

STATE OF VERMONT
AGENCY OF HUMAN SERVICES

DCF

Department for Children and Families

BULLETIN NO.: 17-04

FROM:  Sean Brown, Deputy Commissioner
Economic Services Division

DATE: 2/1/17

SUBJECT: Reach Up and Reach Up Services Procedures

CHANGES ADOPTED EFFECTIVE 2/1/17

INSTRUCTIONS

- Maintain Manual - See instructions below.**
- Proposed Regulation - Retain bulletin and attachments until you receive Manual Maintenance Bulletin: _____**
- Information or Instructions - Retain until _____**

MANUAL REFERENCE(S):

TOC (P-2200)	TOC (P-2280)	TOC (P-2290)
P-2270	P-2290	P-2370

The purpose of this bulletin is to update the Reach Up and the Reach Up Services Temporary Absence procedures.

Reach Up Procedures Table of Content has also been updated.

The Policy and Procedures Index and Alphabetized Table of Contents for Reach Up Procedures have been removed.

Table of Contents have also been created for Reach Ahead Procedures and Reach First Procedures.

The section number for Reach First is changing to avoid duplication with another section within Reach Up Procedures.

Manual Maintenance

Reach Up Procedures

Remove

TOC P-2200, pgs.1- 4 (B16-30)
TOC P-2200 p.5 (B16-30)

P-2200 pgs. A1-A14 (B94-49)
P-2200 pgs. B1-B7 (B94-49)

P-2270 pgs. 1-7 (B16-30)
Nothing

Insert

TOC P-2200 pgs.1-4 (B17-04)
Nothing

Nothing
Nothing

P-2270 pgs. 1-7 (B17-04)
P-2270 p.8 (B17-04)

Reach Ahead Procedures

Remove

Nothing

Insert

TOC (P-2280) (B17-04)

Reach First Procedures

Remove

Nothing
P-2270 A1 (B14-08)

Insert

TOC (P-2290) (B17-04)
P-2290 (B17-04)

Reach Up Services Procedures

Remove

P-2370 pgs.1-3 (B16-30)
Nothing

Insert

P-2370 pgs. 1-3 (B17-04)
P-2370 p.4 (B17-04)

P-2201	Application Procedures
	A. Receipt of Application
	B. Forms
	C. Social Security Numbers
	D. Verification
	E. Response to Request for Verification
	F. Delay in Processing
	G. SRS Referrals
	H. Reach Up Registration
	I. Eligibility Determinations
	J. Orientation Script
	K. Addressing the Effects of Domestic Violence
	L. Eligibility Procedures for Post-60-Month Cases
	M. Verifying Out-of-State TANF Months
P-2202	Review Procedures
	A. Process
	B. Response to Request for Verification
P-2210	Determination and Documentation of Eligibility Factors
	A. Household Composition
	1. Determining the Reach Up Assistance Group
	2. Minor Parents
	3. Joint Custody
	B. Caretaker Household
	C. Financial Eligibility Computation
	A. Housing
	B. Basic Need Requirements
	C. Gross Monthly Income
	D. Net Income
	- Wages/Salary
	- New or Changed Income
	- Decreased Income
	- Self-Employment
	E. Assistance
	F. Net Income
	G. Assistance (with examples)
	- Income Allocation to Child-in-Common
	- Earned In-Kind Income
	- Business Expense
	- Providing Day Care Meals and Snacks
	- Providing Room and/or Board
	- SSI Income

P-2210 Determination and Documentation of Eligibility Factors (Continued)

- D. [Reserved]
- E. Subsidized Housing
- F. [Reserved]
- G. [Reserved]
- H. Dependent Care Expenses for Employed ANFC Recipients
 - 1. Dependent Care Deduction Method
 - 2. Child Care Reimbursement Payment Method
 - 3. Income Exclusion Method
 - 4. Allowable Child Care Expenses
 - 5. Payment Scheduling
 - 6. Changes in Child Care
- I. [Reserved]
- J. Strikers
- K. [Reserved]
- L. Sponsored Aliens

