

COMMUNITY RESPONSE GUIDE THEORY OF CHANGE



FAMILIES



REPORTERS



CPS

What Problems Are We Trying to Solve for Whom?

Some families:

- Cannot easily identify and access support to address their needs in their community;
- Are inappropriately reported to child protective services (CPS) when community-based services could better serve them;
- Experience trauma from unnecessary reports to child protection agencies; and
- Are impacted disproportionately by the child protection system based on oppression and bias related to factors such as poverty, race, geographic location, family structure, disability, sexual orientation, and gender identity or expression.

Some reporters:

- Do not fully understand reporting thresholds or requirements and agency response protocols;
- Report to CPS only because they are not aware of meaningful alternatives;
- Struggle to refer families to community supports because reporters lack knowledge of available community services and confidence in offering supports;
- Are uncertain, hesitant, or lack confidence about when to report concerns to CPS; and
- Make reporting decisions based on biases, which means those decisions can be inaccurate and inconsistent.

Child protection systems:

- Have limited options to respond to families called in for issues that are not appropriate for a CPS response, which may result in inaccurate, inconsistent, or inequitable screening decisions;
- Divert limited resources to processing and responding to referrals that do not warrant a CPS response;
- Investigate and interact with families who would have benefitted from prevention services earlier; and
- Cannot devote the time they wish to reported families who require a CPS response due to abuse and neglect concerns.

What Will Be Different? What Is the Vision?

- Are connected to needed resources and culturally relevant services in their community;
- Experience CPS involvement only when it is needed; and
- Experience support and feel more at ease with seeking support from professionals in their community.

- Understand that alternative services exist for the families they are concerned about;
- Have clarity and confidence about when to report and when to use the available alternatives;
- More easily connect families to prevention services; and
- Make accurate, equitable, and consistent reporting decisions.

- Will receive fewer calls that do not require a CPS response or are not about child abuse/neglect;
- Will have more time for CPS staff to engage with families who truly require a response related to abuse and neglect concerns; and
- Will have more time for screeners to engage with reporters.

TOWARD THE VISION: DEVELOPING A COMMUNITY RESPONSE GUIDE TO ENSURE CHILDREN AND FAMILIES ARE SAFER AND ABLE TO GET THE SUPPORT THEY NEED

The challenges that reporters face may result in reporting that:

- Is not aligned with state legal thresholds for a child protection response;
- Is biased by factors such as poverty, race, geographic location, family structure, disability, sexual orientation, and gender identity or expression;
- Is inconsistent; and
- Leads to child protection investigations for families who could or should be served outside of the system.

Evident Change’s community response guide aims to address these challenges by helping communities collaboratively develop accurate, equitable, and consistent CPS reporting practices tailored to their needs. The public, online guide includes questions for professionals and concerned citizens about the children and families they are seeing to help them find the best help for the child. Sometimes this might be to call CPS; sometimes this might be to connect to a community response navigator or a local community provider. The result is a real-time decision aid that helps professionals and concerned community members understand and consider the range of local options to help families.

The guide’s development process is critical. Community response guides are created collaboratively by a community team of CPS staff and leadership and community stakeholders, including educators; medical and mental health practitioners; law enforcement; children’s advocates; and parents, caregivers, and others with lived experience of the child welfare system. The participatory nature of guide development becomes an intervention in itself, helping this diverse array of stakeholders to imagine new ways of improving child and family safety and well-being.

Communities that develop a community response guide will . . .

- Bring critical community stakeholders together across CPS, community-based service providers, people with lived experience, and other professionals in the community to build trust and develop partnerships.
- Achieve better understanding of:
 - » The existing community-based services network and improvement strategies;
 - » Reporters, their decision-making process, and their understanding of available community-based services;
 - » Who gets reported to CPS (including by race and socioeconomic status) by whom; and whether they are best served by CPS, their community, or not at all; and
 - » Statutes, policies, and practices that shape reporting behaviors.
- Work toward developing a shared vision for a meaningful continuum of responses for their local community that includes the roles of both CPS and community-based services to support children and families.
- Make recommended changes to reporting policy, practice, and statute where needed.
- Design and implement a web-based guide that professionals and community members can use when concerns about family safety or well-being arise.
- Help ensure children and families are safer and are able to get the support they need.