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Chapter:	Working with Youth and Families in Court	
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Approved:	Aryka Radke, Deputy Commissioner	Effective: 7/25/2024
Supersedes:	Family Services Policy 83	Dated: 7/27/2022

Purpose

To outline the division’s responsibilities during juvenile court proceedings for delinquency. This policy does not address youthful offender status (Family Services [Policy 164](#)).

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Related Policies

- Family Services [Policy 80](#): Working with Families in Court – Definitions
- Family Services [Policy 82](#): Juvenile Court Proceedings – CHINS
- Family Services [Policy 84](#): Conditional Custody Orders (CCOs)
- Family Services [Policy 91](#): Kinship Care and Collaboration with Relatives
- Family Services [Policy 99](#): Confidential Placements
- Family Services [Policy 122](#): Case Plan Reviews and Permanency Hearings for Children and Youth in Custody
- Family Services [Policy 124](#): Family Time
- Family Services [Policy 125](#): Permanency Planning for Children and Youth
- Family Services [Policy 162](#): Youth Justice and Juvenile Probation
- Family Services [Policy 163](#): Engaging and Supporting Victims and Impacted Parties

Policy

Delinquency Filing Options

Juvenile Jurisdiction (Delinquency) Chart		
AGE at the time of the alleged offense	OFFENSE	
	OFFENSES other than BIG ELEVEN	BIG ELEVEN and other exceptions
10-11	Proceedings start in Family; NO transfer per 33 V.S.A. § 5204(a)	Proceedings start in Family; NO Transfer per 33 V.S.A. § 5204(a)
12-13	Proceedings start in Family; NO transfer per 33 V.S.A. § 5204(a)	Proceedings start in Family per 33 V.S.A. § 5201(c); Transfer to Criminal is an option (5204(a))
14-15	Proceedings start in Family; NO transfer per 33 V.S.A. § 5204(a)	Proceedings start in Criminal per 33 V.S.A. § 5201(c); Transfer to Family as a delinquency is an option (5203(b)) or as YO
16-18*	Proceedings start in Family per 33 V.S.A. § 5201(d) Misdemeanors: NO transfer	Proceedings start in Criminal per 33 V.S.A. § 5201(c) and 33 V.S.A. § 5201(c)(2) or (3)

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* 19-year-olds will be treated as delinquents on 4/1/2025.	Felonies: Transfer to Criminal upon motion per 33 V.S.A. § 5204(a)	Transfer to Family as a delinquency is an option per 33 V.S.A. § 5203(b) or as YO
19-21	Only juvenile jurisdiction now is through YO	

Youth’s Presence Required at Hearings

The youth must be present at all hearings unless the court has waived their appearance. If the youth is in DCF custody, the family services worker must arrange for the child to be present.

Seeking an Emergency Care Order (ECO)

Division staff will request that law enforcement seek an emergency care order for a youth alleged to have committed a delinquent act only when the child’s immediate welfare, the protection of the community, or both, requires removal from the home; or the child’s welfare is otherwise endangered. Only a law enforcement officer has the authority to take a child into physical custody.


The procedure for initiating custody for an 18-year-old youth is the same for children and youth that come into care under age 18. It will be a rare occurrence that we will need to seek custody of an 18-year-old, however, when we are granted custody, staff should follow the same family finding protocols to identify natural supports for consideration as placement resources. Refer to Family Services [Policy 91](#) (Kinship Care and Collaboration with Relatives) for guidance.

Emergency Care Order (ECO)

At the emergency care hearing, the division may recommend:

- A conditional custody order (CCO) allowing the child to remain with the custodial parent, subject to conditions necessary and sufficient to protect the child, the community or both; or
- An order transferring temporary custody of the child to a noncustodial parent or relative; or
- A transfer of temporary custody to DCF pending a temporary care hearing.

The division has information brochures for custodial parents, non-custodial parents, and relatives:

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- [Information for Custodial Parents](#)
- [Information for Non-Custodial Parents](#)
- [Information for Relatives & Friends](#)

Providing Notice to the Noncustodial Parent

Division staff must make reasonable efforts to locate any noncustodial parent and provide the parent with:

- A copy of the emergency care order or conditional custody order, and
- Notice of the temporary care hearing, and of their right to counsel.

If applicable, the division’s brochure titled [Your Child is in DCF Custody: Information for Non-Custodial Parents](#) should be shared with noncustodial parents.

If the noncustodial parent cannot be located, division staff must provide the court with a summary of the efforts made to locate the parent.

Providing Information to Parents

If, as a result of a court hearing, a child is ordered into the custody of the commissioner, division staff shall promptly notify the child’s parents of their rights to appeal certain decisions made by the division. The division’s brochure titled [Your Child is in DCF Custody: Information for Custodial Parents](#) will be given to the parents of all children in custody, including temporary custody.


