



Family Team Meetings

STATE of Maine
OFFICE OF CHILD AND FAMILY SERVICES POLICY

Section
7

Subsection
1

Approved by: _____
OCFS, Director

EFFECTIVE DATE:
June 16, 2014

LATEST REVISION:
November 30, 2021

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I. SUBJECT

Family Team Meetings (FTM).

II. STATUTORY AUTHORITY

22 M.R.S. [§4003](#), [§4004](#).

III. DEFINITIONS

For a complete list of definitions, see the [OCFS Policy Manual Glossary](#). In this document, the first reference to any word that is defined is hyperlinked to the Glossary.

IV. POLICY

The Office of Child and Family Services (OCFS) is committed to engaging and partnering with families to address child safety, permanency, and well-being. [Family Team Meetings](#) incorporate a strengths-based perspective, drawing on the family's protective capacities to promote change. FTMs emphasize teamwork, engagement with families, and the importance of forming relationships among team members to provide support to the family and continuity for the child. The team may consist of the parents/caregivers, family members, resource parents, service providers, and other formal and informal supports.

Children are encouraged to participate in FTMs whenever appropriate. This may include attending all or part of a meeting. If a child is unable to attend, team members should find ways to ensure the child's voice is represented during the meeting.

V. PROCEDURES

[Indian Child Welfare](#). When the Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) applies, OCFS co-case manages the case with tribal child welfare staff. The steps of the FTM must be done in partnership with tribal child welfare, including preparing for the meeting, determining who will be invited, and identifying who will facilitate the meeting.

[Circumstances When an FTM Must Occur](#). The frequency of FTMs should be based on the identified needs of the family. Any combination of the following decisions can be accomplished at the same FTM. The caseworker's supervisor will attend FTMs when supervisory approval and/or support are needed. A Family Team Meeting (FTM) is required to be held at the following points:

- a. [Pre-removal Family Team Meetings](#): Prior to developing a safety plan with a family or filing a Petition for Preliminary Protection Order (PPO), a Family Team Meeting will be convened that includes parents/caregivers and at least one informal support. The purpose of this FTM is to address safety threats, promote engagement with the family and explore relatives and other informal supports as options for placement, visitation, transportation, etc. The outcome of the FTM may result in a safety plan or a PPO. Informal supports are necessary when considering a safety plan during the Pre-removal FTM, as these supports must be able to monitor and verify the safety plan. If the safety plan is broken and a PPO is subsequently filed, a second Pre-removal FTM is not required, as long as the original Pre-removal FTM occurred within the last 30 days. **Supervisors are expected to participate in Pre-removal FTMs.**
 - i. Information from initial investigation activities and the Structured Decision Making (SDM)© Safety Assessment Tool will help guide the team regarding which safety threats will be addressed in the initial FTM.

- ii. If the decision is to file a PPO, the SDM© Case Plan tool will be used to help develop the [Preliminary Rehabilitation and Reunification Plan](#) with the family at the FTM.
Timeframe: The Preliminary Rehabilitation and Reunification Plan must be filed with the court within 10 days of the PPO.
- iii. By engaging the family's supports safety is increased and there is shared responsibility for monitoring the activities outlined in the Safety Plan, Preliminary Rehabilitation and Reunification Plan, [Rehabilitation and Reunification Plan](#) or the [Prevention Service Family Plan](#).
- iv. The agenda guides the team to identify strengths and needs related to the safety threats as supported by the SDM© Safety Assessment Tool, to brainstorm what could go wrong and develop steps to ensure success.

Note: FTM's are not required for emergency removals that occur after hours on Children's Emergency Services (CES), or when the parents/caregivers are unable to be located.

