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Chapter:	Working with Families	
Subject:	Normalcy and the Reasonable and Prudent Parent Standard (RPPS)	Page 1 of 11
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Purpose

To provide guidance to division staff about promoting normalcy for children and youth in DCF custody, and to provide guidance for caregivers about applying the reasonable and prudent parent standard (RPPS).

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Related Policies

Family Services [Policy 72](#): Educational Achievement and Stability for Children and Youth in DCF Custody

Family Services [Policy 76](#): Supporting and Affirming LGBTQ Children & Youth

Family Services [Policy 77](#): Medical Care for Children and Youth in DCF Custody

Introduction

[The Preventing Sex Trafficking and Strengthening Families Act](#) of 2014 ([PL 113–183](#)) requires child welfare agencies to promote normalcy and well-being for children and youth in foster care. [PL 113–183](#) also requires child welfare agencies to implement a reasonable and prudent parent standard (RPPS), whereby permission for normal, day-to-day activities and events shifts from division staff to caregivers.

Vermont [Act 106](#) of 2018 establishes the reasonable and prudent parent standard into state law and creates liability protection for caregivers acting in accordance with the reasonable and prudent parent standard.

Definitions

Age or Developmentally Appropriate: Activities or items that are:

(a) generally accepted as being suitable for children of the same chronological age or level of maturity or that are determined to be developmentally appropriate for a child, based on the development of cognitive, emotional, physical, and behavioral capacities that are typical for an age or age group; and

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(b) in the case of a specific child, activities or items that are suitable for the child based on the developmental stages attained by the child with respect to the cognitive, emotional, physical, and behavioral capacities of the child.

Caregiver: A foster parent, including a kinship foster parent or residential treatment or other program, with whom a child or youth in DCF custody has been placed (33 V.S.A. § 4906(a)(1)).

Normalcy: Allowing children and youth in out-of-home care to experience childhood and adolescence in ways like their peers not in foster care. This includes opportunities to participate in activities and experiences such as:

- After-school clubs and sports;
- Recreational and community activities;
- School field trips;
- Sleepovers;
- Part-time jobs or summer employment;
- Driver’s education;
- Choice in personal style and expression;
- Cultural and religious practices and expression;
- Access to cell phones, computer usage, and social media;
- Reasonable curfews; and
- Reasonable rules regarding dating and socializing with peers.

Reasonable and Prudent Parent Standard (RPPS): The standard characterized by careful and sensible parental decisions that maintain the health, safety, and best interests of a child or youth in DCF custody, while at the same time encouraging the emotional and developmental growth of the child, that a caregiver must use when determining whether to allow a child in DCF custody to participate in extracurricular, enrichment, cultural, and social activities (33 V.S.A. § 4906(a)(2)).

Policy

Caregivers shall use the reasonable and prudent parent standard when determining whether to allow a child in DCF custody to participate in extracurricular, enrichment, cultural, and social activities (33 V.S.A. § 4906(b)). Caregivers are authorized to provide or withhold permission without prior approval of division staff to allow a child or youth in their care to participate in normal childhood activities and events. Caregivers may approve or disapprove activities independently without the division’s explicit permission unless the activity:

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- (1) conflicts with a safety plan, treatment plan, case plan, or court order; OR
- (2) last more than 72 hours (as a singular event, not the totality of hours spent doing the activity over an extended period of time).

Per Vermont law, a caregiver shall not be liable for injuries to a child in DCF custody that occur as a result of acting in accordance with the reasonable and prudent parent standard. A caregiver acting in good faith in compliance with the RPPS shall be immune from civil liability arising from such action (33 V.S.A. § 4906(c)).

Consultation with division staff is encouraged for decisions where the parent’s and caregiver’s wishes or opinions differ. Caregivers may seek consultation from division staff as needed or desired. See Appendix I for additional information and guidance.

