

KEY CHARACTERISTICS OF FAMILY-BASED CHILD WELFARE MEETINGS

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SOME CORE VALUES OF FAMILY MEETINGS	ALL FAMILIES HAVE STRENGTHS	FAMILIES ARE THE EXPERTS ON THEMSELVES	FAMILIES DESERVE TO BE TREATED WITH DIGNITY AND RESPECT	FAMILIES CAN MAKE WELL-INFORMED DECISIONS ABOUT THEIR CHILDREN'S SAFETY WHEN SUPPORTED	WHEN FAMILIES ARE INVOLVED IN DECISION-MAKING, OUTCOMES CAN IMPROVE	A TEAM IS OFTEN MORE CAPABLE OF CREATIVE AND HIGH-QUALITY DECISION-MAKING THAN AN INDIVIDUAL
ELEMENTS	CHARACTERISTICS SHARED BY ALL	FAMILY TEAM DECISION-MAKING	FAMILY GROUP CONFERENCING (FGC)	EXPEDITED FAMILY GROUP CONFERENCING (EFGC)	MEDIATION	PRE-PROTECTIVE CUSTODY HEARING FACILITATION (PHF)
PURPOSE	Provides support to families at risk of or already involved w/ the child welfare system, in a strengths-based team setting, ensuring child safety.	To make decisions regarding the child's placement and family's plan for child's safety.	To engage extended family members in the child's life in order that a larger, more lasting informal safety net and family-based plan can be achieved for the child's safety, permanency and well-being.	To engage extended family members to make immediate decisions regarding the child's placement.	To provide a private forum for decision making between 2 – 5 individuals: parent-parent; parent-CPS; parent-foster parent, etc..	To front load the child welfare process to provide opportunity for parents to accept delivery of social services early in the court practice.
GOAL OF MEETING	To make best possible plans by using a solution-focused team approach and ensuring family's voice is central.	Team, including family, seeks consensus decision regarding placement that protects child and preserves or reunifies family.	Family, broadly defined, and including extended family, creates a plan to address the "critical issues" that placed the children at risk.	Family, broadly defined, and including extended family, creates a plan to address immediate placement for the child.	Family members and/or others have opportunity to be heard and to achieve a mutual resolution to a problem affecting the child.	Parents and system representatives achieve an immediate temporary plan to proceed on services.
DISTINCTIVE ELEMENT & TIMING of REFERRAL	Needs/strengths-focused Culturally appropriate Individual plans developed Inclusive for participants Family input crucial Linkages to continuing supports, both natural and traditional	All Families Scheduled Every Month: Held for every placement and service related decision faced by every family served by the child welfare agency.	Variable Timing; Optional Referral Two (2) unique elements: (a) comprehensive preparation (b) private family time Both elements position the extended family network as primary decision-makers.	Immediate Referral Upon Removal: Convened within 7-21 days of Removal: Private family time is integral part of the conference's decision-making process.	3 rd party neutral serves as mediator who empowers each participant by facilitating an open dialogue and reality tests solutions given by the parties, not the mediator.	Facilitated meeting occurs immediately prior to formal protective custody hearing with on-site trained facilitators.
DECISION RESPONSIBILITY	Goal is to place family at center of decision-making; ultimately the assigned case manager must approve of plans made.	Agency maintains responsibility if consensus regarding placement issue cannot be achieved.	The extended family develops the proposed plan. The case manager partners with the family in the decision-phase of the conference to ensure child safety, permanency, well-being.	The extended family develops the proposed plan. The case manager partners with the family in the decision-phase of the conference to ensure child safety, permanency, well-being.	The parties at the mediation session have full decision-making responsibility; ability to have approved by agency.	Parents and system representatives make informal decision which is presented to the court for review.

