

# Family Team Decision-Making Guide

*for Caseworkers*



Washington State Department of  
**CHILDREN, YOUTH & FAMILIES**





## Purpose

A Family Team Decision-Making (FTDM) meeting is a type of family meeting used by child welfare agencies to engage families in a shared decision-making process. FTDM meetings are facilitated, inclusive, strength-based and responsible for critical decisions regarding the placement of children. FTDM meetings consist of a network of support for the child(ren) at risk of being removed from their primary caregiver, who have been removed and need stabilization of their current placement, need to change placements or who are reunifying into parental or primary caregiver care. The meetings follow a family-focused model recognizing families are their own experts and are essential to making least restrictive and safest decisions in the best interest of their child(ren). Except in emergent circumstances, FTDM meetings are held prior to a placement decision.

## Goal

The team agrees on decisions regarding the safest and least restrictive placement for children/youth. If a team agreement is not achieved, DCYF holds the responsibility of the placement decision.

## Decision Making

Decision making is the process of making choices by identifying a decision which needs to be made, gathering information and assessing alternative resolutions. Using a step-by-step, decision-making process can help teams come to transparent, thoughtful conclusions by organizing relevant information and defining alternatives. This approach ensures the best interests of the child(ren) are incorporated into the team decision.



## FTDM MEETING TYPE

There are several different types of FTDM meetings, although they can appear or feel to some participants out of control or uncomfortable due to the intensity of emotions, it is critical to trust the process and that families are their own experts.

<b>Imminent Risk of Removal</b>	<p>The child(ren) has not been legally placed (i.e. No placement episode in Famlink). Although, there may be an informal parental or LE placement. Meetings are held when children reside with their parents/legal guardians and are at imminent risk of placement due to present or impending danger. The purpose is to determine if there are mitigating factors, which can prevent the child(ren) from being placed away from their primary caregiver, this could include a safety plan. If it is determined child(ren) cannot safely remain in the home due to the identified safety threat, the team will work to identify the best, least restrictive placement option. The priority will be to place siblings safely together in the home of a relative.</p> <p>Relative Placements - Suitable Other Placements: <a href="http://www.dcyf.wa.gov/4500-specific-services/4527-kinship-care-searching-placing-and-supporting-relatives-and-suitable">www.dcyf.wa.gov/4500-specific-services/4527-kinship-care-searching-placing-and-supporting-relatives-and-suitable</a></p> <p>Background Checks: <a href="http://www.dcyf.wa.gov/6000-operations/6800-background-checks">www.dcyf.wa.gov/6000-operations/6800-background-checks</a></p>
<b>Emergency Placement</b>	<p>The child could be in protective custody by LE, a pick-up order has been signed, a VPA has been signed or a hospital hold. Policy requires meetings to be held within 72 hours of placement occurring and always prior to shelter care hearing (if applicable). The primary goal of an emergency FTDM is to develop a safety plan to sufficiently mitigate or manage the identified present or impending danger which caused emergent action to be taken and allow the child to safely return home, if possible. If identified safety threats cannot be adequately mitigated the child must continue to reside outside of the parent home with an identified plan (i.e. file dependency petition, VPA per policy services and exit from placement meeting). The team identifies and assesses placement options then recommends the safest, least restrictive preference.</p> <p>RCW 13.34.130: <a href="https://apps.leg.wa.gov/RCW/default.aspx?cite=13.34.130">https://apps.leg.wa.gov/RCW/default.aspx?cite=13.34.130</a></p>
<b>Placement Stabilization or Placement Move</b>	<p>The child is in a legal placement and there is potential the placement will disrupt or a move is going to occur. The primary purpose of a stabilization or change of placement meeting is to create a plan to safely and successfully maintain the child in the current placement if possible. These meetings should occur early when there is concern regarding the stability of a placement rather than when the situation has reached a crisis point (i.e. if a caregiver is demonstrating stress with regard to a child's behavior and could be making a statement similar to "I don't know what I'm going to do with..." or "I don't know how long I can handle..."). These could be indicators a meeting to support both the caregiver and the child/youth would be beneficial.</p> <p>If a current placement is unable to be maintained, a child is potentially moving to a more or less restrictive placement, a permanent placement option or being placed with siblings then a change of placement or placement move meeting needs to occur. Sometimes placement stabilization meetings turn into change of placement meetings. It is important to assess the cause of the disruption. New placement options do not always have to be identified, it is helpful to have potential placement caregivers participate, however, meetings can and should occur when needed even if a new or potential placement has not been located. It is important to assess and discuss future placement stability. These meetings provide a forum for a mutual exchange of information between birth parents, their identified supports, caseworker, community providers, current caregivers and potentially proposed caregivers.</p>
<b>Exit From Care</b>	<p>When reunification into parental or primary caregiver home is being considered. The primary purpose of an Exit from care FTDM meeting is to determine if a child can safely return to his /her family and the parents have made sufficient progress in reducing or mitigating the identified safety threats that resulted in the child's out of home placement.</p>

