This self-study course was developed by Aileen McInnis, for the Alaska Center for Resource Families. The information presented in this course is intended to help you learn about the very important change in policy that give foster parents more leeway in making decisions but also holds them to a standard of sensible decision-making based on a child’s ability and developmental stage.

The questionnaire at the back of this course is a way for the Alaska Center for Resource Families to assess that you have read and understood the information provided. In order to obtain training hour credit for this course, please complete the questionnaire and return it to the address below. You may keep this self-study for further reference.
The Reasonable and Prudent Parent Standard: 
*Information for Resource Parents*

In September 2014, Congress passed the “Prevent Sex Trafficking and Strengthening Families” Act, H.R. 4980. Compliance with this law is initiating some important changes in Alaska’s child welfare system and these changes will impact resource parents. In this self-study, we will look at the “Reasonable and Prudent Parent Standard” and the participation of foster youth in social, enrichment, extracurricular and cultural activities. This law recognizes the need to make every effort to *normalize* the lives of foster children. Foster children have often been denied the opportunity to participate in typical childhood activities and resource parents may have been unsure or reluctant to sign permission slips for activities. Participation in normal childhood activities is important to a child’s emotional and social development and in learning basic life coping skills. The Federal Law establishes a “reasonable and prudent parent” standard for making these decisions and Alaska OCS is updating its Policy and Procedures to comply with those standards. This policy went into effect on October 1, 2015.

Specific provisions of the law in regards to the reasonable and prudent parenting standard allows resource parents to use their knowledge of the child’s age and developmental level in making reasonable decisions in the child’s life including:

- Allowing resource parents to decide whether the child may engage in social, extracurricular, enrichment, cultural, and social activities, including sports, field trips, and overnight activities.
- Allowing resource parents to sign permission slips and arrange for transportation for the child to and from activities.
- Requiring resource parents to follow court orders and judgments which may impact those decisions. (For example, a child cannot go on a weekend trip if it violates a scheduled visitation time, unless otherwise approved.)
- Requiring the state to establish a youth rights document for youth 14 years and older describing that youth’s rights with respect to education, health, visitation, and court participation.
- Requiring training of resource parents to include “knowledge and skills relating to the reasonable and prudent parent standard”.

*The Reasonable and Prudent Parent Standard* 
Alaska Center for Resource Families  Page | 2
The Reasonable and Prudent Parent Standard

The focus of this part of the law is to “support normalcy for children in foster care.” That means that children and youth in foster care should be encouraged to have a normal childhood as possible. In order to do that, resource parents are given more leeway to give permission for activities so that we don’t make it difficult for youth and children to participate in every day, developmentally appropriate activities.

The new Alaska policies allows resource parent to approve or disapprove participation in many activities without prior approval of OCS using reasonable and prudent judgment. This “reasonable and prudent parent standard” can be used for most social, extracurricular, cultural and enrichment activities. The term “reasonable and prudent parent standard” means:

- The resource parent makes a careful and sensible parenting decisions through the knowledge of the child’s age and developmental level
- The resource parent will consider the health, safety and best interests of a child while balancing the decision with a need to encourage emotional and developmental growth in a child

Let’s break it down. You as a resource parent can make more of the day to day decisions about a child’s participation in regular activities that are normal for a child’s experience. But you are expected to use a “reasonable and prudent parent” standard in making those decisions. Let’s look at what those words mean.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reasonable:</th>
<th>Having sound judgment; fair and sensible, not excessive or extreme.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Prudent:</td>
<td>Acting with or showing care and thought for the future, wise in handling practical matters</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Resource parents (in fact all parents) should use good judgment in deciding participation in activities and events, be fair and reasonable, and show care and wisdom in making decisions regarding a youth’s participation in activities. Note, this doesn’t mean that a youth will always be able to do what he/she wants, but a parent should be fair and reasonable when making the decisions. That is what is meant by decisions being made based on the “reasonable and prudent parent standard.”
Making the Decision

So think carefully when deciding if a foster child can participate in activities such as after school clubs, sports, sleepovers, field trips, or special events. Just like you would consider information about an activity before approving it for your own birth child, you should ask questions about any activity for a foster child.

