ACTIVITIES AND LIFE EVENTS

(with Reasonable and Prudent Parenting Standard)

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APPENDIX

VII ACTIVITIES AND LIFE EVENTS

A. Purpose

"Activities and Life Events" provides policy and procedures related to opportunities and events that children may engage in while the Department has planning responsibility. In an attempt to provide normalcy for children in Out of Home Care, Act 2016-129 passed by the Alabama Legislature in 2016, grants caregivers authority to allow children placed in Out-of-Home-Care to participate in age and developmentally appropriate childhood activities based on Reasonable and Prudent Parenting Standards (RPPS). Act 2016-129 includes in the caregiver definition a designated official for a child placing agency. This definition includes, but is not limited to foster parents. This allows foster parents and caregivers increased flexibility and discretion in making decisions regarding age appropriate activities.

Code of Alabama, 1975 §§ 12-15-301 (11), 12-15-314 (g) provides the following:

> Reasonable and Prudent Parent Standard. The standard characterized by careful and sensible parental decisions that maintain the health, safety, and best interests of a child, while at the same time encouraging the emotional and developmental growth of the child, that a caregiver shall use when determining whether to allow a child in foster care under the responsibility of the state to participate in extracurricular, enrichment, cultural, and social activities. A caregiver shall be immune from liability in a civil action to recover damages that results from a caregiver's decision using the reasonable and prudent parent standard. However, This immunity does not remove or limit any existing liability protection provided by law.

> Caregiver Authority. A caregiver shall have the authority without prior approval of the department, juvenile court, or circuit court, to allow a child in their care that is in foster care to participate in activities that are age or developmentally appropriate for the child based on a reasonable and prudent parent standard, provided the activities are consistent with provisions of any existing court order, individualized service plan, or promulgated policy of the department that provides guidance to caregivers concerning the reasonable and prudent parent standard. The guidance shall include factors for the caregiver to consider prior to allowing a child to participate in age or developmentally appropriate normal childhood activities.

Age and Developmentally Appropriate. Activities or items that are generally accepted as 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, 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 respect to the cognitive, emotional, physical, and behavioral capacities of the child.

Children, when in foster care or DHR custody, shall be integrated to the maximum extent feasible into normalized leisure and work activities. The RPPS provides flexibility for the out-of-home caregiver to encourage children to engage in age and developmentally appropriate activities that promote child well-being. It allows for reasonable and prudent parenting decisions to be made by the out-of-home caregiver without waiting to obtain approval from social worker or a court.

DHR shall vigorously seek to assure that children, when in foster care or DHR custody, are integrated to the maximum extent feasible into normalized school settings and activities.

Children, while in foster care or DHR custody, shall have access to a comprehensive array of services that address their physical, emotional, and educational needs.

This policy applies to all children in DHR custody and/or planning responsibility.

B. Consent

Parents retain certain residual rights and responsibilities when their children are placed in out-of-home care. Code of Alabama, 1975 § 12-15-102 (23) describes these rights and responsibilities as including, but not necessarily limited to, the right of visitation, the right to consent to adoption, the right to determine religious affiliation, and the responsibility for support, unless determined by order of the juvenile court not to be in the best interests of the child.

Parental consent is required for non-routine medical decisions. Parental consent is also required for children to participate in activities which could result in potential danger (e.g. driving, football, hunting, etc.).

Exceptions to Caregiver Decision Making:

- Changing a child's school, school attendance, IEP, or participation in a GED program
- Adjusting a child's psychotropic or other prescribed medication
- Authorizing children to have major medical procedures
- Changing a child's court-ordered visitation plan
- Interfering with a child's visits with siblings
- Preventing a child from participating in ILP
- Returning a child to the caregiver from whom they were removed
- Allowing a child to drive

The Individualized Service Plan (ISP) team shall address children's participation in selected school and leisure activities. The ISP team shall evaluate the child's chronological and developmental age, maturity level, purpose of the activity, expected benefit to the child, the availability of resources (e.g., financial, transportation, time) to allow participation, and liability to the child, foster parents, and/or county DHR. Whenever possible the Department will encourage our children to explore hobbies, interest, sports, etc. If the foster parent wishes to have the Department pay for an activity, this payment must first be authorized in the ISP. If a foster parent plans to make payment for an activity related to RPPS, no prior authorization is needed.

