

S-222 INTERVENTION PHILOSOPHY FOR CHILDREN IN CARE AND FOSTER FAMILIES MODIFIED



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(previously SE-25)

Policy

All children should have the opportunity to benefit from a family environment that focuses on their strengths and talents, and helps them to seek out favorable circumstances to allow them to feel valued in their daily experiences. It is through these experiences that children learn to occupy a variety of valued social roles that will allow them to acquire new skills, while expanding their support network.

In order to gain reassurance, children must feel that they have the right to speak and that their opinions count. Children need to know that the family believes in their potential, and that they are willing to do everything in their ability to help them succeed. The simple fact of knowing that someone believes in them and sees them in their best light can reduce the distance between where children feel they are presently and where they aspire to be.

Although Valoris is committed to foster families, we would like them to function as independently as possible, in order for the parental role to be as normal as possible. Valoris should only aspire to provide a supporting and supervisory role to these resources. As such, the Agency adopts policies and approaches that favour family values, as well as independence, in order to closely mirror the functioning of other family environments in the community.

Procedure

1. Residential Stability

Valoris strives to offer children stability and a permanency plan at the time of placement. Research has shown that children who experience residential stability have a better chance of experiencing stability as adults. This research also shows that children who experience family stability have more opportunities to be encouraged academically, which increases the probability that they will pursue post-secondary education. In turn, post-secondary education increases the number of employment opportunities available to them. Stability provides significant long-term benefits and impacts other aspects of children's lives. For all of these reasons, it is important to take the time required to develop a permanency plan for children and to consider all options that could maximize their chances of achieving these goals:

- Keeping children with their parents where possible, while providing parents with the tools and resources required to help them be good parents to their children;

- Presenting the file to the Permanency Planning Committee in order to establish alternative life plans in the event that children cannot return to their families. It is recommended that families or children participate in this process in order to allow them to contribute to discussions that pertain to them;
- Inviting children to participate with the Placement Committee in the search for a foster family. Children can provide a description of themselves and indicate what type of environment would be beneficial to them;
- Favouring placements in family settings where children can benefit from individual attention, rather than in a group home;
- Keeping children in their communities in order to maintain ties with the people who are dear to them and continue to attend the local school and their extra-curricular activities;
- Aiming to have only one placement or one set of siblings per foster home in order to allow children to benefit from the necessary support;
- Favouring adoption, where possible, or quasi-adoption.

2. Health

Like all parents, Valoris strives to ensure that children and youth receive necessary healthcare, as research has shown that health is an important factor in positive development. Good health is a determining factor in a child's endurance, energy, and ability to overcome developmental challenges. It is also a key factor that impacts other aspects of a child's life. Children must receive all necessary information in order to make good choices and not compromise their health. Certain steps are also required by the Ministry:

- Undergo an initial medical exam upon admission **including a hearing test** and subsequent annual exams;
- Undergo an initial dental exam upon admission and subsequent annual exams;
- Receive dental follow-up every six months;
- Undergo an initial eye exam upon admission and subsequent annual exams, or as recommended by an optometrist;
- Obtain an immunization record and keep it up to date;
- Assess the need for orthodontic care, as per the recommendations of a dentist;
- Obtain information regarding psychotropic medication prescribed for the child, if any;
- Ask the socio medical team to review the medication and make recommendations for reduction; assist with the reduction of medication, as this may have unknown adverse effects, such as lack of concentration or other severe health problems;
- Help children quit smoking, provide a transdermal patch, and refer them to the Health Unit for information;
- Assume the cost of eyeglasses;
- Ensure that the plan of care include the goal of participating in physical activities; assume the cost of registration and equipment required (hockey equipment, dance classes, karate...);
- Authorize the purchase of a bicycle and a helmet. Children may be asked to contribute toward this purchase, depending on the child's age and the bicycle desired.

3. Education

Like other parents in the community, we must be concerned with our children's education and make every effort to ensure their success. Since school is a place where children spend the majority of their time, it is normal that it is also where they develop the majority of their social skills. According to LAC, children in care face significant academic delays or difficulties more often, which makes their academic progress slower and results in a higher dropout rate for children in care than in the general population. We must be even more cautious in these

situations, by ensuring from the outset of the placement that children and youth develop a healthy routine that promotes learning, and that they receive the support required to succeed.

