

TEAM DECISIONMAKING PROTOCOL / POLICY OUTLINE

PROTOCOL/POLICY SHOULD INCLUDE:

I. DEFINE TEAM DECISIONMAKING MEETING

A. DEFINITION/PURPOSE

- A TDM meeting, including birth parents and youth, is held for ALL decisions involving child/youth removal, change of placement, and reunification/other permanency plan.
- The TDM meeting is held BEFORE the child/youth's move occurs, or in cases of imminent risk, by the next working day, and always before the initial court hearing in cases of removal.
- Neighborhood-based community representatives are invited by the public agency to participate in all TDM meetings, especially those regarding possible child/youth removal.
- The meeting is led by a skilled, immediately accessible, internal facilitator, who is not a case-carrying social worker or line supervisor.
- Information about each meeting, including participants, location, and recommendations, is collected and ultimately linked to data on child & family outcomes, in order to ensure continuing self evaluation of the TDM process and its effectiveness.
- Each TDM meeting resulting in a child/youth's removal serves as a springboard for the planning of an "icebreaker" family team meeting, ideally to be held in conjunction with the first family visit, so that the birth-foster parent relationship can be initiated.

B. GOAL

- To involve birth families and community members, along with resource families, service providers and agency staff, in all placement decisions, to ensure a network of support for the child/youth and the adults who care for them.

II. DESCRIBE DETAILS ABOUT TDM MEETING

A. TYPES OF TDM MEETING

For every family involved with the child welfare agency these are the required points at which a TDM meeting must be held:

- Prior to removing a child/youth, whether emergency or considered;
- Prior to any change of placement for a child/youth already in care;
- Prior to making a permanent plan, including reunification, termination of parental rights, guardianship, emancipation, or planned permanent living arrangement.

(While supervisors must monitor and be accountable for ensuring a TDM is scheduled as mandated, the protocol should note any "firewalls" it has established to ensure that a TDM meeting is held for every required decision; e.g. proof of TDM required to file a petition or to access an approved kin home or a foster home.)

B. 'TRIGGERS' FOR THE MEETING (WHY AND WHEN EACH MEETING IS REQUESTED/HELD)

- **Emergency or Considered Removal**
Scheduled when SW assesses child(ren) at high risk for abuse/neglect, or within one working day after emergency removal/placement of child/youth. TDM team determines

whether agency should file for custody and facilitate placement; or child/youth can return safely home with services; or voluntary placement by parents with provision of services and safety plan, etc.

- **Placement Preservation/Change of Placement**
Requested before child(ren) moved from one placement to another. Meeting scheduled when potential disruption of placement is perceived, safety issues exist or move from current placement is believed necessary to benefit child/youth.
- **Permanency Planning**
 - **Reunification**—scheduled as soon as risk level reduced and parental progress in ability to protect and provide safety for child/youth is recognized. Team determines if child(ren) can safely return to own family, and is held before overnight visits begin.
 - **Other Permanent Plan** (permanent custody/adoption, guardianship, planned permanent living arrangement) meeting scheduled when lack of progress by parents in reducing risk suggests need for permanent placement plan/legal filing.
 - **Emancipation/Aging Out**—held for older youth to make the best possible plans for his/her independence and identify supportive adults/family connections.

C. WHO PARTICIPATES AND ROLE

Each participant is present either because they were invited or their participation was agreed to by the birth parent(s), or because they are involved with the agency team serving the family.

- Birth parents
Recognized as the expert on their family's needs and strengths. Presence and involvement integral to meeting, however with exception of TDM for reunification, absence or non-participation would not preclude or postpone scheduled TDM meeting
- Child(ren)
(Include here your agency's guidelines for inclusion of children/youth in TDM meeting; there should be a presumption that older youth will *always* participate.)
- Extended family and non-relative supports
Invited by parents as support/ to assist/ be resource
- Current caregivers—kin, foster
Key team member; assists in providing information regarding child(ren)'s adjustment, progress, needs; and in developing ideas and reaching decision
- Caseworker/supervisor
Convener of meeting; content expert; with facilitator, leads discussion. Responsible for making decision if absence of consensus
- Community representatives
Defined by their identity as a member of the family's 'community,' whether based on neighborhood, ethnicity, religion, or other connection. They are invited by agency, based on existing partnership, to provide support, resource expertise, external perspective to decision making. Their presence in meeting must be agreed to by parents.
- Service providers
Currently or previously involved with family
- Guardian ad litem (e.g. CASA or Attorney GAL)
Court-appointed representative responsible for representing child's best interest. Attorney GAL always included even if agency has policy excluding attorney participation in TDM.

- Other public agency staff
May include homefinding, independent living, family preservation staff, or others able to provide expertise/information. As agency personnel, they share responsibility for high quality decision; and may seek review of caseworker's decision in situations where consensus not reached, if unable to support the decision due to belief that it puts child/youth at risk of serious harm or violates law or policy.
- Facilitator
Trained process expert who works with caseworker to lead group through solution-focused process. Assigned to family's case throughout involvement with agency. A full team member, who like other agency personnel, is responsible for high quality decision, and expected to seek review of caseworker's decision in situations where consensus not reached, if unable to support the decision due to belief that it puts child/youth at risk of serious harm or violates law or policy. Provides summary report to participants outlining decision and action steps.
- Attorneys
Include agency's guidelines for inclusion/exclusion of both agency and non-agency attorneys.

