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Chapter:	Coordinating with Others	
Subject:	Transportation of Children and Youth in DCF Custody	Page 1 of 12
Approved:	Aryka Radke, Deputy Commissioner	Effective: 6/15/2023
Supersedes:	Family Services Policy 150	Dated: 1/17/2019

Purpose

To describe the requirements for safely transporting children and youth in DCF custody in the least restrictive method.


Acknowledgement: This policy specifically addresses the transportation of children and youth in DCF custody. It is understood that providing transportation for division clients (parents, children and youth not in DCF custody, etc.) will occur as needed. Transportation safety requirements outlined in Vermont law apply to all driving associated with an employee’s job duties. When transporting children/youth not in DCF custody, staff must have verbal permission from the custodian of the child.

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Related Policies & Resources

- Family Services [Policy 72](#): Educational Achievement and Stability for Children and Youth in DCF Custody
- Family Services [Policy 75](#): Normalcy and the Reasonable and Prudent Parent Standard (RPPS)
- Family Services [Policy 140](#): Standby and Call-In
- Family Services [Policy 250](#): Reporting and Responding to Staff Safety Threats

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Family Services [Policy 251](#): Staff Safety in Homes and the Community
Family Services [Policy 252](#): Staff Safety During Removals
Family Services [Policy 269](#): Second Hand Smoke
[Driving Guide for Vermont Youth in Foster Care](#)

Definitions

High End: A term often used to describe factors that are considered high-risk which could lead to potential staff safety, transportation, and/or placement concerns. The term “high end” is often used to describe a child or youth’s presentation or behaviors and the associated meeting or consultation to plan for safety. Examples include (but are not limited to):


- Children/youth who are exhibiting acute, generalized violence against people across settings or have committed an egregious violent offense involving the use of a weapon or serious physical harm/injury;
- Children/youth with sexually harmful behaviors towards others or a history of sexually reactive behaviors;
- Children/youth who are known or suspected victims of human trafficking;
- Children/youth appropriate for non-voluntary programs, or awaiting placement at or coming from a disrupted high-end placement;
- Children/youth with significant runaway behaviors;
- Children/youth with acute, significant substance use concerns; and/or
- Children/youth with significant mental health concerns or acute self-harm, self-injury, or suicidal ideation.

Policy

Overarching Principles

Children and youth in DCF custody shall be transported using the least restrictive method that can reasonably promote safety – always with mindfulness about the potential traumatic impact on the young person. In evaluating the most appropriate level of security, division staff will consider:

- Information known to the division about the child or youth’s strengths, needs, behaviors, risks, triggers, coping strategies, and/or successful methods of engagement or de-escalation;
- Any information known to the division about a child or youth’s prior traumatic experiences involving secure transportation or law enforcement;
- Any child-specific circumstances that warrant a higher level of support or supervision;


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- Whether any of the criteria described in this policy’s definition of “high end” are applicable to the young person;
- The child or youth’s immediate risk to run away or their history of previous runaways and any risky behaviors that occurred while they were missing;
- The risks the child or youth may pose to their own safety or the safety of another person;
- The duration/length of the transport and the number of stops that will be required; and
- Staff safety and any requests for teaming identified.

Further, the division recognizes the impact of racial disparities within child protection and juvenile justice systems nationally and locally, which are attributed to deeply embedded discrimination and biases that have been created and sustained over time. The division is continuously striving for equity in our work – encouraging employees to reflect on their individual practices and the connection to systemic perpetuation of institutional and structural racism.

Assessment of Children/Youth Unknown to the Division


The division has an obligation to conduct a combination of formal and informal assessment of children’s and youth’s strengths, needs, and challenges initially when first entering DCF custody and on an ongoing basis while in care. Naturally, the accuracy and reliability of the division’s assessment strengthens over time as more information is gathered and learned about young people and their families. When a child first enters DCF custody, limited information may be known about their trauma-related behaviors, responses, and risks. There may be physical, emotional, medical, sexual, or behavioral issues or challenges the division is unaware of at the time of initial placement. It is difficult to predict all behaviors and responses of children and youth who have experienced trauma, grief, and loss. The division utilizes information gathered from reports of abuse and neglect, additional context learned during child safety interventions (CSIs), formal assessments and evaluations, use of the Youth Assessment and Screening Instrument (YASI) as applicable, and insight from parents, collateral contacts and providers, and the youth themselves as part of this assessment process. Completion of the [Child Information & Placement Checklist](#) is one of the first instances where division staff provide information and context to caregivers about a youth’s identified past or current trauma-related behaviors, responses, and risk. As the case progresses, this assessment is expanded upon through case planning, referrals, and support and supervision expectations put in place to address the child’s needs. As information known to the division allows, this assessment includes but is not limited to consideration of:

