

**NORTH DAKOTA DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES  
BISMARCK, NORTH DAKOTA  
December 1, 2017**

**PI 17-31**

**TO:** Regional Supervisors  
County Social Services  
Division of Juvenile Services  
Tribal Social Services  
PATH  
Youthworks  
Lutheran Social Services

**FROM:** Kelsey Bless, Permanency Administrator

**SUBJECT:** Foster Care - Babysitting

- 624-05-05
- 624-05-15-49

**PROGRAMS:** Foster Care

**EFFECTIVE:** Immediately

**RETENTION:** Until Manualized

Policy was created to offer flexibility to foster care providers. Foster parents have expressed difficulty securing babysitters who are age 21 or greater when they are temporarily away from the home (attending a concert, wedding, etc.). In the past, ND foster care policy has not allowed an individual under the age of 21 to care for a foster child in the absence of licensed foster parents. Historically, North Dakota has allowed for a substitute caregiver; a responsible adult, age 21 or older, to provide care for a foster child in the absence of the foster parents for a portion of one day. If foster parents are unavailable for more than a portion of one day, case managers must be notified and can assist foster parents in identifying substitute care options with a licensed foster parent.

This Policy Issuance (PI) will allow foster parents to secure a babysitter greater than 14 years old. Policy will highlight the individual identified must be between the ages of 14 and 21 as well as meet additional criteria. The age range is noted specifically because individual's age 21 or greater would meet the current definition of "substitute caregiver". Policy also highlights the difference between babysitting, substitute care, respite, and child care.

### Examples/Scenarios of Babysitting vs. Substitute Care:

- If the foster parents attend a concert and plan to be away from the home for five hours; they may choose to secure their 17 year old niece to babysit given she meets the criteria set forth in policy.
- If the foster parents have errands to run and plan to be gone for three hours; they may choose to secure their 14 year old neighbor to babysit, given he/she does meet the criteria set forth in policy.
- If the foster parents plan to attend an out of town basketball tournament, leaving their home at 8:30am and not returning until 10:30pm (14 hours later); they may choose to secure a substitute caregiver, an individual age 21 or greater, allowed to care for the children for a portion of one day without a license.
- If the foster parents plan to go on a cruise for five days; they shall work with the case manager to secure substitute care from a licensed foster parent in their absence as they are unavailable.

### **Changes to Policy Include ADDITIONS to Definitions 624-05-05**

*Add five definitions to this section:*

- **Babysitting** is short-term care of foster children when the foster parents are temporarily away, however still available to respond if needed. A babysitter can be a responsible individual, between the ages of 14 and 21, secured to provide care and supervision for no more than eight consecutive hours in one day.
- **Substitute care** is temporary care of foster children when the foster parents are unavailable to provide supervision and care for more than a portion of one day.
- **Substitute caregiver** is a responsible adult, age 21 or older, temporarily providing care for a foster child in the absence of the foster parents for a portion of one day. If time exceeds one day, a licensed foster parent must provide substitute care if the primary foster parents are unavailable.
- **Respite care** is temporary relief care for a child with special medical, emotional or behavioral needs, which requires time-limited supervision and care by another licensed foster parent. Respite care cannot exceed 96 hours and is reimbursable through a formal agreement (SFN 929) pre-approved by a regional representative.
- **Child care (daycare)** is planned care for a child required ongoing while the foster parents are at work, school, or otherwise engaged on a regular basis. If ongoing child care is needed, foster parents can be

approved for reimbursement following policy set forth in Maintenance Chapter 623-05.

### **New Policy Section** **Babysitting 624-05-15-49**

Foster parents have various events and activities that may temporarily require the need for a babysitter to care for children in their absence. Foster parents are required to follow the reasonable and prudent parent standard while selecting an appropriate individual to babysit. Foster parents are responsible to prepare the babysitter with necessary information to best care for the children, while maintaining confidentiality to protect the foster children.

Babysitting is distinguishably different from child care, substitute care and respite. Babysitting is the short-term care of foster children when the foster parents are temporarily away, however still available to respond if needed. A babysitter can be a responsible individual, between the ages of 14 and 21, secured to provide care and supervision for no more than eight consecutive hours in one day.

Initially, foster parents should discuss the need to seek a babysitter with the primary foster care case manager. After consultation, a foster care case manager may approve or deny the appropriateness of such future arrangements.

#### **North Dakota Babysitting Criteria**

The individual selected to babysit foster children may not be left responsible for more than eight consecutive hours and must be:

- Between the ages of 14 and 21;
  - *Individual's age 21 or greater meet the definition of a substitute caregiver allowed to care for foster children for a portion of one day. If time exceeds one day, a licensed foster parent must provide substitute care if the primary foster parents are unavailable.*
- Able to demonstrate responsibility;
- Able to demonstrate skills and maturity to supervise others;
- Capable to provide adequate care to others; and
- Pre-approved by the foster care case manager if asked to transport foster children. Approval would require evidence of a driver's license and insurance coverage.

The Foster Child: It is important to recognize how long the foster child has been placed in the foster home, the age of the foster child, how well the child knows the identified babysitter, and the complexity of the child's needs. In addition, the child's vulnerabilities, behaviors and how quickly the foster

parents can respond will help determine when a foster child is ready to be left in the care of a babysitter.

The Individual Babysitting: It is important to be familiar with the individual selected to babysit. A foster family should know his/her maturity, emotional health, and physical and cognitive abilities to accommodate the length of time, time of day, number of children to supervise, etc. These standards must be taken into consideration when determining if an individual is appropriate to babysit foster children.

Babysitting Class: Foster parents should consider selecting an individual who has completed a babysitting certification class. Classes are offered by various organizations such as the American Red Cross, YMCA, Girls Scouts of America, NDSU Extension, Parent Resource Centers, local hospitals, and other agencies across the state. A babysitting certification course is not required by foster care policy, however highly encouraged as such classes do offer specialized training in first aid, CPR, emergencies, the planning of age appropriate activities, meal schedules, infant care, etc.

### **Can a Foster Child Age 14+ Babysit?**

Foster children who meet the policy criteria may be allowed to babysit and care for other children. If the foster child is asked to babysit; this would be an independent living skill assisting both employment and financial management. If appropriate, a responsible foster child should be given the opportunity to engage in the normalcy activity of babysitting. However, an adolescent foster child should not be relied upon to babysit children in their primary placement without agreement and compensation for their time.

### **Reimbursement**

Babysitting costs are the responsibility of the party receiving the service. The cost for a babysitter varies depending on the babysitter's age, experience, number of children they are caring for, their ability to drive, length of time, time of day, etc.

**NOTE:** The ND Foster Parent Handbook located online at <http://www.nd.gov/dhs/info/pubs/docs/cfs/foster-parent-handbook.pdf> has will be updated and posted online before December 6<sup>th</sup> for the convenience in sharing the new information with foster parents.