

 VERMONT DEPARTMENT FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES Family Services Policy Manual		<h1>136</h1>
Chapter:	Special Casework Issues	
Subject:	Body Modification Requests by Children and Youth	
Approved:	Christine Johnson, Deputy Commissioner	Effective: 11/5/19
Supersedes:	Body Modification Requests by Youth	Dated: 9/26/14

Purpose

By Vermont law, [26 V.S.A. § 4102](#), youth under age 18 must have parent or guardian permission for body piercings or tattoos.

This policy outlines the process and considerations for granting permission to youth under the supervision of DCF, Family Services Division, who make a body modification request i.e. tattoos, piercing and/or gauging.

Related Policies

[Family Services Policy 75: Normalcy and the Reasonable and Prudent Parenting Standard](#)

Definitions

Gauging is the means by which one slowly enlarges a body piercing to accommodate increasingly larger sizes of jewelry.

Policy

It is within cultural norms for youth to express themselves through their appearance and personal style. This may include the desire to pierce, gauge, or tattoo themselves. Generally, DCF and caregivers should strive to support youth preferences for personal expression. However, deciding to modify one's body can be permanent and may involve risk to the youth's health. Risks associated with body modification include infection, allergic reaction, chipping of tooth enamel or tooth decay (with tongue piercings), scarring, excessive bleeding, and nerve damage.

For these reasons, DCF, Family Services has the following policy:

Family Services staff shall at no time grant permission for a youth to get a tattoo, gauge, or pierce genitalia or nipples.

In the event that a youth asks for permission to get a tattoo or piercing, Family Services staff shall consult with both parents, if applicable, as well as the caretaker the youth resided

 VERMONT DEPARTMENT FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES Family Services Policy Manual		<h1>136</h1>
Chapter:	Special Casework Issues	
Subject:	Body Modification Requests by Youth	

with prior to their custody episode if it was someone other than a parent (e.g. the youth has been residing with and in the custody of a grandparent prior to coming into custody) about whether this is appropriate. If a parent does not agree with the youth getting a tattoo or piercing, Family Services staff will respect this decision. There may be instances where due to trauma of the youth by a caretaker or if a termination of parental rights has been granted, it is not clinically appropriate to consult with parents to gain permission. In these cases, a Family Services Worker should speak with their supervisor to make this determination.

Additionally, a Family Services Supervisor shall approve the decision to grant permission for a tattoo or piercing. If a parent does not agree with their child getting a tattoo or piercing, Family Services staff shall not grant permission under any circumstances. A denial of permission should be documented in case notes.

To ensure that youth and parents carefully consider the decision, and that all parties are informed of the potential risks, the following should be taken into consideration and discussed with the youth and parent(s):

- Which body part the youth is requesting permission to tattoo or pierce (risk is increased when certain body parts are pierced, such as tongues or belly buttons).
- The overall health of the youth as their health may make them more susceptible to infection, could impact healing time, etc.
- The overall mental health of the youth -- As in is the tattoo or piercing perceived by the current team as a healthy expression of identity and/or inclusion in healthy relationships? Or is this perceived as an attempt to find a more tolerable form of self-harm, validate or affirm poor self-concept, or gain inclusion into negative relationships?
- The age of the youth.
- Social risks and practical implications (current and future) that may be associated with the area the youth would like to tattoo or pierce or the type of tattoo/piercing (e.g. facial piercings/tattoos or tattoos reflecting hate speech or gang affiliations).
- How the tattoo or piercing may cause scarring if removed and the process/costs associated.
- How will the cost of the tattoo or piercing be covered? (Family Services shall at no time use State funds to subsidize the cost of any tattoos or piercings.)

The American Academy of Pediatrics provides resources and research-based information, which covers the risks inherent in tattooing and body piercing and may be helpful in decision-making for Family Services Workers, youth, and parents. Additional guidance, including information about follow up care for body modifications, can be obtained through

 VERMONT DEPARTMENT FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES Family Services Policy Manual		<h1>136</h1>
Chapter:	Special Casework Issues	
Subject:	Body Modification Requests by Youth	

the Vermont Department of Health, Public Health Nurses, and the youth’s primary care physician.

Any agreement reached about tattoos or body piercings shall be documented and signed by the youth, the parent(s) and/or previous caretaker, the Family Services Worker, and the Family Services Supervisor, and shall be added to the youth’s file. The Body Modification Approval Form is available in the forms folder located on DCF’s Operational Site.