



CHILD WELFARE POLICY UPDATE
Differential Response System
August 2013

*The June 2013 Child Welfare Policy Update ([link here](#)) introduced the concept of the **Differential Response System**, an approach used by child protective agencies to have more than one way of responding to allegations of child abuse. Iowa's Child Protective System will implement a Differential Response approach in January 2014. Child Protective Systems in other states have found Differential Response to be more effective in engaging and empowering families while concurrently maintaining the safety of children.*

This second policy update regarding Iowa's Differential Response is designed to provide DHS staff and community members with more specific information about the changes in practice associated with Differential Response, and to provide updates to the work being done by the Differential Response workgroups.

<p>How does Differential Response differ from Iowa's existing Child Protective System?</p> <p>What does Differential Response have in common with Iowa's current Child Protective System?</p>	<p>In Iowa's current Child Protective System, there is a single path for responding to accepted cases of child abuse and neglect. Child Protective agencies using a Differential Response approach are able to respond to in more than one way to accepted reports of child abuse and neglect. In Iowa, there will be two possible paths a case can follow: the <u>Child Abuse Assessment</u> path or the <u>Family Assessment</u> path.</p> <p>As the chart on page 3 illustrates, the Child Abuse Assessment and Family Assessment paths have some differences but share important common elements – the most significant being that both paths share a common focus on the safety of children.</p>
<p>Who will decide what type of assessment the family receives?</p> <p>Who will be doing child protective assessments and family assessments?</p>	<p>The decision about designation of a path (child abuse or family assessment) for an accepted case will be made at the time the referral is accepted at Intake by DHS. Only cases for which denial of critical care are alleged and for which there is no indication that the child is in imminent danger will be placed on the family assessment path. Additional specific screening criteria, to be developed in Iowa Administrative Code, will be used by DHS Intake staff and supervisors to determine the correct path for a case.</p> <p>DHS child protective assessment workers will conduct all assessments.</p>
<p>Will law enforcement still be involved in child protective cases?</p>	<p>Joint investigations with law enforcement are not part of the Family Assessment response. If a child protective worker upon visiting the family determines there is imminent danger to the child (or to the worker) law enforcement should be contacted.</p> <p>Cases assigned to the Child Abuse path will continue to be coordinated with law enforcement as needed</p>

<p>Will DHS child protective workers still be granted confidential access to children at school?</p>	<p>The purpose of confidential access is to immediately assess child safety and interview the child without the potential influence of family members. Confidential access requires supervisory approval.</p> <p>Accepted abuse referrals assigned for Family Assessment path will not involve children whose immediate safety is in jeopardy, so immediately accessing the child at school will not generally be warranted. Similarly, cases accepted for Family Assessment will not result in an abuse finding and likely will not result in criminal charges, so the need to utilize confidential access for evidence-gathering purposes does not exist in this pathway.</p>
<p>Can cases assigned to one path for assessment be switched to the other path?</p> <p>Who can re-assign cases to a different path?</p>	<p>Cases assigned to the Family Assessment path in which it is later learned that the child is unsafe or where additional allegations other than denial of critical care are identified will be re-assigned to the Child Abuse path.</p> <p>In the event that information emerges in a Family Assessment that if known at intake would have placed the case on the Child Abuse path, the case will be re-assigned to the Child Abuse path.</p> <p>Cases on the Child Abuse Assessment path cannot be re-assigned to the Family Assessment path.</p> <p>Path re-assignment is done via consultation between the assigned DHS child protective worker and the worker's supervisor.</p>
<p>What about child safety?</p>	<p>Outcomes from states which have implemented a Differential Response approach to child protection indicate that children are no less safe under Differential Response. Iowa's Differential Response approach is designed to ensure that regardless of which path a case is assigned, safety and risk are carefully assessed.</p>
<p>Can children assessed on the Family Assessment path be referred for filing of a Child in Need of Assistance petition?</p>	<p>It is anticipated that families seen on the Family Assessment path who are determined to need further services will engage in such services voluntarily. In the event court intervention is needed to ensure a child's safety, permanence, or well-being, a Child in Need of Assistance petition can be filed but no later than at completion of the assessment.</p>
<p>It's August and Differential Response is to be implemented January 1, 2014. Are we ready?</p>	<p>All indications at this time are that Iowa will be ready for Differential Response implementation on 1/1/2014. Workgroups including DHS and external partners are actively engaged in completing system design related to training, data gathering, performance measures, and communication. External stakeholders will continue to be involved as Differential Response is implemented.</p>

Iowa's Differential Response Approach Has Two Paths –Child Abuse Assessment and Family Assessment – With the Common Goal of Keeping Children Safe

