

EVIDEXI

FREE PLAYBOOK

Working with a Guardian ad Litem

They report to the judge. Know the playbook.

What a GAL does, how they investigate, what they look for, how to prepare your home and your kids, and the behaviors that help (and hurt) your case.

12 PAGES · PDF · FREE

evidexi.com

Document. Organize. Prepare for court.

What's Inside

- 01 What a Guardian ad Litem actually does

- 02 How a GAL investigation works

- 03 Preparing your home for the GAL visit

- 04 How to talk to the GAL (and what not to say)

- 05 What the GAL asks your children

- 06 Documents and evidence the GAL wants to see

- 07 The behaviors that help your case

- 08 The behaviors that hurt your case

- 09 Responding to the GAL report

Who This Playbook Is For

Parents whose case involves a GAL or custody evaluator. Whether you requested the GAL or the court appointed one, this playbook helps you understand the process and put your best foot forward.

What a Guardian ad Litem Actually Does

A Guardian ad Litem (GAL) is an attorney or trained professional appointed by the court to represent the best interests of the child. They are not your advocate and not your co-parent's advocate. They report directly to the judge, and their recommendation carries enormous weight.

The GAL's Role

- Investigates the living situation of both parents
- Interviews the child, both parents, and relevant third parties
- Reviews documents, records, and evidence from both sides
- Observes parent-child interactions
- Writes a report with recommendations for the judge
- May testify at trial about their findings

What the GAL Is Looking For

- Which parent provides a more stable, safe environment
- Which parent supports the child's relationship with the other parent
- The quality of the parent-child bond
- Evidence of abuse, neglect, or substance issues
- Each parent's ability to meet the child's daily needs
- The child's preference (age-appropriate)

PRO TIP

The GAL's recommendation is not binding, but judges follow it the vast majority of the time. Treat the GAL process as if it is the most important part of your case, because it often is.

How a GAL Investigation Works

The investigation typically takes 30-90 days. The GAL will contact both parents to schedule interviews, home visits, and gather information. Being cooperative and responsive from the first contact sets the tone.

Typical Investigation Steps

- Initial contact with both parents (phone or email)
- Individual interviews with each parent (usually 1-2 hours)
- Home visit to each parent's residence
- Interviews with the child (separate from both parents)
- Collateral contacts: teachers, doctors, therapists, family members
- Review of court documents, police reports, and other records

Investigation Timeline

- Week 1-2: GAL reviews court file and contacts both parents
- Week 2-4: Individual parent interviews
- Week 3-6: Home visits and child interviews
- Week 4-8: Collateral contacts and document review
- Week 6-12: Report writing and filing with the court

PRO TIP

Respond to every GAL communication promptly. Within 24 hours is ideal. Being hard to reach or slow to respond signals that you are uncooperative or have something to hide.

Preparing Your Home for the GAL Visit

The home visit is one of the most nerve-wracking parts of the GAL process. The GAL is not expecting a showroom. They are looking for a safe, stable, child-centered environment. Preparation should be practical, not performative.

What the GAL Looks For

- A dedicated space for the child (bedroom, area for belongings)
- Age-appropriate food in the kitchen
- Basic safety measures (working smoke detectors, secure medications, clean conditions)
- Evidence of the child living there (toys, books, art, school work on the fridge)
- General cleanliness and organization (not perfection)

What NOT to Do

- Do not stage the house like you are selling it. The GAL will notice.
- Do not hide things the GAL will find anyway (roommates, pets, firearms)
- Do not have your new partner present unless the GAL asks
- Do not coach your child on what to say or do during the visit
- Do not bad-mouth the other parent during the home visit

PRO TIP

The GAL may arrive a few minutes early or look at the exterior before knocking. Make sure the outside of your home is also presentable. A safe, well-maintained property signals responsibility.

How to Talk to the GAL (and What Not to Say)

Your interview with the GAL is the single best opportunity to make your case. Everything you say will likely appear in the report. Be honest, be specific, and be focused on your child.

Effective Communication Strategies

- Lead with your child's needs, not your grievances
- Provide specific examples with dates, not vague allegations
- Acknowledge the other parent's strengths (this shows maturity and credibility)
- Explain your proposed parenting plan and why it benefits the child
- Share your concerns calmly and factually
- Have organized documents ready to provide if asked

What NOT to Say

- "I want full custody" without explaining why it is in the child's best interest
- Anything you cannot prove
- Negative comments about the other parent's new partner (unless there is a safety issue)
- Exaggerations or embellishments (GALs are trained to detect them)
- "My child hates going over there" without specific, documented examples

PRO TIP

The GAL is evaluating YOU during the interview, not just listening. Your tone, demeanor, and attitude matter as much as the content. The parent who seems reasonable, honest, and child-focused wins.

What the GAL Asks Your Children

The GAL will interview your child separately from both parents. Understanding what they ask helps you prepare your child (without coaching them). The goal is for your child to feel safe and comfortable.

