



Tennessee Department of Children's Services

Protocol for Employee Code of Conduct

Supplemental to DCS Policy [4.3, Employee Code of Conduct](#)

To support a professional environment that promotes excellence and establish clear expectations across the state, the Department of Children's Services has implemented an agency-wide [Employee Code of Conduct](#) policy. Employees are required to follow this policy and protocol, as well as any attached guides, that outline the specific requirements for each standard. Employees should familiarize themselves with the policy and protocol to ensure compliance and avoid disciplinary action.

Handling Escalated Clients/Families

Due to the sensitive nature of the work at DCS, employees can expect to occasionally encounter children, parents, and families that become angry and escalated. In the event of such an occurrence, employees are expected to continue to conduct themselves in a professional and courteous demeanor, as outlined in the DCS policy [4.3, Employee Code of Conduct](#). The below tips can assist employees with handling escalated situations.

1. Remain calm and keep composure.
2. Be understanding that this is a difficult time for the child, parent, and family.
3. Communicate clearly and effectively.
4. Complete the de-escalation trainings offered by the department (contact your training coordinator if more information is needed).
5. Utilize conflict resolution skills to de-escalate the situation.
6. Collaborate with other community partners, if necessary, to resolve the escalation.

*Should an employee feel unsafe at any time, the employee should immediately inform and request assistance from their supervisor. The supervisor is to then facilitate putting safety precautions in place.

Court Conduct

All employees will represent the Department of Children's Services (DCS) in an honest, ethical, and professional manner while in a court setting. This includes adherence to professionalism in verbal and written communications while testifying, engaging with court and legal staff, clients, and all members of the public, as well as ensuring proper, professional dress during court proceedings. Employees are expected to adhere to the dress code in each court in which they will appear. Court dress code is usually business attire, which prohibits shorts, leggings, or other revealing clothing.

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Dress Code

As representatives of the Department of Children's Services, as well as role models for the youth and families served, all employees are expected to adhere to the following formal dress code at all times:

A. Personal Hygiene, Tattoos, and Body Art:

1. All employees will maintain good personal hygiene, and their person will appear orderly and clean.
2. Hair grooming, cuts, and styles will be neat and present a professional image.
3. Facial hair will be kept neatly trimmed.
4. Jewelry is permitted but will be conservative and with professional appearance.
5. Body art, tattoos, and piercings, are permitted unless they fall under the following categories:
 - a) *Extremist tattoos*: Tattoos affiliated with, depicting, or symbolizing any extremist philosophies, groups, organizations, or activities. This category includes tattoos that promote racial or gender intolerance, encourage discrimination based on factors such as race, gender, religion, etc., or advocate for violence or other unlawful means of depriving individual rights under the U.S. Constitution and Federal or State law.
 - b) *Indecent tattoos*. Tattoos that are grossly offensive to modesty, decency, propriety, or professionalism.
 - c) *Sexist tattoos*. Tattoos that advocate a philosophy and/or degrade or demean a person based on gender.
 - d) *Racist tattoos*. Tattoos or brands that advocate a philosophy and/or degrade or demean a person based on race, ethnicity, or national origin.
 - e) *Facial or neck tattoos*. Facial and/or neck tattoos are not permitted in any situation.
 - f) *Piercings*: Facial piercings are limited to studs.

B. Attire

1. The following business casual attire is acceptable when **NOT** attending court:
 - a) Dress or casual slacks or khakis, skirts, or dresses.
 - b) Dress shirt, blouse, knit shirts, and polo shirts.
 - c) Sweaters, vests, or jackets.

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- d) Ties and sport coats.
 - e) Dress shoes, casual shoes, or dress sandals.
2. For **ALL** court appearances, employees must dress in professional business attire.
- a) The following attire is always **unacceptable**:
 - ◆ Jeans/Denim **Employees may wear jeans and/or tennis shoes on Fridays when in office or when sitting with children at Transitional Homes. Jeans/denim may also be worn during after-hours on call situations. Jeans/denim are *NOT* permitted when employees have *planned* contact with clients and/or community partners. Thus, a change of clothes is recommended in case the need to change into more situationally appropriate clothing arises. **
 - ◆ 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 but no flesh-colored leggings are allowed).
 - ◆ Flip flops, Chaco's/Texas, 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
 - ◆ Shorts of any length
 - ◆ Capris Pants shorter than calf-length
 - ◆ Skirts and dresses shorter than the top of the knee.
 - ◆ Excessively tight clothing
 - ◆ Graphic t-shirts or clothing with writing, logos, pictures, or messages that could be interpreted to have links to drugs, alcohol, tobacco usage, or carry political, sexual or racial overtones are strictly prohibited.

