Promoting the well-being and normalcy of youth in foster care through the Federal Preventing Sex Trafficking and Strengthening Families Act (SFA)

**WHAT?**
Signed into law by President Obama in September 2014, the Strengthening Families Act is designed to promote the well-being and normalcy of youth in foster care. The law establishes the Reasonable and Prudent Parenting Standard (RPPS) to guide and give foster parents, caregivers, and congregate care providers more decision making authority about daily, age-appropriate activities for youth in their care.

**WHO?**
The SFA impacts children and youth in foster care, foster parents, caregivers, group care providers, adult allies, child welfare agencies, and the juvenile courts.

**WHY?**
The engagement of young people, despite their circumstances, in age and developmentally appropriate experiences is critical in their transition into strong and independent adults.

Prior to SFA, policies and practices of child welfare systems were based on three priorities—safety, well-being, and permanency of children and youth. As a result, Child Welfare agencies often unintentionally limited youth development and well-being by focusing primarily on safety. Restricting a child’s engagement in activities and normalcy-related experiences limited agency risk and liability.

Youth report feeling “different” when they are restricted from participating in typical activities of their peers who are not in foster care. Many also report feeling excluded from experiences that are considered milestones in youth development including:

- Obtaining a driver’s license
- Working an after school job
- Practicing important life skills such as cooking, doing laundry, and managing money through a bank account
- Having sleepovers and hanging out with friends
- Attending prom
- Having a cell phone or using the internet
- Participating in sports or extracurricular activities

**System Barriers:**

**The Benefits Outweigh the Risks:**

1Juvenile Law Center, promoting Normalcy for Children and Youth in Foster Care. More information can be found at [www.JLC.org](http://www.JLC.org)

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Letting Kids BE KIDS
What Does “Normalcy” Mean for Youth, Foster Parents & Caregivers?

To promote and ensure normalcy, the SFA gives foster parents, caregivers, and group care providers more autonomy in making Reasonable and Prudent Parenting decisions on behalf of the children and youth in their care. Young people in foster care now have more flexibility to:

**TIPS**

For Youth, Foster Parents, Group Care Providers, Caregivers & Adult Allies:

1. **Discuss what “normal” experiences mean to you.** This could include activities many people take for granted including using the internet or having a cell phone, going on a weekend trip, playing a sport or going to a movie with friends.

2. **Be up-to-date on requirements and trainings** to implement the Reasonable and Prudent Parenting Standard for foster parents, caregivers and group care providers. This includes what decisions can be made without consulting the Department of Child Safety as well as when the Department must be notified for approval or consultation.

3. **Be informed on the Arizona Department of Child Safety Reasonable and Prudent Parent Standard Policy.** Check out: [https://dcs.az.gov/about/dcs-policies](https://dcs.az.gov/about/dcs-policies) and click on Chapter 4: Section 14

4. **Check out the Normalcy section on the Fostering Advocates Arizona website at fosteringadvocatesarizona.org** and hear from the experts, young adults who have experienced foster care, on what normalcy means to them.

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**PRACTICE AUTONOMY, DECISION MAKING, & HEALTHY RISK-TAKING**

**ENGAGE IN SELF-EXPLORATION**

**EXPLORE SKILLS & INTERESTS**

**BUILD & MAINTAIN SUPPORTIVE RELATIONSHIPS**