

How to Utilize Legal Problem Solving to Support Patients with Substance Use Disorder

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Background

Civil legal problems are common

An estimated **74% of low-income American households experienced at least one civil legal problem in 2021**– with many households dealing with multiple issues. Yet many low-income people do not know how to access legal assistance or **do not understand their problem is legal in nature**.

Civil legal problems impact health

Civil legal problems can cause or exacerbate drivers of poor health. 55% of low-income Americans who experienced a civil legal problem say they substantially impacted finances, mental health, physical health, safety, and relationships.

The law is complex and inaccessible

Laws and legal systems are **complex, require interpretation, and constantly evolve**. People who are not attorneys have historically not had access to legal information and problem-solving skills.

There is a scarcity of attorneys to address the civil legal problems of low-income people

There are **5.8 legal aid attorneys for every 10,000 Massachusetts low-income residents**. Typically, fewer than 5% of tenants facing eviction in a Massachusetts court had legal representation (compared to more than 90% of landlords).

As a result, care teams face **moral injury** and **fixing fatigue** when they identify legal problems for which there are limited solutions.



Methodology & Key Program Activities

Legal Key partners with **health and social services organizations** to equip care professionals with legal knowledge and problem-solving skills, building team capacity and empowering them to utilize the law to improve the health and wellbeing of those they serve.

In addition to providing **didactic trainings** on key legal domains, Legal Key **embeds within case management meetings** and provides **rapid response consultation** via phone and email to address individual needs.

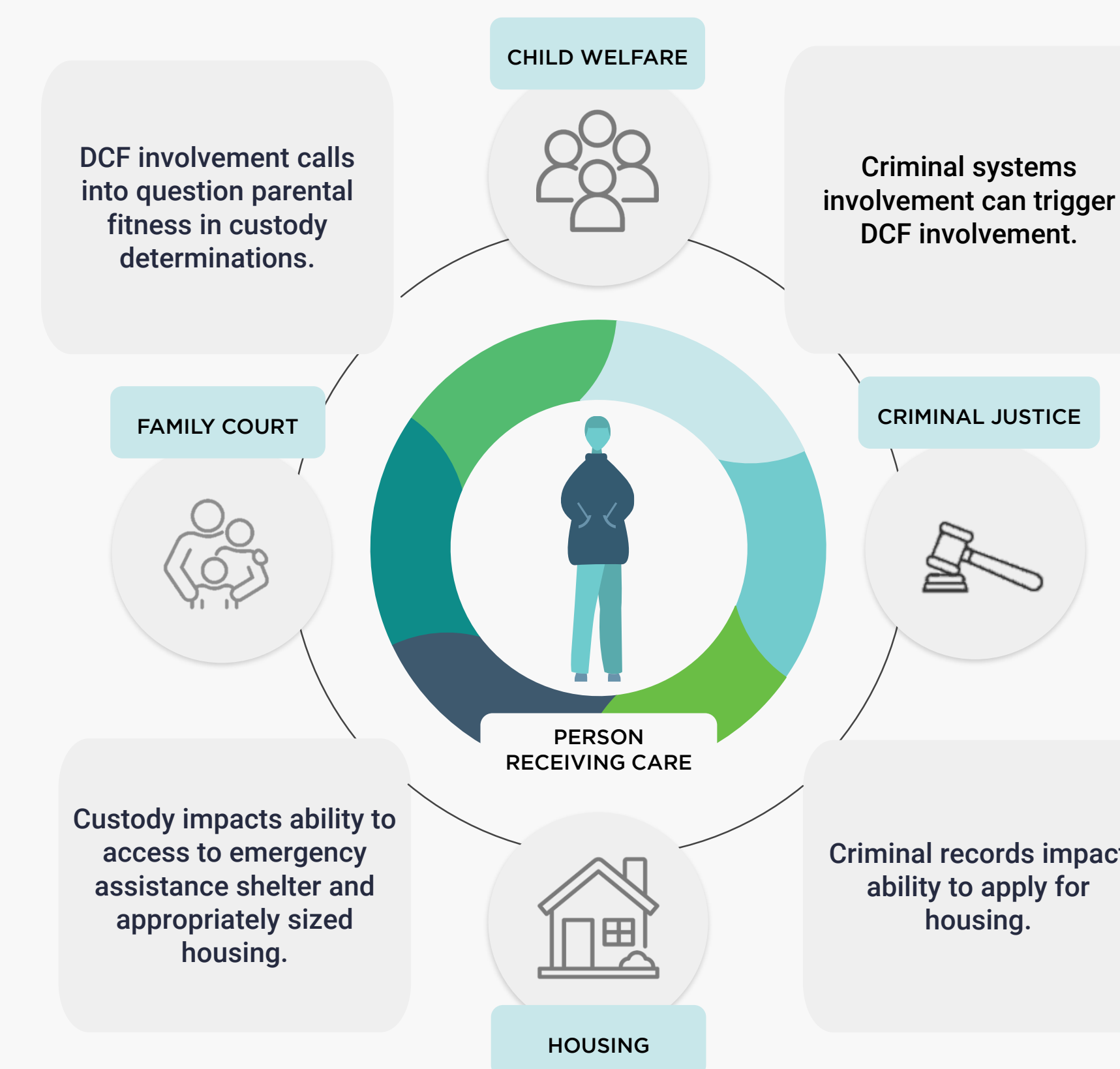
What Legal Problem-Solving Can a Non-Attorney Do?