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- Difficulty forming attachments to caregivers or peers
- Difficulty thinking, learning, or concentrating in school or childcare setting
- Significant sleep disturbances
- Inability to control physical responses to stress
- Inability to regulate emotions
- Lack of impulse control
- Depression or anxiety
- Self-harm or self-injury
- Suicidal ideation or suicide attempts
- Substance use
- Truancy, persistent school refusal, or school suspension/expulsion
- Eating disorder(s)
- Avoidance of social contact or social isolation
- Unfounded allegations of abuse by caregivers
- Unsafe online behaviors (contact with strangers or unknown adults, sexually explicit content on a device, etc.)
- Significant threatening behavior or verbal aggression
- Egregious violent offenses involving the use of a weapon or serious harm/injury
- Fighting or aggression towards people
- Aggression or cruelty to animals
- Destruction of property
- Boundary violating behaviors
- Problematic sexual behaviors
- Running away behaviors
- Fire setting or fire play
- Theft or stealing
- Bladder (enuresis) or bowel (encopresis) issues
- Juvenile justice involvement or adjudication
- Suspicion or confirmation of sex trafficking
- Suspicion or confirmation of gang affiliation.

Transportation Needs of Children & Youth in DCF Custody

All children and youth in DCF custody have transportation needs. Transportation should be arranged or scheduled with as much notice as possible. If a young person has specialized transportation needs (i.e., due to complex medical needs, significant travel for appointments/treatment, or daily transportation to support educational stability),

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division staff may consider whether these needs and arrangements should be included in the case plan.

In most situations, children and youth experiencing significant transitions should be transported by, or under the supervision of, a person they know and trust. Reasonable and appropriate efforts will be made to respect the privacy of the child/youth and prevent physical and psychological trauma. Children and youth will not be transported through secure transportation unless necessary to protect the young person’s health and safety or the safety of another person. Secure transportation is a necessary and helpful service but must be utilized with stewardship and a trauma-informed lens.

Driving Safety & Relevant Laws


In order to perform necessary functions of the division’s work, employees are required to have a valid driver’s license and a vehicle that is functionally and mechanically safe. Division staff are responsible for maintaining a valid driver’s license, adequate automobile insurance coverage, and up-to-date vehicle registration and inspection.

Division staff shall not smoke (neither traditional cigarettes nor electronic cigarettes) in the presence of children or youth served by the division – including within vehicles during transportation. Additionally, division staff will not give permission to or permit any child or youth served by the division to smoke in their presence. See Family Services [Policy 269](#) for additional information. Similarly, the [Licensing Rules For Foster Homes in Vermont](#) and [Licensing Regulations for Residential Treatment Programs](#) prohibit exposure to second hand smoke within vehicles while transporting young people. Additionally, residential treatment programs are required to ensure that youth are properly secured and adequately supervised in any vehicle used by the program to transport children/youth (Regulation #715).

Per [23 V.S.A. § 1099](#), a driver’s use of handheld portable electronic devices is prohibited while operating a motor vehicle. Everyone in the vehicle (all adults and children) will wear seat belts properly and as required by law¹. Per [23 V.S.A. § 1258](#):

- All children under the age of one, and all children weighing less than 20 pounds, regardless of age, shall be restrained in a rear-facing position, properly secured in a federally-approved child passenger restraining system, which shall not be installed in front of an active air bag.
- A child weighing more than 20 pounds, and who is one year of age or older and under the age of eight years, shall be restrained in a child passenger restraining system.

¹ Acknowledgement that some busses and public transportation options do not have installed seatbelts.

