

Prudent Parenting & Normalcy for Youth in Care

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A GUIDE FOR
RESOURCE
CAREGIVERS

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The Need for a Prudent Parenting Standard

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In 2014, the **Preventing Sex Trafficking and Strengthening Families Act** (PL 113-183) introduced guidelines for states to help support normalcy and improve experiences for youth in the child wellbeing system. **The Act** outlines actions states like Rhode Island must take to support normalcy for foster youth, like:

- Promoting participation in age- and developmentally appropriate activities
- Developing guidelines that allow resource caregivers to make reasonable and prudent parenting decisions
- Carrying liability insurance to help protect youth and resource families when making reasonable and prudent parenting decisions
- Creating training opportunities for resource families so they have a clear understanding of, and can use prudent parenting guidelines in support of youth in their care

WHAT IS NORMALCY?

Normalcy means youth in foster care get to do what their friends do. They have the chance to pursue interests, build dreams for their future, and have a supportive family just like their friends. Youth in kinship foster care and traditional out-of-home foster care are entitled to normalcy.



Reasonable and Prudent Parenting Standards

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At the most basic level, reasonable and prudent parenting means parents can approach situations, decisions and make choices after careful consideration of the benefits and potential risks to arrive at a sensible decision in the best interest of a youth in their care. Decisions and choices made using prudent parenting ensure the health, safety and best interest of a youth while also encouraging their social, emotional and developmental growth.

For resource caregivers, a reasonable and prudent parenting standard empowers caregivers to make certain decisions without needing to seek several approvals from caseworkers, family court judges, a court appointed special advocate or guardian ad litem.



“Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA)” are attorney guardian ad litem appointed by the court to represent the best interest of a minor child in legal proceedings. Attorney guardian ad litem are commonly referred to as a GAL.

HOW DOES PRUDENT PARENTING SUPPORT YOUTH IN CARE?

Rhode Island's prudent parenting standard means youth can live in a safe and supportive home where they feel welcome, build trusting and nonjudgmental relationships with the adults in that home, experience the same age- and developmentally appropriate boundaries, supervision and discipline as their peers, have a balanced and flexible schedule, and a space in their room they can personalize.

Responsibilities for Supporting Prudent Parenting Standards

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ALL MEMBERS OF A YOUTH'S CHILD WELLBEING TEAM HAVE RESPONSIBILITIES IN SUPPORTING PRUDENT PARENTING STANDARDS.



DCYF STAFF & PRIMARY SERVICE WORKERS

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All Department staff who work with youth and families are trained in the reasonable and prudent parenting standard so they can support resource families in appropriate decision-making. Designated DCYF Staff are available to answer questions related to supporting normalcy and using the prudent parenting standard.



RESOURCE CAREGIVERS

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Resource caregivers must familiarize themselves with the prudent parenting standard and use it to make parenting decisions to create normalcy for youth in their care.

WHAT IS A PRIMARY SERVICE WORKER?

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“Primary Service Worker” means the DCYF caseworker with main casework responsibility for the child and family.

WHO IS CONSIDERED A CAREGIVER?

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“Caregiver” means the resource parent who is designated by the Department for making caretaking decisions about a child in care.



Using the Prudent Parenting Standard

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THE PRUDENT PARENTING STANDARD SHOULD BE USED WHEN MAKING DAY-TO-DAY, ROUTINE DECISIONS LIKE SIGNING A FIELD TRIP PERMISSION SLIP, ALLOWING A YOUTH TO PARTICIPATE ON MOST SCHOOL SPORTS TEAMS OR IN AN AFTER-SCHOOL ACTIVITY. SOME SPECIFIC SPORTS, EVENTS AND ACTIVITIES COVERED IN THE PRUDENT PARENTING STANDARD INCLUDES:

- ✓ Community events and activities
- ✓ Camping and hiking
- ✓ Sports and clubs
- ✓ Swimming and water activities
- ✓ School-related activities
- ✓ Youth organization activities, like YMCA or Boys and Girls Club activities
- ✓ In-state short trips or excursions and school field trips
- ✓ Going on social outings with friends
- ✓ Volunteering or interning
- ✓ Age-appropriate dating
- ✓ Going to age-appropriate movies or shows
- ✓ Access to a phone to make calls
- ✓ Traveling in cars with peers or the caregivers of their peers, like carpooling
- ✓ Access to the internet and social media with age-appropriate monitoring

Prudent Parenting Questions

To help make decisions using the prudent parenting standard, ask yourself the following questions:

Refusing, withholding or denying participation in activities CANNOT be used as discipline.

- ✓ Is the activity age- and developmentally appropriate for the youth?
- ✓ Do I understand the potential risks and the supports, plans or accommodations in place to manage the risks?
- ✓ Does this activity support a youth's formation of healthy social relationships, development of skills, interests, or talents, build social, emotional, or cultural growth or help them connect with their community?
- ✓ Does it allow a youth to practice age-appropriate autonomy or develop their decision-making skills?
- ✓ Would I allow my biological children to participate in the activity?
- ✓ Is supervision provided or needed?
- ✓ Is the youth behaviorally ready to participate in the activity?

