

Child Abuse and Neglect

STATUTES

A T - A - G L A N C E

Grounds for Termination of Parental Rights

Every State and the District of Columbia have statutes providing for the termination of parental rights.

Termination of parental rights ends the legal parent-child relationship. Once the relationship has been terminated, the child is legally free to be placed for adoption with the objective of securing a more stable, permanent family environment that can meet the child's long-term parenting needs.

Grounds

Some States spell out factors that constitute grounds for termination of parental rights. Other States use general language. The most common statutory grounds for involuntary termination of parental rights include:

- Severe or chronic abuse or neglect.
- Abuse or neglect of other children in the household;
- Abandonment.
- Long-term mental illness or deficiency of the parent(s).
- Long-term alcohol or drug-induced incapacity of the parent(s).
- Failure to support or maintain contact with the child.

Another common ground for termination is a felony conviction of the parent(s) for a crime of violence against the child or other family member, or a conviction for any felony when the term of conviction is such a length as to have a negative impact on the child and the only available provision of care for the child is foster care.

The Adoption and Safe Families Act (ASFA)¹ also requires State agencies to seek termination of the parent-child relationship when:

- A child has been in foster care for 15 of the most recent 22 months.
- A court has determined:
 - A child to be an abandoned infant.
 - That the parent has committed murder of another child of the parent, committed voluntary manslaughter of another child of the parent, aided or abetted, attempted, conspired, or solicited to commit such a murder or such a voluntary manslaughter,² or committed a felony assault that

has resulted in serious bodily injury to the child or to another child of the parent.³

In response to ASFA, many States have adopted limits to the maximum amount of time a child can spend in foster care before termination proceedings must be initiated.

Typically, States have adopted the ASFA standard of 15 out of the most recent 22 months in care. Some States, however, specify shorter time limits, particularly for very young children. Most States have also complied with the other termination grounds required under ASFA.

Reasonable Efforts

The above factors become grounds for terminating parental rights when reasonable efforts by the State to prevent out-of-home placement or to achieve reunification of the family after placement have failed to ameliorate the conditions and/or parental behaviors that led to State intervention.

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The **Statutes-at-a-Glance** series highlights specific topics from the Child Abuse and Neglect State Statutes Compendium of Laws, presented in a table format to provide quick comparisons of statutory provisions across the States. The Compendium is a compilation of State laws on different topics related to child maltreatment reporting laws, central registries, permanency planning, and domestic violence.

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Under ASFA, while reasonable efforts to preserve and reunify families are still required, the child's health and safety is the paramount concern in determining reasonable efforts to be made.⁴ ASFA mandates that reasonable efforts to preserve the family are not required under the following circumstances:

- The parent has subjected the child to aggravated circumstances (as defined by State law, which may include but need not be limited to abandonment, torture, chronic abuse, and sexual abuse).⁵
- The parent has committed murder of another child of the parent.
- The parent has committed voluntary manslaughter of another child of the parent.
- The parent has aided or abetted, attempted, conspired, or solicited to commit murder or voluntary manslaughter.
- The parent has committed a felony assault that results in serious bodily injury to the child or another child of the parent.
- The parental rights of the parent to a sibling have been terminated involuntarily.⁶

Child's Best Interests

Most States consider a child's best interest in termination proceedings. In some States, these statutes use general language mandating that the child's health and safety be paramount in all proceedings, while other States' legislation lists specific factors that must be considered, such as the child's age; the physical, mental, emotional, and moral well-being; cultural and attachment issues; as well as the child's reasonable preferences.

Standard

The U.S. Supreme Court in *Santosky v. Kramer*⁷ set the standard of proof at clear and convincing evidence in termination of parental rights proceedings.

¹ ASFA establishes guidelines that States must comply with as a condition for receiving Federal funds.

² State statutory information concerning a court determination that the parent has aided or abetted, attempted, conspired, or solicited to commit murder or voluntary manslaughter is not included in this chart.

³ 42 U.S.C.A. § 675(5)(E)(West 1997). Under ASFA, there are three exceptions to the requirement to terminate parental rights: At the option of the State, the child is being cared for by a relative; a State agency has documented in the case plan a compelling reason for determining that filing such a petition would not be in the child's best interest; and the State has not provided to the family, consistent with the time period in the State case plan, such services as the State deems necessary for the safe return of the child to the child's home.

⁴ 42 U.S.C.A. § 671(a)(15)(A) (West 1997).

⁵ These "aggravated circumstances" include cases in which a parent has been convicted of murdering another child in the household, severe and aggravated sexual abuse, or single instances of abuse when the abuse is severe enough to be charged as aggravated assault or when there is serious injury to the child.

