



## What is Differential Response?

Differential Response (DR) is an alternative means of responding to allegations of child neglect. DR is different from the Department's traditional investigation process. It allows "screened-in" cases of low to moderate risk to be deflected from the investigative system and serviced through the Differential Response: Pathways to Strengthening and Supporting Families track. This strength-based, family-centered assessment track is designed to engage low to moderate risk families in the services needed to keep children from becoming involved with the child welfare system.

## Highlights of Differential Response

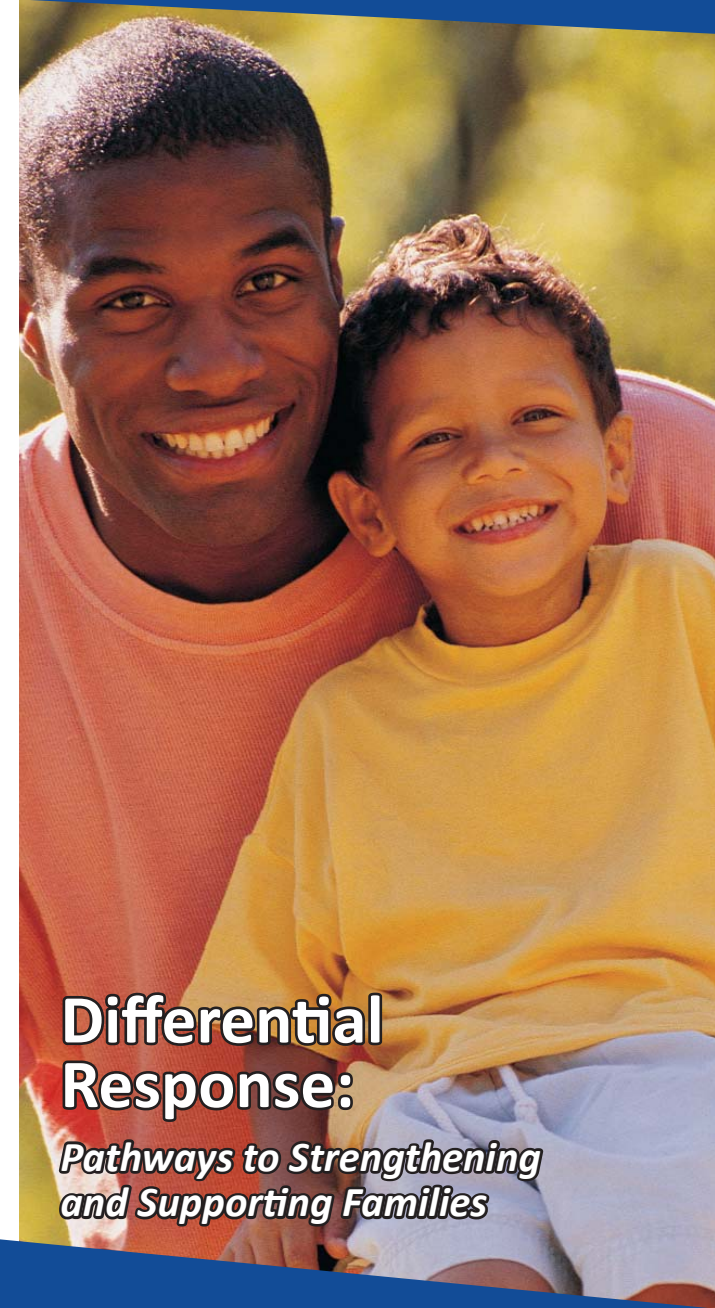
DR is a strengths-based, family focused program. DR is NOT a referral and linkage program. Through DR caseworkers function as the primary change agent/recovery coach working in collaboration with the family to determine service needs and level of involvement

Voluntary services are offered to strengthen and support the family unit, for the purposes of keeping children from becoming involved with the child welfare system.

Alleged perpetrators and victims are not identified on SCR as having a case determination of "unfounded" or "indicated."

### For more information, contact:

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## Differential Response:

*Pathways to Strengthening and Supporting Families*

## Background

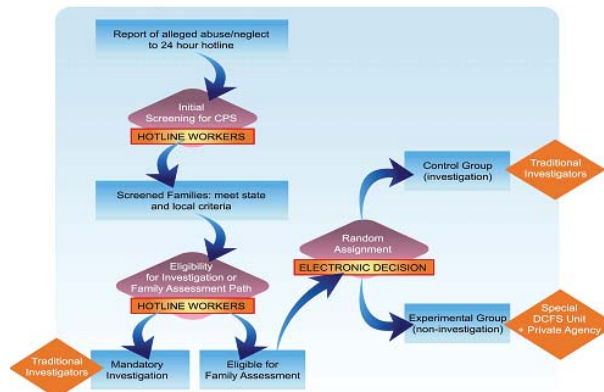
The majority of child abuse and neglect reports made to the State Central Register (SCR) hotline are subsequently “unfounded” through investigation processes conducted by the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS). Based upon research data, low to moderate risk families may be better served using a strength-based, family-centered assessment approach as an alternative to an investigation.

In order to service families under this alternative approach, known as Differential Response, legislation changes were necessary. Illinois Governor Pat Quinn signed the Differential Response Program Act (Public Act 096-760) on August 25, 2009.

The Children’s Bureau funded the American Humane Association and its partners, Walter R. McDonald & Associates and the Institute of Applied Research, to create and operate the Quality Improvement Center on Differential Response in Child Protection Services (QIC-DR). DCFS was selected to be a research and demonstration site. Evaluation of this project will be conducted by the Children and Family Research Center at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, School of Social Work.

## How does DR work?

1. A report of alleged abuse/neglect is made to the DCFS 24 hour State Central Register hotline.
2. An initial screening of the report is conducted by a hotline worker for Child Protective Services.
3. Reports are either “screened-in” or “screened-out” based upon state abuse/neglect criteria.
4. If a report is “screened-in,” it then becomes eligible to be assigned by the Department’s electronic system to either the Investigative track or to the Differential Response track (if it fits the criteria for DR).
5. During this five year demonstration project those cases assigned to DR will be randomly assigned to a DR team or investigations for the purpose of evaluation.



## What is the criteria to qualify for DR?

1. The identifying information for the family including their current address, has to be known at the time of the report; and
2. The alleged perpetrators must be parents, birth or adoptive, legal guardians or responsible relatives; and
3. The family must have no prior “indicated” reports of abuse and/or neglect; or
4. Prior “indicated” reports have been expunged within the timeframe established by the Department for the indicated allegation(s); and
5. The alleged victims, or other siblings or household members, are not currently in the care and custody of the Department or wards of the court; and
6. Protective custody of the children has not been taken or required in the current or any previous case; and
7. The report allegation (s) shall only include:
  - Mental and Emotional Impairment
  - Inadequate Supervision
  - Inadequate Food
  - Inadequate Shelter
  - Inadequate Clothing
  - Medical Neglect
  - Environmental Neglect