



# REASONABLE AND PRUDENT PARENTING

Foster Parent Orientation Training  
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# Key Definitions:

**Normalcy:** age and developmentally appropriate activities and experiences that will allow children and youth to grow.

**Reasonable and Prudent Parenting Standard:** PA Law defines age or developmentally appropriate as follows: “activities or items that are generally accepted as suitable for children of the same chronological age or level of maturity or that are determined to be developmentally appropriate for a child, based on the development of cognitive, emotional, physical, and behavioral capacities that are typical for an age or an age group – AND in the case of a specific child activities or items that are suitable for the child based on the developmental stages obtained by the child with respect to the cognitive, emotional, and behavioral capacities of the child.”

**Age or Developmentally Appropriate Activities:** The standard characterized by careful and sensible parental decisions that maintain the health, safety, and best interests of a child while encouraging the emotional and developmental growth of the child, that the caregiver must use when determining whether to allow a child in out-of-home placement under the responsibility of the county agency to participate in extracurricular, enrichment, and cultural activities and social activities.

## What is Reasonable and Prudent Parenting?

- Careful and sensible parental decisions
- Health, safety, and the best interest of the child
- Emotional and developmental growth
- Applies to every child regardless of age, disability/special needs, or type of placement

## Purpose of Reasonable and Prudent Parenting

- Allows foster parents to give their foster children permission to do age-appropriate activities.
- Promotes cognitive, emotional, physical and behavioral growth
- All states are now required to promote normalcy for children in foster care.

## Facts on the Law:

### Federal Law 113-183

### Provisions on Normalcy for Children in Foster Care

- Each child must have regular and ongoing opportunities to engage in age or developmentally appropriate activities.
- Each youth over 14 has opportunities to gain skills and participate in plans for transition to adulthood
- State agency must take steps (including training of caregivers) to ensure that caregivers are applying reasonable and prudent parenting standard.
- Specifics will be reviewed at every permanency hearing.

# Facts on the Law: State Law PA HB 477

- Every child must be available to engage in age-appropriate activities to the greatest extent possible, including children with special needs.
- Older youth must be able to gain skills related for successful transition to adulthood.
- Caregivers must use a clear set of guiding questions for consideration when making decisions.
- Approved activities may not violate a court order or the child's family service plan.
- Caregivers must receive training.
- Child's service plan must reflect access to these activities.
- The law applies to children in resource family placement and residential placement.
- Caregivers are protected from liability provided they complete the required training, exercise a reasonable and prudent parenting standard for decision making about the activity, and the activity does not violate a court order or the child or family service plan.

## Intent and Focus:

# Normalcy, Healthy Development, and Opportunities for Children and Youth in Out-of-Home Care

The most important focus of this legislation is to ensure that children and youth in out-of-home care can achieve optimum development and live as normal a life as possible while in care. Participation in a wide range of activities based on age, development, social norms and interests supports the healthy growth and well-being of children and youth in a number of ways. Through participating in activities children acquire skills, identify talents and create or deepen relationships. Developmentally appropriate activities engage young people in opportunities to learn problem-solving, conflict resolution and leadership skills. Through self-initiated or peer-led activities youth are able to make and learn from mistakes, experiment within safe boundaries, take appropriate risks and learn to manage risks. These are all elements cultivating social capital which not only enhances well-being but also improves permanency outcomes for children. Ensuring access to the normal activities of childhood and adolescence also respects the integrity and rights of young people in care.

## Intent and Focus: Clarity and Guidance for Caregivers

While the primary focus of the legislation is to improve opportunities and outcomes for the children and youth in care, a second area of focus is to improve the experience of caregiving for resource parents and residential facility staff. When caregivers are empowered to make normal and reasonable decisions related to the everyday life of the children in their care, they generally experience greater satisfaction with their role. In turn, caregivers who feel empowered and satisfied are more likely to encourage their friends or extended family members to consider becoming resource parents.

