

Chapter 6

NORMALCY

6-1. Purpose: This chapter describes the Department's policies and procedures regarding the concept of normalcy. It is the policy of the Department of Children and Families to fully support the efforts of caregivers, providers, and Community-based Care (CBC) lead agencies to ensure that children in our care have the opportunity to fully participate in activities in their schools, neighborhoods, and communities.

6-2. Scope. The policies and procedures within this operating procedure apply to all staff of the Department, CBC lead agencies and subcontracted providers involved with children in out-of-home care of all ages. This includes child protective investigators, case managers, Children's Legal Services attorneys, foster families, child care agency staff, relatives, nonrelatives and Department program specialists. Local policies must not be more restrictive than the policies and procedures outlined in this chapter.

6-3. Authority. The following provide the legal authority for the purpose and scope.

- a. Section 409.145, Florida Statutes (F.S.)
- b. Section 39.4091, F.S.
- c. Section 409.1454, F.S.
- d. Chapter 65C-28, Florida Administrative Code (F.A.C.)

6-4. Explanation of Reasonable and Prudent Parent Standard. In accordance with s.39.4091, F.S., "reasonable and prudent parent standard" means the standard characterized by careful and sensible parental decisions that maintain the child's health, safety, and best interests 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 out-of-home care to participate in extracurricular, enrichment, and social activities.

6-5. Normalcy Overview.

- a. A Child's right to live a healthy, normal childhood is paramount.
- b. A reasonable and prudent parent standard will be applied to decisions regarding a child's participation in normal childhood activities.
- c. Out-of-home caregivers shall be supported in their decision making.
- d. Normalcy focuses on enabling opportunities for social development, recreation, academic growth and positive life experiences, based on a child's desires and developmental, emotional, physical and other needs. Caregivers are empowered to make decisions using a

- e. reasonable and prudent parent standard. Guidelines aimed at also increasing normalcy for caregivers are addressed in Chapters 7 and 8 of this operating procedure.
- f. Decisions shall not contradict any existing court order.
- g. While caregivers have authority to make decisions about the normal activities of foster children in their care, the caregivers needs to consider known parental wishes in these decisions.
- h. The assigned child welfare professional will make diligent efforts to keep the parent(s) informed and involved, including the resolution of differences between the caregiver and parent.

6-6. Overnight/Planned Activities and Outings.

- a. The out-of-town caregiver must determine that the activity or outing is safe and appropriate in accordance with the reasonable and prudent parent standard.
- b. Children shall be encourage to participate in normal school, community, or social activities and outings, such as employment, school field trips, dating, scout camping trips, and activities with friends, school, and church groups as appropriate for the child based upon a reasonable and prudent parent standard.
- c. Background screening is not required for the child's participation in normal childhood activities and outings, like sleepovers with friends, participation in school lock-in's or team sports.
- d. The caregiver may take children placed in their care on vacations and must inform the assigned child welfare professionals in advance of the travel. Travel must be in accordance with any existing court orders.
- e. The caregiver shall notify the assigned child welfare professional in advance or overnight stays exceeding three (3) nights. Examples of such stays include sleep away camps and school trips.
- f. The assigned child welfare professional shall make efforts to accommodate planned activities for the child's participation by assisting in coordination with the family and court, particularly as related to scheduled visitation.

NOTE: See also Chapter 7 ("Babysitting and Overnight Care") and Chapter 8 ("Out of Town Travel/Vacation") of this operating procedure.

6-7. Social Media/Computer Usage/Cell Phones.

- a. Children are permitted to a=participate in social media, computer usage, and have a cell phone as long as permission has been given by the caregiver.

- b. Caregivers shall apply the reasonable and prudent parent standard to decision-making regarding social media usage. Caregivers should be sensitive to the risks of the various forms of social media.
- c. Children have the right to self-disclose information about them selves on social media. Caregivers should educate children regarding the potential impact and ramifications of such disclosures.
- d. Caregivers are permitted to post pictures on social media including children placed in their care. Caregivers may not use the child's last name or identify the child as residing in out-of-home care.

6-8. Driving.

- a. Caregivers and child welfare professionals shall assist children in finding a driver's license education program.
- b. Support of the child's effort to learn to drive a car, obtain a learner's permit, and driver's license shall be based upon the child's age, maturity, and access to insurance.
- c. The Keys to Independence program is available to assist caregivers, youth, and child welfare professionals to maximize children's access to learners' permit, driving education, and drivers' licenses.

