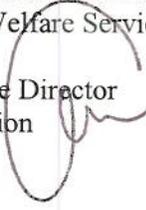


DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN RESOURCES
SOCIAL SERVICES ADMINISTRATION
311 WEST SARATOGA STREET
BALTIMORE, MARYLAND 21201

DATE: May 15, 2013

POLICY #: SSA# 13-13

TO: Directors, Local Departments of Social Services
Assistant Directors, Child Welfare Services

FROM: Carnitra D. White, Executive Director
Social Services Administration 

RE: Alternative Response

PROGRAMS AFFECTED: Child Protective Services, In-Home Services, Out of Home Placement

ORIGINATING OFFICE: Office of Child Welfare and Adult Services Programs

ACTION REQUIRED OF: All Local Departments

REQUIRED ACTION: Implementation of Alternative Response

ACTION DUE DATE: July 1, 2013 – July 1, 2014 (according to the phase in plan outlined in the Background section of this Policy Directive)

CONTACT PERSON: Steve Berry, Manager
In-Home Services
410-767-7108

Deborah Ramelmeier, Deputy Executive Director
Child Welfare and Adult Services Programs
410-767-7506

PURPOSE:

The purpose of this policy is to provide direction as to the implementation of Alternative Response in the State of Maryland.

BACKGROUND:

Over the years, Child Protective Services (CPS) workers have seen an increase in complex cases and a larger volume of referrals, coupled with a reduction in resources. Nearly half of the referrals are screened out. Of those approved for investigation, findings of abuse and neglect are made in fewer than half the cases. Across the country, more states are recognizing that many of the CPS referrals do not require a traditional investigative response to ensure the safety of children. Practice has shifted to provide an “Alternative Response” to CPS referrals where risk to children is lower and the labeling of caretakers as abusers or neglectors would serve little purpose. Best Practices show that partnering collaboratively with families leads to increased engagement and service utilization. Rather than an “Investigative Response,” which involves a more forensic approach, the Alternative Response for these families emphasizes the completion of an assessment to determine the needs of the family and children and the services necessary to strengthen and preserve families. In May 2012, Governor Martin O’Malley approved the passage of House Bill 834, Child Abuse and Neglect-Alternative Response, and authorized the Secretary of Human Resources to establish an Alternative Response program for specified child abuse and neglect reports.

This law requires the Department to create an Alternative Response Council to plan for creating a Child Protective Services (CPS) system that has an Investigative and Alternative Response available for allegations accepted for a CPS response. One of the first recommendations made by the Council and accepted by the Secretary is to phase in implementation of the dual path system over a year beginning July 1, 2013. Phase I jurisdictions (Garrett, Allegany, Washington, Frederick and Montgomery County) are scheduled to go live on July 1, 2013. The remaining phases are as follows: Phase II jurisdictions are Howard, Baltimore, Carroll, Harford and Cecil counties. Phase III jurisdictions are Anne Arundel, Prince George’s, Calvert, Charles and St. Mary’s counties. Phase IV jurisdictions are Kent, Queen Anne’s, Caroline, Talbot, Dorchester, Wicomico and Worcester counties. Phase V is for Baltimore City. Implementation dates for Phase II – V will be announced several months prior to their go live date. This policy becomes effective for jurisdictions as they go live.

OVERVIEW:

How Does Alternative Response Work?

Alternative Response is an approach other than an investigation to work with individuals and families in response to a credible report that a child has been abused or neglected. Alternative Response may only be considered if the alleged maltreatment meets the threshold for Child Protective Services (CPS) intervention. After a case is “screened in,” local staff will evaluate the information obtained from the reporting source and determine whether the case should be assigned for an Investigative Response or for an Alternative Response. Both approaches will address the family’s needs and put in place appropriate measures to protect the child. If the Local Department elects an Alternative Response, the agency will not conduct a formal investigation or

identify a particular individual as responsible for maltreatment in a central registry or case file. Instead, after meeting the family, the caseworker will conduct a full assessment and engage with the family to jointly determine what services would benefit the family. The decision to forgo an investigation will be made in accordance with this policy, weighing the type of maltreatment, the level of risk of harm or endangerment to any child in the home, and the family's history of involvement with the agency.

Screening protocols:

The Screening process is the same. A screener uses the Structured Decision Making (SDM) tool and makes a recommendation as to whether to screen in the report to a supervisor, who makes the final decision. Once the decision to screen in a case has been made, the supervisor will determine whether the case will be assigned for Alternative Response or an Investigative Response. This decision is based upon information known at the time of the screening call and any relevant information in MD CHESSIE, the Maryland Judiciary Case Search, and the Sexual Offender Registry regarding identified adults in the home and alleged perpetrators. Workers and supervisors are not expected to gather additional information from other sources in order to make this pathway decision.