Questions to ask when you are considering the appropriateness of an activity might include:

- *Is it safe for this child?*
- *Is it appropriate for his age?*
- *Is there anything about this child’s special needs that would make this activity inappropriate?*
- *Does this activity “normalize” life in foster care?*
- *Are other children and youth his or her age participating in this activity?*
- *Are the friends and parents that this child is spending time with appropriate and safe for the child to be alone with?*
- *Is this an activity that other children in the home of comparable age and ability participate in?*

As you can see, in some situations for some children, you would decide yes for participation in an activity and in other situations you would decide no. The answer depends on consideration of factors for a particular child and his/her needs. Foster families should also take into consideration the concerns and desires of the birth parents related to participation in activities, though birth parent desires don’t necessarily determine the participation of the child in any activities.

Resource parents should seek information about what is considered normal development expectations for the age of the child in their care. Talk with other parents caring for children of similar ages or seek training or information from the Alaska Center for Resource Families or other child care or parenting agencies. Using a “reasonable and prudent parent standard,” resource parents will still need to weigh this information against the particular needs and abilities of the child in their care. For example, an eleven year old boy with Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder may have judgment skills more at the level of a six year old, so some extended after school activities may not be appropriate due to lack of ability to maintain well in a group for a long time.

For any activities where resource families are making a decision either to allow or not allow a child or youth to participate in an activity, it is advised that resource families make a written record of why they came to that conclusion and how they used a “reasonable and prudent parent standard.” This is not required, but this practice will document that the resource parent gave thought to the decision and attempted to make a wise and considered decision. This would be especially important if it is anticipated that there may be disagreement about the decision from the caseworker or the youth.
Where Is Approval Still Required?
Some decisions will still require that a resource parent seek previous approval before a child can participate in some activity. All statutes and licensing regulations must still be followed. Licensing regulations state that a resource parent will obtain advance permission from the birth parent or OCS in situations re

- risk activities that are not usual to the community
- participate in moderate risk, such as operation of a vehicle, or participation in contact sports or adventure activities
- if a youth is going to be allowed in a foster home to handle a firearm
- For trips for children out of state, or trips longer than 72 hours

Birth parents also have residual rights for visitations, consent to marriage, consent to military enlistment and giving permission for major medical care (including child taking psychotropic medications). These rights have not been affected by the “reasonable and prudent parent standard.”

Please see the table at the end of this article to compare when a resource parent can make the decision and when the social worker makes the decision.

Normalizing Life In Foster Care
The second part of the prudent foster parent standard is that children in custody are entitled to as normal a life as possible and are entitled to participate in age appropriate activities. Youth in OCS custody should have access to those educational and social opportunities normally provided to non-custody youth. Granting resource parents more decision making authority should remove some of the barriers by making it easier for the permission to be granted. Resource families should be helping children and youth participate in:

**Extracurricular Activities:** This would include sports and after school clubs or organizations such as Scouts.

**Enrichment Activities:** This might include attending community events and happenings, going to museums or exhibits.

**Cultural Activities:** This may include participating in cultural group activities or classes such as participation in Alaska Native dance groups or cultural holiday events.

**Social Activities:** This would include age appropriate activities such as having a friend sleep over or going to a dance or sporting activity.

Participating in these activities will begin to be documented in the OCS information system (also known as ORCA) by the child or youth’s caseworker. When the child is placed in your home, you should be informed of his/her age and developmental level. As you get to know the child, find out what his friends and peers are doing, or children that are at the same developmental
level. Try to discover a child’s interest and help him find activities to participate in as he settles into your home.

