



Tennessee Department of Children's Services

Protocol for Employee Conduct and Dress Code

Supplemental to DCS Policies: 1.18, Uniformed Employee's Grooming Requirements & Provisions For Uniforms, 4.9, Employee Disciplinary and Mediation Process, 4.20, Workplace Harassment

In an effort to support a professional environment that promotes excellence and establish clear expectations across the state, the agency has implemented an agency-wide ** conduct and dress code.

Conduct:

All staff must behave in a professional manner at all times. This includes following policy, but also means engaging in courteous behaviors with others.

Appropriate professional language must always be used when conversing with other staff, the public and with youth. At no time may the following language be used: curse/cuss words, racial, ethnic, or religious slurs; derogatory language towards any class of person (gender, orientation, creed, etc.) or specific person; lewd or sexual comments or jokes; or any other language used to demean or make others uncomfortable. Refer to DCS Policy [4.20, Workplace Harassment](#), for more specific information regarding potentially inappropriate language, gestures, and behaviors.

All staff must respond to phone calls, texts, and emails within one (1) business day when possible. In some instances (for example: a report or substantial information is requested), a 24 hour "answer" will not be possible but a 24 hour acknowledgement of the communication with assurance that additional information/response will be forthcoming is expected. Staff must ensure that someone is covering their responsibilities when on annual leave. An email rule and a voicemail message are created, before going on leave, information provided includes: the date staff will return to work and whom to contact in their absence.

Dress Code:

As representatives of the Department, and also role models for the youth and families we serve, staff is expected to adhere to appropriate dress guidelines at all times. Staff should abide by the following dress code:

1. All employees shall give personal hygiene appropriate attention.
2. Grooming and hair styles for employees:
 - Hair should be cut and styled in a manner to present a professional image.
 - Facial hair shall be kept neatly trimmed.
3. Jewelry worn shall be conservative and present a professional image.
4. Body art is defined as the temporary or permanent marking of the human body for aesthetic or non-medical purposes. It includes, but is not limited to tattoos, brands, body gauges, facial jewelry or piercings and intentional scarring.

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- Tattoos are permitted unless they fall under the following categories:
 - Extremist tattoos. Tattoos affiliated with, depicting, or symbolizing extremist philosophies, organizations or activities. This category includes tattoos that: feature philosophies, groups or activities that promote racial or gender intolerance; encourage discrimination based on numerous factors, including race, gender and religion; advocate violence or other unlawful means of depriving individual rights under the U.S. Constitution, and Federal or State law.
 - Indecent tattoos. Tattoos that are grossly offensive to modesty, decency, propriety, or professionalism.
 - Sexist tattoos. Tattoos that advocate a philosophy that degrades or demeans a person based on gender.
 - Racist tattoos. Tattoos or brands that advocate a philosophy that degrades or demeans a person based on race, ethnicity, or national origin.
 - Facial or Neck tattoos. No exposed facial or neck tattoos at any time.
- Piercings: Facial piercings are limited to studs.

5. Business casual attire is acceptable when not attending court:

- Dress or casual slacks or khakis, skirts or dresses
- Dress shirt, blouse, knit shirts and polo shirts
- Sweaters, vests or jackets
- Tie and a sports coat
- Dress shoes, casual shoes, dress sandals

NOTE: Skirts and dresses should be no shorter than the top of the knee.

1. For court appearances all staff must dress in professional attire at all times.

2. The following items are **unacceptable** at all times:

- Jeans/denim*
- Halter tops, strapless or thin /spaghetti-strap tops (without a sweater, collared shirt, or jacket)
- Leggings in lieu of pants- leggings may be worn under a dress or shirt of appropriate length (leggings should not be flesh colored)
- Flip flops, Chaco's/Tevas, soccer sandals, crocs, house shoes, work boots (steel-toed, construction or military)
- Sports attire (unless approved for a special event)
- Clothing exposing plunging necklines, cleavage, shoulders, midriffs, the bare back and thin /see-through (including "cold shoulder") blouses
- Skirts shorter than the top of the knee

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- Shorts of any length
- Capris Pants shorter than calf-length
- Excessively tight clothing
- Graphic t-shirts or clothing with writing and logos. Pictures, logos, or messages on clothing that could be interpreted to have links to drugs, alcohol, tobacco usage or carry political, sexual or racial overtones is strictly prohibited. Refer to DCS Policy [1.18, Unformed Employee's Grooming Requirements & Provisions for Uniforms](#), for more specific information regarding potentially inappropriate language, gestures, and behaviors.
- Camouflage clothing items
- Caps (baseball, stocking, skull etc.) worn inside

3. Transportation Officers must be in full uniform at all times when on duty (including trainings). Shirts must be tucked in and uniforms should be clean and free of wrinkles. Shoes must cover the entire foot.

Persons who do not follow these guidelines may be sent home to change; using annual leave to cover time missed, and may also be subject to disciplinary action.

NOTE: Exceptions to the dress code for medical or religious/cultural reasons may be requested of the Deputy Commissioner/Assistant Commissioner/Executive Director of the employee's program area:

* Staff may wear jeans and/or tennis shoes on Fridays when they are in the office and do not have planned contact with clients and/or community partners or when sitting with children at Transitional Homes. A change of clothes is recommended in case of unplanned situations requiring contact with clients and/or community partners.

** Legal staff, Child Abuse Hotline staff and YDC security staff have separate dress code requirements. Please see your supervisor for those dress code requirements.

It is imperative that all employees maintain and display a professional image to the public. Employees not in compliance are subject to documented counseling sessions. Repeated non-compliance may be reflected in the employee's annual performance document or progressive disciplinary action, up to termination of employment. Supervisors are responsible for maintaining compliance of this policy.

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