

Introduction to
**Lorain County
Children Services**
Alternative Response Pathway

Date: _____

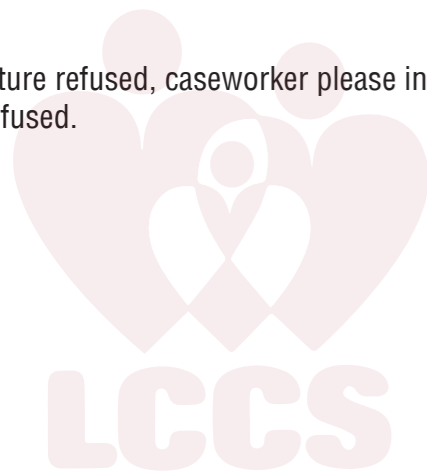
Parent/Family Name: _____

Caseworker: _____

I acknowledge the receipt of An Introduction to Lorain County Children Services Alternative Response Pathway: the booklet that contains information on how reports are made and investigated or assessed, along with my rights. **My signature serves as Acknowledgment Only indicating I have received an explanation of my rights and a copy of this book.**

Signed: _____

If signature refused, caseworker please initial and mark refused.



WILL LCCS TALK TO MY CHILD WITHOUT MY CONSENT?

Through Alternative Response, caseworkers want to meet with your family as a whole to discuss the situation. However, there may be times the caseworker may have concerns for safety and will have to see your child without consent.

If the LCCS caseworker talks with your child or children without your prior knowledge, you will be notified about the interview as soon as possible.

WILL INFORMATION BE SHARED WITH OTHERS?

LCCS is required to share whatever information is necessary to assist a professional service provider or other agency involved.



WHAT IF I HAVE CONCERNS ABOUT THE PROCESS?

If you are concerned that you are not being treated fairly or with respect, please discuss your concerns with your caseworker or his or her supervisor. You may call our Ombudsman at 440-329-5340 for additional help in resolving your concerns.

If, after talking to the worker, the supervisor and the Ombudsman, you still feel your concerns were not addressed, you may call Scott H. Ferris, Executive Director at 440-329-5340 or file a formal grievance. If this still does not resolve your concerns, you may call the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services Office of Children and Families Help Desk at 1-866-635-3748 for more help.

WHAT ARE MY RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES AS A PARENT?

You Have Responsibilities:

- Help your caseworker to have reasonable access to you, your home, and your children in order to complete a risk assessment of your child/children and family circumstances.
- Help your caseworker in defining your family's strengths and/or needs.
- If you are of Native American heritage, let your caseworker know. Our agency complies with the Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) and will assist you as needed.

You Have the Right:

- To be treated with courtesy and respect.
- To receive services in a non-discriminatory manner.
- To be spoken with in words that you understand.
- To ask questions and make your ideas known.
- To hear and talk about your strengths, family risks, and safety issues.
- To take part in talking about, designing, and reviewing your Family Service Plan.
- To participate and request a Family Team Meeting (FTM).
- To express and practice your religious and spiritual beliefs.
- To decide whether to receive services, to refuse any services that aren't required by law or court ordered, and to know the possible consequences if you choose not to receive the services.
- To decide whether or not to take part in surveys or research. If you decide not to, there will be no consequences.
- To complain about the way you or your children have been treated, or about concerns you have.
- To have those complaints looked into through a review of your case and planning, and to get an answer.
- To seek legal advice.
- To review parts of your record (Records of investigations are not available for review). Please request a review form from our receptionist or your caseworker.
- To receive a letter regarding the status of your case with LCCS.



MISSION STATEMENT

In partnership with the community, the staff, foster parents, and volunteers of Lorain County Children Services are committed to the safety and well-being of abused, neglected and dependent children and will provide the highest quality protection, permanency, and prevention services for children and families.

LORAIN COUNTY CHILDREN SERVICES

226 Middle Avenue · Elyria OH 44035

www.childrenservices.org

440-329-5340/ M-F 8:00 AM – 4:30 PM
After Hours/Weekend Hotline 440-329-2121

If a child is in immediate danger or needs immediate medical attention, please call 911.



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INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this brochure is to help you understand the Lorain County Children Services (LCCS) reporting and response process. Please contact your LCCS caseworker if you have questions that are not answered by the information provided in this brochure.

Si hablan español, por favor pida a un interprete.

WHAT IS CHILDREN SERVICES?

Lorain County Children Services is the county agency to help you keep your child/children safe and secure. We know that all families are not the same, and that the concerns you face are different from those of your neighbors, friends and other families across Ohio.

Many times, the best way to begin to help you and your child/children is to listen to you, discuss your family's situation, find solutions and access resources to meet your needs.

