

Rhode Island Department of Children, Youth and Families

Department Operating Procedure

	DOP Number: 700.0085	Effective Date: February 9, 2024	Page 1 of 5
	Version #: 2	Revision History: March 23, 1988 V.1	Director:  Ashley Deckert
Section: Case Management		Title: Expectant and Parenting Youth in Out-of-Home Care	
Legal Authority: Rhode Island General Law §42-72 Rhode Island General Law §23-4.7-6			
Related DOPs: Family Time; DOP: 700.0030 Safety Assessment and Service Planning; DOP: 700.0050 Worker/Client Contact; DOP: 700.0090 Substance Use Disorder Treatment; DOP: 700.0110 Youth Transition Planning and Support DOP: 700.0115			
Related Forms:			

I. PURPOSE

The Department of Children, Youth and Families (hereinafter, the Department) promotes the safety, permanency, and well-being of youth in out-of-home care who are expectant or parenting. The Department makes every effort to ensure that expectant youth in care experience healthy births and develop the skills needed for personal functioning and parenthood. Strong collaboration between the Department, programs, and individual service providers is essential for offering effective, comprehensive support to enhance protective factors for youth in care who are pregnant or parenting.

It is the priority of the Department to keep families together. Therefore, preventing maltreatment is a critical element of working with parenting youth. Under the 2018 Family First Prevention Services Act, pregnant and parenting youth are identified as a population that is eligible for Federal reimbursement for prevention services, including in-home, parent skill-based programs and mental health and substance abuse prevention and treatment services.

Implementing prevention strategies is essential when working with expectant and parenting youth, but it is also important to recognize that sometimes intergenerational systems involvement is a result of oversurveillance, especially for families of color. Young parents in care may feel they are under constant scrutiny and need to prove their ability to parent. The Department makes every effort to minimize the oversurveillance of young parents in care and refocus efforts on strengths-based strategies that support families before they require a child protective services investigation.

The Department is responsible for ensuring health care services are provided to a youth in its care who is pregnant or suspects they are pregnant. If a youth is pregnant, the primary service worker makes referrals to community-based organizations as needed to support the physical and emotional needs of expectant and/or parenting youth.

The Department ensures that a youth who is a parent and the youth's child are placed together in the same home unless extenuating circumstances exist (e.g., medical needs, psychological needs, and home environment) that prevent the parenting youth from caring for their child. The Department does not file a dependency petition unless there is substantiated maltreatment that warrants the Department to file proceedings with the court for the child's safety. If the parenting youth's child is deemed unsafe and the Department is granted custody of the child, the primary service worker creates a separate case in the case management system. The Department also completes a separate Title IV-E eligibility determination.

II. TERMS DEFINED

"Expectant youth" and "parenting youth" means a youth in DCYF care who is pregnant or has become a birth parent.

"Pregnant youth" means the youth in DCYF care who is pregnant.

"Primary Service Worker" means the DCYF caseworker with main casework responsibility for the child and family.

III. PROCEDURE

- A. The primary service worker practices meaningful youth engagement when working with expectant and parenting youth. Youth engagement occurs when the primary service worker holistically partners with young people throughout their case planning and encourages them to lead discussions about their futures.
 1. To authentically engage expectant and parenting youth, the primary service worker must empower youth to make their own choices and choose what goals they want to work toward as they navigate a pregnancy and/or raise a child.
 2. To authentically engage expectant and parenting youth means meeting with them at least once per month and engaging in active service planning led by the parenting youth to empower them to make their own choices. Refer to [DOP: 700.0090: Worker/Client Contact](#) and [DOP: Safety Assessment and Service Planning: DOP: 700.0050](#).
 3. The primary service worker is responsible for referring the parenting youth for wrap-around/preventive services to ensure the baby's well-being.
- B. When a youth discloses that they are expecting, the primary service worker helps them work through all their options.
 1. For fathers and nonpregnant partners, the primary service worker discusses their role in making these decisions or supporting their partner in making these decisions.
 2. The primary service worker ensures that youth are fully informed and supports them as they decide what they want to do. The primary service worker and others substantially involved in the youth's life must not impose their personal beliefs on the youth.
 3. The primary service worker encourages the youth to express their feelings and concerns and ask questions.
 4. The primary service worker assists the youth who suspects they are pregnant in setting up an appointment for a pregnancy test.
 5. If the pregnancy is confirmed, the primary service worker is responsible for ensuring that the youth is informed of the available options.
 - a. The youth must receive nonjudgmental and nondirective

pregnancy and birth options counseling to assist them in making an informed and appropriate decision based on their unique situation.

