



Children And Parents Empowered
Summit County
Domestic Relations Court
Administrative Judge Katarina Cook
Judge Kani H. Hightower

A Parenting Guide to Thrive

Things you can do for your child

Summit County Domestic Relations Court's Child And Parents Empowered (C.A.P.E.) Program empowers families by providing developmentally focused education, support, coping strategies, and guidance to children and caregivers with the goal of creating healthier outcomes for families navigating transitions and litigation.

www.drcourt.org/wp/cape/ | (330) 643-7958 | GNielsen@DRCourt.org





Children And Parents Empowered
Summit County
Domestic Relations Court
Administrative Judge Katarina Cook
Judge Kani H. Hightower

What is the C.A.P.E. Program?

The Children and Parents Empowered (C.A.P.E.) Program provides free services from a Certified Child Life Specialist (CCLS) to educate and support caregivers while promoting children's well-being, healthy development, and positive coping during family transitions related to separation, divorce, and court involvement.

Who Can Participate?

Free services are available for:

- Parents who are expecting a baby
- Parents with a child age 1 year or younger
- Parents of a child who is neurodivergent or has medical complexities
- Children who are neurodivergent or have medical complexities

How the Child Life Specialist Supports Parents

The CCLS provides caregivers with education and practical strategies on:

- Infant cues and developmental milestones
- Creating consistent routines across households
- Supporting emotional regulation
- Healthy coping during family transitions
- Understanding the developmental and emotional needs of neurodivergent children and children with medical complexities
- Reducing stress throughout Court proceedings
- Building a safe, supportive environment where children can thrive

How the Child Life Specialist Supports Children

Children may receive:

- Developmentally appropriate play and therapeutic activities
- Opportunities for emotional expression
- Support in understanding family changes
- Individualized support for neurodivergent children and children with medical complexities
- Strategies to reduce stress during transitions

What is a Certified Child Life Specialist?

A CCLS is a healthcare professional with specialized training in child development who helps children and families cope with stressful experiences through education, play, and emotional support. CCLSs work in hospitals, schools, child advocacy centers, hospice and palliative care programs, camps, military settings, courts, and other community-based programs.

Our Goal

Using a trauma-informed approach, the CCLS at Summit County Domestic Relations Court aims to:

- Promote children's well-being, healthy development, and growth
- Educate and empower parents with evidence-based child development information
- Strengthen the parent-child relationship
- Reduce stress during family transitions
- Help families leave Court feeling confident, informed, and equipped to support their child's long-term success



Bonding with Your Baby After Separation



Children And Parents Empowered
Summit County
Domestic Relations Court
Administrative Judge Katarina Cook
Judge Kani H. Hightower

Understanding Attachment

Infants form attachment relationships—deep emotional bonds with caregivers that help them feel safe, loved, and understood. Attachment develops through consistent, responsive care.

Secure attachment helps babies:

- Develop trust and feel safe
- Build emotional regulation skills
- Learn to communicate their needs
- Develop confidence to explore and learn
- Build healthy relationships throughout life

Babies build secure attachment when caregivers:

- Respond consistently to their baby's cues
- Meet their needs with comfort, affection, food, sleep, and nurturing care
- Learn their baby's individual preferences
- Create predictable routines

Babies can form secure attachments with multiple caregivers. A strong bond with one parent does not reduce the importance of the other parent's relationship with the child.

Breastfeeding & Attachment

Breastfeeding can be a meaningful bonding experience through closeness, skin-to-skin contact, and responsive care. However, breastfeeding is only one way attachment develops.

Attachment is also strengthened through holding, comforting, feeding, diapering, bathing, bedtime routines, and talking, singing, reading, and playing together.

Ways to Strengthen Secure Attachment

Do:

- Respond consistently to your baby's needs
- Comfort your baby when upset
- Maintain predictable routines
- Spend quality one-on-one time together
- Talk, sing, read, and play every day

Avoid When Possible:

- Long periods of unresponsive caregiving
- Ongoing conflict in front of your baby
- Inconsistent caregiving between homes

Every loving interaction helps build secure attachment and supports healthy brain development.

www.drcourt.org/wp/cape/ | (330) 643-7958 | GNielsen@DRCourt.org



Bonding with Your Baby After Separation



Children And Parents Empowered
Summit County
Domestic Relations Court
Administrative Judge Katarina Cook
Judge Kani H. Hightower

Supporting Both Parents' Bonds

For Mothers

Breastfeeding needs and shared parenting time can be balanced in ways that support your baby's development and relationships with both parents.

Helpful strategies include:

- Recognizing the important role fathers play in your baby's development
- Creating a parenting plan that supports breastfeeding while allowing meaningful bonding time with both parents
- Sharing your baby's cues, routines, and soothing strategies
- Supporting consistency across both households

Open communication and flexibility can help parents support their baby's changing developmental and feeding needs while fostering strong relationships with both parents.

For Fathers

Your relationship with your baby grows through consistent, loving care.

Ways to strengthen your bond include:

- Holding your baby skin-to-skin
- Learning and responding to your baby's cues
- Feeding your baby when appropriate
- Talking, singing, reading, and making eye contact
- Participating in diaper changes, baths, bedtime, and play

Your baby learns your voice, touch, and presence. These everyday moments build trust and connection.