⁶ 42 U.S.C.A. § 671(a)(15)(D) (West 1997).

⁷ 455 U.S. 745 (1982).

STATE/STATUTE	OTHER																
		Abandonment or Extreme Parental Disinterest	Abuse/Neglect	Mental Illness or Deficiency	Alcohol- or Drug-induced Incapacity	Felony Conviction/ Incarceration	Failure of Reasonable Efforts	Sexual Abuse	Abuse/Neglect or Loss of Rights of Another Child	Failure to Maintain Contact	Failure to Provide Support	Failure to Establish Paternity	Child Judged in Need of Services/Dependency	Child's Best Interest	Child in Care 15 or Less Months (or Less)	Felony Assault of Child	Murder/Manslaughter of Sibling Child
ALABAMA § 26-18-7		➤	➤	➤	➤	➤	➤	➤	➤	➤	➤	➤	➤	➤	➤	➤	➤
ALASKA §§ 25.23.180(a), (c) 47.10.011 47.10.080©(3), (o) 47.10.088(a)-(h)		➤	➤	➤	➤	➤	➤	➤	➤	➤	➤	➤	➤	➤	➤	➤	➤
ARIZONA §§ 8-533 8-846(B)		➤	➤	➤	➤	➤	➤	➤	➤	➤	➤	➤	➤	➤	➤	➤	➤
ARKANSAS § 9-27-341(a)-(c)		➤	➤	➤	➤	➤	➤	➤	➤	➤	➤	➤	➤	➤	➤	➤	➤
CALIFORNIA Welf. & Inst. Code §§ 361 361.5(b), (h), (i) 366.26©(1)		➤	➤	➤	➤	➤	➤	➤	➤	➤	➤	➤	➤	➤	➤	➤	➤
COLORADO § 19-3-604		➤	➤	➤	➤	➤	➤	➤	➤	➤	➤	➤	➤	➤	➤	➤	➤

STATE/STATUTE	OTHER													
		Abandonment or Extreme Parental Disinterest	Abuse/Neglect	Mental Illness or Deficiency	Alcohol- or Drug-induced Incapacity	Felony Conviction/ Incarceration	Failure of Reasonable Efforts	Sexual Abuse	Abuse/Neglect or Loss of Rights of Another Child	Failure to Maintain Contact	Failure to Provide Support	Child's Best Interest Services/Dependency	Child in Care 15 of 22 Months (or Less)	Child or Assault of Family Member/Sibling
CONNECTICUT §§ 17a-111a 17a-111b(a) 17a-112(i)-(k)		➤	➤	➤	➤	➤	➤	➤	➤	➤	➤	➤	➤	➤
DELAWARE tit. 13 § 1103		➤	➤	➤	➤	➤	➤	➤	➤	➤	➤	➤	➤	➤
DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA §§ 4-1301.09(a)(d) 16-2353 16-2354(b)		➤	➤	➤	➤	➤	➤	➤	➤	➤	➤	➤	➤	➤
FLORIDA § 39.806		➤	➤	➤	➤	➤	➤	➤	➤	➤	➤	➤	➤	➤
GEORGIA §§ 15-11-58 15-11-94		➤	➤	➤	➤	➤	➤	➤	➤	➤	➤	➤	➤	➤
HAWAII §§ 571-61 587-2		➤	➤	➤	➤	➤	➤	➤	➤	➤	➤	➤	➤	➤

STATE/STATUTE	OTHER
IDAHO §§ 16-2005 16-1608(e)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Father not the natural parent. ▪ Murder of child's parent. ▪ Conception result of rape. ▪ Voluntary relinquishment. ▪ Aggravated circumstances.
ILLINOIS 750 ICS 50/1 705 ICS 405/1-2 705 ICS 405/2-13	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ ▶ ▶ ▶ ▶
INDIANA §§ 31-35-2-4.5 31-35-3-4 31-35-3-8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ ▶ ▶ ▶ ▶
IOWA §§ 232.111 232.116	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ ▶ ▶ ▶ ▶
KANSAS §§ 13-1563(h) 38-1583 38-1585	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ ▶ ▶ ▶ ▶
KENTUCKY §§ 600.020(2) 610.127 625.090	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Aggravated circumstances.

