

Chapter 1

Introduction

Section 4: Reporting Sensitive Issues

Reporting Sensitive Issues

This procedure outlines:

- I. What a sensitive issue is.
- II. Sensitive issue identification and reporting process.

The purpose of reporting sensitive issues is to:

- I. Bring highly concerning issues to the attention of Central Office when there is no other established process to do so.
- II. Identify issues that require a Critical Incident Response Team (CIRT).
- III. Prepare for potential inquiries, including from the public or media.

Procedure

I. What is a Sensitive Issue?

“**Sensitive issue**” means a situation that is:

- A. Highly concerning,
- B. May pose a potential liability or,
- C. Is of emerging public or media interest.

There is some discretion in what a Child Welfare professional determines to be a “sensitive issue”. A sensitive issue report may be completed when Child Welfare professionals in the local office determine a situation may require Central Office review or support. Situations that are always sensitive issues are categorized below and include the following:

- A. Child or young adult fatality that comes to the attention of Child Welfare. This includes:
 1. The death of a child alleged to be the result of abuse.
 2. Any death of a child when the deceased child, the deceased child’s siblings or a member of the deceased child’s household was ever the subject of a closed at screening or CPS assessment. This includes a child on an open CPS assessment, open case, receiving in-home services (child protective services or family support services) or in substitute care, and it also includes a child not currently involved with Child Welfare and who may only have Child Welfare history from a very long time ago. The death may or may not be suspicious for abuse, as this includes circumstances when a child dies from a genetic disorder, illness, or accident.
 3. The death of a young adult in the custody of ODHS, in substitute care, or receiving services from Child Welfare.

Note: When the sensitive issue involves the death of a child or young adult refer to the [Child Fatality Protocol](#).

- B. A serious physical injury or near fatality of a child or young adult that comes to the attention of Child Welfare.

This includes a child or young adult who is the subject of a new CPS assessment or is a child or young adult on an open CPS assessment, open case, receiving in-home services (child protective services or family support services) or in substitute care when the child or young adult requires medical attention/intervention due to the severity of the injury. A “suspicious physical injury” under Karly’s Law, although requiring medical attention, is different and often is not a serious physical injury. Use the following definitions, from the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act, below to distinguish between an injury and a serious physical injury or near fatality:

1. A serious physical injury refers to physical injury which involves substantial risk of death, extreme physical pain, severe and obvious disfigurement, or protracted loss or impairment of the function of a body part, limb, organ, or mental faculty. Protracted loss refers to serious physical injuries that run the risk of prolonged recovery periods, reduced quality of life, and in some cases run the risk of death.
2. Near fatality refers to an act that places the child in serious condition or critical condition as determined by a medical professional.

Note: *Contact the child safety consultant assigned to the local office for additional guidance.*

- C. Allegations involving a resource family. This includes:
 1. Families certified by Child Welfare and Office of Developmental Disability Services (ODDS).
 2. Allegations of abuse against a resource parent or in the home of a resource parent.
- D. Media attention.
 1. This includes a situation involving or likely to involve the public, the legislature, or any type of media such as books, magazines, newspaper, television, radio, internet, social media, and gaming.
 2. This is specific to media attention that brings attention to Child Welfare. This does not include each time a parent or child is identified in the media when there is no attention to Child Welfare. For example, when a child is recognized for their accomplishments on a sports team this would not be a sensitive issue unless the child was also identified as being in foster care.
- E. An additional category of “other” is included for issues that happen less frequently. This includes:
 1. Legal actions, such as court orders or potential lawsuits.
 2. The death of an adult receiving services on an open CPS assessment or open Child Welfare case.
 3. Any significant client concern, such as when you anticipate a client will contact Central Office (advance notice is helpful).
 4. Any issue determined by the local office to require Central Office review and support that does not fit in one of the categories described above.

A sensitive issue does not include:

- A. Abuse allegations by an ODHS employee when none of the categories described above apply. ODHS policy requires these issues be reported to Human Resources (HR). When the situation involving the ODHS employee falls within one of the sensitive issue categories a sensitive issue report then the sensitive issue report process must be followed.

- B. Threats or other security concerns made to ODHS employees or facilities. Security threats must be reported using the threat incident notification system ([TINS](#)).

II. Sensitive Issue Identification and Reporting Process

- A. Child Welfare professionals or volunteers who become aware of a situation that meets the definition of a sensitive issue must:
1. Immediately notify a supervisor.
 2. Immediately notify the Oregon Child Abuse Hotline (ORCAH) if the sensitive issue involves:
 - A new report of abuse; or
 - The death of a child or young adult.

Note: *Child Welfare professionals or volunteers may become aware of a sensitive issue through:*

- *A phone call*
 - *An email*
 - *In person contact*
 - *A written document, such as a closed at screening or a letter.*
- B. The supervisor or designee must immediately notify local office leadership as determined by the local office program manager.
- C. There are two types of sensitive issue reports:
1. The sensitive issue report, DHS 0150a, is used for all categories of sensitive issues except when the only applicable category is an allegation involving a resource family.
 2. When the only applicable category of sensitive issue is an allegation involving a resource family, then use the Resource Family Sensitive Issue Report, DHS 0150b.