## Roles of Key DCYF Participants

Each FTDM meeting will involve a family-specific team, the composition will be determined by the family and agency personnel. If the parent(s) object to the attendance of any of the potential participants other than agency staff, the caseworker, facilitator, and parents should discuss the advantage of each participants' role and the importance of inclusion in the process. If the parent(s) continue to object and/or refuse to participate, the parents' wishes will be honored. Although in some cases, the participants might be included in the meeting long enough to provide information relevant to the child and/or the individual's role then be excused from the meeting.



ROLES OF KEY DCYF PARTICIPANTS			
	Before Meeting	During Meeting	After Meeting
Caseworker	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Should speak with supervisor, regarding safety threats.</li> <li>• Have a conversation with the family explaining the FTDM meeting process. Strongly encourage family and supports to attend.</li> <li>• Communicate with providers regarding possible placement decision.</li> <li>• Complete and send FTDM meeting referral to facilitator.</li> <li>• Confirm meeting time/date/location with facilitator prior to inviting others.</li> <li>• Schedule meeting and staff with facilitator.</li> <li>• Indicate any safety issues or special requirements (i.e. DV issues, NCO or other court orders requiring split or separate meetings, interpreter needed or youth participation or possible escalation concern of any participant).</li> <li>• Invite all appropriate participants.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Caseworker is considered the content expert.</li> <li>• Be on time, prepared and attentive. DO NOT answer calls/texts.</li> <li>• Contribute to the decision-making, provide concise accurate information.</li> <li>• Be prepared to articulate the safety threats, thresholds.</li> <li>• Consider the safest, least restrictive placement option.</li> <li>• Be prepared to articulate placement recommendation, why it is appropriate mitigation of safety threats.</li> <li>• Be prepared to develop or discuss the visitation plan.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Complete tasks assigned in the action plan within time frames.</li> <li>• Debrief after meeting as necessary with supervisor and facilitator.</li> </ul>



**ROLES OF KEY DCYF PARTICIPANTS**

	Before Meeting	During Meeting	After Meeting
Supervisor	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Staff with caseworker about the appropriateness of FTDM meeting.</li> <li>• Discuss and support caseworkers in articulating safety concerns and potential mitigating factors.</li> <li>• Pre-staffing with caseworker and meeting facilitator</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strongly encouraged to attend FTDMs.</li> <li>• Be on time and do not answer calls/text during meeting. This family deserves respect and attention.</li> <li>• Assist in setting the tone of respect and open-mindedness for the meeting.</li> <li>• Be open to creative problem-solving.</li> <li>• Be prepared to articulate the reason behind placement recommendation.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Communicate with staff to ensure that the placement decision and action plan items are completed.</li> <li>• Debrief, if necessary, with casework and facilitator.</li> </ul>

