

1. Recognizing the pattern (Facts, conduct, and possible unmet needs)

When concerns arise at home, at school, or in the community, caregivers need a comprehensive understanding of the situation.

Describe what happened:

What did the child say or do? Describe observable conduct rather than a label such as “always trouble.”

What is established? What is disputed or still needs to be checked?

Who was harmed, threatened, or prevented from learning? Is any immediate protection needed?

Look for a pattern:

What is changing: missing work, attendance, peer conflict, behavior at home, or daily routines? When and where does it happen? How often?

What happens before and afterward? When does the child handle a similar situation successfully?

Identify what needs investigation:

Repeated discipline, proposed alternative school placement, or new agency contact warrant review of needs and the response. Consider learning difficulty, supervision, peer conflict, routines, or a possible developmental, mental health, or substance-use concern. Investigate: do not assume a diagnosis or assume that the school, other agencies, law enforcement and / or the courts are correct in their assessments.

What does the child say is difficult? What information do the caregiver, school, or other adults add?

What evaluation or assistance may be needed? Are existing supports, including an IEP where applicable, being carried out?

Understanding the circumstances helps us choose a response. Harmful conduct still requires attention; the goal is an appropriate and effective response.

2. Planning the response (Consequence, repair, and skills to practice)

Address safety first. Then plan a response that fits the conduct, the child's age and development, the pattern, and what has already been tried. Assistance and accountability can be part of the same plan.

Set the expectation

What specific behavior must stop or change? What should the child do instead?

Choose an appropriate consequence

What consequence fits the conduct? Explain the reason, duration, and what completion requires.

Check the fit: Does the response protect others, preserve necessary care and educational support, and help the child understand the boundary? Is it workable for this child?

Plan repair where appropriate

What harm can the child help repair? Consider restitution, replacing property, or acknowledging harmful conduct.

The person harmed is not required to forgive, resume a relationship, or participate in a meeting. Making amends does not give the child a right to another person's time or reassurance.

Teach a usable alternative

In the difficult moment, what words or action will the child practice? Be more specific than "be respectful."

Examples: "Can you explain the first step?" At home: "Can I take a short break, then finish?" Agree on where, how long, and how the child returns to the task.

Who will practice this with the child? When and how often?

Pair the expectation with assistance

What support will address the identified difficulty? What will adults provide, and what will the child be expected to do?

Caregiver wording: "We will help address what is difficult. We will also address the harm. Let's practice what you can do next time."

3. Organizing the team (Names, responsibilities, barriers, and review date)

Identify who will do what and by when. Include the child as appropriate to age and ability, caregiving adults, school staff, providers, and trusted community supports. Choose dependable people with clear expectations and boundaries.

Agree on responsibilities

Participant	Name or contact	Specific responsibility	Due date
Child or young person			
Caregiver or caregiving adults			
Teacher or school support			
Service provider or agency			
Trusted adult or mentor			

Make participation possible

What could prevent follow-through? Consider work schedules, transportation, cost, waiting lists, supervision, or unclear instructions.

Who will resolve each barrier, and by when?

Confirm access and coordination

For a referral or placement change: What need will it address? Who accepted responsibility? When does support begin? Who follows up?

Who coordinates the plan? How will relevant information be shared with appropriate consent?

Review date and time:

How will the team meet or check in?

If a commitment is not met, record what was promised, what remains missing, and the specific action requested. Contact the supervisor or leader responsible when necessary.

A referral is not a completed intervention. DCFS or human services may have a protective or supportive role; clarify the purpose and promised assistance. Agency contact alone does not establish criminal conduct or predict justice involvement.

4. Checking progress (Review the response and choose the next action)

At the agreed review date, compare what happened with the starting concern. Look at safety, conduct, participation, and adult follow-through. Fewer referrals alone do not establish improvement.

Identify evidence of change

Choose two or three observable indicators: attendance, completed work, safe conduct, more workable home routines, earlier help-seeking, or use of the practiced response.

Starting point and review period: What was happening before, and what happened during this period?

What progress deserves specific acknowledgment? What concern remains?

Check the adults' commitments

Were promised supports, evaluations, appointments, and supervision provided? What is incomplete, and who will address it?

Examine a setback on its facts

If another incident occurred, what happened? What does it show about conduct, an unresolved need, a barrier, or a part of the plan that was not carried out?

Address established harm and the child's choices. Also check whether the assistance fits the need and whether adults fulfilled their responsibilities.

Choose what happens next

Continue what is working. Adjust what is not. Seek additional assistance when the present response is insufficient.

Our next action:

Person responsible:

Completion date:

Next review date:

How we will check progress:

A past incident belongs in the child's history. It should not become the only future the adults are willing to imagine.

Related reading: What Caregivers Need to Know

The School-to-Justice Pipeline; When Your Child Becomes "That Kid"; and Interrupting the Path.