
HISTORY OF THE FAMILY DECISION MAKING PROGRAM

NEW ZEALAND – FAMILY GROUP CONFERENCING

The Family Group Conference model was developed in New Zealand and became mandatory in all cases of child abuse and neglect with the passing of the Child, Young Persons and Their Families act of 1989. The model was based on the cultural practices of the Maori People. This act is designed to provide family members with an opportunity to make their own decisions about the safety of their children. The act came about as a direct result of public outcry surrounding the disproportionately high number of Maori children in out of home care. In many cases, the children were placed in Caucasian homes and frequently moved. The typical practice of placing these children outside of their culture was complicated by the fact that there were very few Maori social workers. Concerns of racism in the system were a frequent barrier to the families and workers.

The systemic changes that occurred as a result of this outcry include: Least restrictive placements have been made the first choice, thus decreasing the use of foster care and institutional placements. The law fosters an atmosphere of partnership with the families that allows the family to work towards reunification rather than fighting the system.

OREGON – FAMILY UNITY MEETINGS

In Oregon, a model known as Family Unity Meetings is a part of the child welfare system and is legally mandated to occur within 30 days of a child being taken into the care of the state. The Family Unity Meeting is very similar to the Family Group Conference, but more emphasis is placed on the professionals in the conferencing process. One example of this is that the family is not given the option to meet alone (without professionals) in a Family Unity Meeting, but they always meet alone in the Family Group Conference Model. Additionally, the Family Unity Model is a more formalized process than the Family Group Conference. It is also a more scripted process.

FAMILY DECISION MAKING PROGRAM

The Family Decision Making Program of Casey Family Programs' Cheyenne Division is a hybrid of the Family Group Conference and the Family Unity Meeting that attempts to extract the strengths of each program and work towards the best interest of the child. The Family Decision Making conference model allows the family to choose to meet alone with the professionals in a facilitated planning process. Additionally, we use a strengths based approach to give the family some clearly defined tools to work with

and allow the final report to portray a more three dimensional picture of the family than would be reflected in a standard deficit based case planning tool. This three dimensional picture allows the court to make decisions based on the family's strengths, available resources, and deficits. When the model shifts from a Family Group Conferencing model to a Family Unity model, it is a deliberate shift on the part of the facilitator and is recorded in the conference report.

PHILOSOPHY, VALUES, AND PRACTICE PRINCIPALS

In the days before child welfare laws and organizations, the role of solving family problems fell to the family and their support networks. As government agencies have taken a more prominent role in the protection of children, some extended families have chosen to give up their role in child rearing or been removed from that role by government entities despite their interest in the case.

The Family Decision Making Program provides a forum for families to make plans that are designed to ensure the safety, permanency and well being of their children when the child has entered or is at risk of entering the child welfare or juvenile justice system. Recently, the Adoption and Safe Families Act has shortened the timeline that families work under in achieving reunification. In this climate, the Family Decision Making Program offers the extended family an opportunity to assist the social worker in determining a concurrent case plan that will specify the permanent living arrangement for the children in the event that the family efforts towards reunification are not successful.

The Family Decision Making Program works under the assumption that families have the greatest investment in seeing their children safe and successful. Additionally, the family is more familiar with the family dynamics, structure, and areas of concern than the referring agency including the family secrets that will not be revealed to the professionals. This interest and knowledge makes the family the greatest expert on themselves. The Family Decision Making Program seeks to use this intimate family knowledge in a non-threatening manner to create a plan addressing the safety, permanency and wellbeing of the child.

As a result of the history and philosophy of the Family Decision Making Model, the Family Decision Making Program established a set of values that guides our work with families. These values are:

- All children are entitled to be free from harm.
- Children are best raised in families.
- The primary responsible for care of children rests with their families.
- Families can make safe decisions for their children.
- Families are experts on their strengths, needs, and resources.
- Families offer the best protection for children.
- Families and the Child Welfare System can make more progress on behalf of the child working together cooperatively.
- Families should be respected.
- Children should not be removed from their family unless there is a significant risk of harm to the child, family, or community that cannot be eliminated.