## ROLES OF KEY DCYF PARTICIPANTS

	Before Meeting	During Meeting	After Meeting
Facilitator	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Confirm date/time/location of meeting with caseworker.</li> <li>• Discuss with caseworker what the situation is for the family, identify any concerns, including court order NCO between parties, other DV concerns.</li> <li>• Determine if meeting should be split.</li> <li>• Identify language, cultural barriers or considerations.</li> <li>• Find out if youth will be attending, 14-year-old and older if they have invited two supports.</li> <li>• Determine if the meeting will be combined with an additional Shared Planning Meeting (SPM) if appropriate, family and meeting goals, etc.</li> <li>• Maintains necessary supplies to facilitate the meeting.</li> <li>• If possible, review intake/case notes, most recent safety assessment.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Process expert.</li> <li>• Contributes and is also responsible for high-quality decisions.</li> <li>• Arrive early to ensure set up and preparations are complete.</li> <li>• Emphasize child safety and the least restrictive placement decision.</li> <li>• Review ground rules, the purpose of the meeting.</li> <li>• Emphasize the necessity of privacy as well as the expectation and exceptions to confidentiality.</li> <li>• Ensure all participants have the opportunity to share their input and feel heard.</li> <li>• Utilize group process to guide meeting toward potential consensus for safe, least restrictive placement decision.</li> <li>• Document purpose of the meeting, safety concerns, mitigating factors, placement decision, visitation and action plan.</li> <li>• If placement decision is outside of policy or safety threat is present, then pause meeting to request review of decision from Area Administrator.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure documentation in Famlink is completed within policy timeframes.</li> <li>• Debrief, if necessary with supervisor and casework.</li> </ul>



## Participants

FTDM meetings are an internal mechanism, initiated by DCYF staff within policy timeframes. Although concerted efforts are made within those timeframes to accommodate parental participation it is imperative these meetings are scheduled and held in a timely manner, therefore, at times, meetings must proceed without participation of all possible participants, including parents and other parties to the case.

- **Area Administrator** – In the event consensus regarding placement cannot be reached between staff, the AA will review. The AA or designee will be brought directly into the FTDM meeting either in person or by phone to make the placement decision. This decision will be final.
- **Parents/Legal Guardians** – The parents or legal guardians are recognized as experts on the family's needs and protective capacities. Their presence and participation are integral to the meeting. However, if invites and scheduling have been unsuccessful and they are not participating, the meeting must still take place. The parents are strongly encouraged to attend and to bring additional relatives and/or supports. Incarcerated Parents must still be notified and provided opportunities to participate in FTDM meetings, per policy.
- **Child/Youth** – Children/Youth age 12 and over, if developmentally appropriate, should be invited and supported to participate in the meeting. Children younger than 12 should be considered on a case by case basis. If child/youth cannot attend or is not age-appropriate and there are no other designated representatives for the child at the table, then the caseworker should obtain the views of the child prior to the meeting. This should be shared with the team during the meeting unless they pose a safety threat to the child.
- **Extended Family and Non-Relative Supports** – Can be invited by the family or caseworker to provide support, assistance or resources to the child and/or the parent(s). They should also participate fully in developing ideas and reaching a placement decision during the FTDM meeting.



- **Caregiver(s)** – Current caregivers, kin providers, and foster family members assist in providing information regarding child(ren)'s adjustment, routine, progress, and needs. Whenever possible, they should also participate in developing ideas and in making a placement decision. Potential caregivers may also be invited to meetings to receive full information regarding the child's routine, services, needs, and to ask questions.
- **Service providers** – current or previous involvement with the family may include but are not limited to chemical dependency, domestic violence, mental health providers, medical providers, educational staff, and CPA staff.
- **GAL/CASA (if assigned)** – If a GAL/CASA is assigned, they should be invited to FTDM meetings to share their recommendation for the child's best interest.
- **AAG/OPD attorneys (if assigned)** – Attorneys may be present and participate, if they choose, in a support role. These meetings are not legal proceedings and are not court actions.
- **Tribal Representative** – are invited when the family is eligible to or is a member of a tribe or band, or identifies with a specific tribe or band. If the family identifies as Indian/Native American but is not a member or eligible for membership in a tribe, the caseworker will make efforts to identify and invite a LICWAC member to be present for the FTDM meeting.