Eligibility for Alternative Response:

All cases that meet the criteria for child abuse and neglect may be considered for assignment for an Alternative Response, except as outlined in the two sections below.

Mandatory Disqualifying Criteria

The case may not be referred for Alternative Response if one or more of the following factors are present:

- Sexual abuse
- Abuse or neglect that occurs in an out-of-home placement (resource home, Child Placement Agency (CPA), group home)
- Abuse or neglect resulting in death or serious physical or mental injury
- Level of case severity/risk is moderate to high
- Report meets criteria for Mental Injury Investigation
- Signs or diagnosis of failure to thrive
- The individual suspected of child maltreatment has been identified as responsible for abuse or neglect in the previous 3 year period as documented in agency case record
- The individual suspected of abuse or neglect has had one report assigned to Alternative Response within the prior 12 months
- The individual suspected of abuse or neglect has had two reports assigned to Alternative Response within the prior 24 months
- An active investigation or alternative response is in progress

Discretionary Disqualifying Factors:

If none of the disqualifying factors listed above are present, the Local Department must consider whether it has other information that leads to a conclusion that Alternative Response

would not be the most appropriate intervention to meet the needs of the family or ensure the safety of the children. The supervisor should take into account the following factors in making this determination. The mere existence of one of the discretionary factors listed below does not rule out assignment to Alternative Response but should be taken into account:

- Reported history of a family's inability or refusal to participate in the Alternative Response assessment which may include:
 - Family refuses worker access to a child
 - Family refuses to discuss allegations
 - Family refuses to cooperate and risk and safety are a concern
 - Family rejects the services necessary to address immediate safety issues for the child
- Multiple similar reports (within 120 days)
- Allegations that the maltreater is responsible for domestic violence currently occurring in the home
- Criminal history bearing on child safety
- A current expressed threat of serious harm to child
- A need for law enforcement assistance
- Court ordered Investigation

Reassignment between Pathways:

After initiating an Alternative Response and making contact with the child and family and gathering information, a worker may find it appropriate for the case to be reassigned to an Investigative Response. Likewise, in the early stages of an Investigative Response, a worker may find it appropriate to have the case reassigned for an Alternative Response. A decision relating to reassignment must be made as soon as the worker becomes aware that reassignment may be appropriate. If a worker recommends reassignment, the worker will contact his or her supervisor promptly to discuss the possible referral for an Investigative Response or Alternative Response. All reassignments must have supervisory approval.

Reassignment between pathways does not "restart" the statutory timeframes for initiating and completing an Alternative Response or an Investigative Response. The begin date remains the date the case was screened in as meeting criteria for a child protective services report. A reassignment does not require a change in worker assignment.

A report assigned for an Alternative Response may be reassigned for an Investigative Response at any time based upon:

- A reassessment of the report or relevant facts
- A determination that the case involves one of the mandatory disqualifying factors;
- A family's inability or refusal to participate in the Alternative Response assessment, which may include:
 - Family refuses worker access to a child
 - Family refuses to discuss allegations
 - Family refuses to cooperate and risk and safety are a concern

- Family rejects the services necessary to address immediate safety issues for the child
- Subsequent “screened in” allegation of maltreatment received during active AR
 - Note that this is a mandatory reassignment that will automatically be completed by MD CHESSIE system upon supervisor approval of new “screened in” report.

A report assigned for an Investigative Response may be reassigned for an Alternative Response at any time based on:

- A reassessment of the report or relevant facts that demonstrate that the case meets the criteria for an alternative response AND
- A determination that accepted services would address all issues of risk of abuse or neglect and child safety.

If the worker determines in the course of an Investigative Response that there is no credible evidence of child abuse and neglect such that the proper finding is “Ruled Out,” the case should be closed with that finding and not be reassigned to an Alternative Response.

New referral received during IR or AR

If a subsequent report is received while there is an active AR or IR, the following actions will be taken:

- If the allegations are substantially similar to the initial report that led to the AR or IR and there are no new allegations of maltreatment, the report is "screened out" as a duplicate report. The information relating to the subsequent report shall be forwarded to the active worker.
- If the report contains a new allegation and is “screened in” as meeting criteria, a new investigation is opened to make a finding as to the new allegation. If the case is currently open as an AR, the case will be immediately reassigned for an investigative response. The worker would then make a finding as to the original and subsequent allegations.