Appendix I: Reasonable and Prudent Parent Standard (RPPS) Caregiver Guidelines

Child & Youth Activity Category	GREEN – Examples of childhood activities that are generally considered normal which caregivers can approve or disapprove independently without DCF-FSD’s explicit permission	RED – Examples of childhood activities DCF-FSD must discuss with caregivers, approve, or obtain a court order
<p><i>DCF-FSD approval is needed for any events or activities that (1) conflict with a safety plan, treatment plan, case plan, or court order OR (2) last more than 72 hours. “72 hours” refers to a singular event, not the totality of hours spent doing the activity over an extended period of time. Consultation with DCF-FSD staff is encouraged for decisions where the parent’s and caregiver’s opinions differ.</i></p>		
Recreation Activities	<p>Children/youth and caregivers must comply with all laws and use appropriate protective/safety gear (helmet, life jacket, harness, pads, etc.) based on the activities. Examples include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community events • Cultural events • Family events, gatherings, parties, or reunions • Health and fitness-related activities (gym, weightlifting, high intensity interval training (HIIT), yoga, pilates, running, jogging, jump roping, etc.) • Outdoor activities (camping, fishing, hiking, climbing, biking/cycling, skateboarding, rollerblading, roller skating, riding scooters or hoverboards, riding pedal cars or drifter karts, horseback riding, swimming, diving, snorkeling, rock climbing, ice skating, skiing, snowboarding, snow tubing, river tubing, river rafting, canoeing, kayaking, paddle boarding, other sporting activities, etc.) • Playing in a public park or on a playground 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Any events or activities that conflict with a safety plan, treatment plan, case plan, or court order • Any events or activities lasting more than 72 hours
Social & Extracurricular Activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Camps • Field trips and school-related trips • School dances, prom, and post-prom activities • Band, orchestra, voice lessons, or lessons for a musical instrument • Student council/government, student newspaper, debate team, or other academic competitive teams and clubs • Community service, volunteer projects, or philanthropic opportunities • Cultural or language clubs • Gender & Sexuality Alliance (GSA) meetings/activities at school or in the community; LGBTQ community events or support groups • Youth Development Program (YDP) activities • After school clubs or other school-related activities (art, drama, chorus, ballet, dance classes, etc.) • Sports or athletic activities (football, basketball, baseball, softball, soccer, wrestling, lacrosse, hockey, track and field, tennis, cross country, golf, volleyball, cheerleading, dance team, golf, gymnastics, martial arts, ultimate frisbee, roller derby, etc.) • Amusement parks, waterparks, museums • Concerts, festivals, musicals, plays, other artistic performances 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Field trips or school-related trips lasting more than 72 hours • Field trips or school-related trips requiring international travel (excluding Canada if less than 72 hours) • Any events or activities that conflict with a safety plan, treatment plan, case plan, or court order • Any events or activities lasting more than 72 hours

Child & Youth Activity Category	GREEN – Examples of childhood activities that are generally considered normal which caregivers can approve or disapprove independently without DCF-FSD’s explicit permission	RED – Examples of childhood activities DCF-FSD must discuss with caregivers, approve, or obtain a court order
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Movies, bowling, laser tag, paintball, arcades, or other social activities • Time with peers; “hanging out” in the community or at someone’s home • Sleepovers (spending the night away from the caregiver’s home at a friend’s house or having a friend over to spend the night) • Dating and romantic relationships 	
Religious, Cultural, & Tribal Participation	<p>Children and youth will be supported in attending religious and cultural services and activities of their choosing, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attending religious services of the child or youth’s choice • Participating in church, mosque, synagogue, temple, or other place of worship activities • Participating in cultural activities and events • Participating in tribal activities and events • Speaking in one’s native language with siblings or others who speak the language 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Instances where the child/youth’s and parent’s opinions are in conflict • Instances where the child/youth’s and caregiver’s opinions are in conflict • Instances where the caregiver’s and parent’s opinions are in conflict • Any events or activities lasting more than 72 hours
Travel	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All travel within the United States and Canada lasting less than 72 hours using the <i>Foster Parent Authorization Letter</i> which should be given to caregivers at the time of placement, or provided by DCF-FSD upon request • Taking public transportation alone or with peers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All travel lasting more than 72 hours • All out-of-country travel (excluding Canada), which will require a passport and authorization letter specific to the trip • Any travel that conflicts with a safety plan, treatment plan, case plan, or court order
Supervision	<p>Specific to supervision, the Licensing Regulations for Foster Homes in Vermont require caregivers to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide or arrange for supervision appropriate to each child’s age and developmental level (#302); • Have a plan for providing appropriate substitute care in their absence for employment or other purposes (#303); and • Take reasonable steps to safeguard foster children from hazards (#306). <p>See the Child Welfare Information Gateway’s guidance on leaving a child home alone (specifically the prompts on age and maturity, circumstances, and safety skills). There is no universally accepted age when all children can stay home alone safely.</p> <p>Caregivers must consider a child’s physical, mental, developmental, and emotional maturity and needs, and their willingness and comfort with being alone. Caregivers need to be sure children have the skills and maturity to handle unsupervised situations safely. Caregivers may consider leaving a child unsupervised once they have reached the developmental maturity of 11 years of age and older.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inadequate supervision that violates the Licensing Regulations for Foster Homes in Vermont or Licensing Regulations for Residential Treatment Programs in Vermont • Inadequate supervision that places a child or youth at risk of harm or risk of serious physical injury (see Family Services Policy 50) • Supervision arrangements that conflict with a safety plan, treatment plan, case plan, or court order