Lorain County Children Services offers the following services:

- Child Protective Services
- Foster Care and Adoptive Placements
- Independent Living Services

WHAT IS ALTERNATIVE RESPONSE?

Alternative Response is an approach by Ohio's county child protection agencies to help families access services, support and other help that will resolve concerns when a report is made without requiring a formal investigation of child abuse or neglect. It is based on the belief that families can stay together if they receive the assistance they need. Alternative Response creates a partnership between families and caseworkers and ensures child safety and well-being by addressing the family's issues as early as possible. With Alternative Response, children are safer sooner and families are strengthened.

WHY HAS A LORAIN COUNTY CHILDREN SERVICES CASEWORKER CONTACTED ME?

Getting involved with a county child protection agency can be intimidating and confusing for families. You were referred to Alternative Response because Lorain County Children Services received a report of concern about your child/children.

Under Alternative Response, your caseworker will not conduct an investigation of the report made to the agency. Rather, you and your caseworker will discuss the current situation that you and your family are facing, as well as the events and actions that may have caused this situation. Together, you and your caseworker will create a plan to keep your child safe. If the caseworker meets with you and discovers significant safety concerns, he or she may need to formally investigate the matter.

If you prefer not to be a part of the Alternative Response model, the agency will need to investigate the child abuse and neglect report through the Traditional Pathway response.

For many families, Alternative Response is a more appropriate approach than the traditional, investigative response.

Alternative Response focuses on answering questions such as "What caused this family to experience these issues?" and, "How can we work together to address this concern?" Alternative Response focuses on creating a working partnership among families, child welfare agencies and community agencies. It also focuses on identifying concerns and finding solutions, not on assigning blame, finding fault, gathering evidence, or applying negative labels. Alternative Response allows caseworkers to work with families to identify and use their strengths to solve their concerns and to make certain that they and their child/children are and can remain safe.

If the person making the report is concerned about your child's safety or well-being, we will talk with your child/children, you, and others who can help us understand the situation and determine what actions, if any, may be necessary.

After we assess your situation, we may:

- Close the case with no other involvement,
- Refer you to other community services, or,
- Open a case with your family.

When we finish our assessment, we will send you a letter telling you our conclusions and recommendations. Cases are closed when there is assurance that the children are safe.

WHY WOULD SOMEONE MAKE A REPORT?

The purpose of reporting is to identify children who may be at risk so that the child's safety and well-being can be addressed as soon as possible.

Some signs that people notice and may report to LCCS include, but are not limited to:

- A child with questionable injuries
- A young child who is left alone
- A child who has unattended health care problems or medical needs
- A child who is consistently hungry or appears malnourished

WHO MADE THE REPORT?

Anyone can make a report of suspected child abuse or neglect. The person making the report is not required to provide his/her name. Because of confidentiality laws, the name of the reporter will not be released unless there is a court order to do so. Certain professionals who work with children are mandated by law to immediately report suspected child abuse and neglect.



WHAT HAPPENS AFTER A REPORT IS MADE?

LCCS will respond to child abuse and neglect reports by conducting safety and family assessments and an investigation. The goals of both assessments and the investigation are to:

- Assess child safety
- Strengthen and support families, whenever possible
- Assist the family to make certain that they and their child/children are and can remain safe

WHAT HAPPENS DURING A SAFETY AND FAMILY ASSESSMENT?

In most cases, the LCCS caseworker and family members work together to complete a child safety and family needs assessment. Meeting with the caseworker provides an opportunity for you, as a parent, to share your concerns and perspectives on how to raise your child/children, to identify family needs, to ask questions, and to obtain immediate feedback.

During a family assessment, the LCCS caseworker will:

- Conduct an initial safety assessment and develop a safety plan for the child, if needed
- Talk face-to-face with you, your child/children, and others who may live with you
- Talk to others who may have information about the safety and well-being of your child, including doctors, counselors, and family members.
- Look for signs of injury
- Observe your home's environment
- Check for prior history with a child protection agency
- Complete a risk assessment with your family and determine what services, if any, are needed to prevent future abuse or neglect
- Request your assistance in identifying other individuals who may be able to help your family if services are needed to keep your child/children safe
- Arrange for services to support your family.

LCCS usually completes the initial family assessment within 45 days from the date of the report.

If your family needs services, the LCCS caseworker will develop a Family Service Plan with you, and link you to available community resources such as family counseling, substance abuse services, children's programs, day care, etc.

You may also choose to decline services for your family that are offered as a result of the family assessment. The case will be closed if there is no threat to your child/children's safety.

If your child/children's safety is a concern, and the LCCS caseworker may need to ask the court to require additional services to ensure the safety of your child/children, your case will be switched to Traditional Pathway Response.

