

Family & Children Policies

Tennessee Domestic Violence Shelter Best Practices Manual / Section III



Sample Educational Plan

[ORGANIZATION] Shelter is in the [SCHOOL DISTRICT], which includes [LIST OF PUBLIC ELEMENTARY, MIDDLE, AND HIGH SCHOOLS IN YOUR DISTRICT].

Advocates can help you to enroll your child in school while you are in shelter, if that is needed, and can work with you on planning for transportation to and from school for your children.

[ORGANIZATION] respects parent's right to home school their children, however if parents choose to home school their children they will need to show that they have been registered in a home school program.

We understand that shelter living is a difficult adjustment for many people, especially children; advocates are here to support both you and your children during this transition.

Sample Non-Violent Discipline Policy

It is the policy of [ORGANIZATION] that every resident, including children, has the right to live without threat of violence in any form.

1. Physical, verbal, or emotional violence are not acceptable and will not be tolerated at [ORGANIZATION] shelter.
2. While [ORGANIZATION] understands the importance of allowing parents to choose their own parenting and punishment styles, spanking is something that is contrary to both our commitment to, and rules against, violence in shelter.
 - i. Even when used simply as 'punishment' and not an abusive behavior, spanking can still trigger many negative memories and emotions in adult and child residents.
3. Advocates are available to assist you with non-violent alternatives to spanking as a punishment.
4. If you are having trouble parenting without the use of physical force or threats, please talk to an advocate. The advocates are here to support your parenting and help you create plans and strategies for parenting that are effective and non-violent.

Sample Child Care Policy

It is the policy of [ORGANIZATION] that you have the right to be supported in your role as a parent

1. Staff and volunteers of the Shelter Program will ask your permission before caring for your children or providing them food or medicine. We want your children to understand that you, not we, are watching out for them and meeting their needs.
2. You may make babysitting arrangements with other women. Please complete a babysitting agreement and post it on the clipboard on your bedroom door so that we know who is in charge of your children while you are away.
 1. We want all children to be safe while they are here. Children under 10 must be supervised by a responsible adult. That adult must keep the children within earshot, on the same floor of the building, and be aware of what they are doing.
 - a. Please be aware that children in the program may have been exposed to traumas which result in their acting out, sometimes against other children. For this reason, we ask you to be vigilant in supervising your children.

Babysitting Agreement		
I _____ am leaving _____ in charge of my children		
<small>Parent Name</small>	<small>Babysitter Name</small>	
from _____ to _____ on _____.		
<small>Time</small>	<small>Time</small>	<small>Date</small>
I understand that [ORGANIZATION] is not responsible for the care or supervision of my children.		
Signature _____	Date: _____	
Babysitter's Signature: _____	Date: _____	
Names of children: _____		

Sample Policy on Reporting Child & Elder Abuse and Neglect

Every staff member of [ORGANIZATION] must make a report as required by Tennessee law if they ever suspect that child abuse or neglect, or abuse of a vulnerable or elderly adult, has occurred. Any person with reasonable cause to believe a child is being abused or neglected now or has been in the past must, under the law, report to the Tennessee Department of Children's Services or to local law enforcement. Those who report and "act in good faith" are immune from any civil or criminal charges which may result.

Tennessee defines child abuse as-

- **Physical abuse:** Non-accidental trauma or physical injury of a child, or failure to protect a child from harm. ****NOTE- Being a victim of Domestic Violence does not qualify a parent as committing failure to protect under Tennessee Law.**
- **Neglect:** Failure to provide for a child's physical survival needs to the extent that there is harm, or risk of harm, to the child's health or safety.
- **Sexual abuse:** When a child is involved in intentional sexual acts with an adult or elder child or sexual behaviors/situations in which there is a sexual component.
- **Psychological harm:** A repeated pattern of caregiver behavior or extreme incident(s) that convey to children they are worthless, flawed, unloved, unwanted, endangered.

[AGENCY]'s procedure for reporting abuse or neglect is as follows:

When abuse or neglect is witnessed or suspected:

1. [Agency]'s Director, or Director's proxy, must be notified immediately that a report is being made.
2. Each staff member and client who witnessed or suspects abuse will make a written report of the incident(s).
3. If the child or elder is in immediate or ongoing danger the staff member who witnessed the incident or (in the case of multiple witnesses) a senior staff member will **immediately** call law enforcement to report the incident. A follow up report should be made online at <https://apps.tn.gov/carat> or <https://reportadultabuse.dhs.tn.gov/> to include the written accounts.
4. If there is not imminent danger to the victim [e.g. cases where abuse happened in the past] an immediate report should be made to the TN Child Abuse Hotline 877-237-0004 or Elder Abuser Hotline 1-888-277-8366. A follow up to the call should be made online at <https://apps.tn.gov/carat> or <https://reportadultabuse.dhs.tn.gov/> to include the written accounts.
5. If the abuser is a shelter resident they should NOT be exited from the shelter until after law enforcement or DCS arrive to assess the situation. This is to make sure that the child and offending parent are available for assessment by DCS and/or law enforcement.
 - a. Once law enforcement or DCS arrive on scene staff should let them know that the survivor will be exited from shelter based on the instance of abuse, so that LE/DCS are better able to assess the housing needs of the child.

6. If the abuse is/was perpetrated by the survivor's abuser, an advocate will inform the resident of their intention to report the abuse and to support the survivor and child through the DCS process.
7. Written statements and records of reports will be added to client's file. As long as it does not endanger the child's welfare, or cause the client to flee with the child, the Client should always be informed that a report has been made.

More information on TN law can be found at <https://www.tn.gov/dcs/program-areas/child-safety/reporting/hotline-faq.html>

Example of Children's Rights and Responsibilities

- Children have the right to work with staff that are trained to meet their needs.
- Children have the right to receive advocacy support and services that are age appropriate.
- Children have the right to play, and [ORGANIZATION] will provide age appropriate toys, books and activities.
- Children have the right to be safe and free from violence.
- Children have the right to education; [ORGANIZATION] will provide materials as needed to complete school work, such as pens, pencils, paper, markers, and other supplies.
- Children have the right to be listened to. Staff will provide a listening ear to assist in any problems or concerns you have.

Sample Policy on Serving Teens:

[Name of agency] shall work to ensure access and services for all survivors of domestic violence and their minor children, including teenage boys. Comprehensive plans to meet the needs of survivors and their teen children should consider the following:

1. Developing policies and procedures for identifying and assessing the needs of program participants and their teenage dependents.
2. Providing teens with a range of age-appropriate service options and activities.
3. Providing program participants and their teen dependents with age-appropriate domestic violence written materials.
4. Periodic training of staff for working with teenage secondary and primary victims, and related issues.
5. Monitoring of the policy and program implementation.