The child’s caseworker should be asking participation in activities normal and appropriate for the age of your child when the caseworker conducts monthly visits with the child and visits in your home. If you are not sure what activities are available or are having difficulty getting the child to engage in activities that you feel would be beneficial, talk with your foster child’s caseworker for ideas, talk to other resource parents or talk with the staff at the Alaska Center for Resource Families. These activities should be supported by your foster care stipend though in many cases, schools may waive participation fees for children in care. If you need assistance for fees related to special events, talk to your child’s caseworker about putting in a Special Request for Funds for assistance.

For youth who have APPLA (Another Planned Permanent Living Arrangement), the resource parent will be invited to the Administrative Review to discuss what developmentally appropriate activities the youth is participating in.

Special Considerations for Youth over the Age of 14 Years of Age

Under this law, older children (14 years and older) will also be given more say in their participation in activities and in their case planning. As a resource parent, you should be talking with your youth to learn about his/her interests and help him participate in activities related to his interests. Research has shown that when foster youth engage in normal activities such as school activities, sports and social activities, they have better long term success in independent living and young adulthood. Certainly when youth are engaged in positive activities with positive social connections, their outcomes are much better than when they are isolated and made to feel different from their peers.

In the new policy, youth over the age of 14 will be given a Foster Children’s Bill of Rights Brochure which will outline the rights youth have in this matter. Youth will be allowed have a representative of his choosing to advocate and advise the child on the areas where the Prudent Parent Standard may apply. This Foster Children’s Bill of Rights Brochure is included as Appendix B in this self-study. Youth over the age of 14 will be asked to read and sign this to insure they understand their rights. Resource families should also read and understand these rights.

What If You and Your Child’s Caseworker, or Your Youth Don’t Agree?

As any parent of an adolescent knows, what you think is reasonable and wise as a parent may not be what your youth thinks. And what you think is developmentally appropriate for the youth in your home may not be what another adult may think. So there may be situations where you and the youth in your home, or you and the caseworker may disagree.
If you and the child’s caseworker are not in agreement on age and developmentally appropriate activities, or if you and your youth are not able to come to some kind of agreement, you have options. First of all, always start with talking and listening to the other person. Do they have a point? Think about the definitions of reasonable and prudent. Can you make a compromise or negotiate so that your family values and the youth’s need to have a normal life can both be honored? Does the caseworker understand your reasons for your decisions? Remember, the purpose of these changes is to help children and youth have as normal a childhood experience as possible and help them participate in normal social and enrichment activities. If you and the youth disagree, work toward understanding each other and seeing if you can find a compromise or some place of agreement. Safety and foster family values are always important. So is the right of a foster youth to participate in normal, developmentally appropriate activities. Seek the balance between these two things.

If the differences cannot be worked out, or if you and the worker cannot come to a resolution, you can ask the worker to set up a supervisory staffing to help mediate. This is where the documentation of your application of the “reasonable and prudent parent standard” can be valuable for making your case for why you made the decision you did. If an agreement still cannot be reached, the legal custody of the child belongs to the Office of Children’s Services and ultimately OCS can make the final decision. If the resource parent is still in disagreement with the decision and all the above channels have been used, resource parent can use the Complaint (Grievance) Procedure. Hopefully when we are talking about the process of encouraging youth to be part of normal and developmentally appropriate activities, you won’t have to reach this point. Remember to use “the reasonable and prudent parent standard” to guide your decisions and try to be open about what others may see as normal activities for youth the age of the children in your home. As the parent, you need to balance those expectations with the needs and abilities of the specific child in your home.

For More Information:

ACRF has materials to help you determine normal child development and adolescent development information. Call ACRF at 1-800-478-7307 or contact your nearest ACRF office. To learn more about the Alaska Foster Children’s Bill of Rights, please review Appendix B or contact Facing Foster Care in Alaska either through their Facebook page or by calling (907) 230-8237.