Note: *When the sensitive issue includes an allegation involving a resource family and another category, such as media attention or child fatality, then use the sensitive issue report, DHS 0150a and complete section 3 of the Resource Family Sensitive Issue Report, DHS 0150b.*

- D. Responsibility for completing the sensitive issue report is as follows:
1. ORCAH, or the Office of Training, Investigation and Safety if applicable, is responsible for completing initial sensitive issue reports when there is a child or young adult fatality – this includes when more than one category of sensitive issue applies, such as when a fatality is likely to result in media attention.
 2. The local office program manager or designee is responsible for completing all other initial and follow up sensitive issue reports.
- E. Completing the Sensitive Issue Report
1. The Sensitive Issue Reports, DHS 0150a and DHS 0150b, specific to allegations involving resource families, can be found on the ODHS forms server.
 2. Complete all applicable fields in the applicable form, making sure to:
 - Check whether you are completing an initial or follow up report.

- Include any relevant links, such as to an article.
 - If there is a related screening report, attach a copy.
 - Include a brief description of the issue. For example:
 - ACLJ news is reporting on an incident of alleged abuse by a resource family. The resource family was videotaped yelling at and striking a five-year-old child placed in their care. Currently no children are placed in this home.
 - Parent receiving services on an open CPS assessment died by suicide. Children remain in the home with other parent. Support being provided to family by extended family and Child Welfare.
 - Four-month-old infant in intensive care with injuries alleged to be non-accidental. Family was receiving services until six weeks ago. Sibling with grandparent as part of protective action.
 - If the issue involves an ODHS employee, include the employee name, agency and position.
 - When completing the ODHS involvement section, “at time of incident” refers to the date the event took place. This may be a series of behaviors or events and not a singular behavior or event, in which case consider the earliest date in determining how to complete the section.
- F. Emailing the Sensitive Issue Report. Email the Sensitive Issue Report as follows:
1. Attach the sensitive issue report, screening report form if applicable, and other relevant documents, such as a police report.
 2. Modify the recipients prior to sending the email if:
 - There are confidentiality issues due to the content of the sensitive issue report.
 - The sensitive issue involves an ODHS employee. In this circumstance, regardless of what other sensitive issue categories may apply, send the sensitive issue report to the distribution list created specifically for employee reports in the Outlook address book: Employee.Sensitivelssue@dhsaha.state.or.us
 - Notification by another means is indicated to ensure a more trauma aware approach.
 3. Send the sensitive issue report, DHS 0150a, to the Child Welfare Sensitive Issue Distribution List using the email group [CW-Sensitive Issue Report Distribution](#) in the Outlook address book (unless the issue involves an ODHS employee, then send to Employee.Sensitivelssue@dhsaha.state.or.us).
 4. Send the Resource Family Sensitive Issue Report, DHS 0150b, to the Foster Care Program using the email: ResourceFamily.Sensitivelssue@dhsaha.state.or.us in the Outlook address book (unless the issue involves an ODHS employee, then send to Employee.Sensitivelssue@dhsaha.state.or.us).
 5. Copy the following Child Welfare professionals on the email:
 - All applicable program managers. Consider what Child Welfare local offices are impacted by the issue.

- All applicable district managers. Consider what districts are impacted by the issue.
 - Other relevant Child Welfare professionals.
 - Child safety consultant, permanency consultant and foster care coordinator assigned to the district when applicable.
6. Email subject line.
- For the Sensitive Issue Report, DHS 0150a, the subject line should read “Sensitive Issue Report:”. After the colon, identify the category or categories of sensitive issue. Categories include:
 - Child or young adult fatality
 - Serious physical injury/near fatality
 - Allegation involving a resource family
 - Media attention
 - Other, if none of these categories apply.
 - For the Resource Family Sensitive Issue Report, DHS 150b, the subject line should read “Resource Family Sensitive Issue Report:”. After the colon identify the district where the resource family is certified.
- G. Sensitive issue updates.
1. If there is an open CPS assessment related to the sensitive issue, at a minimum the program manager or designee must complete and email an update to the sensitive issue report or Resource Family Sensitive Issue Report when the CPS assessment is complete.
 2. Provide follow-up information when determined necessary or requested.
- H. Sensitive Issue Reports are the responsibility of all recipients to review and determine next steps, if any, the tracking of Sensitive Issue Reports will occur as follows:
1. Child Fatality Prevention and Review Program tracks reports of fatalities and near fatality/serious injuries.
 2. Foster Care Program tracks reports of allegations involving a resource family.
 3. Communications Office tracks reports involving media attention.
 4. ODHS Legal Unit tracks reports involving legal actions.
- I. A Child Welfare professional with a trauma aware approach and trained in Critical Incident Stress Management provides information to leadership in the local office impacted by the sensitive issue to:
1. Acknowledge the circumstances
 2. Identify support needs
 3. Offer supportive resources
 4. Coordinate a support plan if requested
- J. Sensitive issue recipients must notify others as needed.
- K. ODHS Director or designee must review sensitive issue reports involving child fatalities and assign a

CIRT as outlined in administrative rule.

- L. ODHS leadership will request a case review or action steps as determined necessary.