The law not only empowers caregivers but provides role clarity and helpful guidance to support them as they make these important decisions. Youth get the benefits associated with having other caring adults in their lives. Providing normalcy for youth in care makes it possible for these relationships to flourish.



## Intent and Focus:

### Clarity of Roles for Agencies and Courts

The law clarifies the role for agencies and courts related to decision-making for children and youth in out-of-home care. By ensuring that agencies and courts are only asked to become involved in decisions that truly require their attention, this removes burdens and promotes more effective and efficient practice.

# Why Do We Need These Laws?

**EMPHASIS ON SAFETY:** with a heavy emphasis on safety, federal and state laws have often created burdensome requirements which have effectively prevented many youth in care from participating in the normal activities of childhood and adolescence.

**REAL VS PERCEIVED BARRIERS:** with a lack of clarity about who may sign a permission slip or give a youth the “go-ahead” to join an activity, it is easier to fall back on the default answer of “no.”

**FEAR:** the requirements are often driven by fears that a child will get hurt resulting in someone facing liability problems. All children face a risk of getting hurt at times, but when those in charge of their lives makes reasonable and age-appropriate decisions, the risks are minimized, and the state agencies can ensure that caregivers do not face unreasonable liability exposure.

**TRUST ISSUES:** Historically, the tight leash on resource parent authority, saddled with onerous requirements may have been based on a lack of trust between agencies and caregivers. In addition to new laws, it is important to work on ensuring that caregivers and agencies build the trust needed to ensure safety and health opportunities for children are not jeopardized.

## Examples of Age Appropriate or Developmentally Appropriate Activities

### Family-Life:

Vacation  
Camping  
Using a phone/computer

### Peers/Friendships:

Going places without an adult  
Social media  
Spending the night at a friend's house  
Dating

### School Related:

Playing sports  
Being in band  
Being in a play/musical  
Class field trips  
Attending dances  
Attending sports events/concerts  
Participating in clubs

### Becoming Independent:

Learning to drive  
Operating equipment (lawn mower)  
Part time or summer job  
Taking public transportation  
Volunteer/community service  
Babysitting younger siblings

### Community Related:

Participating in 4H, scouts, clubs  
Summer camps  
Religious activities

## Excluded Activities That Require Consent/Signatures

- Educational Placements – You cannot sign IEPs or 504 plans
- Religious Training – No Baptism, Confirmation, Dedication, etc.
- Non-routine medical or mental health treatments
- Psychotropic Medications
- Leaving the country
- Getting married
- Activities that violate the case plan or court order

## What Is The Cost Of Not Being Given The Opportunity To Experience Developmentally Appropriate Normal Life Activities?

- ✓ Greater stigma
- ✓ Social exclusion and isolation
- ✓ Negatively impacts ability to form and sustain health relationships
- ✓ Hinders socio-emotional well-being.
- ✓ Hinders skill development particularly in areas of decision-making, problem-solving, teamwork, leadership, and managing risk
- ✓ Decreases opportunities for permanency
- ✓ Increases negative outcomes for youth who age out without having these experiences including higher levels of employment, homelessness, poverty, and vulnerability in relationships (domestic violence)

# Consent vs Notice:

## **Consent:**

- Medical treatment
- Educational decisions
- Religious activities
- Grooming and hair style

## **Notice:**

- Overnight stays and travel out of county jurisdiction (as long as court hearings, visits, doctor appointments, and special services aren't missed)
- Respite Care or Extended Baby-sitting

# Tasks of Child Development: Young Children: Infants - 5 Years

- Foundation of Brain Development
- Physical Development, Motor Skills, and Coordination
- Development of Trust
- Attachment to Primary Caregiver(s)
- Ability to Separate While Resolving Abandonment Fears
- Concrete Thinking
- Language Development and Communication
- Awareness of Self as Individual, Separate From Others
- Moving from Parallel Play to Peer Play and Relationships
- Ability to Take Initiative
- Beginning to Develop Self-Control
- Body Image, Self-Care, Beginning of Racial and Gender Identity Awareness
- Right and Wrong is Determined by Reaction From Others – Punishment or Reward