P-2211 Resource Determination

- A. Vehicles
- B. Real Property
- C. Personal Property
- D. Life Insurance
- E. Accessibility and Jointly Owned Resources
- F. Excluded Assets Saved From Earnings

P-2220 Documentation of Eligibility Decisions

- A. Grants
- B. Denials
- C. Reapplications
- D. Reviews
- E. Closures and Reinstatements
- F. Changes
 - Timeframes for Acting on Changes
 - 1. Increases
 - 2. Decreases
 - 3. Earned Income—Employment of Short Duration
 - 4. Non-recurring Grants
- G. [Reserved]
- H. [Reserved]
- I. [Reserved]
- J. \$10 Minimum Grant
- K. Eligibility of Pregnant Women
 - 1. Initial Application

2/1/17

Bulletin No. 17-04

Table of Content p.3

- P-2220 Documentation of Eligibility Decisions
 - 2. Re-Application
 - 3. Adding the Child and Father
 - L. Change in Deprivation Factor
 - Summary Chart

- P-2230 Protective Payments
 - A. General Information
 - B. Determining Money Mismanagement
 - C. ACCESS Procedures
 - D. Benefit Issuance
 - E. Fair Hearing Request
 - F. Review Schedule
 - G. Ending Protective Payments

- P-2231 Overpayments
 - A. Policy Basis
 - B. Overpayment Discovered
 - Examples
 - C. The Recoupment Process
 - Examples

- P-2240 Lump Sum Benefits
 - A. Determining Disqualification
 - Examples
 - Rebates and Vermont Earned Income Tax Credits
 - B. Applying Remainder of Income at Reapplication
 - Steps to Follow
 - Examples
 - C. Change in Period of Ineligibility
 - Policy Basis
 - Examples
 - D. Miscellaneous
 - 1. Lump Sum Income Reported/Discovered Late
 - 2. Fair Hearing on Disqualification for Receipt of Lump Sum
 - 3. Addition of Household Member(s) During Disqualification Period

- P-2251 Family Development Plan
 - A. Quarterly Review FDP
 - B. Team Leader's Role
 - C. Quarterly Review Months

2/1/17

Bulletin No. 17-04

Table of Content p.4

- P-2260 Pursuit of Support
- A. General Procedures
 - B. Waiver of Cooperation
 - C. Addressing Issues with Child Support in the Budget
 - D. Child Support Payments Begin
 - E. Excess-of-Grant (EOG) for Reach Up
 - 1. General Information
 - 2. EOG Period
 - 3. Changes Other Than Support During the EOG Period
 - 4. Support Decreases During the EOG Period
 - 5. EOG Ends
 - 6. Example: Direct Payment/EOG Begins, Ends, Begins Again
 - F. Failure to Cooperate with the OCS 25 percent reduction
- P-2270 Eligibility Procedures for Temporary Absence Cases

2/1/17

Bulletin No. 17-04

P-2270

P-2270 Eligibility Procedures for Temporary Absence Cases

A. General Procedures

In certain cases, where a child or parent/caretaker is or will be absent from the home for a period greater than 30 days, but not expected to exceed 180 consecutive days, the household may continue to receive Reach Up assistance.

Temporary absence may be allowed for a parent when they are absent from the home to receive inpatient or outpatient care from a hospital, substance abuse treatment facility, or other medical treatment institution. Temporary absence may be allowed for a child when a child(ren) is placed in the custody of Family Services Division (FSD); when they are absent from the home to receive care from a hospital, substance abuse treatment facility, or other medical institution; or when the child is incarcerated. Temporary absence based on the parent's voluntary agreement to place the child in someone else's care may also be eligible.

Example of a voluntary placement:

Mom has been experiencing an increase in mental health symptoms and is considering checking into Brattleboro Retreat for a period of time. Mom is supported by her mental health clinician and her primary care provider. Family Services is not involved. Providers write letters of support asking that it is in Mom and child's best interest child be separated from Mom and returned within 180 days. Child can stay temporarily with maternal grandmother, but Mom continues to need financial assistance so she can maintain her apartment. Case may be eligible for Temporary Absence.

