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Operations Memo 2012-15
May 24, 2012

To: Department of Transitional Assistance Staff

From:  **Stephanie Brown, Assistant Commissioner for Policy, Program and External Relations**

Re: TAFDC – Procedural Change for Referring Pregnant and Parenting Teens to a Structured Teen Living Program (TLP)

Background

DTA refers pregnant and parenting teens who apply for, and are receiving TAFDC benefits to the Department of Children and Families (DCF) for an assessment of the teen parent's current living situation when:

- ✓ the teen parent asserts that she cannot live in the home of her parent(s) because domestic violence, abuse, neglect, substance abuse, or other extraordinary circumstance exist in the home; and
- ✓ there is no adult relative age 20 or older or legal guardian with whom the teen parent can live.

DCF conducts a Teen Parent Assessment (TPA) of the teen parent and the parent's home and makes recommendation to DTA about the appropriateness of placement of the teen parent in a structured Teen Living Program. DCF may also make a recommendation that based on the TPA results, the teen parent is capable of living independently or remaining in her current living situation.

Purpose of Memo

This Operations Memo advises DTA staff that effective May 29, 2012, procedures for referring pregnant and parenting teens to DCF for an assessment and possible placement in a TLP have changed as follows:

**Purpose of
Memo
(continued)**

- The TAO and Central Office Teen Parent Liaisons are no longer responsible for making TLP referrals to DCF;
- The case manager, usually a Teen Parent Specialist, is responsible to make TLP referrals directly to DCF; and
- DCF staff will arrange for emergency bed (E-Bed) placements for teen parents in need of immediate placement with a referral from the case manager.

Forms for the referral and placement process remain the same.

**Teen Parent
Living Situations
Requiring a DCF
Referral**

When a pregnant or parenting teen with an active TAFDC case, or who is an applicant for TAFDC and is potentially eligible, reports that she cannot live at home with her parent(s), the case manager (usually a Teen Parent Specialist) must ask the teen parent to describe the current living situation in detail.

If a teen parent under the age of 18 alleges domestic violence, abuse, neglect, or substance abuse in the home, the case manager must explain to the teen parent that DTA is required to make a referral to DCF for an assessment of the parent's home for possible placement in a TLP. For allegations of abuse and/or neglect, the case manager must also file a Child Abuse and/or Neglect report (51A) by calling the local DCF Area Office and following up the oral report with a written 51A report within 48 hours. A list of the DCF Area Offices, the written 51A report form and procedures for filing the form can be found on the DCF website at: www.mass.gov/dcf.

If a teen parent age 18 or over alleges domestic violence, abuse, neglect, substance abuse or other circumstances in the home that may prevent the teen parent from living at home, the case manager should explore with the teen parent whether she can live with another adult relative age 20 or older or a legal guardian.

Note: For an unmarried teen parent, the adult relative age 20 or older cannot be the father of the child.

If there is no appropriate adult with whom the teen parent can live, the case manager must explain to the teen parent that a referral will be made to DCF for an assessment of the parent's home and possible placement in a TLP.

Important: A referral for an E-Bed must be made to DCF for immediate placement if the teen parent has no safe place to stay. See the E-Bed referral section later in this memo for procedures.

Teen Parent Living Situations Requiring a DCF Referral (continued) If domestic violence is alleged, the case manager must make a referral to the Domestic Violence (DV) Specialist, who will complete a safety assessment that day with the teen parent. The DV Specialist will make a recommendation as to whether it would be appropriate to place the teen parent in a domestic violence shelter or a TLP. The DV recommendation may also include restrictions for the teen parent's safety, such as the location of the placement.

The case manager should explore with the teen parent whether she has a safe place to stay until the assessment is completed.

Reminder: When a client discloses concerns about confidentiality of information due to domestic violence or for any other reason, case managers must discuss the availability of the Heightened Level of Security (HLS) indicator in BEACON and the restrictions associated with activating the HLS indicator. The DV Specialist should be consulted. See Operations Memo 2010-50 for procedures regarding the HLS option and client confidentiality.

Referring Clients for TLP Assessment Case managers will work closely with a DCF Teen Parent Liaison to coordinate the TLP referral and assessment process.