STATE/STATUTE	OTHER
LOUISIANA Ch. Code Ann. art. 1015	Murder/Manslaughter of Sibling Child Murder/Manslaughter Child or Sibling Felony Assault of 22 Months (or Less) Child in Care 15 of Child's Best Interest Child Judged in Need of Services/Dependence Failure to Establish Parentalty Failure to Provide Support Failure to Maintain Contact Abuse/Neglect or Loss of Rights of Another Child Sexual Abuse Failure of Reasonable Efforts Felony Conviction/ Incarceration Alcohol- or Drug-Induced Incapacity Mental Illness or Deficiency Abuse/Neglect Abandonment or Extreme Parental Disinterest
MAINE tit. 22 § 4002 4055 4022(1-B) 4041(A-2)	MURKIN §§ 5-313 5-525.1(b)(1)
MARYLAND §§ 5-313 5-525.1(b)(1)	MASSACHUSETTS Ch. 119, § 26(4) Ch. 210, § 3©
MASSACHUSETTS Ch. 119, § 26(4) Ch. 210, § 3©	MICHIGAN § 712A.19b(1), (3), (6)
MINNESOTA §§ 260.012 260C.301	Failure to comply with guardianship plan or court- ordered plan. Risk of harm if returned home. Voluntary relinquishment. Identity of parent(s) unknown.
	Egregious harm. Voluntary relinquishment.

STATE/STATUTE	OTHER
MISSISSIPPI §§ 43-21-603© 93-15-103	Deep-seated antipathy by child. Voluntary relinquishment. Aggravated circumstances.
MISSOURI §§ 211.183(6)-(7) 211.447(2)-(7)	Substantial risk of harm to the child. Conception result of rape.
MONTANA §§ 41-3-609 41-3-423(2)-(7)	Voluntary relinquishment. Conception result of rape. Aggravated circumstances. A history of violent behavior by the parent.
NEBRASKA §§ 43-283.01(4) 43-292 43-292.02	Aggravated circumstances. Lewd and lascivious behavior.
NEVADA §§ 128.105 128.106 128.107 128.109 432B.393(3)	Token efforts by parent(s). Failure of parental adjustment. Risk of harm if returned home.
NEW HAMPSHIRE §§ 170-C:5 169-C:24-a	Risk of harm if returned home.

STATE/STATUTE	OTHER
TENNESSEE §§ 36-1-113(g)-(h) 37-1-166(g)(4)	Murder/Manslaughter of Sibling Child or Sibling
TEXAS §§ 161.001 161.003(a)	Child in Care 15 or 22 Months (or Less) Child's Best Interest Services/Dependency Judged in Need of Establish Parent Failure to Provide Support Failure to Maintain Contact Abuse/Neglect or Loss of Rights of Another Child Sexual Abuse Failure of Reasonable Efforts Felony Conviction/ Incarceration Alcohol- or Drug-Induced Incapacity Mental Illness or Deficiency Abuse/Neglect Abandonment or Extreme Parental Disinterest
UTAH §§ 78-3a-311(2)-(4) 78-3a-402(2) 78-3a-403(2) 78-3a-407 78-3a-408	Risk of substantial harm. Aggravated circumstances. Refusal to submit to court order. Failure to provide education. Voluntary relinquishment. Drug or alcohol addicted newborn.
VERMONT tit.15A § 3-504(a), (b), (d)	Voluntary relinquishment. A history of violent behavior. Location of parent(s) unknown.
VIRGINIA § 16.1-283(A), (B)-(E), (G)	Relationship with another that affects the parent-child relationship. Risk of substantial harm. Identity or location of parent unknown. Failure to assume parental responsibilities.

STATE/STATUTE	OTHER
WASHINGTON §§ 13.34.180 13.34.190 13.34.132	Murder/Manslaughter of Sibling Child Child or Sibling Assault of Sibling Child Child in Care 15 or Less (or Less) Child's Best Interest Services/Dependency Child Judged in Need of Services/Dependency Failure to Establish Paternity Failure to Provide Support Failure to Maintain Contact Abuse/Neglect or Loss of Rights of Another Child
WEST VIRGINIA §§ 49-6-5(a)(1), (b) 49-6-5b	Sexual Abuse Failure of Reasonable Efforts Felony Conviction/ Incarceration Alcohol- or Drug-Induced Incapacity Mental Illness or Deficiency Abuse/Neglect Abandonment or Extreme Parental Disinterest
WISCONSIN §§ 48.415 48.355(2d)	Refusal to cooperate in a reasonable family case plan. Homicide of child's other parent. Aggravated circumstances. Denials of physical placement. Failure to assume parental responsibility. Incestuous parenthood. Conception result of sexual assault.
WYOMING § 14-2-309	Identity or location of parent unknown. Parent is a sexually violent predator. Aggravated circumstances.