Chapter 7

BABYSITTING AND OVERNIGHT CARE

7-1. Purpose. This chapter describes in Department's policies and procedures regarding children in out-of-home care and babysitting. While normalcy focuses on allowing children to participate fully in normal childhood activities and outings, it is the position of the Department of Children and Families that out-of-home caregivers should be supported to function as normal as possible.

7-2. Scope. The policies and procedures within this operating procedure apply to all staff of the Department, Community-Based Care lead agencies and subcontracted providers involved with children in out-of-home care. This includes child protective investigators, case managers, Children's Legal Services attorneys, foster families, relatives, nonrelatives and Department program specialists. Local policies must no be more restrictive than the policies and procedures outlined in this chapter.

7-3. Babysitting Overview

- a. Babysitting does not include overnight care or daily childcare.
- b. Babysitting does not have to occur in a licensed setting and background screening is not required.
- c. Caregivers should use the reasonable and prudent parent standard when choosing babysitters for children placed in their care. Caregivers will ensure:
 - (1) Babysitter is suitable and appropriate for the age, developmental level, and behaviors of the child.
 - (2) Babysitter receives guidance on handling emergencies, including telephone numbers for themselves, child welfare professional, and physicians.
 - (3) Discipline and confidentiality policies for the child have been fully explained.
 - (4) Water safety precautions have been explained.
 - (5) Babysitters must be age 14 or older.
- d. Caregivers shall use the reasonable and prudent parenting standard when assessing a child's ability to stay home alone. Examples of factors to be considered by the caregiver include:
 - (1) Physical and developmental age.
 - (2) Child's knowledge of safety rules, emergency contacts and comfort level.

(3) Child's history of trauma and reasons for entry into care

(4) Child's treatment recommendations and needs.

7-4. Overnight Care

- a. Caregivers may allow a family or person who is well known to them to provide care for children placed in their care overnight.
- b. Caregivers shall utilize the reasonable and prudent parent standard when selecting substitute care.
- c. Substitute caregivers chosen by the caregiver for babysitting will be background screened for all stays exceeding three (3) nights. When the substitute caregiver is utilized due to unexpected circumstances, background screen will be initiated within one (1) business day.
- d. Caregivers shall notify the assigned child welfare professional in advance of all overnight stays exceeding three (3) nights.
- e. The assigned child welfare professional shall consult with the supervisor and other involved parties, such as the Guardian Ad Litem, when the overnight stay needs to exceed seven (7) nights. When relevant, agreement by all parties shall be documented by the child welfare professional in Florida Safe Families Network.
- f. Caregivers shall ensure that the assigned child welfare professional can contact them at all times regarding the location and needs of the child.

Chapter 8

OUT OF TOWN TRAVEL/VACATION

8-1. Purpose. This chapter describes the Department's policies and procedures regarding children in out-of-home care and out of town travel. While normalcy focuses on allowing children to participate fully in normal childhood activities and outings, it is the position of the Department of Children and Families that out-of-home caregivers should be supported to function as normally as possible. Caregivers are strongly encouraged to include children in all activities while maintaining their right to make reasonable and prudent parenting decisions.

8-2. Scope. The policies and procedures within this operating procedure apply to all staff of the Department, Community-Based Care lead agencies and subcontracted providers involved with children in out-of-home care. This includes child protective investigators, case managers, Children's Legal Services attorneys, foster families, child caring agency staff, relatives, non relatives and Department program specialists. Local policies must not be more restrictive than the policies and procedures outlined in this chapter.

8-3. Vacation

- a. Caregivers shall be encouraged to take children placed in their care on planned family vacations.
- b. When travel involves visiting with friends or family of the caregivers, background screening is not required. Caregivers shall utilize the reasonable and prudent standard when choosing who to visit when traveling.
- c. Caregivers will notify the assigned child welfare professional of all out of town travel in advance and in accordance with existing court orders.
- d. Travel cannot conflict with orders of the court. Additional court approval may be required prior to travel.
- e. While caregivers have authority to make decisions about the normal activities of foster children in their care, the caregiver needs to consider known parental wishes in these decisions.

8-4. Out of town Travel.

- a. Out of town travel must also be in compliance with the above paragraph 8-3 covering vacation.
- b. When caregivers need to travel and taking a child with them is not prudent, such as a family emergency, they may choose to leave the child in their care with a family or person well known to them in accordance with Chapter 7 of this operating procedure.

