

Washoe County Department of Social Services
NORMALCY for children placed with Relatives

Background: A parent is often faced with decisions regarding his or her child's participation in activities, as is a caregiver or licensee. However, oftentimes, a foster child has been prohibited from participating in typical childhood activities unless certain requirements were met.

Purpose: To allow children to experience "normalcy" while placed in foster care with a relative for fictive-kin. Washoe County will provide guidance, direction, and set forth parameters by adopting the "Reasonable and Prudent Parent Standard" (referred to as "RPPS" from here on) defined as a "standard used by a caregiver or licensee that is characterized by careful and sensible parental decisions with the goal of maintaining the foster child's health, safety, and best interest". Activities under this policy are viewed as a benefit to the child specifically.

Responsibilities of Licensed Foster Parent in adhering to RPPS: Use the RPPS in applying decision making to A and B of this policy. Caregiver will:

- 1) Have adequate (who, what, when, where, how) information about the activity (who, what, when, where and why);
- 2) Take reasonable steps to determine the appropriateness of an activity;
- 3) Take into account any foreseeable risks of the activity or event; and
- 4) Ask themselves the following questions:
 - Does this activity seem reasonable?
 - Is this activity age-appropriate? A caregiver should consider the foster child's maturity level, mental and physical health, and developmental level.
 - Are there foreseeable hazards or risks associated with the child's history or behaviors (such as drug/alcohol use, sexualized behaviors or aggression)?
 - Is there anything based upon the foster child's case history with the current caregiver or licensee (such as truancy or running away) to suggest that this activity would not be appropriate for the foster child?
 - Does this decision maintain the foster child's health, safety and best interests?
 - Does this activity assist in normalizing life in foster care?

A. Specific activities identified under the policy:

Caregiver will apply RPPS to these common "normalcy" circumstances-list is not intended to be comprehensive and workers should address other circumstances with the child's case worker and team. This policy does not relieve the caregiver's responsibility to comply with other rules or policies including getting permission/travel letter to travel outside the county:

- 1) Overnights with peers: Overnights for the benefit of the child can be approved without non-primary clearance being completed if:
 - The overnight was requested by the child and is with a peer of the child. It is to benefit the child, not the foster parent.

- The foster parent has met the adults who will be responsible for the child and they are “known” to the foster parent.
 - The overnight is not for more than one night, unless approved by the foster child’s case worker and supervisor.
 - The approval is made based on the “prudent parenting standard” and the foster parent has ensured the child will be safe while on the overnight visit.
- 2) Peer relationships and “normal” age appropriate activities: A child in foster care should be allowed the opportunity to attend school functions such as football/basketball games, homecoming and prom.
- The caregiver can make adjustments based on recent behaviors to the approval such as requiring an hourly check in, early pick up time or other measures to ensure the child’s safety.
 - While a caregiver may prevent a foster child from attending specific extracurricular activities as appropriate discipline for misbehavior, the frequency and scope of that discipline cannot result in denial of the foster child’s right to participate in extracurricular activities.
 - Restrictions on extracurricular activities should not be the only disciplinary options to be considered or utilized by a caregiver. Other disciplinary actions should be considered as an alternative to exclusion from extracurricular activities.
 - Foster children can perform household chores such as vacuuming, dusting, dishwashing and bathroom scrubbing as long as the household chore is age appropriate and developmentally appropriate and does not pose unreasonable hazards to the child. The caregiver should not impose excessive or a disproportionate amount of chores on the foster child, as doing so could violate the foster child’s personal rights.
 - A caregiver can bring a foster child to an event and leave the foster child with another supervising adult (who is aware and willing to accept the responsibility for supervision) as long it is of the caregiver’s opinion that the supervising adult is capable of providing care and supervision of the child.
 - Foster children may participate in social media websites such as MySpace, Facebook, Instagram and Twitter. Foster children may have a cellular phone; however, the caregiver may impose reasonable restrictions with regards to the use of any social medial or the use of a cellular phone. These restrictions may include restricting internet usage or restricting the use of the cellular phone when appropriate.
- 3) Teen in foster care driving or passenger with other teen driver:
- The approval of teens as drivers or as a passenger in another teen’s car should be to be for the benefit of the child in foster care.
 - In order to foster independence, young adults may apply for a driver’s permit at the age of 15 ½ and/or a driver’s license at the

age of 16. The caregiver can sign for this or the assigned case worker can provide the permission after verifying the youth is covered by insurance. (NRS 483.300 allows county employees to grant permission for application of a driver's permit and license.) The insurance coverage can be the youth's own policy, the caregiver's policy or another person who can verify the coverage is being provided.

- Caregivers and youth should contact their assigned worker for the specific requirements as outlined in policy, section 13.15.
- The passengers of the teen driver should be within the same peer group (high school students) of the driver. If the teen wishes to drive a younger sibling they should seek approval to drive a younger sibling from the assigned social worker. The driver must follow all applicable laws.
- Caregivers should assess the child in foster care's ability to make sound decisions and should discuss safe decision making with the child in foster care.

4) Child in foster care babysitting: The approval or denial for a child in foster care to provide babysitting services must be *approved by the child's case worker*.

- If the child has attended the Red Cross babysitting class and is mature enough to do so, the approval can be given in a way to meet the child's needs. Starting with a short time and then progressing from there. The child should be provided support and resources such as having an adult available by phone or nearby.

5) Participation in Sports or Other School Sanctioned Activities (Band, Choir, Chess): Children should be provided the opportunity to participate in the school activities and sports of their choosing as long as the event is appropriate and safe for the child.

- For sports, a foster parent should *consult with the child's case worker*. The worker will make at least three attempts to seek approval from the biological parent of the child. If contact with the biological parent cannot be made after three attempts, the case worker will provide approval or denial for the requested sporting activity. The approval or denial will be based on the child and what is in their best interest keeping in mind what is "normal" in their particular foster home.
- A foster child can travel outside the county with their foster family or with the team (or school sanctioned group) as a part of their participating in the activity without going to court. The case workers and/or courts approval may be needed for trips of great length or duration.

B. Exceptions and clarification:

- The RPPS does not apply to the following activities: tattoos, body piercings, and permanent cosmetic application. Changes to the children's hair that are "non-usual," a child's first haircut or

change the style will need to be approved by the biological parents and/or the social worker.

- Any visitation between the foster child and their parents or other relatives must still be approved by the worker.
- If the overnight is out of Washoe County, approval must be requested from the worker. A written request email to the worker at least one week prior to the event is appreciated. In the event you are unsure if you can approve an activity, consult the child's worker or your assigned licensing worker.
- If the case worker disagrees with the caregiver approving an activity, the child and family team should meet to discuss the costs and benefits to the proposed activity. The case worker will not deny the proposed activity without having further consultation with a supervisor and with the foster parent. If necessary the team can consult further with CASA, children's attorneys, or the DA's.
- Every foster parent can apply RPPS when making the decision as to whether or not an activity is safe and enriching to a foster child. If a foster child gets hurt while engaging in an activity that was approved using RPPS, the child and family team should meet or have a phone discussion to allow the foster parent the opportunity to discuss how that applied RPPS in making the decision to permit the activity.