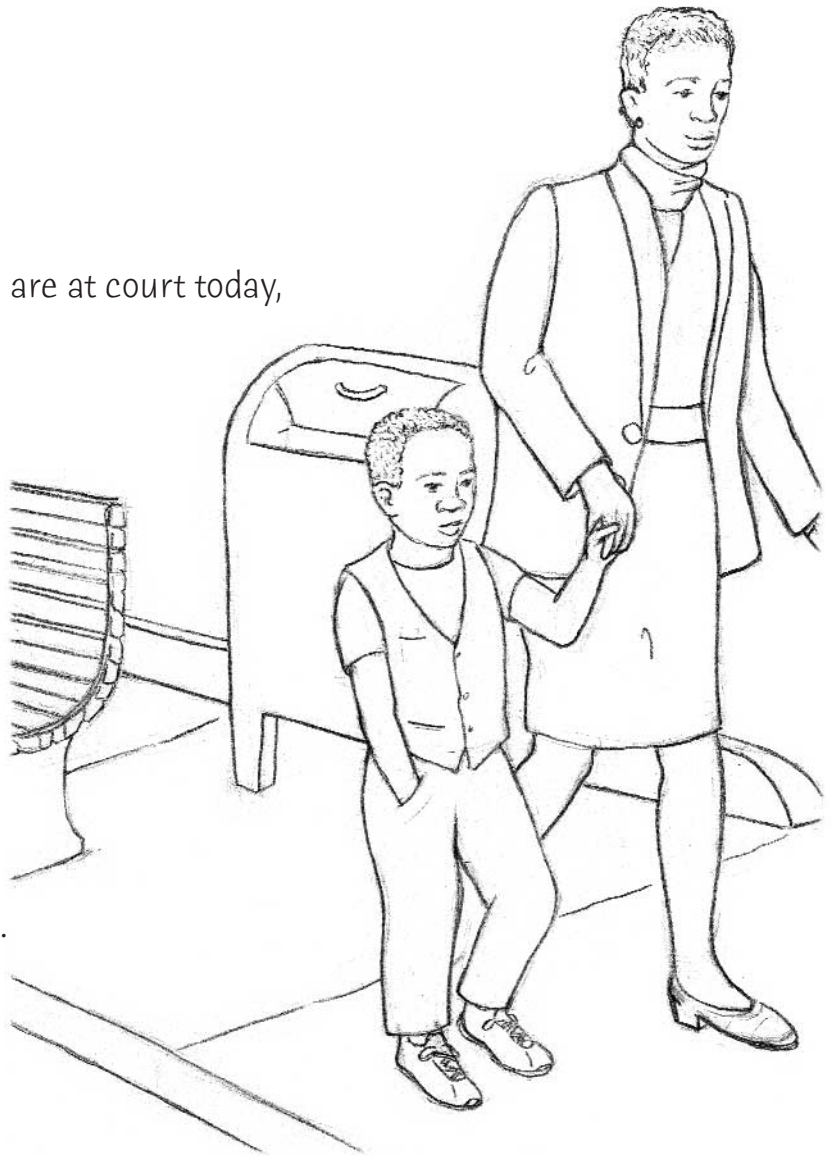
\_\_\_\_\_ who has come here to

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_



I am at court today on a field trip with \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_



I am here because I am involved in a case or I am here as a witness to tell what I have seen or heard.

I do not know why I am at court.



# Who Are the People in Court?

Many people work in a court. Everyone has a job to do.

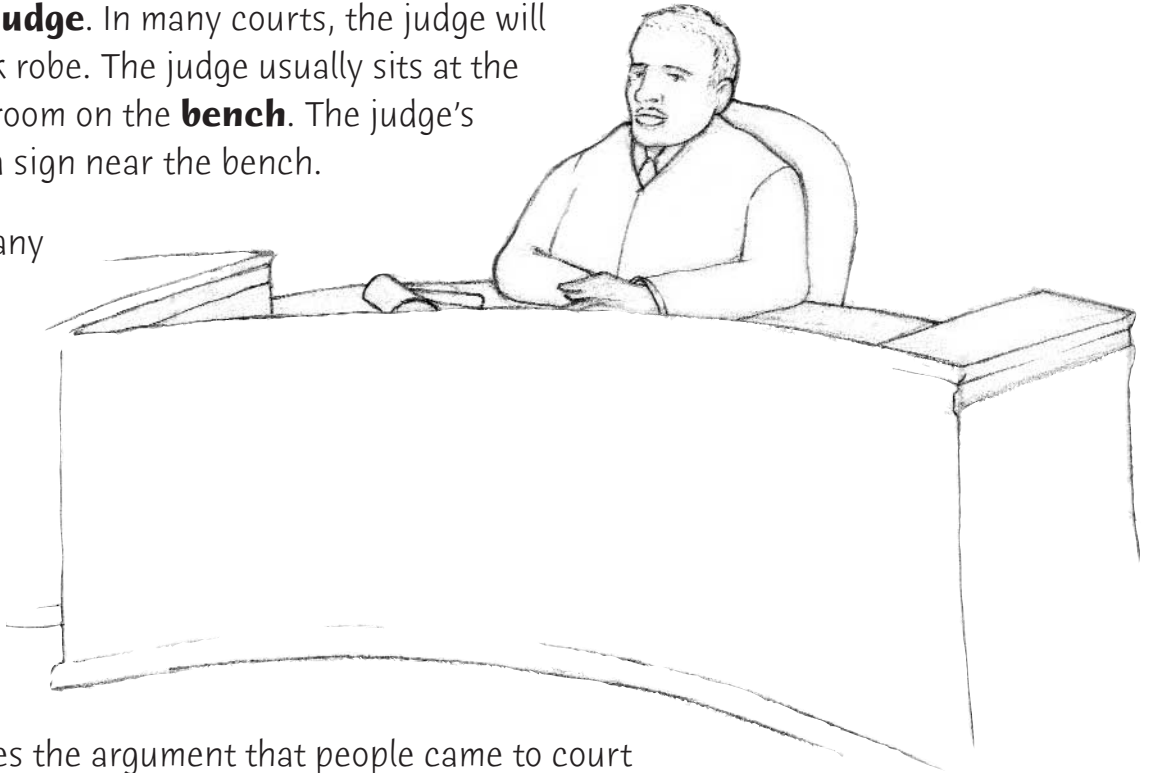
First, there is the **judge**. In many courts, the judge will be wearing a black robe. The judge usually sits at the front of the courtroom on the **bench**. The judge's name is often on a sign near the bench.

The judge does many things. First, the judge is like a referee at a ball game. The judge makes sure that everyone plays by the rules.

Sometimes the judge is also the person who decides the argument that people came to court about. For example, if two people come to court because they disagree about money, the judge might be the person who finally decides who gets the money.

Other times, a group of people decides who wins the argument. These people are called **jurors**. Jurors are people who come to court to listen to each side of a

disagreement. Then the jurors decide how the disagreement will be settled. A group of jurors is called a **jury**.







When people go to court, they often have **lawyers.**

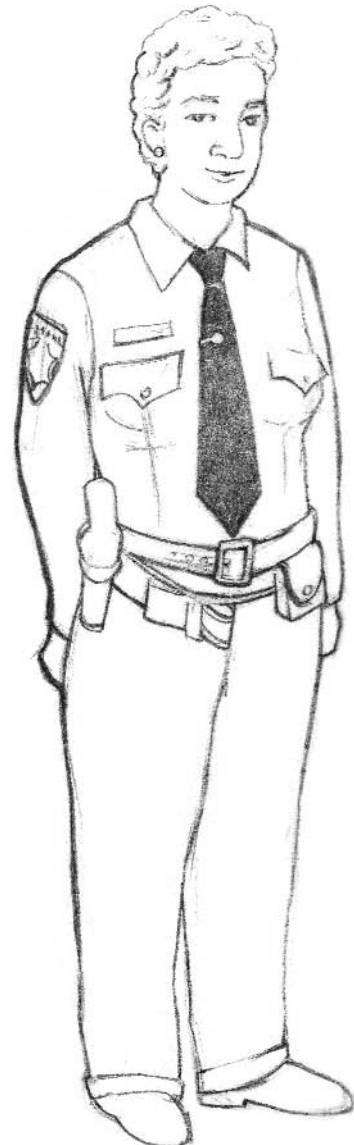
Lawyers are also called **attorneys.**

Lawyers give advice to people on their disagreements in court. It is the lawyer's job to talk to the judge and

jurors for the people who come to court. You don't have to have a lawyer to go to court. When a lawyer talks for someone who has come to court, it means that the lawyer "represents" the person. Each lawyer represents only one person in court. So, if many people are involved in a disagreement, there might be more than one lawyer in court. All kinds of people have lawyers, even children! Lawyers usually sit next to the person they represent in the court.

You can probably spot the **bailiff** very easily. The bailiff is the person who makes sure the people who go to court obey the rules. The bailiff is usually wearing a uniform, like a police officer's uniform.

Courts also have **interpreters** for people who don't speak or understand English. The interpreter's job is to translate what is said in court.



The **court reporter** is the person who writes down everything that everybody says in court. Wow! Can you imagine writing down all the words people say? The court reporter usually sits near the judge and types on a small machine. Court reporters type very fast, and everyone in court has to speak slowly and clearly so the court reporter can hear what they say.



All courts have **clerks** as well. A court clerk keeps all the papers about the cases in the court and organizes them. The clerk keeps track of the decisions or orders that the judge makes during court and also keeps the court's schedule.

**Witnesses** are people who come to court to tell what they have seen or heard. For example, if someone is accused of stealing something, a witness might come to court to say what they saw happen. When witnesses come to court, they have to raise their hand and make a special promise, called an oath, to tell the truth. They take a special seat and the lawyers ask them questions. Cases that last a long time may have lots of witnesses.



**Now that you know about some of the people in a court, can you solve this puzzle? Draw a line to connect the name of the person with the job they do. Good luck!**

Lawyers ○  
or attorneys

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

Judge ○

● This person types everything that is said in court into a machine.

Bailiff ○

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

Jurors ○

● This person translates what is said in court.

Clerk ○

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

Witnesses ○

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

Court reporter ○

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

Interpreter ○

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

*Answers on page 31.*

# How Should I Act in Court?

- Be on time.
- Dress neatly.
- Don't go in alone. Make sure an adult is with you.
- Show respect to the people who are there.
- Don't eat or drink in court.
- Don't chew gum.
- You can't listen to a Walkman in court.
- There may be other cases before yours. You have to be quiet and wait.
- You can read a book, or play quietly with this book while you wait.
- When you talk to a judge, call the judge "Your Honor" to show respect.
- Don't speak unless the judge or a lawyer asks you to.
- If you don't understand something, say that you don't understand. Someone will explain it again for you.

