

HOW DO I COLLECT MY OWN EVIDENCE?

A Resource for Parents written by Family Inclusion Strategies Hunter Peer Parent Expert

DCJ begin collecting evidence before they have even met you, this is in the form of ROSH (risk of significant harm) reports. It is up to you to collect your own evidence. If your matter goes to court (or if it's at court). The magistrate's decision is what counts. The magistrate needs evidence to make an informed decision.

1. Write things down in a way that works for you

Use whatever you will keep up with:

- phone notes
- a notebook
- emails to yourself

Consistency matters more than perfection.

2. Keep copies of everything

- Screenshot text messages from your caseworker
- Keep records of call logs
- Ask for copies of all paperwork
- Save documents in more than one place (email + hard copy + USB or hard drive)

If it's not saved, it's easy to lose and easy to deny.

3. Pay attention to the story DCJ is telling

Listen closely to how DCJ talks about you and your family.

What they say in meetings is often what they later tell the court.

Write down:

- exact wording
- concerns they raise
- patterns in how issues are described

This helps you understand what you need to respond to.

4. Document everything that happens

After:

- meetings
- home visits
- family time
- phone calls
- assessments

Write down:

- date and time
- who was present
- what was said
- what you said
- what you agreed with
- what you did *not* agree with

Even brief notes are powerful over time.

5. Separate facts from opinions

Make a note of:

- what actually happened
- what you believe is inaccurate or unfair

When something isn't true, start collecting evidence that shows this:

- photos
- messages
- records
- support worker notes

6. Keep relevant photos and videos

If there are allegations:

- keep photos or videos that relate to them
- if DCJ shows you something, ask for a copy

These can matter later, even if they don't seem important now.

7. Ask others to document what they see

People who know what's happening can help:

- support services
- advocates
- counsellors
- family members (where appropriate)

Ask them to:

- write notes
- record what you've told them
- keep their own records

These notes can be requested by the court.

8. Take support into meetings

Wherever possible:

- bring an advocate or support person

- ask them to write down what they hear
- include what *you* said and how DCJ responded
- Send this to DCJ after the meeting so it is on your file.

9. Ask for DCJ's meeting records

Always ask for copies of:

- meeting notes
- case notes
- records of phone calls

Check them carefully.

Their notes should reflect **what you said**, not what they *thought you meant*.
If something is wrong, ask for it to be corrected in writing.

10. Save voicemails

If DCJ leaves voicemails:

- keep them
- don't delete them

They may matter later.

11. Keep communication in writing where possible

Parents often say:

- DCJ is more careful in emails and messages
- conversations are easier to misrepresent later

When you can:

- use email or messages instead of phone calls
- follow up phone calls with an email summary

Example:

"Just confirming information from our conversation today..."

12. Add support people to emails

CC:

- your advocate
- support service
- lawyer (if you have one)(you should have one if DCJ are talking to you).

This increases accountability and accuracy.

13. Set up systems early

- Make an email account just for DCJ and services
- Make sure it has enough storage
- Save contact numbers so you know who's calling

14. Get a folder

- Keep anything you have done, courses workshops ect
- All your plans written by them
- Any evidence you have that supports what's going on for you e.g if you have a newborn and they are talking about concerns record all feeds/nappy changes ect.

You are allowed to protect your emotional safety. Speak to people in your own time. Often a communication plan will be made and you will have 48 hours to respond. Do not make this if you're not comfortable with that time frame. Ask for what works for you.

Final Reminder

Collecting evidence is not about being difficult.

It's about **protecting yourself and your family** in a system where records carry power and create stories long before parents realise.

Start early, as soon as they knock! (Or as soon as you finish reading this)

Write it down.

Save everything.

Your voice matters – but only if it's documented.

"I learned early on that they were writing everything down about me, so I started writing things down too. After every meeting, every visit, every phone call – I kept my own record. It wasn't about fighting anyone. It was about making sure my story didn't disappear."

"I wish someone had told me from the start to keep my own evidence. By the time we got to court, the story was already written and I didn't recognise myself in it. So many things were wrong, but I had nothing saved to show what really happened."

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