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Babysitting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Enroll and participate in online or in-person babysitting classes offered by the American Red Cross or other reputable organization. If developmentally appropriate and determined to be safe, youth age 11 and older in DCF custody may babysit other children. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Children/youth with sexually harmful behaviors are not permitted to babysit Children/youth in DCF custody are not permitted to babysit other children in DCF custody DCF-FSD approval is required for siblings to babysit other siblings in DCF custody Babysitting that conflicts with a safety plan, treatment plan, case plan, or court order
Employment (in accordance with state and federal laws)	<p>Youth 14 years and older will be encouraged and supported in:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Accessing employment-related services, such as the Vermont Department of Labor (DOL) or VocRehab Vermont Seeking internship opportunities and/or job shadowing Interviewing for employment Obtaining employment if it does not interfere with school <p>Opportunities for children and youth under 14 may include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Job shadowing experiences Internship opportunities Babysitting Community service, volunteer projects, or philanthropic opportunities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Children/youth under 14 years old are not legally permitted to work
Motorized Activities	<p>Children/youth and caregivers must comply with all laws, take required safety courses, and use appropriate protective/safety gear. See the Vermont law specific to all-terrain vehicles, Vermont ATV Manual, the Vermont Snowmobile Regulations, the Handbook of Vermont Boating Laws and Responsibilities, Vermont’s Legal Requirements for Boating, and the Official Vermont Boating Safety Course Online for additional information.</p> <p>Children/youth riding in/on a motorized vehicle with an adult, including but not limited to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Snowmobiles All-terrain vehicles (ATV) Dirt bikes Go-karts Jet skis Boats 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Children under 12 years old are not legally permitted to operate most motorized equipment or vehicles without restrictions Any activities that conflict with a safety plan, treatment plan, case plan, or court order

Child & Youth Activity Category	GREEN – Examples of childhood activities that are generally considered normal which caregivers can approve or disapprove independently without DCF-FSD’s explicit permission	RED – Examples of childhood activities DCF-FSD must discuss with caregivers, approve, or obtain a court order
	<p>Youth 12 years and older operating motorized equipment/vehicles supervised by a legal adult and following the appropriate safety guidance, including but not limited to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Snowmobile • All-terrain vehicles (ATV) • Dirt bikes • Go-karts • Jet skis • Boats <p>For children under 12 to operate an ATV in Vermont, they must be on land owned by their parents, family, or guardian; have written permission of the landowner or lessee where they are operating the ATV; or must be directly supervised by someone at least 18 years of age.</p>	
Lawn & Farm Equipment	<p>Children/youth and caregivers must comply with all laws and use appropriate protective/safety gear. See the American Academy of Pediatrics Lawn Mower Safety Recommendations.</p> <p>Lawn Equipment:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Operate a walk-behind power mower or hand mower if 12 years or older • Operate a riding lawn mower if 16 years or older • Operate a brush cutter (also known as trimmer mowers or weed whackers) if 16 years or older <p>Farm Equipment:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Grant approval for youth to enroll in a tractor safety course if 14 years or older 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All operation or use of tractors or other farm equipment • Any activities that conflict with a safety plan, treatment plan, case plan, or court order
Driving	<p>See the Vermont Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV) website specific to Teen Drivers, the AAA Guide to Teen Driver Safety, and the AAA Parent-Teen Driving Agreement.</p> <p>Youth should be supported in taking steps to obtain a driver’s license once they reach 15 or 16 years of age if developmentally appropriate. Youth under 18 years old are required to complete the following phases of the Vermont GDL Program to obtain a driver’s license:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Driver’s education course • Learner’s permit (15 years old) • Junior driver’s license (16 years old) • Senior driver’s license (18 years old) <p>With a junior driver’s license, youth are permitted to drive alone but must follow certain restrictions:</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Any activities that conflict with a safety plan, treatment plan, case plan, or court order