The adoption of these basic core values has given rise to several practice principals for the Family Decision Making Program. Those principals are:

- Safety of the child and participants is of paramount concern.
- A successful conference is one where the family is empowered to make safe and appropriate decisions regarding the safety, permanency and wellbeing of their children, AND these decisions are acceptable to the professionals involved with the case.
- The Family Decision Making Conference must be voluntary.
- The real and perceived neutrality and impartiality of the facilitator is key for a successful conference.
- Preparation is a vital component to successful conferencing.
- The family should be given all of the necessary information and time to make informed and well reasoned decisions for their children.

REFERRAL CRITERIA

The decision to accept a case into the Family Decision Making Program is based on the following broad criteria:

FAMILY WILLINGNESS

The Family Decision Making Program is intended to be a voluntary process for families. The goal of the Family Decision Making Program is to empower families to make safe and appropriate decisions for their family. Court ordered cases will be assessed with the family and if they are not willing participants, the court will be advised in writing that they do not meet the FDM Admission Criteria.

CASE FOLLOW-UP

There must be an authority or entity committed to provide a follow up or case management function with the family. The conference process involves a significant investment in time, thought and emotion on the part of the family. It is a disservice to the family to create a plan without ensuring that the plan is given the follow up support needed to enhance the success of the plan.

MENTAL ABILITY TO PARTICIPATE

In some of the families served, there are family members that have mental health issues that prevent them from completely participating in and benefiting from the Family Decision Making process. These cases are appropriate if there is at least one family member who is able to understand the process and assist those other family members in making the plan.

OUTCOME

The outcome for the conference must be identified before the conference is scheduled. The facilitator must meet with the referring party and the family to identify the non-negotiable outcomes and other desired outcomes of the conference. In determining the outcomes, it is important that the facilitator remember to address the families needs as well as the non-negotiable needs provided by the system.

TIMELINE FOR ASSESSMENT

The assessment process should not exceed 30 days unless one of the specific exceptions below is met:

- **Legal necessity** – The Court requests that the conference be delayed in order to avoid jeopardizing pending legal matters.

- **Therapeutic necessity** – A family member, who is considered by the family or referring party to be absolutely necessary for the conference, is unable to attend because it could be harmful to the mental health of one of the family members; the facilitator should speak with that family member’s therapist and determine if a short delay would result in allowing that family member to attend.
- **Family necessity** – The family requests that the process be slowed in order to increase their ability to participate. The facilitator should work with the family and referring party on this type of delay to ensure that a delay would be appropriate.

REJECTED CASES

CLEARLY INAPPROPRIATE REFERRALS

When a case is clearly not appropriate for the Family Decision Making Program, it should be immediately rejected by the person taking the referral. An explanation of why the case is not appropriate should be given, in writing, to the referring party. The case is put into the database and closed.

OTHER INAPPROPRIATE REFERRALS

It is possible that a case will initially appear appropriate, but during the assessment process prove to be an inappropriate referral. In these cases, the facilitator must complete the following steps before the case is closed:

- The facilitator must notify the referring party that the case is not appropriate and explain the reasoning.
- Ensure that all appropriate information has been put into the case file. This must include the reason for rejecting the case in the case narrative.
- Mark the case as a “consultation” and enter the number of hours spent on the case prior to case closure. (form FDM-7)
- Close the case.

ASSESSMENT PROCESS

The assessment of a family's appropriateness for a conference is composed of the following steps:

DATA ENTRY

When a case enters the assessment process, it must be entered into the FDM database within 3 days of receipt of the referral.

