Incident report

Write what you saw, heard and did, in the order it happened. Keep any opinion apart and label it. Use the person's own words in quotation marks. Your organization fills in its state's incident categories (section 4) and deadlines (section 11) before staff use this form.

1. About this report

The report number your agency uses, your agency and program, and the date and time you are writing (with AM or PM).

Report number	
Agency and program	
Date you are writing this	
Time you are writing this (AM or PM)	

Where this comes from: HHS OIG, ACL and OCR, 2018; ICI Frontline Initiative, 2004. OIG lists an "Incident report identification number" and the "Provider agency"; ICI asks for the full date and the time of each entry.

2. The person supported

The person's name, or the ID number your agency's policy says to use.

Name or ID number	

Where this comes from: HHS OIG, ACL and OCR, 2018. OIG lists the "Name (or identification number) of individual involved".

3. When and where

When it happened (or "unknown"), when you learned of it, and the exact place.

Date it happened	
Time it happened (or unknown)	
Date and time you learned of it	
Exact place (for example, "at the bottom of the basement stairs")	

Where this comes from: Vermont DAIL; New Jersey DDD; Indiana DDRS; ICI Frontline Initiative, 2004. Vermont's form asks for the date, time and location; New Jersey's for when it occurred and when it was known to staff; ICI asks you to be "as specific as possible" about where.

4. Type of incident

Tick your state's category. Your organization writes its state's categories here before staff use the form.

☐	☐
☐	☐
☐	☐
☐	☐

Your organization writes its state's categories on these lines. Tick each one that fits.

Other (describe)	

Where this comes from: 42 CFR 441.302(a)(6); HHS OIG, ACL and OCR, 2018. OIG suggests a "standardized list with definitions"; the federal rule has each state define critical incidents (see the FAQ).

5. Who was there

Everyone present or involved, with their role, and whether they saw it happen.

Name (or first name and last initial, if your policy says so)	Role (person supported, DSP, visitor, other)	Saw it happen? (yes or no)

Where this comes from: Vermont DAIL; Indiana DDRS. Vermont asks for "Persons who witnessed or were involved in the incident"; Indiana for each person involved with their role and staff title.

6. Before

What was happening just before: the activity, the setting, who was there, and anything that changed.

Activity	
Setting	
People nearby	
Anything that changed just before (a sound, a change of plan, a request)	

Where this comes from: Vermont DAIL; New Jersey DDD; Indiana DDRS. Vermont asks "What happened before, during and after"; New Jersey lists Activity, Setting, People and Possible Trigger; Indiana asks for the circumstances and activities immediately prior.

7. During

What happened, in order, with times. What you saw and heard. What the person communicated, in their own words in quotation marks, or the signs, gestures or device they used.

Time (AM or PM)	What you saw and heard (facts only)	What the person communicated: their words in quotation marks, or how they communicated

Your opinion, if you add one (label it "In my opinion")	

Where this comes from: Vermont DAIL; New Jersey DDD; ICI Frontline Initiative, 2004. Vermont asks for a description of behaviors observed; New Jersey for Who, What, When, Where and How; ICI calls objective documentation "just the facts."

8. What staff did

Each action staff took, who took it, at what time, and how the person responded.

Time	Who	What they did	How the person responded

Where this comes from: Vermont DAIL; New Jersey DDD. Vermont asks for the interventions staff used; New Jersey for the steps taken during or immediately after.

9. Injuries and care

Any injury you saw (where on the body, size, color), the first aid or care given, and by whom.

Injury seen (where, size, color)	
First aid or care given, by whom, at what time	
Level of harm (tick one)	☐ None ☐ First aid or less ☐ Beyond first aid ☐ Hospital ☐ Death

Where this comes from: Indiana DDRS; New Jersey DDD; HHS OIG, ACL and OCR, 2018. Indiana asks for a description of any injuries; New Jersey for injuries and treatment; OIG lists levels of harm from none to death.

10. After

How the person is now: where, with whom, and what they are communicating.

Where the person is now, and with whom	
What the person is communicating now	

Where this comes from: Vermont DAIL. Vermont's form asks what happened after the incident and the actions taken as a result; the prompts here are ours.

11. Who was notified

Each person or agency told: name, role, date and time, how, and what you told them. Your organization writes its own deadlines in the last column.

Who (role)	Name	Date and time	How	What you told them	Your deadline (your rule and policy)
Your supervisor or the person on call					
The person's family or guardian, as your policy and the person's wishes say					
Support coordinator or case manager					
Your state's incident reporting system or office					
Adult or child protective services, where your rule requires					
Emergency services or law enforcement, where needed or required					
Other (named in your rule or policy)					

The deadline column starts blank on purpose: each state sets its own timeframes. Your organization writes them in before staff use the form.

