Primer on Differential Response: Take Two!

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Purposes of Differential Response and Child Protection

- CPS was established to respond to all reports of suspected child maltreatment - numbers overwhelm available resources.
- We currently either screen out or do not open for services more than half of reports - yet many children are vulnerable.
Purposes of Differential Response and Child Protection

- Troubling that traditional investigatory practice is often adversarial and alienates parents.
- DR is a way to serve more of the legitimate reports (screened in) at an earlier stage by engaging families in a non-adversarial process of linking them to needed services.
Murky Waters: What makes it so difficult to understand ‘Differential Response’

- Different Terminology
- Different Definitions
- Different Models
- Different Services
- Different Service Providers
- Continuous Evolution of the Practice
Terminology

- Differential response also referred to as:
  - Dual track
  - Multiple track
  - Multiple response
  - Alternative response
What is Differential Response?

- Alternative to traditional child protection investigative response and one of several responses within a differential response system
- Sets aside fault finding and substantiation decision
- Usually applied to reports that do not allege serious and imminent harm
What is Differential Response?

- Focuses less on investigative fact finding and more on assessing and ensuring child safety
- Seeks safety through family engagement and collaborative partnerships
- Allows and encourages agencies to provide services without formal determination of abuse or neglect
Core Elements

1. Use of two or more discrete responses to reports of maltreatment that are screened in and accepted

2. Assignment to response pathways is determined by an array of factors

3. Original response assignments can be changed

4. Ability of families who receive a non-investigatory response to accept or refuse to participate in Differential Response or to choose the Traditional Response.
Core Elements

5. Establishment of discrete responses is codified in statute, policy, protocols

6. After an assessment, services are voluntary for families who receive a non-investigatory response (as long as child safety is not compromised)

7. No substantiation of alleged maltreatment and services are offered without formal determination that child maltreatment has occurred

8. Use of central registry is dependent upon type of response.
States with Differential Response

- Statewide or Multiple Jurisdictions
- Pilot or Considering DR
Why Implement Differential Response?

According to *National Study of Child Protective Services Systems and Reform Efforts (2003)*, 20 states identified one of 3 purposes as reason for DR system:

- child safety (55%)
- family preservation or strengthening (45%)
- prevention of CA/N (20%)
Why Implement Differential Response?

- Many parents, reporters, and social workers become frustrated with the limited responses available to children and families.

- The CPS “investigation” is perceived as overly accusatory and adversarial as an initial response for many reports.

- Focus on substantiation and identifying a perpetrator does not contribute to a family’s readiness to engage in services.
Why Implement Differential Response?

- The majority of investigations do not result in any services being provided.
- Since the overwhelming majority of cases are not served through court orders, evidence collection is not always needed.
- Differential Response allows the system to move more quickly to address safety needs.
Why Implement Differential Response?

- Differential response can support families by applying available resources to services rather than investigations.
- Differential response is often accompanied by greater efforts to identify, build, and coordinate formal and non-formal services and supports.
- Children are safer sooner.
Investigation model is rooted in the determination of whether:

- A child has been harmed
- A child is at risk of being harmed
- An individual is culpable for this conduct.
There are *at least two* categories of response

- **investigation:** reports that are immediately recognized as presenting serious safety issues for children/likely placement/criminal charges

- **assessment:** reports that indicate the child may be in need of protection and the family requires services to better address child and family safety and well being.
Factors Determining Response

- Statutory limitations
- Severity of the allegation
- History of past reports
- Ability to assure the safety of the child
- Willingness and capacity of the parents to participate in services
Model for Differential Response System focusing on a child in need of protective services and support and engagement of the family.
Commonalities between Assessment and Investigative Response Pathways

- Focus on child safety
- Promote permanency within the family whenever possible
- Value community services
- Recognize authority of CPS to make decisions of placement and court involvement
- Respond to changing family circumstances

[Schene, 2005]
Commonalities between Assessment and Investigative Response Pathways

- Focus on establishing safety not blame
- Safety through engagement of family strengths and community resources
- Parent as partner using collaborative practices
- Non-judgmental, honest & attentive responses
- Child safety addressed within context of family well-being
- Services not surveillance

[Loman, 2005]
Principles and Assumptions of Differential Response

- The circumstances and needs of families differ and so should the response.
- The majority of reports do not need an adversarial approach or court-ordered interventions.
- Absent an investigation:
  - child safety will not be jeopardized
  - services can be in place more quickly
  - families will be more motivated to use services.
Assumptions continued...

