

What
Happens
To Me



NOW?



A handbook for
Colorado children who
are not living at home.

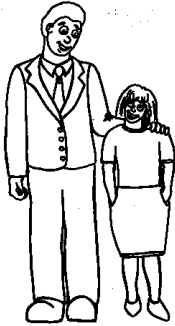
Level II – Recommended for ages approximately 7 through 12.

What Happens to Me Now?

People who work in the court wrote this book for kids like you. The court is the building where the judges and other people work, the hearings (or meetings) are held, and all those papers are filed. We wrote this book because what happens in court can make a big difference in your life. There are lots of people working very hard to figure out what will be good for you.



Remember, you can always ask questions if you are confused or afraid of what goes on!



What Happens to Me Now? was written in 2003 by the following people: Bradley Bittan, Attorney, Denver; Barbara Bosley, Family Court Facilitator, Denver Juvenile Court, Denver; Debra Campeau, Managing Attorney, Office of Guardian Ad Litem, El Paso County, Colorado Springs; Diana Coffey, State Court Administrator's Office; Magistrate David Furman, Denver Juvenile Court, Denver; Daniel Gallagher, Policy Analyst and Court Improvement Project Coordinator – Colorado State Court Administrator's Office; Jim Hustad, Family Court Facilitator, Colorado Springs; Laoise King, Denver City Attorney's Office; Colene Robinson, Staff Attorney, National Association of Counsel for Children, Denver; and Jan Tanski, MA, LMFT, Colorado Coalition of Adoptive Families.



What Happens to Me Now? was illustrated by 18-year-old Denver artist Nathan Zehr.

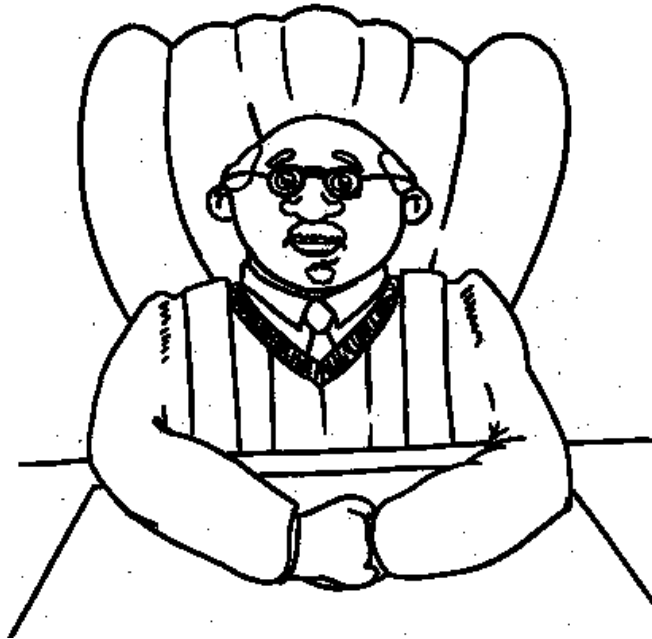
The project was made possible by the generous support of the Colorado State Court Administrator's Office through the Court Improvement Grant, made available through the Department of Health and Human Services – Administration for Children and Families under the provisions of Section 13712 of Subchapter C, Part 1 of the Omnibus Reconciliation Act of 1993: Grants for State Courts.

For additional copies or more information about this book, please call the State Court Administrator's Office at 303-861-1111 or 800-888-0001, toll free, or write to Juvenile Policy Analyst, State Court Administrator's Office, 1301 Pennsylvania Street, Denver, CO 80203. This book is available online at: <http://www.courts.state.co.us/supct/committees/courtimprovecomm.htm> and can be freely copied for your use.

GLOSSARY

These definitions will also appear at the bottom of the first page on which the words are used.