D. CONSENSUS

- The goal is a consensus decision by team regarding placement, that protects child(ren) and preserves or reunifies family; however, the public child welfare agency maintains legal responsibility to make decision if agreement by full team can not be achieved.
- In pursuing a consensus decision by the team, the facilitator will assist the group in moving toward consensus using this framework:
 1. Can the entire TDM team reach consensus? If not...
 2. Can the public agency staff (including facilitator) at the table come to a consensus decision? If not...
 3. The family's social worker makes the decision regarding the placement-related issue at hand. A review process is available if other members of the public agency staff who are part of the TDM team believe the decision puts the child/youth at risk of serious harm or violates law or policy. (See Section III D below.)

E. CONFIDENTIALITY

The confidentiality of information shared at the TDM meeting is not guaranteed. Privacy and respect are emphasized, but parents are informed that information from the meeting may be used for case planning, in subsequent court proceedings if necessary, and in the investigation of a new allegation of abuse or neglect should such information arise.

III. BEFORE TDM MEETING

A. SCHEDULING A TDM MEETING

1. Who can schedule?
TDM meeting must be scheduled by social worker of record or their supervisor
2. When is a TDM meeting scheduled? Identify time frames for each type of meeting to be scheduled from time of request, e.g.:
 - Every emergency placement done after regular work hours will have a TDM meeting the next business day and prior to the initial court hearing. Reserved meeting times for emergency TDM meetings are available daily.
 - TDM meetings to discuss initial placement for children still at home are scheduled after consultation with supervisor regarding risk issues, and should be held by end of day requested or within 24 hours.

- Change of placement meetings should be held within 24 hours of request, or next business day upon notification of caregiver's request for removal or recognition of safety issues. Meetings to discuss considered placement plans, e.g. moves to less restrictive setting, should be scheduled within 5 business days.
 - Reunification TDM should be scheduled according to parental progress in ability to provide safety and meet child/youth's needs, and should not be driven by court schedules. Parent(s) must be present and meeting held before overnight visits begin.
 - Other permanency planning meetings should be scheduled within 2 weeks of request and before any court filing.
 - Emancipation should be held early enough to have a chance to really explore youth's permanent connections, verify preparation for independence, available support post-emancipation, etc.
3. Who to call to schedule a TDM meeting?
Identify by title, preferably TDM unit clerical support
 4. Information necessary to schedule
Basic demographics (names, family address, dates of birth), type of TDM meeting requested, when meeting needed, location desired, and any special needs with regard to safety, security, language interpretation, physical accommodations
 5. Any special scheduling considerations
Will TDM be used for any non-traditional purpose, such as special review, provision of respite, etc? Will TDM be required when a child/youth is hospitalized on an emergency basis? (Generally, exceptions to TDM requirements are discouraged, but if any are created, identify them here.)
 6. Who invites who?
Clarify which participants the social worker is expected to invite (usually those with whom the SW is likely to have contact, such as family, service providers, caregivers) and which participants others (such as TDM clerical support staff) will invite (usually other public agency staff, identified community representatives, GAL.)

B. PREPARATION EXPECTATIONS

- Clarify that caseworker must discuss with supervisor risk and safety issues, jointly determine need for meeting and agree on initial recommendation that will be made at TDM meeting.
- Describe any safety/risk assessment tools to be used by caseworker to determine need for TDM meeting and basis for recommendation, and to be used during meeting as structure for discussion of concerns.
- Social worker responsible to inform parents of meeting purpose, goal, time/location and encourage parents to bring family support. Crisis/after-hour worker must provide information to parents/caregivers for emergency removals (if they are unable to attend the TDM meeting.) including written notification, in addition to an oral explanation. (Sample notice/explanation should be attached to protocol.)
- Social worker contacts facilitator to briefly discuss any special concerns that may affect the TDM process and determine a plan for addressing them at the meeting. Special needs/security issues include but not limited to domestic violence, need for language or deaf interpreter, large group size, etc.
- SW must prepare any youth attending a TDM. Information would include purpose, process, rights etc. Ensure older youth understand the intention and goal for the Emancipation meeting

- Social worker should make advance arrangements for child care if birth parent is expected to bring young children to the meeting

IV. AFTER TDM MEETING

A. DATA COLLECTION

Clarify responsibilities for collection of information from TDM meetings (e.g. participants, location and recommendations) that will be linked to data on child and family outcomes, in order to ensure self-evaluation of the TDM process and its effectiveness.

B. TDM REVIEW OR RECONSIDERATION PROCESS

- Why a review would be requested?
Belief that decision made at TDM meeting will result in serious harm to child/youth or violates law or agency policy
- Who may seek review of a TDM decision?
Only agency staff who participated in the TDM meeting
- When notification of intent to seek review must be given?
Following caseworker's decision due to lack of consensus, notification of intent to seek review must be made immediately, before participants leave the meeting
- When will review decision be made?
Reviewer should come to meeting room and conduct review immediately. Interim safety plan should be made if necessary until decision can be made.
- Who is present at review meeting?
Those who participated in original meeting, possibly also supervisory personnel. Social worker and 'appellant' present summary of meeting and reason for review to designated administrator.
- Who hears the review/is responsible to make review decision?
Agency administrator at highest possible level; an on-call system should be in place.
- Who is responsible for carrying out and supporting final decision?
Decision made by administrator is agency's final decision and agency personnel are responsible to implement it and demonstrate full support.

POLICY MAY CROSS REFERENCE THE FOLLOWING, OR INCLUDE AS ADDENDUM OR APPENDIX:

- Family to Family core values (www.aecf.org)
- Family to Family objectives/outcomes (www.aecf.org)
- Logistical details that are subject to frequent change, such as identified TDM meeting locations, transportation support for families, etc.
- Structure/steps of meeting (TDM Facilitator Training materials)
- Ground rules for meeting (TDM Facilitator Training materials)
- Detailed description of facilitator role/responsibilities
- Readiness/roll-out training details
- Family Team Meeting/"Icebreaker" protocols (Family to Family TDM tool—pages 11-12)