

**ST. LOUIS CITY CHILDREN'S DIVISION  
TEAM DECISION MAKING PROTOCOL**

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## ST. LOUIS CITY CHILDREN'S DIVISION

### TEAM DECISION MAKING PROTOCOL

#### Family to Family and Team Decision Making-- Definitions

The Family to Family initiative is a value-based, principle driven program designed to improve outcomes for children in foster care by involving their family, extended support members and community in key safety and placement decisions. Based on the belief that children need a family, families need the support of strong, nurturing communities, and child welfare agencies can best help families by partnering with their communities, the Family to Family initiative is implemented via four key strategies.

***Building Community Partnerships*** enables the child welfare agency to reach out to individuals and other public and private agencies to build a strong, diverse network of supportive resources committed to helping children and families. ***Recruitment, Training and Support*** identifies and develops resource families that will support the reunification process, and also provide stable, caring home environments for children when they cannot remain in their own home. ***Team Decision Making*** brings key people together to discuss families' strengths and needs, identify and provide resources, and make strength-based plans that will provide for children's safety and make decisions regarding placement. On-going ***Self Evaluation*** gathers and analyzes outcome data, providing feedback that is used to guide Agency practice towards the goal of continuous quality improvement, resulting in improved lives for the children and families of St. Louis City.

#### Goal

The goal of TDM is to involve family and community members, along with caregivers, service providers and agency staff in all decisions regarding child removal, placement and permanency (reunification, emancipation, aging out, guardianship, etc.) and to ensure a network of support for children and the adults who care for them.

The focus of the TDM meeting is to preserve the family, and at the same time, provide for the child's safety and well being. When possible, the family and community's strengths are used to form safety plans that will enable children to safely remain or immediately return home with appropriate services. When this is not possible, plans are made that reflect the least restrictive placement possible for each child that will both keep the child safe, and preserve and nurture the child's familial and community connections.

## Meeting Types and Requirements

**TDM meetings are required under each of the following circumstances:**

### Child Removals:

- Prior to removing a child(Pre-custody), or
- Within one working day of an emergency removal

### Placement Changes:

Prior to any change in a child's placement, including:

- Potential/requested placement changes
- Emergency placement changes
- Move to a concurrent planning home, unless change was planned in a prior TDM meeting
- A TDM meeting is to take place as soon as possible following an unanticipated court ordered placement change
- When a child is away without leave (AWOL) from a placement, the TDM meeting will be held after the child returns.
- *The only time a TDM is held after a placement change would be if the current living arrangement is deemed unsafe for the child. These TDMs will be held as soon after the move as possible.*

**\*There is no longer a five day rule for post placement TDMs. A TDM will be held for all placement changes BEFORE the placement occurs.\***

### Permanency:

- Reunification
- Prior to a trial home visit, (schedule before the child begins overnight visits) or
- Immediately following a court ordered reunification
- Prior to any hearing in which a permanency recommendation will be made
- Adoption staffings are held instead of a TDM when the purpose of the move is strictly for the goal of adoption. Children's Division adoption staff are to be invited and in attendance at these meetings.

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**Exceptions****Foster Care  
Investigations**

When children are removed from a foster home or group home due to 4 allegations of abuse or neglect by the caregivers, a change of placement TDM meeting is to occur within 3 days of removal. The meeting is to be scheduled and attended by the assigned social worker. Foster care or group home monitoring staff are to be invited to the TDM meeting,

The focus of the meeting is to be on the placement needs of the child (ren), not the allegations. The caregivers are to be invited to attend the meeting. Case carrying staff will invite homefinding/licensing staff to the TDM meeting.

**Legal  
Guardianship**

When a legal guardianship, either dependent or non-dependent, is at risk, a Pre-Custody TDM meeting will be scheduled

**Confidentiality**

The focus of TDM meetings is to reach a decision regarding child placement, including the option of the child remaining or returning home, if safe. The meeting is not an investigation, and the case manager is expected to introduce any and all concerns at this time.

All information shared in a TDM meeting is considered confidential, and is to be treated with respect. Information learned in a TDM is not to be repeated or discussed unnecessarily. However, information discussed in a TDM may be disclosed in court proceedings, and it may be used for case planning purposes. All mandated reporting laws will be in effect, and if further abuse is disclosed, this information would be reported to the appropriate agency.

Limits of confidentiality will be explained to parents at the beginning of the meeting.

**Scheduling**

The Children's Division (CD) worker requesting placement or change of placement will complete a TDM request form (see attached) and either email or fax the request to the scheduler at Prince Hall. Once the completed form is received, the scheduler will review the request and whenever possible schedule the meeting to comply with the times the worker has identified under preferences.

