


**DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN RESOURCES
SOCIAL SERVICES ADMINISTRATION
311 W. SARATOGA STRRET
BALTIMORE, MD 21201**

DATE: September 15, 2015

POLICY #: SSA-CW# 16-16
(Replaces Policy SSA# 12-20)

TO: Directors, Local Departments of Social Services
Assistant Directors, Services

FROM: Tracey Paliath 
Deputy Secretary of Programs

RE: Family and Friend Contact

**PROGRAMS
AFFECTED:** Out-of-Home Placement Services

ORIGINATING OFFICE: Out-of-Home Placement

ACTION REQUIRED OF: All Local Departments

REQUIRED ACTION: Implement Policy and Procedures

ACTION DUE: October 1, 2015

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Purpose:

This policy will clarify questions local departments of social services (LDSS) staff and resource providers have concerning allowable activities for children and the authority the resource providers have to make reasonable and prudent parent decisions regard activities for children/youth in their care. Due to the complexity of the dating and visiting activities, this policy provides specific guidelines for the resource provider. This policy supersedes and replaces Policy SSA# 12-20.

Background:

A child in out-of-home placement should be afforded the same opportunities for social engagement as a child who is not in the care of the LDSS. On September 29, 2014, The Preventing Sex Trafficking and Strengthening Families Act, Public Law (P.L. 113-183), was signed into law. This act authorizes resource parents and other resource providers to apply reasonable and prudent parent standards when allowing foster children to participate in age or developmentally appropriate activity opportunities.

Definitions:

Age appropriate or developmentally appropriate means suitable, developmentally appropriate activities for children/youth of a certain age or maturity level based on the capacities typical for the age group and the individual child.

Reasonable and prudent parent standard means the standard characterized by careful and sensible parental decisions that maintain a child's health, safety, and best interest while at the same time encouraging the child's emotional and developmental growth, that a caregiver (resource parent or resource provider staff) must use when determining whether to allow a child in out-of-home placement under the responsibility of the state to participate in extracurricular, enrichment, and social activities.

Determining appropriateness of activities:

In order to determinate if an activity is age or developmentally appropriate the resource provider shall take the following into consideration:

- Appropriateness of the activity in consideration of the child's age, maturity, and developmental level.
- Any law, regulation, or policy that would prevent or create barriers to participation in an activity (example curfew laws).
- Safety and/or risk.
- Best interest of the child.
- Encouragement of emotional growth.
- Level of supervision.
- Child's behavioral history and ability.

Activity Opportunities:

Age or developmentally appropriate activities include:

- Social activities (movies, parties)
- Visits
- Dating
- Group Social activities (concerts, sporting events,)
- Extracurricular school activities or any activities requiring permission slips and arranging transportation for the child to and from the activities (sport teams, clubs, committees field trips, over night events)
- Club activities (boy or girl scouts, community volunteer organizations)
- Cultural Activities (festivals, holiday observance)

Visiting and Dating for children under the age of 18:

Day and overnight visits

The resource provider shall use appropriate discretion and judgment (reasonable and prudent parent standards) when allowing a child in out-of-home placement to spend extended periods of time/day visits or overnight visits with friends. The resource provider shall do the following, prior to approving a child to spend time, including overnights, with friends:

- Meet the adult who will be supervising the activities or who resides in the home where the child will be staying. This includes the resource provider transporting and accompanying the child to the home and walking the child into the home where the overnight visit will occur. The resource provider shall observe the home to make sure it is visually safe.
- Obtain the name, address, and phone numbers for the supervising adult where the child will be staying prior to the visit. The resource provider shall give the supervising adult their phone number.
- Inform the caseworker prior to any overnight stay. The resource provider shall relay all the information about where the child will stay to the caseworker. This may not always be possible in all situations. If the caseworker is not notified the child may still attend the activities. If the resource provider is unable to speak with the caseworker directly prior to the activities, the resource provider shall leave the information on the caseworker's voicemail or through email.

Relative Visits:

Visitation between a child and relatives does not require supervision if there is no history of abuse or neglect between the relative and child, and the **LDSS has approved the relative for visitation**. Please note these are social visits and are not to be used as daycare, long term supervision, or placement. Visitation may include weekend visits. The caseworker shall provide the resource provider with clear guidelines concerning the length of time of the visit and transportation.

Dating:

When a child in out-of-home placement reaches the age and/or maturity level when dating is appropriate the resource provider shall:

- Obtain the name and phone number of the foster child's date;
- Obtain the name and phone number of the parent/adult responsible for the care of the foster child's date;
- Meet in person the foster child's date and ensure the date is age appropriate;
- Have knowledge of where the foster child is going on the date;
- Have knowledge of the transportation arrangement; and
- Set a clear time of when the foster child must return home from the date.

In general, at the age of 16 it is usually appropriate for children to begin to date. However, the age when dating occurs depends on the maturity level of the foster child. Dating can begin at an earlier age if the resource provider determines it is age or developmentally appropriate.

Visiting and Dating for youth age 18 and over:

After the age of 18, the youth is able to make decisions concerning whom they spend extended periods of time. If the resource provider disagrees with the youth's decision concerning day and overnight visits, the resource provider and caseworker will discuss the concerns with the youth. Even though the youth may make their own decision concerning visiting and dating the resource provider shall obtain the following information:

- Name, address, and phone numbers for the foster youth's date or friend where the foster youth is visiting;
- Have knowledge prior to the visit or date if the youth intends to stay overnight;
- Have knowledge of the transportation arrangement; and
- Set a clear time of when the foster youth must return home.

MD CHESSIE:

All overnight visits shall be documented in MD CHESSIE in a contact note. The contact note shall provide a detailed account of the child's activities. The caseworker shall also document in Case Plan 2 section IIIa question 3 all age or developmentally appropriate activities.