Special Considerations for Confidential Placements

The division typically informs parents of the location of their child’s placement. In rare instances, a confidential placement may be necessary for safety reasons. Confidential placements may be considered if informing the parents of the child’s placement would compromise the safety of the child or resource family. See Family Services [Policy 99](#) (Confidential Placements) for additional information.

Division Responsibilities at the Temporary Care Hearing

At the temporary care hearing, the division must provide information about:

- (1) Any reasons for the child’s removal which are not set forth in the officer’s affidavit, which includes the division’s history with the child and family;
- (2) Services, if any, provided to the child and the family in an effort to prevent removal;

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- (3) The need, if any, for continued custody of the child with the department, pending a hearing to adjudicate the merits of the petition;
- (4) Services which could facilitate the return of the child to the custodial parent, guardian, or custodian;
- (5) The identity and location of a noncustodial parent, a relative, or person with a significant relationship with the child known to the division who may be appropriate, capable, willing, and available to assume temporary custody of the child;
- (6) Additional information as required by:
 - a. the Uniform Child Custody Jurisdiction Act pursuant to 15 V.S.A. § 1037 regarding the child’s residence over the last five years, and
 - b. The Indian Child Welfare Act pursuant to 25 U.S.C. § 1901 et seq. regarding the child’s membership or possible eligibility for members in a federally recognized Indian tribe.

The [FS-605](#) (Information for the Temporary Care Hearing) is used to report this information.

Indian Child Welfare Act


The division recognizes and supports the intent of the Indian Child Welfare Act to support and preserve the family, tribal, and cultural affiliations of Indian children. Briefly summarized, the requirements of the Act that are relevant in Vermont are:

- (1) The state must identify Indian children subject to the act, including a child who is a member of an Indian tribe or is eligible for membership in an Indian tribe or is the biological child of a member of the Indian tribe.
- (2) Indian parents and tribes have the right to notice of and to intervene in state proceedings involving Indian children;
- (3) In placing an Indian child, special preference must be given to a member of the child's extended family, other members of the child's tribe, and other Indian families, in that order.

Therefore, the division will inquire if a child is or may be an Indian child as defined in the Act. If so, the district office will promptly contact the Assistant Attorney General for DCF for specific instruction on compliance with the Indian Child Welfare Act.

Identifying and Notifying Kinship Resources

See Family Services [Policy 91](#) (Kinship Care and Collaboration with Relatives) for information on federal requirements to notify the child’s relatives of the child’s removal within 30 days.

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Assessing Suitability of Noncustodial Parent, Relatives, and/or Persons with Significant Relationship

When the division has identified a person who may be appropriate, capable, willing, and available to assume temporary custody of the child, the division must conduct an assessment of suitability to care for the child. The assessment of suitability shall include consideration and documentation of the person's ability to care for the child's needs, a criminal history record check, and a check of allegations of prior child abuse or neglect by the person or by other adults in the person's home. The court may request that the hearing be continued when necessary to complete the assessment.

Consideration will be given to relatives who have a relationship with the child and proximity that would allow the child to remain in the same school.

Protective Orders

Under 33 V.S.A. § 5115, the division (or any other party) may file a motion for the court to make an order restraining or otherwise controlling the conduct of a person when that conduct is or may be detrimental or harmful to a child. Such orders may be issued ex parte or after a hearing and may be reviewed at subsequent hearings.

A person subject to a protective order who intentionally violates provisions concerning contact with the child is subject to punishment as provided in 13 V.S.A. § 1030.

Protective Supervision


Protective supervision is the authority granted by the court to the Department for Children and Families (DCF) in a juvenile case to take reasonable steps to monitor compliance with the court's conditional custody order, including unannounced visits to the home in which the child currently resides.

At a temporary care hearing, the court may make an order establishing protective supervision and requiring the department to make appropriate service referrals for the child and the family, if custody is transferred to an individual other than the commissioner.

The court may order protective supervision as part of a disposition order.

Filing of Initial Case Plan within Sixty (60) Days of the Custody Order

If the court grants or continues DCF custody at the temporary care hearing, the division must file an initial case plan for the child and the family within 60 days of the initial

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order transferring custody. The department must provide a copy of the case plan to the parties, their attorneys, and the guardian ad litem. If the disposition takes place within 60 days of the court transferring custody to DCF, the disposition case plan may serve as the initial case plan. This includes 18-year-old youth who are placed in the custody of the department.