## What's Wrong with This Picture?

Circle the things in the picture that are wrong or that should not be happening in court. Or you can write them here:

---

---

---

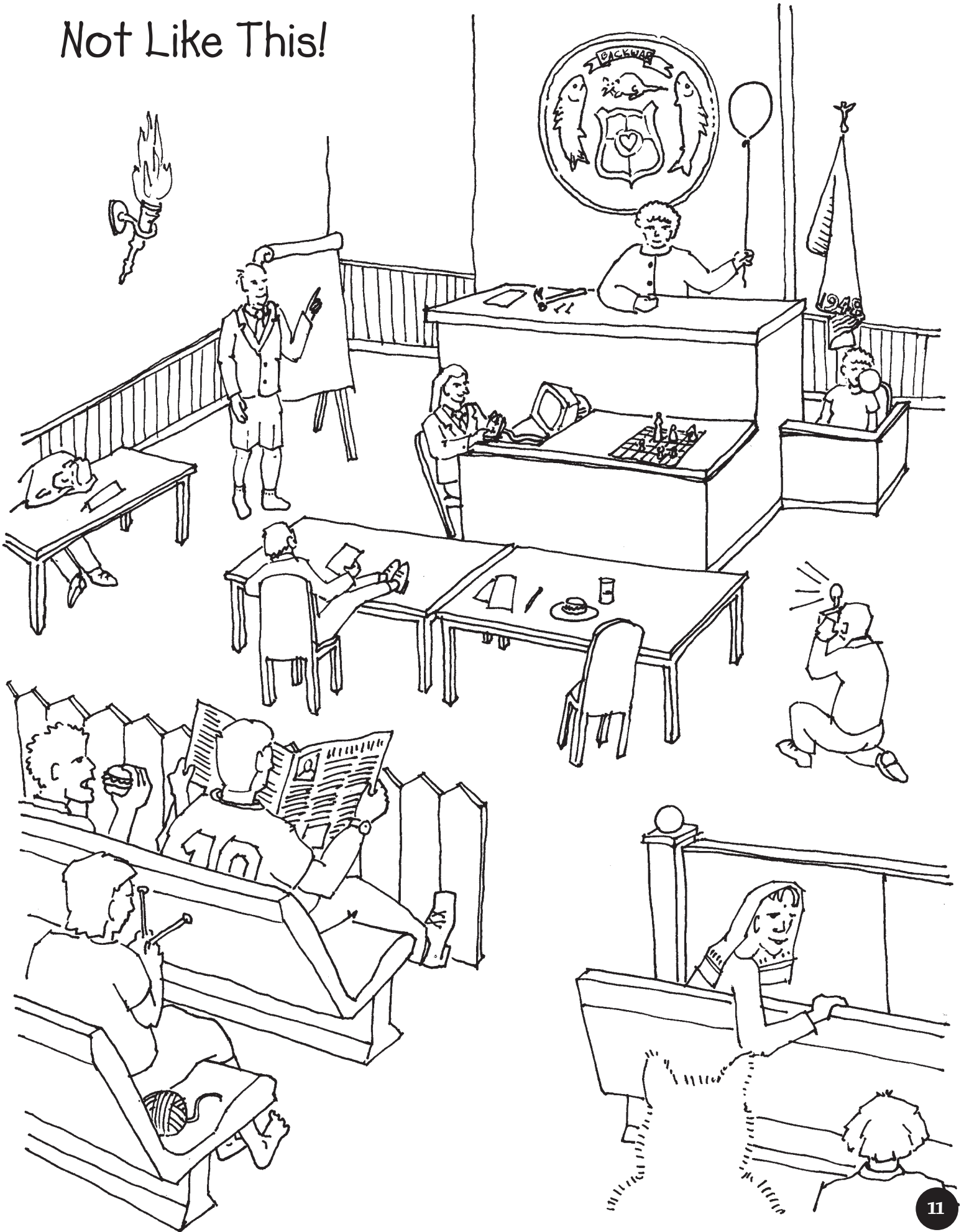
---

---

---

Answers on page 31.

# Not Like This!



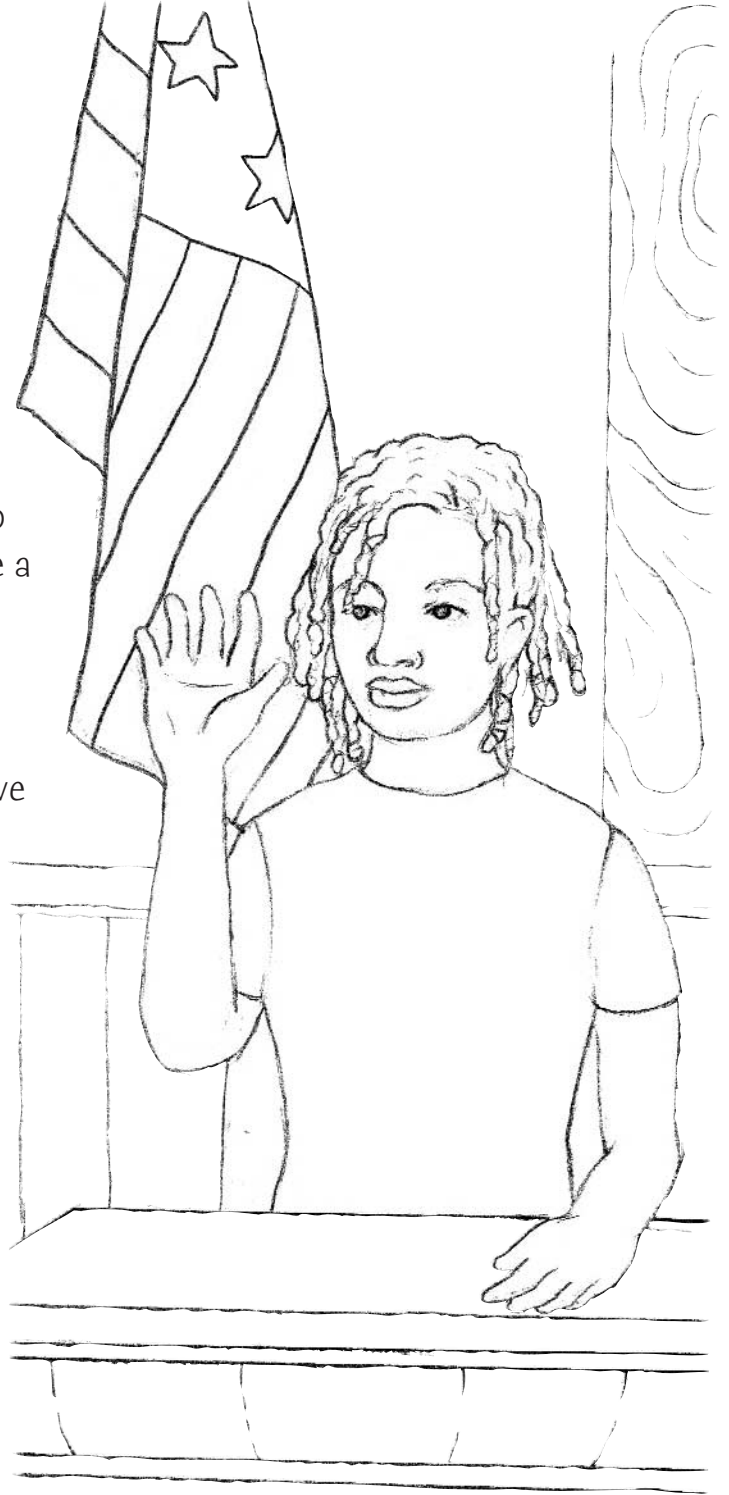
# I Am a Witness

You read about **witnesses** on page 8. Children can go to court and sometimes they can be witnesses, too. The most important thing for every witness to do is to tell the truth. Sometimes it hurts to say what really happened, but if you are a witness you still have to tell the truth.

Sometimes a lawyer can ask you a question and you do not remember the answer. If that ever happens, all you have to do is say you don't remember. If you do not know the answer to a question, you can say, "I don't know." It is important not to guess, and not to say something that you think the lawyer or the judge wants to hear. Lawyers sometimes ask questions in a funny way. If they do, you may not understand what they mean. That's OK, too. Just let the judge or the lawyer know that you do not understand the question, and the judge will take care of the situation.

