



Tennessee Department of Children's Services

Protocol for Accessing and Working in a Transitional House

Supplemental to DCS Policy: [16.46, Child/Youth Referral and Placement](#)

This protocol outlines the tasks and responsibilities for DCS staff for accessing a transitional house, as well as while sitting with and supervising children/youth in the transitional house setting. This protocol applies to custodial and non-custodial children/youth and also covers transitional home use for tasks other than sitting, such as Child and Family Team Meetings (CFTMs), supervised visitations, etc.

This protocol is applicable to all DCS Case Managers, Team Leaders, Team Coordinators, and Regional Directors, including Family Support Services, Child Protective Services, and Juvenile Justice.

A. General Transitional Home Regulations

1. Transitional houses may have their own processes or procedures that must be followed prior to accessing and when working on the property. DCS staff will ensure they are familiar with any transitional house processes or procedures prior to accessing the space and will comply with such requirements.
2. DCS staff will also adhere to the requirements outlined in this protocol.
3. Each region will appoint a Transitional Housing Facilitator (THF) to manage transitional housing in that region.
 - a) The THF is responsible for ensuring each transitional house provides and has access to the following minimum amenities, in working order, for any child/youth awaiting placement at the home:
 - ◆ Restroom/Toilet
 - ◆ Shower/bathing facilities
 - ◆ Adequate sleeping space
 - ◆ Linens (e.g., towels, bedding, pillows, etc.)
 - ◆ Personal care items/toiletries
 - ◆ Regular meals and snacks
4. The THF will be the first point of contact for DCS Case Managers when needing to access a transitional house.

B. Accessing a Transitional Home for Custodial Children/Youth Awaiting Placement

1. For information regarding accessing a transitional home for custodial children/youth, staff may review the **[Checklist for Accessing a Transitional House](#)** located below.

Protocol for Accessing and Working in a Transitional House

Checklist for Accessing a Transitional House for Custodial Children/Youth

Department of Children's Services staff will use this checklist when needing to access a transitional house for a child/youth.

- Notify the Transitional Housing Facilitator of the need for a transitional house immediately upon becoming aware of the need and obtain approval to utilize a transitional space.
- Address any child/youth safety concerns and complete a Safety Plan, if applicable.
- Create a folder for the child/youth that includes [CS-4227, Child Daily Log for Transitional Houses](#) and any completed Safety Plans.
- Ensure the child/youth has all necessary supplies, such as clothing, personal hygiene items, school supplies, etc.).

NOTE: If the child/youth does not have necessary items, contact the THF so the items may be made available at the transitional house.

- Ensure any medications for the child/youth are documented on [CS-0813, Medication Transfer](#) and kept separate from other belongings (exceptions to this include life-saving devices such as inhalers, epi-pens, etc.)
- Complete a search of the child/youth's personal belongings/items to ensure appropriateness of the belongings and that the items do not pose a health or safety risk to the child/youth or others that may also be present at the transitional space.

NOTE: Utilize DCS policy [31.4, Search Procedures](#) for more information.

- Transport the child/youth to the transitional space using DCS policy [31.15, Guidelines for Transportation of Child/Youth By Regional Employees](#)
- Upon arrival at the transitional space, the transporting DCS staff member will provide the DCS staff member sitting with the child/youth the folder created for the child/youth that includes [CS-4227, Child Daily Log for Transitional Houses](#) and any safety plans.

The transporting DCS staff member will also provide the sitting staff member a verbal update regarding the status of the child/youth, to include information regarding when the child/youth last ate, any medications administered and when the next dose is due, specifics regarding any safety plans, school information, any court orders pertaining to contact with parents/caregivers, etc.

C. Tasks and Responsibilities for DCS Staff When Working in Transitional Houses

Contract Agency Providers (Sitters)

1. All DCS staff and contracted providers supervising and supporting children/youth in transition houses will do the following:

