

DSS Policy and Procedure Guide

Division 03: Child Welfare

Chapter 11: **Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI) Support**

Item 001: **Incident Reporting and Investigation**

Suggested changes send to: [DSS PSOA](#) Mailbox

Issued: **October 30, 2015**

References: [PPG 03-01-009](#); [PPG 03-03-008](#); [PPG 03-03-009](#); [PPG 03-04-001](#) ;[Off-Line Intake Screening Form](#)

Revisions in Red

Replaces Issue: April 11, 2014

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Preamble

Child Welfare Policy and Procedure Guides (PPG) are meant to be used as tools to relay best practice and staff expectations. It is understood that specific case scenarios may not always align themselves with the stated practices and that at all times what is of paramount importance is the Safety and Well-being of the children we are charged to protect.

Policy

Department of Social Services (DSS) Child Welfare employees shall expedite internal reporting of all incidents, events, situations or occurrences that may meet the criteria for incident reporting as defined by DSS. Child Welfare staff will also follow a standardized process for addressing the investigation activities required after receiving notification of an incident.

Purpose

To ensure Child Welfare social workers, supervisors, managers and all other employees understand and follow the chain of command and procedures regarding the reporting and investigating of incidents; and to provide a mechanism to:

- Increase knowledge regarding causes and prevention of incidents.
- Improve quality of care and promote a mindset of client safety.
- Focus attention on system issues and processes rather than individual blame.
- Be in compliance with regulatory requirements for the reporting of child fatalities/near fatalities.
- **Ensure the alerts and Health and Education Passport (HEP) for the child/youth are updated, as needed.**

Definitions

Critical Incidents are significant events that require immediate teaming and response from a variety of DSS task areas. In addition, these are incidents that Administration will want to know about in case of media involvement. Examples include:

- Death of a dependent in an Open Case or Referral
- Near Fatality – defined by the federal government as “an act that, as certified by a physician, places the child in serious or critical condition.”
- Extreme Abuse/Multiple Dependents referral
- Media-related/High profile event
- Kidnapping of or absconding with dependent

Reportable Incidents are significant situations requiring robust assessment, follow-up and documentation. They are incidents that unfortunately routinely occur, but which require extra attention for a variety of reasons depending on the incident. Examples include:

- Allegations of abuse or neglect of Fresno County dependents by a care giver
- Severe injury (broken bones, burns, requires hospitalization, Shaken Baby, Hematoma)
- Severe sexual abuse
- Closure or suspension of a Foster Family Agency or Group Home
- Arrest or received criminal history on a foster parent or relative care provider
- Physical/sexual assault by dependent minor
- Attempted suicide by dependent minor or foster parent
- Violent death of parent
- Caregiver that requires **Child Welfare** crisis intervention services
- Death of foster parent or relative caregiver
- Dependent minor hospitalized pursuant to Welfare and Institutions Code (WIC) 5150
- Dependent minor hospitalized for medical reasons
- Abandoned baby
- Arrest of foster child
- Automobile accident with children in car
- Runaway (overnight or longer)

Case alerts in CWS/CMS help staff quickly see items of significance regarding the child/youth and the family. This especially helps when the assigned Social Worker (SW) is out of the office and co-workers are asked to help the family.

Procedure for Critical Incidents

Responsibility for Reporting Critical Incidents During Normal Working Hours (8:00 am to 5:00pm)

When a SW receives information that requires **Critical Incident Reporting**, the following notification procedures shall be followed:

- The SW shall *immediately* notify, in-person or telephonically, **their** Social Work Supervisor (SWS) or the next available SWS.
- If no SWS is available the SW will notify the appropriate Program Manager (PM).
- The SW is to ensure that notification takes place *within 30 minutes* of the incident or receipt of knowledge of the incident.
- The SW is required to have a verbal, real time, exchange with a SWS or PM, either on the telephone or in person. Messages by voice mail and/or e-mail shall not be left for the SWS or PM to receive at a later date.
- The SW shall notify the **Hotline** (559-600-8320) immediately regarding any incidents of suspected abuse or neglect of Fresno County dependent children.
- The SW shall notify the Child Protective Services (CPS) **Hotline** in other counties regarding any incidents of suspected abuse or neglect of children who are dependents of other counties and in out-of-home placements in Fresno County, such as Group Homes or Foster Family Agencies (FFAs).