FAMILY INTERVIEWS

The facilitator should use the Referral Form (form FDM-1) and any other available documentation to locate the family member(s) who are being referred. These family members are contacted and invited to come in for a personal interview. The purpose of this interview is as follows:

- Explain the Family Decision Making Program to the family and determine if they are willing to participate.
- Have the family sign a release of information (form FDM-3). This release of information allows us to contact other service providers and make reports back to the referring party. The FDM-3 also indicates a family's voluntary consent to participate.
- Have the family complete the family contact information (form FDM-2) and confirm that they have included all potential family, affinity and support people. Often times it is helpful to coach the family to invite anybody they would invite to a wedding or graduation.
- Determine what family rituals and food preferences exist.
- Interview the family to determine whom they have used as service providers in the past.
- Through the interview with the family and referring party, assess if any new service providers could be a resource in the conference.
- Assess the family dynamics, attitude towards services, and attitude as it affects their ability to be appropriate for conferencing.
- Make sure that the family knows you intend to call and send invitations to all of the people the family has identified.

COURT COORDINATION

If requested by the family, the facilitator who is preparing for the conference should attend any court hearings or other proceedings with the family. This may include Multi-Disciplinary Teams, treatment reviews, or interviews.

SET CONFERENCE DATE AND TIME

Set the conference time and date. This should be done in a manner that accommodates the family to the greatest extent possible, but still offers an opportunity for professionals to be present.

PREPARING FOR A CONFERENCE

A basic principal to good practice in the Family Decision Making Program is that the preparation that occurs before a conference is crucial to creating a successful conference. In most cases, the concept of giving decision making power to families is a new concept to professionals and families. Family members routinely question their ability to make decisions and plans that will satisfy the social workers and court. The professionals traditionally enjoy an expert role and may find it uncomfortable or even threatening that the family is making decisions. In the Family Decision Making Program, the professionals are still considered experts, but they are asked to give information to empower the family rather than give specific advise. For all participants, the Family Decision Making Program represents a very different method of operation. As a result, it is crucial that everybody is fully briefed about the format, philosophy, and their role in the conference.

DEFINITIONS

KEY VULNERABLE PERSON(S)

Any person who enters the conference feeling that they have something to lose or that something about them will be exposed.

POWER BROKER(S)

Any person who is influential in the family decision making process. Frequently these will also be the people who are able to provide the greatest number of family members and affinity contacts.

PRE-CONFERENCE CONTACTS

CONTACTING THE FAMILY

The conference facilitator must make contact with the Key Vulnerable Person(s) and the Power Broker(s) in face to face interviews whenever possible. If it is not possible to make this contact in person, the facilitator should make this contact by phone. Other family members should be contacted by phone. The outcome of these contacts includes:

- Educate the family members on the court and Family Decision Making Program process.
- Gain information and insight about additional issues relevant to the conference.
- Invite the family to the conference.

- Learn about other family members who should be invited.
- Ensure all required paperwork is completed (i.e. release of information and form FDM-2)

CONTACTING PROFESSIONALS

In addition to sending a written invitation, it is important that the facilitator contacts the involved professionals and discusses their role in the conference with them and the intent of the conference. It is important to clarify the professional's involvement and role in the conference. This may include discussing any specific information that the facilitator should be prepared to present. Always ensure that the appropriate legal entities are invited. In discussing Family Decision Making with legal personnel, it is good to remind them that this is a family centered process and not a legal proceeding.

PREPARING THE SOCIAL WORKER

It is of high importance that the facilitator and social worker create an environment that allows the family to make decisions and take ownership of their plan and the presenting issues. The social worker's tone in the conference is one that can either be an asset or create an "us and them" power differential that undermines the entire process. In order to create the desired positive atmosphere, it is recommended that the social worker and conference facilitator review the following preparation steps:

- Review the case file and be able to answer questions from the family regarding process, legal status, and non-negotiable items.
- Be prepared to present the case in an impartial manner. Avoid editorializing or making value judgements on the facts of the case. It is important that a conference tone of "us versus them" is not established. In the past, some workers have found it helpful to present information in chronological history. Another tactic that is effective is to use statements referring to "the Department" or "the Court". This allows the social worker to depersonalize the actions for themselves and the family.
- Be able to articulate any non-negotiable issues to the family so that they can include them in their case plan.
- Be prepared to accept a family's plan if it meets the safety, permanency, and wellbeing needs of the family.
- The goal of the conference is for the family to take ownership of their plan and it should truly be their plan. The idea that the family owns the plan is crucial to later reasonable efforts arguments and for family follow through.