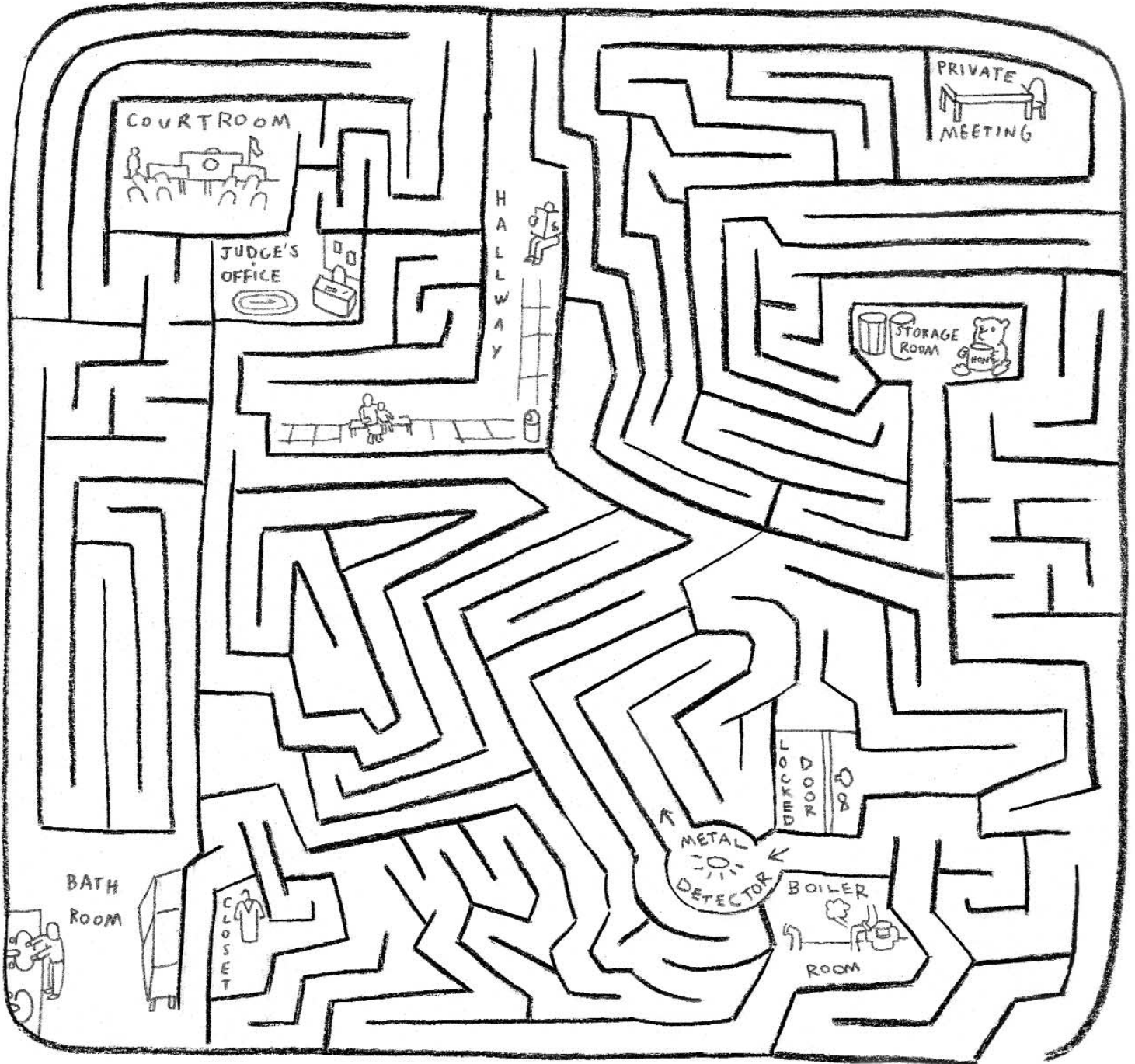
Sometimes children are scared to go to court. If you have to go to court, it's OK to feel scared. Adults get scared about court, too. Just remember the judge is there to make sure everything is fair.

Children usually go to court because of cases involving their family. It could be a criminal case, where someone is charged with a crime. Or it could be a family law case if a mother and father need the judge to decide something. Sometimes it is a case where someone in the family hurt someone else in the family. These cases are hard for everyone.



# Can You Find Your Way to the Courtroom?

(The courthouse isn't really this confusing!)



**Start Here** ↗

# What Is CHIPS?

When children come to court because a parent has hurt them or not taken care of them, this is a **CHIPS** case. This stands for “Child in Need of Protection and/or Services.” Until a child grows up, he or she is dependent on adults and needs their protection. If parents can’t or won’t take care of their child properly, the juvenile court may step in and the child may become in need of protection and/or services from the court in order to keep him or her safe. When this happens, the child may have to live with relatives or another family for awhile. This temporary family is called a **foster care family**.

Usually, parents want to have their child live with them. The judge and social workers will work with parents to make their home healthy and safe. If they succeed, then the child can move back home with the parents. This is called **reunification**.

Sometimes parents can’t make their home safe for the child. Then the judge and others may have to find another home where the child can live safely for a long time. They make a **permanent plan** for a child.

## What Does the Social Worker Do in Children’s Court?

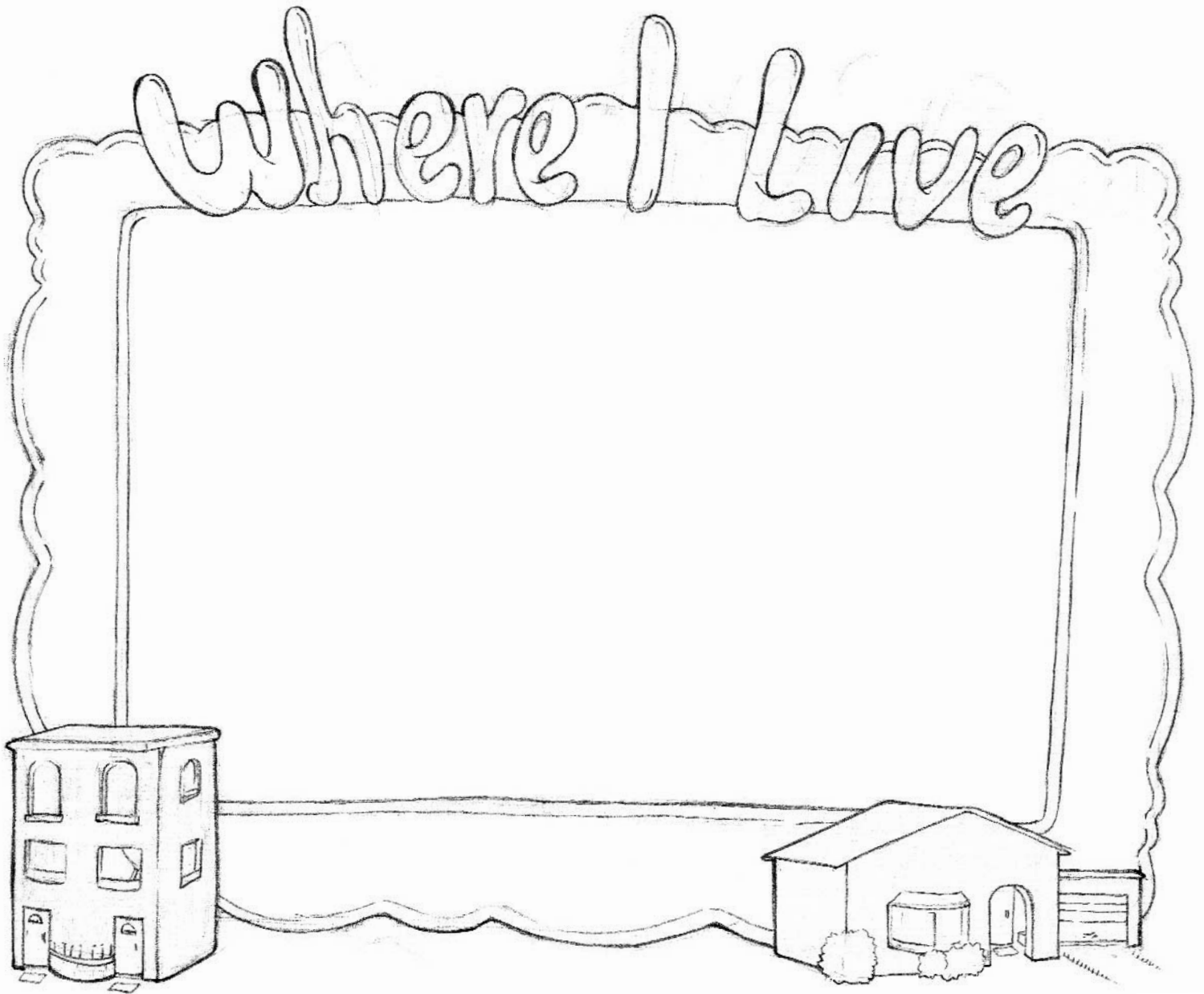
A social worker is a person who tries to protect children and keep them safe. A social worker may help children who are being hit or touched in bad ways (this is called **abuse**). The social worker may also help children who don’t have proper food, clothes, or other things they need (this is called **neglect**). If the abuse or neglect is very bad, the social worker may have to find another place for the child to stay. Then the family and the social worker may have to go to court so that a judge can decide how to help the child and the family.

## What Does the Judge Do in Children’s Court?

You read about judges on page 6 of this book. Judges in children’s court do all the jobs judges usually do, except that there is no jury in children’s court. The judge is the one who makes the final decision about what happens in a case.



It is the judge's job to listen to what everyone says in court. The judge knows what the law is and decides what needs to happen to keep kids safe. If the judge asks you a question, it is very important for you to tell the truth. The judge needs to know the truth to make the best decision for you.



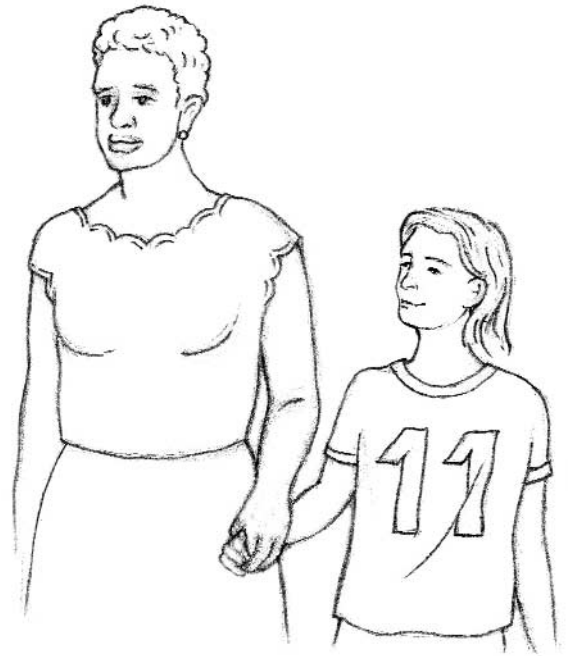
**Draw a picture of the place you live.**

## What Do Lawyers Do in Children's Court?

On page 7 of this book, you learned about the job of lawyers, who are also called attorneys. People involved in a case usually have a lawyer to speak for them in court. The people in a CHIPS (child in need of protection and/or services) case who might have a lawyer are the social worker, mother, father, children, and sometimes others.

## What Does a *Guardian ad Litem* Do in Children's Court?

The judge will assign a special attorney known as a **guardian ad litem** (GAL) to help with a CHIPS case. GALs help the court by talking to the people, especially children, and telling the judge what they learn. GALs spend a lot of time with the children they're assigned to. They listen to the children and tell their story to the court. The GAL also suggests to the courts what can be done to make the child safe and healthy. The GAL's only job is to try to help the court decide what is in a child's best interest.