For incidents involving a child death or severe injury, verbal notification will go up the chain of command until the Director has been notified (i.e. the SWS shall notify the PM, the PM shall notify the Deputy Director (**DD**), and the DD shall notify the Director).

Immediate Notification of **Critical** Incidents after Normal Working Hours (Swing Shift and Standby)

Normal working hours are considered to be 8 am to 5 pm Monday – Friday. At all other times the following notification procedures shall be followed:

- The SW shall first contact the **Hotline** to secure the name and telephone number of the Swing **Shift** or on-call SWS.
- The SW shall telephone the Swing **Shift** or on-call SWS, identify himself/herself and relate the circumstances of the incident as described above.
- The SW shall have a verbal, real time exchange with the Swing **Shift** or on-call SWS. Voice mail messages shall not be left for reporting purposes.

Concurrently, or immediately following verbal notification, **an email must be sent with** the following information **to the DSS Child Welfare CIR distribution list/mailbox and to all involved or assigned DSS staff and their Supervisors:**

Subject: Critical Incident (Type of Incident) (Family/Child's Last Name)

Body of Email:

- The SW's name, **immediate contact** telephone number, and task area.
- The assigned SW's name and task area (if different from above).
- The SWS's name.
- The circumstances of the incident and time of occurrence.
- Full name and date of birth of child(ren), case name and number.
- The location of the child(ren) and with whom.

- Immediate next steps.
- Medical services performed or needed.
- Collaboration with law enforcement.
- Who has been notified or is aware of the situation.
- Full name and date of birth of other child(ren) in the home and/or involved in the incident.
- When the SW will have more information and/or an update.

Program Manager Response

The Lead PM (LPM) is responsible to ensure adequate response and information-sharing.

The LPM will be designated in the following manner:

- After normal business hours – the On Call PM on duty.
- An Emergency Response PM is lead when there is an open investigation. This may transfer to another PM as appropriate to the complexity of the situation.
- The PM of the assigned Case Managing (CM) SW is responsible when there is no open investigation.

Within one hour of notification (or by 9 a.m. the following business day), the LPM will email the DSS Child Welfare CIR distribution list/mailbox and all involved or assigned DSS staff and their Supervisors that they will be the assigned LPM for the incident. This will remain in effect until resolution of the incident or another LPM is designated.

The LPM is responsible for the following:

- Complete and accurate information has been shared with all necessary individuals.
- Identifying and linking to additional program supports.
- Reporting to Risk Management when needed.
- Collaborating with DSS Child Welfare Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI) Support (formerly known as Quality Assurance), including cc'ing CQI Support on any inquiries.

Reporting Updated Information

Updated **emails** are completed as additional information is gathered on the circumstances of the incident, when these circumstances have been stabilized, and/or a resolution to the immediate crisis has been established. **Examples of suggested updates are:**

- Medical procedure needed/completed/outcome
- Parents, previously whereabouts unknown have been located and informed
- Media coverage
- Conclusion/significant occurrence in law enforcement investigation

Conclusion Reporting Requirements

Following **resolution of a Critical Incident**, a completed **Critical Incident Report** is to be emailed to the **DSS Child Welfare CIR distribution list/mailbox** and to all involved or assigned DSS staff and their Supervisors.

Risk Management shall be notified by the PM assigned to the case/referral of all incidents regarding the death of a child in an open DSS referral or case. Refer to the PPG 03-01-009 *Child Death Investigations* for additional information.

Procedure for Reportable Incidents

Responsibility for Reporting Reportable Incidents During Normal Working Hours (8:00 am to 5:00pm)

When a SW receives information regarding a Reportable Incident, they are to report it to a SWS and PM to assist with collaboration and response.

The PM is responsible to ensure notification and coordination of Department staff appropriate to meet the needs of each incident.

Concurrently, or immediately following verbal notification, an email must be sent with the following information to the **DSS Child Welfare CIR distribution list/mailbox** and to all involved or assigned DSS staff and their Supervisors:

Subject: Reportable Incident (Type of Incident) (Family/Child's Last Name)

Body of Email:

- The SW's name, **immediate contact** telephone number, and task area.
- The assigned SW's name and task area (if different from above).
- The SWS's name.
- The circumstances of the incident and time of occurrence.
- Full name and date of birth of child(ren), case name and number.
- The location of the child(ren) and with whom.
- **Immediate next steps.**
- **Medical services performed or needed, if appropriate to the incident.**
- **Collaboration with law enforcement, if appropriate to the incident.**
- **Who has been notified or is aware of the situation.**
- **Full name and date of birth of other child(ren) in the home and/or involved in the incident, if appropriate to the incident.**
- **When the SW will have more information and/or an update, if appropriate to the incident.**

If Leadership or CQI Support believes the Incident should be elevated to Critical, they will email everyone the reason for elevating the Incident. In addition, "Need to Elevate" will be added to the subject line of the email.