Protocol for Accessing and Working in a Transitional House

- a) All staff are required to sign in at the beginning of each shift and sign out at the end. The sign-in/sign-out form can be accessed via the QR code posted at the designated sitting site or through the DCS SharePoint site.
(https://tennessee.sharepoint.com/sites/dcs/DCS_Sitter_Services/Shared%20Documents/Forms/AllItems.aspx).
 - b) Adhere to DCS policy related to professional decorum.
 - ◆ If an emergent issue with a contract agency staff/sitter arises after business hours, DCS staff are to contact the on-call Team Leader.
 - ◆ For any non-emergent issues regarding a contract agency staff/sitter, the regions. Transitional Housing Facilitator will be contacted the following business day.
 - c) Ensure children/youth adhere to set schedules and transitional house policies and procedures.
 - d) Engage in frequent communication regarding the needs of, and any behavior concerns for, the children/youth in the transitional house to ensure safety and well-being of all present in the house.
2. A master list of all approved Contract Agency sitters/employees may be accessed on the DCS SharePoint
(https://tennessee.sharepoint.com/sites/dcs/DCS_Sitter_Services/Shared%20Documents/Forms/AllItems.aspx).
 3. Upon arrival of a contract agency sitter, DCS staff will verify that the contract agency sitter is on the approved sitter list by checking the individual's photo identification (i.e. Tennessee issued photo ID, work photo ID, passport, etc.).
 4. After DCS staff confirm the contract agency sitter/staff are on the approved sitter list, DCS staff log the individual's name, photo ID check, and sign-in date and time on the transitional house sitter services staff log. The contract agency sitter's sign-out date and time will also be logged upon the individual's departure from the transitional home.
 5. The contract agency sitter's information will be maintained in the sitter services staff log and reviewed by the THF, Program Coordinator, or designated regional supervisor.
 6. If the contract agency sitter is not on the approved list or cannot present a valid photo ID, the individual will not be allowed to sit with children/youth in the transitional housing space.
 - a) The contract agency Sitter Services Supervisor will be contacted and informed the individual is not on the approved sitter list.
 - b) DCS will request the contract agency provide another sitter from the approved sitter list, and this information will be documented on the log by the DCS staff member.

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Supplemental to: 16.46

RDA SW22

Protocol for Accessing and Working in a Transitional House

General Sitting Shift Regulations

1. Though the number of DCS staff present at a transitional house will vary based on the number of children/youth awaiting placement at the transitional house, DCS staff and contract agency sitters will adhere to the below stipulations:
 - a) One (1) DCS staff will be present providing continuous supervision for the children/youth in the transitional house.
 - b) An additional DCS staff member shall be assigned to a six (6) hour swing shift during designated peak hours to ensure adequate coverage and to assist in the event of an emergency. These swing shifts will occur as follows:
 - ◆ Sunday through Thursday from 3 pm to 9 pm.
 - ◆ Friday and Saturday from 5 pm to 11 pm.
 - c) Under no circumstances shall the ratio of children/youth to sitters and/or DCS staff exceed a 3:1 ratio. The presence of additional sitters and/or DCS staff may also be required, based upon the needs of the child/youth.
2. Each shift for DCS staff in a transitional house will be six (6) hours in length.
3. DCS staff providing supervision of children/youth will be allotted a 30 (thirty) minute break, if working a shift that exceeds six (6) consecutive hours.
 - a) DCS staff are to alternate breaks to ensure each get the allotted 30 (thirty) minute break.
4. DCS staff will regularly assess the transitional home for safety throughout the shift, ensuring windows and doors are secure; removing any sharp objects or other hazards; and securing items that could be damaged.
5. Head counts, to determine the number of children/youth present in the home matches the number of children/youth that are listed on the home's current placement census, will be performed a minimum of three (3) times per shift, upon the start of the shift, mid-shift, and at the end of a shift.
 - a) Head counts will be documented on form [CS-4294, Child Daily Head Count Log for Transitional Houses](#).
 - b) For head counts performed at the start and end of a shift, both the arriving DCS staff member and departing DCS staff member will perform the count together and sign [CS-4294, Child Daily Head Count Log for Transitional Houses](#) confirming all children are present and accounted for.
 - c) Head counts performed mid-shift will be completed by the active DCS staff sitting in the transition house. This will be documented on [CS-4294, Child Daily Head Count Log for Transitional Houses](#).
6. During shift changes at a transitional house, the departing DCS staff will provide the arriving DCS staff a verbal update of the children/youth, to include an overview of the children/youth in

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RDA SW22

Protocol for Accessing and Working in a Transitional House

the house, any safety plans in place, any tasks needing to be completed, etc.

Documenting a Child/Youth's Stay at a Transitional Home

1. When a child/youth is taken to a transitional house to wait overnight, DCS staff ensures a Notification of Change of Placement is completed that same day using the "Report a Placement Change" link on the [***Placement Central for Staff***](#) web portal.
 - a) DCS staff will select "DCS Office Overnight" as the placement type and indicate address of the transitional house. The Network Development team enters the placement as "in office". Additionally, the designated regional DCS Case Manager ensures that the "Youth in Office" or "Transitional House Overnight" data collection spreadsheet is updated each day.