Common Questions for Children

- "Tell me about your room at Mom/Dad's house"
- "What do you like to do at each house?"
- "Do you have friends in both neighborhoods?"
- "What happens when Mom and Dad disagree?"
- "Is there anything that worries you?"
- "If you could change one thing, what would it be?"

How to Prepare Your Child

- Tell them a nice person will talk to them about their family
- Reassure them there are no right or wrong answers
- Tell them it is okay to say "I don't know"
- Do NOT tell them what to say or what not to say
- Do NOT ask them what the GAL asked or what they said afterwards

PRO TIP

GALs are specifically trained to detect coaching. If your child sounds like they are reciting talking points, it will backfire. The most powerful thing you can do is let your child speak honestly.

Documents and Evidence the GAL Wants to See

The GAL will ask for documents from both parents. Having everything organized and ready to provide quickly demonstrates that you are prepared and transparent. Delays or missing documents look bad.

Documents to Have Ready

- Current custody order and any modifications
- School records (report cards, attendance, IEPs)
- Medical records (especially if there are health concerns)
- Communication logs with the other parent
- Evidence of parental involvement (school events, doctor appointments, activities)
- Any police reports or CPS reports

How to Present Evidence to the GAL

- Organize documents by category with a simple cover sheet
- Provide copies, never originals
- Highlight the most relevant portions
- Include a brief written summary of your concerns (one page maximum)
- Do not overwhelm the GAL with hundreds of pages of texts

PRO TIP

The one-page summary is your most powerful tool. GALs review multiple cases simultaneously. A clear, concise summary of your key concerns makes it easy for them to understand your case.

The Behaviors That Help Your Case

The GAL is observing your behavior from the first phone call to the last interaction. Certain behaviors consistently create positive impressions and lead to favorable recommendations.

Behaviors GALs Reward

- Being responsive, cooperative, and flexible with scheduling
- Speaking positively about the other parent's relationship with the child
- Demonstrating involvement in the child's daily life (school, activities, medical)
- Having a clean, safe, child-friendly home
- Showing emotional stability and maturity
- Following the current custody order to the letter

Demonstrating Child-Focused Parenting

- Asking about what is best for the child, not what is fair to you
- Having a reasonable, workable parenting plan ready
- Showing willingness to co-parent or parallel parent constructively
- Providing evidence of your parenting (photos, school involvement, activities)
- Being honest about your own mistakes and what you have learned

PRO TIP

The single most powerful thing you can demonstrate to a GAL is that you support your child's relationship with the other parent. Even if the other parent is difficult, showing that you encourage the bond speaks volumes.

The Behaviors That Hurt Your Case

GALs see the same destructive patterns repeatedly. These behaviors almost always lead to negative findings in the report. Avoiding them puts you ahead of most parents in the system.

Red Flags for GALs

- Badmouthing the other parent, especially in front of the child
- Being uncooperative with the GAL process (missed appointments, delayed responses)
- Coaching the child on what to say
- Refusing to allow the GAL access to the child or home
- Making false allegations
- Using the child as a messenger or spy

Subtle Behaviors That Also Hurt

- Excessive focus on the other parent rather than your own parenting
- Inability to say anything positive about the co-parent
- Rigid, inflexible approach to scheduling and parenting time
- Over-involving the child in adult conflict
- Attempting to control or manipulate the GAL process

PRO TIP

If you realize you have already made some of these mistakes, acknowledge it honestly to the GAL. Saying "I know I have handled some things poorly and I am working to do better" is far more powerful than pretending everything has been perfect.

Responding to the GAL Report

Once the GAL files their report, you have the right to review it. The report will contain factual findings, observations, and a custody recommendation. How you respond to the report can still influence the outcome.

If the Report Is Favorable

- Provide a copy to your attorney immediately
- Prepare to have the GAL testify if the other parent contests the recommendation
- Continue following the current order and documenting
- Do not gloat, post about it, or tell your child about it

If the Report Is Unfavorable

- Read it carefully and identify specific factual errors
- Discuss with your attorney whether to challenge specific findings
- You have the right to cross-examine the GAL at trial
- Prepare evidence that contradicts incorrect findings
- Consider whether the errors are significant enough to affect the recommendation
- Do not attack the GAL personally. Challenge the facts.

PRO TIP

Judges take GAL reports very seriously. If the report is unfavorable, your best strategy is to identify factual errors and present evidence that contradicts those specific errors. Attacking the GAL's credibility rarely works.

EVIDEXI

This playbook teaches the framework.

The app helps you do it daily.

Evidexi helps you document, organize, and prepare for court, all in one place.

[Try Evidexi Free](#)

app.evidexi.com

- Log incidents with timestamps and details
- Organize evidence by category and date
- Track custody schedule and violations
- Generate court-ready reports
- Keep everything secure and private

Free to start. No credit card required.

© Evidexi. This playbook is for informational purposes only and does not constitute legal advice.