Notification of Reportable Incidents after Normal Business Hours (Swing Shift and Standby)

Normal working hours are considered to be 8 am to 5 pm Monday – Friday. At all other times the following notification procedures shall be followed:

- The SW shall first contact the **Hotline** to secure the name and telephone number of the Swing **Shift** or on-call SWS.
- The SW shall telephone the Swing **Shift** or on-call SWS, identify himself/herself and relate the circumstances of the incident as described above **within 30 minutes of the Incident or receipt of knowledge of the Incident.**
- The SW shall have a verbal, real time exchange with the Swing **Shift** or on-call SWS. Voice mail messages shall not be left for reporting purposes.

Prior to ending their shift, Swing Shift, Standby, Placement Facilitation Team, and any other workers assisting with after-hours response are to email the assigned SW, assigned SWS, assigned PM, the On-call SWS, and the On-Call PM of all Reportable Incidents.

Investigating Critical and Reportable Incidents

When staff is advised of an Incident, the following Incident investigation procedures shall be followed:

- If the **Incident** involves abuse or neglect of **any child**, the SW shall call the **Hotline at 559-600-8320** to advised Hotline staff of the situation and that an **Off-Line Intake Screening Form** will be completed and emailed as soon as practically possible to the **CWS Careline Inbox**, including a cc to their SWS and/or PM. (Do not FAX the form.) The SW shall also provide a telephone number where they can be reached for any further questions and/or clarifications.
 - **Note:** If the SW is the first to hear of the abuse and/or neglect by a Reporting Party, the SW shall be the one to complete the Screening Form/referral and not ask the Reporting Party to call the Hotline.
- The investigation shall follow the procedures outlined in PPG 03-03-008 *Assessment in Investigation of Abuse/Neglect Reports*.
- If the **Incident** involves abuse or neglect of dependent children, the investigation shall follow the procedures outlined in PPG 03-03-009 *Referrals on Dependent Minors*.
 - **Note:** Child abuse/neglect allegations shall not be investigated by the child's assigned SW.
 - **Parents of any dependents shall be advised of any abuse and/or neglect of their child(ren), as well as how their child(ren) is/are doing.**
 - **Foster Parent Resources (FPR) shall be advised of any foster or group homes that need to be placed on hold at [CWS FPR](#).**

- If the Incident involves the death of a child, the investigation shall follow the procedures outline in PPG 03-01-009 *Child Death Investigations*.
- If the Incident is regarding a child who is hospitalized in the ICU or Pediatric ICU for over 24 hours due to any abuse or neglect, the responding SW shall advise **CQI Support**.
- **If the Incident involves an injury or medical procedure, the responding SW shall consult with a Public Health Nurse.**
- **For assistance with well-being issues and services, the responding SW shall consult with the Child Focus Team.**
- **If the Incident involves mental health issues and/or a child/youth being 5150'd, the responding SW shall consult with the CW Mental Health Team.**
- **If the Incident involves a child/youth receiving Wraparound services, the responding SW shall advise the SB 163 Wraparound staff.**
- If the Incident involves a dependent child who has run away, the assigned SW shall ensure a police report has been completed.
- In cases of children who chronically run from placement the assigned SW shall follow procedures outlined in PPG 03-04-001 *Outreach to Missing Dependent Minors*.
- Depending on the circumstance of the Incident, the assigned SW shall notify all appropriate agencies – i.e. law enforcement, mental health services, medical services, FFA staff, etc.
- When the Incident involves dependent children, the assigned SW shall complete any appropriate contacts with the child (ren) and/or family needed to address the Incident and/or stabilize the situation.
- When the Incident involves dependent children, the assigned SW shall ensure that any case management duties required to address the Incident and/or stabilize the situation have been completed.
 - **Note:** This can include, but is not limited to, temporary or permanent placement disruptions or modification of visitation pending the full investigation of child abuse/neglect allegations by the Dependent Investigations Unit (DIU).