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# TAFDC Update

Your source for late  
breaking information  
about the Transitional Aid  
to Families with Dependent  
Children Program

## About the Living Arrangement Assessment...

The living arrangement assessment is **not** a 51A investigation and is **not** for the purpose of removing the child. DSS subcontracts with non-DSS teen specialist assessors who have MSW degrees. These individuals are *not* DSS employees and their functions do *not* include 51A investigations or child removal. Like DTA workers, they are "mandated reporters" and may report a case to DSS for investigation independently. It is very important that the teen parents understand that the assessor's job is not to conduct a DSS 51A investigation.

## Change in GED Hour Requirement

A number of situations have arisen where the current 30-hour requirement for GED participants has proved impractical. Because of this, the policy is being revised. Effective immediately, a teen parent will meet the full-time attendance requirements if she is in an educational program that will lead to a GED that alone, or in combination with other activities, equals or exceeds 20 hours of participation per week.

## Teen Parent Questions and Answers

**q:** Do the teen parent rules apply to a teenage girl who is pregnant?

**a:** Yes, first, a pregnant teen is potentially TAFDC eligible if she is in the last four months of her pregnancy. The teen must also meet the school attendance and living arrangement rules. However, if she cannot attend school because of pregnancy complications which are verified by a competent medical authority, she may be considered to have good cause for not meeting this requirement until the pregnancy-related complications have been resolved.

The teen parent rules also apply to a teenage girl included in the TAFDC grant as a dependent who is in the last four months of her pregnancy. She and her parent or caretaker should be advised of the ongoing educational and living arrangement requirements during and after the birth of the child.

- q:** Are the teen parent rules different for teens under 18 and those who are 18 and 19?
- a:** Teen parents who are 18 and 19 must meet the teen parent school attendance requirements (106 CMR 203.610). If the teen parent who is 18 or 19 is meeting the school attendance requirements, then she automatically meets the requirements for living independently (106 CMR 203.640). A teen parent who is 18 or 19 may *always* make an application in her own name, even if she is living in the home of her mother who is receiving TAFDC for other siblings.
- q:** Is a teen parent under 18 and living with her parents who are not receiving assistance eligible to apply for and receive assistance for herself and her baby? May she apply on her own?

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**a:** A teen parent under 18 living with her parents who are not receiving assistance is potentially eligible to receive assistance for herself and her baby. Such a teen parent has the right to sign her own application (106 CMR 202.115). Her parents do not need to make the application. However, if she lives with them, her parents must cooperate in providing information to determine how much of their income is deemed to the teen and her baby.

If a teen under 18 is living with parents who are receiving assistance for her siblings, then she must be included in their TAFDC application and their assistance unit (she may be eligible for her own Food Stamps if she purchases and prepares apart from the household). However, if such a teen contacts the DTA office seeking assistance because she needs to move out, the case should be referred for a living arrangement assessment to determine if the teen's home situation is one of abuse, neglect or other extraordinary circumstances.

**q:** If a teen parent under 18 is living with her parents not receiving assistance, how is the parents' income deemed? What if the parents refuse to provide the necessary information?

**a:** First, only the income of the natural or adoptive parent(s) that the teen lives with is deemed. You do not count the income of stepparents, siblings or other household members. Second, if the teen's parents provide all necessary information relating to their gross earned and unearned income, you should follow the procedures found in Field Operations Memo 95-31, pages H-26 and H-27. Be sure to pay close attention to the proper coding for the income of the teen's parents. This income is compared to 200 percent of the Federal Poverty Level and *not* the 185 percent Eligibility Standard. To be sure that the 200 percent standard is used, you must enter this income using Client Number 57, 58 or 59. Using any other Client Number will result in an incorrect calculation.

If the teen's parents refuse to provide the information necessary to determine how much of their income is available to be deemed to the teen, the teen and her child(ren) are ineligible for TAFDC. She may be eligible for Food Stamps, child care and Medicaid and should be advised of her right to apply for these services.

**q:** Some 17-year-old teen parents are eligible to have the living arrangement requirement waived. What is the process for obtaining a waiver?

**a:** The process for obtaining this type of waiver is actually part of the regular living arrangement assessment process.

A teen parent under 18 must live with her parents or another adult relative. If a teen states that she cannot live with her parents because of abuse, neglect, addiction to substances, or

some other extraordinary circumstance, this must be confirmed by a living arrangement assessment. If, as a result of the assessment, it is determined that a teen who is 17 years old should not return to the home of her parents and there is no adult relative with whom she may live, a recommendation may be made that the teen can live independently rather than going into a TLP.

This waiver recommendation is made by DSS Central Office to the DTA Central Office Teen Parent Coordinator and the final decision is the Commissioner's. If the decision is to allow the teen to live independently, the local office will be informed by the Central Office Teen Parent Coordinator.

**q:** If a teen parent fails to meet the school attendance requirements, what action should be taken?

It is very important to first find out from the teen *why* she is not in a school program. If she states there are no available programs, you should try to help her find one. *If no program is available, do not sanction.* The local office director should notify the Regional Director of any situation where there is no program available so that the Department of Education may be notified. Again, do not sanction if there is no program available. You

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should also be sure to explore whether the teen has good cause for not meeting the school attendance requirements.

If the teen needs child care, refer her to the local Child Care Resource Center. If she needs transportation, process an authorization for this ESP service. If appropriate educational activities and necessary support services exist, but a teen nevertheless refuses to participate, the sanctioning process should begin.

Sanctioning a teen parent for failing to meet the school attendance requirement is a two-step process. First, the teen is removed from the grant. At this time the worker should try to impress upon her the importance of school attendance and be sure she understands that failure to meet the requirement will result in a loss of benefits for her child(ren) as well as herself. If, after 30 days, she is not meeting the school requirements and you have confirmed there are no barriers to her participation, take action to terminate her TAFDC case (or to remove her child(ren) if they are part of another assistance unit). Be sure to use Action Reason 79. This will ensure that Medicaid and Food Stamps continue.

- q:** How do I handle a case of a teen parent who agrees to comply after being sanctioned for failure to meet the school attendance requirement?
- a:** To have the sanction lifted, she must first meet the school attendance requirements for two weeks by *either* participating or, if the program is currently unavailable, presenting proof that she is enrolled or registered in an appropriate program and will begin participating as soon as possible. If the program will not be available for more than 60 days, the teen must participate in an approved activity (see TAFDC Update #7). Summer vacations are an exception to the 60-day period. During summer vacations, enrollment in a fall program is sufficient. As stated above, if a teen expresses willingness to meet the school requirement but no program is available, the sanction should be lifted and the Regional Director notified of the particulars of the situation.
- q:** After being sanctioned for failure to meet the school attendance requirement, a teen parent agrees to comply. Her program is available and, therefore, she must attend for two weeks before her sanction can be lifted. To attend school she will need child care and transportation. Is she eligible to receive these support services during the two-week period?
- a:** Yes.

- q:** What facilities are available for homeless teen parents under 18?
- a:** Currently, several of the Teen Living Programs are available as emergency placements for homeless teens under 18. These teens may be placed in these facilities while a living arrangement assessment is completed. If the assessment indicates that a TLP is appropriate, they would then move to the designated TLP.

If you have a homeless teen under 18 you should contact the Central Office Teen Parent Coordinator. The TLP placement will be arranged.

Homeless teen parents age 18 and 19 are eligible to be placed in EA-funded shelter. (Note: TAFDC Update #8 contained instructions for handling teens who were living in an EA shelter at the time the TAFDC program started. They were not intended as instructions for ongoing situations.)

