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Jugendamt — Tasks, Support Services, and Parental Rights

What the Jugendamt does, what support it provides, and what rights parents have in Germany.

Deutsche Begriffe: Jugendamt | Kinderschutz | Sorgerecht | Inobhutnahme | Hilfe zur Erziehung | Kindeswohl

What is the Jugendamt?

The **Jugendamt** is a **municipal authority** that exists in every city and district. It is responsible for all matters concerning **children, young people, and families**. Many foreigners know the Jugendamt primarily as "the authority that takes children away" — but this is a **misconception**.

The Jugendamt is first and foremost a **support and counseling service**. Inobhutnahme (removal of a child from the family) is the **very last resort** and only occurs in cases of **acute child endangerment**.

Tasks of the Jugendamt

Counseling and Support

- **Parenting counseling** — for problems with child-rearing, school difficulties, adolescent conflicts
- **Family counseling** — for marital problems, separation, divorce
- **Childcare placement** — entitlement to a childcare place from age 1
- **Youth work** — youth centers, holiday programs, sports activities
- **Financial support** — maintenance advance, economic youth assistance

Child-Rearing Support (HzE)

If parents need **support with child-rearing**, the Jugendamt offers various forms of assistance (§§ 27–35 SGB VIII):

Form of Assistance	What is it?
Parenting counseling (§ 28)	Consultations with specialists (psychologists, social educators)
Socio-pedagogical family support (§ 31)	A family worker regularly visits the home
Educational advisor (§ 30)	Support for the child/young person
Day care group (§ 32)	Afternoon supervision with educational support
Full-time foster care (§ 33)	Child lives with a foster family
Residential care (§ 34)	Child lives in a group home/facility
Intensive socio-pedagogical individual support (§ 35)	For young people in special crisis situations

Important: These services are **voluntary** — you as a parent must consent (unless child endangerment is involved).

Child Protection

The Jugendamt has the **duty** to protect children from harm:

- **Neglect** — inadequate nutrition, hygiene, medical care
- **Physical abuse** — hitting, kicking, injuries
- **Emotional abuse** — constant yelling, humiliation, isolation
- **Sexual abuse**

When child endangerment becomes known (e.g., through neighbors, teachers, doctors):

- 1.** The Jugendamt **investigates** the report
- 2. Home visit** — specialists visit the family (usually announced in advance)
- 3. Support offer** — counseling, family support, assistance
- 4. Inobhutnahme** — only in case of acute danger (child is temporarily placed in care)

Your Rights as a Parent

Principle

Parental rights in Germany are specially protected by the Constitution (Art. 6 GG):

> "The care and education of children is the natural right of parents and their primarily incumbent duty."

This means: **You decide** how to raise your children — as long as **child welfare** is not endangered.

Right to Counseling and Support

- You have a **right to counseling** from the Jugendamt — **free of charge**
- You can **request child-rearing support** — the Jugendamt must review whether you are eligible
- You have the right to **participate in choosing the type of support** (right of choice, § 5 SGB VIII)

During a Home Visit

- The Jugendamt **cannot enter your home without your consent** (inviolability of the home, Art. 13 GG)
- **Exception:** In case of **acute danger** (imminent threat), the Jugendamt can act without your consent — but must **immediately** involve the family court
- You have the right to an **attorney** (in family court proceedings, an attorney is often appointed)

In Case of Inobhutnahme

If the Jugendamt places your child in care:

- The family court must decide **by the next working day at the latest**
- You have the right to **immediate notification** and **a hearing**
- You can hire an **attorney** (legal aid may be available)
- The child receives their own **legal representative** (the child's attorney)
- Inobhutnahme is **temporary** — the goal is always to reunite with the family

Custody Rights

Joint Custody

- **Married parents** — automatically have joint custody
- **Unmarried parents** — the mother automatically has sole custody; the father can file a **declaration of custody** at the Jugendamt or with a notary (free of charge!)

Custody in Case of Separation/Divorce

- Generally, **joint custody** remains in effect
- Only through a family court petition can a parent be **deprived** of custody
- The **right to determine residence** (where the child lives) can be regulated separately

Legal Representation (Beistandschaft)

The Jugendamt can serve as **legal representative** for the child (§ 1712 BGB):

- Assistance with **paternity establishment**
- **Child support calculation** and enforcement
- Free and voluntary

Services Provided by the Jugendamt

Maintenance Advance

If the child's support-obligated parent **does not pay**, the Jugendamt steps in:

- For children up to age 17
- **Amount (2026):** €187-314/month (depending on the child's age)
- **Apply** at the Jugendamt
- No time limit (previously maximum 72 months)

Childcare Fees

- The Jugendamt **covers childcare fees** if you cannot afford them
- Apply for **economic youth assistance** at the Jugendamt
- Based on income — often fully covered for recipients of citizen's benefit or those with low income

Education and Participation (BuT)

- Allowance for **school supplies** (€156/year)
- **Meals** at school/childcare (free)
- **School outings** and class trips
- **Tutoring** if needed

- **Sports clubs/music school** (€15/month)

Common Misconceptions

"The Jugendamt takes children away from their parents"

False. Inobhutnahme is the **very last resort** and only permissible in cases of **acute child endangerment**. In over 95% of cases, the Jugendamt **works together** with parents to improve the situation.

"If I go to the Jugendamt, they will take my child"

False. The Jugendamt is a **counseling service**. If you voluntarily seek help, it shows your **responsibility as a parent** — not the opposite.

"The Jugendamt favors German parents"

False. The Jugendamt is required to treat all families **equally**, regardless of nationality, religion, or immigration status.

"My country doesn't have a Jugendamt, so I don't need to worry about this"

In Germany, the Jugendamt has a **statutory mandate** (SGB VIII). It is important to understand German child protection rules — for example, **physical punishment** of children is **prohibited** in Germany (§ 1631 BGB: "Children have the right to education without violence").

Tips for Foreign Families

- 1. Don't be afraid** — the Jugendamt is a support service, not a criminal court
- 2. Actively seek help** — parenting counseling is free and confidential
- 3. Non-violent parenting** — physical punishment is prohibited in Germany
- 4. Declaration of custody** — unmarried fathers should file the declaration
- 5. Request an interpreter** — the Jugendamt must provide an interpreter if needed
- 6. Apply for maintenance advance** — if the other parent does not pay

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