

State of Mississippi

DFCS

Worker's Guide To Family Team Meetings



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Based on family centered practice principles and philosophy, this practice will remain simple and basic. Remember:

- A group can often be more effective in making good decisions than an individual
- Families are the experts on themselves—we need to engage them as experts.
- When families are included in decision making, they are capable of identifying their own needs and strengths and are much more committed to the successful completion of the plan.
- Members of the family's own community add value to the process by serving as natural allies to the family and as experts on the community's resources
- Nothing about me without me!

About the Initial Family Team Meeting:

Since there is more motivation to change when a family is in a state of crisis, the initial FTM should take place as **early in the case as possible**. Ideally, FTM will be held prior to removal from the home. If removal is necessary, a meeting should be held as soon after as possible, preferably before the shelter hearing. While it may not always be possible to schedule immediately, the initial meeting must be held within 30 days of case opening to maximize its effectiveness and to develop the initial individualized service plan with the family. The FTM is the responsibility of and will be facilitated by the caseworker.

Prior to the Family Team Meeting the worker must find out from the family those other family members, extended family, and supportive persons that the family wants to engage in the process. The goal is to bring these members into the assessment and case planning process as early as possible and to actively engage the family throughout the life of the case in the decision making process.

The intent of the Family Team Meeting is to:

- Prevent removal if possible by identifying the natural supports that the family has available, or services that can be utilized and wrapped around the family to create safety.
- Establish a relationship between the worker, the family and kin.
- Learn about any family progress since the safety assessment:
 - *Reinforce and celebrate any steps that the family has taken to mitigate the reasons we are involved in the system*
- Engage the family and secure an investment in working together.
- Ensure a common definition of success.
- Explore family needs and appropriate services to address those needs—relating to the reason the family is involved in the system.

- Learn about family existing strengths, resources, and protective capacities.
- Identify roles and responsibilities for each member of the team
- Provide sample documents so that the families understand what is required by the court.
- Identifying a member of the team that will stay connected to the family—and help the team assess progress toward to agreed upon definition of success.

If a child is in care the intent of the meeting is also to:

- Establish a relationship between the resource family and the birth family.
- Address the predictable tension that can exist between a resource family and a birth family and talk about how to resolve the tension—be very transparent.
- Have the birth family share their knowledge about the child’s needs, likes, dislikes, sleeping schedules, napping, favorite food, medical history, etc.
- Discuss ongoing interaction between the child and their family—the role of each in making sure the child stays connected to his kin (this can include teachers, best friend, neighbor and relative)
- Be very specific about the process—and the timeframes—create a visual aide to shoe the flow of the case through the system. FULL DISCLOSURE!

Setting the Stage:

- Inviting the right people—not “forgetting” to invite someone because they may be difficult or you don’t want to hear what they have to say.
- Knowing the state laws and policies—clarify expectations for permanence, safety and child well being.
- In the verbal invitation describe the intent and the outcomes expected.
- Identifying a site that is most conducive to family engagement: churches, community sites, resource family home, birth family home, school
- Schedule when the family (and resource if appropriate) and child can attend—many will occur outside of the 8-5 timeframes.
- Start on time (and try to go no longer than one-two hour—maybe less)

Ongoing Family Team Meeting

We meet as needed to keep our finger on the pulse of family needs and progress nad to ensure that the case plan remains viable.

These are the kinds of occurrences that can result in a case plan review or a Family Team Meeting:

- Any move of the child
- Resource family asks for a meeting—as they are struggling with the child and do not want the placement to disrupt
- The family is not making progress toward the agreed upon definition of “success”
- The family is making progress and the services are no longer needed
- The family asks for a meeting

- The child asks for a meeting to talk about their lives
- Support and preparation for court—so that everyone is on the same page

Facilitation of the Meeting:

Facilitators need to set the ground rules to ensure a productive meeting:

- Engage the family in setting their own rules
- No disrespectful language, behavior or negative tones—team members have the right to call one another if they observe these behaviors.
- No talking over another person.
- No cell phones or pagers during the meetings
- Unless it is an emergency—no one leaves the meeting until the meeting is done

A Good Facilitator:

- Facilitator will protect ideas and individuals from attack or being ignored through the provision of a safe, supportive environment to permit communication
- Models supportive, non-threatening, respectful behavior.
- Conflict resolution in family team meetings: Getting to consensus
- Understand the difference between effective sharing of self—and telling people what to do.
- Finds ways to use humor to diffuse conflict—although we don't want to be afraid of conflict
- Fine line between being a part of the team—and facilitating the process.
- Periodically summarize, clarify, reframe and identify areas of agreement to assist the group.
- Make certain that the family's voice is heard and validate their feelings. Seek to find the balance between task and process.
- Inviting diverse perspectives without taking sides.
- Facilitators are sensitive and responsive to nonverbal cues. They must manage conflict and emotions.
- Facilitators move the group through the problem-solving/decision-making process, maintaining reasonable time frames.
- Facilitators accurately record information and decisions. They provide a copy of the safety/action steps at the completion of the staffing to all participants.

TEN TIPS FOR SOCIAL WORKERS FOR EFFECTIVE FAMILY TEAM MEETINGS¹

- 1.** Be on time. If you are going to be delayed for any reason, let the facilitator know so attendees can be informed.
- 2.** Assist parent(s) with transportation if needed.
- 3.** Explain the purpose of the meeting in advance to non-agency attendees
- 4.** Ensure that every person in the room feels that their perspective is validated.
- 5.** Be sensitive and respectful of the serious nature of the staffing. Parents and others are watching, not just during the meeting but also before the meeting begins and after it ends.
- 6.** Schedule adequate time for yourself. While it is important to adhere to timeframes for the meeting, remember we are dealing with critical and emotional decisions in the lives of families and whatever time is needed to make a quality decision should be expended.
- 7.** Be clear on the goal of developing a decision, with the assistance of the child's family and others, that keeps the child safe in the least restrictive placement/least intrusive manner.
- 8.** Come organized to present a summary of the situation and prepared with ideas and a recommendation, while receptive to the opinions and ideas of the other participants
- 9.** Be honest and fair in what you say. Discussion should be strengths-based, direct and straightforward.
- 10.** Assist in keeping the group focused and productive. Invite others to share their perspectives, information and opinion.

¹ This is borrowed in part from Casey Family Programs Family to Family Team Decision Making Model