- b. If appropriate, the parents of the youth should be involved in the decision-making process to provide emotional or financial support.
 - c. If a youth chooses to terminate their pregnancy, they may want to consult with their parents in this decision-making process.
 - d. However, in accordance with RIGL 23-4.7-6, the youth may decide, with the approval of the family court, to terminate their pregnancy without parental knowledge or consent. In this situation, the agency handling the procedure files the petition on behalf of the youth. In some instances, the court may grant the Department authorization to execute the releases/necessary paperwork for the procedure.
 - e. The primary service worker supports the youth in engaging the putative father.
- C. Before childbirth, the primary service worker connects the youth to timely, ongoing, relevant, and accessible services appropriate to their needs that address:
- 1. Prenatal health care, including traveling to appointments. Prenatal Health Care includes:
 - a. Genetic risk identification.
 - b. Food and nutrition.
 - c. Mental health care, including information, screening, and treatment for prenatal depression.
 - d. Substance use conditions. Refer to [DOP: 700.0110; Substance Use Disorder Treatment](#).
 - e. Medication use; (if applicable, a qualified mental health professional should re-evaluate pharmacological treatments for safety, risks, and benefits during pregnancy and make appropriate adjustments to the treatment plan, such as tapering or adjusting dosages or increasing monitoring of symptoms).
 - f. Smoking cessation.
 - 2. Signing up for pregnancy, childbirth, and/or parenting classes.
 - 3. Establishing a birth plan that outlines their preferences for labor and delivery.
 - 4. If applicable, determine the post-birth placement for the youth and their child.
 - 5. When making plans during a pregnancy, the primary service worker ensures that both partners are actively involved in planning and decision-making, regardless of whether they are the one to give birth.
- D. Parenting education is another important form of preparation that can set expectant and parenting youth up for success. All new parents need education on how to care for a newborn and be a successful parent. Throughout the pregnancy and following childbirth, the primary service worker ensures that expectant and parenting youth are helped to develop skills and knowledge related to:
- 1. basic caregiving routines;
 - 2. child growth and development;
 - 3. meeting children's social, emotional, and physical health needs;
 - 4. environmental safety and injury prevention;
 - 5. safe practices for sleeping and bathing;
 - 6. parent-child interactions and bonding;

7. age-appropriate behavioral expectations and appropriate discipline;
 8. family planning, and
 9. establishing a functioning support network of family members or caring adults.
- E. Following childbirth, the primary service worker promotes child and parental well-being and ensures youth receive timely postnatal care and support related to:
1. postpartum health care;
 2. postpartum depression, including screening for and addressing changes in the birthing parent's mood and emotional state,
 3. behavior, and coping strategies;
 4. breastfeeding education and assistance;
 5. pediatric care, including well-baby visits and immunizations, and
 6. family planning.
- F. Expectant and parenting youth are informed of their legal rights regarding the custody of their children and Department policy.
1. During shared planning meetings, all dependent pregnant and parenting youth must be provided with information about their rights and the duties and responsibilities of the Department.
 2. Separation of a child from a parenting youth is prohibited for reasons other than abuse or neglect.
 - a. A child must not be separated from youth parents due solely to the youth's age, involvement with the child welfare system, mental health status, unless it impairs their ability to safely care for their child, or as a means of obtaining services or financial support for the children.
 3. When a parenting youth and their child live in the same placement, and there is no need to file a dependency on that child, the Department considers the child's home to be that of the dependent youth.
- G. The primary service worker collaborates with expectant and parenting youth and their caregivers, co-parents, and other family members, when appropriate, to define in the family's service plan:
1. the rights of the expectant and parenting youth;
 2. the responsibilities of all parties involved; and
 3. each individual's role and expectations for supporting the parenting youth to care for their child. Refer to [DOP: 700.0050; Safety Assessment and Service Planning](#).
- H. The primary service worker assists expectant and parenting youth to obtain or enroll in assistance that will support them in caring for their children and work towards financial independence, including:
1. public benefits such as Medicaid, WIC, SNAP, and TANF;
 2. transportation;
 3. maternal and child health programs;
 4. legal advocacy;
 5. affordable and quality child care;
 6. community resources, such as free clinics;
 7. educational or vocational programs that support and accommodate the circumstances of expectant and parenting youth; and
 8. child support.
- I. Fatherhood and Paternal Engagement
1. Young adult fathers and other non-birthing partners often do not receive the same support and resources as mothers and other birth-giving

- parents.
2. The primary service worker treats non-birthing partners as equals who need the same support and resources as the birth-giving parent.
 - a. They will likely also benefit from resources explicitly tailored to fathers and their unique challenges, such as navigating biases, feeling left out of parenting decisions, and experiencing pressure to provide financially.
 - b. The [National Responsible Fatherhood Clearinghouse](#) is an excellent resource to share with young fathers for information about co-parenting, personal resilience, child support, custody, and family time.
 3. The primary service worker promotes responsible fatherhood and paternal engagement by:
 - a. indicating in the case record when a youth in out-of-home care becomes a father;
 - b. identifying the relationship between expectant youth parents;
 - c. linking youth fathers to services that help them understand their legal rights and responsibilities, establish legal paternity, adjust to the parenting role; and
 - d. assisting pregnant youth to notify birth fathers and engage them in service planning when appropriate. Refer to [Safety Assessment and Service Planning; DOP: 700.0050](#), and [Family Time; DOP: 700.0030](#).
- J. Transition Planning
1. Transition planning is vital for expectant and parenting youth who are on track to age out of the child welfare system to ensure they are prepared for independent living.
 2. For youth who are either expecting or parenting, the primary service worker must make every effort to prepare them for independent living since they will be responsible for caring for and providing for a dependent. Refer to [Youth Transition Planning and Support DOP: 700.0115](#).