- b. Prevention Service Cases: The following are circumstances when an FTM must occur during an open prevention service case:
 - i. Within the first thirty (30) days of the prevention service case to inform the development of the Prevention Service Family Plan;
 - ii. At least once every sixty (60) days to update the Prevention Service Family Plan; and
 - iii. Prior to case closure.
- c. Child Custody Cases: The frequency of FTMs should be based on the identified needs of the family but must occur at least once every three months. For example, more frequent FTMs may be required at the beginning of reunification, during preparation for trial home placement, and during new recruited adoptive placements. The following are circumstances when an FTM must occur:
 - i. At the request of the family, child, or other team members. Any member of the team may contact the caseworker to request an FTM. When any member of the team requests an FTM, the caseworker will make reasonable efforts to schedule the FTM within 10 days of the request;
 - ii. Prior to filing a Jeopardy Petition;
 - iii. To inform the development of the Preliminary Reunification and Rehabilitation Plan and the Rehabilitation and Reunification Plan;
 - iv. To inform the development of the Child Plan and Youth Transition Plan;
 - v. Prior to recommending residential placement;
 - vi. Prior to changing the case goal;
 - vii. Prior to a trial home placement; and
 - viii. Prior to case closure.

Note: For Prevention Service Cases and Child Custody Cases, the frequency of FTMs should be based on the identified needs of the family.

Required Participants. A family team meeting is focused on the safety, permanency and well-being needs of the child. It is the responsibility of OCFS staff to ensure that all required team members are invited to attend FTMs and to help the family understand the importance of having

team members present that need to be involved in decision-making. For example, when a visitation schedule is being established or revised, the resource parents must be present.

- a. At a minimum, the following must be invited to attend:
 - i. Parents/caregivers, including those residing outside of the home;
 - ii. Child, if developmentally appropriate;
 - iii. Resource parents;
 - iv. Tribal partners (if this is an ICWA case);
 - v. Guardians ad litem;
 - vi. Parents' attorneys;
 - vii. Visit supervisors.
- b. The family may have informal supports such as relatives or friends that can provide support to the family in meeting their goals and ensuring child safety. The caseworker will assist the family in identifying informal supports and inviting them to the FTM.
- c. The family may also have formal supports, such as mental health or substance use treatment providers, domestic violence advocates, or case managers. The caseworker will engage and guide the family to add essential members to their team that can assist them in being successful in reaching their goals.
- d. Children are encouraged to participate in FTMs whenever it is developmentally appropriate for them to do so, with consideration given to their age, development, and emotional well-being. This may include attending all or part of a meeting. If a child is unable to attend, team members should find ways to ensure the child's voice is represented during the meeting. There are many creative ways to accomplish this – such as having photos of the child visible during the meeting, playing video or audio messages from the child, reading a letter written by the child, bringing one of the child's favorite toys, or using an empty chair to represent the child. For youth in care aged 14 and older, at least two members of their team, who are not their caregiver or caseworker, must be chosen by them to participate (see [3.9 Youth Transition Services](#)).
- e. In the event that a team member is not able to participate in person, the caseworker will provide the option for participation virtually or by phone.
- f. The caseworker is responsible for sending the FTM Summary to parents/caregivers following the meeting and for ensuring the child is informed of decisions made during the FTM that impact them. **Timeframe:** The caseworker will provide the FTM Summary to parents/caregivers within 10 days of the FTM.

Family Team Meeting Preparation and Engagement. FTM preparation is an opportunity to engage the family and team members in meaningful conversations related to the family's strengths and needs. Preparing for FTMs should be incorporated into the caseworkers ongoing work with families, their formal and informal supports, and other collateral contacts. The caseworker should discuss the family's goals during monthly contacts with the family and other team members.

