



**DIFFERENTIAL RESPONSE: A Promising
Approach to Serving Connecticut's Children,
Families, and Communities**

**CONNECTICUT
DEPARTMENT OF CHILDREN AND FAMILIES**

Defining Differential Response

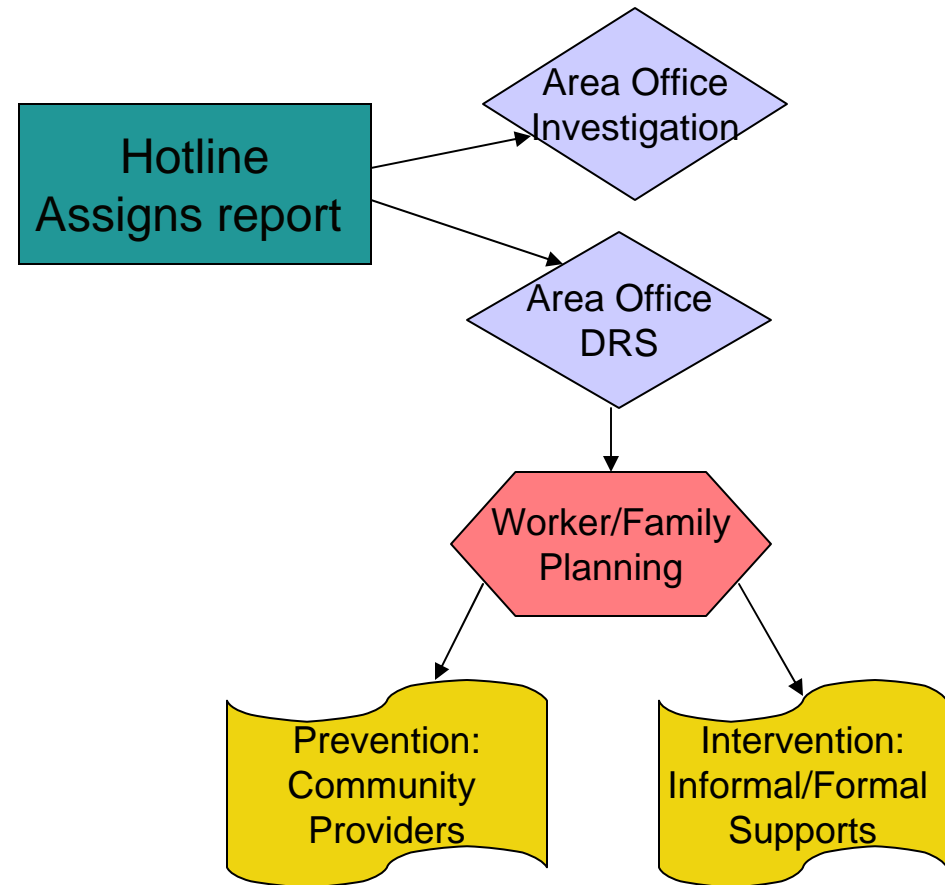
- A Differential Response system allows DCF the flexibility to engage families coming to the agency's attention via allegations of abuse and neglect in a way that is best suited to the needs of the family.
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Who is eligible?

- 44,000 annual reports of abuse and/or neglect to Hotline—68% of those, or 28,000, are accepted for traditional CPS investigation. Only 12%, or 5386, of all reports made receive ongoing services from DCF due to safety and/or risk concerns.
 - For those accepted reports that:
 - Are given a 72 hour response time;
 - Have low risk or moderate risk, and;
 - Do not have any one of the 15 exceptional circumstances, including:
 - Critical incident reports
 - Child fatality involved
 - Hospital or police custody involved
 - Child abandoned
 - Sexual abuse
 - Previous adjudication
 - Caregiver incapacitated
 - Child left alone
 - Newborn or mother testing positive for drugs
 - Open CPS case
 - 2 or more substantiations in previous 12 mos.
 - **However, DRS workers have the ability to switch tracks and send family through traditional investigation if safety seems compromised**
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How does it work?