1. Attorney/Lawyer: A person who goes to college for a long time to study the laws (or rules).
2. C.A.S.A.: Stands for Court Appointed Special Advocate (see C.A.S.A. volunteer).
3. C.A.S.A. Volunteer: A person who is not an attorney that wants to help you and helps the judge decide what is best for you. The C.A.S.A. Volunteer has taken a lot of classes about the laws and what kids need. (You may not have a C.A.S.A. Volunteer in your situation.)
4. Case: Your situation is called a "case," because it has to do with you, your parents, and your brothers and sisters.
5. Caseworker: This person works for the Department of Human Services and makes sure that you and your parents are getting what is needed. The lawyer for the caseworker is called a City or County Attorney.
6. Court: The court is the building where the judges work, the hearings are held, and all those papers are filed in your situation. Decisions are made here. This is the place where everyone meets to decide what will happen next in your situation.
7. Court Hearing or Trial: This is when the judge listens to the people and attorneys in your situation to decide what should happen to you. Tell your caseworker or GAL if you want to tell the judge something.
8. Foster Parent: Your foster parents decided that they wanted to help you and have agreed to let you stay at their home while your situation is going on. It is important that you obey their rules while staying with them. You can also talk to them about things that are bothering you.
9. GAL or Guardian ad Litem: The judge assigns a GAL to help the judge decide what is best for you. Your GAL is an attorney who has gone to college and has helped a lot of other kids, just like you. You should ask to meet with your GAL.
10. Judge/Magistrate: A judge or magistrate works in the courthouse and decides what should happen to you. The judge is in charge of your situation. The judge makes sure everyone does his or her job in your situation. Judges and magistrates went to college to learn the laws and were chosen because of their ability and interest to help kids like you. These people work very hard to figure out what is best for you.
11. Parent Attorney: Your parents have an attorney to work for them. These attorneys have gone to college to learn the laws and have worked with a lot of other parents.



Why Aren't You Living at Home?

Sometimes, your parents are not able to take care of you or keep you safe. When this happens, you may have to live with someone else. That's why you are not living at home.

What Happens Next?

The first thing that happens is your parents will go to court and see a judge. Your parents will almost always have a lawyer to help them. The judge will be told what happened to you. The judge will decide what is best for you. The judge will also decide where you will live.

Many people will help the judge decide what is best for you. The people who will help the judge make these decisions are your caseworker, your Guardian ad Litem (a lawyer chosen to tell the court what is best for you), and other people chosen by the court.

The judge chooses these people because they have gone to college to learn how to help children like you. These people really care about helping kids. They have helped a lot of kids like you.

Court: The court is the building where the judges work, the hearings are held, and all those papers are filed in your situation. Decisions are made here. This is the place where everyone meets to decide what will happen next in your situation.

Judge/Magistrate: A judge or magistrate works in the courthouse and decides what should happen to you. The judge is in charge of your situation. The judge makes sure everyone does his or her job in your situation. Judges and magistrates went to college to learn the laws and were chosen because of their ability and interest to help kids like you. They work very hard to figure out what is best for you.

Attorney/Lawyer: A person who goes to college for a long time to study the laws (or rules).

Caseworker: This person works for the Department of Human Services and makes sure that you and your parents are getting what is needed.

GAL or Guardian ad Litem: The judge assigns a GAL to help decide what is best for you. Your GAL is an attorney who has gone to college and has helped a lot of other kids, just like you.

