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|  VERMONT DEPARTMENT FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES Family Services Policy Manual | | <h1>136</h1> |
| Chapter: | Special Casework Issues | |
| Subject: | Body Modification Requests by Youth | |
| Approved: | Cynthia K. Walcott, Deputy Commissioner | Effective: 9/26/2014 |
| Supersedes: | Family Services Policy No. 136, Body Modification Requests by Youth | Dated: 3/25/2013 |

Purpose

To outline policy for granting permission to a youth under the supervision of DCF, Family Services Division who makes a body modification request i.e. tattoo, piercing and/or gauging.

Definitions

Gauging is the means by which one slowly enlarges a body piercing to accommodate increasingly larger sizes of jewelry.

Policy


It is often within cultural norms for youth to want to pierce, gauge, or tattoo themselves. However, deciding to modify one's body can be permanent and may involve risk to the youth's health. Risks associated with body modification include infection, allergic reaction, chipping of tooth enamel or tooth decay (with tongue piercings), scarring, excessive bleeding, and nerve damage.

For the aforementioned reasons, DCF, Family Services has the following policy.

Family Services staff shall at no time grant permission for a youth to get a tattoo, gauge, or pierce genitalia or nipples.

In the event that a youth asks for permission to get a piercing, Family Services staff shall consult with both parents, if applicable, as well as the caretaker the youth resided with prior to their custody episode if it was someone other than a parent (eg. the youth has been residing and in the custody of a grandparent prior to coming into custody) about whether or not this is appropriate. If a parent does not agree with the youth getting a piercing Family Services staff will respect this decision. There may be instances where due to trauma of the youth by a caretaker or if a termination of parental rights has been granted, it is not clinically appropriate to consult with parents to gain permission. In these cases, a social worker should speak with their supervisor to make this determination.

Additionally, a Family Services supervisor shall approve the decision to grant permission

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for a piercing. If a parent does not agree with their child getting a piercing, Family Services staff shall not grant permission under any circumstances. A denial of permission should be documented in case notes.

The following should be taken into consideration and discussed with the youth and parent(s):

- Which body part the youth is requesting permission to pierce (risk is increased when certain body parts are pierced, such as tongues or belly buttons)
- The overall health of the youth as their health may make them more susceptible to infection, could impact healing time, etc.
- The overall mental health of the youth -- As in is the piercing perceived by the current team as a healthy expression of identity and/or inclusion in healthy relationships? Or is this perceived as an attempt to find a more tolerable form of self-harm, validate or affirm poor self-concept, or gain inclusion into negative relationships?
- The age of the youth
- The social stigma that may be associated with the area the youth would like to pierce
- Whether or not the piercing will cause scarring if it is removed
- How will the cost of the piercing be covered? (Family Services shall at no time use state funds to subsidize the cost of any piercings.)

The American Academy of Pediatrics provides resources and research-based information, which covers the risks inherent in body piercing and may be helpful in decision-making for social workers, youth, and parents.

Any agreement reached about body piercing shall be reduced to writing and signed by the youth, the parent(s) or previous caretaker, the Family Services social worker, and the Family Services supervisor and shall be added to the youth's file. The Body Modification Approval Form is available in the forms folder located on the DCF Intranet.