

# Guidelines for Writing and Distributing Incident Reports

## ***What is the purpose of an Incident Report?***

Incident Reports are used to communicate information to other people and to document significant events within individual records and as required by state standards. People often use the information obtained from incident reports when formulating plans or profiles, to develop support strategies and when making decisions. Consequently, it is extremely important for the content of the Incident Report to reflect clear information in a factual, unbiased manner to avoid passing along opinions and judgements. What a staff person has to say concerning an incident is essential to other people who are trying to understand what has happened and why it occurred. Staff should re-read the reports that they have written prior to submitting them to assure that they are legible, have been completed properly and that the report truly states what the writer has intended to convey.

All sections of the report must be completed (avoid leaving blanks). Incident Reports are legal documents which may be viewed by the individual, his/her guardian, designee or legal representative and may be utilized by courts. Be sure to use the full name of staff or providers when referencing them in a report; initials of staff/providers are not sufficient.

## ***When Should An Incident Report Be Written?***

Staff should prepare an incident report to document unusual and/or significant events or emergencies involving individuals who receive services and/or support. Examples of such events include but are not limited to the following:

- Injury to individual or caused to others;
- Aggressive behavior directed at others;
- Self abusive behavior;
- Endangering or threatening others;
- Serious illness and/or hospitalization;
- Imminent death or death;
- Property destruction;
- Serious disruptive situation while in the community;
- Illegal or unusual problematic behavior;
- Being victimized by another individual who receives services;
- Any incident involving the police, fire department, ambulance etc.
- Any time someone has physically intervened with an individual when such intervention is **not** in accordance with an approved behavioral treatment plan;
- Any time an individual is involved in an automobile accident while receiving services;
- Being a victim of a crime reported to a law enforcement agency;
- Being incarcerated (in jail or prison for at least one overnight stay);
- Significant accomplishments or other positive changes which should be noted by others.

***Please Note: If you are unsure about whether or not to complete an incident report, write one!***

### ***Special Considerations:***

- #1 If an incident involves a potential rights violation, a Report of Possible Rights Violation form should be completed rather than the Incident Report form.
- #2 If an individual has an approved behavioral plan/profile which addresses the specific behavior exhibited, it is not necessary to complete an incident report in addition to the behavioral data sheet unless you want to document the occurrence of extreme circumstances related to the behavior.
- #3 If an incident involves the behavior/injury of more than one individual, separate reports are necessary. Be sure that you do not include confidential information about others on an individual's report (use the person's initials if you must refer to another individual who receives services).
- #4 If a PRN medication has been used as a behavioral intervention, in addition to the physician's order, there needs to be a detailed protocol for use of the PRN medication approved by the Human Rights Committee.

### ***Statewide Reporting:***

All Area Agencies are now expected to provide data concerning incidents as part of the statewide Outcomes Partnership. This data includes statistics about ***serious injuries, victims of specific crimes, and incarcerations***. Therefore it is essential that an Incident Report be completed whenever such situation occurs.

Data addressing ***serious injuries*** includes only those injuries which required professional medical treatment (hospitalization, emergency room visits, doctors visits, care by an RN or LPN). Serious injuries include but are not limited to: fractures, wounds requiring stitches, serious burns, etc. Injuries that were treated by a medical profession but which could have been treated by a layperson will not be counted as a serious injury.

Data regarding ***crimes*** includes those situations where individuals who receive services/support have been **victims** of the following crimes reported to a law enforcement agency:

***Theft*** (unauthorized taking of, or control over, property of another);  
***Robbery*** (theft involving physical force, weapons and/or threats to another person);  
***Burglary*** (unauthorized entry of structure with intent to commit a crime there);  
***Assault*** (causing bodily injury to another purposely, negligently or recklessly);  
***Sexual assault*** (sexual coercion by force, threat, misuse of authority, etc.)

Data regarding ***incarceration*** includes situations where an individual who receives services/support has been held in jail or prison for at least one overnight.

