

## OHIO ALTERNATIVE RESPONSE PROJECT

### ALTERNATIVE RESPONSE FUNDAMENTALS IN SUPPORT OF OHIO'S CHILD PROTECTION PRACTICE MODEL MARCH 2010

OHIO'S ALTERNATIVE RESPONSE (AR) PRACTICE IDENTIFIES THE GOAL, PRINCIPLES, CORE ELEMENTS, FOUNDATIONAL TENETS, WORKERS SKILL SETS, AND INDICATORS OF QUALITY PRACTICES WITH FAMILIES. THERE ARE NUMEROUS COMMONALITIES BETWEEN THE AR REQUISITES AND THE INVESTIGATION RESPONSE. QUALITY CHILD PROTECTION PRACTICE INCLUDES SPECIFIC PRINCIPLES AND METHODS IN WORKING WITH FAMILIES THAT ENCOMPASSES ALL OF OUR WORK, REGARDLESS OF THE INITIAL RESPONSE TO REPORTS OF MALTREATMENT. WHAT FOLLOWS IS AN ARTICULATION OF THE REQUISITES OF AN ALTERNATIVE RESPONSE APPROACH.

#### GOAL

The Ohio Department of Job and Family Services (ODJFS), in collaboration with other state agencies, state professional associations, community stakeholders, Ohio's 88 counties and the three branches of Ohio government, will develop a **statewide child protection system** that provides *two* pathways – an investigation pathway and an alternative response pathway – that assesses and responds to the unique safety concerns, risks and protective capacities of each family who is subject of an accepted report of child maltreatment.

#### PRINCIPLES: FOR ALL CHILD PROTECTIVE SERVICES (CPS) INTERVENTIONS

- ♦ Child safety comes first, and all policies, guidelines and practices are child centered and family-focused.
- ♦ CPS emphasizes family engagement and involvement in all aspects of our practice.
- ♦ CPS supports assessment and intervention processes that focus on family strengths while addressing the underlying conditions and contributing factors that impact child safety.
- ♦ Child safety is best achieved through active, collaborative and respectful engagement of parents, family, community and all other CPS stakeholders.
- ♦ When families cannot assure child safety, it is necessary for the agency, courts, community, and/or extended families and kin to make appropriate efforts to provide protection.

#### PRINCIPLES: ALTERNATIVE RESPONSE SPECIFIC

- ♦ Alternative Response is a CPS intervention.
- ♦ Families screened into the child welfare system and identified as eligible for Alternative Response have the opportunity to make an informed decision to participate in Alternative Response or to be served by the Investigation Response.
- ♦ Families are more easily engaged in a partnership when the labels of perpetrators and victims have been removed.
- ♦ Alternative Response systems are designed to identify family needs and find creative solutions, including formal and informal supports and services.
- ♦ Child protective agencies should respect family choices in the selection of services.

#### CORE ELEMENTS

The *core elements* of Ohio's Alternative Response are the following:

- ♦ Use of two or more discrete response pathways for abuse and neglect reports that are screened-in and accepted;
- ♦ Establishment of discrete response pathways is formalized in statute, rules, and protocols;
- ♦ Screening decisions are documented by identifying the factors that are used to determine initial pathway assignment (e.g., presence of imminent danger, level of risk, the number of previous reports, the source of the report, and/or presenting case characteristics such as type of alleged maltreatment and age of the alleged victim);

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- ♦ Initial pathway assignment can change based on new information acquired by the CPS agency that alters risk level or safety concerns;
- ♦ Families who are assigned to the alternative response pathway can choose to receive the investigation response;
- ♦ After assessment, if there are no safety concerns, families can accept or refuse the services offered;
- ♦ Assessments are completed using a child centered, family focused strength based perspective.
- ♦ Families served in an alternative response pathway do not have a formal determination of child maltreatment; and
- ♦ *Perpetrator* and *victim* labels are removed from the intake record for those reports assigned to an alternative response pathway.

## FOUNDATIONAL TENETS OF THE PRACTICE MODEL

### *Alternative Response*

- ♦ The primary goal of Alternative Response is child safety.
- ♦ Alternative Response practice is based on safety-focused engagement of and partnership with families and communities rather than expectation of compliance.
- ♦ Transparency in purpose and process is of utmost importance.
- ♦ Interventions collaboratively created by the practitioner/social worker and the family are more likely to succeed.
- ♦ Intervention in the lives of families should be commensurate with the family's needs.
- ♦ Partners – whether they be the community, service providers, colleagues, and/or families – share power.
- ♦ Practice focuses on the solutions, not the problems.