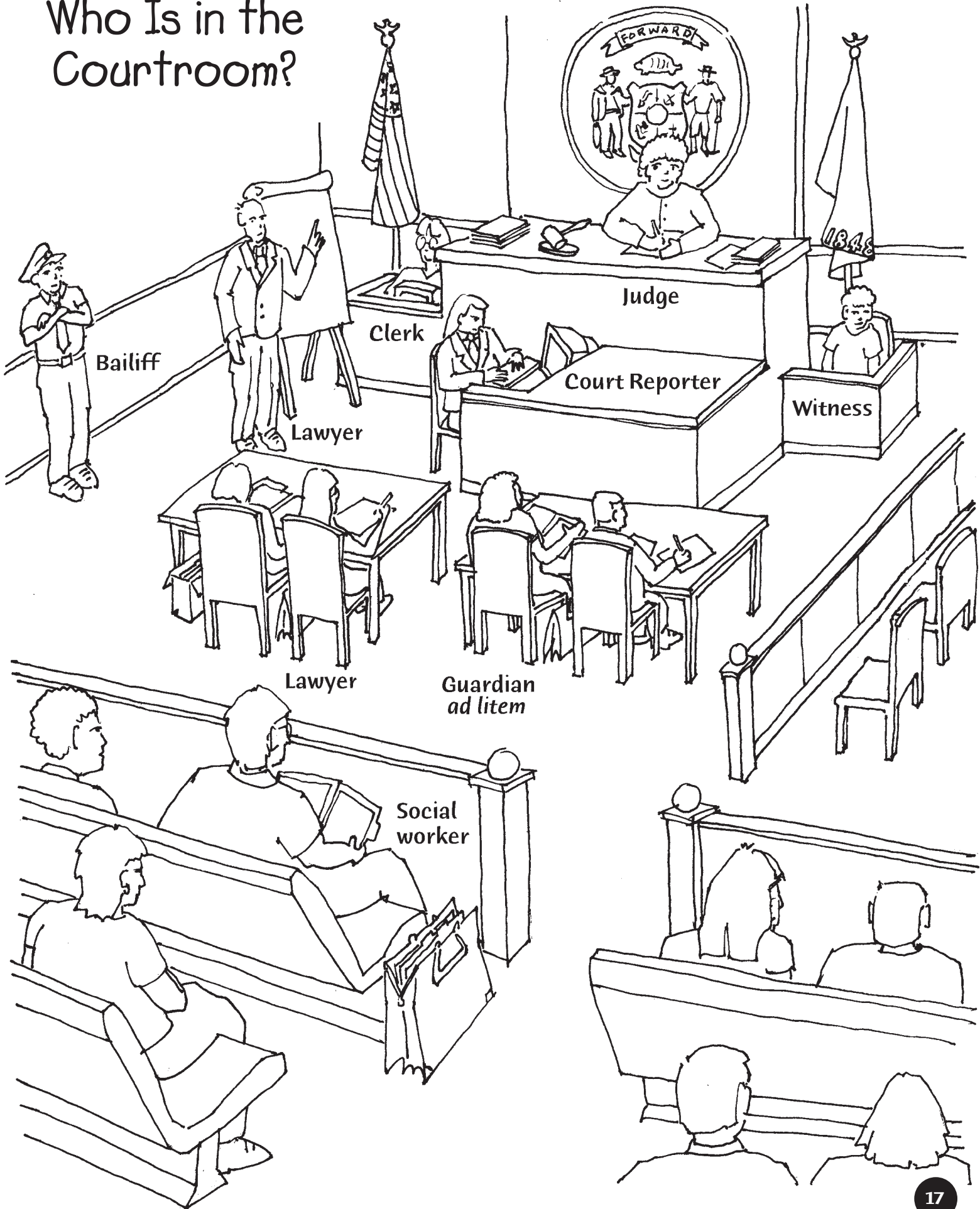


## What Do Children Do in Children's Court?

This book tells about witnesses on pages 8 and 12. A child might be a witness. If you are a witness, the lawyers and sometimes the judge will ask you questions. Of course, it is very important to tell the truth when you answer questions in court. You even have to make a special promise, called an oath, to tell the truth before you answer questions. It is also important to answer just the questions that you understand. If you don't understand a question, it is OK to say so and have the question explained to you.

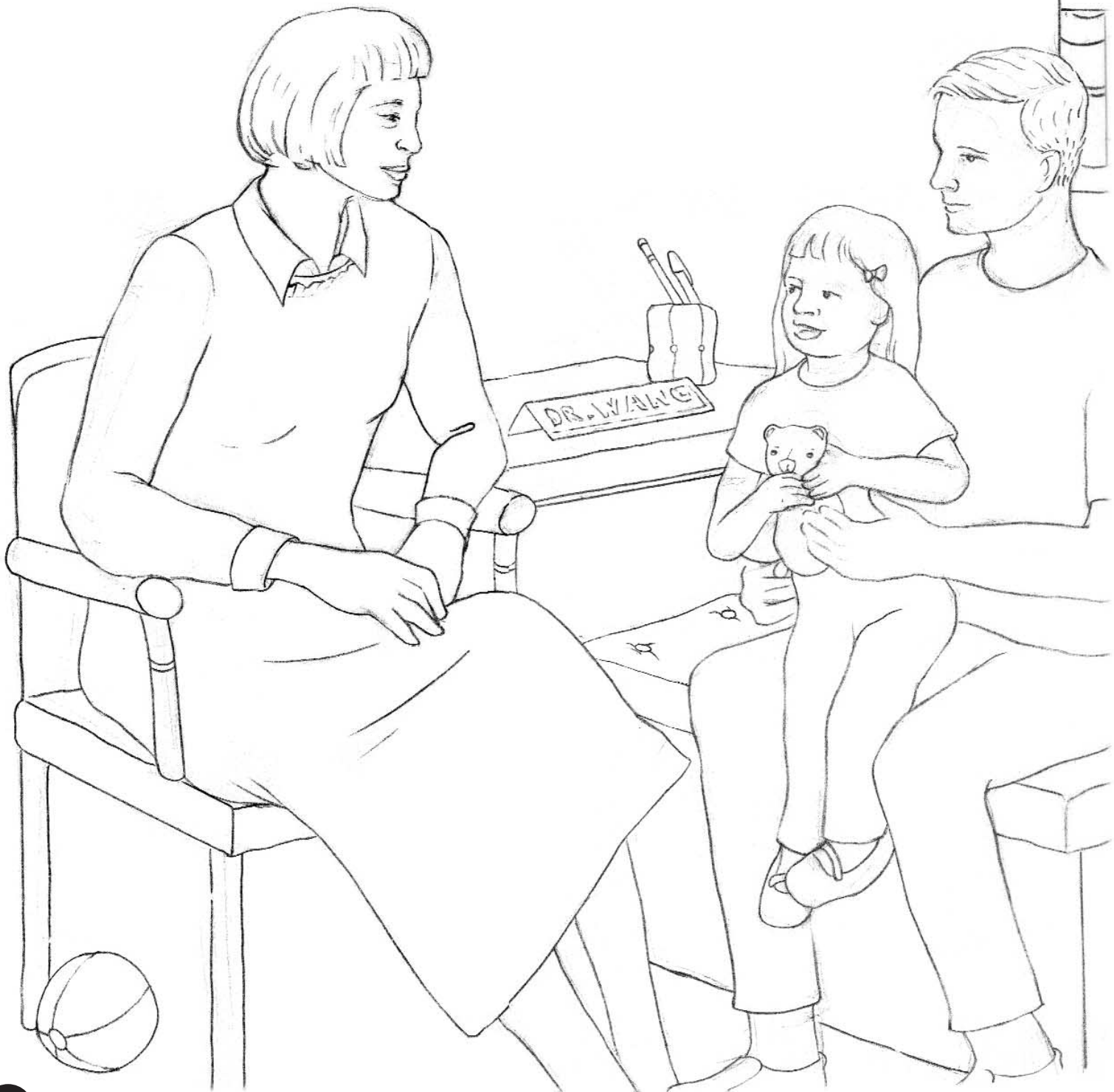
If you're afraid to answer questions in the courtroom, be sure to tell your lawyer, if you have one, or the judge. They will do everything they can to make you feel more comfortable.

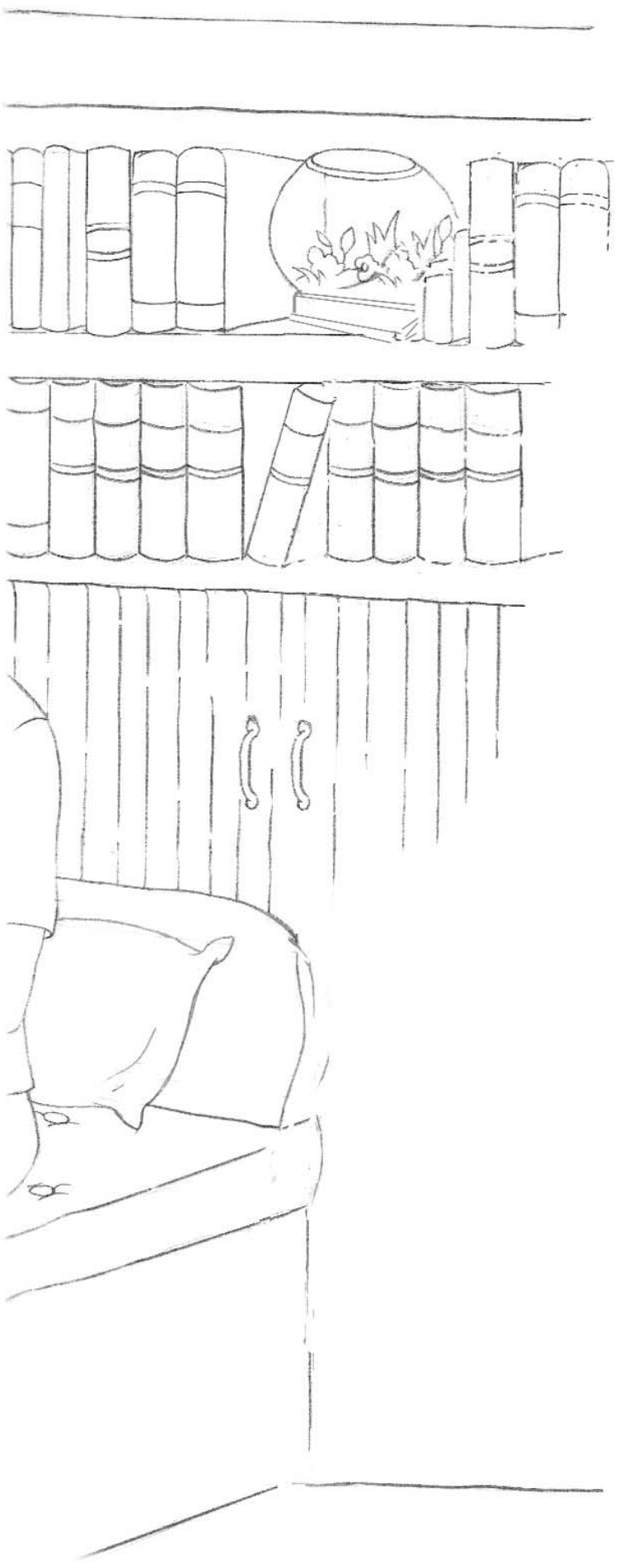
# Who Is in the Courtroom?