The State of Alaska Office of Children’s Services has included this information about the Reasonable and Prudent Parent Standard in the Child Protective Services Manual under the following sections:

6.5.4 Prudent Parent Standard
6.5.8 Participation in Risk Activities
6.5.10 Trips for a Child in Custody
### Appendix A: Common Situations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>COMMON SITUATIONS</th>
<th>Resource Parent Can Give Permission/ Should Apply Reasonable and Prudent Parent Standard</th>
<th>Need OCS Permission/Birth Parent Permission or Paperwork</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Travel and Trips</strong></td>
<td>Can include foster children on trips with the family less than 72 hours that don’t take the family out of state. Resource parents can give the permission but need to notify OCS if out-of-home for more than 24 hours. Can include foster children in normal family recreational activities such as camping, hiking, fishing, and sports as long as required safety equipment is used (such as life preservers for boating and helmets when required for biking)</td>
<td>Need 14 day notice for trip out of state or out of country Need Travel Authorization for ferry or plane or if OCS is paying for mileage or transportation costs Need prior approval if interferes with court ordered or family contact plans</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>School Trip</strong></td>
<td>Resource Parent can sign permission slip for activities that take child away from home for less than 72 hours</td>
<td>Activities where child will be gone for longer than 72 hours from home</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Overnight Activities and Sleepovers</strong></td>
<td>Resource parent can give permission using a reasonable and prudent parenting standard.</td>
<td>Activities where child will be gone for longer than 72 hours from home or if involves travel paid for by OCS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Extra-curricular, Social, Cultural or Enrichment Activities</strong></td>
<td>Extra curricular, social activities, cultural activities that fit the community norm and not considered high risk or are restricted by regulation or law. Arranging of transportation to and from activities</td>
<td>Activities where child will be gone for longer than 72 hours from home or may interfere with court ordered family contact or are considered high risk.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Risk Activities</strong></td>
<td>Participation in organized non-contact sports and risk activities usual in the community and appropriate for the child.</td>
<td>Required to request advance permission from placement worker to participate in high risk or risk activities not usual for the community and moderate risk such as operation of a vehicle, participation in contact sports or adventure activities or handling of a firearm. No participation in activities prohibited by licensing regulations (i.e. child 8 or younger riding on a ATV or snowmobile, boating without a flotation device or participating in an airborne activity such as hang gliding)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Haircuts</strong></td>
<td>If the child requires normal upkeep of his current hairstyle, the resource parent is able and responsible to providing this. (If unsure about what is normal for the child, check with the case worker.)</td>
<td>Any haircuts which alter the child’s appearance dramatically. Some families due to cultural, religious or personal reasons have strong views on the importance of hair or the reasons for haircuts. Parent or Guardian permission is needed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Driver’s License</strong></td>
<td>Resource parent is not recognized by DMV as an eligible person to sign application form so permission needs OCS approval and consent of birth parent.</td>
<td>Can get driver’s license with OCS approval and consent of birth parent or legal guardian. Caseworker or guardian of child must sign DMV application form. Must have insurance through responsible adult such as resource parent or relative.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Youth 14+  

Youth 14-years and older  
CPS Policy 3.14.2.1

You have a right to have a credit report done, as well as assistance to correct any errors on your credit report.

You have a right to have two support people of your choice who are appropriate to help you with case planning.

You have a right to access knowledge and skills on becoming a successful adult.

You have a right to have access to programs and supports outside of Office of Children’s Services to prepare for the future.

Youth 18+  

Youth 18-years and older leaving Foster Care  
CPS Policy 3.20.1.A RIGHTS

If you were receiving Medicaid when you aged out of foster care at age 18-years or older, you may be eligible for Former Foster Care Medicaid until age 26 through Department of Public Assistance.

If you were in foster care for at least 6 months, you have the right to receive the following documents when you exit care: birth certificate, social security card, health insurance documentation, medical record and identification card (or drivers license), BIA card, tribal card or tribal certificate.

I understand my rights. My rights have been explained to me.