WRITTEN INVITATIONS

In addition to the telephone contacts, the facilitator should send written invitations to the family and professionals.

During the process of contacting family members, the facilitator should use their interview skills to continue to assess the conference for safety, appropriateness, and outcomes. The facilitator will need to review these items to inform decisions on where the conference is held, what security measures are appropriate, whether or not the family should meet alone, and to shape the conference so that the family's and referring party's desired outcomes are met.

FACILITATOR RESPONSIBILITIES

In addition to the contacts with the family, the facilitator has other duties that must be completed prior to the conference. Those duties include:

CONFERENCE LOCATION

The facilitator needs to ensure that there is a location available to have a conference. The ideal location for a conference would include the following elements:

- Neutral
- Comfortable
- Appropriate for the group size.
- Private
- Easy access to bathrooms, kitchen, and supplies
- Ample parking

ARRANGE CONFERENCE CALLS

In cases where family members are unable to attend the conference in person, it may be necessary to have a conference call to facilitate their attendance. In these cases, the conference call should be coordinated in advance with the pertinent attendees and the phone service that is providing the conference calling.

ARRANGE MENU

Using the notes on the form FDM-2, the facilitator coordinates arrangements for food and drinks for the conference. If the conference runs late into the evening or through a mealtime, it is appropriate to serve a meal. Meals can be arranged by the facilitator or brought by the family.

SCHEDULE GUEST SPEAKERS

There may be a need to have a guest speaker make a presentation as part of the information sharing portion of the conference. The facilitator schedules this presenter and explains their role in the conference. If the presenter could become a resource to the family, it may be beneficial for them to stay for the entire conference, otherwise they should leave after they share information.

PREPARE ANY HANDOUTS OR MATERIALS

If there are handouts or has any type of presentation materials that will be used in the conference, those items should be readied in advance of the conference. Examples of this would include handouts that outline ground rules and the agenda, or if a professional brings a handout for the group, a copy is attached to the finished report and sent out for the group to review.

DAY OF CONFERENCE

On the day of the conference, the facilitator should set up the conference room with any needed supplies and ensure that all necessary preparation has been completed. Coordination with administrative staff around participant arrival, food service, and conference room use is determined by local division procedure.

THE FAMILY DECISION MAKING CONFERENCE

Family Decision Making conferences call together parents, extended family members, affinity relations, social workers, and other professional/para-professionals to make a plan for the best interests of the child. This is a family-empowerment model and at all phases, the family is consulted regarding who should be invited, when the conference should be held, what food should be served, and many other choices. Family Decision Making Program facilitators are taught, "When in doubt, ask the family."

The Family Decision Making Conference has three distinct phases:

Information Sharing: In the information sharing phase, all of the issues are put on the table by the family and professionals. This is done to establish a common pool of knowledge that will be used to guide decisions. The strengths and concerns of the family are considered in this phase, as are legal issues, and non-negotiable items. The goal of this phase is to provide the participants with a complete picture of the child, family and the current needs of both.

Planning Phase: In the planning phase, the family may or may not meet alone based on the purpose of the conference, the family dynamics, safety concerns, and the wishes of the family. During this phase, the family creates a plan to address the needs and issues that were raised in the information sharing phase.

Commitments Phase: In the final phase of the conference, the family presents their plan. The social worker and other professionals review the plan to determine if the plan is adequate to meet the safety, permanency, and wellbeing needs of the child. The social worker may approve the plan as it stands, ask the family to reconvene their family time and modify the plan, or the facilitator can guide the process of adjusting the plan to meet the needs of the family and child welfare system.

INFORMATION SHARING

OUTCOME AND OVERVIEW

The first step in the conference process is the information sharing. In this part of the conference, the expectations of the conference are established, information regarding the case is shared among conference members, and the family is given the parameters of the case plan that they will be asked to create.

At the end of this component, the family will know why and how they were referred and what items are non-negotiable. They will be able to make a case plan that addresses the issues of safety, permanency, and wellbeing for their child.