# Tasks of Childhood Development: School-Age Children: 6-12 years

- Beginning of Abstract Thinking
- Ability to Solve Problems and Resolve Conflict
- Continued Physical Development, Growth, and Strength
- Peer Relationships and Sense of Belonging are Important
- Mastery of Skills, Development of Talents
- Awareness of Rules and Societal Norms
- Emerging Sense of Right and Wrong with Keen Sense of Fairness



# Tasks of Childhood Development: Adolescents: 13 – early 20s

- Significant Brain Development
- Significant Physical Changes, Hormones, Body Image Issues
- Gender Expression and Sexual Identity
- Who Am I? Exploration of Identity Development
- Racial and Ethnic Identity Awareness and Exploration
- Emerging Sense of Personal Values and Moral Code
- Fitting in with Peers
- Emerging Autonomy and Independence
- Risk Taking
- Future and Goal-Oriented

## Tasks of Adolescent Development: (1 of 5)

<p>Adjust to sexually maturing bodies and feelings</p>	<p>Teens are faced with adjusting to bodies that as much as double in size and that acquire sexual characteristics, as well as learning to manage the accompanying biological changes and sexual feelings and to engage in healthy sexual favors . Their task also includes establishing a sexual identity and developing the skills for romantic relationships.</p>
<p>Develop and apply abstract thinking skills</p>	<p>Teens typically undergo profound changes in their way of thinking during adolescence, allowing them more effectively to understand and coordinate abstract ideas, to think about possibilities , to try out hypotheses, to think ahead, to think about thinking, and to construct philosophies.</p>

## Tasks of Adolescent Development: (2 of 5)

<p>Develop and apply a more complex level of perspective taking</p>	<p>Teens typically acquire a powerful new ability to understand human relationships, in which, having learned to “put themselves in another person’s shoes,” they learn to take into account both their perspective and other persons at the same time, and to use this new ability in resolving problems and conflicts in relationships.</p>
<p>Develop and apply new coping skills in areas such as decision making, problem solving, and conflict resolution</p>	<p>Related to all these dramatic shifts, teens are involved in acquiring new abilities to think about and plan for the future, to engage in more sophisticated strategies for decision making, problem solving, conflict resolution, and to moderate their risk taking to serve goals rather than jeopardize them.</p>

## Tasks of Adolescent Development: (3 of 5)

Identify meaningful moral standards, values, and belief systems

Building on these changes and resulting skills, teens typically develop a more complex understanding of moral behavior and underlying principles of justice and care, questioning beliefs from childhood and adopting more personally meaningful values, religious views, and belief systems to guide their decisions and behavior.

Understand and express more complex emotional experiences

Also related to these changes are shifts for teens toward an ability to identify and communicate more complex emotions, to understand the emotion of others in more sophisticated ways, and to think about emotions in abstract ways.

## Tasks of Adolescent Development: (4 of 5)

<p>Form friendships that are mutually close and supportive</p>	<p>Although youngsters typically have friends throughout childhood, teens generally develop peer relationships that play much more powerful roles in providing support and connection in their lives. They tend to shift from relationships based largely on the sharing of interests and activities to those based on the sharing of ideas and feelings, with the development of mutual trust and understanding.</p>
<p>Establish key aspects of identity</p>	<p>Identity formation is in a sense a lifelong processes, but crucial aspects of identity are typically forged at adolescence, including developing an identity that reflects a sense of individuality as well as connection to valued people and groups. Another part of this task is developing a positive identity around gender, physical attributes, sexuality, ethnicity, and (if appropriate) having been adopted, as well as sensitivity, to the diversity of groups that make up American society.</p>

## Tasks of Adolescent Development: (5 of 5)

Meet the demands of increasingly mature roles and responsibilities

Teens gradually take on the roles that will be expected of them in adulthood, learning to acquire the skills and manage the multiple demands that will allow them to move into the labor market, as well as to meet expectations regarding commitment to family, community, and citizenship.