If I have any questions I can contact my Regional Independent Living Specialist (RILS). My RILS name and phone number is:

The Office of Children’s Services has the duty to protect your safety and at times, the rights you have may be limited due to safety concerns or directions from the court. If at any time you feel your rights are not being respected or you are not being heard, there are people you can contact. Your caseworker (Protective Services Specialist) or GAL/CASA may be able to help or you may contact your attorney. If that does not help, you have the right to contact the Ombudsman’s office at: 1-800-478-2624.

Bill Walker, Governor, State of Alaska  
Valerie Davidson, Commissioner,  
Department of Health & Social Services  
Christy Lawton, Director, Office of Children’s Services  
P.O. Box 110630 • Juneau, AK 99811-0630  
(907) 465-3191 • www.dhss.alaska.gov/ocs
You have the right to be safe, always.

**FAMILY**

- You have the right to have lifelong family connections and a permanent family — CPS Policy 2.5.3
- You have the right to regular family contact when appropriate — CPS Policy 6.5.6
- You have the right to be kept with siblings whenever possible — CPS Policy 2.3.6
- You have the right to have extensive family searches completed — CPS Policy 2.5.3
- You have the right to have access to a phone to contact appropriate friends and family members — CPS Policy 2.9

**HEALTH**

- You have the right to see a doctor, dentist, eye doctor or specialist for medical care — CPS Policy 6.3.1
- You have the right to talk to a counselor or mental health clinician — AK Statute 47.10.084
- You have the right to be free of abuse and neglect — CPS Policy 2.9.1
- You have the right to have a say about your medical and mental health care — AK Statute 25.20.025

**INFORMATION**

- You have the right to know why you are in OCS custody and in foster care — CPS Policy 2.9.1
- You have the right to have a say in your case plan and placement — CPS Policy 2.9
- You have the right to be included and informed before things happen in your case — CPS Policy 4.4.1
- You have the right to be informed and to be heard — CPS Policy 6.1

**RESPECT**

- You have the right to be who you are and to express yourself — CPS Policy 1.1
- You have the right to be notified of court hearings and meetings about you and your family (in an age-appropriate manner) — CPS Policy 6.6.3
- You have the right to bring a supporter(s) with you to meetings and court hearings — CINA Rule 3
- You have the right to tell a judge what you want to have happen in your case — AK Statute 47.10.080(8)
- You have the right to have input on your permanency goals — CPS Policy 2.9.5
- You have the right to know your permanency plan and your case plan — CPS Policy 6.1
- You have the right to be educated and informed before changes are made to your case plan and placement — CPS Policy 2.9.2

**You have family rights**

- You have the right to be notified and to be heard — CPS Policy 6.1
- You have the right to bring a supporter(s) with you to meetings and court hearings — CINA Rule 3
- You have the right to tell a judge what you want to have happen in your case — AK Statute 47.10.080(8)
- You have the right to have input on your permanency goals — CPS Policy 2.9.5
- You have the right to know your permanency plan and your case plan — CPS Policy 6.1
- You have the right to be educated and informed before changes are made to your case plan and placement — CPS Policy 2.9.2

**Respect**

- You have the right to be who you are and to express yourself — CPS Policy 1.1
- You have the right to be notified of court hearings and meetings about you and your family (in an age-appropriate manner) — CPS Policy 6.6.3
- You have the right to bring a supporter(s) with you to meetings and court hearings — CINA Rule 3
- You have the right to tell a judge what you want to have happen in your case — AK Statute 47.10.080(8)
- You have the right to have input on your permanency goals — CPS Policy 2.9.5
- You have the right to know your permanency plan and your case plan — CPS Policy 6.1
- You have the right to be educated and informed before changes are made to your case plan and placement — CPS Policy 2.9.2
ALASKA CENTER FOR RESOURCE FAMILIES
SELF-STUDY QUESTIONNAIRE FOR FOSTER PARENTS

SUBJECT: FOSTER CARE

COURSE: THE REASONABLE AND PRUDENT PARENT

STANDARD: INFORMATION FOR RESOURCE PARENTS

1.5 TRAINING HOURS CREDIT

Please read the above self-study. Then complete the questionnaire found on the following pages. Try answering the questions first from what you remember from the reading. Then review the course if necessary. These questions pertain specifically to the course, which you have read.

