



## COMMUNITY GUIDE

# ALTERNATIVE RESPONSE



For more information  
Contact your local Department of Social Services  
call 1-800-332-6347  
or go to  
[dhs.maryland.gov](http://dhs.maryland.gov)



State of Maryland  
Wes Moore, Governor  
Aruna Miller, Lt. Governor

Maryland Department of Human Services  
Rafael López, Secretary



DHS/SSA/3001/August 2017

**ALTERNATIVE**  **RESPONSE**

*Keeping Children Safe by Engaging Families*

**O**ur most important job is to help Maryland's families protect, promote and ensure the safety and well-being of their children and youth. We recognize that our state's families—their situations, their strengths and their challenges—are unique. There is no one "right" solution for every family.

In order to meet the individual needs of Maryland's children and families, Child Protective Services workers need the flexibility to use different tools and strategies to respond to a range of situations. For some families, the traditional child protective services response is necessary to investigate and determine if abuse or neglect has occurred and to ensure child safety and well-being. For many others, however, a more appropriate approach involves working collaboratively with families to identify concerns, applying solutions that can help keep families together and providing them with the services and supports they need to keep their children safe.

## Protecting Children by Strengthening Families

Alternative Response is a family-engagement approach designed to keep children and families safe and together whenever possible. Alternative Response builds collaborative connections among the local departments of social services, community agencies and families to identify issues and meet families' needs using available supports and services.

Research has shown that Alternative Response results in increased child safety, increased family involvement and greater family satisfaction. Alternative Response can keep families strong and prevent them from returning to the child welfare system.

Alternative Response is an approach that:

- Involves families
- Encourages workers and families to collaborate
- Focuses on identifying concerns and finding solutions
- Forms stronger connections with community-based agencies

## Partnering with Families to Promote and Ensure Well-Being

In Alternative Response, families play a critical role in assuring their children's safety and well-being. They are involved in the decision-making process regarding their family's needs and concerns. Given certain circumstances, the worker has the option to change the CPS response from Alternative Response to an Investigative Response. Should this happen, the family will be informed.

The caseworker has the responsibility to engage the family in an assessment. The worker and family together develop a Service Plan to assist the family in maintaining the safety of their children. The Service Plan outlines the available supports and services needed to keep the children safe.

## Child Safety as a Community Responsibility

Alternative Response is built on the belief that child safety is a community responsibility. It connects families to community organizations and service providers to address and resolve concerns as they arise. Identifying concerns early on and working with families as equal partners can help alleviate the stresses that often lead to abuse and neglect. This can help keep families together and prevent foster care placements. It is intended to give families the supports and services they need to stay together safely.