Custodial Children/Youth with Prescribed Medications in a Transitional House

1. DCS staff will notify the DCS Registered Nurse when a child/youth with prescribed medication will be waiting for placement in a transitional house for more than one night.
2. DCS staff will comply with the [***Protocol for DCS Case Managers to Distribute or Observe Self-Administration of Medication for Custodial Youth***](#) and DCS policy [***20.15, Medication Administration, Storage, and Disposal***](#) for any prescribed medications.
3. DCS Registered Nurses (RN) may administer medication as per [***20.15, Medication Administration, Storage, and Disposal***](#).
4. If there are children/youth awaiting placement in transitional houses that are also prescribed medication, a DCS Registered Nurse (RN) will complete an in-person visit to those transitional houses a minimum of two (2) times per week to review [***CS-4223, Medication Observation Record***](#) for accuracy, remove expired or discontinued medications, ensure any needed medication refills are obtained timely, and consult with DCS staff regarding any health-related concerns and/or issues.
 - a) DCS Registered Nurses may only complete inspections/transitional house visits virtually in cases of emergency. In those instances, DCS approved video technology will be utilized.
 - b) When using video technology, the DCS Registered Nurse will guide/instruct the DCS staff at the transitional house regarding medication administration and management, as well as address any concerns/needs.
5. The DCS Registered Nurse will also be available for consultations/education with DCS staff sitting with custodial children/youth in a transitional house setting via telephone for any health-related concerns and/or issues.
 - a) For any after-hours nursing needs, the DCS Registered Nurse on call will be contacted.
6. Review the [***Protocol for DCS Nurses to Support Regional Operations and Statewide Services***](#) for more specific tasks, responsibilities, and information.

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RDA SW22

Protocol for Accessing and Working in a Transitional House

Supervision of Custodial Children/Youth in Transitional Houses

1. DCS staff maintains the responsibility of providing continuous, 24 (twenty-four) hour supervision of children/youth placed in transitional houses
 - a) While transitional homes may have approved volunteers and/or DCS Contract providers assisting DCS staff at transitional house locations, supervision remains the sole responsibility of DCS staff at all times.
2. DCS staff will ensure direct sight and sound supervision of all children/youth at all times. Doors should not be closed, unless it is to allow for privacy during times of bathing/showering/dressing or using the restroom. Children/youth will not be without adequate DCS staff supervision, as defined by this protocol.
3. While supervision of children/youth in the transitional house is required, children/youth should be provided the ability to use the restroom/shower/dress with reasonable privacy, as described above in number three (3).
 - a) Children/youth must be accompanied to the entry of the restroom by DCS staff, and DCS staff is to remain within visual distance of the restroom entrance while also allowing the child/youth with reasonable privacy to shower, dress, or use the restroom.
 - b) Children/youth may not be accompanied by other children/youth inside the restroom/showering area.
4. DCS staff on-duty at a transitional house will not engage in other work-related activities, such as completing case recordings, taking phone calls, etc. DCS staff are to be focused solely on the duties of providing care and supervision to the children/youth temporarily placed in the transitional home.
 - a) If a phone call pertaining to a child/youth in a transitional house must be taken while on sitting duty, DCS staff will refrain from discussing confidential case information and make the call as brief as possible to ensure appropriate supervision of all children/youth in the house.

Emergencies in a Transitional House

1. In the event an emergency arises while DCS staff and a child/youth are at a transitional house, the DCS staff member will follow regular regional procedures (e.g., use of the regional on-call protocol in the event of a child behavior issue; contacting 911 or law enforcement if needed; etc.).

Technology Access for Custodial Children/Youth in a Transitional House

1. Technology access for children/youth is to be limited and only allowed in transitional houses where electronic devices are permitted. DCS staff must be able to directly supervise the screen

Protocol for Accessing and Working in a Transitional House

of the electronic device at all times.

2. DCS staff will ***not*** allow children/youth access to cell phones while in the transitional house, unless it is for the purpose of conducting a supervised phone call visitation with the child/youth's parent(s)/guardian(s).
 - a) The Child and Family Team (CFT) can assess the appropriateness of a child's/youth's access to a cell phone once the child is permanently placed.

Nutrition for Custodial Children/Youth in a Transitional House

1. To meet the nutritional needs for children/youth waiting for placement at transitional houses, regional leadership or designated staff will:
 - a) Secure a caterer or other form of routine meal delivery.
 - b) Create and post weekly menus/meal plans for staff and youth to review/access when needed.
 - c) Consult the agency dietician for guidance on meal planning to ensure dietary needs are met.
 - d) DCS staff sitting will ensure children/youth receive meals on schedule and document any reason for which a child/youth may not have received meals.