Non-Negotiable Decisions and Prudent Parenting

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WITH CHILDREN AND YOUTH IN FOSTER CARE, THERE ARE CERTAIN SITUATIONS WHERE RESOURCE FAMILIES ARE NOT ABLE TO MAKE A DECISION OR DETERMINATION AS THE CAREGIVER FOR THE CHILD OR CHILDREN. THOSE SITUATIONS INCLUDE:

- ✗ Court ordered visitation and sibling visits
- ✗ Medical approvals
- ✗ Returning a child without court approval
- ✗ Altering the discipline policy
- ✗ Approving IEP and 504 Plan services
- ✗ Drastic changes to a child's appearance including haircuts
- ✗ Interfering with or contradicting court orders regarding case plans, therapy services, etc.
- ✗ Participating at trampoline parks
- ✗ Participating in ziplining and high ropes courses
- ✗ Contact or collision sports (ask the primary service workers for a list)
- ✗ Changing a child's religion

ALWAYS CONTACT YOUR CHILD'S CASEWORKER WHEN YOU HAVE A QUESTION REGARDING A NON-NEGOTIABLE SITUATION.

Prudent Parenting Standards for Social Media and Cell Phone Usage

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Youth in care are permitted to use social media and should be given the same opportunity to access a cell phone as their peers, with age-appropriate supervision and in compliance with minimum age requirements for social media accounts.

Resource caregivers can use the prudent parenting standard to determine rules and guidelines around using a cell phone and social media, including considering the youth's age and development needs.

Resource caregivers and/or primary service worker must have regular and candid conversations with the youth about safe practices and privacy, rules, expectations and risks of cell phone and social media use.



Making Decisions about Babysitters, Playdates and Unsupervised Time

RESOURCE CAREGIVERS CAN SELECT A RELIABLE AND MATURE INDIVIDUAL TO PROVIDE SUPERVISION OR TO BABYSIT A YOUTH IN THEIR CARE.

Care needed longer than 24 hours by an individual who isn't a babysitter or the caregiver is considered Respite Care. Situations when resource caregivers must follow the Respite Care Policy include if specialized care or support is needed for an extended period of time or if resource caregivers are not able to secure care using their natural supports.

DAY CARE AND AFTER-SCHOOL PROGRAMS

Babysitting or supervision provided by childcare centers, private "home" daycares, and after-school programs require authorization by the Department. DCYF Staff can provide families with information about approved childcare centers and programs.

PLAYDATES AND SLEEPOVERS

Playdates and sleepovers under 48 hours are considered differently than babysitting arrangements. Resource caregivers must decide if the youth is developmentally ready and if the friend's home is appropriate. This includes talking with the youth about how they feel, and what the expectations are for them being away from home. Resource caregivers must get the contact information for the friend's parents and be available in case the youth need to be picked up.

SLEEPOVERS EXCEEDING 48 HOURS

Unexpected or planned sleepovers lasting longer than 48 hours require authorization from the Department which includes conducting clearances and background checks for all individuals over 18 years old. If the sleepover is part of a sleep-away camp, the resource caregivers must notify the primary service worker, supervisor and administrator in writing or by phone PRIOR to the camp start date. The child wellbeing team will determine if additional authorization is required.

UNSUPERVISED TIME AT HOME

Resource caregivers can occasionally leave youth alone without supervision, but cannot leave youth alone, unsupervised overnight. Before leaving youth without supervision, resource caregivers must consider:

- The age, maturity and developmental level of the youth
- The length of time and time of day they will be left unsupervised
- The inherent risk of harm and whether there is a known safety plan in place
- If the special needs of the youth can still be met while unsupervised

If you determine the youth in your care is able to spend a short amount of time unsupervised, it is your responsibility to communicate to the youth:

- Where the emergency numbers are posted
- How long you will be away and they will be unsupervised
- Family emergency procedures
- How they can get in touch with you

"Babysitting" means short-term care that is less than 24 hours and occurs occasionally.

Prudent Parenting Standards and Traveling with Youth in Care

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RESOURCE CAREGIVERS ARE ENCOURAGED TO USE THE PRUDENT PARENTING STANDARD WHEN TRAVELING OR TAKING VACATIONS WITH YOUTH IN THEIR CARE. THERE ARE DIFFERENT LEVELS OF PRIOR COMMUNICATION AND AUTHORIZATION NEEDED DEPENDING ON THE DESTINATION AND LENGTH OF THE VACATION.



TRAVEL WITHIN RHODE ISLAND FOR LESS THAN 48 HOURS

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For in state trips that will not interfere with court-ordered case plans such as visitation schedules, use prudent parenting standards to determine the appropriateness of the trip.



TRAVEL WITHIN RHODE ISLAND FOR MORE THAN 48 HOURS AND LESS THAN 7 NIGHTS

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You must notify the primary service worker in advance of the trip, but consent for the trip is not required unless it will interfere with court-ordered case plans.



TRAVEL WITHIN RHODE ISLAND FOR MORE THAN 7 NIGHTS

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You must seek advance approval from the youth's primary service worker and their parents or legal guardians. The youth's service worker will request consent from the parents or legal guardians.



TRAVEL OUTSIDE RHODE ISLAND OR OUTSIDE OF THE COUNTRY OVERNIGHT

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Prior approval from the youth's primary service worker, parents or legal guardians, and CASA or GAL attorney is required. If any parties disagree with travel, the youth's primary service worker may consult with the Department's Legal Services to determine if family court may issue a consent decree.



While you may be accustomed to traveling into states like Massachusetts for work or to run errands, trips with your foster children to overnight destinations in states bordering Rhode Island are considered out-of-state travel and require authorization and consent.

Have Questions?



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