# Mental Health Hearings

Mental health is all about how people think and see things in the world. Mental health is just as important as physical health. A person with emotional or mental problems may feel or act sick. Sometimes people have such big emotional or mental problems that the only place they can be taken care of is





a hospital. This can happen to both adults and children. Adults can give their own permission to a hospital to treat them. Usually, parents can give a hospital permission to treat their children. These are called “voluntary” admissions to a hospital.

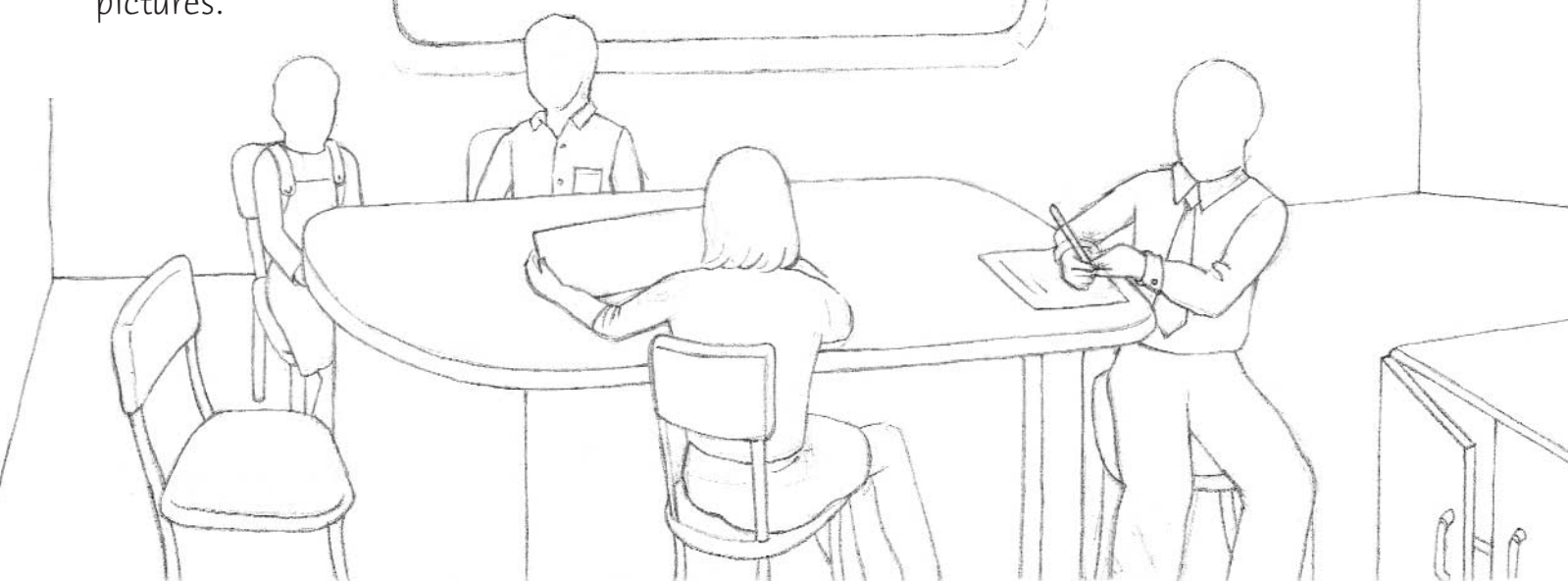
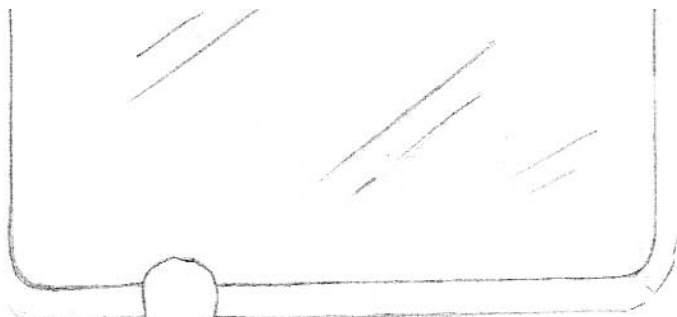
Sometimes people can’t or won’t give a hospital permission to treat themselves or their child. In that case, a court might be asked to order or “commit” the person to go into the hospital. The person goes in front of a judge who hears the case. This is called a **hearing**. The hearing where a judge decides whether or not to order treatment in a hospital may be called a commitment hearing.

At the commitment hearing the judge will hear stories and facts about what mental or emotional problems the person has and how to treat them. The judge has to decide if there are any problems and if the problems are so big that the person has to stay in the hospital, even if the person doesn’t want to. If the problems are not too big, the person may still have to see a doctor, but not in a hospital.

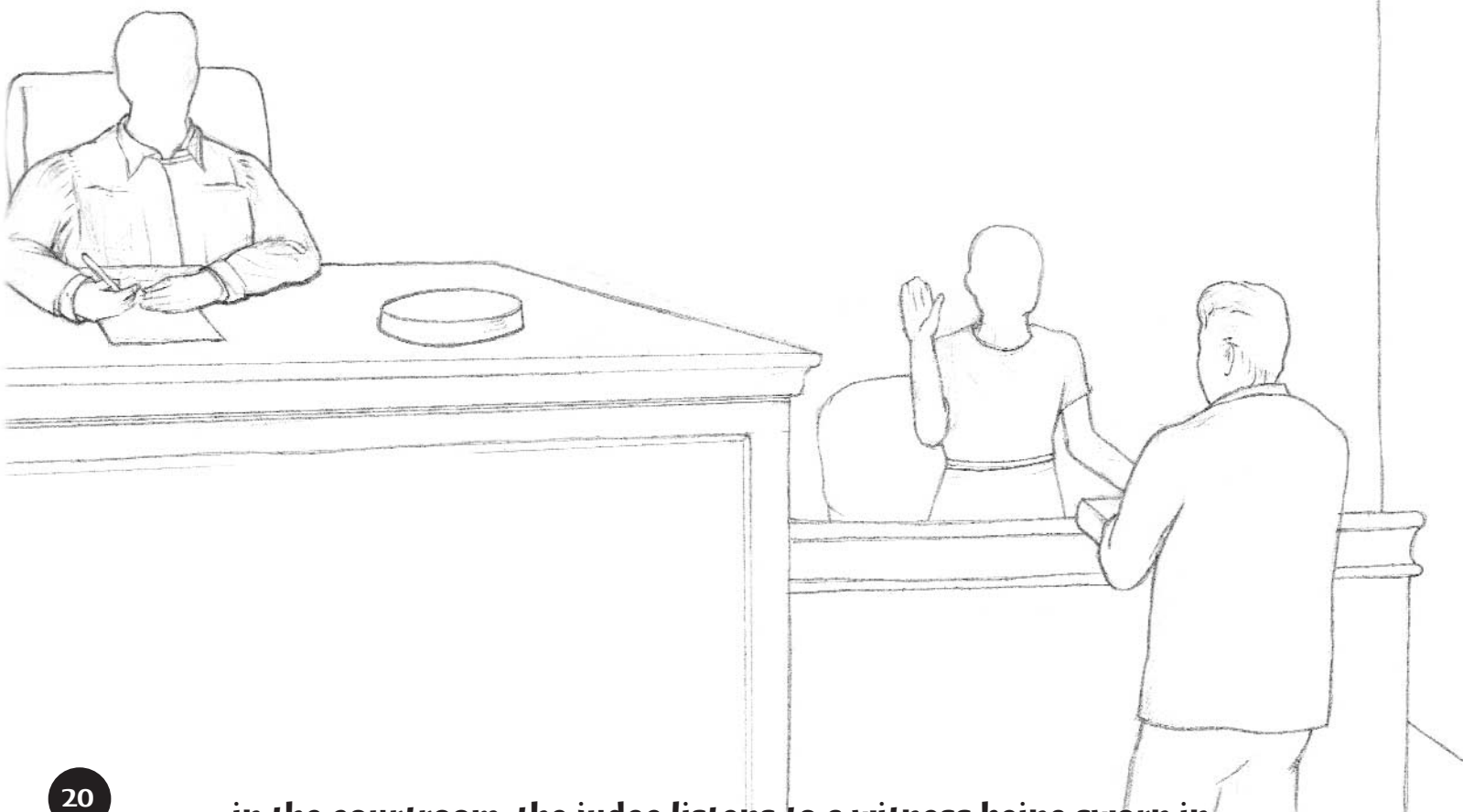
Sometimes the judge goes to the hospital and holds the commitment hearing there instead of in the courthouse.

