

What is Alternative Response?

Alternative Response is a better way to handle lower risk reports of child abuse and neglect. Instead of a traditional “one size fits all” approach that requires workers to treat all cases exactly the same way, Alternative Response allows workers to tailor their approach to best serve families. The result is a smarter system that produces safer kids and stronger families.

Under Alternative Response, the Department will screen reports of possible child abuse or neglect just like it does today. The difference is that cases that are not screened out will be assigned to one of two tracks: Traditional Response or Alternative Response. Higher risk reports including cases involving serious physical injury or sexual abuse will be referred to the Traditional Response track and will be handled the same way they are today, resulting in a formal finding. Lower risk reports can be pursued through Alternative Response.

For cases on the Alternative Response track, the Department will work collaboratively with the family to provide services without the threat of a formal finding of abuse or neglect. Families are more receptive to this approach as they see their caseworker as someone who can help them rather than someone who is investigating them.

For example, rather than investigating and treating a single mother who is struggling with issues of poverty and having a difficult time providing for her child the same way that the Department would investigate an allegation of physical or sexual abuse, the Department can instead approach that mother with ways to provide healthcare, clothing and food for her child.

Alternative Response is a recognized best practice currently used in over 20 states and is endorsed by the National Council of State Legislatures, Casey Families Programs, and the American Humane Association. Maryland is in currently working with partners on a year-long planning process and will begin implementation in July 2013.

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