The words and actions that we use show children the value and importance that we place on education. We must therefore take the time to ask children what is happening at school, discuss with them their career and study plans, and diligently check their agenda. Our discussions should communicate our expectation that children will pursue post-secondary education. Children often realize what is expected of them and can even exceed these expectations. If we verbalize our confidence in their abilities to pursue post-secondary education, they are likely to be encouraged to do so.

Over the past few years, Valoris has tried through various means to support children in their academic careers, and we encourage parents to do the same:

- Make every effort to keep children in the same school, even if they must move. If this is impossible, offer transportation (in conjunction with the School Board, if possible) so that children may continue to attend the same school. Plan a school change at the most opportune moment, such as during the Christmas Break for children in primary school, or at the end of the semester for secondary school students.
- Send a note from the beginning of the school year encouraging foster parents to purchase books and/or monthly magazine subscriptions to encourage reading in children. The agency assumes these costs.
- Encourage an interest in reading through visits to the library and nightly reading with children.
- Reimburse foster parents for the cost of educational games that they purchase for children, following a discussion with their worker.
- Assume or contribute to the cost of a portable computer for youths who are beginning post-secondary studies.
- Offer tutoring services and encourage psychoeducational assessments.
- Ensure that children who have a modified education program can earn the credits required to obtain a high school diploma.
- Attend meetings of the Identification, Placement and Review Committee (IPRC) that concern the children.
- Encourage foster parents to participate in parent/teacher interviews.
- Encourage children to participate in cultural outings organized by the school, and reimburse the associated costs.
- Help youth to apply for scholarships with the Valoris Foundation and other sources.
- Cover the cost of the youth's post-secondary studies and textbooks.
- Support youth who are enrolled in post-secondary studies (from 21 to 24 years old) through the Residential Centre Fund.
- Encourage youth who have left care to use funds available to them through the Contingency Fund for Former wards, up to the age of 30, to resume their studies, start a small business or undertake another project approved by the committee that manages the funds.

4. Identity

Identity is a phenomenon that is both fluid and changing, developed through various life experiences. A person's beliefs and values may change once confronted with various experiences and with maturity. There are several components to a person's identity: gender, ethnicity, religion, language, social class, age, sexual orientation, body image, roles, personality, interests, occupation, personal social history and the ability to manage various situations. Identity can therefore be defined as how people perceive themselves and their

abilities. It is also important for children to have information about their parents and the reasons why they were placed in care.

As children may experience several types of breakdown in their lives (changing foster families, schools, friends...), it is important to find ways to help them to develop and strengthen their sense of self, while also providing them with opportunities to gain personal, cultural and community experiences in keeping with their cultural origins and family history:

- Match children with families that speak the same language and who share the same religion, or who will provide them with opportunities to maintain their religious practices;
- Ask parents to provide baby pictures of the children, as well as photos of other members of their family;
- Reimburse the cost of creating children's life books;
- Encourage the foster family to provide children with disposable cameras for school activities, vacations and family visits, and purchase a camera for children at Christmas or as a birthday gift;
- Encourage children to create their own life books and register them for a scrapbooking class, if desired;
- Recognize the accomplishments of children and youth during an evening of recognition;
- Support youth in the Youth Network by following their progress and providing opportunities to meet other youths throughout the province and registering them to workshops to develop their leadership abilities;
- Facilitate the process to allow children to assume the name of their foster families, even if they do not want to be adopted.

5. Family and Social Relationships

Research shows that even if children cannot live with their parents, they should, where appropriate, maintain ties to them and to their extended families: grandparents, siblings, aunts and uncles. These relationships provide children with a sense of continuity, and these children generally fare better in both the short and long terms than those who have lost contact with their families. Both research and experience have shown that many children return to their parents or re-establish contact with them. Maintaining contact with family does not necessarily have a negative impact on the attachment that children may develop with their foster families. What matters is that children form attachments, as attachment provides continuity, which in turn increases positive results for them as adults (education, employment...). We should rejoice when children are surrounded by a variety of people who they can rely on when faced with problems.