Shared custody and Conditional Custody Orders (CCO) do not necessarily indicate a need for temporary absence unless the child(ren) is out of the household more than 50% of the time.

Homelessness alone does not disqualify the parent for continued benefits if the intent is for the parent and the child to be again living together within 180 days.

1. Reporting Temporary Absence

The household is responsible for reporting an absence, but if reported by FSD, Economic Services must act on the information.

a. In cases involving children in FSD custody, FSD can either provide:

- i. form [FS201FC-M](#) indicating if household is receiving Reach Up.
- ii. an email to ESD stating that a child(ren) were removed and that the current case plan includes reunification.

- b. If the household reports to Case Management, the Reach Up Supervisor or Case Manager reports temporary absence to Eligibility if not already reported.
- c. Eligibility and case management will share the responsibility of explaining the temporary absence process with families, though in cases where case management is involved, the case manager will take the lead in this conversation. It will be assumed that participants will want their Reach Up benefit continued, but participants can opt out. In these cases, a voluntary withdrawal will be entered as soon as possible.

2. Determining Eligibility

- a. The most common Temporary Absence cases involve FSD custody. In these cases contact should be made with the local FSD office to ensure that the current plan includes reunification. District offices may have different methods for making this contact and may include District Management, Eligibility or Case Management staff. All contact should be clearly noted in catn (and case notes as applicable).
 - i. If child is placed in out of state care but remains in the custody of the State of Vermont, the child is eligible for Temporary Absence.
 - ii. If child is placed in out of state care and custody is no longer held by the State of Vermont, then the child will not be eligible.
- b. In cases where the parent is absent from the home the [201 Waiver of Confidentiality](#) should indicate the facility(ies) where the parent is staying as well as the temporary caretaker(s) of the child(ren) and the protective payee (may be one and the same) for the case. In cases where the child(ren) is absent from the home, but not in FSD custody the [201WC](#) should indicate the name of some professional who is advocating for the absence and would be willing to speak to ESD regarding the status of the reunification plan. When available, case managers can be an integral part in ensuring this paperwork is completed and understood.
- c. If verification is requested and is not returned the grant shall be closed or reduced (if other children remain in the household).
- d. BPS submits all requested verification to their local management team to make the determination if the grant remains open, needs to be closed, or should be approved or denied.

- e. District management teams will designate who is responsible for determining temp absence eligibility. The 180 Day Temporary Absence Calculator can be found on the RUFA tab of the ESD Calculator located on the [ESD Intranet Homepage](#).
- f. The management team designee will email the decision to the BPS for processing. The following blurb can be used:

(Name, SSN) has been approved for continued Reach Up benefits due to the temporary absence of a (parent/caretake or child(ren)) for up to 180 days. The absent household member will remain active for Reach Up. Please enter a left date on the MEMB panel in ACCESS, with a code of 6 -"allowable for RU". The absent household member must be removed however, for 3SVT and FUEL.

The full Reach Up grant that the household is receiving must be counted for 3SVT and FUEL. Enter a UNEA panel countable for 3SVT and Fuel just for the portion of the Reach Up grant that isn't being counted (see example below), and write RU Temp. Absence in the "description" field.

Example: Reach Up grant is \$640. The 3SVT budget is only counting \$426.70 (because of the person being removed for RUFA). A UNEA panel needs to be created for \$213.30 (\$640-426.70).

The 180 days will max out on (date). If DCF-FSD is involved and informs us at any point between now and then that the court approved case plan has changed to Termination of Parental Rights (TPR), the Reach Up grant must close or be reduced by removing the code 6 on the MEMB panel.

Lastly, please put a WARN on this case indicating the temporary absence of the appropriate household member and enter a CATN as well.

