



Advocates for Justice and Education, Inc.

The federally designated Parent Training and Information Center for Washington DC

Navigating Unusual Incidents and Emergency Situations at Your Child's DCPS School

Are you curious about your child's school's response to emergencies? Unsure about the steps to take? Wonder how school staff are supposed to respond to allegations of abuse or misconduct by staff?

While AJE can't provide direct answers, we can share documents from DCPS and other DC agencies to help parents understand what their DCPS schools say they will do when navigating a crisis, unusual incident, or unforeseen circumstances. To learn more, you can click on the links we provide to connect with the DCPS document providing the basis for our answer.

What kinds of situations are addressed here?

DCPS families can find the plan for reporting incidents [here](#) and how DCPS [communicates those incidents to the community](#). The incidences covered range from minor technology issues to major cases such as missing children, and determine the specific circumstances under which they are required to make these reports. For example, DCPS incident response states that administrations are required to notify an individual with the requisite expertise to resolve low-risk matters via email.

For high-risk incidents the incident response protocol (see page 3 [here](#)) should be implemented immediately; the same business day as the identification of the incident. DCPS defines a high-risk incident as “*an immediate risk of harm to student health, welfare, or safety exists, significant harm has just occurred, or impact is on the entire school (e.g. alleged sexual misconduct, alleged corporal punishment, a comprehensive facilities issue, such as a full utility outage, or a missing student).*”

Parents can access the full DCPS School [Crisis Response Handbook](#) for detailed directions that school administrators are told to take during emergencies. This document refers to much larger document called the [Response Plan & Management Guide](#); it is a comprehensive multi-agency resource. It outlines how external entities such as how police and fire departments are supposed to handle emergencies in both DCPS and Charter schools. More information about Emergency Management and crisis response in DC can be found [here](#).

Who should DCPS staff tell about an incident?

Many parents wonder what happens after they raise a concern at the school level, or share an incident that they think merits further action or investigation with school staff. DCPS has [Internal Reporting Requirements Regarding](#) all incidents, which direct staff to -

- Contact your immediate supervisor. If your immediate supervisor is not available, contact your chief of schools.
- Contact your school security officer to ensure that an incident report is submitted into the system.
- Activate school crisis plan, as needed.
- If incident involves any DCPS employee, contact Labor Management and Employee Relations (LMER): dcps.lmer@dc.gov

What should I expect school staff to do when there is a serious incident or allegation such as, bullying, abuse, violence, gender-based or sexual misconduct (including harassment, trafficking and exploitation)?

In addition to the four steps mentioned before, DCPS has specific additional reporting requirements for some more serious incidents.

For incidents involving – violence, medical emergencies or crime, staff are directed to:

- Contact 911 immediately.
- Contact DCPS Police Command Center: (202) 576-6950

For incidents involving alleged - sexual abuse, assault, or violence sex trafficking/sex act depiction/exploitation staff are directed to:

- Contact Metropolitan Police Department (MPD)
- Contact DCPS Police Command Center: (202) 576- 6950
- Contact Child and Family Services Administration (CFSA): (202) 671-SAFE
- Contact Central Office CARE Team: (202) 442-5405 or email dcps.care@dc.gov

For incidents involving alleged - bullying, gender-based/sexual harassment, hazing, hostile environment, intimidation, quid-pro-quo harassment, retaliation, or harassment staff are directed to:

- Contact Central Office CARE Team: (202) 442-5405
- Contact DCPS Police Command Center: (202) 576- 6950

Parents should notice that it is an allegation that triggers these additional steps; in other words, the staff member needs to complete the additional reporting without requiring an investigation at the school level first. It is also important to remember that all DCPS staff are required by law to report suspected child abuse, neglect and/or unexplained injuries. This document details DCPS [staff mandatory reporting obligations](#).

Who investigates these allegations?

The [DCPS Incident Response Guidelines](#) often directs staff (and parents) to contact the CARE team (Comprehensive Alternative Resolution & Equity) and the CARE does have broad jurisdiction within DCPS. Parents can learn more about the CARE team [here](#). However, even though DCPS may direct school staff to contact the CARE team, the investigation may not stay with them, as the CARE Team does not typically investigate staff misconduct. In AJE's experience, allegations of staff misconduct are usually referred to the Labor Management and Employee Relations (LMER), either directly, or as a referral from the CARE team.

Outside of DCPS, these incidents may be investigated by MPD or CFSA.

When are parents notified about an incident?

It depends on the type of incident. This document about how [DCPS communicates with families and the public](#) about serious incidents/staff misconduct and explains what information DCPS can share about the incident. It also states that the goal is to communicate to the school community by the next day at the latest with a preference for same day communication. For high risk incidents the incident response protocol (see page 3 [here](#)), requires that a communication plan be created that same day, but it is less clear when that plan needs to be implemented and parents informed. AJE is also unclear on what DCPS' policy is for communicating lower-risk incidents to parents.

My student attends a charter school. Where can I find out about their policies?

AJE obtaining much of this information via a DC Freedom of Information Act request (DC FOIA). In DC, charter schools are not subject to FOIA, like DCPS, so we regret that we cannot give charter families this level of information. We encourage DC families to look at their charter school handbook and website if they have questions about the school policies. If you can't find the information you need, try the PCSB's transparency hub, or ask the school.

Parents should remember that the [School Emergency Response Plan and Management Guide](#) applies to both DCPS and Charter schools and may be helpful.

There was an incident at aftercare/beforecare. Who should I contact? What rules apply?

Because there are many different arrangements and relationships between schools and care providers, and many different types of incidents, it is impossible to give families a single answer to this question. AJE encourages families to notify the Principal of the school the program is located at, the DCPS Out of School Program (OSTP) Office at 202-442-5002, and the Director of the program where the incident happened, and consult with us about your rights.

Childcare locations at schools providing before and after-school care are NOT required to be licensed. But some opt to be licensed by OSSE. If they are licensed, you can also make a complaint or share concerns by calling OSSE's Complaint and Unusual Incidents Hotline: (202) 727-2993 or sending an email to OSSE.ChildcareComplaints@dc.gov.

Contact Advocates for Justice and Education (AJE)

If you have questions or would like to request our assistance call, email or visit AJE.

(202) 678-8060 • information@aje-dc.org • www.aje-dc.org

1200 G Street NW Suite 650 • Washington, DC 20005 (Metro Center).