

Normalcy for Children and Youth in Foster Care

Implementing Missouri HB 1877 & PL 113-183

Summary

Children and youth in care have the fundamental right to be safe and well cared for, without unnecessary barriers or trade-offs in other aspects of wellbeing. All children and youth are encouraged to participate in age or developmentally appropriate activities based on their interests and as supported by their primary caregiver/resource parent. Resource parents are the primary decision makers and are responsible for acting as reasonable and prudent parents, with assistance and advice from professionals and birth parents as appropriate. Developing assets in the Five Domains of Wellbeing, removing barriers to normalcy, and dramatically expanding opportunities for healthy child and youth development is everyone's responsibility.

Definitions

- ❖ **Reasonable and prudent parent standard** is used to determine whether to allow a child or youth in out-of-home care to participate in extracurricular, enrichment, cultural, and social activities. The standard is characterized by careful and sensible parental decisions that maintain health, safety, and best interests of a youth while encouraging social-emotional growth and positive youth development.
- ❖ **Age or developmentally-appropriate** is defined as suitable, developmentally appropriate activities for children of a certain age or maturity level based on the capacities typical for the age group and the individual child.

Implementation Steps – *Stop and Starting Doing Immediately*

- ❖ **Stop background checks for normalized activities**
 - Background checks are not needed for friends, sleep overs, visits and riding in cars
- ❖ **Stop moving youth based on trauma responses or normalized adolescent behaviors such as lying, arguing, cursing, low motivation, not following rules, school problems, impulsive decisions or poor follow-through**
 - Moving isn't an appropriate natural or logical consequence for mistakes or misbehavior
- ❖ **Family vacations do not need approval**
 - Please notify your caseworker and birth family for in-state and out-of-state vacations; if the trip requires a Passport you will need additional approvals
- ❖ **Driving and riding in cars**
 - Youth are allowed to ride in cars with friends, parents, and extended relatives when approved by the resource parent and consistent with licensure and traffic laws
- ❖ **Social networking**
 - Resource parents and youth can post photos as long as they do not specifically identify the child or youth as being in foster care
 - Youth are able to use Facebook and other social media accounts unless specifically prohibited by safety plans or guidelines/restrictions applying to the general public

TIPS for Caseworkers

- ❖ Work with the family to create an awareness and opportunities to enhancing well-being
- ❖ If a youth approaches you and doesn't like their caregiver's decision, what will you do?
 - Empathize with the youth, discuss with the caregiver and provide support if needed
- ❖ Primary goal is to support the caregiver in parenting and instilling normalcy in the home
- ❖ Create opportunities for social connection with extended family and friends

TIPS for teens

- ❖ Know your rights
 - Use *"What's It All About : A Guide for Youth in Out of Home Care"*
- ❖ Youth ages 14 and over can invite support people of your choice to all meetings and conferences; think about who could provide positive support if you asked them?
- ❖ Discuss goals, myths and desires with caregiver and caseworker
- ❖ School – you can remain in the same school or enroll in a new school right away

TIPS for Resource Parents

- ❖ Be clear about expectations and consequences (do not include threats of having to move)
- ❖ Maintain birth parent involvement, as well as connections to appropriate adults and peers
 - This law does not eliminate birth parent involvement, but allows current caregiver the ability to make decisions in the best interest of the child or youth
- ❖ View each child or youth through a developmental lens, understand their trauma history and its implications, and create rules and expectations that are individualized and appropriate
- ❖ What happens when it goes wrong and what steps may be taken?
 - Resource family resolves the situation themselves and informs the caseworker
 - Caseworker takes the issue to supervisor or team to further discuss any concerns
 - Team Decision-Making Meeting or Family Support Team Meeting to review
- ❖ Is there a liability concern?
 - Liability concerns are minimized if acting as reasonable and prudent parent and supporting normal and age or developmentally appropriate activities as required by law
- ❖ Maintain and create opportunities with extended family
 - Use reasonable and prudent decision making, get to know each other, remain open to opportunities to build and strengthen social connections for the child or youth

TIPS for birth parents

- ❖ There is a loss of control when children are in state custody and it is okay to acknowledge and talk it through
- ❖ Be involved in the process, work with your child, caseworker, and resource parent

TIPS for Youth Advisors/Advocates

- ❖ Role is to advocate as needed in applying the reasonable and prudent parent standard and normalized activities for children or youth in an age or developmentally appropriate manner