

Georgia Division of Family & Children Services
Placement and Permanency Services / Caregiver Recruitment and Retention Unit

Reasonable and Prudent Parenting Standards
Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

The FAQs will be continually updated as needed and available at www.fostergeorgia.com and at www.gascore.com "revised by dates" will be changed as the document is updated to indicate that additional FAQs have been added. To add a question, please email the Caregiver Recruitment and Retention Unit at CRRU@dhs.ga.gov.

1. Why are we doing this?

*The Preventing Sex Trafficking and Strengthening Families Act includes more than prevention. It also requires states to provide youth in foster care a **list of their rights**, as well as opportunities to **participate in their case plan**. Furthermore, this bill addresses long term foster care by exploring more options for older youth in care instead of resorting to **permanent foster care**. This bill additionally focuses on opportunities to provide more **normalcy** for youth in care by reducing the amount of red tape a young person faces when seeking to participate in school or community activities.*

2. Shouldn't we have been doing this all along?

Many foster families are currently supporting youth in the most "normal" ways possible. A lot of foster kids have great opportunities to try new things and be a part of community groups and clubs. However, there are limitations on the amount of time youth can be unsupervised or be in homes of their friends. The best example is youth not being able to go to sleepovers because of the background checks that need to be done. This new policy leaves the decisions about things like that to care givers.

3. What about liability?

Caregivers are immune from civil liability when approving children and youth to participate in age and developmentally appropriate activities and/or substitute care when the caregiver is acting in accord with the Reasonable and Prudent Parent Standards.

4. Providers are often cited regarding lack of supervision. Will RCC and OPM be the judge of what is reasonable and prudent?

Both RCC and OPM staff are knowledgeable about the RPPS. All DFCS permanency and CPS are being trained in RPPS. Additionally, RPPS has been added to the DFCS Child Welfare Policy Manual and has been added to the FY2016 RBWO Minimum Standards (for private agencies). The Prudent Parenting Project Team/Workgroup will continue to review additional policies such as Corrective Action Plans and Policy Violations to determine if policies will need to be amended. Remember, each agency is required to complete a thorough initial assessment and continuous annual assessment of the foster parent. During these assessments, providers should be assessing the foster parent's caregiver's capacity. Providers are also required to provide training to the foster parent/caregiver to increase their caregiver capacity annually.

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5. We got a lot of specific questions all along the line of, what if a parent and a youth agree on something but their agency and or DFCS and/or their birth parent doesn't agree. How does that get resolved?

The foster parent/caregiver will be the primary day-to-day basis decision maker. However, the birth parent should be involved as much as practical in decision-making. Circumstances that can't be resolved with a parenting team (caregiver, birth parent, staff, youth) should be elevated to the next line of supervision within DFCS until a satisfactory resolution can be reached.

6. Who pays for "normal" activities?

No new specials funds have been made available. However, there are several ways to fund the children's normal activities.

- *Ask about any available county funds.*
- *For children under age 14 years, utilize Summer Safety/Enrichment Funds (UAS 521, code80)*
- *Afterschool Programs*
- *Youth who are over 14 years old and has been in custody of DFCS for over 6 months, and are ILP eligible, could seek funding through ILP. However, the information regarding the activity should be included in the child's Written Transitional Living Plan.*
- *Children who are in foster care typically have Amerigroup Medicaid. Amerigroup currently covers cost for after-school Boys and Girls Club and Girl Scouts. Foster parents would need to contact Amerigroup to access these services.*
- *Foster parents/caregivers are encouraged to seek no or low-cost community-based activities as well.*

7. What role will the Graduated Independence Plan (GIP) policy play in all of this?

DFCS will be making changes to several policies that would affect a foster parents/caregiver's ability to exercise prudent parenting. As of now, DFCS would encourage the use of the graduated independence plan as a tool to communicate with the youth regarding the agency's expectation of him/her as the provider continues to grant the child's means to gain independence. A written GIP however is no longer required though its use is still recommended.

8. How are we going to ensure that ALL youth have access to these opportunities?

The law requires that DFCS ensure that youth have access to age and developmentally appropriate activities. During ECEM contacts, DFCS and RBWO providers should include this in their assessments. Staff should ask children questions regarding their activities. For private providers, OPM will continue to assess this during their monitoring visits for comprehensive and safety reviews.

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9. Children and youth in foster care MAY NOT ride with other teens, their coaches, etc., right?

They may ride with other people including other teens with the permission of their caregivers. Caregivers must have knowledge of the current teen driving laws and decision is subject to the legal restrictions regarding teen drivers and the number of teen passengers they are permitted to have. A list of Frequently Asked Questions for Teen Driving Laws is located at <http://www.dds.ga.gov/faqs/index.aspx?faqcategoryid=42>.