CASEWORK PROCESS

Time Frames:

The required timeframes for Alternative Response mirror those for Investigative Response; initial contact must be made within 24 hours of acceptance for physical abuse and 5 days for neglect. The entire Alternative Response assessment process may not exceed 60 days. All of the following actions must be taken within the 24-hour/5-day timeframes:

- See the child and the child’s parents or primary caretaker (visit should take place in the home whenever possible)
- Solicit parents cooperation to interview the child separately
- Complete a Safety Assessment on ALL children in the household and determine safety of the child, wherever the child is, plus all other children in the household
- Determine safety of other children in the care or custody of the individual suspected of abuse or neglect

- Advise the appropriate law enforcement agency that the report has been assigned for Alternative Response, if the law enforcement agency made the report of abuse or neglect
- Inform the individual suspected of child abuse or neglect of the allegations made against the individual in a manner consistent with laws protecting the rights of the person who made the report.

Assessment Procedure:

Alternative Response requires a full family assessment, which includes:

- Completion of Safety Assessment
- Completion of Risk Assessment
- Completion of Family Strengths and Needs Assessment (CANS-F)
- Evaluation of the child's home environment (during home visit)
- Discussion with child's caregiver and family members about their service needs, focusing upon strength building
- Develop a safety plan addressing the safety of the child or children in the household and the risk of subsequent abuse or neglect

The assessment is initiated by contacting the family to set up a home visit within the guidelines listed in the previous section. If the visit cannot be set up within the required timeframes, the worker should ask the parents for permission to see the child/ren at his or her school or day care or other mutually agreed upon setting for the purposes of safety assessment.

The assessment is a collaborative effort that involves the family in all conclusions and recommendations for service provision. Workers shall ensure that parents and children are approached in a non-adversarial manner and allow all family members to participate in the assessment process, as developmentally appropriate. Assessing and ensuring child safety and risk of maltreatment must always be paramount in all interactions with a family during the AR assessment. The tenets and procedures related to Family Centered Practice are to be applied in work with families receiving an Alternative Response.

Identification and Resolution of Service Needs:

During the course of an Alternative Response, immediate services may be needed depending upon the risk assessment and safety plan. The worker shall complete all of the following actions:

- Render any appropriate services in the best interests of the child(ren) to address any immediate issues of safety and risk
- Refer the family and child(ren) for additional services if needed
- Establish a plan to monitor the safety plan and the provision or completion of appropriate services as is necessary to ensure the safety of the child/ren and other children in the household.

Completion of Assessment and Case Closure

An Alternative Response Assessment shall be completed within 60 days after acceptance of the report and submitted to the worker's supervisor for approval.

Within 10 days of completing the Alternative Response Assessment, the Department shall provide a written report to the family members who are participating in the AR Assessment as to whether and what services are necessary to address both the safety of the child or other children in the household and the risk of subsequent abuse or neglect.

If the family requires services beyond the 60-day window, the case should be considered for transfer to In-Home Consolidated Services. If the case does not meet criteria to receive services via In-Home Services, the local department shall make appropriate referrals and linkages to community agencies before closing the case.

The Alternative Response case may be closed any time prior to 60 days if:

- The family declines to accept services and there are no safety issues regarding the children in the home and no grounds to sustain a Child in Need of Assistance petition;
- The family has been linked to appropriate community resources to stabilize the family and does not need ongoing services from the Department; or
- The issues that brought the family to the Department's attention have been resolved and there is no current need for services.

Transfer to In-Home Consolidated Services:

- If any of the children are "conditionally safe" (per SAFE-C) or the risk assessment indicates moderate-high risk, the case should be transferred to In-Home Consolidated Services for continued service provision

Record Retention:

The local Department shall maintain complete records related to an Alternative Response and services for 3 years after the report was received. If there is no subsequent child welfare involvement during the 3 years, the records will be expunged. If there is subsequent child welfare involvement within the 3 years, the record shall not be expunged.

Release of Information Pertaining to Alternative Response Records

Alternative Response is a child protective services intervention and records are subject to all laws pertaining to the protection of and/or disclosure of child protective services records. These records may be made available in any subsequent Child in Need of Assistance proceedings to the same extent as investigative records.

The presence of an Alternative Response record shall not be released in response to a 3rd party background request for child protective services history.

MD CHESSIE Instructions:

Pathway Determination

After the supervisor approves the report as “screened in”, the CPS response type window will appear. The system will default to CPS-AR unless the user selects one of the mandatory or discretionary disqualifiers. The radio button will change to CPS-IR if the user selects one of the options. The grayed out options are system selected based upon selections made under Structured Decision Making and are not user selected. When User selects “ok” (with CPS-AR enabled), a popup window will appear to confirm that user wants to assign the case to CPS-AR. If the user responds “no”, the user will not leave the CPS Response Type screen. If user responds “yes”, the Assign/Transfer screen will appear and case can be assigned to a worker.