Renegotiate relationships with adults in parenting roles

Although the task of adolescence has sometimes been described as “separating” from parents and other caregivers, it is more widely seen now as adults and teens working together to negotiate a change in the relationship that accommodates a balance of autonomy and ongoing connection, with the emphasis on each depending in part on the family’s ethnic background.

# “Good” Risks vs “Unhealthy” Risks

- Trying a new instrument, sport, or auditioning for the school play
- Making new friends, asking someone out of a date
- Applying for a job and/or college
- Learning to drive
- Dropping out of school
- Drinking and/or using drugs
- Unsafe sex
- Driving too fast

# Children with Special Needs

- Must have equal opportunities and access to age and developmentally appropriate activities as their typically-developed peers.
- A diagnosis or developmental delay cannot become a barrier to participation in the normal activities of childhood adolescence.
- Coaches, club leaders and other adults involved with the child's activities may need to have some basic information about the child's special needs in order to ensure safety and inclusion, but confidentiality must still be respected.
- Caregivers may need to advocate for appropriate accommodations for youth with special needs to participate in school or community activities such as sign language interpreter, wrap-around support aides, special equipment etc.
- While safety is a paramount concern it is important to give children with special needs the same opportunities as their typically-developing peers to try, make mistakes, learn from mistakes, and try again. It is important not to be over-protective or patronizing of children with special needs.



# Teen Parents

Experts working with pregnant and parenting teens have identified the following ways that teen parents more need help and support:

- Planning and Organizing
- Scheduling and Keeping Appointments
- Understanding the basics of hygiene, nutrition, health and safety – beginning with feeding, bathing, and diapering
- Managing high stress times of the day – morning routine, homework hour, dinner hour, bedtime
- Reading infants cues and learning their signals
- Adjusting parenting approaches to child's development
- Problem solving – anticipating situations and predicting outcomes
- Setting limits and following through

# Teen Parents

Teen parents themselves have identified the following as their greatest need help and support:

- Someone to talk to when they feel lost or unsure of what to do
- Someone to help them find resources
- Assure them that it does not mean they are a failure if they need help
- Validation that this is their child, and they are the parent
- A plan for how to deal with stress
- A support group of other teen parents

# Overall Tips When Caring For Pregnant Teens or Teen Parents

- ✓ Balance support against interference
- ✓ Provide information about parenting classes, health, nutrition, and other needs
- ✓ Help father's establish paternity
- ✓ Support fathers in their parenting roles as well as mothers
- ✓ Keep records that demonstrate the teens parent's strengths and efforts to be a good parent.
- ✓ Promote confidence and competence in the teen parent
- ✓ Help teen parents do things for themselves, do not do things for them
- ✓ Do not undermine parents in the handling of their own children

# Most Importantly When Caring For Pregnant Teens or Teen Parents

Teen parents are not only parents – they are also teens and need opportunities to experience normal teen activities. Work together with the teen parent, caseworker, and other supportive adults in the young person's life to develop a schedule that includes time for hobbies, activities that promote well-being, skill development and social growth. Include support for appropriate accommodations for baby-sitting, transportation, and related ancillary supports. Help the teen find a balance between becoming a responsible parent who puts their child first and growing as an individual.

## LGBTQ or Other Non-Conforming Expressions of Gender and Sexuality

- LGBTQ youth often endure living through months or years of bullying and harassment, and then experience further harassment or abuse related to their sexual orientation or gender expression after being placed in foster care. These youth often have enormous strengths and capacity for resilience, yet at the same time they are frequently at high risk for serious emotional challenges as well as running away.
- As a caregiver, it is important to ensure that all young people in your home feel and are in reality both physically and emotionally safe and protected from harassment and discrimination. There are several things that caregivers can do to ensure that these young people receive the understanding, support, and opportunities they need for healthy and positive development.