A child has the right at the ISP or at any other time to advise a worker whether they believe they have been denied the ability to participate in a normalizing activity.

DHR shall obtain written permission, whenever applicable, from the parents for the child's participation in the selected activity. File the original permission in the case record and provide a copy to the parents and foster parents.

DHR shall sign the PSD-DFC-823, Inter-Agency Agreement, when they place a child in a residential facility. This agreement addresses consent of the county DHR for medical treatment for the child, and provides permission for the child to participate in recreational, social and educational activities offered or approved by the child care facility and taking place within the state.

All residential agencies shall have a staff member trained in RPPS who will be responsible for approving requests for children in out of home care to participate in age and developmentally appropriate activities. If an activity that requires consent from a parent is requested, the residential staff member trained in RPPS will contact the child's Social Worker for guidance. Please note the exceptions to caregiver decision making listed above.

DHR is prohibited by law from signing "hold harmless" agreements or "hold harmless" statements in contracts. Staff shall carefully review all agreements for "hold harmless" statements since they are sometimes included in residential facility agreements or special permission requests. Child welfare staff may strike through the "hold harmless" statement and add an addendum indicating that DHR is prohibited by law from entering into "hold harmless" agreements on behalf of the State and therefore agrees to assume only whatever responsibility may be otherwise legally assumed by the State. If there are questions about the "hold harmless", contact the Office of Resource Management.

C. Clothing & Appearance

Clothing and other personal possessions contribute significantly to the child's feelings of normalcy, self-esteem and dignity. If at all possible, a child should bring with him into foster care his/her own clothing and personal items. Parents should be encouraged to have these items ready. This is helpful to parents and children in that they are actively participating in the plan, as well as knowing they are providing needed items.

Temporarily Altering Appearance (e.g., Haircut/color): Foster parents should make the decisions as to temporarily altering of a child's appearance based on known preferences of the birth parent. Birth parents' wishes shall be shared with the foster parent at the time of placement and at the ISP. Children 14 years old or older shall also participate in the decision-making process (Please see Chapter 420-3-23 of the Alabama Department of Public Health Administrative Code for rules and regulations regarding permanently altering appearance).

If the parents are unable to provide an adequate initial supply of clothing or if the Department is unable to provide this through some other source, the foster parents should be authorized to purchase an initial specified amount of clothing to be paid for from local public or private funds when such is available. Workers and foster families can assist accordingly.

Eight percent (8 %) of the board payment should be allotted each month for clothing expenses. This may not always meet the ongoing need for clothing as children outgrow

or clothes need to be replaced; therefore, counties are allowed through Local Fund Polices to spend up to $750.00 per year for clothing. (Refer to Local Funds Policy) The foster care facility (foster family boarding home, therapeutic foster home) is expected to provide clothes for the child from the board payment as long as the child remains in foster care.

D. Spiritual Development

The County DHR shall take into consideration the religious affiliation of the children and their parents when children are placed in foster care. The foster care providers shall be informed about the children's involvement in prior and present religious services and activities. When children are placed within close proximity to their home, they may be able to continue participation in the same services and activities with the assistance and supervision of a family friend or neighbor. Children may attend the services and activities of the foster parents or other religious denominations with agreement from their parents, who retain the residual right to determine religious affiliation. It is always helpful to use the ISP team's expertise as the choices are made.

E. Allowances/Finances

Foster children may receive allowances to develop skills and values in the wise management of money. Important factors to consider in determining when to begin giving allowances are the following:

- age and maturity of the child;
- amount and frequency of the allowance; and
- financial expense of activities approved for the child.

A child placed in a child care facility is to receive an allowance and also have the opportunity to earn spending money as recommended by the ISP team. Allowances are not considered a supplement to the board payment. The source of money for an allowance may be private funds or local funds, except that Flex Funds cannot be used.