CPS Response Type - Referrals (#9318840)

<p>i Mandatory Disqualifying Criteria</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Sexual Abuse <input type="checkbox"/> Abuse or neglect that occurs in an out-of-home placement (resource home, Child Placement Agency (CPA), group home) <input type="checkbox"/> Abuse or neglect resulting in death or serious physical or mental injury <input type="checkbox"/> Level of case severity/risk is moderate to high <input type="checkbox"/> Report meets criteria for Mental Injury Investigation <input type="checkbox"/> Signs or diagnosis of failure to thrive <input type="checkbox"/> The individual suspected of child maltreatment has been identified as responsible for abuse or neglect in the previous 3 year period as documented in agency case record <input type="checkbox"/> The individual suspected of abuse or neglect has had one report assigned to Alternative Response within the prior 12 months. <input type="checkbox"/> The individual suspected of abuse or neglect has had two reports assigned to Alternative Response within the prior 24 months. <input type="checkbox"/> An active investigation or alternative response is in progress 	<p>i Discretionary Disqualifying Factors</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Reported history of a family's inability or refusal to participate in the Alternative Response assessment which may include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Family refuses worker access to a child -Family refuses to discuss allegations -Family refuses to cooperate and risk and safety are a concern -Family rejects the services necessary to address immediate safety issues for the child <input type="checkbox"/> Multiple similar reports (within 120 days) <input type="checkbox"/> Allegations that the maltreater is responsible for domestic violence currently occurring in the home <input type="checkbox"/> Criminal history bearing on child safety <input type="checkbox"/> A current expressed threat of serious harm to child <input type="checkbox"/> A need for law enforcement assistance <input type="checkbox"/> Court ordered investigation
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CPS Response Type

CPS-AR CPS-IR

CPS Response Reassignment

User selects “CPS Response Reassignment” folder in tree to get to screen

Child Protective Services > Mouse, Mickey [AR#2775460] >
CPS Response Reassignment

Case Head: Mouse, Mickey
CPS Approved Date: 07/19/2013
CPS ID: 2775460

CPS Response Reassignment History

Date	Initial CPS Response Type	CPS Response Change	Reason for Change	Approval Date
07/19/2013	CPS-AR	CPS-IR		00/00/0000

CPS Response Reassignment Details

Date: 07/19/2013
Initial CPS Response Type: CPS-AR
CPS Response Change: CPS-IR
Reason for Change:
Approval Dt: 00/00/0000
Notes:
[Approval](#)

User selects “new”, the information in the highlighted line will system populate. Worker selects reason for change and adds notes. User “saves” and Approval hyperlink will activate. User sends for supervisory approval. Once the supervisor approves, the CPS type will change on the folder, giving the worker access to folders for the new CPS Type. NOTE: After approval, the information in the AR Summary screen and the IR Investigation findings screen will be deleted upon transfer between types. If the case is reassigned back to original response type, the user will have to fill out the screens again. The maltreatment folder will transfer between CPS types.

Alternative Response Summary Screen

1. Reason for AR referral - brief description of what brought family to DSS attention
2. Children participating - User selects children from “select” hyperlink. Must be confirmed as clients, under age 18 and be “participating as child” on demographic screen
3. Individuals Participating - Includes all adults participating in the AR. Must be confirmed as clients
4. Services Interventions - Select hyperlink provides multi select drop down
5. Services Address AR - required if services were provided. If no services were provided, enter “no services provided”
6. Issues Requiring further Intervention - User entered narrative
7. Recommendations - User entered narrative
8. Case Closure – User selects radio button. If select “Referred to Community Resources”, user selects from hyperlink. If select “referred to DSS program”, user will make selections from radio buttons at bottom left. In Home and Out of Home should rarely be selected together.

Child Protective Services > Mouse, Mickey [AR#2775460] >
Alternative Response Information > Alternative Response Summary

Summary Detail

Case Head: Mouse, Mickey CPS ID: 2775460
AR Assessment Start Date: 07/19/2013 AR Assessment Closure Date: 00/00/0000

Reason for AR Referral: Test Edit

1

Children Participating in Incident Select

Client ID	Client Name	Cis Client ID
3490921	Minney Mouse	499009949

2

Individuals Participating in the AR Assessment Select

Client ID	Client Name	Cis Client ID
3490920	Mickey Mouse	499009948

3

Child Protective Services > Mouse, Mickey [AR#2775460] >
Alternative Response Information > Alternative Response Summary

Summary Detail

Services and Interventions Provided to the family to mitigate Safety and Risk Issues: Select

4 Counseling

How did the services provided address the reason for AR referral? Edit

5 dfg

Issues requiring further interventions: Edit

6 dfg

Recommendations for the Family: Edit

7 dfg

Case Closure Status: Clients referred to community services Select

8 In-Home Services Out-of-Home Services Family Investment Services Counseling

Alternative Response Summary Approval

User completes Summary and Detail tabs and then submits for supervisory approval. Once supervisor approves, the case is closed and it is removed from the user's tree. User will print out the Summary to send to AR participants from hyperlink (similar process as for 181 in CPS-IR).