- Effective assessment tools can be put in place to assure safety and an informed response.
- Frontline staff in CPS and other agencies are trained in strength based and collaborative interventions.
- Only cases of greater severity need to be on the state central registry.
- Cases are monitored sufficiently to change course/paths when situation requires.
Assessment is the Key

- Assessment must be more comprehensive than risk/safety assessments - purpose is to understand underlying factors leading to child’s vulnerability.
- ALSO purpose is to identify protective factors in family and larger social context that could be MOBILIZED to protect child and strengthen the family.
Family Engagement

- Family members have significant expertise and whenever possible it is important to engage them in identifying issues and to honor family choices when they do not jeopardize safety.

- Seek collaboration with family and their formal and informal support system.

- Whenever possible, eliminate practices that produce resistance such as drop in visits, joint visits with law enforcement, and interviewing child without parental knowledge.
Preparation for Implementation

- Clarity needed on what is being implemented and what is expected in terms of CPS, families, and communities.
- Important to track progress/outcomes.
- Clarify articulation with data system -- e.g., track assignment, if not substantiated, how characterized?
Preparation for Implementation

- Educate mandated reporters, inform community agencies, train staff, work with courts and law enforcement - all essential

- If some cases are managed primarily by community agency - care must be given to process of communication on progress/outcomes
Service Types and Needs
(Families assigned to AR pathway)

- Concrete Services (clothing, food, utility payment, housing, job training, transportation)
- Parenting Classes
- Domestic Violence services
- Mental Health services
- Substance Abuse Treatment
- Counseling (for adults and for children)
- Home-based services
- Population-specific services (e.g., Spanish-speaking clients, men, fathers, children with disabilities, etc.)
Tracking Progress/Outcomes in All Tracks

- Essential to remember that all cases were considered legitimate - and outcomes of safety, permanency, and well-being need to be attended to.

- If CPS itself is not taking lead, it still has responsibility to track these outcomes and respond/intervene when the situation warrants.
Tracking Progress/Outcomes in All Tracks

- Changes in child safety during initial case
- Long-term child safety and welfare: New reports of child abuse and neglect
- Permanency: Subsequent removals and placements
- Family satisfaction and cooperation
- Family functioning and well-being, skills of individual family members, financial well-being and social support
- Services to families
- Worker satisfaction
- Judicial system: referrals to juvenile/family court, reduction in court hearings, child removals, TPR orders, etc.
- Economic outcomes
Experience of Specific Jurisdictions

**Minnesota [extensive experience]**

- Piloted in set of counties; competition to be in pilot
- Evaluation built in from start - rigorous
- “Learning community” met regularly to share implementation issues across counties
- Strength based approach to families, clear process of engagement - independently significant
Experience of Specific Jurisdictions

**OHIO [10 pilots launched July 1, 2008]**

- Bill authorizes AR pilot project in state of Ohio
- Piloting in ten counties for 18 months; competition to be in pilot (RFP process)
- Evaluation built in from start- random assignment
- Design Workgroup/Leadership Council (pilot representatives) make design and implementation decisions – requisites of all; guidelines allowing for county discretion
- Eye toward statewide implementation
- It is all about relationships!
Potential Challenges

- Subsequent reports
- Deterioration of safety framework
- Family does not participate voluntarily
- Insufficiency of service resources
- Inadequate involvement of fathers and other significant stakeholders
- Communication with/within community service system
Prospective Benefits

- More children are better protected over time by engaging more parents in the process of making sustainable changes.
- The rate of subsequent, repeat reports to CPS has been demonstrated to decrease.
- Both families and agency child protection workers are more satisfied with the outcomes.
- Involvement of larger systems of support.
- The approach is cost neutral or saves money over time.
The Developmental Process

Different Phases pose Different Challenges and Opportunities

- Design
- Early Implementation
- Mid-Implementation
- Maturity
- Ongoing
Lessons Learned

- There is intrinsic value of family voice as partners, guiding service planning and decision making.
- Community partnerships are most effective ways to protect children.
- There is a need to involve families and community stakeholders early in process.
Lessons Learned

- Communication among/across jurisdictions is essential – establish vehicles for regular contact
- Assessment is ongoing and cumulative as trust builds - need to respond
- Evaluation matters – bring evaluators in early and make the investment to do it well
Unresolved Issues

- Old data system requirements have to be adjusted to new practices
- How to sustain significant changes
- Partnerships with community agencies
- Tracking progress as well as outcomes
- Systematic expansion of body of evidence supporting practice
New Directions in Child Welfare

- Potential CAPTA amendments
- Comprehensive assessment
- Whither substantiation
- Reaching broader set of vulnerable children and parents
- Systematically incorporating evidence of what works into ongoing practice
- Expanding outcomes of child wellbeing
American Humane’s Differential Response Initiative

- Publications
- Annual conference
- Training/technical assistance/consultation
- Disseminate information
- National Quality Improvement Center on Differential Response in Child Protective Services
Questions?