

Parent Handbook

Positive Alternatives, Inc.



www.positive-alternatives.org

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We warmly welcome you and your youth to Positive Alternatives. We believe in unconditional positive regard for all the youth we work with and treat them with dignity and respect.

We realize that by the time your son or daughter has been placed at Positive Alternatives, you and your family have probably been through a great deal of stress. We hope that the time spent at our program will help your child work through the many stressors, trauma, and issues they are currently facing.

We want to make this difficult time as easy for you as possible. Hopefully this handbook will answer many of the questions that you will initially have. You are always welcome to call the group home to ask questions or just to “check in” and see how your child is doing.

Remember, we are all here because we care very deeply about youth, their families, and the problems they face. The more we can communicate with each other, the easier and more smoothly the stay at Positive Alternatives will be for your child.

Mission Statement

Through a continuum of family and strength-based services, Positive Alternatives strives to equip at-risk youth and young adults with the social, emotional and developmental skills needed to flourish.

Vision Statement

Positive Alternatives is an innovative resource in Wisconsin for at-risk youth, young adults and their families by providing creative and collaborative services. Acknowledging that youth, families, and the community share the responsibility for preparing children for a successful adulthood, Positive Alternatives strives to equip at-risk youth and young adults with the social, emotional and developmental skills needed to flourish.

We are dedicated to empowering those we serve to reach their greatest potential, creating an environment that fosters unity, pride and resiliency, and inspires our community to embrace the strengths of youth. Our goal is to provide services that involve the family, focus on the desired outcome and build on strengths for the purpose of allowing individuals the opportunity to enhance social, emotional and developmental skills.

Philosophy

Positive Alternatives, Inc. operates from the belief that individuals and families pass through developmental stages. Each stage requires the individuals and/or families to face new tasks and discover alternative adaptive techniques. Successful adaptation at any one stage depends greatly on the individual and family's ability to master the skills required in the previous stage. Behaviors that prove to be problematic are viewed as signals of difficulties mastering the skills associated with the tasks for their stage of development. We recognize the unique task associated with the developmental stages involving youth.

History and Overview of Positive Alternatives, Inc.

Positive Alternatives, Inc. has been in existence since 1974. Our goal is to continually look for innovative and creative programs to benefit youth, the community, and the counties that we service. These services are driven by our current mission statement.

The agency's services started in October 1974, when Alpha House Youth Care, Inc., a 501©3, non-profit corporation was developed. Although the agency changed the corporation name in July 1996 to Positive Alternatives, Inc., the group home retained the program name of Alpha House. Positive Alternatives is governed by a Board of Directors with representation from each of the communities that Positive Alternatives has a location.

Positive Alternatives' group homes are licensed by the State of Wisconsin as an eight-bed group foster home for male and female youth between the ages of 12 and 21 years old. The first group home in Menomonie, Wisconsin was followed by a second, which now serves only female residents, opened in 2006 in River Falls, Wisconsin. Our third home, an all-female resident home located in Amery, Wisconsin, opened in the Summer of 2014. In 2015 we opened our fourth group home in Wisconsin Rapids and in 2017 we opened our fifth group home in Marathon County (Wausau). All group homes provide room and board, supervision, structure, support and recreational opportunities for the residents. The three western locations and our location in Wisconsin Rapids accept referrals from all Wisconsin counties, while Marathon County accepts only Marathon County placements.

Positive Alternatives' Staff

Positive Alternatives is staffed with 24-hour supervision at a minimum ratio of 1 staff to 5 residents. Our staff is made up of the following:

Program Director and Group Home Manager:

The Program Director is one of the two supervisors of the group home who plays a large role in the treatment of your child. The Program Director oversees the entire program and serves as the main contact when there are any program issues, concerns, or grievances.

The Group Home Manager is the second supervisor of the group home. This person is directly involved in the treatment of your child. The Group Home Manager serves as the main contact between parents, social workers, and the youth. Any questions or problems regarding the youth's treatment can be directed to this person when necessary.