## Additional Items

**Confidentiality:** The confidentiality of information shared at the FTDM meeting cannot be guaranteed. Privacy and respect are emphasized but parents must be informed that information from the meeting may be used for case planning, in court proceedings, and the investigation of new child abuse or neglect allegations. All participants will be asked to sign a confidentiality statement form at the beginning of each meeting. This form should be filed in the case file.

**Consent:** Consent for the Department of Children, Youth, and Families to share parent/youth (if participating in the meeting) information must be signed at the beginning of EVERY meeting, including special agreements for mental health and chemical dependency. It should be shared with the parents/youth the consent is valid only for the meeting and the individuals participating in the meeting. This should be filed in the case file. If a parent/youth refuses to sign, then DCYF may not disclose any information regarding that individual during the meeting. The meeting should still be held.

**Excluding Participants:** Certain circumstances may require that an individual be excluded from participation in the FTDM meeting. Those circumstances include:

- The excluded individual is the intake subject in an ongoing related criminal investigation.
- It is unsafe for an individual to participate in an FTDM, exclusion decision should be staffed between caseworker, facilitator, and supervisor.

**Review Process:** A review of the FTDM meeting placement decision can only be initiated by an agency staff person and only when:

- The placement decision does not mitigate the safety concerns and the child would still be unsafe.
- A concern with the safety/action plan proposed that is not aligned with current policy or law.
- DCYF staff feels a less restrictive, less intrusive placement option is adequate to keep the child safe.
- The request for review occurs immediately before the meeting concludes. The AA decision is final.

There may be regional practice variances. If you have questions, contact your local FTDM facilitator.

## Policies and Links

1710 *Shared Planning Guide* (CWP\_0070):  
[www.dcyf.wa.gov/sites/default/files/pubs/CWP\\_0070.pdf](http://www.dcyf.wa.gov/sites/default/files/pubs/CWP_0070.pdf)

1720-FTDM Policy: [www.dcyf.wa.gov/1700-case-staffings/1720-family-team-decision-making-meetings](http://www.dcyf.wa.gov/1700-case-staffings/1720-family-team-decision-making-meetings)

4307-VPA Policy: [www.dcyf.wa.gov/4300-case-planning/4307-voluntary-placement-agreement](http://www.dcyf.wa.gov/4300-case-planning/4307-voluntary-placement-agreement)

6800-Background Checks: [www.dcyf.wa.gov/6000-operations/6800-background-checks](http://www.dcyf.wa.gov/6000-operations/6800-background-checks)

4527 Policy - Relative Placements - Suitable Other Placements: [www.dcyf.wa.gov/4500-specific-services/4527-kinship-care-searching-placing-and-supporting-relatives-and-suitable](http://www.dcyf.wa.gov/4500-specific-services/4527-kinship-care-searching-placing-and-supporting-relatives-and-suitable)

Case Timelines: [www.dcyf.wa.gov/sites/default/files/pdf/casestaffingflow.pdf](http://www.dcyf.wa.gov/sites/default/files/pdf/casestaffingflow.pdf)

4254-Family Time: [www.dcyf.wa.gov/4250-placement-out-home-and-conditions-return-home/4254-family-time-and-sibling-and-relative-visits](http://www.dcyf.wa.gov/4250-placement-out-home-and-conditions-return-home/4254-family-time-and-sibling-and-relative-visits)

4310 Transitioning Youth Policy:  
[www.dcyf.wa.gov/4300-case-planning/4310-transitioning-youth-successful-adulthood](http://www.dcyf.wa.gov/4300-case-planning/4310-transitioning-youth-successful-adulthood)







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