



Honorable Max Baer
Pennsylvania Supreme Court Justice

New OCFC video encourages “normalcy” for foster children

A new video is available to help judges, attorneys and others promote routine activity among youth in foster care families.

The *Establishing Normalcy for Foster Youth* video was produced by the Office of Children and Families in the Courts (OCFC). It is available free online on the PA Courts YouTube channel, or by requesting copies from the OCFC. The video was produced by OCFC and AOPC’s Communications Office.



Sandra Moore
Director of the Office of Children and Families in the Courts

“Participating in sports or clubs, going to the prom, attending community events, working a summer job, getting a driver’s license or hanging out with friends are all critical to a child’s well-being – not only emotionally, but in developing valuable life-coping skills,” said **Sandra Moore**, director for the OCFC.

The benefits of providing foster youth the same opportunities to participate in “normal” activities as their friends without the unnecessary involvement of case managers, provider agencies or the court system is one of many related topics addressed in the video. Teaching responsibility, encouraging the development of healthy decision-making skills, increasing a sense of belonging and preparing youth for a successful transition to adulthood are other video topics.



Honorable Michael Sholley
Snyder/Union County Judge

“Normalcy is a critical factor in child development as we strive to raise good, productive, healthy and happy citizens,” Supreme Court Justice **Max Baer** said. “Everyday experiences help youth navigate childhood and adolescence, and ultimately, transition into adulthood. Many times, foster youth miss out on these rites of passage due to barriers created by the system.”

The initiative is part of the federal Strengthening Families Act, which requires states to modify or enact new laws to address normalcy difficulties. For years foster youth and foster parents faced real and perceived barriers that involved complicated procedures and time-consuming approval processes.



Kerith Strano Taylor, Esq.
Jefferson County Guardian ad Litem

The “Reasonable and Prudent Parent” standard incorporated into the law removes obstacles and red tape by empowering foster parents, rather than caseworkers or the legal system, to make the same types of decisions they would make for their own children, such as joining a school athletic team, getting a driver’s license or going out to eat with friends.

“Children come into the dependency system for a variety of reasons, typically for reasons that are out of their control,” Moore explained. “But time doesn’t stand still. They continue to grow and mature while in foster care. And if we want them to develop the skills needed to become productive members of society, they need opportunities similar to those youth not in foster care.”

Courts, legal advocates, child welfare professionals and foster families are encouraged to watch the video and examine local practices that impact the scope of opportunities provided to foster youth.



Clay Cauley, Esq.
Chester County Hearing Master

“Many of us take for granted these ‘normal’ experiences, but for many youth in foster care, ‘normal’ is often out of reach,” Justice Baer added. “It’s an understatement to say that normalcy matters greatly to every child in the dependency system. As judges, we have to remain vigilant in our resolve to ensure that all of Pennsylvania’s foster children have ongoing opportunities to be involved in activities that enhance their physical, emotional and spiritual growth.”

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INFORMATION

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