### *Families*

- ♦ Families have strengths and resources; it is the job of CPS to tap into them and help the family apply them to keep their children safe.
- ♦ Families' values & cultural traditions are to be identified, understood and respected.
- ♦ Families are the experts; honor family wisdom about their circumstances, strengths and needs.
- ♦ Most families want to address threats to child safety.
- ♦ Most families can be partners in achieving child safety.
- ♦ Families are more than the presenting concerns that brought them to the attention of the child protection agency.
- ♦ Families are helped through connections with their natural support network and with community services and resources, when appropriate.

### *Services*

- ♦ Services are provided based on need as well as on child safety and maltreatment risk.
- ♦ Where service gaps exist, efforts are expended to fill the gap in order to be responsive to the needs of families served by the child protection system.
- ♦ Service plans are simple and family friendly.
- ♦ Services are driven by parents and honored, unless compromising child safety.
- ♦ Services are terminated when safety and high risk issues are resolved and in voluntary situations, when there is no longer mutual agreement to continue.

## WORKERS' SKILL SETS

The following skills are instrumental in the implementation of the practice model at all levels of the public child welfare system:

- ♦ *Engaging*: Effectively joining with family and community to establish common goals concerning child safety, well being, and permanency.

- ♦ *Assessing*: Gathering information about reported concerns and family needs, evaluating the relevance of that information as well as identifying family strengths and community and tribal resources that may be applied to address those concerns and needs.
  - ♦ *Partnering*: Respectful and meaningful collaboration with families and community to achieve shared goals.
  - ♦ *Planning*: Setting goals, developing strategies, and outlining tasks and schedules to accomplish the goals derived from the engaging, assessing, and partnering process.
  - ♦ *Implementing*: Identifying and applying the most effective and culturally appropriate services, resources, and processes to meet the goals established in the planning stage.
  - ♦ *Evaluating*: Monitoring outcomes of service plans and system programs to determine if the desired goals are being achieved and if not, to use this information to reconsider goals and strategies developed in the planning phase or services and resources identified in the implementation stage.
  - ♦ *Advocacy*: Recognizing individual or group needs, providing intervention on behalf of a client or client group, communicating to decision makers and initiating actions to secure or enhance a needed service, resource, or entitlement.
  - ♦ *Communication*: Effectively sending and receiving information within the appropriate cultural context. Methods include verbal, non-verbal, electronic, and written communication
  - ♦ *Cultural Competence*: Interacting with families without making assumptions, respecting and learning from the unique characteristics and strengths of the family and tribe while acknowledging and honoring the diversity within and across cultures, and applying these skills to the partnership with the family and tribe and the options made available to them.
- (MN Practice Model, 2009)

#### SELECTED INDICATORS OF QUALITY PRACTICES WITH FAMILIES<sup>1</sup>

The following behaviors are indicative of fidelity to the Alternative Response Practice Model. These are selected examples from which to examine the quality of child protection practice:

- ♦ Communicate with families in a respectful, non-judgmental, and supportive manner.
- ♦ Minimize use of drop-in visits (It may be necessary when there is no phone, no response or timeline constraints dictate such a visit).
- ♦ Meet the family at a time that is convenient for them.
- ♦ Meet with family members together, whenever possible and appropriate to do so.
- ♦ Ask parental permission to see children.
- ♦ Use of law enforcement on home visits should be avoided unless worker safety may be jeopardized.
- ♦ Use the *warm handoff* in referring the family to a new service provider and new worker.
- ♦ Be honest about the lack of knowledge of the family's life circumstances and culture and be open to learning about these things from the family.
- ♦ Actively listen to the family's story.
- ♦ Search for the family's strengths and competencies.
- ♦ Encourage the family to develop their own goals and make the decisions that affect them.
- ♦ Partner with the family to meet family-identified needs.
- ♦ Honor family decisions unless they compromise child safety.

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<sup>1</sup> These behaviors are necessary, but not sufficient, to demonstrate adherence to Alternative Response practice. There are multiple factors (e.g., case record review, supervisor feedback, family input, etc.) that require consideration when assessing the quality of practice.

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