



# **TALLAHASSEE POLICE DEPARTMENT**

## **GENERAL ORDERS MANUAL**

 Proudly Policing Since 1841	<b>SUBJECT</b> Child Abuse and Neglect Investigations		 Nationally Accredited 1986
	<b>CHIEF OF POLICE</b> <i>Signature on File</i>		
<b>NUMBER</b> 34	<b>ISSUE DATE</b> 10/29/2001	<b>REVISION DATE</b> 11/07/2024	<b>TOTAL PAGES</b> 6

### **AUTHORITY/RELATED REFERENCES**

Florida State Statutes, Chapter 39  
Florida State Statutes, Chapter 827  
General Order 18, Criminal Investigations  
General Order 32, Juvenile Procedures and Programs

### **KEY WORD INDEX**

<b>Delayed Reporting of Incidents</b>	Procedure VII
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### **POLICY**

When having contact with a victim of child abuse or neglect, members of the Tallahassee Police Department shall focus first on the physical and mental care of the victim and then the criminal investigation.

### **DEFINITIONS**

**Caregiver:** Persons responsible for care of a juvenile (e.g., parents, guardians, babysitter, teacher).

**CPT:** Child Protection Team.

**Disclosure:** Any statement by a victim alleging maltreatment by another.

**Protective Custody:** For the purposes of this policy, the action of a sworn member physically removing a juvenile from their present surroundings because their current situation creates a reasonable fear for the juvenile's life or physical or mental health.

## **PROCEDURES**

### **I. CHILD ABUSE INCIDENTS – OFFICER RESPONSIBILITIES**

When responding to the report of a recent child abuse incident, the officer(s) on scene shall:

- A. Determine the immediate medical needs of the victim and summon emergency medical assistance as warranted.
- B. Interview witnesses to determine the circumstances surrounding the incident, to include:
  1. How the disclosure was made (what was the catalyst or conversation prior to the disclosure, what statements or words were used by the child).
  2. Any and all persons (including siblings) who reside at the same location as the victim (to include name, date of birth, and basic contact information).
- C. Obtain detailed written statements from witnesses.
- D. Notify a Special Victims Unit (SVU) detective as soon as practical if the incident meets call out criteria in General order 18 section V C.
- E. Whenever possible, coordinate suspect interviews with an SVU detective. if the incident meets call out criteria in General Order 18 section V C.
- F. Take enforcement action as warranted, or if more appropriate, coordinate such action with the SVU detective.
- G. Notify the Department of Children and Families (DCF) either by calling the Child Abuse Hotline (1-800-962-2873) or completing the online

report (<https://reportabuse.dcf.state.fl.us/>) when the incident involves a caregiver or any adult.

- H. Complete the offense report, and appropriate supplemental reports, prior to the end of their tour of duty.

## **II. CHILD ABUSE INCIDENTS – EXAMINATION AND TREATMENT**

- A. In abuse cases where physical examination of the victim is warranted, responding officers and detectives shall consider these factors in completing this part of the investigation:

1. The child's privacy rights.
2. The child's age and gender.
3. The location of the reported injury on the child's body.
4. The child's willingness to allow a stranger to visually examine an injury.

- B. In conducting examinations of the victim for injury, officers and detectives shall not visually or physically examine or photograph injuries of the victim's genitalia, buttocks, or any other bodily area normally covered while wearing a swimsuit.

- C. If the victim's injuries do not require immediate medical attention at a hospital emergency room, the CPT physician should perform the examination and treatment, and the SVU detective shall coordinate this arrangement.

- D. The responsibility for obtaining photographs of victim injury (excluding those in areas listed in B above) belongs to the responding officer(s). The officer should take photographs with clarity (verify photos prior to leaving the scene) and to scale (scale provided by forensics or compared to a commonly sized object).

## **III. CHILD ABUSE INCIDENTS – VICTIM INTERVIEWS**

- A. Refer to "[Fact Finding Assessment for Child Physical/Sexual Abuse Cases](#)" document in PowerDMS for guidance on victim interviews.

