



## Differential Response Overview (SB 942 Work Session 4/10/17)

Oregonians agree that children who stay safely at home with their families have the best chance to thrive. Children are safer and families stronger when DHS, communities and families work together to identify and provide for the families' needs as early as possible.



Differential Response is a family centered approach for families struggling with issues of child abuse or neglect. Differential Response includes two tracks, an Alternative Response and a Traditional Response.

In all counties in the state, whether they are practicing DR or not, when Child Welfare receives a report defined by law as child abuse or neglect and the report requires assessment by the department, a timeline of 24 hours or 5 days is assigned. In addition, all counties conduct comprehensive CPS assessments based on the Oregon Safety Model.

In counties practicing DR, after the screener determines a report meets criteria for assignment, they then decide whether the report is assigned as either a Traditional or an Alternative Response. Child Welfare Screeners make the track assignment decision based on information received from the reporter, a review of the CPS history, and information from collateral sources. However, an Alternative Response is encouraged for most cases that do not allege severe harm. Approximately half of the assigned assessments in DR counties have been assigned Alternative Response and of those approximately 10-15% half switched to Traditional Response when needed.

What's the same whether Alternative Response or Traditional Response?

1. Safety, Permanency & Well-Being of Children
2. Family focused
3. Strengths based through engagement
4. DHS, Community and Family Partnership
5. Comprehensive CPS Assessment of reported concern
6. Identification of moderate to high needs
7. Assess family strengths and needs
8. Provision of services post-CPS assessment after case is closed when 6 & 7 apply
9. Unsafe children are protected through child welfare intervention

What are the differences between AR and TR assessments?

Alternative Response	Traditional Response
Reports do not allege severe harm	Reports allege severe harm
Joint first contact with support person/community partner offered	
More often allows for pre-arranged contact	More often requires unannounced contact

with families	
No disposition	Disposition of founded, unfounded or unable to determine
No central registry entry	Central registry entry for founded disposition

Alternative Response provides more opportunity to partner with families and community to solve family issues related to abuse and neglect. Removing dispositions and recognizing family as the experts of their own families are two parts of Alternative Response.

When child protection workers are assigned a case of abuse or neglect in the Alternative Response, they generally call ahead to set up a time to meet with the family to complete a comprehensive safety assessment to determine if the child is safe. The family will be asked if there are any people of support they would like to accompany the CPS worker on the first visit.

The Traditional Response is for the most serious reports of child abuse or neglect. These cases also receive a comprehensive safety assessment. A finding as to whether abuse or neglect occurred must be made.

Whether the assessment is Traditional or Alternative, when the child is determined to be safe and the family determined to have moderate to high needs, a service provider may also assess the family's strengths and needs in order to help the family determine what services and community connections may be helpful to them after the CPS assessment is closed. Moderate to High Needs means: The child/ren are safe but the family conditions, behaviors or circumstances are likely to have a negative impact (not judged to be severe) on the child's physical, sexual, or emotional/behavioral development or functioning over the next year without intervention. And that short-term targeted services can reduce or eliminate the likelihood that negative impact will occur.

When a child is found to be unsafe in either response, DHS will work with families to protect children. Foster care is the last resort and is used only when attempts to keep children safe at home have been exhausted.

There are some optional components of the CPS assessment process in Differential Response. They are:

- whether the family opts to have a support person at the first visit with family or beyond;
- whether the family opts to have a Family Strengths and Needs Assessment conducted with a community service provider when their children have been determined to be safe and their family has moderate to high needs; and
- whether the family, with safe children and moderate to high needs, wishes to be connected to services in the community either paid by child welfare or not.

For visual depictions of the differences and similarities between Alternative Response and Traditional Response CPS Assessments in Differential Response counties please go to:

<http://www.oregon.gov/DHS/CHILDREN/DIFFERENTIAL-RESPONSE/Documents/Flowchart-Ar.pdf>

<http://www.oregon.gov/DHS/CHILDREN/DIFFERENTIAL-RESPONSE/Documents/Flowchart-Tr.pdf>

In counties not practicing Differential Response, there is not the option to offer the Family Strengths and Needs Assessment or provide paid/contracted services to a family with a safe child and moderate to high needs after the CPS assessment is closed. In those counties, they may make referrals to non-contracted community services, but the CPS worker then closes the case because the children were determined to be safe therefore no safety threats for Child Welfare to continue to monitor and help manage.

Here are some general national findings, which our evaluators believe it may be too early to be seeing some of these results in OR:

- Child safety not diminished
- Families & workers more satisfied
- Re-reports reduced over time
- Re-abuse reduced over time
- Foster care entry reduced over time
- Long term costs reduced

Why Oregon chose to invest in Differential Response:

- the recognition that more children in Oregon were coming into care and staying longer because of neglect; and
- The Governor's Task Force on Disproportionality in Child Welfare report prioritized Differential Response (DR) as a strategy and recommendation to move Oregon toward the safe and equitable reduction of children in foster care; and
- National findings showed DR to be a promising practice

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