# Courthouse Rooms to Decorate

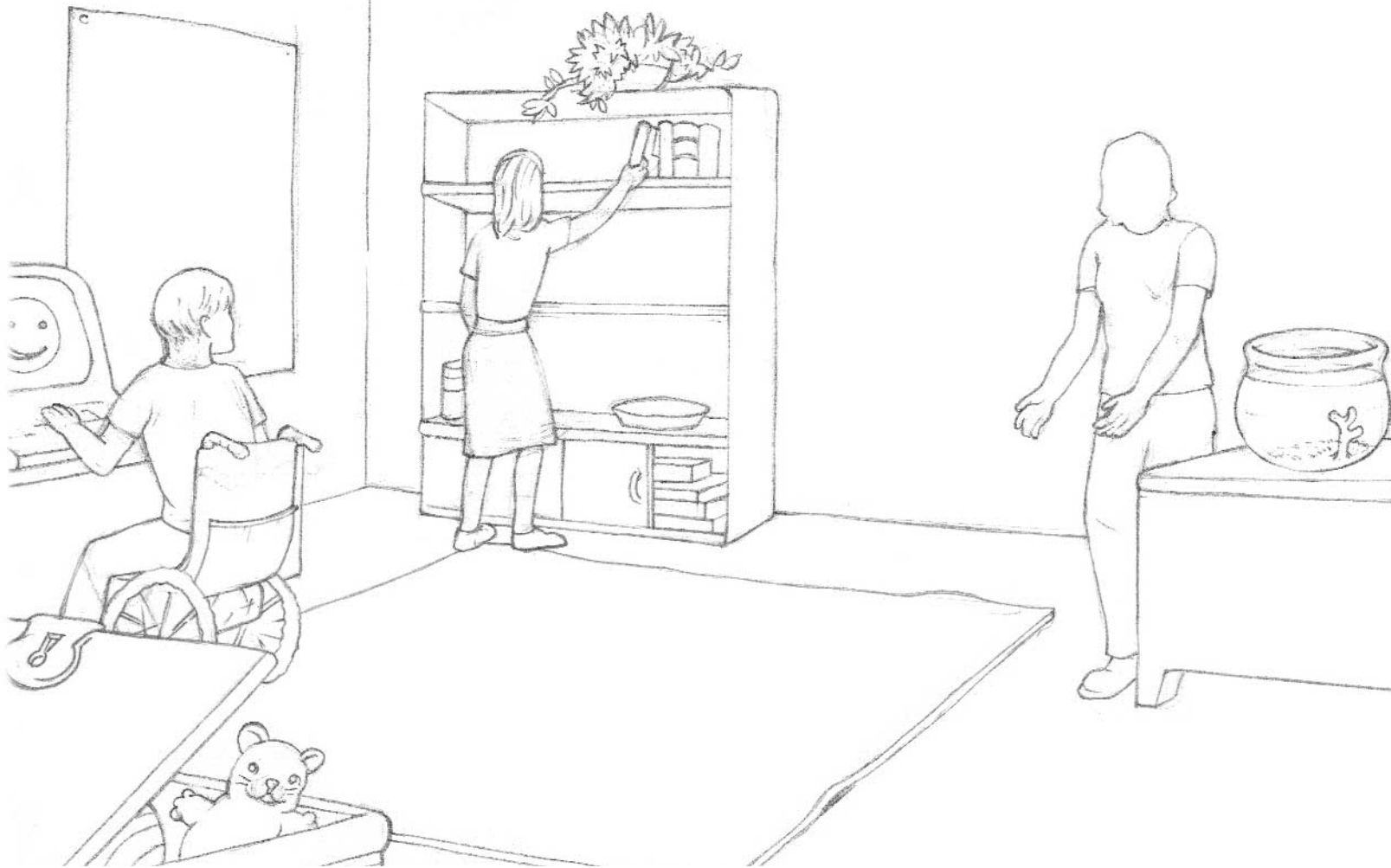
Give these people in the courthouse faces and then color in the pictures.



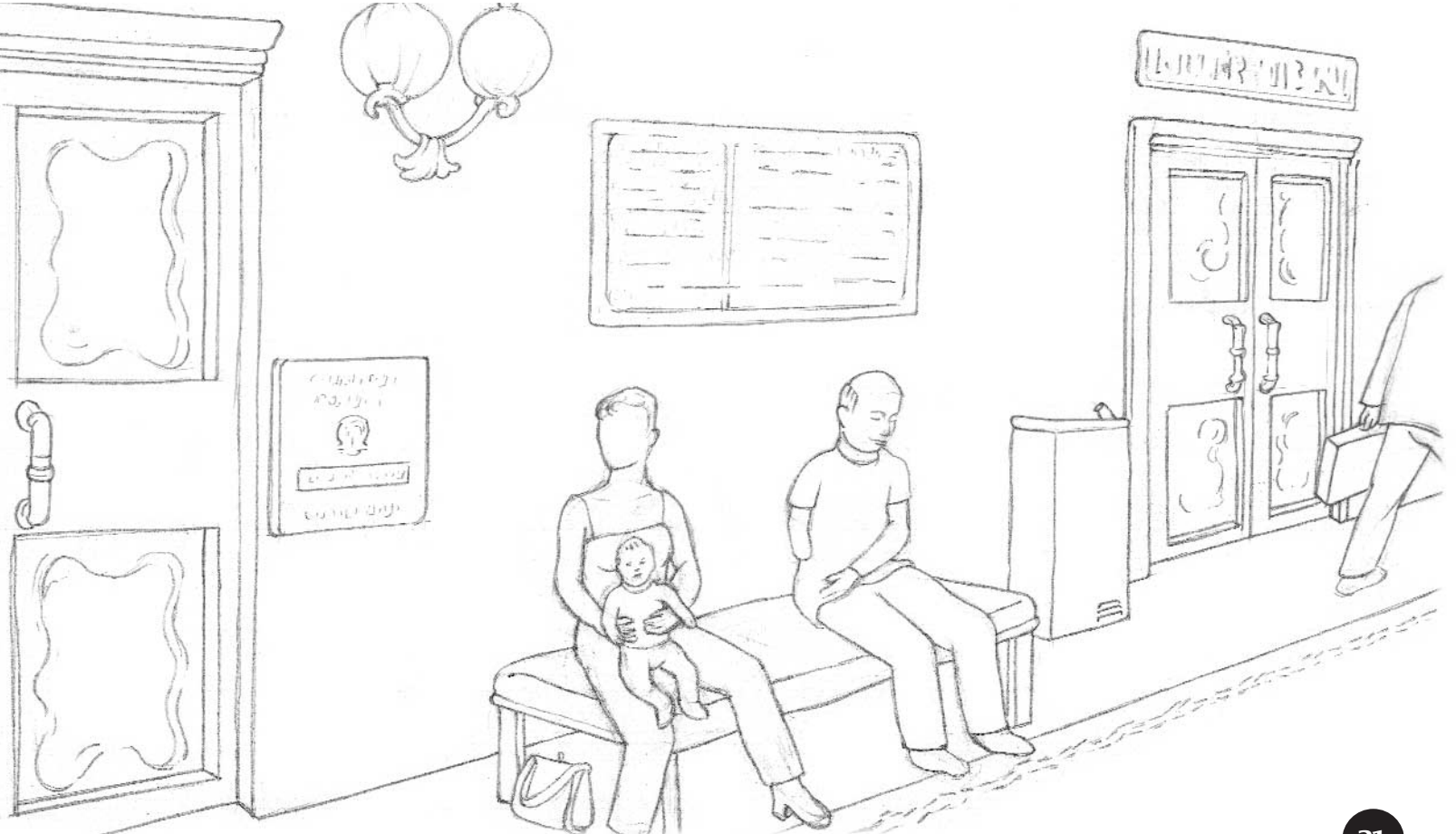
**a child tells her story in a special room**



**in the courtroom, the judge listens to a witness being sworn in**



**a children's waiting room in the courthouse**



**waiting their turn outside the courtroom**

# Family Court

When a mother and father decide they can't live together anymore, they may decide to separate and live in different homes. If they have been married and don't want to live together or be married anymore, they can either get a **legal separation** or a **divorce**. To get a divorce, married people have to go to court. In court, a mediator will help the parents plan for how they will take care of their children, and a judge will decide how they will split up all the things they shared while living together.

Lots of children have parents who go to family court. Children almost never have to go to court even if their parents have a case there, but once in a while they do. If you have to go to court, remember that it isn't because you have done something wrong.

Courts are different than other places you may have been, but you don't have to be afraid. It helps to talk to someone about your feelings about going to court. Talk with your parents or your lawyer who is called a **guardian ad litem**.

If your parents aren't living together, they need to figure out how you can spend time with both of your parents. They need to figure out when you will live with each of your parents. This plan about where you live is called a parenting plan.







**Write a story about a person going to family court.**

**Maybe you know someone who went to family court to fix a problem.**



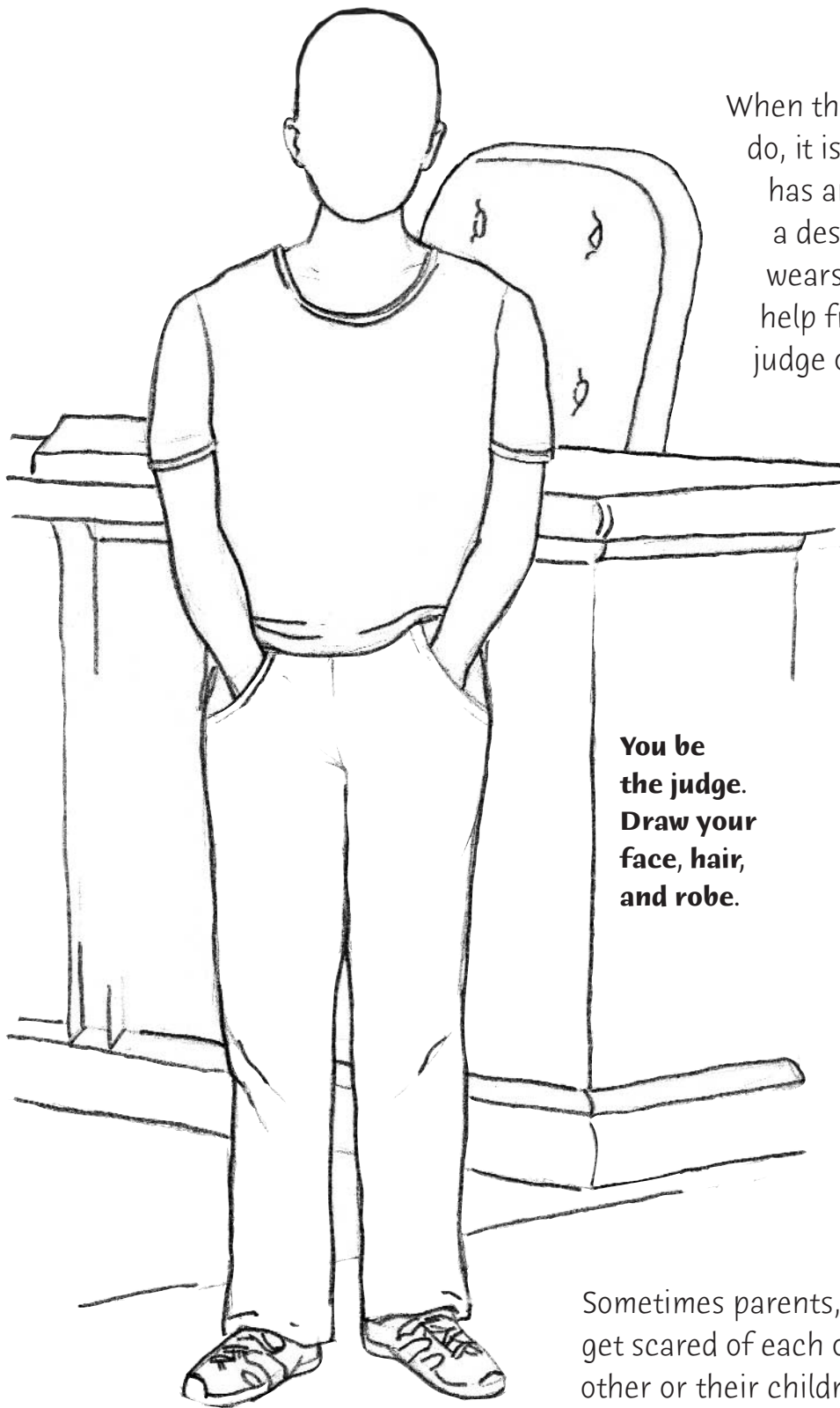
If you live mostly with one parent, you will usually get to spend time with the other parent. The plan for the time you spend with your other parent is called a **physical placement schedule**.