1. Obtaining Employment / Participate in an Internship

Youth age 14 years and older in foster care should be appropriately encouraged and supported when pursuing employment as long as it does not interfere with their academic progress regardless of their placement. Employment by teens in foster care, either part-time or during the summer months, will provide youth with opportunities to learn independent life skills and acquire hands-on experience, while also allow them to earn spending money. Federal and State rules regarding young workers are designed to strike a balance between ensuring sufficient time for educational opportunities and allowing appropriate work experiences. (ADOL)

RPPS allows for placement providers to assist foster children with obtaining employment by youth age 14 years and older in accordance with the Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA). Initial employment by teens should be used to provide instruction and guidance related to budgeting and money management without placing grownup expectations on their income. Foster care youth should have

primary input related to the use of these funds. Placement providers cannot require any type of payment from foster children's employment income without collaboration and approval of the ISP team.

Youth in all foster care placements should also be offered the opportunities to participate in available internships, community service and volunteerism. These activities are perfect for helping youth develop a sense of value, creativity, and empowerment when they are willing to give of their time. Youth should be encouraged without being forced or coerced into service projects. An agreeable partnership within the ISP team should be reached to arrange for suitable transportation of youth involved in these activities.

F. Car Seats

According to Section 32-5-222, Code of Alabama 1975, as amended, state law mandates that every person transporting a child in a motor vehicle operated on the roadways, street, or highways, shall provide for the protection of the child by properly using a child passenger restraint system meeting applicable federal motor vehicle safety standards. Specifically the requirements are:

1. Infant only seats and convertible seats used in the rear facing position for infants until at least one year of age or 20 pounds.

2. Convertible seats in the forward position or forward facing seats until the child is at least five years of age or 40 pounds.

3. Booster seats until the child is six years of age.

4. Seat belts until fifteen years of age. Due to this requirement, children under the age of fifteen cannot be transported in the bed of a pick-up truck.

Alabama Law indicates that each front seat occupant of a passenger car manufactured with safety belts in compliance with Federal Motor Vehicle Safety Standards shall have a safety belt properly fastened about his body at all times when the vehicle is in motion. The following rules/practices must also be observed.

No child less than 100 pounds should ride in the front seat of a vehicle.

Staff and foster parents shall refer to all applicable ALEA rules and regulations when transporting foster children.

No foster child shall ever be transported in the bed of a pick-up truck.

The County Department can obtain car seats (convertible and infant) for use by foster parents and workers from Office Services. Workers are to assure that foster parents who transport foster children under the age six have age appropriate car seats available for their usage. This is to be discussed with foster parents when a foster child under six (6) is

placed in the home. Car seats must be returned to the Department if the youngsters leaves the home, or when he/she reaches age 6.

G. Driving

In accordance with Alabama law, a child who attains age fifteen (15) may take a written examination for a learner's permit to drive when accompanied by a licensed driver. At age sixteen (16), a child may test for a driver's license. Completion of a driver's education course shall be encouraged prior to this testing.

1. Permission

With the appropriate permit or license, DHR can authorize or give permission for children in foster care to drive. The preference of the parents is to be addressed at the ISP when possible. The decision to allow children in out of home care to drive is not left to the discretion of the foster parent.

The situation in which ISP team members including parents are not in agreement, DHR may request permission from the court for the child to drive. DHR shall schedule an ISP team meeting to discuss the child's desire to drive and to provide team members an opportunity to consider the request. The plan shall include the privileges and responsibilities which apply, as well as consequences of violating the agreement.

A youth may not obtain a driver's license, drive or purchase a motor vehicle, if the following conditions exist:

- The parent's or legal custodian's objection and the court upholds their objection.
- The youth is known to have a substance abuse problem (drugs or alcohol), currently uses drugs and /or alcohol, or has a recent history without rehabilitation of drug and /or alcohol abuse.
- The youth has a physical condition or other difficulties that would impede driving safely and there are no accommodations for these limitations.

Permission for driving shall be in compliance with the Graduated Diver License Act Number 210-735. The Act provides requirements for each state of the Graduated License which includes: Stage I (Learner's Permit); Stage II (Restricted License) and Stage III (Unrestricted or Regular License. Staff and caregivers should be familiar with this law.

