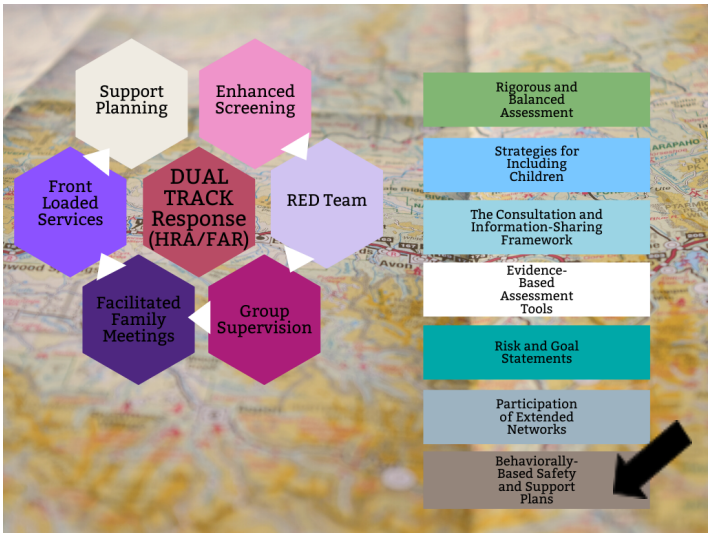
Support Plan Toolkit

This toolkit provides valuable information and resources that assist with practice improvement for support planning with Colorado families who are involved with the child welfare system. The effort to pool and organize these resources would not have been possible without our county practice leaders who make such a difference in this field. Special thanks to county staff and our partners who participated in the Differential Response Support Plan Workgroup as well as the Differential Response Leadership Council and Child Protection Task Group. Gratitude also must be given to CSU and their ARCH study recommendations. Their research indicated that a resource like this toolkit was in-demand for caseworkers wanting to enhance their social work practice.

What is a support plan?

12 CCR 2509-1,7.000.2(A) dictates: "Support Plan" means a written plan developed in the absence of safety concerns. It is family-driven, department-facilitated, and includes the family's network, which may include extended family, friends, natural supports, and community resources. A support plan is concrete, agreed upon, and includes specific actions that the family and network are doing to mitigate risk and ensure future safety.

Support plans provide specific steps for families in response to risks to children/youth safety. Support plans should be as unique as our families are, and are developed in partnership between the family and case worker. The support plan should be seen as a living document that is practiced over time and should be modified if determined to be ineffective. Support plans might list the family support network, actions that support safety, or community resources. Support planning is an integral part of Differential Response and is most effective when we engage families to help create a plan that keeps children/youth safe and minimizes risk. Families can use these plans to keep their children/youth safe long past DHS involvement.



Support planning is a useful skill, but does take practice. The links below are a great place to start:

SUPPORT PLAN INSTRUCTIONS

SUPPORT PLAN TEMPLATE

Difference between Safety, Support, and Treatment Plan Slides

ARCH Study Documents

What are the differences between support plans and other types of child welfare plans?

Support plans are one of the several types of "plans" outlined in statute. There is a big distinction between a support plan, a safety plan, and a treatment plan. 12 CCR 2509-1,7.000.2(A) dictates that a safety plan is a limited term plan made by the family, supports, and agency. Safety plans are required when there is an unmitigated safety concern as determined by the Colorado Safety Assessment Tool. The safety plan establishes protection for the children/youth and ideally, prevents out of home placement. Safety plans are short term and may outline "how can this family make it safely through the weekend," while support plans create meaningful and sustainable action steps that enhance protection for children *over time*. Sustainable and family-centered support plans are crafted by the caseworker and the family, in partnership. This requires the worker to use their facilitation skills, transparency, patience, and rigor.

Treatment plans address the behavioral changes and goals for the participants during an ongoing case. The safety and risk assessments should serve as the basis for treatment planning. Treatment plans are intensive and the very specific requirements for their contents can be found under 12 CCR 2509-4, 7.301.21. The treatment plan must list the services the family is receiving and the desired outcome of those services. These goals are to be SMART (specific, measurable, agreed upon, realistic, and time-limited) and the participants are given action steps to complete. Treatment plans, particularly when there is a Dependency and Neglect case may need to be much more formal than a support plan. The support plan is more flexible and should be unique and creative as families are. We can utilize much more family-friendly language rather than formal language or legalese.

When do I create a support plan?

Support planning can occur at any stage of involvement but ideally will be created with enough time to "practice" and modify as necessary. Once the case worker and family have a common understanding of the family's supports, strengths, and what solutions have worked in the past, they can effectively partner to create a support plan. Planning can be done through a family engagement meeting or during a caseworker visit. Case workers often find that creating support plans when the network can be present ensures that everyone is on the same page and has a shared understanding of the plan.