### ***Who should be notified of Incidents?***

Serious incidents must be verbally reported to the service coordinator and guardian at the time of the incident or ASAP within 24 hours. Other involved providers should also be notified of incidents as appropriate. Following completion of the administrative review, the program administrator should distribute Incident Report forms within 3 working days as indicated below:

- Mail or deliver the **original** Incident Report to the Area Agency Service Coordinator to be maintained in the individual's clinical record;
- Send a **copy** to involved guardian;
- Maintain a **copy** for the individual's record at the provider agency;
- Please do not fax copies unless you have been specifically asked to do so.

### ***What actions are provider agencies expected to take in regard to Incidents?***

Regions 8 and 10 expect each agency to have a designated program administrator to review Incident Reports for each residence or program. This reviewer should be responsible for assuring that each report is legible, has been properly completed, that information has been communicated appropriately, and that any necessary actions or follow up have been initiated prior to submission of the report to the Area Agency. The reviewer should focus on the specific issues related to the incident to assure all appropriate actions have been taken in response to the incident and to identify measures which can be initiated or reinforced to prevent future occurrences. If the reviewer is unable to take necessary actions, the reviewer should communicate with his/her supervisor, with the Area Agency Service Coordinator, or Area Agency Complaint Investigator as appropriate to seek their assistance in resolving the matter. The reviewer is also expected to review incidents collectively, by individual and by residence or program, to determine whether or not additional preventive actions are needed.

### ***Each person writing an Incident Report should consider the following:***

#### ***Cause of Incident:***

If you do not feel that you have factual information, you may state your opinion provided that you indicate that it is your opinion and not fact. Even if the actual cause of an incident remains unknown after you have attempted to determine it, you should provide as much information as you have concerning what happened prior to the event/during the event as this may provide a clue to the reader. If you did not actually witness the incident or event, you may still write an Incident Report; however, be sure to state that the information is based on what was reported to you and by whom it was reported.

### ***Language:***

Describe the incident in concrete, behavioral terms. Please do not assume that people will understand generalities...be specific. If another individual receiving services is involved in the incident, do not refer to that person by full name; use his/her initials instead to protect confidentiality. Review your report to assure that you have not used judgmental terminology or left unanswered questions. It is best to prepare an Incident Report immediately following the incident while the facts are still clear. However, staff may still be emotionally involved at that time so it may be helpful to have another person review the report prior to it being submitted.

**Please remember that your description of the incident is what other people will rely on to obtain information concerning the individual and the incident. It is important to assure that your report does not convey negative images of you or the individual when a more neutral one should be conveyed. Examples: stating that you pushed the individual away, when what you really did was to block the individual's hand from striking you; stating someone "stole" food out of the refrigerator when the individual took food out of his/her refrigerator. Your report has the ability to influence others, so please assure that it is properly prepared and provides a factual accounting of the incident.**

### ***Reliability of your observation:***

Would other people seeing or hearing the incident agree with the account that you have written? If another person was involved in the incident or witnessed it, consult with that person to assure that the report concurs with that person's observations. When writing your report, use terms that are specific and clearly describe the behavior that occurred. For example, don't use generalities such as aggressive/upset/agitated, state the behavior that you observed that made you believe the person was being aggressive, was upset or agitated.

### ***Objectivity:***

When writing your report, be sure that you have not allowed an earlier situation or prior information to influence your perception of the current incident. You are writing your report as a recorder, not as a judge. Consequently, be sure that your report is free from judgmental statements, sarcasm, or condescending comments. Again, it is advisable that you reread your completed Incident Report to assure that you have written what you really intended to say.

For purposes of determining significant incidents, Regions 8 and 10 will utilize the following criteria:

**Serious Injury:** Definition provided by Outcomes Partnership. An injury that requires treatment by a medical professional (e.g. fractures, wounds requiring stitches).

**Crimes against consumers** which were reported to a law enforcement agency (police) as defined by Outcome Partnership including: Theft, Robbery, Burglary, Assault, Sexual Assault

**Incarceration** of an individual who receives services in a jail or prison for at least one overnight.

**Serious Behavioral** incident involving:

- Injury requiring medical treatment to another person;

- Use of physical holding without a behavioral plan outlining such intervention;

- Community disturbance;

Other