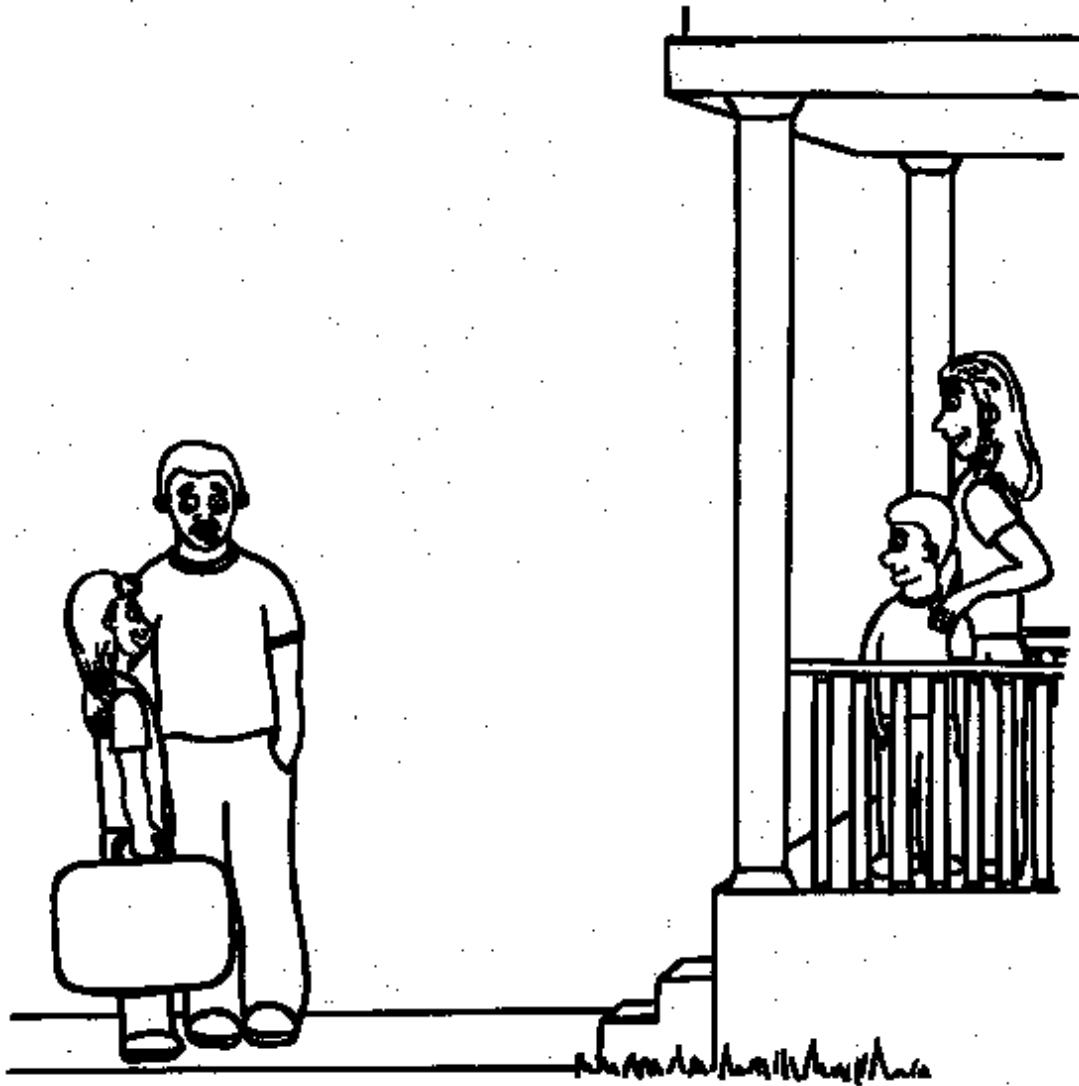


Are You the Only Child Not Living at Home?

NO. About one million children in the United States are not living at home. Sometimes things like this just happen to children.

Is It Your Fault That You Are Not Living at Home?

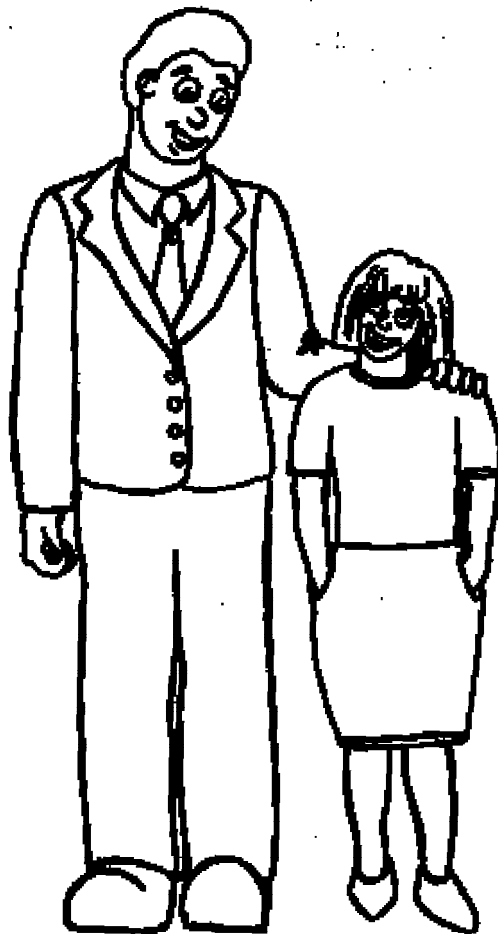
NO. You should not blame yourself because you are not living at home. It is not your fault that your parents cannot take care of you or keep you safe. The judge is going to have people help your parents learn how to give you a safe and good place to live. The judge will decide if your parents can take care of you.