When your parents need help deciding about physical placement, they can see a court **mediator**. The mediator listens to your mother's and your father's ideas about how best to take care of you. The mediator helps them work out a plan that will be best for you. If they cannot work out a plan, a **guardian ad litem**—your lawyer—will get involved, and will usually want to meet the children. If the guardian *ad litem* wants to talk to you, he or she will probably ask you questions about how things are going for you at home, at school, and with your friends, but won't ask you to choose which parent you want

to live with or to say if you like one of your parents more than the other. This lawyer will also meet with your parents to try to figure out the best physical placement arrangement for you.

Parents also have to figure out how much money they need to give each other to take care of you after they separate. This money is called **child support**. The court will decide how much support will be paid if your parents need help reaching an agreement. You will not be involved in this.

If your parents and the mediator can't work out a parenting plan, the judge will tell your parents that a guardian *ad litem* will do a custody evaluation. This lawyer will spend some time getting to know both you and your parents and will think about what would be the best way for you to spend time with your parents, and tell the judge what he or she thinks.



**You be the judge. Draw your face, hair, and robe.**

When the **judge** tells someone what to do, it is called an **order**. The judge has an office in the court and sits at a desk called a **bench**. The judge wears a black **robe**. The judge gets help from the **clerk**, who keeps the judge organized. In the courtroom, there is also a person called a **bailiff** who keeps everyone safe. Sometimes a judge can't finish a case in one day. Then the judge will **continue** the case.

Your parents can also come to court to ask the judge to decide who your father is. This may be because your father's name is not on your birth certificate, or because your parents weren't married to each other when you were born. The judge can make a decision about who is legally your father. This decision is called **paternity judgment**.

Sometimes parents, or people who live together, get scared of each other. Some parents hurt each other or their children. This is called **domestic violence**. If one parent hurts or really scares the other parent, that other parent can ask the judge for help. The judge can make a court order that tells the parent who is hurting or scaring the family to stay away and not hurt the family anymore. This kind of court order is called a **restraining order**, or sometimes a **TRO**, for **temporary restraining order**.

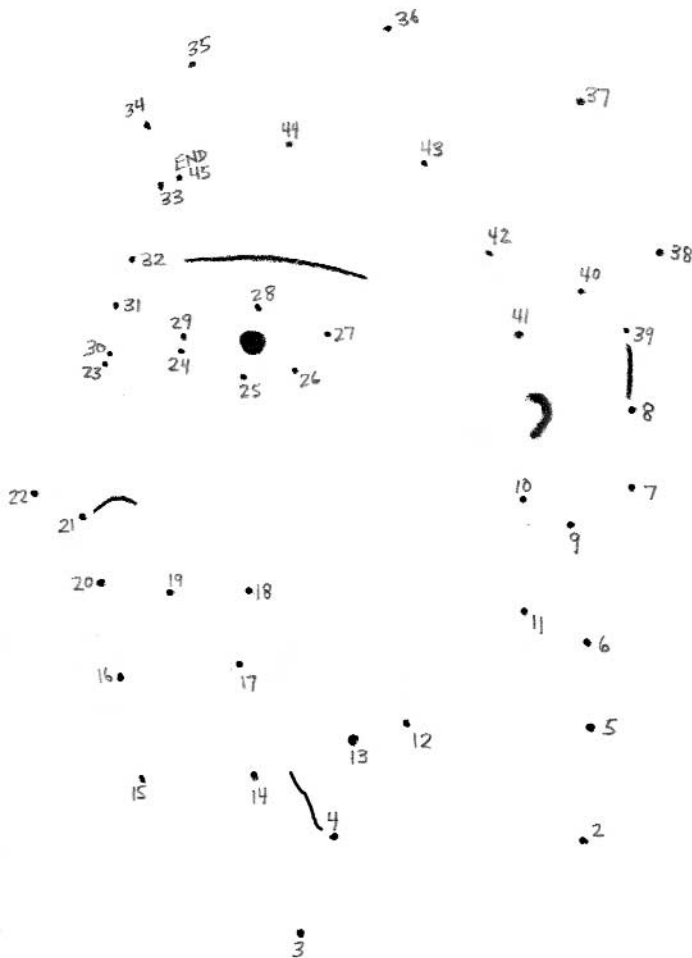
# Guardianships

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 gives the friend or relative the legal right to act as the parent. When a judge 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.

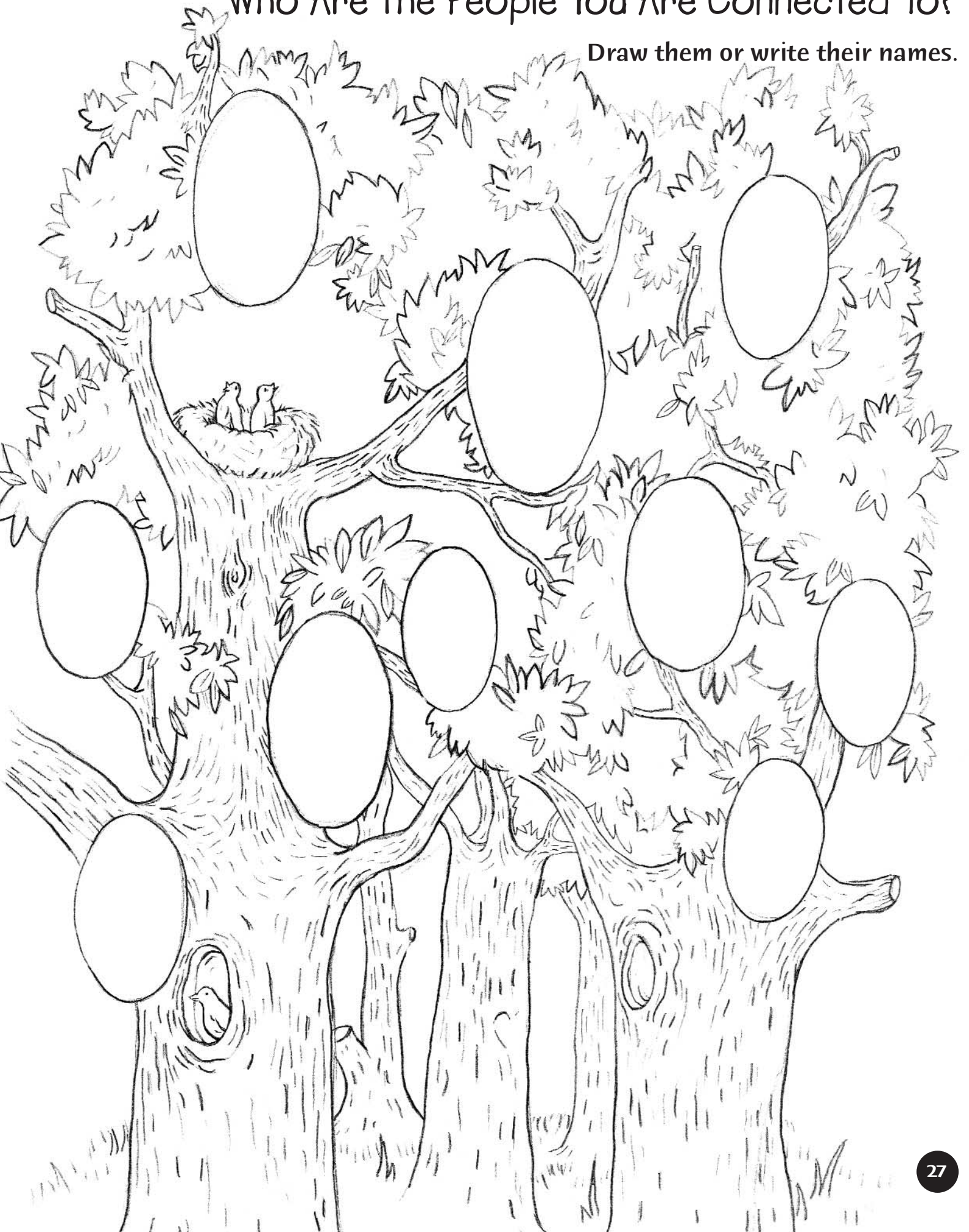
Parents who cannot care for their children may still love their children. If they are able to, the mother and father may visit or phone the children at the guardian's home or other places. If the parents get better, the judge may allow the parents to take care of the children again.

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



# Who Are the People You Are Connected To?

Draw them or write their names.



# I'm Being Adopted

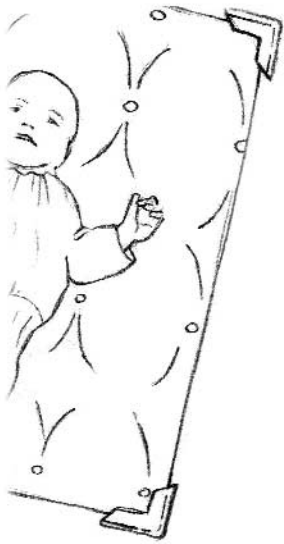
**Adoption** is the way a child legally becomes part of a new family. The judge decides if it is best for the child to be adopted. Before the judge makes this decision, a social worker will talk to the child. The social worker also meets the new parents and visits the new home. After adoption a child 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.

People adopt children because they love children and want to bring a child into their family. Foster parents, the birth-parents' 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.



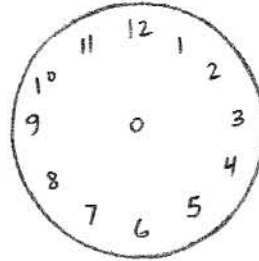
A large, blank, lined writing area that occupies most of the page. The lines are horizontal and evenly spaced, providing a space for the student to write their story or information.

Write about someone you know who is adopted.