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- ◆ Camouflage clothing items.
- ◆ Caps (baseball, stocking, cowboy, skull etc.) worn inside.
- b) Employees should always follow the DCS dress code while utilizing video conferencing for meetings, visits, court appearances, and any other video conferencing completed on the Department's behalf. Employees should treat video conferencing as though they are attending in-person and adhere to the DCS *Code of Conduct* policy.
- c) 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.
- d) Legal employees and Child Abuse Hotline employees have separate dress code requirements. Please see your supervisor for those dress code requirements.

NOTE: Employees who do not follow these guidelines may be sent home to change, required to use annual leave to cover time missed, and are subject to documented counseling sessions.

Integrity and Ethics

A. Honesty and Credibility

Employees are to conduct themselves in a manner that will ensure their ability to accurately and credibly represent the Department of Children's Services.

1. All employees will familiarize themselves with and understand the [Giglio Awareness Statement \(tn.gov\)](#).
2. Employees will not engage in or be involved in dishonesty, fraud, misrepresentation, or the falsification of documents in any capacity, including during court testimony, case documentation, case reviews, etc.
3. Employees will avoid situations that involve, could involve, or give the impression of a conflict of interest.
4. All agency employees are required to report suspected dishonesty, fraud, misrepresentation, or possible falsification of documents directly upon becoming aware of these possible violations. The [Protocol for Concerns for Fraud and Falsification](#) can also assist employees with reporting any concerns.

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B. On and Off-Duty Conduct

Employees are expected to let reason and discretion determine their behavior during business hours, as well as off-duty on their personal time.

1. Employees will uphold the duties of their position as is required of public servants.
2. Employees will not make racial, ethnic, or religious slurs, use derogatory language towards any class of person (gender, orientation, creed, etc.) or specific person, or use any other language used to demean or make others uncomfortable.
3. All employees are to review and comply with the Department of Human Resources policy on *Abusive Conduct in the Workplace* found at [DOHRPolicy17-001.pdf \(tn.gov\)](#).
4. Violence and/or abuse towards others is unacceptable at the Department of Children's Services. The *Workplace Violence Prevention Guidelines* can be reviewed in policy [4.29, Workplace Violence Prevention Guidelines](#).
5. Employees may refer to DCS Policy [4.20, Workplace Harassment](#) and the Department of Human Resources policy on *Workplace Discrimination and Harassment* at [DOHRPolicy12-008.pdf \(tn.gov\)](#) for more specific information regarding potentially inappropriate language, gestures, and behaviors.
6. Employees will *never* knowingly violate the rights of any individual under the United States Constitution ([U.S. Constitution | Constitution Annotated | Congress.gov | Library of Congress](#)), the Tennessee Constitution ([Tennessee Constitution.pmd \(tnsosfiles.com\)](#)), or any applicable statute.
7. Employees will not associate with individuals that are actively engaging in criminal behaviors, *unless* doing so is required for successful completion of their duties.
8. Employees will not knowingly affiliate or become affiliated with organizations of a subversive nature.
9. All employees will follow all statewide and agency policies, protocols, and rules, as well as all state, federal, and local laws or regulations.
10. Any employee aware another agency employee has violated, plans to violate, or is violating the law, or any Department of Children's Services policies, procedures, rules, or regulations will report the information to their supervisor immediately using [ProFraudFalse.pdf \(tn.gov\)](#). The supervisor will then determine the next course of action and if an Internal Affairs investigation is required.

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Acceptable Use of State Issued Equipment

For more information, employees may review the DCS policy on policy [7.2, Acceptable Use, Network Access Rights, and Obligations](#).

1. Only state approved backgrounds and screensavers are permitted for use.
2. For court appearances, employees may utilize a court's mandated technology-based platform via their state-issued electronic devices.
3. Photos taken on any state issued device should only be taken during the course of an employee's official duties (i.e. photos of children, homes, etc.) and immediately uploaded to the Electronic Record System.
4. Employees are *not* to take or have case/client related photographs on their personal electronic devices.
5. At no time should an employee operate a state vehicle during the use of video conferencing due to the safety concerns this would incur. Additionally, Tennessee law on the use of cell phones while operating a motor vehicle must be followed.
6. The use of an employee's personal phone, computer, or other electronic device is highly discouraged as it could open the device to public records and discovery requests.
7. There is no right to or expectation of privacy while utilizing a state owned/leased vehicle, state-issued electronic device, or any state sanctioned network or platform.

