THE #FKLM FAMILY BLUEPRINT

Who May Make School and Medical Decisions?

Legal & Policy Literacy · Family & Caregiver Questions

The questions families should ask locally about decision-making authority.

IN THIS GUIDE

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A free guide from My Fairy GodParents — for youth impacted by parental incarceration, justice-impacted youth, and the caregivers and families who support them.
myfairygodparents.org/resources/family-blueprint

Print, write on it, and share it with the people helping your family.

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THE DIFFERENCE THIS MAKES

One of the most common moments a caregiver hits a wall is not dramatic — it is a school office or a clinic front desk saying, in effect, we cannot act on your say-so alone. It feels personal, as if the staff member doubts the relationship, when it is almost always a documentation question with a documentation answer.

Schools and clinics generally do not decide who may act for a child based on who shows up, how the family explains itself, or how long the arrangement has existed. They rely on what is on file. That file might be a parent's signed authorization, a caregiver affidavit, a power of attorney, a guardianship order, or a court's placement paperwork, depending on your state and the institution's own policy.

This lesson explains how those decisions are generally made and how to find the specific answer for your school, your clinic, and your state. It cannot tell you what document you personally need or whether you qualify for one — that depends on your circumstances and your state's law, and it is exactly the kind of question a legal aid organization or a school registrar answers directly.

TWO SEPARATE QUESTIONS, TWO SEPARATE ANSWERS

School decision-making and medical decision-making are governed by different rules, sometimes even within the same state, so an answer for one does not automatically apply to the other. A document that lets you enroll a child in school may not authorize a doctor to treat that same child, and the reverse is also true.

Within each of those, there are often smaller categories. A school may distinguish between enrolling a child, receiving report cards, and consenting to a special education evaluation. A clinic may distinguish between routine care, prescriptions, and emergency treatment. Ask about the specific decision you need to make, not decision-making in general.

Because of this, the useful habit is to ask each institution its own question rather than assuming an answer from one applies elsewhere: "What do you need from me to do X?" is more productive than "Am I allowed to make decisions for this child?"

WHAT INSTITUTIONS TYPICALLY LOOK FOR

Schools commonly accept some combination of a parent's written authorization, a caregiver's sworn affidavit

(sometimes called a caregiver authorization affidavit), a power of attorney, or a court order naming a guardian or legal custodian. Which of these a district accepts, and what form it uses, is set at the state or district level.

Medical providers commonly rely on a parent's signed consent form, a power of attorney for health care, or a guardianship order. Many providers will treat a child in a true emergency regardless of paperwork, but routine care, prescriptions, and non-emergency procedures usually require something on file in advance.

In both settings, informal arrangements — a parent's verbal okay, a family understanding, a note that is not on the institution's approved form — are the most common reason a caregiver is turned away. The fix is rarely proving the relationship is real; it is getting the right paper into the right hands ahead of time.

+ WHY THE ANSWER DIFFERS BY STATE, DISTRICT, AND PROVIDER

State law sets the outer boundaries of what a caregiver document can accomplish — for instance, many states have a specific caregiver authorization statute for schools and health care, while others rely more heavily on power of attorney or guardianship. Districts and individual clinics then set their own accepted forms and procedures within those boundaries.

This means two caregivers in neighboring counties, or even two schools in the same district, can be told different things and both be accurately describing their own institution's practice. It is not a sign that someone is wrong; it is a sign that you need the local answer, not a general one.

This is also why MFGP cannot tell a family which document they need or whether a given document will work at a given school. That determination belongs to the institution and, where it is contested, to an attorney or legal aid organization familiar with your state.

+ WHAT TO DO WHEN YOU ARE TURNED AWAY

Ask, specifically and in writing if possible, what document would change the answer. Staff can often name the exact form even when they cannot explain the underlying law, and that name is what you need to act on.

Ask for the refusal itself in writing when the decision matters — a missed enrollment deadline or a delayed medical appointment. A written refusal is what a legal aid attorney or court self-help center will want to see if the family needs help resolving it.

Keep a single folder, physical or digital, with whatever document you currently hold, the child's birth certificate, immunization records, and insurance information. Producing the right paper in five minutes rather than five days is often what makes the difference on the day it matters.

+ TWO CALLS, TWO DIFFERENT ANSWERS

A grandmother raising her grandson called his new school to ask what she needed to enroll him, since she had never gone through anything more formal than the family deciding he would live with her. The registrar named a specific caregiver affidavit used by that state and told her where to get the form notarized.

She assumed the same document would let her take him to the pediatrician, and the clinic's front desk told

her it would not — they needed either the parent's signed consent form or a power of attorney for health care. She had not known those were different questions with different answers.

She left both conversations with the exact names of the documents required, which she wrote down before hanging up. Neither call told her whether she was legally entitled to those documents; both told her precisely what to ask a legal aid intake worker about next.

+ WORDS YOU CAN USE

Asking a school registrar

Phone or in person.

“I'm the relative caring for [child's name] day to day. What document does this school need on file from me to enroll him and to be the contact for school decisions? Could you tell me the exact name of the form?”

Asking a medical office

Phone, before an appointment is needed.

“I care for [child's name] and I'm not their parent. What do you need on file from me to authorize routine care and prescriptions? Does that differ from what you'd need in an emergency?”

When you are told no

In person or by phone, asking for specifics.

“I understand you can't act on what I've given you. Can you tell me exactly what document would change that answer? And could I get today's decision in writing, in case I need to follow up with a legal aid office?”

Calling legal aid with the right question

Phone intake.

“I'm a relative caregiver, not the child's legal guardian. I've been told by the school/clinic that I need [document named by the institution]. Can you help me understand what that document requires and how to get one in my state?”

+ GET A CLEAR ANSWER FOR YOUR FAMILY

- [ ] Ask the school what exact document it requires for enrollment and school decisions.
- [ ] Ask the medical provider what it requires for routine care versus emergency care.
- [ ] Write down the exact form name each institution gives you.
- [ ] Ask what happens if the child changes schools or providers.

- [ ] Request any refusal in writing when the decision has a deadline.
- [ ] Start a folder with the child's birth certificate, immunization records, and insurance card.
- [ ] Note which document, if any, you currently hold on file with each institution.
- [ ] Call a legal aid organization or court self-help center if the answer is unclear or contested.

+ REFLECT AND WRITE

Which institution has already turned me away, and did I get a specific reason?

Do I know the exact document each school and provider in my child's life requires?

What is currently in my paperwork folder, and what is missing?

Who is the one person or office I will call this week to get a clear local answer?

+ YOUR NEXT STEP

> Call one school or clinic and ask what document they require on file.

+ WHERE THIS COMES FROM

Source: USA.gov — Legal Aid — verified August 2026. Curated and summarized by MFGP.
https://www.usa.gov/legal-aid
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For decisions with legal, medical, financial, or clinical consequences, work with a licensed professional or the organizations listed with each resource.
The information provided through The #FKLM Family Blueprint is for general educational purposes and is not legal advice. Laws and policies differ by jurisdiction and may change. Families needing advice about their individual circumstances should consult an appropriately qualified attorney or legal-services organization.

You do not have to do this alone.

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