



Nathan Deal, Governor

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SOCIAL SERVICES MANUAL TRANSMITTAL No. 2012-01

To: County Departments of Family and Children Services
DFCS Regional Directors
State Staff
Room Board Watchful Oversight (RBWO) Providers

From: Ron Scroggy, Interim Division Director
Division of Family and Children Services

Re: Foster Care Services Manual: 1011.16 (Runaway Child/Youth) **REVISED**
Foster Care Services Manual: 1011.16.1 (Youth Who Are Absent Without Permission from Care) **NEW**
Foster Care Services Manual: 1015.41 (Graduated Independence: Supervision of Older Youth) **NEW**

Date: March 15, 2012

Purpose

The Foster Care Services Manual has been revised to incorporate necessary changes to ensure safety while improving our practice on behalf of youth in care. The specific policy updates provides requirements and procedures for the following:

1. Youth in foster care who run away from their placement resource.
2. Youth in foster care who are absent without permission from their placement resource.
3. A Graduated Independence Plan (GIP) for youth in foster care to facilitate normalcy and age appropriate independence through participation in age-appropriate activities.

Discussion

While a right of passage for adolescent development includes experiencing age-appropriate independence and taking personal responsibility, it can be especially challenging for youth in foster care to experience a sense of normalcy in their pursuit to master this critical stage of development. Placement providers and caregivers are also challenged in their response to the youth's plight for independence within the constraints of the foster care system. The Division of Family and Children Services (DFCS) strives to improve this experience for youth in their journey to adulthood, while also addressing their safety needs. To this end, and with the release of the enclosed policies, DFCS will partner with placement providers and caregivers to assess the youth's capacity for self sufficiency, utilize critical decision making skills as youth test personal abilities, skills and independence, and respond promptly and appropriately when the youth's judgment or other circumstances results in a threat to their safety.

Implementation

The enclosed policies are effective April 1, 2012. The On-line Directives Information System (ODIS) will be updated to reflect the revisions. In order to facilitate effective implementation, Regional/County and Room Board Watchful Oversight (RBWO) leadership shall:

1. Review the policies to note key changes and impact on the affected population, staff

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- workload, and practice/training needs.
2. Identify and address barriers/concerns that may impede effective implementation.
 3. Facilitate policy review opportunities for **staff** and **caregivers** to ensure their familiarity with the revised policy and practice requirements and related procedures.
 4. Monitor implementation to ensure the following:
 - a. Timely/appropriate response and follow up for youth determined to have run away from their placements to expedite their safe return and provide appropriate services to prevent future runaway episodes.
 - b. Timely/appropriate efforts to ascertain the whereabouts of youth determined to be absent without permission to expedite their safe return and provide appropriate services to prevent future AWOP episodes.
 - c. GIPs are developed when appropriate, to foster a sense of normalcy for youth in care, while also ensuring their safety as they participate in age-appropriate activities.

Questions should be directed to the Field Program Specialist in your region. Regional staff may direct questions to the Practice and Policy Unit at PPPD_Unit@dhr.state.ga.us.