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- A child eight through 17 years of age shall be restrained in a safety belt system or a child passenger restraining system.

In most cases, the back seat is the safest place for children to be seated. The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommend all children younger than 13 should be seated in the back seat of vehicles.

Use of Teamed Responses for Transportation


All individuals transporting children and youth in DCF custody (division staff, caregivers, contracted providers, and others) are expected to maintain appropriate supervision to promote the safety of the child/youth and others. District office team members along with the individual(s) providing transportation may determine when a child or youth should be transported with more than one adult in the vehicle to increase supervision and safety for everyone. Teams may be comprised of two or more family services workers, or the role may be filled by a supervisor, district director, resource coordinator, human services case aide, central office staff, contracted co-located partner, community partner, service provider, substance abuse screener, domestic violence specialist, DOC staff, law enforcement, guardian ad litem (GAL), or someone within the family’s team or safety/support network.

Family Services [Policy 251](#) (Staff Safety in Homes and the Community) outlines circumstances requiring a teamed response and speaks to the use of teamed responses in other circumstances, such as during transportation:

In instances where a teamed response is not required by this policy, supervisors may determine that it is necessary based on consideration of all circumstances surrounding a case or work environment. Broad consideration should be given to the safety of all staff, communities, families, and children and youth. If a supervisor determines that a teamed response is necessary, employees are not permitted to decline.

Examples of other circumstances where a teamed response may be appropriate include, but are not limited to, the following:

- (1) *A teamed response may be used when transporting a child not previously known to the division, when information is limited, or there are indicators of an acuteness of need or consequent unpredictability.*
- (2) *A teamed response may be used during a home or community visit with clients or household members with known emotional or behavioral challenges (e.g., a history of sexually harmful behaviors, physical aggression, making false accusations, or running away).*

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- (3) *A teamed response may be necessary when transporting a group of children, depending on the ages and developmental levels of the children, to adequately supervise the children while driving to the destination.*
- (4) *A teamed response may be necessary when a child or youth first enters DCF custody when making an initial out-of-home placement or during a placement change the youth is ambivalent about or in disagreement.*

If at any time a child or youth exits a vehicle without permission, the individual or team providing transportation must exercise reasonable judgment on whether to follow the young person, contact law enforcement, or both. Division staff, caregivers, or individuals providing contracted non-secure transportation are not expected to jeopardize their own safety by attempting to apprehend the young person.

At the discretion of the individuals providing transportation, the young person’s personal items (bags, purses, backpacks, etc.) may be locked in the vehicle’s trunk if the youth’s behavior indicates this will increase safety or reduce risk to run away.

Transportation After Hours


Family Services [Policy 140](#) (Standby and Call-In) articulates the following after hours response guidelines about transportation:

In situations regarding youth transports or situations where a child or youth require contact with workers after hours (e.g., accompanying or supervising a child at a hospital or police station), CIES will gather as much information about the child as possible and share this information with the worker. If limited information is known about a youth entering care because of their own behavior or delinquent acts, possible risks and the safety of staff will be considered when deciding how the youth will be transported.

CIES will collaborate with workers to determine if a teamed response is needed and call-in another worker if warranted. Family services workers should contact the CIES supervisor if they do not feel safe with a situation where they are being called in and would like additional resources (a teamed response) to respond.

Non-Contracted Options for Transportation

Generally, children and youth in DCF custody should have access to the most normal and trauma-informed means of transportation as is possible and available – i.e., with family members, the people they live with, other individuals known to them, or division

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staff. Caregivers, by exercising the reasonable and prudent parent standard (RPPS), may allow children and youth to be driven by people known to them. Additionally, some youth in DCF custody have their driver’s license and can drive themselves and their family members or household residents. See Family Services [Policy 75](#) for additional information on the RPPS and supporting normalcy and youth driving.

Non-contracted transportation options include situations where a child or youth rides with a licensed driver in a private vehicle, state fleet car, rental car, or transportation service vehicle. Preferably, the licensed driver should be known to the child or youth. As age and developmentally appropriate, children/youth may utilize public transportation, taxicab services, or ride sharing options.