Where this comes from: Vermont DAIL; New Jersey DDD; Indiana DDRS; 42 CFR 441.302(a)(6). Vermont asks "when and how notified"; New Jersey asks what was told to the guardian; Indiana's form records the date each person was notified; the federal rule has providers report to the State "within State-established timeframes and procedures."

12. Follow-up planned

What is planned but not yet done, who will do it, and by when.

Action planned	Who	By when

Where this comes from: Vermont DAIL; Indiana DDRS. Vermont asks for "any planned follow up"; Indiana for actions planned but not yet implemented.

13. Your signature

Your name, title, signature, date, time and phone number. Sign only what you wrote.

Your name	
Your title	
Signature	
Date and time	
Phone	

Where this comes from: Vermont DAIL; ICI Frontline Initiative, 2004. Vermont asks for the person reporting, signature, date and phone; ICI: "Always sign what you have written."

14. Supervisor review

The supervisor's name, title, date and comments, and any follow-up they add.

Supervisor name and title	
Date reviewed	
Comments and follow-up	
Signature	

Where this comes from: Vermont DAIL; HHS OIG, ACL and OCR, 2018. Vermont asks for a supervisor's review, comments and signature; for incidents that result in significant injury, OIG's model practices call for a preliminary review by senior management.

FOR NEW STAFF AND THE SUPERVISORS WHO TEACH THEM

How to write it: ten rules

Each rule names its source; the example sentences are ours.

1. **Make everyone safe first, then write.** New Jersey's guide puts it in three steps: act, write, report. Write once the person and others are safe. (New Jersey DDD)
2. **Write it as soon as you can.** ICI: documenting "immediately (or soon as possible) after it occurs is optimal." Your state's rule and your agency's policy set the deadline, and your organization writes it on the form. (ICI Frontline Initiative, 2004; HHS OIG, ACL and OCR, 2018)
3. **Write only the facts, and label any opinion.** Objective documentation is "just the facts": what you saw, heard and did. If you add an opinion, keep it apart and say so, as ICI advises (for example, "In my opinion, …"; that wording is ours). Indiana's instructions say it in two words: "Be objective." (ICI Frontline Initiative, 2004; Indiana DDRS)
4. **Tell it in order: before, during, after.** Give each part a time, with AM or PM, and name the exact place. Vermont's form asks what happened "before, during and after." (Vermont DAIL; ICI Frontline Initiative, 2004)
5. **Write what the person communicated, in their own words.** Put their exact words in quotation marks. If they used signs, gestures, pictures or a device, describe what they did. Their words are a fact; your summary of them is not. (This tip is ours, built on ICI's "just the facts.") (ICI Frontline Initiative, 2004; NADSP Code of Ethics)
6. **Describe what happened, not a label.** Words like "aggressive," "noncompliant," "meltdown" or "attention-seeking" are conclusions. Write the action you saw instead. NADSP's Code asks DSPs to "Ensure that my own biases do not interfere with honoring and supporting people." Describing the action you saw is one way to do that. (NADSP Code of Ethics)
7. **Name everyone present and their role.** Indiana asks for each person involved, with their role and staff title; Vermont for everyone who witnessed or was involved. (Indiana DDRS; Vermont DAIL)
8. **Record every notification.** Who you told, when, how, and what you said. Vermont asks "when and how notified"; New Jersey asks what was told to the guardian. (Vermont DAIL; New Jersey DDD)
9. **Sign it, date it, and correct it the right way.** ICI: "Always sign what you have written." Draw one line through a mistake and initial it. Never write ahead of what happened, and never sign for someone else. (ICI Frontline Initiative, 2004)
10. **Keep it private.** Share the report only with the people your policy and your state's rule name, including those you must notify (section 11). NADSP's Code: "Follow the confidentiality policies and guidelines of my employer and the state." New Jersey's guide says incident documents "must be kept confidential." (NADSP Code of Ethics; New Jersey DDD)

Abuse, neglect or exploitation. If you see or suspect abuse, neglect or exploitation, report it. NADSP's Code: "Report any observed or suspected abuse, neglect, or exploitation to the appropriate authorities." The 2018 joint report says people should be "free from retaliation or adverse consequences because they reported incidents." Your state's rule names who you tell.

Facts, not opinions: five examples

Made up for teaching; the names are invented.

