

## Connecticut Custody Case Checklist for Pro Se Litigants

*If you are representing yourself in a custody case, it is crucial to gather and organize all relevant information to ensure your case is well prepared and focused. This checklist is designed to help pro se litigants stay on track, streamline the process, and focus on the best interests of the child. Prepared by a parent for parents. This is NOT legal advice.*

### **1. Best Interests of the Child Standards (C.G.S. § 46b-56c)**

*Connecticut courts prioritize the best interests of the child in custody cases. Collect evidence and documentation that aligns with the following factors considered by the court:*

#### **[ ] Child's Emotional and Physical Needs:**

- [ ] Document examples of how you meet the child's basic needs (food, shelter, medical care, emotional support).
- [ ] Gather evidence of the child's emotional stability and any nurturing activities you provide (e.g., involvement in extracurricular activities, therapy, etc.).

#### **[ ] Child's Relationship with Each Parent:**

- [ ] Collect documentation (photos, letters, texts) showing your involvement in your child's life.
- [ ] Show the quality of time you spend with your child (school events, medical appointments, holidays).

#### **[ ] Willingness to Co-Parent:**

- [ ] Demonstrate your willingness to facilitate a positive relationship between the child and the other parent.
- [ ] Save communication records showing your effort to coordinate visitation or other shared responsibilities.

#### **[ ] Continuity and Stability:**

- [ ] Provide proof of stable living arrangements (lease agreements, utility bills).
- [ ] Gather records of the child's school performance, showing consistency and stability in their education.

#### **[ ] Child's Preference:**

- [ ] If your child is old enough and the court allows, the child's preference may be taken into account. Be ready to discuss whether your child has expressed a preference and why.

### **2. Documenting Harm or Threat of Harm (Only if Substantiated)**

*If the other parent has harmed the child in the past or is causing harm currently, make sure all accusations are supported by credible evidence.*

#### **[ ] Incidents of Abuse or Neglect:**

- [ ] Collect any police reports, Department of Children and Families (DCF) involvement, medical records, or other official documents related to abuse or neglect.
- [ ] Keep a log of any incidents, including dates, locations, and detailed descriptions of what occurred.

#### **[ ] Witness Statements:**

- [ ] Ask for written, notarized statements from any witnesses (e.g., teachers, neighbors, family members) who can attest to incidents of abuse, neglect, or harmful behavior.

#### **[ ] Medical and Psychological Records:**

- [ ] Obtain records from doctors, therapists, or other professionals who have treated your child for injuries or emotional distress related to the other parent's actions.

**Communication Evidence:**

Save emails, text messages, or social media posts where the other parent may have threatened or admitted to harmful actions.

**Substance Abuse Documentation:**

If substance abuse by the other parent is an issue, gather police reports, drug tests, or medical records to substantiate your claim.

### **3. Parenting Plan**

*Create a comprehensive parenting plan to propose to the court. This demonstrates your commitment to co-parenting and addressing the child's needs.*

**Custody and Visitation Schedule:**

Clearly define physical and legal custody arrangements.

Propose a detailed schedule for parenting time, including weekdays, weekends, holidays, and vacations.

**Decision-Making Responsibilities:**

Outline how decisions will be made about the child's education, healthcare, extracurricular activities, and religion.

**Communication Between Parents:**

Propose guidelines for regular communication between parents, such as weekly updates or using a co-parenting app.

**Transportation and Exchange of the Child:**

Include details on how and where the child will be exchanged between parents, and who will be responsible for transportation.

**Handling Disputes:**

Propose a method for resolving disagreements (e.g., mediation) to prevent future conflicts.

### **4. Additional Documents and Evidence**

*Gather any other documents that can strengthen your case or clarify your role in the child's life.*

**Child's Records:**

School reports, IEP or 504 Plans (if applicable), attendance records.

Medical records, including routine checkups, vaccinations, and any specialized care.

**Financial Information:**

Documentation showing your ability to financially support the child, such as pay stubs, tax returns, and evidence of child support payments (if applicable).

**Photographs and Videos:**

Compile photos or videos that demonstrate your active involvement in your child's life.

### **5. Court Forms and Legal Filings**

Ensure that all court filings are completed accurately and submitted on time. You can find forms on the Connecticut Judicial Branch website or at the courthouse.

**Custody Application Forms:**

Complete and file the required custody or modification forms.

**Motions and Responses:**

File any motions (e.g., for emergency custody) and ensure you respond to any motions filed by the other parent.

**[ ] Proof of Service:**

- [ ] Ensure that the other parent has been served with any court documents as required by law.

**6. Courtroom Preparation**

*Prepare for your court appearance by organizing all evidence and anticipating questions the judge may ask.*

**[ ] Organize Documents:**

- [ ] Bring copies of all evidence, including financial records, custody plans, and documents supporting your claims of harm or the best interests of the child.

**[ ] Practice Testifying:**

- [ ] Rehearse your testimony, focusing on the best interests of your child and remaining calm and factual.

**[ ] Prepare Witnesses:**

- [ ] If you have witnesses, ensure they are available and understand the court process.

**7. Resources and Support**

**[ ] Court Navigators:**

- [ ] Check if your courthouse offers a Court Navigator program to help pro se litigants.

**[ ] Family Court Services:**

- [ ] Reach out to Family Relations Counselors for assistance with creating a parenting plan or mediation services.

**[ ] Legal Aid or Family Law Clinics:**

- [ ] Consider seeking free legal advice from a family law clinic or legal aid organization if you need guidance on preparing your case.

**Conclusion**

*This checklist will help you stay organized and focused as you represent yourself in a custody case. By keeping your attention on the best interests of your child, gathering evidence methodically, and presenting a clear parenting plan, you can improve your chances of a successful outcome. Remember to remain respectful and professional throughout the process, as this will strengthen your case in the eyes of the court.*

**\*\*Disclaimer\*\***

**This checklist is provided for informational purposes only and is not intended to serve as legal advice. While every effort has been made to ensure the accuracy of the information, laws and legal procedures may vary by jurisdiction and may change over time. This checklist is specific to Connecticut law and may not apply to other states.**

**Pro se litigants are encouraged to seek guidance from an attorney or legal professional, particularly for complex legal issues or questions related to their individual case. The use of this checklist does not create an attorney-client relationship, and the authors are not responsible for any legal outcomes resulting from its use. For personalized legal advice, please consult a qualified attorney.**