Where Will You Live Now?

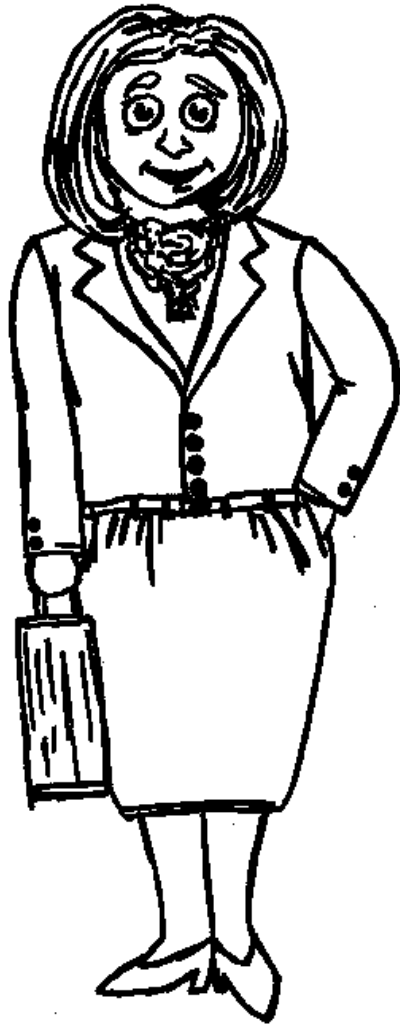
If your relatives or family friends are unable to take care of you, the judge may have you live in a foster home. In a foster home, foster parents take care of you until the judge decides if you can go back to your own house.

Foster Parent: Your foster parents decided that they wanted to help you and have agreed to let you stay at their home while your situation is going on. It is important that you obey their rules while staying with them. You can also talk to them about things that are bothering you.



Will You Get to See Your Parents?

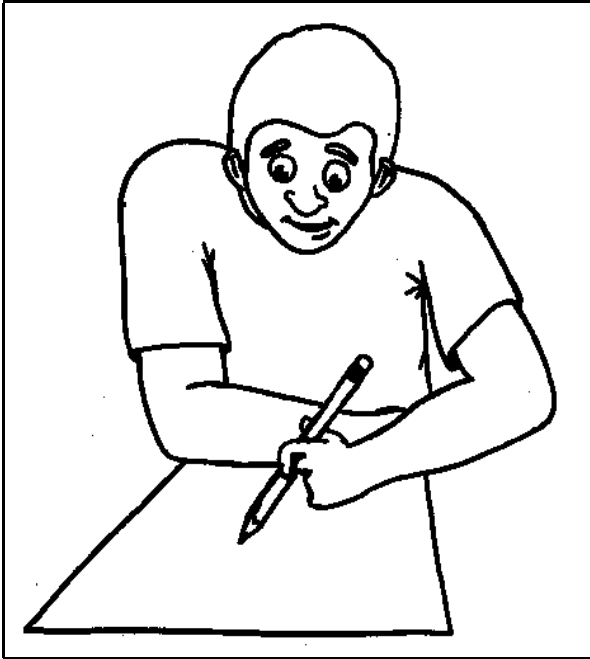
The judge will decide if you can see your parents. Before deciding if you can see your parents, the judge will get information from your caseworker, your Guardian ad Litem, and other people to see what they think is best for you. Usually, you will get to see your brothers and sisters if you are not living at the same house. Sometimes, other people may be present when you visit with your parents.



Who Can You Talk to About What Has Happened to You?

Being away from home can be very confusing. You may need to talk to someone about what has happened. Some people you can talk to include your caseworker, your Guardian ad Litem, your C.A.S.A. worker, your foster parents, or your therapist.

C.A.S.A.: Stands for Court Appointed Special Advocate. A C.A.S.A. worker is a person who is not an attorney, who wants to help you and helps the judge decide what is best for you. The C.A.S.A. Volunteer has taken a lot of classes about the laws and what kids need. (You may not have a C.A.S.A. Volunteer in your situation.)



Can You Talk to the Judge?

