



Tennessee Department of Children's Services

Protocol for Employee and Team Support after a Child/Youth or Employee Death

Supplemental to DCS Policy: 20.27, Child Death-Near Death Rapid Response

Protocol Statement: The Department supports the mental health and holistic wellness of all employees. DCS employees sometimes experience tragedies in their workplace. It is vital the Department have a trauma-informed, supportive, team-centered response to support employees in light of tragic events. In addition to using this protocol for employee support following a child or employee death, this protocol may also be used to access support for other tragedies or traumatic occurrences (e.g. staff being assaulted/threatened, severe abuse case, serious and traumatic local events such as mass shootings).

Purpose: To structure the organizational response in support of the mental health of DCS employees following the deaths of children or employees and/or other traumatic events.

Death of a Child in DCS Custody:

1. Immediately upon learning of a child's death in custody, DCS employees contact the Child Abuse Hotline. This is done to ensure proper legislative notifications, regardless of a known allegation of abuse or neglect. Please see DCS Policy [20.27, Child Death Near-Death Rapid Response](#) and [Protocol for Death of a Child/Youth in DCS Custody/Guardianship](#) for more information on next steps, family notifications, and planning service arrangements.

Note: The Special Investigations Unit (SIU) investigates these incidents when there is an allegation of abuse or neglect and/or when the child/youth's cause of death is sudden and unexpected. SIU meets initial response, interviews alleged perpetrators, makes appropriate service referrals, and conducts other investigative tasks. See DCS Policy 20.27, Child Death-Near Death Rapid Response for more information

2. Upon receiving a referral of a child's death in DCS custody, the Child Abuse Hotline emails the referral to the [EI DCS Child Death or Preliminary Near Death Alert@tn.gov](mailto:EI_DCS_Child_Death_or_Preliminary_Near_Death_Alert@tn.gov) in accordance with DCS Policy [20.27, Child Death Near-Death Rapid Response](#). The DCS Team Support lead/designee monitors and tracks the notifications.

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3. DCS Team Support contacts the Regional Administrator, Juvenile Justice Director, or YDC Superintendent (whichever is involved) and offers technical assistance and support. In as much as it is possible and helpful, DCS Team Support serves as the single point-of-contact regarding Central Office communications and support.
4. The Regional Human Resources Director or designee contacts the Employee Assistance Program (EAP) provider and coordinates on-site Critical Incident Debriefing.
5. Within one business day, DCS Team Support arrives on-site, as needed, to provide inperson support and technical assistance.

Death of a Child with an Open Non-custodial Case:

1. Immediately upon learning of a child's death during an open non-custodial case, DCS employees must contact the Child Abuse Hotline. This is done regardless of a known allegation of abuse or neglect. Please see DCS Policy [20.27, Child Death Near-Death Rapid Response](#) for more information and next steps.
2. The DCS Team Support lead/designee reviews the open case and the known circumstances of the child's death. As a general guideline, DCS Team Support lead/designee contacts the applicable Regional Leader if:
 - The child's death was unexpected;
3. The child's death appears to have involved abuse or neglect; or Other special circumstances upon request via: EI.DCS.Volunteer.Team.Support@tn.gov.
4. DCS Team Support contacts the Regional Administrator, Juvenile Justice Director, and/or CPS Director (whichever is involved) to provide technical assistance and support.

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5. The Human Resources Director or designee contacts the Department's Employee Assistance Program (EAP) provider and coordinates on-site Critical Incident Debriefing.

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Death of an Employee and/or Other Tragic Events:

6. The Regional Administrator, CPS Director, Juvenile Justice Director, YDC Superintendent, or designee contacts DCS Team Support via: [EI DCS.Volunteer Team Support@tn.gov](mailto:EI.DCS.Volunteer.Team.Support@tn.gov).
 - If someone from Team Support learns of an employee death and/or other tragic event, the Team Support member contacts the Regional Administrator, CPS Director, or Juvenile Justice Director regardless of whether or not an email was sent to: [EI DCS.Volunteer Team Support@tn.gov](mailto:EI.DCS.Volunteer.Team.Support@tn.gov).
1. The Regional Human Resources Director or designee contacts the Department's Employee Assistance Program (EAP) provider and coordinates on-site Critical Incident Debriefing.
2. Within one (1) business day, DCS Team Support arrives on-site, as needed, to provide inperson support and technical assistance.

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