Valoris must act in the least intrusive manner possible with regard to the functioning of foster families. Valoris must make every effort to allow children to experience a normal family life:

- Make every effort to place siblings together or near to each other in order to maintain contact between them;
- Encourage families who have siblings in their care to plan activities together and to invite the children in order to provide regular contact if they cannot live together;
- We would like children to maintain contact with their parents through telephone calls and/or visits. We encourage foster parents to provide transportation for these visits, wherever possible and where suitable;
- The Agency has developed a list of tasks for foster parents (primarily parenting tasks) and for workers (primarily coaching and mediation tasks) in order to assign the parental role to foster parents and to clarify the worker's role toward foster families;
- The Agency favours the use of private respite care with members of the foster parents' family, as these people are part of the child's network;

- The Agency and foster families will encourage children to invite friends to their home and visit their friends' homes as well;
- We authorize an amount to be used to purchase birthday and Christmas gifts for siblings, and an amount for birthday gifts for friends;
- We will assume mileage costs in order to allow parents to accompany children to these activities;
- We offer positive incentives to families who meet certain pre-established criteria (number of years that a child has been with the family, no use of respite services...);
- We encourage families to participate in training sessions offered through Valor & Solutions or our community partners.

6. Social Presentation

One of the factors that helps children to be accepted by their peers is their appearance. The way children dress, behave and communicate all have an impact on how they are perceived by their peers and the adults around them. The first impression that people have of a child could change their perception of that child. We are responsible for helping children understand what impression they give others, and providing the tools required to help them feel comfortable in different situations:

- It is important to make an inventory of children's clothing in order to ensure that their wardrobes contain clothing that is appropriate to their size and the season. Funds are allocated for renewing children's clothing.
- We reimburse the cost of haircuts.
- We reimburse certain clothing expenses for graduations, first communions and confirmations.
- Since some children have difficulties with language or mobility, occupational therapy, physiotherapy and speech-language pathology services are provided to children to improve their communication and mobility.
- For children who have difficulty with socialization, the assistance of an integration agent can be offered to develop their social skills, ease integration and help them to make friends.

7. Emotional and Behavioural Development

Just like other parents, we want children's development to be problem-free and would like to shelter them from emotional and mental health issues or behavioural problems. Despite this wish, certain children at certain times of their lives will face various difficulties, and this often affects their behaviour. Most importantly, we must remember to recognize children's strengths and offer them positive experiences as much as possible. Even if we try to help children through the use of various services, it is important to simultaneously include them in family, community and other activities in order to increase the number of positive experiences in their lives.

- Refer children to psychological, psychiatric or counselling services for assessments and follow-up, as needed;
- Offer the assistance of a community integration agent to help with self-esteem issues, grief, and behaviour issues, and encouraging children to participate in formal or informal positive activities within the community.

8. Personal Care Skills

It would be false to assume that the preparation for independence begins near the end of adolescence. Rather, preparation for independence occurs throughout childhood, adolescence and adulthood. At a young age, children can take on small tasks that are appropriate to their skills and abilities. As children grow, these tasks increase in complexity and in number. After

all, youth do not need to leave the foster home when they reach 18 years of age; they may continue to live there while continuing to develop the skills required for independence.

The goal is to acquire skills that will allow youth to develop independence:

- Foster parents are encouraged to assign children chores as early as possible to develop their skills.
- Foster parents model personal care skills (hygiene).
- Encourage youth to make their own appointments (medical, dental, etc.).
- Help youth to develop organizational skills.
- Help youth become familiar with community resources.
- Encourage youth to find part-time employment.
- Provide assistance through the employment centre program to create a resume and prepare for an interview.
- Refer youth to the Independence group.
- Pay for a driver's course with a contribution from youth.
- Pay for drivers' license with a contribution from youth.
- Help youth open a bank account and manage a budget.
- Offer workshops on saving the subsidy equivalent to the Ontario Child Benefit (OCBE).
- Provide an independence kit to help youth settle into an apartment.

Definitions

Parents: includes biological parents, adoptive parents, step-mother, step-father or all other persons responsible for the child previous to Valoris' involvement.

Child: according to the Ontario Child and Family Services Act (CFS), RSO 1990, C. 11, a child is defined as a person under the age of eighteen years.

Annex(es)

Philosophy on Placement in Foster Care – 1996

References

- Valoris policies on services for children in care;
- Valoris Policies on services for foster families;
- Valoris' mission statement and insights;
- Philosophy on placement in foster care – 1998;
- Looking After Children Approach (LAC);
- Foster Care Licensing Manual, Ministry of Community and Social Services, 1999 :
 - 0203-03: Health Care Responsibilities;
 - 0302-03: Health Care Responsibilities.