Contracted Options for Transportation

When using a contractor for transportation services, there are three different levels:

1. Standard Transportation
2. Safety Enhanced Transportation
3. Secure Transportation

All contracted drivers are subject to background checks (child abuse registry, criminal records, and DMV database)².

Contracted Standard Transportation

When standard transportation is provided as a contracted service, the child or youth is transported by a licensed driver in a private vehicle, business vehicle, rental car, or transportation service vehicle.


Contracted Safety Enhanced Transportation

When safety enhanced transportation is utilized, a contracted service provider transports the young person (youth who are considered a moderate risk to flee, are not known to the division, or may need a second skilled person in the vehicle for safety and monitoring) in a safe and secure manner without using physical restraints. Their staff are trained in restraint procedure if it becomes necessary during transport.

Contracted Secure Transportation

The Agency of Human Services (AHS) maintains a statewide contract with Vermont

² Division staff are subject to these background checks prior to hire. Respite providers, foster/kinship parents, and residential treatment program staff are subject to these background checks during the licensing process (initially and during renewals).

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County Sheriffs for the purpose of providing secure transportation. When contracted secure transportation is utilized, youth are transported in a law enforcement vehicle utilizing the AHS protocol for secure transportation. It is best practice for the law enforcement officer to be accompanied by a second adult, preferably one known to the child or youth. However, this may not always be possible.

According to the AHS protocol, secure transportation is approached in the following priority order:

1. Provide a secure transport by avoiding any form of restraint;
2. Provide a secure transport through utilization of soft-restraint;
3. Provide a secure transport through utilization of metal restraint.

Secure Transportation Protocol

Secure transportation is permitted only in the instances specified below:


- Transport for placement at a secure facility (in-state or out-of-state); or
- Transport for a youth already residing at a secure facility (i.e., transportation to and from court); or
- The child or youth poses high risk to themselves or to another person, as documented on the *Transportation Assessment Form (FS-653)* and the risk cannot be safely controlled using non-secure transport.

Although secure transportation is permitted for youth being placed at a secure facility or already residing at a secure facility, secure transportation is not required for all transports. It may be likely that youth initially being placed at a secure facility will be transported securely due to the risk to themselves and others. There are also instances where youth may be placed at a secure facility and do not need to be transported securely, such as when they are interviewing at a residential treatment program or transitioning back into the community.

See the [Secure Sheriff Transport Request Protocol](#). All secure (Sheriff) youth transport requests are usually handled by the Windham County Sheriff's Office dispatch unless they are busy with emergencies.

To request approval for secure transportation, the assigned family services worker or Centralized Intake and Emergency Services (CIES) staff must complete the *Transportation Assessment Form (FS-653)* and *Request for Secure Transportation of a Juvenile Form (FS-652)*.

Between midnight and 8:00 AM, CIES may provide verbal authorization to law

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enforcement for secure transport and ensure the forms are sent the following morning. All secure transports must be approved as follows:

Circumstance:	Approval Required From:
All daytime/business hour transports	supervisor or district director
All after-hours transports	covering CIES supervisor

If the youth is picked up out-of-state, the division will contact the sheriff contractor geographically closest to where the youth is being held. Approval from Vermont’s ICPC deputy compact administrator is required before a sheriff contractor leaves to return a youth in DCF custody from another state.

In instances where youth are placed in secure facilities and need to be transported to attend any court hearing (family court or criminal court), the court should be notified of the need for secure transportation. Invoices for transport from secure facilities to court should be submitted to the Department of State’s Attorneys and Sheriffs.

State Vehicles with Partitions/Barriers Between the Driver and Passengers

If a district office has a vehicle with partitions or barriers between the driver and passengers, they must create a protocol governing how it will be utilized. Any protocol developed must rule out less-restrictive options as unsafe or not appropriate for the circumstances prior to use of the partitioned vehicle. The protocol should be sensitized to addressing unconscious bias and combating disproportionality and disparity in how children and youth are transported within the state’s child protection and juvenile justice system.

