



## **Child Welfare: Safe and Equitable Foster Care Reduction**

■ OSM Refresh ■ Strengthening, Preserving and Reunifying Families ■ Differential Response

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Oregonians agree children have the best opportunities when they remain safely at home and can be raised with their own families. Children are also safer and families are stronger when communities, families and DHS work in partnership to identify and address issues early. Differential Response (DR) is a family-centered approach which supports protecting children to ensure a successful future. DR is a redesign of the child welfare system's front end that allows more than one path for intervention with families with a screened in report of abuse or neglect.

There are three parts to Oregon's approach to implementation of Differential Response:

- 1) Refresher on the Oregon Safety Model;
- 2) Implementation of Strengthening, Preserving and Reunifying Families contracts; and
- 3) Staged implementation of Oregon's DR model, beginning in Lane, Lake and Klamath Counties.

**1. Oregon Safety Model:** Most families child welfare encounters are or can safely care for their children at home. When a child cannot remain safely at home, the state intervenes to ensure child safety which may include placing a child into foster care. Our Oregon Safety Model refresh is meant to improve upon and strengthen safety decision making throughout the life of the case. The OSM provides a systematic safety intervention approach and is the responsibility of all staff at every level.

The Oregon Safety Model refresh is:

- Improving staff competency by ensuring line supervisors fully understand the OSM concepts and coach their casework staff to practice the model with fidelity;
- Providing consistency in practice and decision making across stages of service beginning at intake;
- Furthering the agency's work to reduce disproportionality in foster care and emphasize family centered practice;
- Distinctly defining safety threats and families with moderate to high needs;
- Clarifying the specific information needed to make safety decisions;
- Clearly outlining factors to consider when making decisions involving safety and risk; and
- Identifying skills and tools to support this practice.

**2. Essential Services:** Another step is to identify and create an array of services for families through collaboration between DHS and local community partners. These services envisioned as part of the Strengthening, Preserving and Reunifying Families law (aka SB 964) will specifically address needs of children and families who come to the attention of child welfare through a report of abuse or neglect. These services are designed to address gaps in the service array in local communities --specifically, these services aimed at maintaining children safely in the home, reducing the lengths of stay in foster care and addressing re-abuse of children.

**3. Staged Implementation of Oregon's DR model:** This step is to provide the route for families to connect to their community and needed services. The families involved with child welfare will receive a comprehensive child safety assessment by child welfare staff. However, just as every family is unique, the department's approach needs to be flexible enough to serve the family's needs. Oregon's DR design will include the specific screening criteria to determine the best response to assess families and increase our success in keeping children safely parented at home while the family receives services. Families can more successfully resolve issues when they are viewed as part of the solution and where they partner with child welfare and their community in problem solving and the identification of services and supports needed.

We need all three parts to make the enhanced system work the way we want in order to get the results we want. Here's the vision when all three parts of the initiative are in place and working together:

- More children will be kept safely at home and in their communities using the Oregon Safety Model and its core concepts and tools to guide decision making;
- The community and Oregon DHS will work in partnership with a shared responsibility for keeping children safely at home and in their communities;
- Families will partner with Oregon DHS to realize their full potential and develop solutions for their challenges;
- Fewer children will re-enter the child welfare system through improved services for families;
- Disproportionality will be reduced among children of color, and;
- Private agencies and community organizations will experience stronger partnerships with Oregon DHS on behalf of children and families.

For more information please visit the Differential Response website:

<http://www.oregon.gov/dhs/children/beyondfc/differential-response/Pages/default.aspx>