Most TDMs are held during business hours, however exceptions are considered on a case by case basis. Requests are subject to the availability of the facilitator and meeting space.

The scheduler will contact the worker who requested the TDM via email to confirm the time and place of the TDM. Whenever possible, the scheduler will also send invitation as a courtesy to identified participants if their email address is on file or provided and requested by the worker. The worker is still primarily responsible for inviting the parents, caregivers, potential or current service providers and other persons who can support the team process.

The ongoing/intake worker is responsible for informing parents of the meeting purpose, goal, and time/location and to encourage parent(s) to bring persons as family support. It is crucial that the worker conduct a preparatory meeting to clarify what the TDM is about and to enable the family to make good choices regarding who they will invite. The family is encouraged to invite key support people.

After-hour workers must provide information about the TDM process to parents/caregivers when removals occur after hours. A brochure is available which explains the TDM process to give to parents and other people attending the TDM.

**NOTE: The ongoing/intake worker should not inform any participants of the time/location of the meeting before receiving confirmation from the scheduler.**

The Deputy Juvenile Officer (DJO), Guardian Ad Litem (GAL) or the caregiver may request a TDM through the TDM scheduler. The scheduler will forward that request to the worker, supervisor and program manager, whom then will be responsible for scheduling the meeting.

**Scheduling—  
Pre-custody  
(Initial) and  
Emergency  
Removals**

**Assigned Children Service Worker:**

When there is a possibility a child may have to be brought into protective custody, or when an emergency protective custody has occurred, the assigned worker is to:

- Consult with his or her supervisor regarding the situation (for a possible removal).
- Complete consultation with an available qualified consultant when a consultation is required.
- Complete the TDM scheduling request form and request a TDM meeting be held that same day, or the next working day.
- If completing the removal after working hours, leave a message on the Scheduler's voice mail requesting a meeting be scheduled. Follow up with a referral form on the next working day.
- Notify the TDM facilitator of any special needs or concerns such as the need for an interpreter or security presence due to family or domestic violence.
- Discuss parent's availability and location preference before scheduling in order to increase participation.
- Fill out the section of the TDM brochure, indicating the date, time and location of the TDM meeting.
- Give the brochure to the parents, explain the meeting, and encourage their participation.
- Encourage the parents to invite extended family members and other support people who you do mind if confidential information is shared

with. Parents should invite no more than five support persons to the meeting. Some possible support people for the parents to invite are: 6

- Family and friends
  - Service providers
  - Substitute care providers
  - Clergy and other church personnel/members
  - Teachers/school staff
  - Any others who may support the parents and child (ren).
- Discuss the meeting with the child. If appropriate, invite the child to the meeting (See Participants and Roles below for further information).
  - Encourage the child to invite support people (see list above for suggestions).

**Scheduling—  
Placement  
Change and  
Permanency  
Meetings**

The assigned social worker or supervisor may request a change of placement/reunification meeting or a permanency TDM meeting by completing the TDM form and sending the form via email or fax to the TDM scheduling desk. Placement change meetings will generally be held prior to the possible move and within 3 working days of the request for the meeting.

**Meeting  
Notification/  
Invitation**

Meeting notification/invitations will be completed as follows:

<b>POSSIBLE PARTICIPANT</b>	<b>PERSON RESPONSIBLE TO NOTIFY</b>
Parents	Assigned social worker
Child(ren)	Assigned social worker
Other participants requested by the parents	Parents and assigned social worker
Participants requested by the child	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Child, or</li> <li>• Assigned social worker (if participant is known to the worker)</li> </ul>
Other agencies Family Court personnel, Voice for Children volunteers, etc.	Assigned social worker, or TDM staff, at the social worker's request

**Location**

TDMs are held at the local Children Division offices: Prince Hall, South Broadway, Sigel School and the Wainwright Building. TDMs may be held at other community locations. Other locations within the community may be available and will be added on a case by case basis. All locations will be convenient to participants and accessible to persons with disabilities. Locations will also be safe, quiet and have adequate seating and parking for all participants.

**Security**

**Staff may consider the following special arrangements to address security concerns:**

**Referring Social Worker:**

- Alert TDM scheduler of **ANY SECURITY CONCERNS** when requesting the meeting, or as soon as the concerns become known.
- Request that the TDM meeting be held in a Social Services office.

**TDM Facilitator:**

- Alert Security of any security concerns.
- Arrange seating to provide quick access to the door.
- When serious concerns are present, consider arranging for the person to participate from another location through a conference call.
- See Domestic Violence and Special Circumstances sections below for further information.

**Participants and Roles—  
Parents, Family  
and Other  
Support People**

Non-CD participants at TDM meetings may include the following. Please see the “Special Circumstances” section below for further information.