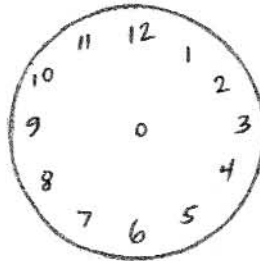
You can write about yourself if you are adopted,  
or you can make up a story.

Draw the hands on the clocks for:

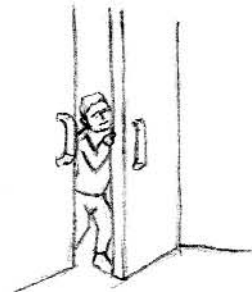
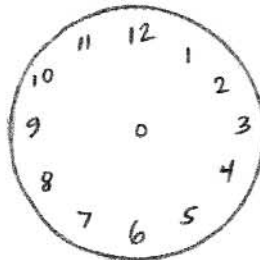
what time you woke up



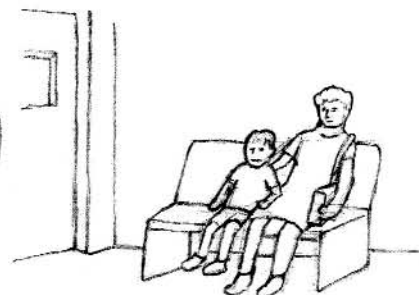
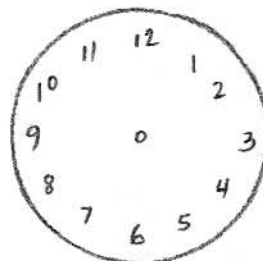
what time you left your house



what time you got to court



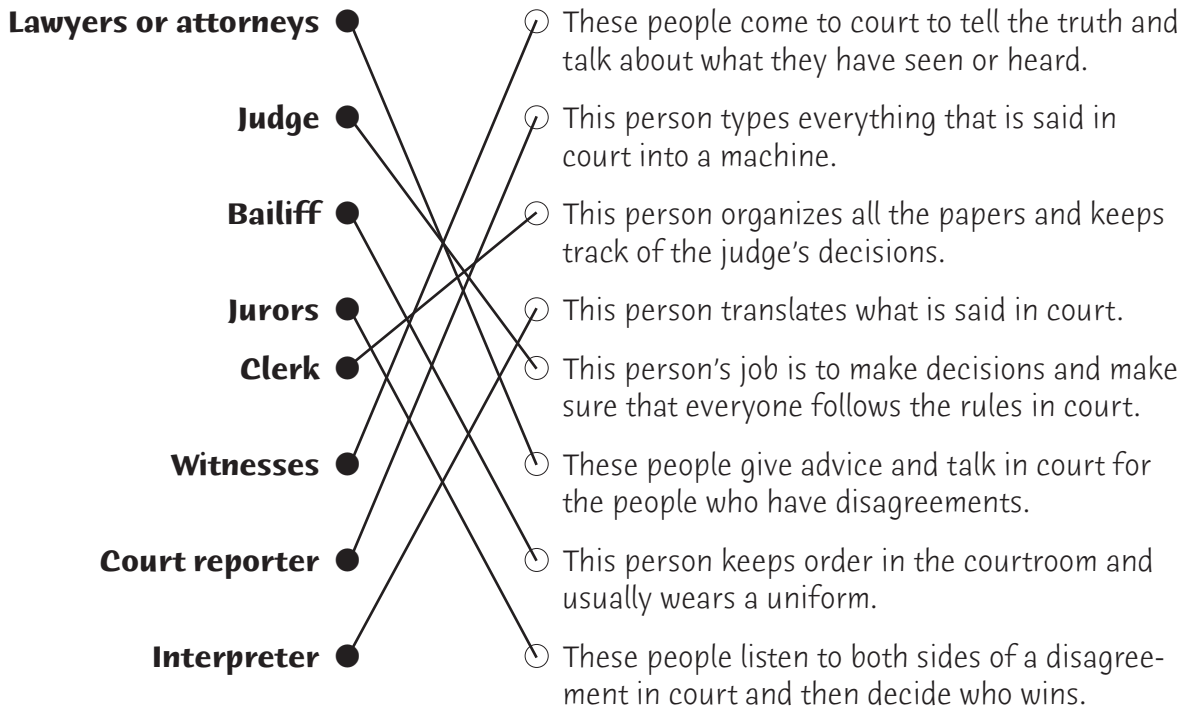
what time it is now





# Answer Key

## Who Are the People in Court? (page 9)



## What's Wrong with This Picture? (pages 10-11)

Looking at the picture from left to right, and top to bottom:

A fiery torch on the wall.

Wisconsin seal says "BACKWARD" instead of "FORWARD" and has a mouse, two fish and a heart.

Lawyer is wearing shorts in court and no shoes.

Judge is holding a balloon and using a claw hammer instead of a gavel.

There are no papers or files on the judge's desk.

State flag says 1948 instead of 1848; the flagpole is missing.

Witness is chewing gum and blowing a bubble.

Court reporter is playing a video game and has a chess set on the desk.

Clerk's desk has no papers or files and the clerk is asleep.

Lawyer has feet on table and is not wearing shoes; there is food on the lawyer's table.

Picket fence in courtroom.

People in audience are eating, reading a newspaper, talking and knitting during the proceeding, and one of them is barefoot.

And is that a bear in the courtroom?!

See page 17 for an accurate courtroom picture.



## Facts About Me

My name is \_\_\_\_\_

My birthday is \_\_\_\_\_

The name of my school is \_\_\_\_\_

I am in grade \_\_\_\_\_

My teachers' names are \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

My favorite subject is \_\_\_\_\_

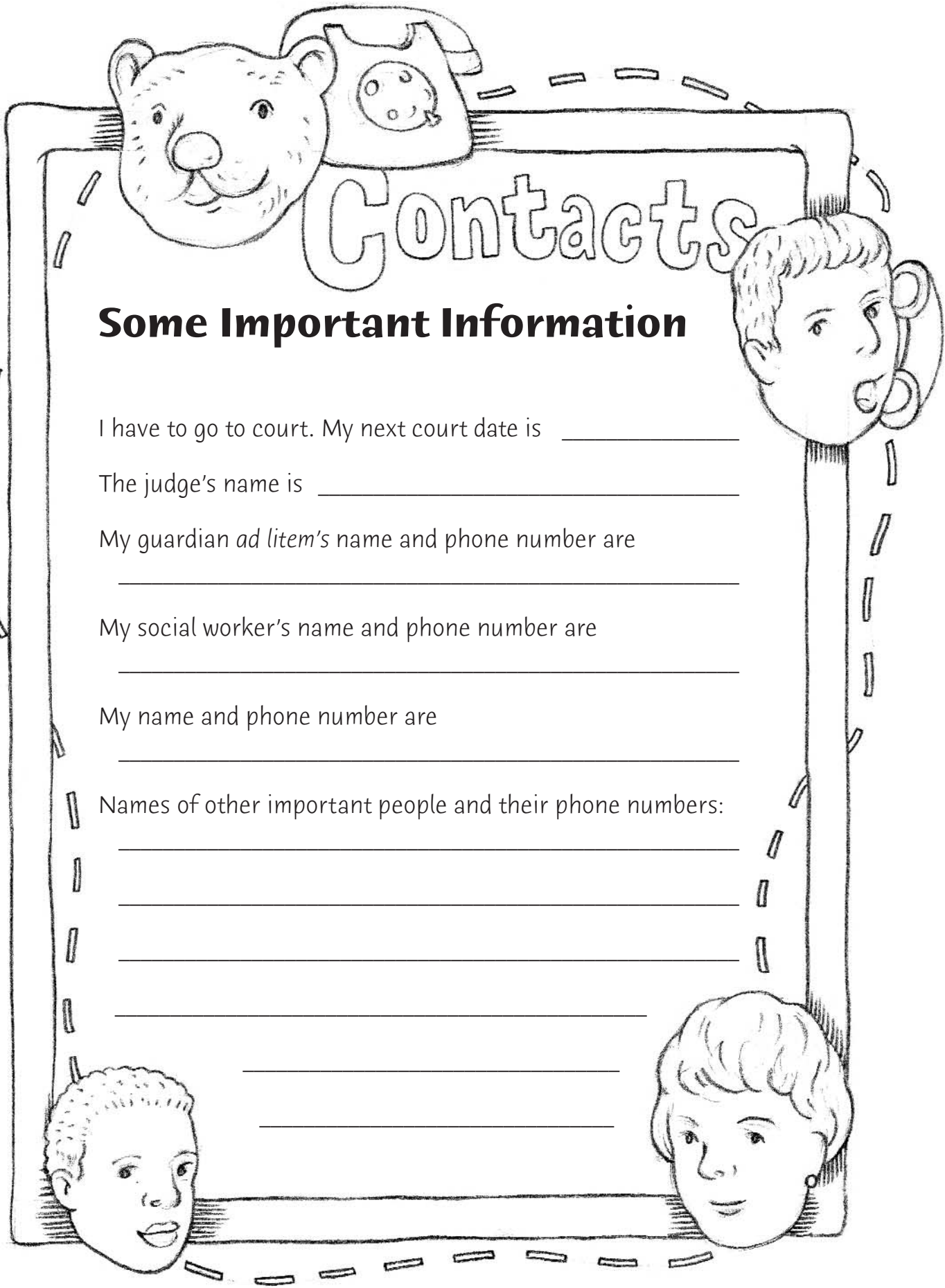
My hobbies are \_\_\_\_\_

The people I live with are \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Something else I want to say about myself \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_



# Contacts

## Some Important Information

I have to go to court. My next court date is \_\_\_\_\_

The judge's name is \_\_\_\_\_

My guardian *ad litem's* name and phone number are  
\_\_\_\_\_

My social worker's name and phone number are  
\_\_\_\_\_

My name and phone number are  
\_\_\_\_\_

Names of other important people and their phone numbers:  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

# About This Book

***What's Happening in Court?* is intended for children who are in court for any reason—whether they are witnesses, visitors to the courthouse, or involved in a case. It aims to introduce children to the court processes in which they are or could be involved, the people who work in the judicial system, and the vocabulary that surrounds judicial proceedings. It is meant to be used as a teaching tool that may foster conversations between children and adults about the court system, and a game book that gives children who are in court something to do while they wait.**

**This book is not intended to give or substitute for legal advice.**



**This book is for elementary-age children. Depending on their age, ability, and interest, they may look at and color the pictures, read the text, play the games, or do the activities.**

**We hope Wisconsin's children will find this book interesting and fun.**