10. Children and youth in foster care MAY NOT ride ATV's and other equipment, right?

The youth may ride ATV's and other equipment if they practice safe measures such as wearing helmets with permission from the caregiver(s) and the agency/Division. Please see the Caregiver Guidelines Chart.

11. Children and youth in foster care MAY NOT participate community activities unless background screenings have occurred, right?

Background screenings are not a requirement for participation in community activities. The youth may participate with the permission of their caregiver(s).

12. Children and youth in foster care MAY NOT travel with their foster parents out of country or out of state, right?

The children and youth in foster care may travel out of country and/or state, however, this will require advance approval from DFCS and the Juvenile Court (for out of country travel).

13. Children and youth in foster care MAY NOT spend the night at a friend's house without screenings and approvals from DFCS?

It is not required for the friend's parents to receive screenings for overnight visits. The youth may participate with the permission of their caregiver (s). Please see the Babysitting & Overnight Guidelines handout.

14. Who can be considered a "substitute caregiver"?

Please see the Substitute Caregiver & Overnights Guidelines handout for the key requirements.

15. Do non-reimbursed Substitute Caretakers have to have ACCURINT searches completed and out-of-state CPS checks conducted if they have lived out of state previously?

No, Accurint checks nor out of state CPS checks apply to substitute caregivers unless the person becomes a routine caregiver. Please see the Substitute Caregiver & Overnights Guidelines handout for key requirements.

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16. Who will be responsible for the foster parent reviewing the DFCS disciplinary policy with a substitute caregiver?

The foster parent will be responsible for reviewing the discipline policy with the substitute caregiver. Please see the Substitute & Overnight Guidelines handout for key requirements.

17. How much information should a caregiver share with substitute caregiver?

The caregiver is able to share enough information to ensure that the substitute caregiver will be able to care for the child. This does not require discussing personal information regarding family/child's case.

18. Do non-reimbursed Substitute Caregivers and adults that are hosting our foster children in their homes for overnight sleepovers have to sign a copy of the Form 29 (Safety Agreement)?

It is not required for a substitute caregiver to sign a Safety Agreement, but it is encouraged that they be provided a copy. However, the caregiver should make sure that the substitute caregiver/babysitter is prepared and able to meet the needs of the children placed in their temporary care, explained the DFCS discipline policy, and provided with behavior management instructions. Please see the Substitute Caregiver & Overnight Guidelines handout.

19. Is every individual in the parenting role required to participate in IMPACT Training?

IMPACT is for individuals who are going to serve as the primary or secondary caregiver for the foster children. It is not required that Substitute Caregivers (whether routine or occasional) receive IMPACT training. Please see the Substitute Caregiver & Overnight Guidelines handout for the key requirements.

20. Are foster parents allowed to be "substitute caregivers" for foster youth from a different agency? (Ex. foster parent from Agency 1 provide care for a foster child from Agency 2, the foster parents maybe friends/relatives, however foster through different agencies.)

Yes, they can. The reasonable and prudent parenting standard empowers the foster parents to make day-to-day decision-making for children placed in their home. The foster parent will have the ability to leave the child with an alternative/substitute caregiver (friends or relatives) even if that friend is a foster parent. Keep in mind though that an active foster parent must continue to meet the DFCS Safety and Quality Standards at all times, which includes foster home utilization standards. If the number of children sleeping over will violate the SQS in anyway, it is reasonable and prudent to check with your agency in advance.

*Substitute Caregiving (ie, babysitting) **is not to be confused with paid respite**, however. To use a foster parent friend for respite, the foster parents will have to communicate and coordinate this through their agencies as usual.*

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21. Can non-reimbursed substitute caregivers babysit foster children in their own homes as opposed to the home of the foster parents?

The caregiver should make a reasonable and prudent decision regarding where the babysitting should take place. One of the requirements is for the substitute caregiver to be able to meet the needs of children placed in their temporary care. An average parent would make sure to at least visit the substitute caregiver's home to determine whether it is an appropriate environment.

22. Who can serve as a caregiver for Child Care Institutions (CCIs)?

Caregivers at CCIs or group homes must be in the role of Human Services Professional or higher, at least 25 years of age or 10 years older than the youth for whom the decision is being made.

23. Will caregivers be responsible if a youth cuts hair, pierced body part, etc. while at a friend's home?

There is a difference between "responsible" and "liable". The Preventing Sex Trafficking and Strengthening Families Act provides liability cover for caregivers when children are injured while participating in an approved activity (in this case the activity is having been given permission to visit a friend). The youth is responsible for the actions described in the question not the caregiver.

24. Can children 14 years of age and older be left under their own supervision for short periods of time with other children present, i.e. friends, foster parent's younger children and/or other foster children 14 years and older?