2. Insurance

Children must have liability insurance to drive an automobile. If children in foster care or their birth family purchase the insurance, it is necessary for DHR to verify that the insurance is current and that renewals of premiums have been paid. The foster parents may choose to add liability coverage for the child in their foster home to their insurance policy. If a teen is employed and has his/her own income, they may purchase liability insurance. Other individuals may purchase the liability insurance for the child when authorized to do so by the ISP. Children in foster care are **not** eligible to be covered under the State

General Liability, Automobile Liability Program. The Department cannot purchase insurance through federal, state, or local funds.

3. Purchasing/Owning Vehicles

Permission for a child in DHR custody to purchase/own a vehicle shall be obtained from the parents or the court. The child must have a valid driver's license and liability insurance.

H. Recreational Activities / Socialization

Before allowing children in out of home care to engage in recreational and/or social activities, foster parents should consider whether the child has the safety equipment and necessary permissions and/or training for the child to safely engage in an activity including but not limited to boating, rock climbing, recreational vehicle use, sports or camping.

1. Hunting

Foster care providers shall permit a child in their care to hunt only if they have obtained written permission of the institution, agency, or individual holding custody. Permission for a child in the temporary custody of DHR to hunt shall be granted only by parents or the court. If the child is in the permanent custody of DHR, permission shall be obtained from the court. If the court grants permission, the court order or other written statement provided shall be filed in the case record and a copy sent to the foster care provider. If a parent is the party granting permission, a written statement shall be signed with the original filed in the record and a copy provided to the parent and foster parent.

Code of Alabama § 9-11-44.1 requires persons sixteen (16) years of age or older to present certification of completion of an approved hunter education course prior to obtaining a hunting license. Hunter education courses are offered statewide at each County Extension Services Office. In addition, the Division of Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries Offices offer these courses in certain counties. The county DHR may contact the Department of Conservation and Natural Resources, 1-800-245-2740, for more information.

2. Swimming & Watersports

Minimum Standards states children must have direct supervision by someone 16 or older who is trained in water safety (this is in regard to pools and water safety). Children and youth in care will be encouraged to take swimming lessons from a certified swimming instructor. Families participating in leisure activities involving bodies of water, must also be trained in water safety even if they do not have a pool, spa, hot tub or other body of water on their foster family home /adoptive resource property.

3. Contact sports

The Department's Out of Home Care Policies, section on Maintaining Family Connections provides that parents be contacted for consent in support of their children participating in activities which could result in potential danger (e.g. driving, football, hunting).

4. Socialization

Visiting with friends, including friends from his or her home community or a prior placement, will be promoted for every child in out-of-home care, unless visiting places the child's safety at risk.

The "reasonable rules" outlined in the Maintaining Family Connections section of the Out of Home Care Manual apply to visits with friends. Rules for visiting with friends should be fair, flexible, and consistently applied to all children in the home or other placement unless there is an exception made by the ISP team with the input of the child. The exception must be documented. The reasonable and prudent parent standard is applicable to participation in after-school activities, outings, sleepovers with friends, dating, etc. Please see the appendices at the end of this chapter for a grid that indicates whether a background check is required for participation in specific activities, and if so, what type of background check is required.

5. Social Media

Please see the appendices at the end of this chapter for guidance on the appropriate use of social media.

I. Publicity

Consent may be given for the news media to use photographs of children when the purpose is to recognize a child's achievements (e. g., high school graduation; academic or athletic awards and scholarships). Nineteen and twenty year olds may provide their own consent and must notify their child welfare worker. When DHR holds temporary custody, parental consent shall be obtained if the parents are available and the child is under age nineteen (19) years. Counties should attempt to obtain consent from parents at the initial ISP. If the parents are not available, the County Director may provide consent upon recommendation by the child, the child's worker, and the worker's supervisor following a review of the child's circumstances. If DHR holds permanent custody, the Office of Adoption shall be notified of the plan for publicity. Any concerns or questions regarding publicity and the provision of consent shall be directed to the county's SDHR consultant.

J. Travel of a Child in the Care/Custody of DHR

Routine travel of a child in the care/custody of DHR with an out-of-home care provider is to be expected. As this travel may be either in county or out of county, and does not require prior approval except as noted below, when child welfare staff become aware of travel plans they should routinely remind out of home care providers to contact them when planning the travel, provide contact information, length of the trip and destination.