- a. Caseworker Responsibilities. Prior to the first FTM (excluding the pre-removal FTM), the caseworker will discuss the following information with the family:
 - i. An explanation of the purpose of the FTM and structure of the meeting;
 - ii. Information shared/learned during the FTM process will be documented and is part of the case record;

- iii. Information regarding the process for team members to request an FTM;
- iv. The process for identifying FTM participants, the importance of including both informal and formal supports in the FTM, and that FTM participants may change over time as the case progresses;
- v. The importance of the parents/caregivers being active participants in the FTM process;
- vi. An explanation of things that cannot change during FTMs, to include:
 - 1. Child custody status;
 - 2. Conditions in relevant court orders (PFAs, Jeopardy Orders, bail conditions, etc.)

b. In planning and preparing for an FTM, caseworkers will:

- i. Explore culture, race, and identity with the family to determine if there are any factors that could impact the way the family engages in the FTM process;
- ii. Provide as much flexibility as possible in order to accommodate the cultural needs of the family;
- iii. Follow any court orders in effect limiting or prohibiting contact between family members;
- iv. Prepare for the FTM by discussing relevant information with their supervisor prior to the FTM to inform decision-making;
- v. Ensure that FTMs are scheduled at a time and place that is convenient, accessible and provides safety for the family and other team members.
- vi. Engage with the parents/caregivers to identify team members; discuss OCFS concerns and solicit feedback from the parents/caregivers related to child safety, permanency, and well-being; identify strengths the team can build upon, and ensure the family fully understands the “things that cannot change” and “worries” portions of the meeting. In addition, the caseworker will:
 - 1. Ensure the family is aware that certain participants must be invited to the FTM. These team members include the parents/caregivers, resource parents, Guardian ad litem, parents’ attorneys, and if an ICWA case, tribal child welfare partners.
 - 2. If an ICWA case, ensure the family understands that tribal child welfare is a required participant and will also be involved in planning the meeting.
- vii. Engage with team members regarding the upcoming meeting to support transparency between OCFS and the team and to share the purpose of the meeting, the agenda, and that participants should be active contributors in the meeting. Explore what they believe the family’s strengths are, worries they have for the family, and the needs of the family and child. The caseworker will:
 - 1. Encourage the family to contact team members first to inform them of the purpose of the meeting and notify them that they will receive a call from the caseworker to prepare them to participate in the meeting.
 - 2. Reach out to service providers and collateral contacts prior to FTMs to gather information regarding the family’s progress toward rehabilitation and/or reunification.

3. If the caseworker is unable to engage in preparation for the FTM with the family, the caseworker will document the reason for this in the child welfare information system. **Exceptions to completing FTM preparation will not be granted in circumstances where domestic violence is a concern.**

Special Considerations. The caseworker will identify special circumstances that may require additional planning and coordination prior to the FTM. Considerations include, but are not limited to the following:

- a. ICWA cases in which the caseworker will partner with tribal child welfare to schedule the FTM and ensure that team members identified by tribal child welfare are invited;
- b. Cases that may require an interpreter, cultural broker, or other services to support the family's participation in the FTM; and
- c. Cases involving domestic abuse and violence. If domestic abuse and violence is a factor the caseworker will:
 - i. Work with the Domestic Abuse and Violence Advocate to address safety concerns for the child and non-offending caregiver.
 - ii. Schedule separate meetings for the offending and non-offending caregivers.
 - iii. The non-offending parent's FTM should be held first and the team should discuss the information that will be shared with the offending parent in their meeting.
 - iv. Ensure that any court orders in effect limiting or prohibiting contact between family members are followed.
- d. For parents/caregivers who are incarcerated, provide support as necessary to arrange their participation in the FTM;
- e. Determine whether there are intellectual or cognitive impairments or other factors that require additional support for any team members; and
- f. Any additional considerations or limitations that require further preparation (Zoom links/dial-in information for team members joining virtually, etc.).

Facilitating Family Team Meetings. FTMs will be facilitated in such a manner that the family and team will be able to collaboratively identify and develop strengths to support the family in making the necessary changes that will increase the safety, permanency, and well-being of the child.