Associate Case Manager I:

The Associate Case Manager I is directly involved in the treatment of your child. They work collaboratively with the Group Home Manager throughout the youth's placement within the group home. The Associate Case Manager I serves as the main contact between parents, social workers, service providers, and the youth.

Lead Staff:

There is a lead staff on each shift within the group home. They also play a role in the treatment of your child. The lead staff is responsible for the everyday needs of your child including school, hygiene, and appointments. The lead staff works directly with the youth daily. The leads are responsible for structuring their shifts, collaborating with resident counselors, meals, recreation, community service, and constructive homework time.

Resident Counselors:

Resident Counselors play a large supporting role among our staff. They are responsible for the everyday needs of your child alongside a lead staff. They staff the group home on nights, weekends, holidays, and any time needed. They may also be a primary to your child where they were identified as a support staff and meet 1:1 once a week for approximately one hour.

Family Involvement

Family contact is requested and encouraged. We request that you maintain a routine of contacts including visits, phone calls, and mail. This should be something that we can count on as well as your child.

Additionally, it is vital that the family members are supportive of the child's treatment plan and simultaneously demonstrate their commitment through contact and participation.

Questions or differences that family members have with the agency practice or policy should be directly communicated with the Program Director, rather than involving the child.

Positive Alternatives respects the family's rights and responsibility to assure that their child receives optimum care and treatment.

In order to positively affect change, everyone needs to be involved. Please feel free to call and communicate with your youth's case manager at any time if you would like to check-in more frequently or have questions regarding any part of our youth's placement. Positive Alternatives' staff call treatment team members of each youth placed with us to provide updates on behaviors, and we encourage parents/legal guardians to do the same.

Client Rights, Confidentiality, and Release of Information

Treatment Rights

1. A treatment plan you understand and that meets your child's needs.
2. Care and treatment provided by qualified staff.
3. Prompt, proper, and adequate health care for your child.
4. Your child has the right to be protected from cruel, embarrassing, or abusive punishment.
5. You and your child have the right to be treated equally regarding age, religion, race, sex, or disability.
6. Strict maintenance of confidentiality by Positive Alternatives' staff concerning information related to you and your child.
7. Your child's right to private visits, mail, and phone calls. You have the right to an explanation if restricted.
8. Your child's right to privacy, consistent with safe supervision, during day-to-day life.
9. You and your child have the right to make a complaint or file a grievance if you feel your rights are not respected.
10. In special circumstances, Positive Alternatives may limit the rights that are outlined above. For example, telephone calls may be monitored or limited if the calls are extremely upsetting to a child. The agency may not of its own accord, prevent you from visiting your son or daughter as long as the visit is set up according to our policy.

Confidentiality

Respecting the privacy of the youth and their families is a priority of Positive Alternatives. Personal information is confidential and will not be disclosed or discussed with anyone, without appropriate authorization to do so.

Release of Information

The Release of Information document has been or will be provided for you to complete at the time of your child's placement within the group home. The intent of this disclosure is to authorize the release and exchange of information for the purpose of Positive Alternatives providing the proper care and service to your youth.

Grievance Procedure

Positive Alternatives, Inc. supports the protection of your child's rights as guaranteed by the United States Government for its citizens. Clients, parents or legal guardians, and any other stakeholders have the right to file a grievance without interference or retaliation. The following are steps to take if you would like to file a grievance with the group home:

1. Inform the Program Director of the intent to and the nature of grievance. If the Program Director is unacceptable (due to involvement in the grievance) or unavailable, the grievance should be referred to the Program Director's supervisor, the Vice President/COO. The Program Director will assist, as needed, in getting the grievance documented and keep you up to date on resolving the grievance.
2. The documented grievance will be forwarded to the President/CEO for action and reply within 10 business days.
3. In the event that your child wishes to lodge a grievance, the child should inform the Program Director.

Permitted and Prohibited Personal Belongings

Permitted Personal Belongings

Positive Alternatives understands the importance of creating a home-like environment where the youth can feel safe, both physically and psychologically. The group home promotes this by allowing the youth to possess personal items throughout their placement. Items not listed below may be considered by the Program Director or Group Home Manager.