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Youth cannot be employed to drive (delivery jobs or courier service jobs) until they have held the license for 1 year or have turned 18 years old. • Youth cannot carry any passengers for the first 3 months unless they are accompanied by a licensed adult who is at least 25 years old. • Youth may begin carrying family members as passengers only during the second 3 months. • After 6 months, there are no passenger restrictions. <p>Other activities related to driving:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ride in a car with a friend who has a senior driver’s license or junior driver’s license for at least 6 months • Transport other children (peers, siblings, other children placed in the home) if the youth has a senior driver’s license or junior driver’s license for at least 6 months • Ride in a car with an adult, such as a friend’s parent <p>Youth in DCF custody who obtain a driver’s license and are subsequently adopted/change their name are required to officially change the name associated with their driver’s license through the Vermont DMV within 30 days of the name change per 23 V.S.A. § 205.</p>	
Hunting & Activities Involving Firearms	<p>Children/youth and caregivers must follow the Vermont Fish & Wildlife Department’s statutes and regulations and take appropriate safety measures. Firearms must be stored in accordance with the Licensing Regulations for Foster Homes in Vermont (#407).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Grant approval for children/youth to take online hunter education courses • Enroll youth ages 12 and older (at a sixth-grade reading level) in the in-person hunter education course, bowhunter education course, or combined class through the Vermont Fish & Wildlife Department 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Obtain/purchase a hunting license • Hunting with a gun or bow • Archery • Target shooting • Any activities involving weapons that conflict with a safety plan, treatment plan, case plan, or court order
Personal Style & Appearance	<p>When children and youth begin voicing opinions about their appearance, personal style and expression (regardless of gender), caregivers should strive to support their preferences. Examples include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wearing gender affirming hairstyles, clothing, and accessories • Wearing contact lenses or glasses • Temporarily altering one’s appearance (haircut, hairstyle, hair dye, henna tattoo, temporary tattoo, spray tanning or self-tanning, etc.) • Wearing makeup and wearing perfume/cologne • Painting one’s nails or getting manicures or pedicures <p>All children and youth will be supported in wearing gender affirming clothing that aligns with their gender identity.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children/youth in DCF custody are not permitted to use tanning beds • Permanently alter one’s appearance (piercings, gauges, tattoos, etc.) • Instances where the child/youth’s and parent’s opinions are in conflict • Instances where the caregiver’s and parent’s opinions are in conflict • Instances where the child/youth’s and caregiver’s opinions are in conflict

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Technology	<p>Caregivers are expected to establish house rules and norms around acceptable and unacceptable technology use. The rules should consider children’s age, developmental level, maturity, and trust. These norms may differ from family-to-family. Factors caregivers should consider include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Decide where you are comfortable having children use devices. Can they only use it in family spaces, like a family room, office or kitchen? Can they bring it into their bedroom or the bathroom? Can they use it at the dinner table? • Consider the difference between using a device for homework or school projects and using it for entertainment. The child’s school may have specific policies for how a device may be used and by whom (i.e., no siblings or peers). • Talk about what it means to “balance” time spent with technology, media, and other activities. What are some steps your family can take to balance screen time with face-to-face time? Do you want to make the dinner table a device-free zone, in which no family member (not even the adults) may use a cell phone, tablet, or computer? Do you want to set a curfew for when devices need to be shut off or put away? <p>Caregivers are expected to monitor/limit technology use based on the house rules and norms, and clearly explain to youth how they will be monitored or limited. Methods of monitoring technology use include: limiting the number of hours and locations where devices can be used, knowing the child’s passwords and checking their activity, employing privacy settings (location tracking, parental controls for internet use, or use of monitoring apps), and having ongoing dialogue about online behaviors and setting healthy limits. Caregivers should increase monitoring or employ restrictions based on behaviors, violations of agreed upon rules, or incidents. The use of technology is an ongoing discussion and learning opportunity for young people and caregivers.</p> <p>See Social Media: Tips for Foster Parents and Caregivers and Common Sense Media’s Family Toolbox, which contains family media agreements, device contracts, a media log, tip sheets, a sexting handbook for teens, digital glossary of terms, parent advice videos, and activity sheets.</p> <p>When safe and developmentally appropriate, children and youth should:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have access to and learn how to use technology, the internet, and electronic devices (iPods, tablets, laptops, computers, gaming systems, etc.) with appropriate monitoring • Have access to social media accounts with appropriate monitoring • Receive support and be taught about the risks of technology and social media for all young people, and the special risks that children in foster care might face • Learn how to keep personal information private and set strict privacy settings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Own a cell phone • Technology access for youth who have recently run away or been missing • Technology access that places a suspected or known victim of sex trafficking in danger or at risk • Technology use that compromises a child or family’s confidentiality • Allowing unlimited and/or unmonitored technology access is not permitted • Technology access which conflicts with a safety plan, treatment plan, case plan, or court order