Making the Most of Time Together

Both parents can support attachment by:

- Following the baby's cues
- Maintaining consistent routines
- Spending focused, distraction-free time together
- Sharing updates about the baby's needs, routines, and likes & dislikes
- Encouraging positive relationships with both parents

Positive relationships with both parents help promote healthy brain development, emotional well-being, and lifelong resilience.

www.drcourt.org/wp/cape/ | (330) 643-7958 | GNielsen@DRCourt.org



Infant Cues

Infants communicate when they want to play, when they're hungry, tired, and overwhelmed through nonverbal cues including facial expressions, body movements, eye contact, and sounds. Here's a guide to help you identify what your baby needs based on what they are communicating:



Children And Parents Empowered
Summit County
Domestic Relations Court
Administrative Judge Katarina Cook
Judge Kani H. Hightower



I want to play

- Bright wide eyes
- Reaching for toys or faces
- Round mouth
- Cooing
- Eye contact
- Smiles
- Hands reaching out to you
- Excitement
- Seeking stimulation



I am tired

- Becoming quiet or still
- less interest in people/toys
- Irritability/Frowning
- Change in cry
- Lack of focus
- Yawning
- Clenching fists
- Rubbing eyes/face
- Jerky movements
- Sucking fingers
- Staring into the distance



I need a break (overwhelmed)

- Looking/Turning head away
- Arching back
- Frowning
- Yawning
- Wrinkling forehead
- Squirming
- Kicking
- Hands up in a stop motion



I'm full.

- Closed lips
- Pulling or pushing away
- Relaxed body
- Unclenching fists
- Slowing or stopping sucking
- Turning head away
- Becoming distracted or drowsy



I want to be near you.

- Relaxed face and body
- Follow your voice and face
- Reach toward you
- Stare at you
- Raises their head

Infant Cues (Continued)



**Children And Parents Empowered
Summit County
Domestic Relations Court**
Administrative Judge Katarina Cook
Judge Kani H. Hightower

Early Feeding Cues - "I'm hungry."



Stirring



Mouth Open



Turning Heads

Mid Feeding Cues - "I'm really hungry."



Stretching



Increased Movement



Hand to Mouth

Late Feeding Cues - "Calm me, then feed me."



Crying



Agitation



Turning Red

Other signals that your baby is hungry:

- Strong sucking noises
- Concentrated face
- Bringing fists to mouth
- Sucking on fingers
- Easily upset when feeding is stopped

When crying, your baby may also be telling you:

- I need something to be different.
- I need my diaper changed
- I am too hot or too cold.
- I need to be burped.
- I might be sick.
- I am uncomfortable.
- I am afraid.

Understanding Infant Cues During Transitions

Infants communicate their needs through cues such as crying, facial expressions, body movements, sounds, and changes in behavior. Learning your baby's unique cues helps you respond in ways that help them feel safe and understood.



Children And Parents Empowered
Summit County
Domestic Relations Court
Administrative Judge Katarina Cook
Judge Kani H. Hightower

Crying During Transitions

Transitions between caregivers or homes can be a new experience for infants. Babies may need time to adjust to changes in routines, environments, or caregivers.

If your baby cries during a transition, remember:

- Crying during a transition can be a normal response to change.
- Babies may cry even when they feel safe, loved, and cared for.
- A baby's reaction during a transition does not mean they prefer one caregiver over the other.
- Fussiness may be related to tiredness, hunger, overstimulation, or adjusting to a new experience.
- Each caregiver may notice different cues and develop their own ways of comforting their baby.

Supporting Your Baby During Transitions

Caregivers can help their baby feel secure by:

- Staying calm and offering comfort and reassurance.
- Using familiar routines and soothing strategies.
- Allowing time for their baby to adjust after transitions.
- Sharing information about feeding, sleep, and calming strategies.
- Paying attention to their baby's cues and individual needs.
- Avoiding arguments, conflict, or negative conversations in front of their baby or during exchanges, as infants are sensitive to stress even when they cannot understand the words being spoken.

Learning Your Baby's Cues Across Households

Babies may respond differently in different environments or with different caregivers. This is a normal part of development.

Both caregivers can:

- Learn their baby's hunger, tiredness, and comfort cues.
- Share helpful information about routines and preferences.
- Support consistency while allowing each parent to build their own relationship with their baby.

Different parenting styles or soothing approaches do not mean one parent is doing something wrong. Babies benefit from caregivers who are responsive, loving, and attentive to their needs.

Remember

Your baby's crying is a way of expressing their needs and adjusting to their environment—not a judgment of either parent or their relationship with their baby. Responding with patience, comfort, consistency, and peaceful transitions helps your baby feel safe, secure, and supported.



Children And Parents Empowered
Summit County
Domestic Relations Court

Administrative Judge Katarina Cook

Judge Kani H. Hightower

For questions or more information contact:

Gracie Nielsen

(330) 643-7958

GNielsen@DRCourt.org

or visit: www.drcourt.org/wp/cape/

made possible by the generous support of:



OHIO STATE BAR
FOUNDATION



Full Term
First Birthday

fulltermfirstbirthday.org