After you have answered all the questions, please send your completed questionnaire to the Alaska Center for Resource Families, 815 Second Avenue, Suite 202, Fairbanks, Alaska 99701. We will score your answers and credit your training record credit with 1.5 training hours. A score of 70% correct or better will entitle you to receive training credit, we will contact you to determine if you wish to review the material and retake the questionnaire.

If you have questions or concerns about this self-study course, please call us on our toll-free line at 1-800-478-7307. Fairbanks/North Pole call: 479-7307; Anchorage: 279-1799.

The following section is an evaluation of these self-study materials. Please fill it out upon completion of the questionnaire, and return this page to us with the rest of the course materials. Thank you for your time and comments. It helps us provide appropriate training to meet the needs of foster parents.

************* EVALUATION OF SELF-STUDY MATERIALS *************

Please complete the following questions.

1. Did this self-study course meet with your expectations? _____YES _____NO

2. How would you rate the written presentation of information on the topic?

   _____Excellent   _____Good   _____Fair   _____Poor

3. Did this course add to your knowledge and/or skills? _____YES _____NO

4. Comments/Concerns:
The Reasonable and Prudent Parent Standard: Information for Foster Parents 1.5 Hours

NAME: _________________________________________________ PHONE NO.: ____________________

ADDRESS: _______________________________________________________________________________
Street or Post Office City/State Zip

EMAIL: __________________________________________________________________________________

☐ YES! I would like to receive ACRF email. (Includes Training Tracks Newsletter, training reminders and community events or training of interest for resource families)

Are you a foster parent? ☐ YES ☐ NO If YES, what is your Foster Home License #: _______________

If NO, please check one: ☐ Pending Foster Parent ☐ OCS ☐ Birth Parent ☐ Adoptive Parent
☐ Residential Treatment Facility (License #: ___________ ) ☐ Agency: ____________________________
☐ Other (please specify): ______________________________________________________________________

CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING

Please answer the following questions. These questions address information specifically stated in the self-study course. Please try to answer them first from what you remember from the course before referring back to the self-study materials.

1. The reasonable and prudent parenting standard takes away the ability of foster parents to make decisions about daily activities and school involvement and gives more decision-making power to the social worker

☐ a. TRUE ☐ b. FALSE

2. An important part of the new law includes the provision that resource families should be helping children and youth participate in extracurricular, social and cultural activities normal for their age and developmental level.

☐ a. TRUE ☐ b. FALSE

3. Foster parents will be regularly asked about how they are encouraging youth to participate in normal activities by whom?

☐ a. By social workers on monthly visits ☐ b. By licensing workers during the application process ☐ c. By the local OCS Regional Manager ☐ d. All of the Above

4. Youth in the foster care system who are over the age of 14 years old will be given an Alaska Foster Children’s Bill of Rights Brochure which will outline their rights in the matter of participating in normal activities.

☐ a) TRUE ☐ b) FALSE
5. Who is able to give the permission for the following activities? (circle the correct answer for each)
   - Trips for less than 72 hours? Foster Parent Caseworker
   - Signing for school permission slips? Foster Parent Caseworker
   - Transportation to school activities? Foster Parent Caseworker
   - Travel out of state? Foster Parent Caseworker
   - Overnight activities? Foster Parent Caseworker
   - High risk activities? Foster Parent Caseworker

6. How would you define the “reasonable and prudent parent standard”?

7. Foster parents may make different decisions for different youth even if they are the same age because foster parents are supposed to take the youth’s individual needs and abilities into consideration
   _____ a. TRUE
   _____ b. FALSE

8. What are the four (4) areas of activities that foster children and youth should be encouraged to participate in?
   a. __________________________________________
   b. __________________________________________
   c. __________________________________________
   d. __________________________________________