- Bedding and pillows, although these items are provided
- Clothes and shoes
- Comfort items such as blankets, stuffed animals, or sensory items
- Pictures, letters, and other personal reminders of family and friends
- Reading, writing, and art materials
- Some personal electronics, such as MP3 Player or iPod
- Jewelry and other accessories
- Personal hygiene items
- Fidgets, stress balls, or other items promoting healthy coping
- Favorite snack and drinks

Prohibited Personal Belongings

Prohibited items from the group home may include the following and is not an exhausted list (Exceptions may apply):

- Posters, clothing, paraphernalia, movies/video games, and/or other items which exhibit and/or imply gangs, abuse, sex, nudity, drugs and alcohol, or are offensive to others
- Larger electronics, including televisions and stereo systems or speakers
- Cell phones and any device that has Wi-Fi capabilities and cameras installed
- Knives/blades or other items identified as weapons
- Candles or flammable items (matches, lighters, etc.)
- Alcoholic beverages
- Tobacco products and paraphernalia
- Controlled substances

Frequently Asked Questions:

Can I visit my child and how do I go about setting this up?

Yes, of course you can visit your child. All visits must be pre-arranged through the Program Director or Group Home Manager. Remember these visits must be arranged during daytime hours of 8am-4pm Monday-Thursday and Friday by 2:00pm. A 24-hour advance notice is recommended. These visits will be approved on an individual basis and will reflect the child's treatment plan. Generally, visits progress from on-grounds visits to off-grounds visits, and perhaps eventually to overnight home visits. These visits also reflect your child's privilege level and treatment plan. These variables can be discussed when you are planning your visit. Visits requested outside these hours will not be approved.

What supplies does my child need? Do they need money?

Your child is supplied with everything they will need besides clothing and prescription medication. These items need to be provided by you. Long term residents may receive a small clothing allowance if needed. Your child also receives a weekly allowance and does not need money or treats from you. We discourage this as our allowance scale provides motivation in your child's treatment plan and is enough money for the treats they need.

Who should I contact regarding my child?

You can call the group home at any time to ask the staff questions about your child. If you reach a resident counselor, they will be able to answer any questions you have that relate

to how your child is doing at that time. They may not, however, know all the answers to questions about your child's treatment or upcoming/past activities. They will direct you to either the Program Director, Group Home Manager, or Lead Staff to get these questions answered. These staff can be contacted Monday-Friday (8am-4pm).

What type of education will my child receive?

If your child is here long term, he or she will be enrolled in the local school district. He or she may also attend day treatment. We have consistent contact with the schools and will ensure that if there are any behavioral problems, they will also be subject to consequence here. Each resident is expected complete at least two hours of study/constructive time daily.

What type of recreation will my child be doing?

Your child will be participating in recreation. The type of recreation will depend on their privilege level. Once privileges are earned, recreation may be off grounds and include going to movies, swimming, roller skating, hiking, and fishing. On grounds recreation events are available to everyone. These events may include basketball, arts & crafts, board games, video games, and cards. Your child always has the right to recreation; however, based upon privilege level, the recreation may be limited.

What are the consequences at Positive Alternatives? What is Resident Restriction (RR)?

The residents receive consequences by pulled privileges. If a resident is on "Red" or "Resident Restriction (RR)" they are not allowed to have privileges. When this is the case,

your child's privileges such as visits, or phone calls may be limited. You can talk to any staff member regarding the incident leading up to the consequence.

Can I call my child on the telephone?

Your child will be allowed to make and receive phone calls pending their privilege status and treatment plan. If, for some reason your child is not available to take a phone call, a message can be given to him/her and the staff that answered the telephone can answer any questions you may have.

How does my child earn privileges and what is a treatment plan?

Your child earns privileges based on their behavior and the privileges are measured by levels and phases. A child who is here for longer than 30 days is placed on a treatment plan and earns both levels and phases. This is developed by the goals of the youth, parents, social worker, and your child's case manager. If your child is here short-term (less than 30 days), he/she will only earn a level. This level will represent what privileges they can earn.