Social Media

1. Employees will not utilize personal social media accounts during business hours and during any after-hours duties.
2. Employees are not to make any comments, statements, speeches, appearances, endorsements, or publish any materials on their personal social media accounts that could possibly be considered to represent the views or positions of the Department of Children's Services.
3. All employees understand that the Department of Children's Services may access any information transmitted, created, exchanged, downloaded, or discussed on a public internet platform at any time without advance notification to the employee.

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4. Employees understand social media privacy settings regularly change, and at no time should an employee assume any personal information posted on a social media platform is private or protected.
5. Employees understand they can be personally subject to civil lawsuit and litigation, based on their activities on personal social media platforms, in the following instances:
 - a) Posting or publishing false information that results in the defamation or harms the reputation of any individual, group, or organization.
 - b) Posting or publishing private, personal information, not previously disclosed to the general public and not of legitimate public concern, of another individual without that individual's permission.
 - c) Utilizing another person's name, likeness, or other personal characteristics for purposes of exploitation without that individual's permission.
 - d) Plagiarizing and/or publishing another person's creative works, trademarks, or confidential business information without express permission from the owner.

NOTE: Any employee who becomes aware that another DCS employee has violated policy [4.3, Code of Conduct](#) and/or the [Protocol for Social Media Usage to Contact Clients](#) for personal or work-related use will notify their supervisor immediately.

Conduct Unbecoming

Drug Free Workplace:

The Department of Children's Services operates a drug-free work environment for the safety of its employees, the children/families served, and the public.

1. Any employee found to be violating policy [4.8, Drug Free Workplace](#), will be subject to disciplinary action, up to and including termination.
2. Employees will not use legally prescribed controlled substances while on duty if said substances impair an employee's speech, physical function, cognitive/reasoning abilities, and/or their ability to perform the essential functions of the job.
3. If an employee is aware a legally prescribed controlled substance may or will impair their abilities as described above, the employee will contact their supervisor and human resource representative to discuss taking leave or other possible options during the timeframe in which they will be taking the substance/medication.

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4. Employees understand that employment with the Department of Children's Services may require employees to work or be called into work (i.e. on-call, sitting with children, etc.) after normal business hours.
5. Employees scheduled for after-hours on call duties will assume they will be called in to work and *not* consume alcohol during periods of assigned on call responsibilities.
6. Employees are aware and understand that it is the expectation of the Department that employees do not allow themselves to become impaired *in any capacity* when employees may be expected/required to report to work for on call duties.
7. Should an employee be required to report to work after-hours, as per the employee's previously determined schedule, and find themselves impaired/unable to perform their duties due to any drug or alcohol use, legal or illegal, the employee will immediately notify the supervisor of the situation.
8. Upon being informed an employee is impaired and unable to complete the functions of their job, the supervisor will make note of the employee's condition and report the incident up the chain of command. The employee may then be required to report to their Human Resource representative for drug testing as outlined in the DCS policy for *Employee Drug Testing*, which may be viewed at policy [**4.7, Reasonable Suspicion Drug-Testing**](#). The employee is *not* to report to work in these circumstances for *any* reason.

*Employees can utilize the state's *Behavioral Health* services at [**Behavioral Health \(tn.gov\)**](#) and *Emotional Wellbeing Solutions* program at [**Emotional Wellbeing Solutions \(tn.gov\)**](#) for assistance and are encouraged to seek help for any drug or alcohol related issues. Both programs are administered by Optum on a 24/7 basis at 855.HERE4TN (855.437.3486) or [**www.Here4TN.com**](#).

Abuse of Authority:

Employees will not use their agency badge credentials or official position in a manner that does not exude professionalism and integrity.

- A. Employees will not mistreat subordinates, those the agency serves, or the public.
- B. Employees are not to accept and/or receive any special privileges as a result of their employment for themselves or others.
- C. Employees are not to endorse any product or service utilizing their professional title or position.
- D. Employees will not allow personal feelings to influence/affect their professional duties, behaviors, or discretion.

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- E. Employees will not accept or solicit any gift, reward, gratuity, loan, service, or fee from any individual, agency, business, or corporation as a direct or indirect consideration for the performance of their duties.