# LGBTQ or Other Non-Conforming Expressions of Gender and Sexuality

## How to support LGBTQ youth in their homes or facilities:

- Recognize that you may be already parenting LGBTQ young people you have not disclosed their identity or orientation to you.
- Be aware of your own personal feelings or beliefs that might conflict with your responsibilities to LGBTQ youth in your home.
- Educate yourself and others about LGBTQ youth.
- Let the youth in your home know that you are comfortable with people with are LGBTQ.
- Display visible signs such as posters, stickers, or books to demonstrate an acceptance of LGBTQ people.
- Eliminate anti-LGBTQ slurs.
- Use gender neutral language when talking to young people. For example, instead of asking a teenaged boy whether he has a "girlfriend", ask if he has "someone special in his life".
- Listen to and honor the young person's preferences related to hairstyle, make-up, clothing choices, etc.
- If a young person is letting you know that they are LGBTQ, don't ignore it. Talk to them about it.
- Protect LGBTQ young people from bias and harassment.
- Ensure that all youth in your home, including LGBTQ youth have access to appropriate reproductive and sexual care services and caring professionals who can answer questions about a range of sexual health issues ranging from developmentally appropriate sexual questioning and exploration to sexually transmitted diseases, to living with HIV/AIDS to reporting and coping with sexual harassment, attacks, or rape.
- Help an LGBTQ young person find resources and support in the community.
- Support LGBTQ youth in pursuing activities related to their talents, interests, and aspirations – become their advocate to ensure that they do not face barriers to inclusion in sports, peer-group activities or community events.
- Consider joining a support group for parents of LGBTQ youth so that you will be supported in your own efforts to care for the youth in your home.

# Youth with History of Justice System Contact or Involvement

- The adolescent brain science we looked at a few moments ago provides an insight into the propensity teens have for high-risk behaviors. Many developmentally-typical youth behaviors such as skipping school (truancy), experimenting with alcohol or drugs, fighting over a potential date or athletic rivalry, etc. may result in arrest and possible placement in justice system facilities. This is particularly true for young people already in the child welfare system – youth who have been abused, neglected and/or placed in foster care have a much greater risk of being arrested than their peers outside of the child welfare system. Youth involved in both systems are often referred to as “crossover youth” and in Pennsylvania, their cases are called “shared custody” cases.
- In recent years, research and advocates have begun to demonstrate the critical link between well-being and better outcomes for youth who have been involved with the juvenile or criminal justice system. Justice systems with an intentional focus on well-being find youth experience shorter stays in detention and similar restrictive, deep-end facilities and less recidivism upon discharge. Both youth and community safety outcomes improve. Youth with support for their well-being before, during, and after their involvement with the justice system are also more likely to stay engaged in school and employment. Therefore, not only do these young people have a right to the same normalcy activities as their peers, ensuring that they have access to such activities is a critical factor for their successful transition to becoming productive, safe, and contributing members of the community.

# Youth with History of Justice System Contact or Involvement

Research has demonstrated that youth with justice system involvement achieve better outcomes when they have access to:

- Positive school experiences based on an individualized plan that is developed with their involvement
- Normalized youth development and leadership opportunities;
- Opportunities to engage in positive community activities including volunteer work and service activities beyond those that are court-ordered
- Positive relationships with both peer and adult role models, mentors, and older youth who have successfully transitioned from the justice system
- Exposure to a range of education and post-secondary educational opportunities, work experiences and career pathways
- Supportive and involved family connections



# What is Child Trauma?

Some of the key words that come to mind when thinking about the definition of trauma are