For the referral, the case manager is responsible to:

- explain to the teen parent that a referral will be made to DCF for an assessment of the current living situation;
 - explain to the teen parent that the person conducting the assessment will contact them to schedule an appointment. The case manager should assure the teen parent that the person is not a DCF investigator but an independent clinician contracted with DCF for TLP assessment purposes.
 - complete the *Teen Parent Referral* form online found in Policy Online in Online Forms, and print a copy of the completed form;
 - have the teen parent sign the Authorization to Release Information section of the *Teen Parent Referral* form;
 - copy the completed and signed *Teen Parent Referral* form;
 - give a copy of the signed *Teen Parent Referral* form to the teen parent and file the original in the physical case record;
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Referring Clients • for TLP Assessment (continued)

- e-mail, typing SECURE: in the Subject line, the completed *Teen Parent Referral* form and verification of the teen parent's TAFDC eligibility status to the DCF Teen Parent Liaison at: Kelly.Coursey@state.ma.us; and copy the case manager's unit supervisor and the TAO director or designee; and

Important: For TLP placement, the teen parent must have an active TAFDC case or be pending immediate approval for TAFDC. For a pending case, the unit supervisor's approval authorization must be pending release overnight. An application for SNAP benefits for the teen parent must also be processed and authorized.

- annotate the Narrative tab that a referral has been made to DCF for TLP placement.

E-mail the documents no later than the following day.

Teen Parent Refuses to Sign the Teen Parent Referral Form

A referral for an assessment of a teen parent's current living situation cannot be made unless the teen parent signs the *Teen Parent Referral* form.

If a teen parent 18 or older alleges domestic violence, abuse and/or neglect, or substance abuse in the home but refuses to sign the *Teen Parent Referral* form for a TLP assessment, the case manager must make a referral to the DV Specialist, who will complete a safety assessment that day with the teen parent.

If a teen parent under the age of 18 alleges domestic violence, abuse and/or neglect, or substance abuse in the home but refuses to sign the *Teen Parent Referral* form for a TLP assessment, the case manager must file a Child Abuse and/or Neglect report (51A) with the local DCF Area Office. The case manager must also notify the DCF Teen Parent Liaison, Kelly Coursey, about the 51A report by sending a SECURE e-mail to:

Kelly.Coursey@state.ma.us and copying the case manager's unit supervisor and the TAO director or designee. For a domestic violence allegation, the case manager must make a referral to the DV Specialist, who will complete a safety assessment that day with the teen parent.

DCF Staff Responsibilities

Once the referral for a TLP assessment is received by DCF, the DCF Teen Parent Liaison will:

- arrange for the assessment with a contracted clinical assessor;
 - track the status of the assessment referral;
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DCF Staff Responsibilities (continued)

- follow-up on the outcome and recommendation with the assessor; and
- notify the DCF TLP Clinical Coordinator, Kellie-ann Hurley, of the recommendation.

If the recommendation is to place the teen parent in a TLP, the DCF Clinical Coordinator will:

- send an e-mail, typing SECURE: in the Subject line, with the DCF *Teen Living Program Assessment Recommendation* form to the case manager with the name, address and phone number of the TLP and the name of the TLP contact person;
- make the referral for placement to the TLP; and

Note: The TLP contact person will contact the teen parent by phone and schedule an intake appointment.

- send an e-mail, typing SECURE: in the Subject line, with the DCF *Teen Living Program Assessment Recommendation* form to the case manager when the teen parent enters the TLP or if the teen parent refuses the placement.

Important: If the teen parent refuses to enter the TLP, the case manager must request verification of the teen parent's current living situation by generating a Verification Checklist (VC-1), and giving it to the teen parent, or sending it to the teen parent's last known address.

If the recommendation is to not place the teen parent in a TLP, DCF may recommend that based on the TPA results the teen parent is capable of living independently or remaining in her current living situation.

Informing the Teen Parent of the Assessment Recommendation

On the same day the case manager receives the DCF *Teen Living Program Assessment Recommendation* form, or at least the following work day, the case manager should contact the teen parent by phone and schedule an appointment with her to discuss the assessment recommendation.

