

# What Was Brad Pitt's "Safety Plan" And Why Did He Have One?

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Those of us who have been following the divorce of Angelina Jolie and Brad Pitt may have wondered why Brad Pitt was seeing his children under a "safety plan" fashioned by the California Department of Children and Family Services.

In New Jersey, as with every state, the Division of Child Protection and Permanency (DCPP), the former Division of Youth and Family Services (DYFS) is in place to protect children from abuse. DCPP's main goal is to protect children who cannot protect themselves and then provide services to parents so that they can be better parents and thus, not put their children in danger.

From the press coverage of the Brangelina separation, it appeared that someone called the Department of Children and Family Services about Brad Pitt's behavior toward his son, Maddox during a flight. According to the press, the allegations were that he physically and verbally abused Maddox.

Once the Division is called in, it makes a preliminary assessment of the danger posed to a child by the adult who is the alleged abuser. If the danger to the child is not severe, the Division proposes a "safety plan" to address the need to protect the child from a potentially abusive adult. In short, if one abides by the terms of the plan, at the end of the time frame set out in the plan, there are no remaining restraints on the adult having contact with the child, and the "safety plan" simply expires.

Depending on the offending behavior, some parents will be restrained from unrestricted contact with the child, others will be given a "safety plan" to address the incident which generated the complaint. For example, if the alleged incident involved drugs or the failure to correctly take prescribed drugs for a diagnosed mental health condition, an adult may have to pass regular drug testing or undergo a substance abuse evaluation or a psychiatric evaluation.

Here, Brad Pitt signed on to a plan which provided him with supervised parenting time with his children in the presence of a therapist. The plan also provided that he and Angelina Jolie engage in family therapy, and that he also participate in his own personal therapy separately. This plan is similar to one which might be imposed on an alleged abusive parent in New Jersey.

In California, if the Department of Children and Family Services had determined that Brad Pitt had engaged in child abuse, it would have turned its findings over the U. S. District Attorney for prosecution. However, the Department has cleared Brad Pitt of child abuse. In New Jersey, if DCCP determines that a parent has engaged in child abuse, it has its own attorneys on staff who prosecute the abuse complaint in State Court.

Brad Pitt has several attorneys who are advising him through this troubled situation. It is important that any parent or adult who is contacted by DCCP about his or her conduct obtains the services of an attorney, even if one's first tendency might be to directly respond to questions a DCCP worker asks. There are appellate division decisions almost every day addressing DCCP's actions for good or for ill. Dealing with DCCP without an attorney can be treacherous for the person who does not understand the rules and laws which govern DCCP and its investigations.