IMPORTANT: If at any time during the temporary absence, another parent or caretaker applies for and is granted Reach Up Financial Assistance for the child(ren), make sure to inform the District Management team so the information can be added to the tracking sheet.

3. Special Circumstances

- a. New Reach Up applicants, and current recipients adding an absent child (that is not already considered temporarily absent) to the grant, can also apply/add the child to grant

requesting Temporary Absence eligibility if reunification is expected to be within 30 days. Look at the date of the first RU payment as the start of the 30-day period. If reunification is not expected within 30 days, but is expected within 180 days, send the case to central office for a determination of whether the application/addition should be approved.

B. Temporary Absence of Child(ren)

ESD will use a teaming approach to monitor those cases where the temporary absence is due to custody or placement of the child by FSD. The Family Services social worker assigned to the family, the parent/caretaker's Reach Up case manager, and Eligibility will work together to assist the family. In cases of a child only Reach Up grant, case management will not be set up and communication will remain between FSD and the District Management Team.

1. Granting Temporary Absence

- a. BPS enters a left date on the MEMB panel in ACCESS with a code of 6 "allowable for RU." Left date will be the first day that the child is consecutively absent, or the first day that the child is consecutively not in the household 50% of the time or more.
- b. BPS removes the child(ren) for 3SVT and the full Reach Up grant that the household is receiving must be counted for 3SVT and FUEL.
- c. BPS enters a UNEA panel countable for 3SVT and Fuel just for the portion of the Reach Up grant that isn't being counted (see example below), and write "RU Temp Absence" in the "description" field.

Example: Reach Up grant is \$640. The 3SVT budget is only counting \$426.70 (because of the person being removed for RUFA). A UNEA panel needs to be created for \$213.30 (\$640-426.70).

- d. BPS enters a WARN on case indicating the temporary absence of a child(ren), and enters a CATN as well.
- e. BPS sets up a future TO DO that indicates when the maximum of 180 days will be reached.
- f. BPS will inform RUCM (as appropriate)
 - i. Any change to the parent/caretaker's plan for the child to return home at the end of the absence.

- ii. Indications or reports that it is no longer the parent/caretaker's intent to maintain a home for the child during the absence.
- iii. Changes in the parent/caretaker's living situation.
- iv. Information regarding the child's incarceration, medical care, or DCF custody status.
- v. Changes affecting the parent/caretaker's eligibility for Reach Up.

2. Ending Temporary Absence

- a. If child(ren) is returned to household within 180 days the BPS will
 - i. remove the left date and code 6 on the MEMB panel
 - ii. add the child(ren) back to 3SVT household effective the date of return
 - iii. remove the UNEA panel for "RU Temp Absence"
 - iv. remove the temporary absence WARN
 - v. enter CATN indicating child(ren)'s name and date of return
 - vi. Contact COPS if a 666 number was used to "trick" the system and they will correct ACCESS to say that yes indeed this child is the same.
- b. If an FSD custody case and FSD reports to BPS at any point that the court approved plan for the family has changed to Termination of Parental Rights (TPR) prior to the 180th day, the BPS reports this to the case manager and Reach Up Supervisor who will send an email to AHS.DCFESDCOReachUp@vermont.gov for review of the case. If the decision is to close, Supervisor will inform the BPS and the Reach Up grant must close or be reduced.
- c. Cases that are closing prior to the 180th day for other eligibility related reasons should be treated as any ongoing Reach Up case.
- d. Cases which are not reunited within 180s days should be closed as soon as possible after the 180th day.

C. Temporary Absence of Parent/Caretaker

1. Granting Temporary Absence

- a. In two parent households, BPS enters a left date on the parent's MEMB panel in ACCESS with a code of 6 "allowable for RU". Left date will be the first day that the parent is consecutively absent. See B (1) c above and follow instructions to count full RUFA grant amount in 3SVT and SF budgets.