- Report accepted at Hotline
- Assigned to DRS or Investigation track
- Hotline sends report to Area Office
- Worker contacts family to schedule first face-to-face
- Family planning/support networks/community involvement



Traditional CPS Investigation

- Investigation: Response involves gathering evidence and making formal safety and risk determinations (SDM). Forensic in nature, and generally used for reports of the most severe types of maltreatment or those that are potentially criminal.
 - Can be intrusive, adversarial, does not address underlying issues on behalf of frequently encountered families
 - 72-hr, 24-hr, Same Day, Critical Incident (45 days total).
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Family Assessment Response

- Assessment: Applied in low and moderate risk cases (72-hr reports), involves engaging the families as allies “empowerment through partnerships” , assessing the family’s strengths, needs, and supports and offering services to meet the family’s needs at the families discretion.
 - No formal determination of substantiation of child abuse and neglect
 - Family centered and supportive approach focused on collaboratively identifying and addressing family identified needs
 - 72-hr (90 days total).
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From the Knock at the Door

- Investigation
 - Immediate to 72-hr engagement
 - SDM Safety Assessment
 - Non-voluntary
 - Unannounced home visits
 - DPS, CPS, Collateral ROI's, License Plate numbers
 - Mandatory private interview w/ child(ren)
 - 45 Day involvement
 - Family Assessment
 - 5 day window for engagement
 - SDM Safety Assessment
 - Telephone call to the home preferred
 - Planned home visits
 - CPS, DPS only
 - Child interviews and referral for services at the family's discretion
 - 90 Day involvement
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What differential response is NOT...

- Differential response does not focus on *screened out cases* that typically would not be accepted by the Hotline, rather it focuses on responding differentially to *accepted* reports of child maltreatment.
 - But with 80-85% of all investigations being conducted on families known to the Department (either an open or previously open case), clearly a new approach to working with these chronic family conditions is needed.
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Why Differential Response?

- Driven by the desire to....
 - ❑ Be more flexible in the response to child abuse and neglect reports
 - ❑ Recognize that an adversarial focus is neither needed nor helpful in all cases
 - ❑ Better understand the family issues that lie beneath maltreatment reports
 - ❑ Engage parents more effectively to use services that address their specific needs
 - ❑ Increase sharing responsibility and accountability for families and communities
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Shared Principles of Traditional CPS and Differential Response

- Focus on safety and well-being of the child
 - Promote permanency within the family through engaging kin and community supports
 - Recognize the authority of CPS to make decisions about removal, out of home placement and court involvement, when necessary
 - Acknowledge that other community services may be more appropriate than CPS in some cases
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EXPERIENCE IN THE FIELD

- The National Study of Child Protective Services Systems and Reform Efforts identified 30 States with policies in 2007, that reflected differential or alternative response.
 - Over 12 States had implemented DR statewide, although not uniformly, while numerous other states have demonstrations or pilot sites.
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Protective Factors

Protective factors are conditions in families and communities that, when present, increase the health and well-being of children and families. These attributes serve as buffers, helping parents to find resources, supports, or coping strategies that allow them to parent effectively, even under stress.

Readiness for Implementation

□ MAJOR PLANNING AREAS

CT DCF is collaborating with other States, researchers, family representatives and advocates, and community leaders and providers to effectively and efficiently implement DRS in 2010.

- **Program Model and Development**
 - **Workforce/Organizational Development and Training**
 - **Communications and Outreach**
 - **Legal, Legislative and Policy**
 - **IT Planning and Data Development**
 - **Research, Evaluation and Measurement**
 - **Community Readiness and Service Array**
 - **Fiscal Impact and Business Operations**
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GUIDING PRINCIPLES FOR IMPLEMENTATION

- Involve Community Stakeholders in Program Development
 - Ensure service availability and strengthen community relationships
 - Training is needed to make implementation successful
 - Acknowledge challenges and promote the use of promising practices through transparency
 - Evaluate outcomes
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