1. Out of County Travel with an Out-of-Home Care Provider In Excess Of Three Days

The child welfare worker shall instruct foster care parents/providers to notify DHR when an out-of-home care provider desires to take a child on a trip out of county in excess of three days**.** These trips must have DHR approval. The information outlined below shall be obtained prior to approval.

- The circumstances and purpose of the trip;
- The destination;
- The procedure for contact of the worker/provider by county DHR during the trip;* and
- The length of the visit/trip.

2. Out of State Travel with an Out-of-Home Care Provider

For children in the temporary and permanent custody of the Department, any **out-of-state** visits/trips, involving an overnight stay, must have the approval and concurrence of the County Director. The County Director, as the final approving authority for out-of-state travel for foster children, must concur with the out-of-state travel involving an overnight stay. (Refer to section B. Consent, located in this policy, if parental agreement becomes an issue.)

For children in the temporary custody of the Department, travel out-of-country should be approved by the child's parent if the child's parent (s) are actively involved in the ISP process. If the child is in the permanent custody of the Department, then the County Director must determine if it is safe for the child to travel to the out-of-country destination and if it's in the child's best interest.

Out of State travel involving an overnight stay customarily requires the Governor's Office approval; however, the Governor's Office has issued a blanket approval for out-of-state travel for foster children in certain circumstances. The blanket approval provides an expedited process to allow children to have opportunities for recreation, education, or other activities as described. The following circumstances do **not** require the approval of the Governor's Office.

- Foster parents and/or foster children are **not** traveling in the service of the state.
- All expenses are paid by other entities **with no costs to State or County DHR.**
- County Department of Human Resources has received SDHR approval by telephone with written confirmation.

Out-of-state travel forms are still required and must have the signature of the commissioner. Attach the approval to any pertinent travel submission as described above.

3. Air Travel by Children in the Care/Custody of DHR

A written request and the Department's 1584(located on the DHR intraweb under Administration) for approval of all air travel must be submitted to the Family Services. Following approval by Family Services, the request is submitted to the Commissioner for approval. Prior approval for air travel shall be obtained from the Director, Family Services and the DHR Commissioner.

4. Out-of-State Air Travel

There are situations in which the child welfare worker and supervisor have justification for requesting air travel rather than travel by automobile. The following factors must be considered:

- total cost of trip;
- expected travel time;
- loss of worker time and unavailability for other case responsibilities;
- any need for additional staff to accompany the worker and child on an automobile trip; and
- other information pertinent to the request.

5. In-State Air Travel

In addition to the above items there must be further justification for in-state air travel. The following shall be considered:

- medical condition of child that requires air travel as opposed to automobile;
- other information about the child that justifies in-state air travel.

K. Military Service

The opportunity to serve in the Armed Forces is available to anyone meeting enlistment requirements. Federal law requires that males register with Selective Service no later than thirty (30) days after their eighteenth (18th) birthday with registration prior to their birthday preferred. Persons who have attained age seventeen (17) are allowed to volunteer for induction into the Armed Forces with the written consent of their parents or legal guardians. If a parent or legal guardian is not available to sign for the prospective inductee, DHR shall request **either** of the following:

- permission of the court; **or**
- appointment by the court of a guardian who can provide consent for the enlistment (USC 50 App. § 454);

An ISP team meeting shall be held prior to child welfare staff providing assistance to minors entering military service. Factors to consider include:

- The age and maturity of the child;
- The reasoning behind the child's decision to enlist;
- The circumstances at the present time in the child's life;
- The child's vocational plans for now and the future; and
- Information from an armed forces recruiter about realistic possibilities of the child being accepted for military service.

L. Marriage

If a child in the Department's custody under the age of eighteen years wants to marry, and has not been previously married, parental or a guardian's consent is required (Code of Alabama, 1975 § 30-1-5). The judge of probate must require the parents' or guardians' consent be given either personally or in writing. DHR is **not** allowed to provide consent to marriage. However, a judge of probate may in unusual circumstances designate the Department to give consent to marriage.

