



Tennessee Department of Children's Services  
**Protocol for Case Documentation Requirements**

Supplemental to DCS Policy: [31.14, Case Documentation Requirements](#)

**A. Appropriateness and Quality of Case Recordings**

1. Case recordings are written in clear, concise and complete sentences without omitting relevant information and do not include **slang** language or subjective/personal value judgments.
  - a) Slang: Unconventional words or phrases that express either something new or something old in a new way. It is flippant, irreverent, or it may be indecent or obscene.
2. Abbreviations and acronyms used must be commonly understood and acceptable.
3. Complete names and roles of case members are clearly identified in initial recordings that reference those persons.
4. E-mails and text messages are not to be pasted directly into case recordings. The information communicated is summarized in case recordings.
5. Notes are behaviorally descriptive and avoid vague, non-descriptive language that can be left open for interpretation.
6. For information regarding the use of Artificial Intelligence in case documentation, refer to DCS policy [7.17, Artificial Intelligence](#).

**B. Confidentiality and Sensitivity**

1. When writing case recordings, workers are mindful of the right to confidentiality and do not include information about persons unrelated to the case, except where those persons have

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a direct effect on the child/youth and family (in which case, only relevant information will be documented).

2. When writing case recordings, without sacrificing accuracy and completeness, workers are sensitive to the emotional well-being of the child/youth and family in the choice of terminology used (being mindful that the child/youth and family may be voluntarily or involuntarily exposed to the documentation in the future).

### **C. Documentation Outline Requirements**

1. Case recordings that document contacts with or on behalf of children/youth and families identify the following information:
  - a) Create Date and Date of Contact;
  - b) Individual that created the entry;
  - c) Duration of Contact;
  - d) Contact Type;
  - e) Contact Method;
  - f) Location of Contact: Court, DCS Group Home, DCS Office, YDC, Family Home, Hospital, Jail/Detention, Provider Office, etc.;
  - g) Purpose of Contact: Safety – child/community, Permanency, Well-being, Service Planning; and
  - h) Participants contacted.
2. The narrative of case recordings documenting significant contacts with or on behalf of children/youth and families, either face-to face or by other methods, are written to include the following components:

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- a) **Content** -Includes a summary of the interactions, agreements, decisions, evidence of facts, or issues that were discussed either face to face or by other means. Content includes discussions about the results of assessments and how they are being utilized in planning. Content also describes how the family was engaged in exploring all factors or elements impacting their current global situation. Current recordings indicate whether or not the child/youth had 1:1 private time with the worker and specifically addresses the strengths and needs identified in all family case plans, including probation and aftercare. Whatever purposes of the contact were identified (i.e. Safety, Permanency, Well-being or Service Planning) the narrative reflects discussion of those issues. The content of contacts should regularly reflect discussion with children and families about their progress toward achieving permanency and resolving the issues or concerns that brought them to the attention of the Department.
  
- b) **Observation**- Includes a record of all observations in descriptive, measurable terms. Includes individual behaviors witnessed; the appearance of the child(ren) and/or family members (as applicable); descriptions of observable developmental delays, illness or need for medical care; description of the interactions among parties present, including the interaction with worker; significant environmental factors; safety and risk factors; any observed strengths or needs; and, the family's response to interventions or services being implemented.
  
- c) **Next Steps** – Includes a statement of what is to be done next as a result of this contact, or as a natural progression of the case management process, including date/time and location of the next planned contact and follow-up steps. Generic actions steps are not to be used.
  
- d) Phone contacts, brief interactions or other casework activities can be summarized in a single narrative with essential information and any next steps required.

### **D. Monthly Expectations**

1. Over the course of each month, the caseworker engages in global assessment and quality contacts with all key case members. This information is integrated in case planning and decision making with case members on an ongoing basis.
  
2. Each case has an opening summary that outlines the composition of the home and family

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structure, reason for involvement with the Department, history with the Department, MSW consult or an individual with an advanced clinical degree (if applicable), and current living situation/placement.

### **E. Unsuccessful Contacts**

1. Unsuccessful attempts to make direct or telephone contact with or on behalf of client children/youth and families are entered as a case recording in the Electronic Record System.
2. The following minimum information is included in such case recordings:
  - a) Date and time of the unsuccessful contact;
  - b) Who was to be contacted;
  - c) The location of the unsuccessful contact;
  - d) If it was an attempted direct contact, whether the person(s) to be contacted was/were aware of the planned contact; and
  - e) Plan for rescheduling the contact.

### **F. Documentation for Reviews, Hearings and Child and Family Team Meetings**

The narrative entry regarding Reviews, Hearings, and Child and Family Team Meetings will include identification of all efforts made by workers to encourage and accommodate participation by all pertinent parties.

### **G. Contract Provider Case Recording Documentation**

Contract Providers enter a Monthly Progress Report that includes the elements set out in this protocol.

1. Documentation also includes narrative text that addresses the broad areas of Safety, Permanency, and Well-being as they were discussed with each member of the team.
2. Documentation under Well-being includes updates on Health and Development, School successes or struggles, identified strengths and needs, as well as Services being implemented and the impact of those services.

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- a) For a youth 14 (fourteen) years of age and older, Interdependent Living skills obtained or required are also reported on.
3. Documentation under Permanency includes detailed information regarding the progress towards permanency, what parent/child visits have occurred and a summary of what happened in those visits. Worker/child visits, worker/parent visits and siblings' visits are also documented as a part of this monthly progress report.
4. Documentation is detailed and descriptive and demonstrates case specific progress each month.

### **H. Correspondence and Other Documentation**

Documentation of e-mail, regular mail, facsimiles (faxes), and other materials received/sent may be recorded as a case recording in the Electronic Record System and will include the following minimum information:

1. Date sent or received,
2. Name (and relationship to the client child/youth) of the sender and recipient,
3. Type and date of the document,
4. Summary of the pertinent information,
5. Any planned action to be taken based on the content of the document, and
6. Location of the document.

**Note:** Do not copy/paste emails, letters or facsimiles directly into case recordings.

### **I. Supervisory Responsibility**

1. When supervisory staff directs case management staff regarding a specific action to be taken (or not taken) related to a case, the supervisor will adhere to the requirements listed

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in DCS policy [4.4, Performance and Case Supervision Practice Guidelines and Criteria](#).

2. Supervisors review Electronic Record System case conference notes using the appropriate case file review tool for cases assigned under their supervision to ensure that appropriate casework and documentation are occurring.

### **J. Contact with DCS Attorneys**

1. Conversations between DCS case management staff and DCS Legal Counsel Attorneys may be documented in the Electronic Record System Case Conference Notes module as a legal consult, but must be limited only to the date, time, person(s) contacted, and purpose of contact.
2. Specific content of the discussion is considered attorney-client privilege, and is not recorded in the official record (in neither the Electronic Record System case record or family case file).

### **K. Printing Case Recordings**

1. Electronic Record System hard copy case recordings **may** be printed for the purposes of audits and court testimony. However, hard copy case files will not be maintained.