

# Residential Programs for Children with Emotional and Behavioral Disorders: Things For Parents to Consider

## What is a residential program?

Residential treatment means a 24-hour-a-day program under the clinical supervision of a mental health professional in a community residential setting other than an acute care hospital or regional treatment center inpatient unit. Residential treatment may include evaluation, behavior modification, intensive therapy, medication management, specialized diets, or other treatment services.

## Why might residential treatment be needed?

When your child's emotional or behavioral problems become so severe that your family is unable to keep him or her at home, your child may be placed in a hospital or residential treatment facility. The need for out-of-home placement of a child may be due to a variety of reasons, including assessment and diagnosis, crisis intervention, psychiatric treatment, abuse prevention, or education. In discussing residential treatment, it is important that you first consider your child's evaluation data and behavior to see if they warrant a residential placement. You should review the alternatives that have been tried.

## How are children placed in a residential setting?

*Voluntary Placement:* You, as parents, may choose to place your child in a residential setting because it has been recommended by a therapist, county social worker or other professional, or because you have done your own research. **If your child's placement in a residential facility is voluntary and not court-ordered, you do not have to give up custody or parental rights in order to receive these services.** Even though there are no federal requirements that parents give up custody, some counties may try to insist that parents give up their rights in order to receive a county-funded residential placement.

You need to use extreme caution in these circumstances and should seek the assistance of a PACER advocate or lawyer before giving up your parental rights.

*Individual Education Program (IEP) Team Placement:* IEP teams, which include parents, may determine that in order for your child to receive a free, appropriate public education (FAPE), placement is needed in a residential setting. This means that the IEP team has determined that your son or daughter needs a therapeutic setting such as residential treatment in order to receive educational benefit from the IEP services.

*Court-ordered Placement:* The court may order a child into a residential program to ensure the child's safety or for the child to access treatment.

## What questions should be asked when considering a residential program for my child?

### Program

- Ask to schedule a tour of the program and to talk with program staff. Obtain a "feel" for how staff interact with families and with children.
- Who is served by the program? What are the ages and gender of the children in the program? Are most of the children under court-ordered placement or voluntary placement?
- What are the approaches used by staff to deal with behavior? What is the program's philosophy of positive behavior interventions? Is there a facility-wide behavior plan? Will it be individualized for my child?
- How will education services be provided? Can my child receive the special education services he or she needs for his or her disability (i.e., learning disability)?

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- What are the program's practices for medication management?

### **Family Involvement**

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- How will we as parents be involved in the treatment plan?
- What are the visitation policies? How often can parents call or visit? Can my child come home on holidays or weekends?

### **Financial**

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- How is this placement going to be paid for (i.e., private insurance, public school as a special education related service, medical assistance, county, court-ordered and funded, etc.) and are there any out of pocket expenses for us as parents?

### **Transition Back to the Community**

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- What is the average or expected length of stay for a child in this residential program?

- What are the program's requirements for my child to move back to the community?
- What is the transition process to ensure success when my child does return to the community? What kinds of follow-up care will be provided?

### **What are some of my rights as a parent?**

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You have the right to be involved throughout the duration of your child's stay in a residential facility unless parental rights have been terminated through the court. Parents have the right to:

- be informed about the services your child is receiving
- attend planning meetings, IEP meetings
- receive copies of your child's records
- disagree with the placement unless it has been court-ordered