

## What Is “Best Interest?”

S1-Pre

The **Juvenile Court Act** spells out the *legal definition* of “best interest” at length, with a very useful checklist of factors that we should all consider in our observations and in writing our reports. The statute asks that we take into account the child’s **age** and **developmental needs** as we consider these factors:

The **physical safety and welfare** of the child, including food, shelter, health, & clothing.

The development of the **child’s identity**;

The child’s **background and ties**, including familial, cultural, and religious;

The child’s **sense of attachments**, including where the child actually feels love, attachment and a sense of being valued (as opposed to where adults believe the child should feel such love, attachment, and a sense of being valued);

The child’s **sense of security**;

The child’s **sense of familiarity**;

**Continuity of affection** for the child;

The child’s **wishes and long term goals**;

The child’s **community ties**, including church, school, and friends;

The child’s **need for permanence**, which includes the child’s need for stability and continuity of relationships with parent figure and with siblings and other relatives;

The **uniqueness of every family and child**

The **risks attendant to entering and being in substitute care**

### Bottom Line:

*A safe and permanent home, as quickly as possible.*