

Normalcy Questions and Answers

Question 1: Are teens in foster care allowed to have cell phones? A foster parent said that this is not allowed but not sure if this really means that DCF doesn't pay for it directly but it is otherwise "allowed" like any other child. What's the real answer?

Answer: Clearly the answer is "yes." A child in foster care can have a cell phone. According to the Pew Internet & American Life Project, teen cell phone use is on the rise. The Project first began surveying teenagers about their mobile phones in 2004 when a survey showed that 45% of teens had cell phones. Since that time, mobile phone use has climbed steadily among teens ages 12 to 17 – to 71% in early 2008. Thus, we can clearly state that cell phone use/ownership is the norm for American teens.

There are "things" to consider, as there would be with any other teen not in foster care. For example, who pays for the phone? Funds can come from any number of sources. The system of care should work together with the youth or the foster parent to explore funding options. Some older youth could buy their own cell phone. Some parents may be willing to buy a cell phone for their child while in foster care. There is no expectation for a foster parent to use their personal funds to purchase the cell phone.

Consideration should be given to the method of payment for obtaining and maintaining the cell phone before making a decision and insurance coverage on the phone is encouraged. As with any family unit, considerations as to whether the child gets a cell phone includes responsibility, available funds to purchase the phone and monthly costs, etc.

Ref: DCF, Alan Abramowitz

Date: Nov 2010

Question 2: Is it permissible for youth in foster care to hunt with guns or other weapons such as bows?

Answer: Hunting is a normalcy consideration for youth that should be carefully weighed on an individual basis. Youth who are from counties in areas of the state where hunting is common may have a different concept of normalcy within their family and community as compared to youth from urban areas. The following are critical considerations for staff and family caregivers to review before making any decisions regarding hunting:

This activity must comply with all relevant Florida Statutes (see sections 790.22 and 790.174, F.S.) regarding the possession and use of firearms or other weapons (e.g., bows, etc.) by minors. Prior to participation, staff/foster parents must ensure the youth completes the Florida hunter safety course as required by law and places a copy of the card that is issued upon

completion in the youth's file. The Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission will provide the required guidance.

The decision to permit a youth to participate in the event is a decision that must include the birth parents (consent in writing) if the parents' rights have not been terminated and the foster parent(s), but more importantly you must include the youth in this decision. In addition, if the youth is under the care of a therapist for any reason but more importantly if the child has been a victim of physical abuse or sexual abuse, you must consult with and obtain in writing the therapist's opinion whether the child should participate before agreeing for the youth to go hunting.

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Question 3: We have an upcoming event that involves community volunteers assembling and delivering Thanksgiving Baskets to needy families we serve. We have been advised that the new background check law requires volunteers to complete a Level 2 background screening, and that if they have less than 10 hours of contact per month this requirement can be waived IF the volunteer remains in the line of sight of staff who have completed the background check. Please advise if this applies, and if so, does it apply only to families with DCF involvement/open DCF cases/etc.

Answer: If these volunteers are delivering Thanksgiving Food and NOT any other "service" to the family, they don't need to be screened or remain in the line of sight of staff who have completed the background screening. These "volunteers" are not providing the services that are being addressed in the statute which requires employees and volunteers to be screened as a condition of employment.

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