- B. Interviews of juvenile victims under 8 years old:

1. Officers shall not interview juvenile victims in this age group.

2. Officers should direct all fact-finding questions to the person to whom the juvenile victim reported the sexual battery and other adults with pertinent information about the juvenile or incident.

C. Victims 8 – 12 years old:

1. Officers shall ask fact finding questions to determine crime, jurisdiction, time of occurrence, etc.
2. Officers should interview the person with whom the victim made the disclosure and/or other adults with pertinent information about the victim or incident.

D. Victims 13 – 17 years old:

1. Officers shall ask fact finding questions to determine crime, jurisdiction, time of occurrence, etc.
2. Officers should interview the person with whom the victim made the disclosure and/or other adults with pertinent information about the victim or incident.

#### **IV. CHILD NEGLECT INCIDENTS – OFFICER RESPONSIBILITIES**

The procedures outlined above for child abuse incidents are equally relevant when investigating child neglect incidents, and when responding to such incidents the officer(s) on scene shall:

- A. Follow all applicable procedures outlined in sections I – III above.
- B. Accurately document the conditions and environment present at the neglect location, to include, but not limited to:
  1. The presence and amount of clutter, trash, feces, or spoiled food.
  2. The presence or lack of necessities such as water, age-appropriate food, age-appropriate clothing and utility service.
  3. The time frame during which the victim(s) had been left alone.
  4. The presence of dangers (e.g., poisons, weapons).
  5. The age and overall appearance of the child(ren).

**V. DETECTIVE RESPONSIBILITIES**

Detectives responding to the report of a recent child abuse or neglect incident shall:

- A. Obtain an incident briefing from the officer or supervisor with the most knowledge of the circumstances surrounding the reported crime.
- B. Examine the crime scene for evidence.
- C. Coordinate with the assigned forensic specialist concerning:
  - 1. Evidentiary items to collect from the crime scene.
  - 2. Photographs of the crime scene and the victim's injuries.
- D. If necessary, conduct a brief interview of the victim after obtaining preliminary details from the initial officer or supervisor.
- E. Coordinate with the CPT concerning the following:
  - 1. Interview of the victim.
  - 2. Photographs of the victim's injuries.
  - 3. Investigative activities, as appropriate.
- F. Conduct follow-up activities, as applicable, in coordination with district officers, forensic specialists, and other detectives.

**VI. GENERAL PROTECTIVE CUSTODY PROTOCOLS**

- A. A sworn member may take a child into protective custody in the following circumstances:
  - 1. The child has no parent, legal custodian, or responsible adult/relative immediately known or available to provide supervision and care.
  - 2. Probable cause exists to believe the custodian of the child has materially violated a condition of placement imposed by the court.
  - 3. Probable cause exists to support the conclusion the child is:
    - a. Abandoned.

- b. Physically or sexually abused.
  - c. Neglected.
  - d. Sick or injured.
- B. When a sworn member discovers a child in a situation as described in subsection A above, and for subsection A 3, has probable cause to believe the child's condition is the result of the actions of their parent, guardian, caregiver, or other adult, the member shall notify the DCF as soon as practical, and:
  - 1. Report the situation to the DCF representative,
  - 2. Answer appropriate questions of the DCF representative, and
  - 3. Coordinate with the DCF representative on whether or not a DCF member should respond to the scene, hospital or other location.
- C. A criminal charge against the parent or guardian is not a prerequisite for a sworn officer to take a child into protective custody.

## **VII. DELAYED REPORTING OF CHILD ABUSE & NEGLECT INCIDENTS**

In response to the delayed reporting of a child abuse or neglect incident, Department members shall adhere to applicable procedures outlined in this policy.

History: previous title (*lateral transfer*) – issued 07/15/1985, revised 01/31/1988, retired 10/29/2001.  
current title – issued 10/29/2001, revised 06/18/07,08/03/09 and 11/07/24.