

## Between Families newsletter 2024

### Normalcy: Letting Kids Be Kids

[Normalcy: Letting Kids be Kids - CASA | Advocacy In Action \(casaforchildren.org\)](https://casaforchildren.org)

Being a teenager is not an easy feat for anyone. But being a teenager in foster care is a maze of difficulty, red tape, and oftentimes isolation. Until recently, many children in foster care were unable to participate in the childhood activities their peers not in foster care often take for granted – sleep overs, playing sports, field trips, scouts, school pictures, going to a movie, dating, getting a job, having an allowance, a driver’s license or even volunteering. These “normal” activities are referred to as normalcy. Normalcy “encompasses the collection of age and developmentally appropriate activities, experiences and opportunities that should make up the daily lives of young people within the context of a caring and supportive family.”<sup>1</sup>

Childhood activities are important, not just because they are fun, and give a sense of belonging to children and teens, those activities help in brain development, relationship building skills and healthy risk taking. When participating in these activities, youth build networks of relationships or social capital. Social capital is built through participation in activities through which young adults learn to work with others in a community, build networks of support and friend groups. Building lasting relationships outside of the foster home is critical for teens who may age out of the foster care system and need support in what could be a difficult transition. This social capital means having, and being able to, depend on lasting lifelong friends, resources and opportunities, including jobs and internships. Oftentimes youth in foster care have already experienced loss and disruption and have a great need for the community bonds and social capital that normalcy activities can facilitate.

An adolescent’s brain continues to develop through the teen years and their experiences and relationships are essential to the teen’s brain growth. “Psychological development occurs in the adolescent brain’s frontal lobes, particularly in the prefrontal cortex, which governs reasoning, planning, decision making, judgement, and impulse control.”<sup>2</sup> The relationships built, and the experiences created in the activities of childhood create a safe place for learning and healthy risk taking in an environment where caring adults can provide boundaries, advice and a safe environment.

Caring adults can be the teen’s foster parents, school teacher, employer, faith-based organizer, dance instructor, or scout leader. Risk taking is a normal and healthy part of growing up- best done with access to caring adults. Previously, the foster care system was so risk averse, it created an atmosphere of isolation for teen’s in foster care. They were unable to participate in regular activities as simple as getting their high school yearbook picture taken or having a sleep over at a friend’s house without background checks and court orders. Thankfully, those days changed with the passage of the Preventing Sex Trafficking and Strengthening Families Act in 2014.<sup>4</sup> Before that only five States – Florida, California, Utah, Washington, and Ohio – had laws promoting normalcy. The Strengthening Families Act, and the 37 states who have responded to its requirements, have removed barriers to normalcy by allowing foster parents and placements the authority to make normalcy decisions for children in their care. Foster parents are now empowered by these new laws to make decisions regarding day-to-day activities for the children placed in their care.

From dating and babysitting, to sports and employment, there is no longer a need for foster parents to go to the case worker to get permission for children in their care to participate in age appropriate activities as long as foster parents make decisions adhering to the reasonable prudent parent standard. The same laws apply to youth placed in congregate care. There must be an identified decision maker in the group home and the youth should understand how to seek permission from the caregiver to participate in normalcy activities.

**Reasonable Prudent Parent Standard.** The foster parent or placement (this includes children placed in group homes or institutions) must make decisions that maintain the health, safety, and best interest of a child and to make normal, day-to-day decisions affecting children in their care regarding extracurricular, enrichment, cultural, social or sporting activities. **Participation in Age and Developmentally Appropriate Activities.** Many states specifically use language in their normalcy statutes addressing the older youth's rights to participate in age and developmentally appropriate activities. The court may address whether or not the youth is attending family celebrations, spending time with peers and mentors, or even assuming more responsibilities and independence in their current placement. **Case Planning.** Youth 14 and over must participate in creating and revising their case plans. Youth can have two people with them who are not foster parents or case workers to aid them in planning. Youth must also be provided with a list of their rights as part of the case planning process. The list must at least include: rights with respect to "education, health, visitation and court participation," the right to discharge documents and to "stay safe and avoid exploitation." The case plan must include a signed acknowledgement that the list of rights has been received and "explained to the child in age-appropriate way."

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**PLEASE COMPLETE THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONNAIRE**

.5hr credit

- 1) True or False: Children in foster care have always been allowed to participate in childhood activities such as sleep over, playing sports, field trips ect.
- 2) True or False : Normalcy “encompasses the collection of age- and developmentally-appropriate activities, experiences and opportunities that should make up the daily lives of young people within the context of a caring and supportive family.”
- 3) Short answer: Childhood activities are not just fun and give a sense of belonging to children and teens, these activities also \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- 4) Short answer: According to the article how is social capital built? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- 5) True or False: Social Capital means having and being able to depend on lasting lifelong friends, resources and opportunities.
- 6) Short answer: Before the “Preventing Sex Trafficking and Strengthening Families Act in 2014 what 5 states had laws promoting normalcy? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- 7) True or False: From dating and babysitting, to sports and employment, there is no longer a need for foster parents to go to the case worker to get permission for children in their care to participate in age appropriate activities as long as foster parents make decisions adhering to the reasonable prudent parent standard.
- 8) True or False: The court may address whether or not the youth is attending family celebrations, spending time with peers and mentors, or even assuming more responsibilities and independence in their current placement.

## Answer Key

- 1) True or **False**: Children in foster care have always been allowed to participate in childhood activities such as sleep over, playing sports, field trips ect.
- 2) **True** or False : Normalcy “encompasses the collection of age- and developmentally-appropriate activities, experiences and opportunities that should make up the daily lives of young people within the context of a caring and supportive family.”
- 3) Short answer: Childhood activities are not just fun and give a sense of belonging to children and teens, these activities also help in brain development, relationship building skills and healthy risk taking
- 4) Short answer: According to the article how is social capital built? Through participation in activities through which young adults learn to work with other in a community, build networks of support and friend groups.
- 5) **True** or False: Social Capital means having and being able to depend on lasting lifelong friends, resources and opportunities.
- 6) Short answer: Before the “Preventing Sex Trafficking and Strengthening Families Act in 2014 what 5 states had laws promoting normalcy? Florida, California, Utah, Washington and Ohio
- 7) **True** or False: From dating and babysitting, to sports and employment, there is no longer a need for foster parents to go to the case worker to get permission for children in their care to participate in age appropriate activities as long as foster parents make decisions adhering to the reasonable prudent parent standard.
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