- Physical and/or sexual abuse
- Bullying
- Life-threatening violence
- Natural disasters (hurricane, etc.)
- Witnessing community violence
- Seeing or being caught in a house fire
- Experiencing harsh or very painful medical treatment
- Being in a car accident
- Hearing gunfire
- Experiencing a long separation from a parent or caregiver
- Living with uncertainty about when or if your basic needs will be met (food, affection, protection from harm) such as when a parent is addicted to drugs or has a severe mental illness

# What is Child Trauma?

Some national experts describe trauma as:

- **Physical and Emotional:** Trauma impacts the mind, body, the emotions, and the spirit.
- **Response:** It is how the child reacts to the event that will determine the potential for long-term impact – reactions to the same event may vary from one child to another
- **Threat:** The threat is in the perception of the child – it doesn't matter if an objective onlooker perceives it differently – if the child feels threatened, the trauma is real
- **Someone critically important to the child** The child's experience of trauma can be just as significant if the incident or injury happens to another person as if it happens to the child himself.

# How Does Trauma Affect the Child's Ability to Safely Engage in Activities?

## DEMONSTRATION

While most of the time, children and youth who have experienced trauma will exhibit great capacity for resilience and therefore will behave and respond to everyday situations in ways that are similar to children who have not experienced trauma, there will be times when the trauma “kicks in” and has an impact on their thoughts, feelings and behaviors. This will then have an effect on their ability to safely participate in the types of activities and experiences we have been discussing during this training.

### **Visualization:**

Imagine two identical water bottles filled  $\frac{3}{4}$  with liquid. One contains plain water, and the other contains seltzer water. If someone were to shake the bottle of plain water, what could you imagine happening to it? It would stay the same. If someone then were to shake the bottle with seltzer water in it and open it slowly, what do you think would happen to this one? It would fizz until it starts to fizz out of the bottle.

### **Key Point:**

The bottles looked identical. Both bottles were shaken the same way, but the carbonated bottle had a very different reaction. The bottle with seltzer water can be representative of a child who has experienced trauma.

# How Does Trauma Affect the Child's Ability to Safely Engage in Activities?

## **Some responses you might have to this demonstration:**

- When a child exposed to trauma is in a calm state, he or she might behave much like a child who has not been affected by trauma.
- When someone is observing another person, it may not be evident that he or she has the potential to erupt as a result of having a trauma triggered
- When facing some kind of disturbance or "shake up", a non-trauma-impacted child does not "explode" or seep out the way a trauma-impacted child often does
- It can be hard to recognize when someone has an underlying potential to have his or her trauma triggered
- Once a traumatized child has been triggered, it can take much longer for him or her to calm down
- When a traumatized child "explodes" and "fizzes out all over the place", a normal reaction is to jump back, move away, react with surprise, frustration or anger, which in turn can be isolating, shaming or a source of more upset for the child

# How Does Trauma Affect the Child's Ability to Safely Engage in Activities?

It is very important to remember the image of the seltzer water bottle when you observe a child or teen who seems to have a much stronger, more extreme reaction to even minor agitations.

Ask yourself, "I wonder if this person is reacting this way because of some trauma related issue?"

**Reflection Question:** How do you think this information will help you ensure that children and youth who have experienced trauma can safely engage in age and developmentally appropriate activities and experiences?

**NOTE:** When a child or youth is reacting like the carbonated water, it is often because they have experienced what is referred to as a *trauma trigger*.

# Trauma Triggers and Safety Plans

- Trauma triggers are personal and individual for each child, youth, or adult.
- They are often sensory-based and can be related to a specific smell, sound (siren, music, etc.), visual cue (color, image), etc.
- Places, objects (item of clothing, a toy) can also serve as trauma-triggers.
- When the child experiences the trigger, he or she is transported to that place and time when the trauma occurred. The brain is aroused in the same way that it was when the original trauma occurred.
- **The child is not merely remembering the traumatic experience, in many ways the child is reliving it putting the child into the “fight, flight, or freeze” state and reducing the child’s likelihood of using rational problem-solving skills in that moment.**
- The child is not thinking it through, nor is he or she intentionally choosing to behave in the ways illustrated.