M. Death and Burial/Cremation

When death occurs while children are in out-of-home care and the birth family is financially unable to assume responsibility, County Departments may request payment from state funds. The child's burial/cremation expenses may be paid by SDHR when the child was placed in out-of-home care pursuant to a court order granting DHR legal custody.

County Departments shall follow the procedures outlined below:

- If parental rights have not been terminated, contact the child's family for input on planning and payment of the final services.
- Determine if the child has resources (i.e., burial insurance or private earmarked funds) which can be applied to the expenses**.** It is not necessary to contact the family regarding resources when the child was in DHR permanent custody.
- Obtain a written itemized statement of estimated expenses from a local funeral home/crematorium. Request the funeral home send the W-9 form along with the itemized statement. The funeral must be modest and grave markers are included as an acceptable expense. "Modest" is suggested as under $2,000, but will be determined by the local market. If there is more than one funeral home in the county, obtain two (2) estimates. Both estimates (originals) must be submitted to SDHR. Funeral homes may offer a reduced price due to the circumstances. The worker should feel free to approach the funeral home regarding these circumstances.
- Explore community resources and obtain contributions, whenever possible, toward the burial expenses**.**

- When burial expenses exceed available resources (e.g., insurance, private earmarked funds, contributions), select the least expensive estimate and request payment from SDHR.

- The county director must sign off on the invoice before submitting to SDHR.

If the child's family desires cremation, the procedures listed above will apply. It is the birth parents right to make the decision regarding the final disposition of the remains.

1. To Request Payment from SDHR:

   - Prepare a memo addressed to the Family Services Director explaining the circumstances surrounding the child's death and the reason State funds are needed to pay burial/cremation expenses. Include resources (e.g., contributions, insurance, private earmarked funds) explored and identify funds utilized to offset the expenses.

     Note: If the child received benefits from Social Security, Supplemental Security Income, or the Veteran's Administration, prior contact must have been made with the local Social Security Administration or Veteran's Administration office to obtain authorization to disburse any fund balances and determine to whom they can be paid. Social Security Administration policy provides that any benefits remaining after the death of a child should go to the estate of the child.

   - When funds have been obtained to offset the expenses, pay that amount directly to the vendor. Document the reduction in expenses on the itemized statement.
   - Submit the memo, funeral home Federal ID known as W-9 form, and the itemized statement for the burial/cremation expenses to SDHR's Office of Child Welfare Consultation (OCWC), Intake for review.

   The OCWC Intake consultant will process the materials for approval and forward to the Finance Division for payment.

N. Life Books

Children in out-of-home care need a link with their past. It is their right to know who they are and from where they come. A life book is a way to help the child form that link. This is done through the collection of historical data, memorabilia, stories, and the special events in his life and provides the child with a clearer picture of who he is. A life book can help in decreasing the trauma created by losses and separations and help a child understand what is happening to him.

The life book is an important tool that can be used in the psychological development of the child. Methods for developing a life book and information to be included are to be incorporated into every foster parent's orientation. A life book is to be prepared for each child entering foster care and is to begin at the time of placement. It becomes a part of the child's possessions and accompanies the child when the child moves from out-of-home care.

The life book may be a folder, packet, picture album, or an especially prepared box which can be used to create a permanent record for the child, the birth family, the foster family or the adoptive family.

The child's birth parents can help by providing significant information about the child's life prior to placement. Also cards, letters, etc., from the birth parents to the child while in care may be added.

Illustrations of material which may be included are:

- Child's birth information (birth certificate, birth weight, length, time of birth, news events of that date, etc.)
- Family tree (description and/or pictures of parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles, siblings, and the siblings' order of birth, etc.)
- Placement history and significant others who may have been a part of the placements (foster parents, special teachers, neighbors, friends, social workers, etc.)
- Medical history (immunizations, hospitalizations, medical facilities where medical services were received, illnesses, allergies, etc.)
- The pages in the child's life book regarding health, immunization and dental records must be reviewed, updated and given to the out-of-home care provider by the worker at the time a child enters foster care and each time a child is moved. The information must include 1) the names and addresses of the child's health care providers and 2) the record of the child's immunizations, medications and known medical problems.
- Education history (names, addresses, and dates of schools attended, grades, report cards, school pictures, class plays, achievement awards, sports events, etc.).
- The pages in the child's life book regarding the child's school history must be reviewed, updated and given to the out-of-home care provider by the worker at the time a child enters foster care and each time a child is moved.
- Letters, birthday cards, special mementos and drawings by child.
- Pictures of child and significant others.
- Recording or postcards or souvenirs from vacations or special trips.

