

What is a Guardian Ad Litem in a Pennsylvania Child Custody Case?



By Tom Clark, Family Law Attorney

Although the courts generally prefer that couples and their attorneys work through parenting and custody issues themselves via alternative dispute resolutions, there are times when it becomes necessary for a third party to intervene. In high-conflict **custody cases**, when it becomes almost impossible for the parents to agree on even the most minor of issues, the court may appoint a guardian *ad litem* (GAL) for a child.

The GAL is an attorney who is responsible for representing the best interests of the child; — which is not always what the child, or the parents, want. To do so, the GAL will meet with each child and interview the parents and caretakers. She or he will also review any relevant court, psychological and school records. The goal is to provide the court with a neutral third party who can objectively evaluate what arrangements will best address the child's needs and safety.

Having conducted a thorough review of the case, the GAL can provide a written report to the court. Both parties may review this report and provide comment. The GAL is also responsible for explaining the proceedings to the child (to the extent that they are capable of understanding) and is also obliged to express the **child's wishes to the court**.

In private custody cases, the court may assess the cost of a GAL to the child's parents or guardians. Children who are in the custody of Pennsylvania's Child & Youth Services Department are always granted the services of a GAL.

Although every case is different, the courts generally prefer to avoid appointing GALs. It is always best for the parents to reach agreement on their own as to what will best serve their child moving forward.

If you have custody issues and have questions about the role of a guardian *ad litem*, please contact us, the best child **custody lawyers in PA**. **We have served as GALs and represented clients in custody cases where a GAL has been appointed.** We're happy to help you better understand what this means for you and your child.

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