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have access to online support/community groups for youth in foster care, such as FosterClub, Foster Care Alumni of America, and the Youth Development Program’s Facebook Page • Learn how to use technology in support of future life skills (build a resume, search for jobs, search for apartments, research future career options, search and apply for colleges, scholarships, or financial aid) 	
Photos	Children and youth will be supported in having yearbook photos, senior photos, school dance photos, and other photos with teammates or peers. Additionally, photos of children and youth may appear in a newspaper if the young person is not identified as a “foster child”, in “DCF custody”, or “a ward of the state”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Photos of children/youth in DCF custody for brochures or advertising purposes are not permitted • Photos that conflict with a safety plan, treatment plan, case plan, or court order
Privileges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Access to toys, games, books, movies, etc. within the home • Magazine or other mailed or electronic subscriptions • Rearranging one’s bedroom or having choices of décor or decoration 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Privileges that conflict with a safety plan, treatment plan, case plan, or court order
Financial Skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Receive a personal allowance • Open and maintain a bank account (savings and/or checking) • Learn how to balance a checkbook and write/deposit checks • Learn how to use online banking • Learn basic credit and loan information 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Activities that conflict with a safety plan, treatment plan, case plan, or court order
Privacy	<p>The Licensing Regulations for Foster Homes in Vermont (#319) require foster parents to respect a child’s privacy (including personal space and personal belongings). Caregivers are expected to establish house rules and norms regarding respecting all household members’ privacy. For instance:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is there a rule about knocking on closed doors before entering? • Are there rules regarding closing bedroom doors (when the child is alone vs. when friends, siblings, or a significant other are in the bedroom)? • Are household members welcome in bedroom spaces? • Is it expected that the person doing laundry will be entering bedrooms and bathrooms to gather laundry and put clean laundry away? • Similarly, is it expected that household members will enter bedrooms to collect glasses, dishes or other items from the kitchen that may have accumulated in a bedroom? • Are there any behaviors or actions that could prompt an area to be searched? How is this communicated to the young person? <p>Children and youth are always able to have private conversations with their attorney, guardian ad litem (GAL), Family Services Worker, therapist, or other team members</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Privacy which conflicts with a safety plan, treatment plan, case plan, or court order • Privacy infringements that violate the Licensing Regulations for Foster Homes in Vermont or Licensing Regulations for Residential Treatment Programs in Vermont • Privacy which conflicts with a therapeutically or medically determined and documented need • There are limits to privacy in circumstances of imminent danger (concern of a missing weapon, active threats of self-harm or suicide, etc.) • Surveillance recording devices of any kind (video monitors, “nanny

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	<p>as requested or desired.</p> <p>Additional privacy considerations:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ability to have private conversations with others • Age and developmentally appropriate freedom and alone time • Bedroom privacy • Bathroom privacy 	<p>cameras”, baby monitors, or audio recording devices) are not permitted to be used in children’s bedrooms above the age of 5 years old unless the circumstance meets the therapeutic, medical, or safety related exception criteria above</p>
Health & Wellness	<p>With the <i>Foster Parent Authorization Letter</i>, caregivers are permitted to obtain routine and emergency medical, psychiatric, psychological, dental, ophthalmologic, or other specialized medical services or treatment recommended by a licensed physician for children and youth in DCF custody. Additionally:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Routine medical care will include immunizations and vaccinations. • Children and youth are always able to have private conversations with doctors or other medical professionals, and request privacy in exam rooms. • Youth may provide input regarding their medication management. • Youth may administer medication on their own if developmentally appropriate and determined to be safe. <p>Youth will be supported in their reproductive, contraceptive, and sexual health care needs, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Having access to age-appropriate and medically accurate sexual health information and education. • Following the medically recommended schedule for gynecological or obstetrics appointments. The American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (ACOG) recommends that females first see a gynecologist between the ages of 13 and 15. This first appointment may occur earlier if there is a medical need or request by the youth. • Having access to feminine hygiene products (tampons, pads, menstrual cups) of the youth’s choice. • Per Vermont law, children and youth of any age are permitted to seek reproductive health services and obtain birth control or abortions on their own without parent/guardian or partner permission. <p>Per Vermont Act 35, minors may give consent to receive any legally authorized outpatient treatment (psychotherapy and other counseling services that are supportive, but not prescription drugs) from a mental health professional without the consent of a parent or legal guardian.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Changes in providers (primary care, therapist, etc.) must be approved by DCF-FSD • Specialized tests, anesthesia, and all surgery must be approved by DCF-FSD • Children and youth’s treatment plans must be signed/approved by DCF-FSD • Discharge from treatment or psychiatric hospitalization must be approved by DCF-FSD • DCF-FSD oversight is required for all anti-psychotic medications • When a young person seeks mental health treatment without the consent of a parent or legal guardian and DCF-FSD staff or caregivers would like to receive information about their treatment or progress, the youth’s consent is required for a mental health professional to share information with anyone.