INFORMATION SHARING PROCESS

The information sharing process begins when the conference members arrive and ends when the conference process shifts towards making a plan using the shared information. The steps occurring during this time are:

SIGN-IN

A sign in sheet must be completed and all conference participants are asked to sign in as they arrive. (form FDM-6)

INTRODUCTIONS AND HOUSEKEEPING

Once the participants have arrived, the facilitator should lead the group in introductions. The facilitator advises the group of any general housekeeping items such as the location of the bathrooms, food, and drink.

OPENING RITUAL

If the family has selected some ritual that is culturally significant to them or appropriate to their family; they will be asked to lead the group in that ceremony. Examples of this have included prayer and song.

GROUND RULES

In order to maintain a productive conference that feels safe to each participant, the facilitator must explain the ground rules. Suggested ground rules include:

1. Focus on the children – this ground rule is designed to take the focus off of past family issues and to use the conference time to focus in on the best interests of the child.
2. Be respectful
3. Do not blame or shame
4. One person speaks at a time
5. It is OK to disagree within the limits of respect, no blaming or shaming, and focusing on the children.
6. Everything said in conference is confidential except for:
 - Threats to harm oneself or someone else.
 - Reports of abuse or neglect.
 - Information that will be compiled into the final report.

The facilitator may need to make amendments to the ground rules before or during the conference to address a specific circumstance or dynamic. This is appropriate to maintain the integrity of the conference and the feeling of safety for the participants. When a ground rule is amended in the conference, it should be posted and discussed with the group.

It is recommended that a standard set of ground rules be placed on handouts or on a poster that can be used for each conference. This will be a time savings in the conference preparation process and ensure consistent rules between conferences.

PRESENTING PROBLEM

Child Welfare and Children in Need of Supervision

In child welfare and Children in Need of Supervision cases, the family is frequently asked to lead the discussion around presenting problem by inviting them to share why they believe their child has been placed into protective custody or is otherwise involved with the system. Once the family has given their information, the referring entity or other official party is asked to give information to the group about the presenting problem or other version of events leading up to the conference referral.

Juvenile Justice

Because of the desired restorative justice aspect of a Family Decision Making Conference used to address juvenile delinquency, the order of the participants is changed to offer consideration to the victim of the crime. In these cases, the official facts of offense are presented first (usually from the charging document) and the victim is asked to provide the context and emotion for those events. Once the victim has presented any information they feel is appropriate, the juvenile is asked to present the facts of offense from his/her perspective. Often times, this order of events presents an opportunity for dialogue between the offender, the victim, and their families. As long as this dialogue is productive and falls within the established ground rules, it should be encouraged.

LEGAL STATUS

An official from the court or other agency should make a presentation on the legal status of the case including any non-negotiable items from the court. The Adoption and Safe Families Act must be presented for child welfare cases. In the case of Children in Need of Supervision and Juvenile Justice cases, the presentation would include information on sentencing options and probation.

STRENGTHS AND NEEDS

In most cases a strengths and concerns method is used to get information on those people in the conference who will be the main focus of the case plan. In child welfare cases, this may include the child and parent(s) and in juvenile justice cases the juvenile offender alone may be done. The family and the conference facilitator can determine who is appropriate for this process. Often times, this is a productive and non-threatening manner for the professionals to introduce specific information about the family members and family dynamics. Some points to consider for the strengths and needs include:

- Start with strengths.
- Make the dialogue free flowing rather than forcing answers from people in the room.
- Ask questions to clarify and provoke discussion.
- Post all of the answers you get on a flip chart.

INFORMATION MANAGEMENT

As the family speaks, a great volume of information is going to be passed around the room. It is important for the conference facilitator to capture the key points of this information and post it where the conference participants can see it. Normally, this information is recorded on flip charts and posted around the room. Examples include:

- Non-negotiable items
- Information on resources.
- Planning ideas.
- Key discussions or definitions. (e.g. What is safety?)
- Other input that could be important to the decision making process or in writing the case plan or conference summary report.

At times, caseworkers or others will want to place a case plan on the overhead or data projector. This is perfectly acceptable and will help ensure that the needs of the referring party are met.