*Children 14 years of age and older may be left under their **own supervision** for short periods of time. Foster parents/Caregivers should use the good judgment and assess the children's acuity mix when deciding to leave children unattended for short periods of time. Children in DFCS custody may not be left under the supervision of other minors (see DFCS Child Welfare Policy 14.18 Supervision of Children).*

25. What are non-negotiables?

Non-negotiables are situations where the caregiver cannot make sole decisions for foster children. These decisions must be made by the biological or removal family and/or DFCS. The following is a list of non-negotiables:

- *Court Ordered Visitation/General*
- *Medical Approvals-other*
- *Return children without court approval*
- *Disciplinary Policy*

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- *Changing Schools*
- *ILP*
- *Drastic changes of child's appearance*
- *Medications*

26. Are Child Placing Agencies allowed to add further approvals or restrictions to the approval criteria set out by the State?

No. Neither state nor CPAs may create rules/standards which are a barrier to execution of RPPS.

27. Can foster parent(s)/caregiver(s) consent for a youth to obtain a driver's license?

O.C.G.A Section 40-5-26(a)(1) states that the parent or guardian must give permission. The caregiver is not considered to be the parent or the guardian of the child, therefore, cannot consent for the youth to obtain a driver's license.

28. Is there a restriction on how often a child/youth can go to sleepovers?

There is no cumulative total for sleepovers. The sleepover cannot exceed two (2) consecutive nights without notifying DFCS. Sleep-overs do not equate to babysitting, rather they are for the purpose of child interaction with peers.

29. Is there a restriction on age of a child/youth that can go to sleepovers?

There is no age restriction on when a youth can attend a sleep-over. However, it is recommended that caregiver utilized the "Know" Before You Say "No" handout to assist with making reasonable and prudent parenting decisions.

30. How will the youth be informed regarding the Youth Rights and Responsibilities?

The Georgia ILP will be hosting Youth Rights and Responsibilities Workshops around the state in Fall 2015. All youth are being encouraged to participate in this workshop and will sign an acknowledgment form that states that they have received the information. It is also important for the DFCS case manager to continue to review the information with youth to ensure all youth understand their rights and responsibilities.

31. What email address should the youth use in order to file grievances?

Youth can file a grievance by sending an email to the Erika Dennis at Erika.Dennis@dhs.ga.gov or askILP@dhs.ga.gov until the Georgia ILP site is available.

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32. My college aged sister (who needs pocket money) comes over to our house when we go to our small group each week and we pay her just to help her out. Is she a routine caregiver after the 3rd time she does that?

All routine caregivers regardless of relationship are subject to the screening requirement. If caregiving becomes routine, at designated dates/times, routine caregiving requirements apply.

33. The spirit of RPP seems to fit best with “get that person approved before the 4th instance” for caregivers who have little or no pre-existing relationship with the family.

This applies, only if the person providing care (substitute caregiver" will continue to do so routinely for designated days/times.

34. The rules for children to be away from home overnight seem far more permissive than day/evening. There is no restriction or approval for families who do overnights on multiple occasions. The restrictions are only based on consecutive nights, correct?

Correct. Foster parents must make reasonable and prudent decisions regarding overnights. Since these are not for the purpose of arranging for routine childcare but rather supporting the friendships between children, the screening requirement does not apply.

35. If I do not have a long-standing relationship with someone, how does RPPS apply?

Foster parents need to have confidence that any person they choose to provide care for their children are capable of meeting the child/ren’s needs. Therefore, the foster parent must have confidence in any potential caretaker before applying RPPS.

36. The term “babysitter” and “routine caregiver” are both creating confusing signals on who needs to be approved.

A babysitter is either a “routine” or “occasional” caregiver. It depends on how often the particular babysitter is used. We use the terms “substitute caregiver, routine/occasional caregivers and unreimbursed caregiver” to help distinguish categories of caregiving. For example, to distinguish between state paid child care (licensed daycare, CAPS) and informal foster parent arranged, non-state paid child care (i.e. Babysitter).

Please see the chart below for key distinguishing features of babysitters, routine caregivers, occasional caregivers and playmate’s parents.

	Babysitter	Routine Caregiver	Occasional Caregiver	Parent of Child’s Playmate
Description	Provides foster parent arranged watchful oversight of children; A babysitter is a routine or occasional caregiver.	Provides foster parent arranged watchful oversight of children. Routine care means care provided more than once a week, usually at designated times.	Provides foster parent arranged watchful oversight of children. Occasional care means care provided once a week or less.	Parent of the foster child’s friend; caregiving occurs in the course of the children being friends and desiring to spend time together.