Education for Custodial Children/Youth in a Transitional House

1. The Regional Education Specialist will work with the assigned Family Services Worker (FSW) for each child/youth awaiting placement in transitional housing to ensure educational needs are met.

Mental Health and Supportive Services for Custodial Children/Youth in a Transitional House

1. If the child/youth was receiving therapy services prior to the child/youth waiting for placement in a transitional house, DCS staff will work with the Regional Clinical Psychologist/designee, to coordinate continuation of services or to arrange for local therapeutic services within 24 (twenty-four) hours of the child/youth entering a transitional house.
2. Under the supervision of an independently licensed Mental Health Clinician, a DCS Behavior Support Specialist can provide support to custodial children/youth awaiting placement in transition homes.
3. For children/youth without a pre-existing therapeutic support in place, but who present with exceptional needs, such as psychosis, physical aggression, self-harm, property destruction, anxiety/sadness, runaway, recent suicidal ideation/hospitalization, defiance etc., the DCS staff member will contact the Behavior Specialist or Regional Mental Health Clinician via telephone call or email to request that the specific child/youth be seen by the Specialist or Clinician for additional support.

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RDA SW22

Protocol for Accessing and Working in a Transitional House

4. The Regional Mental Health and/or Behavior Specialist will communicate on a weekly basis with the Program Coordinator/designee to actively identify children/youth that need support and ensure the child/youth is seen for supportive interventions.
5. If a child/youth expresses homicidal or suicidal thoughts, is engaging in self-harm, or is exhibiting symptoms of psychosis that place the child/youth or others in danger, such as hearing voices telling them to harm people, the onsite DCS staff will contact Mobile Crisis services immediately (855-274-7471) and follow the recommendations received, including implementation of any safety plans that may be developed.
 - a) DCS staff will also complete an incident report (DCS policy [1.4, Incident Reporting](#)) and notify the Regional Director, immediately. The Regional Director will notify the Executive Director.
6. A DCS Mental Health Clinician may be consulted on any mental health need or concern for custodial children/youth awaiting placement in a transitional house.

Accessing a Transitional House for Non-Custodial Children/Youth

1. While the primary purpose of a transitional house is to provide a safe and appropriate place for a custodial child/youth to await placement, some transitional houses may allow access to the transitional house for non-custodial children/youth in certain situations. For instance, DCS staff may utilize a transitional house as a place for non-custodial children/youth to wait while expedited placement referrals are being completed or a parent/guardian is being located to retrieve the child/youth.
2. If the transitional house is used to conduct supervised visitation or a CFTM, the DCS Case Manager/staff ensures all applicable DCS policy and this protocol, as well as any transitional house processes and/or procedures, are followed.
3. Staff should review the **Checklist for Accessing a Transitional House** for non-custodial children, provided below, for more information.

Checklist for Accessing a Transitional House for Non-Custodial Children/Youth

- Notify the Transitional Housing Facilitator of the need for a transitional house **immediately** upon becoming aware of the need and obtain approval to utilize a transitional space.
- If DCS staff is providing transportation for the non-custodial child/youth, the DCS Case Manager will first obtain the parent/guardian's consent to transport the child/youth to the transitional house using **CS-0827, Non-Custodial Consent for Transport**. The DCS Case Manager will also note the purpose of waiting at the transitional house with the child/youth on **CS-0827, Non-Custodial Consent for Transport**.

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RDA SW22

Protocol for Accessing and Working in a Transitional House

Departing a Transitional House

1. For information regarding departing a transitional home, staff may review the ***Checklist for Departing a Transitional House*** located below.

Checklist for Departing a Transitional House for DCS Staff

Department of Children's Services staff will use this checklist when preparing to depart a transitional house. NOTE: Some tasks may be completed by a Contract Agency Sitter, if present.

- Pick up all trash. Take out the trash.
- Wash and put away any dirty dishes/utensils.
- Clean up any spills in the home and/ wipe down dirty counters.
- Wash and put away any dirty laundry.
- Tidy the home by putting toys and other household items away in their designated areas.
- Lock all doors prior to leaving the home.
- Notify transitional house staff upon leaving the home.
- Notify the DCS Transitional Housing Facilitator upon leaving the home.
- If leaving the transitional house with a child/youth, DCS staff will ensure the child/youth has all belongings, including any medications, and transport the child/youth utilizing DCS policy **[31.15, Guidelines for Transportation of Child/Youth By Regional Employees](#)**.