

Differential Response:

A community approach to supporting families and protecting children

Sacramento County
Child Protective Services

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“Every child in Sacramento lives in a safe, stable, permanent home, nurtured by healthy families and a strong community.”

– Vision statement for
CPS Child Welfare
System Improvements



What is differential response?

Everyone knows that an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure. This philosophy is just as true for families in crisis. It's much better to prevent child abuse and neglect by offering support to families before problems reach a crisis.

That's the idea behind differential response, a new way for CPS to respond to calls to the Child Abuse Hotline.

Differential response is an early intervention and prevention program. It allows CPS to link at-risk families to services in their neighborhood. It is based on the theory that if families are offered services earlier, it may keep them out of the system later.

Linking families to services like counseling and drug and alcohol treatment increases the chances that child abuse and neglect can be prevented, and that children can remain safely at home, without the need for foster care or a formal CPS investigation.

How does differential response work?

Once a call is made to the Child Abuse Hotline, a social worker assesses the information and may refer the family for a differential response. A family may receive one of the following responses.

• The Community Response

This is for families whose cases would have ordinarily been screened out. A partner from a community agency responds to the family on a voluntary basis, depending on the family's needs.

• The Joint Response (CPS/Community Partner)

A CPS social worker and someone from a community agency respond together to assess the family's situation and offer services that meet the families' needs. The CPS worker tries to get the family's permission before visiting.

• The CPS-Only Response

This is the conventional child welfare response. It occurs where there is a moderate to high risk of harm to the child and at least one safety issue.

The social worker will visit the family, assess the situation and take appropriate action, whether it be offering voluntary services or – for the most serious cases – removing the child. If the assessment determines that neighborhood services are the best fit, the worker will contact a community partner and arrange for a follow-up visit.

Sacramento County is one of 11 counties in California using differential response.

What neighborhoods are affected?

Because of limited funding, CPS offers differential response in neighborhoods with the highest rates of referrals and child removal.

The initial project was launched in the 95838 (Del Paso Heights) neighborhood.

The second phase serves south Sacramento neighborhoods in the 95814, 95817, 95820, and 95824 zip codes.

Additional south Sacramento neighborhoods in the 95822, 95823 and 95832 area codes are scheduled to receive differential response services in the summer of 2007.

What community agencies are involved?

Differential response requires CPS to partner with a community agency to handle the community response and the joint CPS/community response. In Del Paso Heights, CPS is working with the Mutual Assistance Network of Del Paso Heights. In south Sacramento, CPS is working with the La Familia Counseling Center and River Oak Center for Children.



How will this affect me?

If you or your family has had contact with CPS or may have in the future, CPS will work with you and a community agency, on a voluntary basis whenever possible, to offer help and assistance.

If you are a member of the general public, we want you to know how CPS is changing. We need the support of the community to be effective.

How can I help?

Protecting children is too big a job for one government agency. Sacramento County continues to build partnerships with community-based organizations, birth parents, youth, foster (resource) families, the faith community and relative caregivers. We want to collaborate in ways that benefit children and families.

If you or your agency would like to be a part of this effort, contact:

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