This is not a total list of information to be included in a life book but is to be used as a guide. It is the responsibility of the worker to assist the foster parents with materials to be included or deleted. The worker is also responsible for adding material which may only be available through the worker. As the life book is for the child's emotional and psychological development, the worker and foster parents will need to help the child select articles to be incorporated. It is important that the child know that the life book tells a story and that he is the leading character.

APPENDIX

Guide for the use of Social Media
(credit: FACT SHEET, "Social Media: Tips for Foster Parents" Child Welfare Information Gateway)

While it may be tempting to forbid youth to use social media, this is seldom realistic. The Internet and mobile devices are too widespread and accessible. Caregivers can provide guidance and boundaries to help youth use media safety. As with many close situations, you may need to start with close supervision and gradually provide more freedom as youth demonstrate responsibility.

Benefits of Social Media:

- **Maintaining social ties. Youth can keep in touch with existing friends, siblings, and others and make new connections. This may be important for young people who have been moved from their communities**
- **Support. Through online community groups, youth can share experiences with peers (see, for example, social media options through FosterClub at http://fyi3.com).**
- **Family connections. Youth may be able to share posts and other information with biological family members between family visits, where appropriate and approved by the caseworker.**
- **Self-expression. Videos, blogs, and other digital venues allow youth to express their feelings and ideas, which can help them shape their identity and contribute to healing from childhood trauma.**

What are the risks? While all youth may be at some risk for unsafe online situations, youth in foster care may be particularly vulnerable to inappropriate contact, cyberbullying, or child predators. In addition, social media use may aid in communication with adults or family members who are "off limits."

Tips for safe use of social media by youth

- **Discuss social media with youth in your care. Ask youth how they use social media and why it's important to them. Share and discuss this series' tip sheet for youth https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/smtips_youth.cfm**
- **Talk with your caseworker. Ask about safety needs or concerns that may affect your youth's use of social media and whether there have been any past issues with social media use.**
- **Set house rules early on for what's okay and what's not. Rules will likely vary with youth's age (see sample family media agreements for different age groups at http://www.commonsensemedia.org/sites/default/files/imce/educatefamilies_fma_all.pdf.**

- **Set strict privacy settings. Understand settings for each network used, so youth in your care can limit who can find them, what they can see, and how they can communicate (for information on Facebook settings, read http://www.connectsafely.org/pdfs/fbparents.pdf; for other networks, consult networks' user information).**
- **Teach youth to keep personal information private. Advise youth not to post a full name, address, school name, phone number, photo, or other identifying information.**

- **Monitor use. Keep computers in a common family space (not a bedroom) and keep track of mobile device use. Know what type of social media your youth uses. Consider asking youth for passwords and permission to let a trusted adult "friend" them. However, try to balance monitoring with privacy.**
- **Conduct searches. Every so often, search on a youth's name and address and see what information or tagged photos are publicly available (see http://www.commonsensemedia.org/advice-for-parents/ photos-gone-wild-how-combat-unwanted-photos-facebook).**
- **Explain the need to be careful. Make sure youth understand that not everyone is who they say they are. Advise youth to avoid sharing intimate photos and talking online about sex.**
- **Discuss cyberbullying. Warn youth not to send, forward, or respond to mean or embarrassing messages or pictures. Help youth document, block, and report cyberbullying if needed (for information on cyberbullying, see http://www.stopbullying.gov/cyberbullying).**
- **Keep lines of communication open. Encourage youth to let you know if an exchange makes them uncomfortable or if someone asks to meet them in person.**
- **Be prepared to deal with mistakes. When youth slip up and don't follow guidelines, approach the situation as a "learning opportunity" and calmly work together with youth on what to do next.**