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- b. For single parent household BPS enters a left date on the parent's MEMB panel in ACCESS with a code 6 "allowable for RU" and approves closure of 3SVT and SF benefits, unless parent is maintaining eligibility on their own. If parent is remaining active on 3SVT or SF, BPS must enter a left date on the child (ren)'s MEMB panel with a code 6.
 - c. BPS sets up protective payments for housing (if housing is included in the grant). Housing includes rent, mortgage, property taxes, insurance, allowable maintenance and repair.
 - d. BPS sets up the protective payee who will receive any remainder of the Reach Up grant. Parent should not retain access to benefits. When selecting EBT Alternate Payee Status select 1C "Cash Only First Alternate" See [SOP 2104 Entering an Alternate Payee in ACCESS/Processing a 139AP form](#) and follow directions with information from form [207 Protective Payment Agreement](#).
 - e. BPS can inform protective payee that they may apply for 3SVT and SF for themselves and the child(ren) if income eligible. They should not gain access to the Absent Parent/Caretaker's 3SVT or SF benefit. If protective payee is also caring for children outside of the child (ren)'s typical house they may also be eligible for a caretaker grant. See 2270 D below.
 - f. BPS enters a WARN on case indicating the temporary absence of a parent/caregiver, and enters a CATN as well.
 - g. BPS sets up a future TO DO that indicates when the maximum of 180 days will be reached.
 - h. BPS will inform RUCM
 - i. if parent will be absent more than 180 days,
 - ii. any change in the parent/caretaker's plan to return home,
 - iii. reports that it is no longer the parent/caretaker's intent to maintain a home and be responsible for the child,
 - iv. a change in the designated responsible adult and alternate payee,
 - v. information regarding the parent/caretaker's inpatient or outpatient care from a hospital, substance abuse treatment facility or other medical institution and/or
 - vi. changes affecting the parent/caretaker's eligibility for Reach Up.

2. Ending Temporary Absence

See above Procedure B as applicable. If a protective payee was assigned follow the directions for “Removing or Making Changes to an Existing Alternate Payee” in the [SOP 2104](#) referenced in 2270 C (1) d above.

D. Setting Up Caretaker Grant for Child (if applicable)

In cases where the parent will be absent from the household, and the children are being cared for by a caretaker outside of their parents’ home, the caretaker may be able to apply for a caretaker grant.

1. BPS will set up a caretaker case for the designated responsible adult (use real SSN if they are not already or have never received Reach Up for themselves).
2. BPS give the child(ren) 666#s and keep all other information as is. BPS indicates “no” when ACCESS asks if this child is really the other child in temporary absence household.
3. Create WARN and enter CATN that this child(ren) is really open in another household.
4. BPS will contact COPS if a 666 number was used to merge cases upon closure of the caretaker grant so cases can be merged.

E. Continuation of Temporary Absence Eligibility

1. Case closes for Eligibility related non-coop:
 - a. If verification comes in before the closure date, case would be reopened with no changes to Temp Absence eligibility.
 - b. If verification comes in after the closure date, the client must reapply. Use the date of the first Reach Up payment as a starting point for the time period:
 - i. If the children will return to the household within 30 days case can be approved.

2/1/17

Bulletin No. 17-04

P-2270 p.8

ii. If the children will not return to the household within 30 days, BPS or Case Manager should connect with FSD (if child is in custody) to determine if the goal is still reunification. If absence is related to reasons other than FSD custody, verification should be requested from collateral sources to determine if reunification is still the goal. Consider how much time the household already utilized under Temporary Absence eligibility. For example: Someone was granted a temp absence and had been on RU for 90 days under the temp absence before closing for failing to return an IR. If they reapply the next month, use 90 days as the time frame for when the child must return to the home.

2. If reopened case is about to be sanctioned—make sure to allow 10 days for household to receive notice of reduced sanction amount (sanction may need to be put in place for following month depending when case is reopened).

F. Temporary Absence Where Parent(s) Receives SSI and all Children are Absent from Household

Please refer to [P-2210 C23](#) p.2.