- **Birth parent(s) (prior to TPR)**
  - The expert on the child and family—essential to the TDM process.
- **Child**
  - Assigned Social Worker to discuss attendance with all children age 12 and over.
  - Assigned Social Worker to discuss meeting with younger children, obtaining child's input regarding the issues to be discussed, as appropriate.
  - Some circumstances to consider when deciding if a child should attend:
    - ◆ Child's choice—child can decide not to attend.
    - ◆ Circumstances—parent's emotionally abusive or hostile towards the child, mental illness, sexual abuse, domestic violence.
    - ◆ Child's developmental age, to be considered as well as his or her chronological age.
- **Caregiver**
  - Provides information on the needs of the child
  - Active participant in sharing placement options
- **Extended family and non-related support people**
  - May attend with the parent's consent.

- Provides support to the child, parents, and/or caregiver, and to help generate positive options for the child's placement and safety needs.
- **Community service providers**
  - May attend with the parent's consent
  - Provides support and information regarding needed resources and services.
- **Child Advocate/VFC/Court Personnel**
  - Provides support for the child, as needed.
  - Provides information regarding needed resources and services.
- **Attorney**
  - For the child or the parent

**NOTE:** Please see "Special Circumstances" below for further information regarding participants.

**Participants and Roles—  
Facilitator**

- Assigned to families throughout the life of the case, when possible.
- Focuses other participants on the purpose of the meeting and the well-being of the child (ren).
- Encourages all participants to plainly voice all applicable concerns, while maintaining an environment of respect and safety.
- Encourages consensus.
- Provides a copy of the meeting summary report to participants
- Must seek a review if he or she believes the decision will not keep the child safe or violates Agency policy. (See Review Process section)
- Responsible for data entry of some meeting and outcome information (See Documentation section below).

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**Participants and Roles—  
Assigned  
Children's  
Service Worker**

- Requests meeting.
- Encourages parents to invite support people to the meeting.
- Invites service providers and others to the meeting.
- Invites parents and other possible participants known to the Social worker.
- Must attend the TDM meeting.
- Notifies the child's assigned attorney of the TDM, when the child has a representing attorney.

**NOTE:** The notice is not intended to seek permission for the TDM, nor is it an invitation to the attorney to attend the meeting.

- Provides a thorough report regarding the safety concerns that brought the family to the attention of the agency.
- Provides information regarding the family's strengths.
- For all meetings, completes the Risk and Safety Assessment prior to the TDM meeting, brings the document to the meeting, and is prepared to



discuss any and all concerns regarding child safety with the family during<sup>9</sup> the meeting.

- Maintains receptivity to group input regarding safety and placement planning.
  - Presents own thoughts regarding safety and placement plans.  
Comes to the meeting prepared to discuss possible placement options.
  - Makes final decision (along with his or her supervisor, when present), if consensus cannot be reached.
  - Files a copy of the TDM Meeting Plan in the child's service folder.
  - Follows up with participants who left the meeting early regarding any decisions that were made, if necessary.
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**Participants and Roles—  
Children's Service Supervisor**

- Are to attend all TDM meetings with each of their workers,
  - Must send an alternate supervisor/program manager if not able to attend.
  - Maintains receptivity to group input regarding safety and placement planning.
  - Presents own thoughts regarding safety and placement plans.
  - Participates in group discussion to generate appropriate safety and/or placement plans for the child.
  - May not request a review of the decision if not in attendance.
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**Pagers/Cell Phones**

All TDM participants are to turn their pagers and cell phones off, or to silent (not vibrate) mode.

Workers may not take calls or leave during the course of the meeting unless the facilitator believes a short break would benefit the participants.

The TDM facilitator will remind participants about this policy at the beginning of each meeting.

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**Special Circumstances**

The following circumstances may require special arrangements for the TDM meeting. Consultation with the assigned Children's Service Worker, the Supervisor and the meeting facilitator is to be considered.

- Domestic violence
  - See Domestic violence section below.
- Sexual/emotional/on-going abuse
  - Consider the needs of the child (ren) and family when arranging TDM meetings for these sensitive situations.
- History of violence
  - The person with the history of violence may need to participate through a telephone call, or by providing written input.
  - Alert the facilitator and Security if there are any concerns regarding possible violence.

- Criminal prosecution possible or in progress
  - Consider consulting with the Detective/Investigator involved.
- Incarcerated/hospitalized parents
  - Consider a conference call, Polycom camera, or written statement from the parent.

