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## About the Family Justice Review Committee

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The Family Justice Review Committee is a non-profit community-based organization which helps children and families who are being affected by divorce/separation or matters relating to child protection or the criminal justice system. We provide helpful information and some services. When we cannot provide services we attempt to direct persons on to where they can obtain appropriate services.

In addition to children's advocacy services and children's videotaped interview service, we offer support services intended to help families experiencing problems with high conflict and family court related issues. Some of these services include:

- ❑ **Public support meetings**
- ❑ **Parenting & family court educational materials & sources of helpful information**
- ❑ **Third party mediation**
- ❑ **Third party witnesses for verification or prevention of false allegations**
- ❑ **Courses relating to divorce and separation**
- ❑ **Access to support from other members of the community**
- ❑ **Courtroom support through court watch services**
- ❑ **Library and research materials relating to family law and parenting issues**
- ❑ **Assistance to contact your MP and MPP about changing laws.**

If you have other questions then please contact us for additional information or visit our website at <http://www.canadacourtwatch.com>

### **Obtaining accurate and reliable information from children in a fair and accountable way is a growing problem!**

In recent years there has been a growing frustration, and in some cases, outrage, by children and parents, at the manner in which information from children of separation or divorce is collected and processed through the family court system.

Many have complained that it takes weeks, if not months, to have a government funded lawyer or social worker interview a child to obtain information from the child as part of a child custody or child protection assessment. The children's lawyer's office has even been criticized by the court for taking too long to get information and for not following the court's instructions.

Complaints abound from children and parents who claim that social workers and lawyers with the children's lawyer's office were negligent in gathering information and that they did not report accurately to the court. Some children have reported that court appointed assessors did not even ask them if they were being abused by a parent during a child custody evaluation!

Many children have reported that they do not trust the workers they spoke to nor did they feel that the persons who interviewed them listened or reported their concerns accurately. Some children have even reported being intimidated and coerced by those who were interviewing them and actually told to lie to authorities in order to favor one side in a dispute.

Reducing and/or eliminating many of these long standing complaints is now possible through third party videotaped interviews of children. A videotaped interview will quickly and efficiently get testimony from the child in an accurate and accountable manner. Children can greatly benefit from this service if they feel that their lawyer is not doing his/her job.

**Help for children who feel that they are not being properly represented or listened to by their court appointed children's lawyer.**

# Don't Trust Your Children's Lawyer?

For help & information call

**Family Justice Review Committee**

**Tel: (416) 410-4115**

(For greater Toronto and Hamilton region Inquiries)

Website: <http://www.canadacourtwatch.com>

E mail: [info@canadacourtwatch.com](mailto:info@canadacourtwatch.com)

## Do you feel that you are not being listened to?

*Are you not happy with your children's lawyer because of any of the following reasons:*

- Does your children's lawyer tell you that you have to live with a parent who you do not want to live with?
- Does your children's lawyer not return your phone calls promptly and sometimes never does?
- Do you feel that you are not being listened to or believed by those in the system and does your children's lawyer not seem to be listening to what you have to say to him/her?
- Does your children's lawyer seem to be supporting one parent more than another in a child custody dispute?
- Does your children's lawyer seem to be helping the child protection agency rather than helping you?
- Has your children's lawyer not explained things so that you understand them?
- Has your children's lawyer told you things that you felt were lies?
- Have you reported being physically or emotionally abused by a parent or worker to your children's lawyer but he/she has done nothing?
- Has your children's lawyer told you that if you do not agree to something that you will be put into a group home or foster home?

- Are you being exposed to negative influences such as drugs, alcohol, smoking or domestic violence and your children's lawyer has done nothing to help you?
- Are you feeling frustrated with the current custody and access arrangements but your lawyer does not seem to be doing anything about it?
- Are you being denied your rights to have a meaningful relationship with one of your parents?
- Are you being abused in a group home or foster home setting and it seems that nobody is listening to your concerns about where you are being placed?
- Are you in a group home or foster home and your children's lawyer has not told you or your parents how you can get out of there?
- Are you being asked to sign documents which you don't fully understand?
- Are you being denied your rights to reasonable telephone contact with a parent and your lawyer is not doing anything so that you can call your parent?
- Are you angry and frustrated at the court system because of delays, inaction and failure to address those matters which affect you?
- Do you want to speak to or be heard by the judge, but nobody has told you how they can help you to do this?
- Do you feel like you really want to speak to someone who will really listen to you and accurately report what it is that you want people to hear?

## A community-based child advocate many be able to help you!

Many children have lawyers appointed to them by the courts when their parents are involved in a divorce and/or separation or when children have been placed in the care of a child protection agency (Children's Aid Society in Ontario) These lawyers are usually paid for by the government.

Although a number of children do receive reasonable service from their court appointed lawyers, unfortunately, many have reported that they do not. Some children have reported that their lawyers have reported exactly the opposite to the court from what the child has said. Some have said that their lawyer seems to be working for the other side, not for them. Many children have reported that they do not trust their court appointed lawyer and don't feel comfortable with them.

If you are a child of any age under the age of 18 years of age and feel that your court appointed lawyer is not representing you properly or you feel that you not being listened to by those in the system, then we may be able to help you and/or your parents.

We can provide helpful information and advice on how to get your voice heard and to get your lawyer doing his/her job better. Depending on where you live, we may be able to meet with you and to advocate on your behalf instead of your lawyer.

If you would feel that you need help, all you have to do is to contact our agency and to send in one of our application forms. Often, because your lawyer may attempt to prevent us from being involved in your case, you must be willing to be interviewed either by phone or in person in a videotaped interview where you can report the reasons why you feel you need an advocate working on your behalf.