# Key Characteristics of Family Meetings

## Some Core Values of Family Meetings
- All families have strengths
- Families are the experts on themselves
- Families deserve to be treated with dignity and respect
- Families can make well-informed decisions about keeping their children safe when supported
- When families are involved in decision-making, outcomes can improve
- A team is often more capable of creative & high-quality decision-making than an individual

## Models and Characteristics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Models</th>
<th>Characteristics Shared by All</th>
<th>(TDM) Team Decision-Making</th>
<th>(FDGM) Family Group Decision-Making</th>
<th>(FTC) Family Team Conference</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Purpose</td>
<td>To provide support to families at risk of or already involved with the child welfare system, in a strengths-based team setting which ensures child safety</td>
<td>To make immediate decisions regarding a child’s placement.</td>
<td>To develop a plan that ensures protection of a child.</td>
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<td>Goal of Meeting</td>
<td>To make best possible plans by using a solution-focused team approach and ensuring a family’s voice is central</td>
<td>Team, including family, seeks consensus decision regarding placement that protects child and preserves or reunifies families.</td>
<td>Family, with support of others, makes a plan for child to ensure safety and stabilize current crisis</td>
<td>Family, using expertise and support of team members, develops plan to address needs and utilize strengths, at a variety of critical points</td>
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| Distinctive Elements | - Needs/strengths-focused  
- Culturally appropriate  
- Individualized plans developed  
- Inclusive (participants w/ family input critical  
- Linkages to continuing supports, both natural and traditional | Held for EVERY placement-related decision faced by EVERY family served by the public child welfare agency | - Private family time  
- Family traditions/culture emphasized | - Family tells the “family story”  
- Option to use for prevention purposes with families not yet involved with the CW system |
| Decision Responsibility | Goal is to place the family at the center of decision-making; ultimately the assigned social worker must approve of plans made | Agency maintains responsibility if consensus regarding placement issue cannot be achieved | Family develops plan that protects child, sharing responsibility with agency | Family determines outcome, except for identified non-negotiable issues |
| Scheduling Requirements | Varies… | Mandatory—meeting held before any placement or re-placement occurs, or before any initial court hearing in cases of imminent risk of removal | Voluntary—meeting is held only with family’s approval and if scheduled by assigned worker or other involved person | Voluntary—meeting is held only with family’s approval and if scheduled by family’s assigned worker or community worker |
| Referral | Varies… | Assigned social worker required to schedule when placement-related decision must be made | Any professional involved with family may refer at any time | Assigned social worker, family, or other team members may refer at anytime |
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| **Preparation** | Preparing the family for the meeting is both respectful and important to positive outcomes     | • Often limited preparation due to crisis nature of many placement decisions  
  • Assigned social worker invites and preps them                                                                                      | • Emphasis on advance planning, often 20-30 hours total, over 3-4 weeks period  
  • Coordinator invites and prepares family and others                                                                                    | Assigned social worker or community worker has pre-meeting with the family to determine goal/desired outcome, and to prepare family and identify team members |
| **Team Members** | Birth parents and extended family, including non-relative supports as family chooses; child (as appropriate), service providers, assigned social worker, involved agency staff (i.e. supervisor)  
  Typically CASA or GAL (not attorney)                                                                                                        | All family members are encouraged to attend, even if birth parents object                                                                 | Family decided on participants with input from facilitator |
| **Facilitator** | Trained facilitators with strong strengths-based orientation and excellent group process skills                                                                 | Impartial facilitator, often coordinator of meeting who is responsible for pre-meeting preparation | Trained agency staff, often the assigned social worker or community-based service provider |
| **Length of Meeting** | Varies…                                                                                      | One to two hours                                                                                           | Three to five hours                                                                                               | Varies |
| **Confidentiality** | Privacy and respect are core values and set the tone for the meeting. New allegations of abuse/neglect must be reported | Focus on privacy—family told information may be used for case planning, or in court if necessary. USE OF FORMS IS DISCOURAGED                      | Signed agreement of confidentiality often used                                                               | Signed confidentiality statement used |
| **Post Meeting Responsibilities** | Attention to post-meeting safety and emotional issues is a part of the discussion. Follow-up meetings are typical  
  • Assigned social worker primarily responsible to implement decision from meeting; other participants play support role  
  • Outcome data collected and used for self evaluation                                                                                     | Assigned social worker responsible for monitoring and ensure plan is implemented                              | Primary social worker or community person monitors individualized course of action plan and makes adjustments if necessary |
| **Usage** | Growing! And complementary … a continuum of family meeting types provides the opportunity for best practice and positive outcomes  
  TDM is a core strategy used in over 80 AECF Family to Family sites including Cleveland, Louisville, Detroit, Denver and San Francisco  
  Variations of FGDM in place in several hundred US sites and in Canada and Europe  
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