PREPARE THE GROUP TO MAKE THE PLAN

Once all of the pertinent information has been introduced, the facilitator should lead a discussion that reviews the goal of the conference and the points that are non-negotiable. The desired outcome is that the family will have a clear expectation of what the professional members of the group are seeking in a case plan and that the family is ready to begin their decision making process.

PLANNING PROCESS

OUTCOME AND OVERVIEW

The planning process is the portion of the conference where the actual case plan is created. This portion of the process must be family led and may take place with or without the professionals present.

The outcome of this portion of the conference is that the family creates the case plan that they will follow to address the issues that have contributed to their involvement with the system and referral to the Family Decision Making Program. In child welfare cases, the family will also present options for the concurrent plan that will occur if the family is unable to complete the reunification plan.

SHOULD THE FAMILY MEET ALONE?

The conference facilitator will make the decision on whether or not the family will meet alone. That decision is based on several factors. Those factors include:

1. **Safety** – If the conference facilitator has any reason to believe that the physical or emotional wellbeing of any conference member could be compromised, the family should not meet alone. This factor must be assessed on an ongoing basis from the facilitator's first contact with the family and throughout the conference process.
2. **Balance of Power** -- The facilitator should examine the room dynamics to assure that there is a balance of power within the room. One example that would preclude meeting alone would be that the biological mother comes to the conference alone and the estranged biological father comes to the conference with all of his family members. This would be a very uneven and threatening balance of power that the facilitator would want to consider very seriously before allowing the family to meet.
3. **Family Wishes** -- If the family does not want to meet alone, they should not be forced to meet alone.
4. **Group Size** -- If only one or two family members are present, it would not be productive for them to meet alone. In this case, however, the facilitator must be very careful to empower the family to ensure that there is a level playing field between them and the professionals in the plan making process.
5. **Productivity/Level of Understanding** -- In the case of groups that are extremely low functioning as a whole, it is sometimes necessary to keep the professionals present to make sure that the group stays on task and that a plan is generated. This is a subjective assessment that is usually made through the course of the

conference, but it is also an assessment that the facilitator should be very cautious about making.

6. Other circumstances -- The conference process, as a whole, is a dynamic event. As such, it may be necessary for the facilitator to make an assessment in the conference that the family should not meet alone based on events or interpersonal issues that arise during the conference. The facilitator should be able to clearly articulate his concerns that lead to having the family and professionals meet together.

WHEN THE FAMILY MEETS ALONE

FACILITATOR RESPONSIBILITIES

Before allowing the family to meet alone, the facilitator must ask the family to appoint a person to act as the scribe for the group, tell the family where to find the facilitator when they are finished, and make sure that any questions they have are answered.

WHILE THE FAMILY MEETS

During the time that the family is meeting alone, the facilitator can meet with the professional staff and begin some of the initial service coordination if that is appropriate. The professional staff does not undertake a separate planning process without the family.

While meeting, the family may request that the professionals clarify issues or provide additional resource information.

WHEN THE FAMILY DOES NOT MEET ALONE

FACILITATOR RESPONSIBILITIES

When the professional group and the family group meet together, the facilitator has to ensure that the family is the primary source of planning input. This can be done by asking the family open ended questions and soliciting ideas from them on what services are needed and how to apply those services. Experience has shown that the professional group will be very eager to provide input in this section, but it is imperative that the family create the majority of the plan with the professional group serving as consultants to the family to support their planning process.

IMPORTANT PROCESS NOTE:

When the professionals and facilitator take part in the planning process rather than allowing a family to meet alone, a fundamental shift in the conference model has taken place. The conference becomes a Family Unity Meeting rather than following a true Family Group Conference model. It should always be noted in the final report whether or not a family has met alone to create their plan. A widely held view is that this form of conferencing is less empowering to the family than the Family Group Conference process.

COMMITMENTS PROCESS

OVERVIEW AND OUTCOME

In this final phase of the conference, the family and professionals ensure that the plan meets the needs of the family and satisfies the concerns of the referring party.

The desired outcome of this portion of the conference is that the family creates a case plan or court recommendations for use by the referring party.