If you want to talk to the judge, tell your caseworker, Guardian ad Litem, or C.A.S.A. worker. You can also write a letter to the judge and give it to your caseworker, Guardian ad Litem, or C.A.S.A. worker, and he or she will give it to the judge for you.

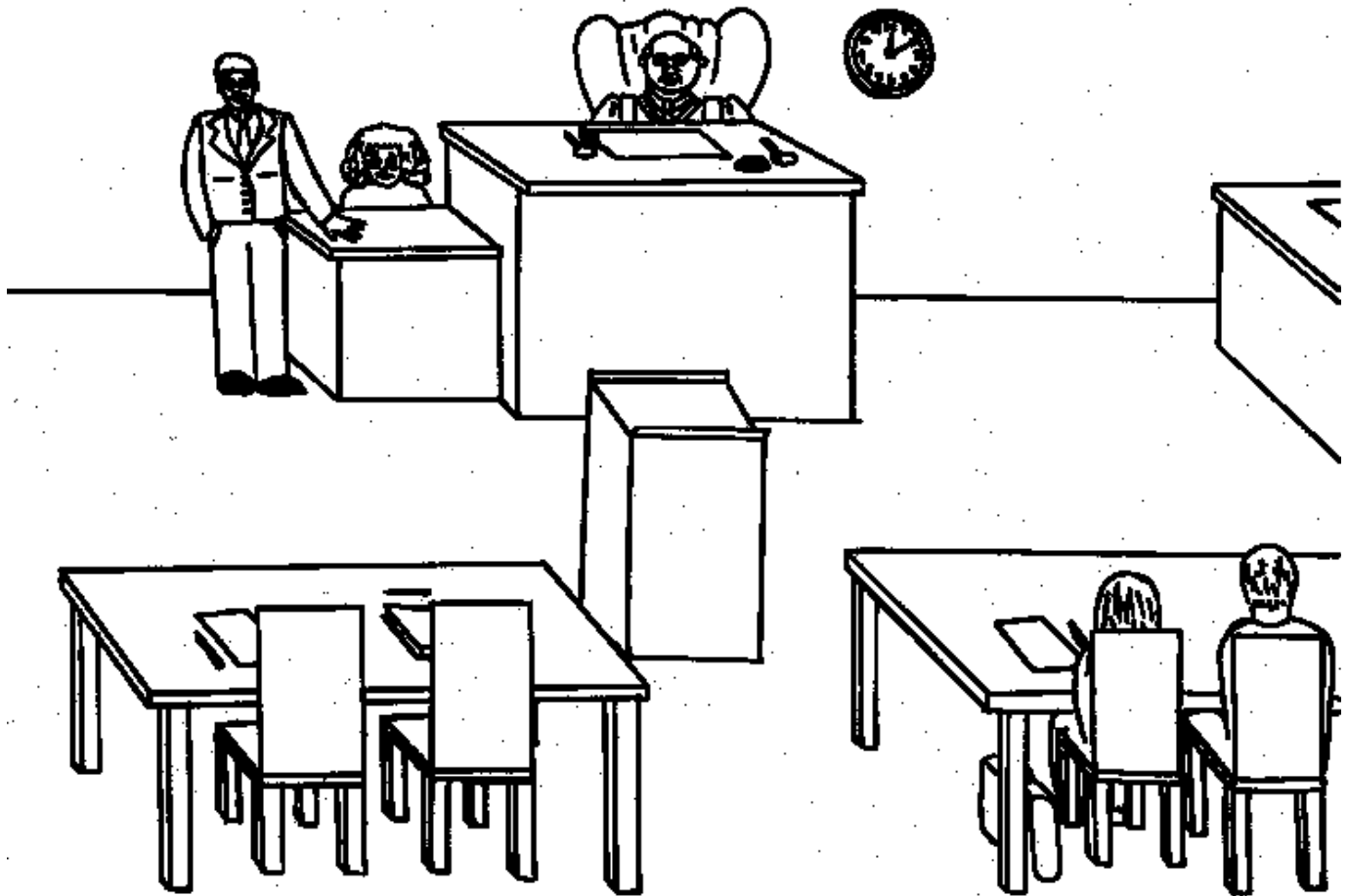
You might not get what you want from the judge, but the judge will think really hard about what you have to say.



Will You Be Able to Live at Home Again?

The judge will decide if you will be able to live at home. The judge will let you go home if it is safe for you. Until you go home, the judge will decide where you live.

