

ACCS to Take “Different” Approach Engaging — Not Just Investigating — Families

Allen County is preparing to join a pilot program designed to keep children and families together whenever possible. Thirty-three Ohio counties have already implemented the Differential Response model. This new program allows caseworkers flexibility in their approach to assessing and providing services to families who have abuse and neglect allegations. While serious cases of child maltreatment will continue to have traditional investigations, other less severe incidents may be assigned to the differential response model.

The DR model allows the agency to look at the needs of the child and family, and offer services without formal investigation that may result in a disposition of abuse or neglect. Research has shown that Differential Response **results in increased child safety, increased family involvement, and increased family satisfaction.**

In April of 2012 Allen County and five others will join the pilot program, which began in 2007. “This is an opportunity for us to have an influence on how child protective services are provided statewide”, said Cynthia Scanland, ACCS Director of Intake & Investigations. The plan is for all of Ohio to eventually take this approach.

Why: Because One Size Doesn’t Fit All

Child abuse and neglect reports vary significantly. For example, an isolated incident of inadequate supervision is not comparable to repeatedly hitting a toddler for misbehaving. Nor is either of these the same as the sexual exploitation of a young person by his parent. In traditional child protective services systems there is only one response to all of those reports. Child welfare workers investigate the allegation that results in a formal disposition indicating whether or not maltreatment occurred. Currently, research findings indicate that this single approach is not effective in all types of reports of maltreatment. That’s why **differential response**, also referred to as “dual track,” “multiple track” or “alternative response,” has emerged. “It is an approach that allows child protective services to respond in multiple ways to abuse and neglect allegations,” said Scott Ferris, ACCS Executive Director.

The ways in which differential response is practiced varies; however, generally, for high risk reports, an investigation ensues while for low and moderate risk cases with no immediate safety concerns, a family assessment is conducted which gauges the family's needs and strengths. Research shows that these families who receive an assessment rather than an investigation are more likely to be receptive to and engaged in the receipt of services when they are approached in a non-adversarial, non-accusatory manner.

“This approach is really about assessing the needs of each family on an individual basis and offering services to meet those needs”, said Scanland. This has been tried in many places throughout the country and all studies show it to be a successful way of both keeping children safe and reducing the number of children who are court ordered into foster care.

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