Payment	May or may not be paid by the foster parent	May or may not be paid by the foster parent	May or may not be paid by the foster parent	None; the children are playing together or having a sleep-over.
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Relationship to Foster Parent	May or may not be a related to the foster parent	May or may not be a related to the foster parent	May or may not be a related to the foster parent	If related to the foster parent, then the occasional/routine policy prevails and applies.
Foster Grandparents & Other Relatives (The parents and relatives of the foster parent)	Determine if the person will be providing routine or occasional care. Routine Caregivers must complete the Unreimbursed Routine Substitute In-Home/Out of Home Caregiver Form and satisfactorily complete required safety and criminal history screenings.	Unreimbursed Routine Substitute In-Home/Out of Home Caregiver Form and satisfactorily complete required safety and criminal history screenings. (see policy 14.18).	Occasional Caregivers are not required to undergo safety screenings, unless they become a routine caregiver – then the screening requirement applies.	If related to the foster parent, then the occasional/routine policy prevails and applies.
When Should They Be Screened	When it is determined that they babysitter will be providing routine care (more than once/week at designated times).	Prior to them providing the routine care.	When it is determined that they are a routine caregiver.	N/A unless they are relatives of the foster parent.

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37. At what point does someone in the foster family's natural network become subject to approvals if all they are doing is being a friend of the family or child in the natural course of life?

Unless they are serving as a routine caregiver, they are not subject to screenings assuming of course that they do not live in the foster parent's household.

38. If they are a part of the family's natural network does the fact that I decide to pay them something have any bearing on their need to get approved?

All routine caregivers regardless of payment arrangements are subject to the screening requirement.

39. My neighbor has my kids over after school to play with her kids several times a week. I host all the kids at my house on the other days. Is she ever subject to needing approval?

No, the caregiving that occurs in the course of the children being friends and desiring to spend time together does not subject the parent to screenings. Please see the chart in Q35.

40. Foster families are no longer required to ask their agency about sleepovers that do not exceed 2 nights. As a result, how will the agency meet its requirement of "always knowing where the child is" or has that expectation been softened in the development of the new policy?

There is not a policy that states that DFCS has to know (physically) where children are at all times. This is not reasonable or practicable for even intact families. DFCS must know at all times where children are placed and where they are for paid respite. The caregivers with whom children are placed are entrusted with knowing where children in their care are (physically).

41. What documentation will be required by a foster parent or CCI designee to satisfy the standard of a prudent parent decision that results in harm or other potential legal situations?

No documentation is required other than the caregiver keeping general notes about what activities the child took part in.

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42. How do CPAs and CCIs minimize the chance of receiving RCCL citation for lack of supervision? Note: This response is provided by RCCL.

By ensuring that the caregiver has been provided with a complete history of the child, a current service plan for the child, and training on the facilities'/agencies' prudent parenting policies and procedures and using that information along with the caregivers' direct parental experiences with the child whenever making reasonable prudent parenting decisions. Both direct care staff (including foster parents) and administrative staff have a role in ensuring that decisions regarding supervision of children are both prudent and reasonable. Additional details on each of the four components of Prudent Parenting Decision Making are provided below:

- 1) **Referral/Intake**- The provider should ensure that the referral source has provided them with a complete history (to the extent known) regarding: the child's needs; previous disruptions and cause of those disruptions; triggers and precautions; behavioral concerns; and academic attendance and performance. That information should in turn be passed on to the caregiver upon placement or as soon as it becomes available and utilized as part of the reasonable and prudent parenting decision-making process. The receipt and provision of this information to the caregiver should be documented in the file.
- 2) **Service Plans**-The provider should ensure that service plans are kept current and are based on a comprehensive written assessment. The plans should provide the caregiver with guidelines on recommended levels of supervision based on both historical and current functioning, needs, and behaviors of the child. The completed plans and provision of this information to the caregiver should be documented in the file. Information obtained through supervision of the placement should be utilized to revise the plan as "changes to functioning, needs, behaviors, and recommended levels of supervision occur" so it can be more specific..."as needed" seems to subjective).
- 3) **Facility Policies and Procedures**-each facility/agency should have clear policies and procedures related to the implementation of Reasonable Prudent Parenting (RPP) and should include guidelines to caregivers such as increased supervision during the first 30 days of placement and when the referral/intake information or current behaviors warrant. All caregivers should be trained on those policies and procedures.
- 4) **Caregiver's Judgment**-Each caregiver should consider numbers 1-3 above along with their own parental experiences with the child and the child's current behaviors and needs in order to make reasonable Prudent Parenting decisions. Changes in behaviors, functioning, and needs of the child should be discussed regularly with the provider, but at a minimum during monthly supervision and documented in the file.

43. Can staff take residents off-campus or away from foster home for an overnight trip?

If the agency (CPA or CCI) has coordinated or are participating in an overnight activity such as conferences or vacations, it is appropriate for staff also be present on those outings. However, staff are not allowed to take foster children on private overnight activities or private staffs' family and friends outings.