

DCF's Drive to DRS

To provide you greater background, especially for those just hearing about DRS, this approach, in essence, establishes a two part system for responding to maltreatment reports accepted by the Hotline. The first part is the differential response which does not require an identified “victim” or “perpetrator” nor does it require a formal determination or substantiation of abuse or neglect; this response is generally applied to reports that are deemed low to moderate risk as determined by the Hotline's current assessment process (Note: no changes would be made to our statutory definition of accepted report nor with our use of our standard SDM risk assessment tool).

In the absence of immediate safety concerns, families guide the intervention by voluntarily collaborating with DCF to determine their strengths and needs. At the discretion of the family, case management and linkage to services specific to those needs are offered by the Department.

The second part of the system is the standard child protection investigation. An investigation response involves gathering information and making a formal determination whether child maltreatment has occurred or the child is at risk of abuse or neglect. This type of response is generally used for reports of the most severe types of maltreatment or those that are potentially criminal.

Some commonalities between DRS and traditional investigations are a focus on child safety, leveraging community services to support child and family needs, and recognizing the authority of DCF to make decisions up to and including legal intervention to ensure child safety at any point in delivering services to the family.

The Department is moving to DRS for a simple reason. By enhancing the protective capacity of caretakers, children will be in safe, stable, and appropriate environments, and through support and empowerment-based interventions families and communities will be strengthened.

At present, over 30 child welfare jurisdictions have completely or partially integrated DRS into their systems. Evaluation of these jurisdictions has shown that:

- child safety is not compromised;
- maltreatment reoccurrence is reduced;
- staff and families reported a greater sense of satisfaction and participation thereby increasing their willingness to engage with providers;
- a greater array of services are provided and these services were provided earlier; and services were provided more often than with standard child protection interventions.

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In 2006, the Department of Children and Families began developing a Differential Response System service delivery model. Connecticut's DRS model is a strength-based, family-centered approach to partnering with family supports to protect children and enhance parental capacity. This approach is predicated on partnerships and collaboration between families, the Department, and community providers.

Following a mandatory safety assessment and determination that children in the home are safe, the intervention shifts from being agency to family driven. The Department and family partner to identify strengths, needs, formal and informal supports. Community specific service linkage is offered to address the family's identified needs, which can be accessed at the family's discretion. Further, DRS families would be given access to an array of the Department's resources historically exclusive to active CPS cases including clinical assessments and flex funding.

The Department has taken several steps to assure that the model we are designing will be the best fit and most appropriate for the needs of the families of Connecticut. As part of this effort we have:

- engaged with the National Resource Center for Child Protection as our technical advisor;
- engaged with Casey Family Programs;
- participated in two national conferences on DRS;
- have engaged the community (families, community providers, and inter-jurisdictional child welfare agencies) through a formal Request for Information, and less formally through public awareness and outreach meetings;
- met with policy-makers and federal child welfare experts; and,
- taken many other steps to assure that not only the planning process is open and transparent, but that we incorporate the latest research and best thinking available into our model design.

The purpose of this DRS communication is to keep you abreast of this important initiative for the Department. A special effort will be made to regularly update you on the status of DRS and how this reform effort may impact you and our work with children and families.