PROCESS

If the family has met alone, they present their plan to the professional group in its entirety before any of the professionals make comments or suggests changes to the plan. If the family has not met alone, this portion of the conference can tend to merge into the Planning Process.

FACILITATOR RESPONSIBILITIES

In this portion of the conference the facilitator is responsible for asking questions that will provoke conversation around the plan and helping the family assess the realism of the plan and their expectations. A common finding in this area is that the family tends to give themselves too many tasks and too little time to complete those tasks. In these instances, the facilitator and professionals should assist the family in making the plan more realistic.

Another role of the facilitator during this phase of the conference can be to begin recording the actual case plan as the family presents it. This can be done on the Case Recommendations form (form FDM-4), an externally provided case plan or on flip chart paper.

WRAP UP

Once the conference participants reach a consensus on the case plan, the conference facilitator can close the conference. This can be done by asking the family if they have any special ritual that they would like to use to close the conference and by thanking the participants. At this point the facilitator hands out an evaluation tool for the participants to fill out. If an evaluation is not handed out at this point, the facilitator can mail it out with the report for the family to return at a later date.

POST CONFERENCE

Once the conference has ended, the facilitator may have several ancillary duties that must be completed before the case concludes its participation with the Family Decision Making Program. In this chapter, we will examine those duties.

SERVICES TO THE FAMILY AND REFERRING PARTY

FAMILY DECISION MAKING PROGRAM CONFERENCE REPORT

In any case where the Family Decision Making Program contributes to making a recommendation for a child, a report must be generated summarizing the recommendations and decision making process. The report format is the Family Decision Making Report. There is a version of this report for Juvenile Justice (form FDM-5a) and Child Welfare (form FDM-5b). This report format should be modified to reflect any unique needs of the conference.

Once the report is completed, the facilitator ensures that it is mailed in a timely manner. A copy should be sent to all conference attendees and any other party required under statute. Such examples may include the Guardian ad Litum, private legal counsel, and the District Attorney.

If an evaluation was not completed as part of the conference wrap up, the facilitator should send out an evaluation and self addressed stamped envelope with the report so that the family can return it.

MDT PARTICIPATION

If the court process requires that a multidisciplinary team meeting be held in the case, the facilitator should plan on attending that meeting to represent the families wishes and answer questions about the Family Decision Making Program report.

COURT PARTICIPATION

In each case where a recommendation has been generated, the facilitator should be prepared to attend court and ensure that any questions about the report or recommendations are answered for the court.

FOLLOW UP CONFERENCE

In some cases, there will come a need to conduct a follow up conference. If that conference occurs in the same calendar year as the original conference, it will not be counted as a new client and the case will be reopened. The conference process is unchanged for the second conference.

If the second conference arises on an entirely new set of circumstances or on a different case type, the facilitator may staff counting it as a separate case.

TRACKING THE NUMBER OF CHILDREN SERVED

CHILDREN SERVED THROUGH CONFERENCE

When a conference is held, the facilitator should determine the number of children in the home that receive meaningful and significant service from the conference process. The child(ren) that is the subject of the conference is always counted. Additional children in the home may be counted if they meet the following criteria:

1. They are individually considered by the conference members to examine concerns or safety issues involving them. One way this can be done is through the strength's and concerns exercise.
2. The family has expressed a concern for the safety, permanency, or wellbeing of this child during the intake or conference process.
3. The family or service providers agree to take measures addressing the concerns of the child.
4. The final FDM report contains recommendations pertinent to the child.

CHILDREN SERVED THROUGH CONSULTATION

There will be times that a juvenile is served by the Family Decision Making Program in a manner that does not result in a conference. The service provided must result in meaningful and significant service to the child in order to be considered a child served. Children must meet the following criteria in order to be considered served by a consultation:

1. The facilitator has had one or more face to face meetings with the family.
2. The meetings result in a recommendation to the court or have an effect on the case that can be articulated/measured.
3. A case file is created in the FDM program and that file contains documentation that justifies counting the child as served.
4. The Division Director approves the case as a child served.