The judge and all the other people involved in your situation will decide if it is good for you to go home. If it is not good for you to go home, you will live somewhere else, such as with relatives, family friends, or a foster family.



How Does the Judge Decide if You Should Go Home?

The judge's job is to decide what is best for you. Before the judge makes a decision, the judge will listen to what your caseworker has to say. The judge will also listen to your Guardian ad Litem, your parents, your parent's attorney, your relatives, and many other people who care about you. After the judge hears what everyone has to say, the judge will make a decision on where you should live. Remember, the judge will decide based on what everyone says and what is best for you.

Parent Attorney: Your parents have an attorney to work for them. These attorneys have gone to college to learn the laws and have worked with a lot of other parents.

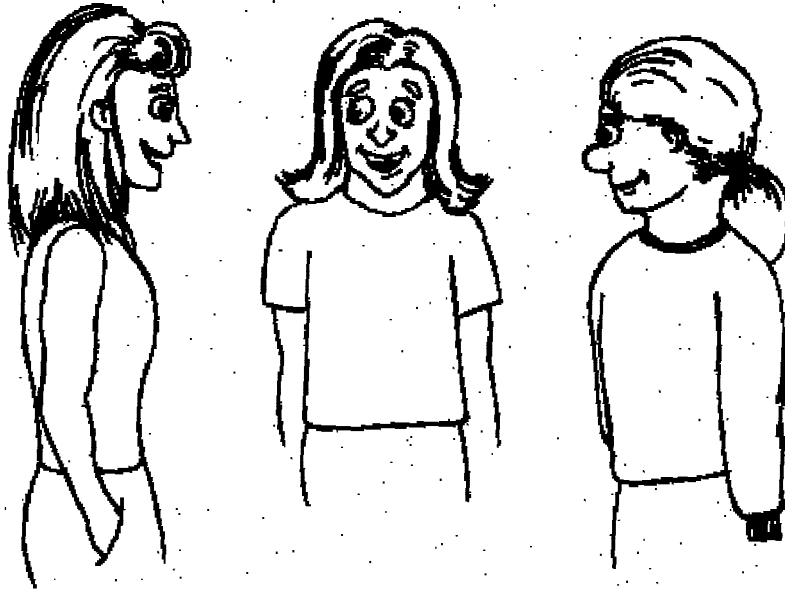


When Will You Know What Is Going to Happen to You?

The judge has to give your parents time to do some things before you can go home. The judge requires your parents, your caseworker, Guardian ad Litem, or C.A.S.A. worker to attend hearings every few months. At these hearings, the judge listens carefully to everyone to learn how things are going with you and with your parents. The judge has to decide what should happen in your situation and if (or when) you should go home.

Some children may not go home because their parents are not able to give them a safe place to live. If this happens to you, the judge will decide where you should live. This is when the judge works very hard and struggles to make the best decision for you.

Court Hearing or Trial: This is when the judge listens to the people and attorneys in your situation to decide what should happen to you. Tell your caseworker or GAL if you want to tell the judge something.



What Should You Say if Your Friends Ask Why You Are Not Living at Home?

It's OK to tell your friends that you don't want to talk about it. You can also tell your friends that your parents have some problems and you are living with someone else until they can solve those problems.

REMEMBER:

Everyone wants to be sure that you have a safe place to live.

You should never be left alone with no one to take care of you.

It's OK for you to feel sad that you are not living at home.

Go to school and do the best you can.

Ask questions and talk about what is happening to you and how you feel about it.

Talk and visit with your friends if you can.

Your caseworker, Guardian ad Litem, and C.A.S.A. worker are there to help you any way they can. Don't be afraid to tell them how you feel and ask them questions about what is happening.

Names and Phone Numbers

Caseworker: _____

Phone Number: _____

Caseworker: _____

Phone Number: _____

Caseworker: _____

Phone Number: _____

Guardian ad Litem: _____

Phone Number: _____

C.A.S.A. Worker: _____

Phone Number: _____

Judge/Magistrate: _____

Judge/Magistrate: _____

Other Names and Phone Numbers

Name: _____

Phone Number: _____

Name: _____

Phone Number: _____

Name: _____

Phone Number: _____

Name: _____

Phone Number: _____

NOTES