Instead of	Write
Maria was being difficult at dinner.	At 5:40 PM, Maria pushed her plate away and said, "I don't want this." She stood up and walked to her room.
James had a meltdown for no reason.	At 2:15 PM, the fire alarm test sounded in the day program hall. James covered his ears and sat on the floor for about 4 minutes. When the sound stopped, he signed "finished."
Devon got aggressive with staff.	At 7:05 PM, after I said the van trip was cancelled, Devon hit my left forearm once with an open hand and said, "You promised." I saw no mark.
Ana seemed fine afterward.	At 7:30 PM, Ana was on the couch watching TV. She said, "My knee hurts." I saw a red mark about 1 inch wide on her right knee.
I handled it appropriately.	I stood about 6 feet away, spoke quietly and offered Priya her headphones. She took them at 2:19 PM.

For training leads: set it up and teach it in five steps

1. **Fill in your state's categories and deadlines first.** Open your state's incident reporting rule or guide (from your state's developmental disabilities, behavioral health or licensing agency) and your agency's policy. Write their incident categories in section 4 and each deadline in the last column of section 11. We leave both blank on purpose: they differ by state. Fill in sections 4 and 11 in the Word form, then print it; anything added to the PDF is handwritten on each copy.
2. **Add your agency's names and numbers.** Type them into the Name column of section 11 in the Word form before you print: who is on call, how to reach them, and the name of your state's reporting system, so a new DSP never has to look it up during a shift.

3. **Teach the ten writing rules with the example pairs.** Read each "instead of" line aloud and have staff rewrite it as facts before you show the "write" line.
4. **Practice on a made-up incident.** Describe a short scene, have each new DSP write the report, then swap and check it against the ten rules.
5. **Review real reports as a supervisor.** Use the supervisor review section. The 2018 joint report's model practices have providers' review committees "identify the facts surrounding incidents, including any contributing factors."

Where each section comes from

Read November 15, 2026. The section prompts, the ten rules' wording and the examples are Special Learning's; the quoted lines are as published. None of these organizations has reviewed or endorsed this template. The fillable Word version is at the web address at the foot of each page.

1. **42 CFR 441.302(a)(6).** 42 CFR 441.302(a)(6), State assurances: incident management system (added by the 2024 HCBS Access Rule, 89 FR 40865, May 10, 2024), eCFR, up to date as of November 12, 2026. https://www.ecfr.gov/current/title-42/section-441.302
2. **HHS OIG, ACL and OCR, 2018.** HHS Office of Inspector General, Administration for Community Living and Office for Civil Rights, joint report, Ensuring Beneficiary Health and Safety in Group Homes Through State Implementation of Comprehensive Compliance Oversight, January 2018, Appendix A: Model Practices for State Incident Management and Investigation. https://oig.hhs.gov/reports-and-publications/featured-topics/group-homes/group-homes-joint-report.pdf
3. **NADSP Code of Ethics.** National Alliance for Direct Support Professionals (NADSP), The NADSP Code of Ethics (revised 2026), tenets as published on nadsp.org. https://nadsp.org/resources/the-nadsp-code-of-ethics/
4. **ICI Frontline Initiative, 2004.** Traci LaLiberte, "Doing Documentation 'Write!'," Frontline Initiative, Volume 5, Number 4 (2004), Institute on Community Integration, University of Minnesota. https://publications.ici.umn.edu/frontline-initiative/5-4/doing-documentation-write
5. **Vermont DAIL.** Vermont Department of Disabilities, Aging and Independent Living (DAIL), Critical Incident Reporting Guidelines and Critical Incident Reporting Form (updated May 2022). https://asd.vermont.gov/sites/asd/files/documents/DAIL_CIR_Guidelines_6_2022.pdf
6. **Indiana DDRS.** Indiana Division of Disability and Rehabilitative Services (DDRS), Policy BQIS 460 0301 008, Incident Reporting and Management, with Exhibit A (effective March 1, 2011, as posted). https://www.in.gov/fssa/ddrs/files/Incident_Reporting_and_Management.pdf
7. **New Jersey DDD.** New Jersey Division of Developmental Disabilities (DDD), Your Quick Reference Guide to Incident Reporting, and its Initial Incident Report form. https://nj.gov/humanservices/ddd/assets/documents/providers/incident-reporting-guide.pdf

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One next step: if your staff support autistic people, the Level 1 ABA Online Training Course for groups introduces autism and behavior-support foundations. $99 per learner · One-time purchase · Each learner has 12 weeks of access from the day they activate their code · Free 7-day trial of the first 2 sessions.