 <b>VERMONT</b> DEPARTMENT FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES Family Services Policy Manual		<b>74</b>
Chapter:	Working with Families	
Subject:	Pregnant and Parenting Teens in Custody	Page 1 of 3
Approved:	Fredrick M. Ober, Division Director	Effective: 10/27/99 FINAL
Supersedes:	Casework Procedure 4020	Dated: 1/15/92

## Purpose

To outline policy to assist teens to make appropriate pregnancy choices, ensure appropriate pre-natal care, preparation for parenting, family planning services, assessment of the youth in custody's capacity to safely parent, and provision of positive support services for parenting teens in order to ensure permanency for their children.

## Policy

### **Pregnancy Options**

A youth in custody who becomes pregnant or fathers a child will have access to comprehensive, non-judgmental counseling about her or her options (including parenting, co-parenting, adoption or abortion), rights and responsibilities. Department staff will respect the values and beliefs of the youth and encourage responsible decision-making.

In Vermont, a pregnant teenager is not required to inform her parent(s) of her pregnancy or of any choices she makes concerning her pregnancy, including the choice of abortion. District staff may or may not choose to inform the youth's parents, depending upon the youth's best interest. Such factors as her physical health, past history of abuse and neglect, etc., will guide this decision. If safety factors prohibit informing her parents, the reasons for that choice will be clearly outlined on the Supervisory Tracking Form (FS-261).

If the pregnant teen chooses to make an adoption plan for her child, she will be referred to a licensed child placing agency which handles adoption for counseling and planning. The father of the child should be involved with decision-making whenever possible.

### **Assessing Safety**

Department staff who become aware that a youth in custody is pregnant will immediately report the situation to his or her own supervisor. The supervisor will promptly convene a staffing, to include the intake supervisors to assess:

- the youth's ability to parent;
- what supportive services she will need;

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- What role the infant's father is expected to play and how he can be supported in that role;
- Discuss the steps the intake supervisor thinks necessary, upon the birth of the infant, to ensure the infant's safety, such as:
  - Commencing a risk of harm investigation;
  - Filing a petition should be filed under Chapter 55;
  - Opening a protective services case;
  - assigning an additional social worker to monitor the infant's safety.

#### Referrals for Supportive Services

All pregnant youth in custody will be promptly referred to:


- appropriate medical practitioner for health screening and information;
- the local District Health Department Office for enrollment in the Healthy Babies program, WIC, and other appropriate programs; and
- the local Parent Child Center to participate in both the ReachUp Program and other parenting preparation classes.

#### Parenting Teens

All parenting teens in custody will be referred to appropriate supportive family services for themselves and their children, including education, financial assistance, child care, peer support groups, mentoring, etc.

Whenever possible, single parent teens in custody not living with their own family will live with foster families trained to address their special situation and needs or in other setting intended to support teen parenting. Under those circumstances, the foster parent will receive reimbursement for the care of the teen parent and an additional payment for the child. The second payment is initiated by completing the Non-Custody Infant Information Screen in SSMIS. This screen should be updated when the infant is no longer living with the teen parent.

When a parenting teen in custody is living independently with his or her infant, either with or without the child's other parent, district staff will work with them to develop the skills

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necessary to function as a viable family while providing the supervision necessary to ensure the safety of parents and children.

#### **Contraceptive Services**

Caseworkers will ensure that appropriate supportive counseling and contraceptive services are made available to teens in custody.

#### **Child Support**

Expectant teen parents will be informed of the responsibility of each parent to provide support to the child during the child's minority.

#### **Teen Fathers**

When working with a male youth in custody who has fathered a child, the social worker should assist him to:

- develop an understanding of his role, rights and responsibilities as a father;
- access parent preparation and family planning services;
- register as the child's father in the Putative Father's Registry maintained at the Chittenden Probate Court to ensure that should the child's mother terminate her parental rights, he will be notified of his rights.