Appendix I: Safety & Logistical Tips for Transporting Children and Youth

Planning Considerations:

- Consider the pros and cons of utilizing a fleet vehicle or rental vehicle vs. a personal vehicle:
 - Some individuals may feel safer taking their personal vehicle during winter months because of the snow tires they have and the comfort of driving a familiar vehicle in inclement weather.
 - For some individuals, taking a fleet car or rental car instead of a personal vehicle provides a sense of privacy so their license plate number or make/model of vehicle are not known to clients.
 - Sometimes the urgency of the matter and what options are available may determine this for us.
- Be aware of areas you might encounter without cell phone service.
- Utilize SafeSignal technology, which can be used with or without cell service for emergency notification.
- Always know who your point of contact is if an issue comes up (this may be CIES and/or you may have local agreements within your district office between your supervisor, team, DD, etc.)
- Know who to call if you have car trouble or need roadside assistance (BGS, AAA, Auto Insurance Provider, etc.)
- Did you inquire about a teamed response? Consider whether a second person should join you for the transport. This may be recommended due to safety reasons, challenging child/youth behaviors, concerns about allegations, managing complex medical or supportive equipment, etc.
- Be mindful of how well rested you are and how that will impact you on the length of the drive.
- For youth with challenging behaviors, consider whether you need a vehicle with third row seating (which allows a second person to sit in the middle row).
- Consider whether to use the vehicle's child safety locks for the backseat.
- Consider whether to disengage window controls and lock the windows.
- Depending on the age of the child/youth, consider whether you know how to install car seats and booster seats.
- Refresh your memory on child passenger safety requirements (height/weight requirements for rear-facing infant seats, forward facing car seats/booster seats, seat belts, etc.)
- Do not wear large pieces of jewelry or scarves around your neck while transporting youth.
- Plan your route – know where you want to stop for food, gas, or bathroom breaks.
- For long drives, consider meeting the child/youth the night before or transport early in the morning so they can sleep during the drive.
- Consider whether there is a need to have Naloxone/Narcan/Evzio on hand in the vehicle.

While Driving:

- Always operate a safe vehicle in working order with enough gasoline to get to and from the destination.
- If driving after hours, try to have a full tank of gas since there are a limited number of gas stations open 24/7.
- Keep all valuables or personal items out of sight in the vehicle (especially your cell phone). If you won't need items during the transport, remove them or move them to the trunk, glove box, or side door.
 - Items that are not needed could be stored/locked in a trunk.
 - Small items such as a wallet or purse could be stored in the compartment on the driver's side door.

- Remove money and change from the vehicle so that children/youth are not tempted to take it or ingest it.
- Remove all sharp objects, including pens, pencils, pocket knives, or similar items.
- If driving during winter months, move any snow scrapers or ice picks into a more secure location (trunk, along the driver's side seat, etc.). If driving during warmer months, remove snow scrapers and ice picks from the vehicle.
- Keep extra windshield wiper fluid out of reach from children/youth.
- Be mindful of what is in the glove box and if you have the ability to lock it.
- Consider where the child/youth will sit:
 - Generally, children should sit in the back seat for safety. The AAP and CDC recommend all children younger than 13 should be seated in the back seat.
 - There are guidelines about who can sit in the front passenger seat based on height/weight/age. Staff are not under any obligation to allow children to sit in the front seat.
- Have an awareness of the items the child/youth has with them and where their belongings are stored in the vehicle.
- Keep your car doors locked while driving; if necessary, keep windows only partially open while driving.
- Ask the child/youth about their preferences on air conditioning and/or heat – and try to accommodate them.
- Let youth exit vehicles first to safeguard against them locking themselves inside the vehicle, grabbing items, or attempting to steal the car.

Rapport Building & Keeping Kids Entertained:

- Allow kids to choose the music they want to listen to
- Allow kids to eat food or snacks
- Try to engage with kids in conversation (avoiding sensitive topics or adult/case topics)
- Bring books in the car for kids (as long as this won't make them car sick)
- Depending on the vehicle or resources available, allow them to watch a movie
- Do not allow them to use your phone!

While Stopped:

- Be mindful that restaurants, gas stations, and service plazas often have free Wi-Fi (this could be helpful for your use or a reminder to safeguard if the youth has a known device or talent in obtaining additional phones/devices).
- If there is a choice in available restrooms:
 - Choose one with multiple stalls so you can be nearby; or
 - Choose a family restroom with only one exit so you can remain outside the door.