- a. Prior to the FTM, the caseworker will complete the SDM© Case Plan Tool, which helps identify the family and child strengths and priority needs. During the FTM, the caseworker will assist the family in developing their goals based on identified strengths, needs and expectations outlined in court orders.
- b. It is the responsibility of the caseworker to facilitate the team in a manner that ensures all team members are able to actively participate and resolves conflicts by negotiating potential solutions. When there is disagreement or conflict among team members that impacts the team's ability to engage in a meaningful way, the caseworker will remind the team of the family's goals and focus the discussion on behavioral change required to achieve those goals.

Family Team Meeting Agenda. The purpose and desired outcomes of the meeting governs the agenda. The items below provide an outline to guide staff in the FTM meeting process to help the family and team reach the identified goals for that meeting. The agenda is intended to be flexible to best meet the needs of the family and team.

- a. **Welcome and Introductions/Confidentiality (Family and Team):** Team members will introduce themselves and their connection to the family. The caseworker will explain that content discussed during the FTM is confidential, and team members will sign the Confidentiality Agreement. This is also an opportunity to identify key team members who are not present.
- b. **Ground Rules (All):** FTM ground rules are established and agreed upon by all team members. Rules are developed through an active discussion by all group members. The purpose of this process is for the group to take ownership for how the meeting is run and for all members to be able to refer to if necessary. If not already emphasized, this is a good time to discuss and set expectations for strength-based language and behavior. At the beginning of each subsequent meeting the team should review the ground rules, recognizing that they may need to be modified as the team continues to meet.
- c. **Purpose of the Meeting (Family/Staff):** The caseworker and/or family discusses the Family Team Meeting purpose and goals. At the first meeting, the team should discuss the reason for child welfare involvement. Subsequent FTMs will address needs, according to the priorities established by the team.
- d. **Child Needs (All):** The family, with help and support from other team members, identify what is needed to achieve case goals, and increase safety for the child. These needs include the family's beliefs, values, and culture.
- e. **Strengths (All):** Strengths are identified by stating the behaviors, beliefs and values demonstrated by the family that can be used to assist them in addressing the identified needs. Strengths are either discussed as a separate agenda item or as part of the identification of the child's needs. Identifying strengths helps focus on solutions-building and builds the family's trust in team members. Strengths should specifically relate to the child safety concerns.
- f. **Family Needs:** The caseworker will utilize the SDM© Case Plan Tool and court orders to assist in identifying family goals, impact on the child and how to prioritize goals.
- g. **Action Steps:** Action steps should outline who will do what by when, be measurable, time limited, and identify any potential barriers.
- h. **Conclusion/Next Steps:** The caseworker will schedule the next meeting. The caseworker will provide the parents/caregivers with a copy of the FTM Summary and any plan developed at the meeting within 10 days of the meeting. The caseworker will remind team members that although the next FTM will be scheduled at the conclusion of the meeting, any team member may request an FTM at any time should they feel one is necessary.

Family Team Meeting Documentation.

- a. The caseworker will document all activities related to FTM planning, preparation, and engagement. For example, who was invited, attended, etc. within the child welfare information system.
- b. The caseworker will use the FTM Summary to document details from the FTM, to include who attended, what was discussed and action steps. **Timeframe:** The FTM

Summary information will be entered into the child welfare information system within 10 days of the FTM.

- c. If the family refuses to participate in the FTM, the caseworker will document this in the child welfare information system, stating the reason for the family's refusal to participate.

VI. POLICY SUPERSEDES

IV.D-6 Family Team Meetings, Effective June 6, 2014

VII. LINKS TO RELATED POLICIES

[2.2 Child Protection Investigation](#)

[3.9 Youth Transition Services](#)

[7.2 Domestic Violence and Child Abuse and Neglect](#)

[7.4 Indian Child Welfare](#)

VIII. APPENDICES

Appendix A: Family Team Meeting Summary

Appendix B: Sign-in/Confidentiality Agreement

Appendix C: FTM Agenda

Note: The hyperlinks to these documents only work on DHHS issued computers. If you would like to request a copy of these documents, please email your request to:

OCFSPolicyTraining.DHHS@maine.gov