2/1/17

Bulletin No. 17-04

Table of Contents

P-2281 Reach Ahead Auto-Enrollment and Applications

P-2282 Reach Ahead Reviews

P-2283 Reach Ahead Re-instatement

P-2284 Transfer from Reach Ahead back to Reach Up

2/1/17

Bulletin No. 17-04

Table of Contents

P-2290 Reach First Program

A. Determining Eligibility

2/1/17

Bulletin No. 17-04

P-2290

P-2290 Reach First Program

A. Determining Eligibility

1. Determine if the family is:

a. **Ineligible for Reach First** (see 2115)

- i. Received RF payment in 12 months preceding month of application;
- ii. Meeting the work requirement, but still financially eligible for Reach Up;
- iii. Minor Parent;
- iv. Received temporary housing in the current month; or
- v. Closed RUFA within the past 30 days

b. **Inappropriate for Reach first** (see 2116)

- i. A single parent who wants a deferment for child under the age of 2; or
- ii. Families who are already meeting what would become their Reach Up work requirement, but not able to be self-sufficient within four months.

If they are ineligible or inappropriate, then it is a Reach Up application.

2. If the applicant is neither ineligible nor inappropriate, determine if the family's financial situation qualifies them for Reach First (see 2114). Review the Reach Up/Reach First Enrollment Questionnaire (604) and talk with the applicant to determine the following:

- a. Can Reach First address the family's needs within the next four months? In other words, without further assistance after this time period because their needs will be met in other ways such as Unemployment Insurance or PSE. If it is unclear, then it is a Reach Up application; or
- b. Can the family demonstrate a feasible plan to be self-sufficient by the time Reach First will have ended? (Keep in mind that by the time Reach First is granted, there will be less than 4 full months to reach the self-sufficiency goal. Use the tentative Reach First end date in your discussion.)

If the family is unable to demonstrate satisfactorily that they will not need on-going assistance beyond the 4 month Reach First period, then it is a Reach Up application.

3. If the family meets the eligibility criteria for Reach Up assistance, meets the Reach First eligibility criteria in Step 2 above and the family has a mandatory applicant (see 2117), the family must participate in Reach First.
4. If the family is financially eligible for Reach Up assistance and meets all Reach First eligibility criteria in Step 2 (see 2114), but has no mandatory applicants (see 2117), the family may choose to participate in either Reach First or Reach Up (see 2118).

2/1/17

Bulletin No. 17-04

P-2370

P-2370 Case Management Procedures for Temporary Absence

A. General Procedures

In certain cases where a child or parent/caretaker is or will be absent from the home for a period greater than 30 days, but not expected to exceed 180 consecutive days, the household may continue to receive Reach Up assistance.

Temporary absence may be allowed for a parent when they are absent from the home to receive inpatient or outpatient care from a hospital, substance abuse treatment facility, or other medical treatment institution. Temporary absence may be allowed for a child when a child(ren) is placed in the custody of Family Services Division (FSD); when they are absent from the home to receive care from a hospital, substance abuse treatment facility, or other medical institution; or when the child is incarcerated. Temporary absence based on the parent's voluntary agreement to place the child in someone else's care may also be eligible.

Example of a voluntary placement:

Mom has been experiencing an increase in mental health symptoms and is considering checking into Brattleboro Retreat for a period of time. Mom is supported by her mental health clinician and her primary care provider. Family Services is not involved. Providers write letters of support asking that it is in Mom and child's best interest child be separated from Mom and returned within 180 days. Child can stay temporarily with maternal grandmother, but Mom continues to need financial assistance so she can maintain her apartment. Case may be eligible for Temporary Absence.

Shared custody and Conditional Custody Orders (CCO) do not necessarily indicate a need for temporary absence unless the child(ren) is out of the household more than 50% of the time.

Homelessness alone doesn't disqualify the parent for continued benefits if the intent is for the parent and the child to be again living together within 180 days.