If the recommendation is to place the teen parent in a TLP, the case manager will give the teen parent the name, address and phone number of the TLP and the name of the TLP contact person. The case manager will inform the teen parent that the TLP contact person will contact the teen parent by phone and schedule an intake appointment.

**Teen Parent
Living
Independently**

For DCF to recommend that a teen parent be allowed to live independently, she must have achieved educational and vocational goals and acquired necessary independent living skills and parenting skills. She must also meet the requirements found at 106 CMR 203.640, which are the following:

- The teen parent is married and living with her spouse;

Or

- The teen parent, **under age 18**, is unmarried, or is married and not living with her spouse, and DCF confirms that there is no known reason the teen parent cannot live independently, that she is a graduate of a DCF independent living program and that she is:
 1. a high school graduate; or
 2. a graduate of a GED program; or
 3. attending school full-time not beyond the high school level; or
 4. attending a full-time GED program and participating in an approved training or employment-related activity for a total of 20 hours per week.

Or

- The teen parent, **age 18 or 19**, is unmarried, or is married and not living with her spouse, and is :
 1. a high school graduate;
 2. a graduate of a GED program;
 3. attending school full-time not beyond the high school level; or
 4. attending a full-time GED program and participating in an approved training or employment-related activity for a total of 20 hours per week.

Or

- The teen parent, **age 17**, is unmarried, or is married and not living with her spouse, and a DCF assessment of the home of the teen's parent confirms that the teen parent cannot return to the parent's home; and a DCF assessment also confirms that the teen parent's current living environment poses no apparent threat to the health and safety of the teen parent and her child.

See 106 CMR 203.640 for verifications for a teen parent living independently.

DCF Independent Living Recommendation When a TPA results in a recommendation that the teen parent be allowed to live independently, in addition to the *Teen Living Program Assessment Recommendation* form sent to DTA, DCF must submit to the case manager appropriate verifications supporting the recommendation. See 106 CMR 203.640(B) for the required verifications.

Once the *Teen Living Program Assessment Recommendation* form and verifications package are received, the case manager or the unit supervisor must submit them to the DTA Commissioner or designee, who will review the recommendation and either approve or deny the independent living arrangement.

Emergency Placement (E-Bed) Procedures

If a teen parent asserts that she cannot live at home until an assessment is completed, a referral for an E-Bed must be made to the DCF Teen Parent Liaison for immediate placement.

For an E-Bed placement, in addition to completing the *Teen Parent Referral* form, the case manager must complete, sign and have the teen parent sign the *TLP Admission Checklist for Emergency Placements* form found in Policy Online in the Online Forms folder, and follow the instructions in the “Referring Clients for TLP Assessment” section earlier in this memo.

Important: The case manager must call the DCF Teen Parent Liaison, Kelly Coursey, immediately at: (617) 748-2228 to request an E-Bed placement.

On the same day, the case manager must e-mail, typing SECURE: in the Subject line, the *Teen Parent Referral* form, the *TLP Admission Checklist for Emergency Placements* form and verification of the teen parent’s TAFDC eligibility status to Kelly Coursey at: Kelly.Coursey@state.ma.us. DCF will not make the E-Bed placement without the completed forms.

Send copies to the DCF TLP Clinical Coordinator, Kellie-ann Hurley at Kellie-ann.Hurley@state.ma.us, the DTA unit supervisor and the TAO director or designee.

If DCF notifies the case manager that an E-Bed is not available but the teen parent still requires immediate placement, the case manager must refer the teen parent to the Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD), following the TAO’s procedures for EA shelter placement referrals. The case manager must inform the teen parent that an EA placement is only temporary until a TLP becomes available.

**Emergency
Placement
(E-Bed)
Procedures
(continued)**

When a permanent placement in a TLP becomes available, the DCF TLP Clinical Coordinator will inform the case manager by phone and by e-mail, and copy the case manager's unit supervisor and the TAO director or designee.

Staff at DTA, DCF and DHCD will confer to determine whether the teen parent should remain in the EA shelter or transfer to the TLP, taking into account the stability and best interest of the teen parent and her child.

Questions

If you have any questions, please have your Hotline designee call the Policy Hotline.
