

STANDARD: MANAGING THE BEHAVIOR OF CHILDREN IN FOSTER CARE WITH POSITIVE AND EFFECTIVE DISCIPLINE

PURPOSE

The purpose of this standard is to provide direction and guidance to the Child and Family Services (CFS) programs and its resource families regarding the use of positive and effective discipline as one way to protect the safety and well-being of the children in their home and to reduce the risk of abuse resulting from inappropriate discipline. CFS standards are intended to achieve statewide consistency in the development and application of CFS core services and will be implemented in the context of all applicable laws, rules, and policies. Standards will also provide a measurement for program accountability.

INTRODUCTION

When a resource family is approved for licensure they enter into a relationship with the Department of Health and Welfare and become a member of the professional team providing services and support to children in out-of-home care. As part of the resource family selection process, the Department through its PRIDE pre-service training makes every effort to clarify non-negotiable expectations in terms of providing care to children. The Department's standard for managing the behavior of children in care is one of the non-negotiable items.

Discipline is an essential part of child rearing. When used appropriate, it is a learning experience that will enable children to mature and develop acceptable patterns of behavior. The purpose of discipline is to teach children and adolescents to function appropriately in a family and community and to become responsible self-regulating adults.

STANDARD

Any resource family licensed by Children and Family Services to accept the placement of children must agree to abide by the Department's standard for managing the behavior of children in foster care with positive and effective discipline and its prohibition of corporal punishment.

The authority for the discipline of a foster child will not be delegated by a resource parent to other members of the household. If in doubt, a resource parent will consult with Children and Family Services prior to using any behavior management or discipline method that exceeds the provisions of this standard.

As part of the licensing process, all resource families will sign a copy of this standard indicating they have read and agree to abide by its provisions before any child is placed in the home.

Definitions

Behavior Management/ Discipline: Actions taken by an adult intended to influence the behavior of a child. These actions are intended to teach appropriate behavior through the use of positive reinforcement, time-out, redirection, ignoring, natural consequences, etc. Methods of behavior management and discipline for children will be based on each child's needs, stage of development, and behavior. Discipline will promote self-control, self-esteem, and independence. See IDAPA 16.06.02.446 Child Care Licensing Standards

Corporal Punishment: Physical punishment administered to a child's body, such as, but not limited to, spanking, kicking, slapping, pinching, punching, shaking, and hitting.

Punishment: Aversive actions taken by an adult toward a child with the intent of stopping a behavior which the child is exhibiting or has exhibited and preventing it from reoccurring.

Punishment Prohibitions: The following types of punishment of a foster child are prohibited (See IDAPA 16.06.02.446 Child Care Licensing Standards):

- a. Physical force or any kind of punishment inflicted on the body, including spanking;
- b. Cruel and unusual physical exercise or forcing a child to take an uncomfortable position;
- c. Use of excessive physical labor with no benefit other than for punishment;
- d. Mechanical, medical, or chemical restraint;
- e. Locking a child in a room or area of the home;
- f. Denying necessary food, clothing, bedding, rest, toilet use, bathing facilities, or entrance to the foster home;
- g. Mental or emotional cruelty;
- h. Verbal abuse, ridicule, humiliation, profanity, threats or other forms of degradation directed at a child or a child's family;
- i. Threats of removal from the foster home;
- j. Denial of visits or communication with a child's family unless authorized by a children's agency in its service plan for the child and family; and
- k. Denial of necessary educational, medical, counseling, or social services.

Permissible Restraint

A foster parent who has received specific training in the use of child restraint may use reasonable restraint methods, with prior approval by the Department, to prevent a child from harming himself, other persons or property, or to allow a child to gain control of him or herself. Any prior approval of restraint methods by a trained foster parent must be in writing and the foster parent must document, in detail, any use of restraint including what lead up to the restraint and what alternatives were tried but proved ineffective before restraint was used.

Reasons For No Use of Corporal Punishment

Persons from different backgrounds, cultures or belief systems may have values which view the corporal punishment of children as a positive and effective method of discipline. This is not the position of the Department.

The Department's position and belief is that foster children are an especially vulnerable group of children. For most children in foster care, their life experiences are far different from children who have always known parental love, understanding, and consistency. Children in foster care have often experienced multiple losses, such as the loss of birth parents, siblings, grandparents, and previous foster families. They often suffer from low self-esteem. Frequently they have been victims of physical and sexual abuse. Given these traumatic histories, corporal punishment often means something entirely different to a foster child than it might to another child who hasn't had these experiences.

If corporal punishment results in bruising or other physical damage to the child, anyone who has reason to believe that abuse or neglect has occurred is obligated to report. If the allegations are substantiated, this will result in removal of the child, revocation of the family's license and the possibility of criminal charges. A prohibition of corporal punishment prevents this type of further trauma to the foster child.

Principles of Effective Discipline

Effective discipline teaches children in the absence of physical and verbal intimidation. Effective discipline will:

- Provide for a choice of discipline methods that meet the individual needs of the child or adolescent;
- Ensure that effective alternatives to physical/corporal punishment are used;
- Ensure the child or adolescent understands the reason for each disciplinary action;
- Take into consideration the child's life experiences and age, developmentally, socially, intellectually, and emotionally; and
- Establish limits and behavioral guidelines that clearly reinforce that the child or adolescent must take responsibility for his/her behavior, and there will be relevant consequences when behavior is inappropriate.

Guidelines For Resource Families

- Resource families are encouraged to rely on talking with a child or adolescent and denying privileges as much as possible as a method of discipline. These are effective ways of disciplining both children and teens.
- It is always important to listen to the child or adolescent and consider their feelings in the discipline process.
- Understanding, firmness, and fairness are important when exercising discipline.
- Consistent limit-setting and rules clearly explained to the child or adolescent should be applied.
- Methods of discipline should always be relevant to the problem behavior. Resource families are encouraged to involve the child or adolescent in determining what the consequences will be when inappropriate behavior has occurred.
- Children should have appropriate and acceptable behavior acknowledged and recognized. Parenting in this positive way is encouraged rather than focusing only on the child's negative behavior.
- Resource families will work with the child's or adolescent's case manager, therapist, teachers, and other appropriate persons to explore and affirm acceptable disciplinary methods and alternatives to physical punishment suited to the child's or adolescent's individual needs. Resource families will discuss this standard with persons providing services to the child and inform the case manager of any behavior modification or treatment recommendations which conflict with this standard.

Additional training on positive and effective methods of discipline will be made available by the Department upon request, or when, and if, it becomes apparent that the resource family needs assistance in managing the behaviors of children placed in their home.

Statement of Agreement To Abide By The Provisions of This Discipline Standard

(1) We/I have read and understand this standard related to managing the behavior of a child in foster care through positive and effective discipline and agree to abide by the defined terms of this standard.

(2) We/I agree that there will be no form of corporal punishment used in managing the behavior of children placed with us.

(3) We/I agree to not use any form of physical restraint unless approved by the Department of Health and Welfare and we/I have received specific training in the use of non-violent methods of restraint.

(4) We/I acknowledge receipt of a copy of this standard on the date below.

Resource Parent Date

Resource Parent Date

Resource Family Specialist Date

References:

IDAPA 16.06.02 Child Care Licensing Standards

IDAPA 16.06.02.446 Behavior Management and Discipline

Any variance to these standards will be documented and approved by Division administration, unless otherwise noted.