33 V.S.A. § 5314(b) specifies that the initial case plan shall not be used or referred to as evidence prior to a finding that a child is in need of care or supervision. If a parent or their attorney has questions about the use of this information in upcoming court proceedings, they should be referred to the state’s attorney.

Refer to Family Services [Policy 122](#) (Case Plan Reviews and Permanency Hearings for Children and Youth in DCF Custody) for information on case plans and plan reviews.

Direct Referral from Court to a DCF Approved Community Justice Program


Following adjudication, in lieu of probation, the court may refer a youth to a community-based provider approved by the division (either a community justice center (CJC) or a balanced and restorative justice program (BARJ)). The youth does not need to be placed on probation to exercise this option. If the community-based provider does not accept the case or if the youth fails to complete the program in a manner deemed satisfactory and timely by the provider, the youth will return to the court for disposition.

Disposition Case Plan for Youth Adjudicated for a Delinquency

Once the court makes a merits finding and order, the division must submit a disposition case plan no later than seven (7) business days before the scheduled disposition hearing. To the extent that the safety of the public and the youth allow, plans for the youth should focus on the family and allow him or her to remain in their own community.

The division may recommend one or more of the following dispositional options:

- (1) Juvenile probation for fixed period of time or until further order of the court; in addition to this a youth who has been adjudicated delinquent may be extended on probation under the supervision of the division until age 19.5 if the youth was 16 or 17 years old when they committed the offense, and up to age 20.5 if the youth was 18 at the time of the offense.
- (2) Continuing or returning custody to the custodial parent, guardian, custodian, or back to the youth if they are 18 years old The division may recommend that for a fixed period, this order be subject to such conditions necessary and sufficient to provide for the safety of the child and the community, including protective supervision for up to six months unless further extended by court order.

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- (3) Transfer of custody to a noncustodial parent, relative, or person with a significant connection to the child. This may be a conditional custody order, and include protective supervision, for a period of up to six months unless further extended by court order.
- (4) Transfer of custody to DCF;
- (5) Termination of parental rights without limitation to adoption or permanent guardianship;
- (6) Directly referring a youth to a community-based provider approved by the division (either a community justice center (CJC) or a balanced and restorative justice program (BARJ)). This option is used in lieu of probation, so the youth should not also be placed on probation if this option is exercised.

Child Support and Other Benefits


The division may apply to receive any financial benefits for which the child is or may be eligible, including child support, based on the best interests of the child and the circumstances of the family. The division will treat income received on behalf of the child as recovery of expenses incurred by the division in caring for the child. When the court discharges the child from custody or the division is no longer supporting the child, any income not expended on the child's care will be refunded to the child or their legal guardian, as appropriate.

When the division continues to support an individual over the age of 18, the division will continue to receive benefits on behalf of the individual unless another agreement has been made. When the individual receives those payments directly, the division will subtract the amount from payments to or on behalf of the individual.

The payment of child support is one way that parents continue their commitment to and responsibility for their children who are in DCF custody. The division will request that the court address child support to be paid by each parent for all children in custody except:

- A parent who is supported by Reach Up or SSI will not be asked to pay child support;
- In rare cases, in which requesting child support is clearly detrimental to the child's best interest, including when the Office of Child Support has granted a domestic violence waiver.

The child benefits specialist will address child support at disposition for each new custody entrant. When the court has not already addressed child support issues, the child benefits specialist will request that child support be addressed at the next permanency hearing.

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Genetic Testing

Where parentage of a child is in question, or the court orders genetic testing, the child benefits specialist will assist the district office in obtaining genetic testing.

Family Contact

33 V.S.A. Chapter 52 on delinquency does not contain detailed provisions for parent-child contact. However, the act specifies that a disposition case plan for a youth in DCF custody contain a recommendation for parent-child contact if appropriate. Both a temporary care order and a disposition order may contain orders for parent-child contact under such terms and conditions as are necessary for the protection of the child.

See Family Services [Policy 124](#) (Family Time (Parent/Child Contact)) for additional information on family time.

Sixty Day Post-Disposition Review

For any youth whose custody is transferred to DCF, or who is the subject of a conditional custody order, the court will hold a post-disposition review within 60 days of the date of the disposition for the purpose of monitoring progress and reviewing the parent-child contact order. Family services workers should use the division’s *Post-Disposition Review Template* for this report.

The division must notify the child’s foster parent, pre-adoptive parent, relative caregiver, or any custodian of the post-disposition hearing using the [Foster Parent Court Notification Card](#). Per 33 V.S.A. § 5320, caregivers have the right to be heard at post-disposition hearings. Judges may ask caregivers to share their perspective verbally in court or in writing. Any individual without party status seeking inclusion in the hearing may petition the court for admittance by filing a request with the clerk of the court. See Family Services [Policy 122](#) for information on case plan reviews.

