Engaging Children in Dependency Hearings
13 Tips for Judges

1. **Accommodate child's schedule**: plan hearings around school so that the child may attend.
2. **Ensure child is present:** a child may appear in person, via FaceTime, by telephone, or the child may write a letter to the judge. It is important to have options, and make sure all parties know the expectations.
3. **Reschedule for unexcused absences**: continue any hearing where the child is not present and has not been excused by the Court.
4. **Prepare child in advance**: allow CASA, the child's attorney, or a caseworker to speak with the child before entering the courtroom to lessen anxiety.
5. **Anticipate child-parent interactions**: make advance arrangements if the child might be adversely affected by seeing a parent.
6. **Child engagement**: allow the child to appear outside the presence of parents when appropriate. Talk to the child on the record in chambers or in the jury room.
7. **Do not leave child unattended**: ask CASA, the child's attorney, or a caseworker to escort the child out of the courtroom after speaking with the judge.
8. **Transportation**: tell DHS to arrange transportation for the child.
9. **Make child feel comfortable**: have a child-friendly room available in case the hearing doesn't start on time. Once inside the courtroom, introduce the people at counsel table.
10. **Child comprehension**: Make sure the child understands the judge's role. Avoid using legal terms and acronyms.
11. **Look for the cause of the problem**: if a child does not want to attend court, dig a little deeper. What are the reasons and what accommodations can you make?
12. **Develop guidelines to waive a child's appearance in court**: for example, child is in an adoptive placement out of state and is too young to participate by phone or child is severely disabled and unable to travel to court.
13. **Make child feel important**: issue a special invitation to the child and ask CASA, the child's attorney, or caseworker to deliver the invitation.