# Trauma Triggers and Safety Plans

## **EXAMPLES:**

- A toddler who saw her cousin lying in a pool of blood after a drive-by shooting has a tantrum when a jar of red finger paints spills at a birthday party.
- A nine-year-old who was verbally and sexually tormented by an older sibling who began the abuse sessions by mocking him for being fat begins to attack another player on the Little League field after being called fat.
- A teenager who was abused by her stepfather walks off the job and refuses to go back to work after being the new supervisor. The supervisor wears the same aftershave as her stepfather.

# Trauma Triggers and Safety Plans

As you can see these are all physical reminders – certain sights, smells, colors, etc., that will instinctively take the child or youth back to the moment in time when they experienced the trauma. Reactions such as these may cause the young person to be excluded from normal, age, and developmentally appropriate activities such as peer birthday parties, sports team, or part-time jobs. This social exclusion compounds the child's sense of loss and hopelessness about their own future.

Yet we know that there is *always* hope, that every child can heal from trauma and that *caregivers are the ones who can make the difference in their lives by providing safety, meaningful relationships, and access to normal childhood and teen experiences.*

**NOTE:** Children or youth who have experienced trauma can learn how to use individualized Safety Plans to help them recognize and cope with trauma triggers when they occur.

**ASK YOURSELF:** What are some ideas you might have for helping a child or teen to develop a safety plan?



# IDEAS TO HELP A YOUTH/TEEN CREATE A SAFETY PLAN

- Take deep breaths when I feel stressed
- Count slowly to ten
- Carry a picture with me of someone I trust and look at it when I feel stressed
- Have a little song, poem, prayer, or saying that I can repeat to myself when I feel upset or stressed
- Make a list of adults I feel comfortable talking to when I am upset, sad, or angry
- Carry a small “stress ball” to squeeze when I need to release some anger

# Developmental Safety Plans for Kids: Young Children

## **THINGS I CAN DO WHEN I FEEL UPSET, ANGRY, OR NEED TO CALM DOWN:**

### **With my eyes I can:**

- Read a book
- Look at pictures that make me feel happy
- Look at a picture of someone I love
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

### **With my ears and mouth I can:**

- Count to 10 or say my ABC's
- Listen to music **or** sing a song
- Say a positive thing about myself
- Tell a joke or do something funny
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

### **With my nose and mouth I can:**

- Blow bubbles or take some deep breaths
- Smell a flower
- Smell a sachet
- Eat a small snack like a few apple slices
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

### **With my hands, feet, and whole body I can:**

- Squeeze Play-doh or a stress ball
- Hug a soft toy or doll
- Scribble on or tear up some paper
- Move my body (jumping jacks, run in place, do a dance)
- Tense and relax
- Play my favorite game
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

# Developmental Safety Plans for Kids: School Age Children

## **SLOW DOWN**

- Take a deep breath.
- Put the brakes on inside my head.

## **FOCUS**

- Look around, notice where I am right now.
- Listen to my breathing.
- Wiggle my fingers and toes.

## **RELAX** – what 3 things help me the most when I need to relax?

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_

## **LISTEN** – What words can I say or sing to myself to stay calm? Write them down.

## **CALL FOR HELP** – If I need a friend or adult I can trust, who can I call on?

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_

# Developmental Safety Plans for Kids Teen or Young Adult

<b>BREATHE</b>	<b>CONNECT</b>	<b>5 SENSES</b>
Slow controlled breaths	With my body – I am HERE	See:
Blow bubbles	With my Present – It is NOW	Smell:
Blow out a candle	With my Feelings – I'm OK	Hear:
Deep belly breath	With Someone Safe	Touch:
In through the nose, out through the mouth	With a Helper if Needed	Taste:

## Model For Decision Making:

- Identify the Issue – What is the child really asking?
- Gather Information
- Brainstorm
- Evaluate Options
- Decide and Act
- Reflect and Learn

## Step One: Identify the Issue What is the child really asking?

- Is the young person asking for a one-time experience or an on-going activity?
- Has he or she participated in this activity before?
- Does the youth fully understand what is involved and why he or she wants to do this activity?