Conditional Custody Orders – Duration, Review, and Division Responsibilities

CCOs are meant to be time limited. Division staff will make efforts to ensure a timely ending to CCOs and safe closure of these cases.

CCOs with Custodial Parents	The presumptive duration of the order is no longer than six months from the date of the disposition order or conditional custody order, <u>whichever occurs later</u> , unless otherwise extended by the court. If the
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	<p>department, or any party, recommends that the order remain in effect for a longer period, they must file a petition at least 14 days before the presumptive expiration date. Following a hearing, the court may extend the order for a period not to exceed six months. When the final order expires, the court will issue an order vacating the conditions, and transferring full custody to the parent without conditions.</p>
<p>CCOs with Noncustodial Parents and Non-Parents</p>	<p>These orders will be reviewed at a hearing to be held six months from the date of the disposition order or conditional custody order, <u>whichever occurs later</u>. At the hearing, the court shall determine whether it is in the child’s best interest to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transfer either full or conditional custody to a parent; • Establish a permanent guardianship; • Move towards termination of parental rights and adoption; OR • If the court determines that reasonable progress has been made towards reunification, and that reunification is in the best interest of the child, the court may extend the CCO for a period not to exceed six months, and set the matter for further hearing.


During the period of a CCO, the division shall maintain an open case with a case plan and provide appropriate service referrals to the parent(s) and custodian. See Family Services [Policy 84](#) for additional information on conditional custody orders.

Permanency Hearing

The transfer of custody to the department is for an indeterminate period but is subject to periodic review at a permanency hearing. The permanency hearing must be held within 12 months of the transfer of custody away from the custodial parent, and every 12 months thereafter.

The division must file with the court a notice of permanency review together with a case plan and recommendation for a permanency goal. The court must hold a permanency review hearing within 30 days of that filing.

The division must provide notice to the state’s attorney, all parties to the proceeding, and the youth’s foster, pre-adoptive or relative caregivers. Division staff will utilize the

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[Foster Parent Court Notification Card](#) to notify caregivers of their right to be heard at permanency hearings.

Permanency Reasonable Efforts Finding

The division must also file a petition for a finding of reasonable efforts and a report or affidavit, with notice to all parties. Reasonable efforts to finalize a permanency plan may consist of:

- (1) Reasonable efforts to reunify the child and family following the child’s removal from the home, where the permanency plan for the child is reunification; or
- (2) Reasonable efforts to arrange and finalize an alternate permanent living arrangement for the child, in cases where the permanency plan for the child does not include reunification.

Modifying Court Orders and Violations of Probation

A disposition order is a final order. The division or any other party may file a motion to modify the disposition order, or any other order when there are changed circumstances that require the modification to serve the child’s best interests.

During the period of probation, the division may request that the court modify or add to the conditions of probation, including when the youth fails to comply with conditions of probation.


Refer to Family Services [Policy 162](#) for additional information on juvenile probation and violations of probation.

Placement of Probationer

Division family services workers may place a youth on probation or authorize any law enforcement officer to do so by giving the officer a written statement ([FS-316: Detention of Juvenile Probationer](#)), which specifies the violation.

This method of initiating violation of probation proceedings may be employed when the youth has violated a condition of their probation certificate and the youth's behaviors constitute:

- immediate risk to public safety;
- immediate risk to abscond; or
- a pattern of minor violations.

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Vacating Court Orders

The division or any other party may petition the court to vacate some or all of its disposition order and/or to terminate its jurisdiction over the child. Unless all parties waive their right to a hearing, the court must hold a hearing on the petition and give notice to all parties.

Once the juvenile court’s jurisdiction has been terminated, any previous orders regarding the legal relationships between the child and his other parents and/or guardians are fully effective. Examples of these types of orders include custody orders from a parentage or divorce proceeding, or a guardianship order from a probate proceeding. There is an important exception to this: if a judge in a disposition order (1) transfers custody of a child to the parent who was formerly the noncustodial parent and (2) closes the juvenile court case, this disposition order is not confidential and will be made part of the record in any existing parentage or divorce proceeding. In these limited circumstances, the juvenile court’s disposition order replaces the previous custody order in the divorce/parentage case.

If the family services worker recommends a different custody arrangement other than the arrangement that was in place prior to the commencement of the juvenile court proceedings, the juvenile court should not be asked to vacate orders and terminate jurisdiction. Rather, at the next permanency hearing, the family services worker should make their recommendations for the child’s custodial arrangements to the court. If either parent owes court-ordered child support to the division, the child support order should not be vacated. Rather, it should be modified to order the parents to pay arrearages.