

Resource Parent Handbook

Reasonable and Prudent Parenting

Federal and District Law

The “reasonable and prudent parenting standard” is built into federal [Public Law 113](#), which includes portions specific to strengthening families, as well as a clause for resource parents making decisions for children in their care. To ensure compliance with the federal law, the District also passed the [Supporting Normalcy, Empowering Foster Children, and Encouraging Placement with Siblings Amendment Act of 2016 \(DC Law 21-160\)](#).

Key Definitions

- **RPP Standard:** This standard includes careful and sensible decisions about a child’s participation in extracurricular, enrichment, cultural and social activities that help maintain the child’s sense of normalcy and support the child’s emotional and developmental growth.
- **Age-Appropriate:** The federal definition for age-appropriate has two parts: (1) age-based activities (e.g., it’s inappropriate for a 5-year-old child to supervise a younger sibling), and (2) specific cognitive, emotional, physical, and behavioral capacities (e.g., it’s inappropriate to expect a child diagnosed as medically fragile to participate in physically demanding extracurricular activities).
- **Normalcy:** “Normalcy” includes daily routines familiar to the child. Routines should ensure that a child’s experiences in out-of-home care are typical for any child of the same age. Routine activities should also support the child’s health, well-being, development and happiness.

Considerations for Decision-Making



As a resource parent, you will weigh decisions against many factors, including the child’s needs, abilities and maturity level. If you need help deciding, you can always contact the family’s social worker, your assigned resource parent support worker (RPSW), or guardian *ad litem* (GAL). And if you’ve established a shared parenting relationship with the birth parents, you can get their input as well.

Applying the RPP Standard

- **Safety** – Any potential risk to the child should be a primary consideration for making decisions, especially when a child hopes to participate in an activity that

requires supervision or there are concerns for safety and security of the environment where the activity is to take place.

- **Case Plans** – There may be limitations or prohibitions contained in the child’s case plan and court orders.
- **Birth Parents** – If you don’t have an established relationship with the birth parents, just check with your RPSW or the child’s social worker to be sure you are aware of the birth parents’ preferences or objections to particular types of activities.
- **Culture** – Consider the child’s culture and any related needs or interests when making decisions, especially if the child was raised in a different culture (or religion) than your own.
- **Age & Development** – As described above, decisions should take into account the child’s age, maturity, and developmental level, behavioral history and any developmental challenges.
- **Health** – Naturally, the child’s mental and physical health, including any medication regimen, must be incorporated into decisions.

Allowance

CFSA’s policy on [Youth Personal Allowance](#) states: *A resource parent shall not suspend or withhold the youth’s personal allowance as a method of punishment or discipline.* If you do choose to suspend an allowance as a consequence for seriously inappropriate behavior, you will need to document your reasons and share those reasons with the social worker and RPSW. If such a situation like this occurs, please be sure to put the money aside for later use by the youth (as detailed in the policy). An allowance log is recommended!



Babysitters



You may use a trusted babysitter who is at least 16 years old and familiar to you through interactions and experience. Not every babysitter needs a background check, especially for a short-term activity. If you are going to rely on a substitute caregiver over a longer period of time, a background check will be necessary. Please review CFSA's policy on [Temporary Supervision of Children in Foster Care](#) for additional clarification.

Hair Cuts

No haircuts should occur without consent from the birth parents. Consent can be confirmed directly between parents or facilitated by the social worker. There may be religious or cultural reasons for maintaining a particular hairstyle. If nothing else, just imagine yourself as the birth parent: how would you feel if a resource parent made a significant hairstyle decision for your child?

Out-of-Town Travel

You must inform the Agency of all plans to travel more than 100 miles from the District. REMEMBER: The Agency has a responsibility to inform the parents, GAL, and in some cases the Family Court about travel. Please plan in advance and share your travel plans as soon as you know them.

If you are scheduling a vacation, please consider pre-existing visitation schedules and, if you are co-parenting with the birth parents, try to have a conversation first. The Agency believes visitation is important, but they realize that there may be a time when rescheduling a visit might make sense. Please be flexible and have a conversation with the birth parents, or social worker, about planning an extended parent visit for the child before or after the trip. As long as the Agency's [travel policy](#) is followed, working out a compromise is usually in the best interest of the child.

Changing Schools

School enrollment should always be a team discussion and include the social worker, GAL, CFSA's Office of Well Being, as well as the parents, who usually have educational decision-making rights. Federal law [42 USC § 675\(C\)\(iv\)](#) requires educational stability for children in out-of-home care, including a preference for keeping children in the same school they attended before entering care. **RPP does not override these requirements**, so CFSA will maintain a child's previous school enrollment [unless](#) there is clear evidence that the former school is not in the child's best interest. In some cases, transportation can be provided to maintain educational stability.

Permission, Consent & Release Forms



RPP covers many activities, including field trips, indoor rock climbing, laser tag or a bouncy house. If you are considering a high-risk or dangerous activity such as zip lining or ATV riding, you must inform the birth parent and request their consent or signature of a release form.