ENGAGING YOUNG CHILDREN (AGES 0-12 MO) IN THE COURTROOM

JUDICIAL BENCH CARD¹

Document court actions

Document in the court order:

- Whether the infant is present at the hearing.
- OR if not present, address the reasons why the infant is not in attendance.
 - Ask why the infant is not present and what efforts were made for the infant's attendance.
 - Explore and encourage resolution of transportation issues as a reason for nonattendance.
 - Depending on the situation, consider postponing the hearing until the infant can be present.
 - Request a current picture that will be introduced into the record.2

Observe the infant's behavior and appearance

- · How does the child interact and respond to caregivers, parents, and guardians?
- Assess whether the child appears healthy and well kept.
- Does the child exhibit appropriate developmental milestones?³

Preparations for court attendance

- Ensure that your courtroom is child friendly.⁴
- Ensure all children are accompanied by a familiar caregiver.

Possible questions to ask the caregiver about the infant

- Is the infant forming healthy attachments?⁵ With whom?
- Is the infant meeting developmental milestones?

AGE	MILESTONES*
2 months	Lifts head up 45 degrees Laughs Smiles spontaneously
4 months	Rolls over Follows to 180 degrees Turns to rattling sound
6 months	Sits with no support Turns to voice Feeds self
9 months	Pulls to stand Says "Dada" and "Mama," nonspecific Waves bye-bye
12 months	Stands alone Can say 1 word Imitates activities
18 months	Runs Can remove garment Can point to at least 1 body part

^{*50%} to 90% of children can perform these milestones.

The Milestone Chart was adapted from Hagan JF, Shaw JS, Duncan PM, eds. 2008. Bright Futures: Guidelines For Health Supervision of Infants, Children, and Adolescents, Third Edition, Elk Grove Village, IL: American Academy of Pediatrics and Schor EL, ed. 2004. Caring For Your School-Age Child, New York: Bantam Books.

- ¹ This bench card was created to assist judges when a child is present in the courtroom. It does not include what information the judge should require from additional parties, such as a report from the child's therapist about the child's mental health status.
- ² The social worker or caregiver can provide the court with a picture.
- ³ Please refer to the Milestone Chart. For more information about child development, see Genie Miller Gillespie and Diane Boyd Rauber (eds.), A Judge's Guide: Making Child-Centered Decisions In Custody Cases (ABA Child Custody and Adoption Pro Bono Project and ABA Center on Children and the Law 2d ed. 2008)

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- ⁴ It may be necessary to address issues related to the infant's safety at the courthouse and the appropriateness of courtroom waiting areas. Judges may find it beneficial to have age-appropriate toys and books available.
- ⁵ For more information about attachment, see JoAnne Solchany and Lisa Pilnik, Healthy Attachment for Very Young Children in Foster Care, Child Law Practice, Vol. 27, No. 6 (August 2008).
- ⁶ Please refer to the Milestone Chart.

For more information, see http://www.abanet.org/child/empowerment/home.html.

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