

Allegheny County expects foster parents and group home/residential staff to make day-to-day decisions about the care of children and youth in out-of-home placement as permitted by law.**

When making a decision related to the child or youth's day-to-day life, foster parents and group home/residential staff should use a "Reasonable and Prudent Parenting Standard" to help make the decision. This means that resource parents and group home/residential staff should make sensible parental decisions that maintain the health, safety and best interests of a young person, while at the same time, encouraging the emotional and developmental growth of the young person.

Any concerns of the birth parents/family-of-origin must be taken into consideration but are not the determining factors in the child/youth's participation in an activity.

WHAT TO CONSIDER WHEN MAKING A DECISION?

When making a decision about the child/youth participating in an activity, the resource parent needs to consider the following factors:

- The child's age, maturity and developmental level to maintain the overall health and safety of the child.
- The potential risk factors and the appropriateness of the extracurricular, enrichment or social activity or experience.
- The best interest of the child, based on information known by the caregiver.
- The child's wishes.
- The importance of encouraging the child's emotional and developmental growth.
- The importance of supporting the child in developing skills to successfully transition to adulthood.
- The importance of providing the child with the most family-like living experience possible.
- Any special needs or accommodations that the child may need to safely participate in the activity or experience.
- Whether the activity or experience is culturally appropriate and/or affirming.
- Whether the activity or experience will be affirming for the child or youth given their sexual orientation and gender identity.
- Does the activity/experience impact or defy court orders, visitation or service plans?
- What does the birth family think/feel about this activity or experience?

****Relevant laws include:**

- Pennsylvania Act 75 of 2015; Public Law 440 "Activities and Experiences for Children in Out-of-home Placements Act" (December 10, 2015)
- United States Public Law 113 – 183 "Preventing Sex Trafficking and Strengthening Families Act" (September 29, 2014)

WHAT CAN A RESOURCE PARENT/GROUP HOME/RESIDENTIAL STAFF APPROVE?

The following lists provide examples of normal childhood activities that a resource parent/group home/residential staff can independently provide consent for.

Personal Care

- Use of makeup and jewelry
- Type of clothing
- Haircuts/styling for the purpose of maintaining the health of hair

Decisions to drastically change a hair style (length by more than two inches, the color of a youth's hair or styles which can cause damage to natural hair) must be made by the resource parent(s) and the birth parent(s) together. If an agreement cannot be made, the hairstyle/color will remain as is typical for the child/youth until an agreement can be made.

Family Recreation

- Community events
- Family events
- Travel outside of the county of jurisdiction
- Camping/hiking
- Sporting activities with use of appropriate protective gear.
- Swimming and water activities with appropriate supervision and safety equipment for water activities
- Hunting by youth aged 12 years and older. (PA law states minors aged 12 and older may hunt with a valid hunting license.)

Social/Extracurricular Activities

- Day/sleep-over camps
- Field trips
- School-related activities
- Youth organization activities
- Sports activities
- Community activities
- Attending a movie/mall or other social outing with friends
- Spending the night away from the caregiver's home
- Obtaining employment
- Dating
- Travel in cars with peers and/or peers' parents
- Access to a telephone for calls with birth family members and peers

Motorized Activities

- Obtain a driver's permit and license to operate a car
- Operate a lawn mower
- Operation of ATV (PA law states minors aged eight and older may operate an ATV after receiving the PA ATV safety certificate.)
- Operation of snow mobiles (PA law states minors aged 10 and older may operate a snow mobile after receiving the appropriate safety certificate.)
- Operation of personal watercraft and boats (PA law states minors aged 12 and older may operate a personal watercraft (Jet-Ski etc.) or other boating vehicle after receiving their boating safety education certificate.)

WHAT ABOUT SPECIAL CIRCUMSTANCES, SUCH AS:

➤ **Overnight stays?**

Resource parents are permitted to make decisions about the child/youth's overnight stays within the following parameters:

- Resource parents should inform their foster care provider agency and the child/youth's county Office of Children, Youth and Families (CYF) caseworker at least three days in advance of any overnight or out-of-county experiences which will last more than 72 hours.
- If normal childhood experiences, such as weekend visits with friends, sleepovers, summer camp, etc., would potentially interfere with parent/child or sibling visitation, the county CYF caseworker, foster care providers and birth family members will be expected to arrange visitation around the activities/experiences.
- If a travel experience were to cause an occasional visit with birth family members to be missed, the county CYF caseworker and/or foster care providers will arrange and support make-up visitation.
- The resource parent is expected to be supportive of and assist with any change in visitation or make-up visits that take place.

➤ **Approving medical/other treatment, and education decisions?**

Birth parents, court-appointed medical and educational decision-makers and/or the county Office of Children, Youth and Families are still responsible for providing consent and making decisions about religious training, educational placement and all non-routine physical or mental health treatment, as well as the use of psychotropic medication.

➤ **Approving piercings or tattoos?**

As stated by Pennsylvania law, consent for piercings and tattoos must be made by the birth parent, adoptive parent or court-appointed permanent legal guardian.

➤ **Can a resource parent decide to use a backup caregiver to provide child care?**

Provider agencies must have clearances on file for routine child care providers and backup caregivers. However, if the child/youth is visiting with resource family members on occasion, those individuals do not need clearances on file.