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SCHEDULING REQUIREMENT	Varies . . .	Mandatory – meeting held before any placement or re-placement occurs, or before any initial court hearing in cases of imminent risk removal.	Parental agreement to participate is preferred but not required; coordinator works with child’s extended family network to participate in decision-making.	Parental agreement to participate is preferred but not required; coordinator works with child’s extended family to participate.	Parties may be required to attend mediation; decision whether to resolve is voluntary. The mediation center will schedule after referral by case manager.	Potentially mandatory for all protective custody hearings. Need for an on-site facilitator. System participants must be engaged.
REFERRAL	Varies . . .	Assigned case manager required to schedule when placement-related decision must be made.	The case manager, supervisor, judge, family, may refer the family to FGC at any time, but optimally early in the case progress.	The case manager, supervisor, judge, family, should refer the family to EFGC within the first 1-7 days of the case.	The case manager, family, judge, or other may refer to mediation at any time.	Judge, case manager, county attorneys, GaL, defense attorneys all on-board for this “day of hearing” process.
PREPARATION	Preparing the family for the meeting is both respectful and important to positive outcomes.	Often limited preparation due to crisis nature of many placement decisions. Case manager invites family and prepares them.	Preparation viewed as critically important to engage family in participating and leading the process. FGC Coordinator can spend 25 to 40 hours and 3-4 weeks preparing for the FGC.	Preparation by the EFGC Coordinator essential in order to overcome initial crisis reaction by family, gain trust, and engage participation in EFGC.	Often limited preparation so that 3 rd party neutral mediator is not viewed as biased or partial.	Often limited preparation of parents.
TEAM MEMBERS	May include: birth parents, extended family, non-relative supports, child, partners from neighborhood or community, service providers, case manager, involved agency staff, and if already placed outside of family – caregiver and GAL/ CASA.	Facilitator is deemed a team member. All who attend have either family’s permission or a right to participate as treatment team members.	FGC Coordinator helps parents to identify and expand inclusion of family members and service providers during preparation phase. Meetings average 9 family members and 3 service providers.	FGC Coordinator helps parents to identify and expand inclusion of family members and service providers during preparation phase. Meetings average 5 family members and 2 service providers.	Participants are usually limited to the key stakeholders to the problem.	Parents, child welfare, parents’ attorneys, GaL, county attorneys are involved stakeholders.
FACILITATOR	Trained facilitator with strong strengths-based orientation and excellent group process skills.	Either the case manager, or preferably, an accessible, full time agency staff facilitator who, as team member, shares responsibility for quality decision. Same facilitator for family throughout their involvement with the system.	A neutral, 3 rd party trained FGC Coordinator, with no case specific responsibility, prepares participants, guides the process and does not have decision-making authority. Coordinator is from a Nebraska ODR-approved mediation center.	A neutral, 3 rd party trained EFGC Coordinator, with no case specific responsibility, prepares participants, guides the process and does not have decision-making authority. Coordinator is from a Nebraska ODR-approved mediation center.	A neutral, 3 rd party trained mediator, who generally is affiliated with a community-based mediation center, guides the process and does not have decision-making authority.	A neutral, 3 rd party trained facilitator, with child welfare and conflict resolution skills, and with no case specific responsibility is optimum.

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LENGTH OF MEETING	Varies . . .	One to two hours	Three to five hours	One to three hours	One to three hours	45 minutes to 75 minutes.
CONFIDENTIALITY	Privacy and respect are core values and set the tone for the meeting. New allegations of abuse/neglect must be reported.	Focus on privacy – family is told information may be used for case planning, or in court if necessary. Use of forms is discouraged.	Participants sign confidentiality statement.	Participants sign confidentiality statement.	Participants sign confidentiality statement and Nebraska Dispute Resolution Act applies.	Participants sign a confidentiality statement.
AFTER MEETING RESPONSIBILITIES	Attention to post-meeting safety and emotional issues is part of the discussion. Follow up meetings are typical.	Assigned social worker primarily responsible to implement decision from meetings; other participants play supporting roles. Outcome data collected and used for self evaluation and planning.	Participants may carry out and monitor family plan, often a designated family member with the case manager. Follow up session(s) if necessary to adjust or change plans. Case manager may integrate FGC plan into ongoing Family Team Meetings to enhance follow through.	Participants may carry out and monitor family plan, often a designated family member with the case manager. Follow up session(s) if necessary to adjust or change plans. Case manager may integrate FGC plan into ongoing Family Team Meetings to enhance follow through.	Participants are fully responsible for implementing their mediated decisions, unless otherwise designated and agreed to by a third party.	Recommendations from facilitated meeting are advanced to the protective custody hearing for judicial review.
USAGE	Growing throughout the US and internationally. A continuum of family meeting types provides the opportunity for best practice and positive outcomes.	Family Team Meeting is a core strategy used in all Nebraska child welfare cases.	FGC is a “best practice” and has been used in Nebraska since 2000. Variations of FGC are being implemented in over 35 states and 22 countries. American Human Assn, www.fgdm.org , has more information.	EFGC is a uniquely developed Nebraska application. It has been showcased at the 2005 international Family Group Decision Making Conf.	Mediation is used in child welfare, parenting, family conflict cases in all 50 states and in many countries.	Pre-protective custody hearing facilitation has been modeled by Pima County, AZ and piloted in Nebraska in Douglas County (2004-2006). Is a “best practice” from NE Children’s Summit (2006)