


<b>31.21, Immediate Notification of Serious Incidents to a Deputy Commissioner (DC)</b>	
<b>Application:</b> All Department of Children's Services Employees	
<b>Authority:</b> None	<b>Standards:</b> None
<b>Commissioner:</b> 	<b>Date:</b> 1/9/2026
Original Effective Date: 02/09/2026 Current Effective Date: 02/09/2026	Supersedes: None Last Review Date: 9/08/2025
<b>Glossary:</b> ○ None	

**Policy Statement:**

The Tennessee Department of Children's Services is committed to ensuring the safety and well-being of the children and families served through its programs as well as our staff serving within the Department's programs. To support this commitment, Deputy Commissioners must be promptly notified of any serious incident that may significantly impact the safety of a child or youth, the operations of the Department, or the public trust in the child welfare system.

**Purpose:**

To establish a clear procedure and expectation of when to notify a Deputy Commissioner of serious incidents to ensure timely awareness, appropriate response, and accountability within the Department.

**Procedures:**

**A. Immediate Notification to a Deputy Commissioner (DC)**

1. DCS staff **must immediately report** the situations listed below — and any similar circumstances — by phone to their direct line of supervision, ultimately ensuring that the Deputy Commissioner (DC) is informed. If the situation meets the appropriate criteria, the DC is expected to notify the Commissioner.
  - a) Fatality or near fatality of a custodial child as outlined in DCS policy [20.28, Child Death and Near-Death Response and Review](#).
  - b) Fatality or near fatality of a staff member.

- c) If an Amber Alert is issued for a DCS custodial child.
  - d) Significant loss of budgetary dollars/funding or damage to state property that results in the inability to use a state office.
  - e) Any hospitalization/admission or critical emergency department visit of a child; or, the hospitalization/admission or critical emergency department visit of a DCS staff (resulting from an injury received during the line of duty).
  - f) Firearm or other weapons found at a DCS facility, DCS vehicles, or other group home placement as outlined in DCS policy [1.4, Incident Reporting](#).
  - g) Arrest of a DCS employee for actions taken in the line of duty as per DCS policy [4.1, Employee Background Checks](#).
  - h) Serious provider disruption resulting in placement issues.
  - i) Breach of confidentiality (refer to policy [9.4, Confidential Client-Specific Information](#)).
    - ◆ Notification to the Regional and Central office Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) Privacy officer in the case of protected health information not involving other confidential matters.
2. See DCS policy [29.11, Emergency Action Plans \(EAPs\)](#) for information regarding reporting of natural disasters.
  3. Media presence at a DCS facility or group home placement or imminent media risk, as per DCS policy [1.15, News Media Relations for DCS Regional Offices and a Youth Development Center](#).
  4. If unsure whether a matter requires immediate notification, call and email your direct line of supervision.
  5. If you are unable to reach any persons in your direct line of supervision, call the Hotline for assistance in ultimately notifying an executive level team member. You must also send a **thorough email** to your direct supervisor.

**B. Email Notification to Deputy Commissioner (DC)**

1. If a situation **does not meet the criteria above for immediate phone notification** but, is one of the circumstances listed below, it must be **reported via email** to your direct line of supervision, up to and including your DC.

2. Circumstances that warrant an email notification include, but are not limited to, the following:
  - a) Fatality of a foster parent.
  - b) Non-critical emergency department visit of a child or a DCS staff (resulting from injury occurring in the line of duty) not requiring immediate phone call.
  - c) Assault on staff as outlined in DCS policy [1.4, Incident Reporting](#).
  - d) If a parent or guardian violates a court-ordered custody agreement, such as unlawfully taking, hiding, or withholding a child.
  - e) Custodial child/youth runs away, absconds, or escapes their placement.
  - f) Court orders or subpoenas requiring the appearance of DCS executive leadership.
  - g) Arrest of a DCS employee, foster parent, or residential provider as per DCS policy [4.1, Employee Background Checks](#).
  - h) Any event disrupting daily operations of staff or DCS offices (e.g., severe/inclement weather, staff illness, security threats, or significant damage to DCS-owned, contracted, or leased facilities).
  - i) Positive news or staff recognition, with staff consent to share (e.g., exceptional service, childbirths/major milestones, successful permanency outcomes).

**Note:** Staff are not required to share personal information unless they choose to.
3. If unsure whether a matter requires email notification, call or email your direct supervisor.

**Forms:**

None

**Collateral Documents:**

[1.4, Incident Reporting](#)

[1.15, News Media Relations for DCS Regional Offices and a Youth Development Center](#)

[4.1, Employee Background Checks](#)

[9.4, Confidential Client-Specific Information](#)

[20.28, Child Death and Near-Death Response and Review](#)