

PROVIDING NORMALCY

FOR YOUTH IN FOSTER CARE

As caregivers, you know how resilient and brave children in foster care can be, while also understanding the challenges they face. Caregivers must navigate many decisions in order to provide a normal, safe and loving environment for children. In an effort to be a partner through this process, VDSS developed this resource guide. We hope this information will be helpful to you as you strive to be the best caregiver and advocate for children in your care, and help them reach their fullest potential.

The Preventing Sex Trafficking and Strengthening Families Act (P.L. 113-183) is a federal policy that was created to assist in the provision of normalcy in foster care by empowering caregivers to make everyday decisions regarding the activities of foster children and youth in their care so that these children can have as normal a childhood as possible. Normalcy can be further explained through the Reasonable and Prudent Parent Standard.



Reasonable and Prudent Parent Standard:

Careful and sensible parental decisions which ensure the child's health, safety, and best interest while at the same time encouraging the child's emotional and developmental growth, that a caregiver shall use when determining whether to allow a child in foster care to participate in extracurricular, enrichment, cultural, and social activities.

What is the law?

The law states that caregivers must utilize the Reasonable and Prudent Parent standards when making decisions regarding the activities of the foster youth in their care, which includes considering the following:

- » The child's age, maturity, and developmental level to maintain the overall health and safety of the child;
- » Potential risk factors and the appropriateness of the activity;
- » The best interest of the child based on the caregiver's knowledge of the child;
- » The importance of encouraging the child's emotional and developmental growth;
- » The importance of providing the child with the most family-like living experience possible;
- » The behavioral history of the child and the child's ability to safely participate in the proposed activity;
- » The wishes of birth parents whose rights have not been terminated; and
- » The child's foster care plan.



Frequent Issues:

Social Media

- » Children are permitted to participate in social media as long as permission has been given by caregiver.

Driving

Caregiver and Case Worker should:

- » Assist the child in enrolling in a driver's education program;
- » Support the child's efforts to learn to drive a car, obtain learner's permit & driver's license (age, maturity, insurance); and
- » Assist the child in obtaining automobile insurance.

Overnight / Planned Outings

- » The caregiver shall determine that it is safe & appropriate.
- » Background screenings are not necessary for a child to participate in normal school or community activities and outings such as school field trips, dating, scout camp outs, sleepovers and activities with friends, families, school and church groups.

Bank Accounts

- » Whenever it is appropriate, children should be encouraged to open and maintain bank accounts.

Babysitting

- » Youth are allowed to babysit consistent with their foster care plan.
- » A babysitting course is recommended.

Caregivers can have a babysitter in their home to provide short-term babysitting. When arranging for a babysitter the caregiver shall ensure:

- » Babysitter is suitable for the age, developmental level and behaviors of child;
- » Babysitter understands how to handle emergencies and have appropriate contact information; and
- » Discipline and confidentiality policies for the child have been explained.

Vacations

- » Caregivers are encouraged to take children on vacation as they would their own children.



Special Considerations:

- » Foster youth with disabilities shall be provided with an equal opportunity to participate in activities.
- » Confidentiality requirements for department records shall not restrict the child's participation in customary activities appropriate for the child's age and developmental level.

Consistent with the child's foster care plan, the child shall be given permission/encouragement to:

- » Have opportunities to spend his or her own money
- » Have access to a phone
- » Have reasonable curfews
- » Travel with other youth or adults
- » Have his or her picture taken for publication in a newspaper or yearbook
- » Receive public recognition for accomplishments
- » Participate in school or after-school organizations or clubs
- » Participate in community events

Children should be provided with information when it is appropriate regarding:

- » Teen sexuality issues
- » Drug and alcohol use and abuse
- » Runaway prevention
- » Health services
- » Community involvement
- » Locating available resources
- » Identifying legal issues
- » Understanding his or her legal rights
- » Accessing specific legal advice

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