

## Family Team Decision-Making Meetings

# Frequently Asked Questions

by Social Workers

### **What is a Family Team Decision-Making Meeting (FTDM)?**

A FTDM is a meeting that occurs whenever a placement decision needs to be made.

### **Who participates in a FTDM?**

Typical participants include the parents, the child (unless it is deemed inappropriate), relatives, family friends, neighbors, caregivers, community members and service providers along with the social worker and supervisor. In some instances, additional invitations are made to placement specialists, former caseworkers, etc. If the child has a Guardian ad Litem, the GAL is invited.

### **How long do FTDMs last?**

Meetings typically last between 1 and 2 hours.

### **When should I make a referral?**

#### **When there is an imminent risk of placement:**

The purpose of imminent risk FTDMs is to see if it's possible to create a plan that will allow the child to remain safely in the home. If the group determines that this is not possible, the meeting will look at the various placement options available and determine which would best meet the needs of the child. Identifying relatives willing and able to be a placement resource is a key component in these meetings.

#### **When a child has been placed on an emergency basis:**

When a child has been removed on an emergency basis it is important to come together to assess whether the child can safely return home. If that is not the case, it is important to determine if the current placement is in the child's best interests or if an alternative plan would be more appropriate. Referrals for these meetings should be made immediately upon placement. Relatives and fictive kin again play a key role in these meetings.

#### **When a child's placement may be changing:**

Meetings occur whenever there is a potential placement disruption. Ideally, the purpose of the meeting is to create a plan that will maintain the child in the current placement and avoid disruption. If this is not possible, an alternative placement plan is explored and a plan created. To maximize the benefit of these meetings, it is important to make the referral at the first sign of problems within the placement. Meetings should also occur when a move to a less restrictive placement is being considered.

*an initial recommendation may be  
important to remain open to suggestions*



### **When a child may be exiting placement:**

Meetings take place when exit from placement is under consideration. Meetings of this type may result in a plan to facilitate reunification, adoption, guardianship or emancipation.

### **Which cases MUST I refer for a FTDM?**

A FTDM is required for all cases involving a placement decision:

#### **Emergency, imminent or considered removal of a child.**

Where it is not possible to hold the FTDM prior to removal due to imminent risk issues, scheduling issues, or if the child is already placed into protective custody by law enforcement, the FTDM is held as soon as possible, but no later than 72 hours after the removal and always prior to the shelter care hearing.

#### **Placement preservation/planned or unplanned placement move decisions.**

For placement change/move situations, if immediate safety of the child is at imminent risk, safety should be the first consideration prior to scheduling a FTDM.

#### **Exits from care involving reunification with the family from which the child(ren) were originally removed.**

Permanency Planning decisions, such as placement in pre-determined guardianships or adoptive home do not require a FTDM, however, a FTDM or other family meeting may be appropriate.

FTDM meetings cannot be held in lieu of mandatory CPT meetings, nor can CPT meetings be held in lieu of a FTDM meeting. Efforts should be made to combine these meetings with a CPT quorum and incorporate FTDM meeting structure.

### **How do I request a FTDM?**

Submit a completed FTDM referral form to the FTDM facilitator or designee.

### **Who is responsible to invite the participants?**

Practice varies from office to office. Consult with your local FTDM facilitator(s) to determine the practice within your office.

### **What happens at a FTDM?**

- The FTDM facilitator leads the group through a process that first identifies and clarifies why the meeting is needed.
- This is followed by a discussion on family strengths and what is going well within the family.
- Concerns and needs are identified.
- The group then begins discussing possible solutions.
- During the final stage of the meeting, the group settles upon the most appropriate course of action to keep the child safe. The group then creates a detailed plan that builds on the family's strengths while specifically addressing the identified needs and safety concerns.

### **Where are FTDMs held?**

Meetings are often held in the DCFS office. Alternatively, they may be held at the child's school, a local hospital or elsewhere in the community.

### **What is my role at the meeting?**

As the social worker it is important to come to the meeting prepared. You should be familiar with the case and the safety concerns. If your supervisor is unable to attend the meeting, it is important that you staff the case with them prior to the meeting. Be prepared to describe safety/risk assessment information, family strengths and supports, along with the history and services offered. If the meeting involves a potential placement move, be familiar with the situation, services available to provide support and the options available. Be open to brainstorming solutions to the concerns. While an initial recommendation may be requested, it is important to remain open to suggestions that might alter your initial thinking.

### **What about confidentiality?**

At the beginning of the meeting, parents (and children 12 and over), are asked to sign a consent form that allows information to be shared about their situation. The rest of the team signs an agreement that states that information shared at the meeting will be kept private. This agreement however, stipulates that Children's Administration may use the information shared in other meetings, court proceedings, case planning, reports, etc. In addition, the agreement states that employees of CA are required to report information disclosed during the meeting that may constitute child abuse or child negligent treatment/maltreatment. Mandated reporters are likewise, obliged to report child abuse and/or neglect.

If the focus of the meeting does not necessitate discussion about the parent's situation, it may be possible to proceed with the meeting without a signed consent form from the parent. Meetings of this nature would be limited to meetings involving alternative placement options but could not involve discussion around reunification or maintaining a child in the parent's home.

### **What happens if an agreement is not reached?**

If the group is unable to come to an agreement, the social worker (along with their supervisor) has the responsibility and authority to create the plan for the child.

### **What is my responsibility after the FTDM?**

It is the social worker's responsibility to implement the plan as developed by the team within the timelines indicated in the plan.