**Domestic  
Violence and  
Sexual Abuse**

When there is **current** or **historical** domestic violence or sexual abuse within a family scheduled for a TDM meeting, the following procedures will be observed:

- Referring Social Worker to request a secure site for the meeting (e.g. SSA offices with security).
- Alert Security of possible increased security needs.
- Restraining orders—the restrained person is not to attend a meeting with the protected person.
- The offender may participate from another location via conference call, if telephone contact is not prohibited as a condition of the restraining order.
- Consider security for the meeting, and for participants when walking out to their cars.
- Arrange for a domestic violence or sexual abuse advocate to attend the TDM meeting, if the victim agrees and an advocate is available.
- Remember that the best way to protect a child exposed to domestic violence is by helping the abused parent to stay safe by forming a safety plan.

**Meeting  
Steps/Process**

TDM meetings will generally be structured as follows:

- The facilitator will begin the meeting by explaining the purpose and meeting guidelines.
- All meeting participants are asked to present the family's strengths.
- The CD worker defines the issue to be discussed/resolved in that meeting.
- The facilitator encourages direct, respectful discussion, focused on the purpose for the meeting.
- Consensus is sought and final decisions are formulated.
- The meeting will generally take 1 1/2 hours. Staff should block the entire 2 hours on their calendar to be present, prepared and willing to debrief if needed.
- The facilitator records meeting information and decisions on the TDM Meeting Summary form, obtains each participant's signature, and gives a copy to each participant before they leave.

**Meeting  
Guidelines**

At the beginning of each TDM meeting, the facilitator will explain the following meeting guidelines. Additionally, the meeting guidelines will be posted on their name tents. At the beginning of each meeting the facilitator will review the guidelines and ask each participant if he or she would like to

add anything, and to make a commitment to follow the guidelines for the meeting. 11

1. Right to Privacy.
2. Everyone has the right to speak and ask questions.
3. We will treat each other with respect.
4. It is OK to disagree.
5. Speak honestly without shaming or blaming.
6. Turn off cell phones during the meeting.

**PLEASE PARTICIPATE FULLY IN THE MEETING.  
THE SUCCESS OF THIS MEETING IS UP TO ALL OF US!**

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**Decision  
Making/  
Consensus**

The goal of the TDM meeting is to reach group consensus regarding safety and placement decisions for the child. Reaching consensus may be facilitated by focusing on the purpose of the meeting, positive brainstorming, and actively sharing the common goal of doing what is best for the child.

Reaching consensus does not necessarily mean that each participant totally agrees with everything; however each participant has consented to the plan and agreed to support the decision made by the team.

Decisions are to be made according to the following hierarchy:

- Group consensus
- CD core staff attending the meeting consensus (Core staff is the assigned social worker, his or her supervisor and the facilitator.)
- Assigned Social Worker/Supervisor (if attending the meeting) decision.

NOTE: Please see the Review section below for further information regarding decision making in TDM meetings.

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**Review Process**

It is the role of the facilitator to assure that each participant is engaged in the discussion and has the opportunity to state a view of the case, including an opinion on the recommendation reached. If the group cannot reach consensus, the Children's Division maintains legal responsibility to make a decision regarding the placement of the child.

If a Children's Division employee, contracted staff, or the facilitator feels the team's decision places the child at risk of harm or violates a law, or CD policy that individual may appeal the decision to the Children's Division Director of designee. The facilitator must immediately notify the Children's Division director or designee by conference call. The appeal is to include all participants in attendance at the original meeting and should be held immediately following the TDM meeting.

Only participants who are agency staff and have attended the TDM may appeal the decision of the team. 12

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**Meeting  
Process  
Feedback**

TDM meeting participants may contact the TDM manager if they would like to provide input regarding the TDM meeting process. Input is to be confined to meeting process issues, such as the meeting format, timing and structure. Decisions reached by the TDM participants are not to be re-examined as a part of the feedback process.

TDM recommendations are binding and represent the recommendation of the agency.

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**Documentation**

TDM facilitators are responsible to complete the Meeting Summary form and the required data entry forms for each meeting:

- Complete the Meeting Summary form and give each participant a copy.
  - Complete the TDM data entry forms.
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**TDM  
Check Points**

The following procedures will be put in place to ensure that TDM meetings are being scheduled and held as required:

**Emergency placement (removals) meetings**

- The TDM scheduler will review a placement email received from Family Court each morning to determine if all CD-involved removals from the prior day have been scheduled for an Emergency Placement TDM meeting.
- If a meeting is not scheduled for an Emergency Placement TDM, the scheduler will call the assigned emergency response social worker to coordinate the meeting.

**Placement change and permanency meetings**

- Change of placement reports will be completed to determine compliance.
  - Supervisors are expected to ensure that TDM meetings are completed as mandated.
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**Forms**

**Form Name**

TDM Scheduling Request Form  
TDM Meeting Summary Report  
TDM Brochure  
TDM Notes Form  
TDM Facilitator Evaluation Form

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