1. Reporting Temporary Absence

The household is responsible for reporting an absence, but if reported by FSD, Economic Services must act on the information.

a. In cases involving children in FSD custody, FSD can either provide:

- i. form [FS201FC-M](#) indicating if household is receiving Reach.
- ii. an email to ESD stating that a child(ren) were removed that the current plan includes reunification.

2/1/17

Bulletin No. 17-04

P-2370 p.2

- b. If the household reports to Case Management, the case manager reports temporary absence to Eligibility if not already reported.
- c. In all cases where case management is involved, the case manager will help explain the temporary absence process to the family. It will be assumed that participants will want their Reach Up benefit continued, but participants can opt out.

2. Determining Eligibility

- a. Eligibility will follow procedures to gather verification of absence. If case manager receives any verification it will be shared with Eligibility.
- b. The most common Temporary Absence cases involve FSD custody. If FSD reports at any point that the court approved plan for the family has changed to Termination of Parental Rights (TPR) the case manager reports this to the Reach Up Supervisor who will send an email to AHS.DCFESDCOReachUp@vermont.gov for review of the case. If the decision is to close, the case manager will inform Eligibility and the Reach Up grant must close or be reduced.
- c. Each District will keep a list of all Temporary Absence decisions and submit a copy to Reach Up Central Office on a quarterly basis.

3. General Case Management Responsibilities:

- a. Case manager continues to administer the services component of the Reach Up Program.
- b. Family Development Plan requirements that were applicable prior to the absence still apply, unless in direct conflict with what is being required of the participant by FSD. FDP activities that support the parent's engagement with Family Services is recommended.
- c. If it is unlikely that reunification will occur before the 180 days is completed, but the court plan remains reunification, it is best practice to help the participant plan ahead for their transition off of Reach Up after their 180 day period has expired.

B. Temporary Absence of Child(ren)

ESD will use a teaming approach to monitor those cases where the temporary absence is due to custody or placement of the child by Family Services. The Family Services social worker assigned

2/1/17

Bulletin No. 17-04

P-2370 p.3

to the family, the parent/caretaker's Reach Up case manager, and Eligibility will work together to assist the family. In cases of a child only Reach Up grant, case management will not be set up and communication will remain between Family Services and the District Management Team.

1. Case Management Responsibilities

- a. Though requested through Eligibility, whenever possible the case manager will assist in obtaining a [201WC](#) release from the parent/caretaker in situations where the child's absence is due to incarceration, medical care, or a voluntary placement and contact the appropriate parties (including the parent/caretaker) two or more times per month including face to face, phone and email contact.
- b. In cases of FSD custody, case manager will have contact two times or more per month with the parent/caretaker and the Family Services social worker. This will include a monthly team meeting, as well as phone and email contact.
- c. Case manager will specifically inquire
 - i. Is the absence still expected to be less or no more than 180 days?
 - ii. Does the parent/caretaker still plan on having the child return home?
 - iii. What is the parent/caretaker's living situation? (Is she maintaining a home for the child's return? Up-to-date on rent? Looking for housing if "homeless"? ...etc.)
- d. Case manager will share pertinent information received from Eligibility or an institution with the Family Services social worker.
- e. Case manager will report any changes to Eligibility that might affect continuing eligibility for the Reach Up grant.

C. Temporary Absence of Parent/Caretaker

1. Case Management Responsibilities

- a. Though requested through Eligibility, whenever possible the case manager will assist in obtaining a [201WC](#) from the parent/caretaker and contact the hospital, substance abuse treatment facility or other medical institution.

2/1/17

Bulletin No. 17-04

P-2370 p.4

- b. Case manager will code absent parent/caretaker as medically deferred from the work requirement.
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- c. Case manager will have a minimum of contact two times per month with the absent parent/caretaker, if the facility and situation permits, in part to monitor the parent/caretaker's continuing ability to return within 180 days. This requirement can be waived in situations where it has been verified with the hospital, substance abuse treatment facility or other medical institution, that contact is not allowed, would be unreasonably difficult to arrange, or would be detrimental to the parent/caretaker's treatment plan.
- d. See B (1) c and d above.