There is no current statutory or rule requirement for workers to create a support plan, but is a valuable best practice with many benefits:

- Provides the family with a plan they can come back to, extending outside of their involvement with DHS

- Involves the support network and is shared with that network
- When practiced over time, families become increasingly comfortable with using and modifying the plan to more specifically address their unique needs and strengths
- No “with us” without us: families have proven to be more invested when engaged in planning for their children/youth and can provide input and since families know themselves best, typically have the best ideas to ensure that plans that are achievable
- Support plans may serve as valuable information in determining assignment in RED teams (if the plan was followed/not)
- Support plans provide a wealth of information about the safety network and what has been tried historically should the family come back into the child welfare system

How do I create a support plan?

Developing support plans often start with the worker, the family, and the support network thinking through this critical question: How can we ensure that everyone who cares about the children/youth knows that the risk is being addressed and the children/youth are safe? Some steps to consider in designing support plans with the family, network and child/youth:

1. Building relationships, assessing risk and safety

Use all the skills you have at connecting and understanding each family. What caregiver actions led to the safety concern? What has been the impact on the child or young person? This is a good place to use solution-focused questions to help with relationship building, information gathering and critical thinking.

Solution Focused Questions

Questions to Help Elicit and Co-Develop Plans With Families

Seven Questions to Prep for Safety/Support Planning

2. Get clear on the Risk Statements and Goal Statements

In the assessment phase, you will create risk and goal statements with the parents and their network. Remember that while the best statements are ones created with families and in their own language, these statements also incorporate agency ‘bottom lines’ and have to address the safety concerns. Support plan actions should be aligned with these statements to promote consistency in agency messaging and so the family clearly understands the safety concern the team is hoping to address.

Risk and Goal Statement Tips

How Language Impacts Families

Support Planning Based on Risk

3 Types of Risk Statements

Goal Statement Formulas

3. Define and describe the task to the family

Be clear with the family what a support plan is and how it relates to the Risk and Goal Statements. Families should understand that this is a set of agreements they are making to journey from the risk statement to the goal.

4. Identify and involve the network

If you haven't already, get clear with the family on who else should be invited to the table. Remember that it is very difficult to create safety without supports. Networks help us strive toward a different level of accountability and know the family far better than we do. The most realistic and achievable ideas may come from the network. The network must understand the concern and what they are being asked to do. A support plan is merely theoretical if supports are unaware of or haven't agreed to their role in the plan.

Safety Circles

Eco Map

Orienting the Network

Snapshot of Support

Support Planning in a Family Engagement Meeting

5. Address the critical concerns and celebrate successes

Ask hard questions. "What will happen if…" and "how will you handle it when…". Identify what the backup plans are. If a family has no current safety concerns as determined by the Colorado Safety Assessment Tool, it is likely the family is doing many things well in their attempts to mitigate the risk to the children/youth. Capture these successes and build on them.

Exception Questions

6. Reach initial agreement on the plan

Once you have the outline of a support plan, it's helpful to scale willingness, confidence, and capacity with the team. You may also opt to use tools like gradients of agreement to test the depth of commitment to take the action steps you have created together. If families or members of the network are uncertain or reluctant, reconsider the plan.

Gradients of Agreement

7. Bring it back to the children/youth

When age/developmentally appropriate, take the plan back to the children/young person. Empower children and youth to take actions that support their safety (safety objects,

ensuring they know who is in the network and how to reach them, ways caring adults can tell the child/youth feels unsafe). Ask them for their ideas or ways they can enhance the plan. Children and youth can be engaged in the support planning process in many ways. Allow them to be creative or draw, or utilize tools like the safety house or 3 houses.

Safety House

3 Houses

Strategies for Authentic Youth Voice

CO4KIDS Youth Voice

Youth Voices Rising

Youth Voice: Why Family Matters

Youth Engagement is Critical

8. Monitor, build on the plan, and continue to assess

Ask the family "how will we know if this is working? Or not?" Plans are so impactful when we create clear methods and timelines for measuring success and coming back together for any changes. These plans are a process, not an event and will need to be adjusted over time. Families can hold "fire drills" and practice the plan to ensure that the plan works for *their* family. Celebrate successes as they come! It not only increases engagement and relationship, but leaves families feeling hopeful.

Where do I document my support plan?

Families should always receive a written copy of the support plan, as owners of that plan. Support plans are sometimes referred to as "refrigerator plans" because they go on the fridge along with the emergency and poison control numbers. Copies may also be appropriate to distribute to identified supports listed in the plan.

Case workers are also responsible for documenting the plan in our state documentation system. Currently, support plans "live" in many places in Trails. Counties have documented them in the framework, in the support plan box, in ROC notes, and in closing summaries to name a few.

We are hoping to achieve more consistency in locating and utilizing these plans. Future plans for Trails would incorporate **one** identified place for support plan documentation; in the framework. The framework window will be modified to include a drop down for "Support Plans" in order to make it easier to document, search for, and modify.