## Step Two: Gather Information

Be specific and thorough

- Is the activity safe for this child or youth?
- Is this an age or developmentally appropriate activity?
- Does this activity contribute to the child's health and well-being?
- Is this activity specifically disallowed by the case plan or a court order?
- What are the specifics – what, when, and where will this activity take place?
- Who will be involved – adults and peers?
- Will the child or youth need and special accommodations or supports in order to participate safely?
- Are there costs associated with this activity?
- Any other pertinent information needed?

## Step Three: Brainstorm

If it seems like an age and developmentally appropriate activity but hurdles or barriers exist, brainstorm potential solutions to overcome the barriers

- Talk to other parents or caregivers to generate multiple options for issues such as paying for the activity, transportation, or other logistical hurdles.
- Talk to agency staff and the child's attorney (GAL) or CASA worker to generate options for seeking revisions to case plans or court orders.
- Work with the child or youth, caseworker, and any medical doctor or therapist (if appropriate) to generate ideas for providing appropriate safety measures, accommodations and supports for the child to safely participate in the activity.
- Ask the caseworker to arrange a joint conversation with the child or youth, caregiver, caseworker, and biological parent if needed to address any conflicts or issues such as how to arrange participation in activities during home visits etc.
- Seek and listen to the child or youth's voice or input.
- Be creative.



# Step Four: Evaluate Options

1. Is this activity or opportunity suitable for a child of this age, maturity, and development level?
2. What are the child's wishes about this activity or opportunity?
3. Is this an activity or opportunity that will support and maintain the overall health, safety and well-being of the child?
  - a. Does it encourage and support healthy physical development? (access to exercise, strength-building, etc.)
  - b. Does it encourage and support emotional development and growth?
  - c. Does it allow the child to appropriately express his/her cultural, racial, or spiritual identity?
  - d. Does it provide a healthy social experience for the child?
4. Does participation in this activity or opportunity support the most family-like living experience and permanency opportunities for this child?
5. Does participation in this activity or opportunity help the child or youth to developing skills to successful transition to adulthood?

## Step Four: Evaluate Options (Continued)

6. Will the child need any special accommodations based on special needs, trauma history, sexual orientation, gender expression or other factors in order to safely participate in this activity or experience and have we successfully generated ideas to provide these accommodations?
7. What are the potential risk factors to this child?
8. What are the potential risk factors to others?
9. What is the full scope of the request (in other words, does participation in this activity also require specific transportation arrangements, use of equipment, missing school or therapeutic appointments and how can these factors be taken into account when making a decision)?
10. Does supporting the child's participation in this activity or opportunity support the best interest of this child, based upon all of the information I have available?

## Step Five: Decide and Act

You may never have all the information or assurances you would like to have.

No decision will be perfect or 100% risk free.

Yet it is important to make a decision in a timely manner and act upon it so that children and youth experience normalcy in their daily lives.

## Step Six: Reflect and Learn

After the decision has been made and the child has participated in the activity, take time to reflect upon the experience and learn from it to enhance further decision making.

- What decision did you make?
- How did the child feel about the decision?
- Did the child participate in the activity or opportunity?
- In what ways did this experience benefit the child?
- What were some of the unforeseen challenges or unintended consequences?
- How will this experience influence future decisions for this child?
- How will this experience influence future decisions for other children in my care?

## Does Saying “Yes” Guarantee a Good Outcome?

- Learning from the mistakes or “failures” is an important part of growing up, developing maturity, and successful transitioning into adulthood.
- The decision-making model is not a guarantee that every activity will have a positive outcome for the child, but with guidance, even those that end in disappointment can become learning opportunities.