

## Physical, Mental, and Dental Health – Bench Practices

*Infants and young children who come before the court have unique physical, mental and developmental issues that should be addressed as early as possible. The following list of questions should elicit critical information that will assist in addressing the physical, mental and dental health needs of children in the child welfare system.*

A number of sections of Chapter 39 describe the obligations of various entities regarding provision of health-related services to children in dependency cases. The court has a role in receiving information from the parties and in ensuring that services are provided to children as required by law. Some of those provisions are set forth here. Section 39.407(3)(f), Florida Statutes provides, in part, that “[t]he department shall fully inform the court of the child’s medical and behavioral status as part of the social services report prepared for each judicial review hearing held for a child for whom psychotropic medication has been prescribed or provided under this subsection. As a part of the information provided to the court, the department shall furnish copies of all pertinent medical records concerning the child which have been generated since the previous hearing.” Section 39.402, Florida Statutes provides that if a parent is unavailable or unable to consent or withholds consent and the court determines access to the records and information is necessary to provide services to the child, the court shall issue an order granting access. In addition, section 39.6241, Florida Statutes requires for youth in Another Planned Permanent Living Arrangement that the department and guardian ad litem must provide the court with a recommended list and description of services needed by the child, such as independent living services and medical, dental, educational, or psychological referrals, and a recommended list and description of services needed by his or her caregiver.

### A. Physical Health

- Has the child received a comprehensive health assessment (i.e. **early periodic screening, diagnosis and treatment, well- baby exams, newborn screenings or annual physical**) since entering foster care? If so, have all the identified needs been addressed?
- Has the treating physician conducted a review of the child’s pertinent **birth and family history**?
- Ensure that a referral to the child protection team has been made in cases involving allegations of **physical and or sexual abuse**.
- Ensure that children who have a history of sexual abuse receive trauma informed counseling prior to being exposed to sexual education materials.
- Are the child’s **immunizations** complete and up-to-date for his or her age? If so, have the immunizations been filed with the court and does the caregiver have a copy?
- Has the child received developmentally appropriate information regarding the Human Papillomavirus (HPV) vaccine? The HPV vaccine can be administered to girls as young as age 9 but is mostly commonly administered to girls/women ages 11 to 26 years of age.
- Does the child have an acute or **chronic health issue** that needs to be addressed?

- Has the **child received a hearing and vision screening since entering foster care?**
- Does the child have a history and or been assessed for **allergies**? Are there environmental conditions impacting the allergies?
- Has the child received a screening for **lead poisoning, anemia, exposure to methamphetamine producing chemicals, or other harmful exposures?**
- Has the child received routine medical check-ups and illness related visits, using a primary physician or specific wellness clinic?
- Has the child received the necessary prescriptions for **medication** and access to **medical equipment (nebulizer, asthma pumps etc.)?**
- Based on the child's physical health needs, inquire if an assessment of the **caregiver's capacity to care** for the child has been conducted.
- Based on the child's physical health needs, inquire if the child's physical health needs warrant placement in a **medical foster home**.
- Has the adolescent received a **family planning consultation that included abstinence education as well as available methods of birth control?**
- Has the child received developmentally appropriate sexual health education that included instruction in: interpersonal relationships and communication skills, reproductive health, prevention of sexually transmitted diseases, and prevention of physical and sexual abuse?
- Ensure that the Blue Book is traveling with the child.

## **B. Mental/Social Emotional Health**

- If applicable, inquire what the comprehensive **behavioral health assessment** says about the child's development and mental health needs.
- **Ages 0-3:** The early intervention for children under three is known as Part C of Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) which in Florida is *Early Steps* in Children's Medical Services. This program offers free developmental screening, evaluations and treatment statewide.
- **School age:** The early intervention for children ages 3-5 is Part B of the IDEA which is known as The Florida Diagnostic and Learning Resources System (FDLRS) offering free diagnostic and instructional supports mostly for school age children.
- Ensure that children ages **0-5 receive developmental screenings that emphasis social and emotional development**. If delays or deficits are determined, ensure that the appropriate referrals are made.
- Inquire if the child was exposed to substances, including alcohol, pre-natal. For children who were substance exposed, ensure that these children are referred for development screenings and assessments that address exposure to substances and identify interventions.
- Inquire if the child has been referred for or is currently receiving counseling.
- Does the child have a **diagnosis of a developmental delay** or disability?
- Is the child receiving services from the **Agency for Persons with Disabilities (APD)** or on a wait list for such services if the child has a developmental disability?

- Does the child have an **Individualized Education Plan (IEP)**? If yes, what is the noted disability on the IEP? Ensure that the case manager has a copy of the most recent IEP and that it has been filed with the courts.
- Is the infant or toddler receiving services from Children’s Medical Services-Early Steps? If yes, are all of the services being provided as authorized on the Individualized Family Support Plan (IFSP)? If not, has a referral been made to Early Steps as required by CAPTA?
- If indicated, will the parent and child be referred for evidence-based parenting program that includes observable real-time parent child interactions to practice and acquire new skills?
- If applicable, inquire if the adolescent has been screened, and if indicated, received an assessment for substance abuse related issues. If indicated by the assessment, has the youth been referred for treatment services?
- Is the child currently being prescribed any **psychotropic medications**? If yes, which medications have been prescribed and has consent been obtained?
- Inquire if the child’s need for medication has clearly been explained to him or her and the caregiver.
- Does the child have any mental health issues that impair his or her ability to learn, interact appropriately or attend school regularly? If yes, what is this mental health issue and how is it being addressed?
- Based on the child’s mental health needs, inquire if an assessment of the caregiver’s capacity to care for the child has been conducted.
- If the child has been previously hospitalized for a mental health issue, ensure that the case worker has obtained all records from the hospitalization.
- Inquire if the child’s mental health needs warrant placement in a medical foster home.

### C. Dental Health

- Has the child received a dental examination since entering foster care?
- Has the child received **routine check-ups/cleanings** (including accommodations for children with special needs), fillings and other preventive treatment?
- Does the child have dental needs that extend beyond preventive care? If yes, how are the needs being addressed?
- Ensure that the case manager or caregiver has instructed the child on the proper way to brush and floss.
- Is the child receiving fluoride or fluoride treatments on a regular basis?
- Inquire if the child’s next dental examination has been scheduled.
- Has the child and the caregiver been educated on the importance of good oral health?

**If the permanency goal is reunification, ensure that the case plan requires the parent(s) to actively participate in the child’s health services, including attending medical appointments with the child.**