There is more to the law than legal representation! Peer recovery coaches, social workers, community health workers, and other care team members can play a role in addressing patients' health-related legal needs. Some possible actions they can take:

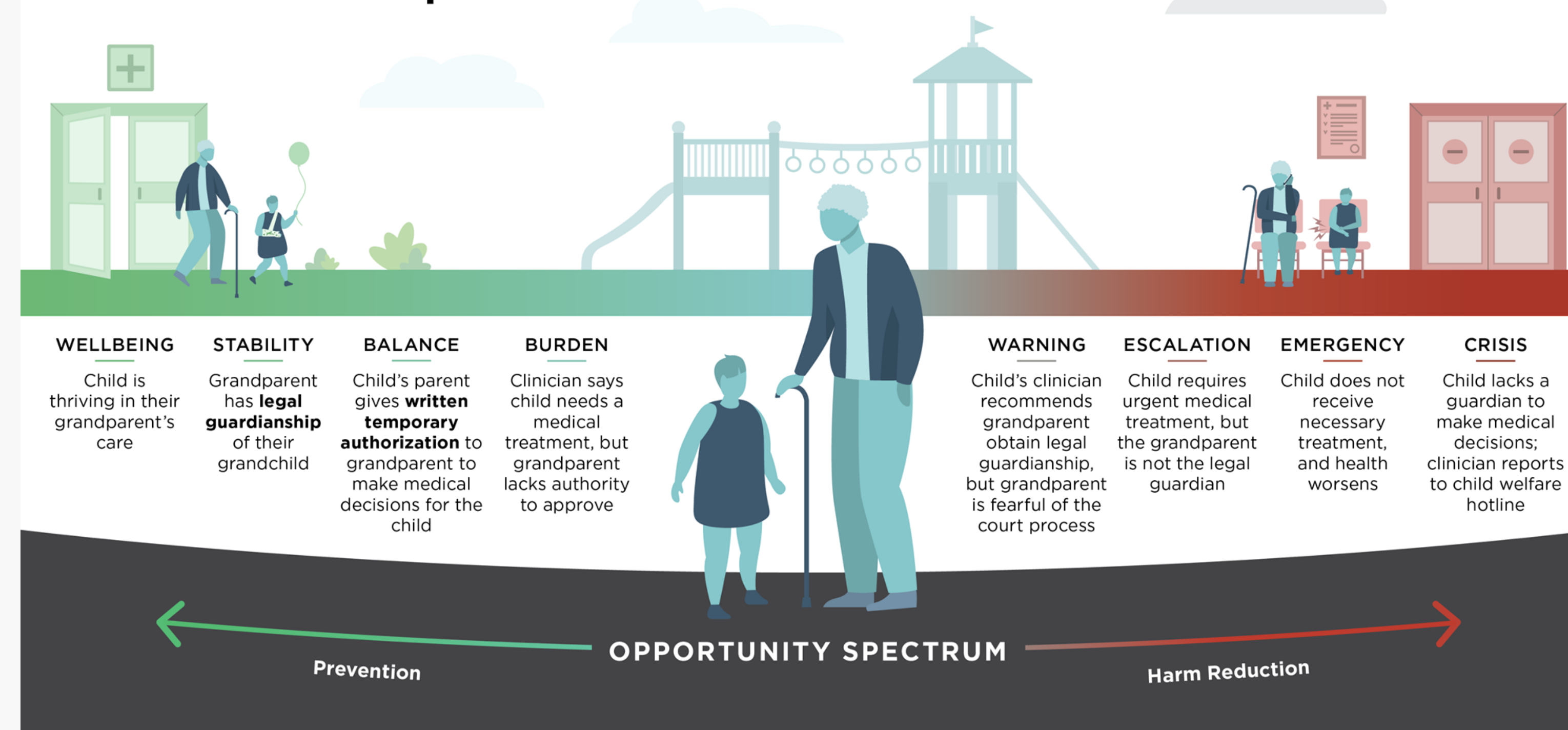
- Education about legal rights and resources
- Coaching on system navigation and strategies to reduce barriers to resources and legal protections
- Facilitation of coordinated hand-offs to responsive resources
- Expectation management about the responsiveness of specific resources, and how a particular decision could generate trade-offs or unintended consequences

Adapted from Legal Problem-Solving and Flourishing: A Handbook for Perinatal and Early Childhood System-Builders (pg. 3)

Supporting an Individual in Navigating Overlapping Legal Systems



Family Law - Minor Guardianship



Ask yourself:
Where along this spectrum was the last family that you supported?

Outcomes & Impact

As a result of Legal Key's support, information about legal rights and systems is **clear and widely accessible** to individuals and communities of care. Care teams use **legal problem-solving** to support individuals *before* civil legal issues escalate to reduce the physical, mental, and financial stress of high-stakes crises.

Legal Key consulted on **1,010 unique legal questions** across 25 partners in 2024.



340 Housing Consults

Including permanent housing access, temporary shelter, conditions issues, evictions, and more.



273 Personal & Family Stability Consults

Including criminal systems involvement, child welfare processes, guardianship, custody, ID documents, and more.



213 Income Supports Consults

Including disability benefits, health insurance, immigrant eligibility for public benefits, and more.



170 Immigration Consults

Including pending applications for residency, pending removal hearings, general questions about legal status, and more.



14 Education Consults

Including special education and access to appropriate services.

How effective has Legal Key's training and support been in helping you and your team identify and address potential legal and health issues before they become problems for your clients?

