

**WASHINGTON STATE  
FAMILY TEAM DECISION-MAKING MEETING  
PRACTICE GUIDE**

<b>Purpose</b>	A Family Team Decision-Making meeting is a facilitated team process which can include birth/adoptive parents, guardians, extended family members, youth (as appropriate), community members, service providers, child welfare staff and/or caregivers. These meetings are held to make critical decisions regarding the placement of children following an emergent removal of child(ren) from their home, changes in out-of-home placement, and reunification or placement into a permanent home. There may be instances when a FTDM can be held prior to placement if there is not an immediate safety threat such as a child who is on a hospital hold and a FTDM could provide placement options. Permanency planning starts the moment children are placed out of their homes and are discussed during a Family Team Decision-Making meeting. A Family Team Decision-Making meeting will take place in all placement decisions to achieve the least restrictive, safest placement, in the best interest of the child. By utilizing this inclusive process, a network of support for the child(ren) and adults who care for them is assured.
<b>Definition of a FTDM meeting</b>	A meeting that brings families and communities together with the people involved in their lives to <b>make decisions</b> about the placement of the child.
<b>Goal</b>	Consensus regarding a decision that provides the safest and least-restrictive placement in the best interest of the child. The priorities are to protect children, preserve or reunify families and/or prevent placement disruption. Consensus is the goal, however the final decision remains with Children’s Administration.
<b>Decision-Making</b>	<b>A consensus driven decision-making process</b> does not necessarily imply unanimity. Consensus allows individuals’ ideas and suggestions to be heard and considered during the FTDM meeting. However, by law, Children’s Administration is ultimately responsible to make the decision that provides safety for the child(ren). The social worker and/or the supervisor will make the placement decision <u>in the absence of consensus</u> .
<b>Types of FTDM Meetings</b>	
<b>Imminent Risk of Removal</b> <i>The child has not been legally placed (i.e. there is not a placement episode in Famlink).</i> <i>The child however, may have been placed</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>informally by police</i></li> <li>• <i>there may be a hospital</i></li> </ul>	Meetings are held when children reside with their parents/legal guardians and are at imminent risk of placement due to present or impending danger. The decision for placement for a child who is in present or impending danger and there are no protective factors such as a hospital hold or informal placement by law enforcement must be made immediately. At no time can a child be left in a situation where they are in danger to wait for a FTDM. The purpose is to determine if a safety plan can be developed that can control the safety threats or substitute for

<p><i>hold</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>the child may be informally placed by the parent with a relative/neighbor, etc.</i></li> </ul>	<p>diminished protective capacities and allow the child(ren) to safely remain in the parent's care. If it is determined that a child must be temporarily removed in order to control the identified safety threats, the group will work to identify the best, least restrictive placement option for the child. If children cannot be safe with their families, the priority will be to place siblings safely together in the homes of relatives.</p>
<p><b>Emergency Placement</b></p> <p><i>The child is</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>in protective custody</i></li> <li>• <i>there has been a pick-up order or</i></li> <li>• <i>A VPA has been signed.</i></li> </ul>	<p>Meetings are required to occur within 72 hours of placement and always prior to the Shelter-care hearing when a child has been placed on an emergency basis. The primary goal of an emergency placement meeting is to develop a safety plan to sufficiently control threats to allow the child to safely return home. If safety threats cannot be adequately controlled, the child must continue to reside outside of the parent's home and an out of home safety plan must be developed. The team assesses the placement options and proposes the safest and least-restrictive place for the child to live.</p>
<p><b>Placement Move:</b></p> <p><i>When</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>a child is in a legal placement and the placement is potentially disrupting or</i></li> <li>• <i>a move is imminent.</i></li> </ul>	<p>Meetings are held when a child's placement may be changing. The primary purpose of the meeting is to create a plan that will maintain the child in the current placement. In cases where the placement cannot be preserved, it is still important to hold a FTDM to assess the cause of the placement disruption, determine the appropriateness of the new placement, and assist future placement stability. This is a forum for a mutual exchange of information between birth parents, their identified supports, social work staff, community providers, current caregivers and proposed caregivers.</p>
<p><b>Exit from Care:</b></p> <p><i>Whenever reunification with the birth parent is being considered</i></p>	<p>The primary purpose of an Exit from Care FTDM meeting is to determine if a child can safely return to his/her family and the parents have made sufficient progress in reducing or controlling the safety threats that resulted in the child's out-of-home placement.</p>
	<p><b>Roles Of Participants</b></p>
<p><b>Roles of Participants</b></p>	<p>Each FTDM meeting will involve a family-specific team, the composition will be determined by the family and agency personnel. If the parent(s) object to the attendance of any of the potential participants other than agency staff, the social worker, facilitator and parents should discuss the advantage of the participant's inclusion in the process. If the parent(s) continue to object and/or refuse to participate, the parents' wishes will be honored.</p>
<p><b>Social Worker</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Social worker is the content expert</i></li> </ul>	<p><b>Before the Meeting</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The social worker and supervisor discuss the family level and individual level safety threats in order for the social worker to have a conversation with the family and</li> </ul>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>The assigned or referring social worker is required to attend the FTDM meeting. If unable to attend, the social worker's supervisor will attend in place of the assigned worker.</i></li> </ul>	<p>support networks around a placement decision.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The social worker explains the process of the FTDM meeting to the family and other participants involved with the child. The family is strongly encouraged to attend and to bring additional relatives and/or support persons to the meeting. The social worker also explains the benefits of a Community Representative at the FTDM meeting and encourages the family to allow their attendance if possible.</li> <li>• The social worker completes the FTDM referral form and sends it to the appropriate designee.</li> <li>• The assigned social worker notifies the FTDM facilitator when serious safety/Domestic Violence concerns are indicated.</li> </ul> <p><b>During the Meeting</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The social worker is on time to the meeting and makes necessary plans to stay for the length of the meeting without interruption.</li> <li>• The social worker assists the team in developing a decision that maintains the child in the safest, least-restrictive environment.</li> <li>• If consensus is not reached, the social worker will be asked to consider all of the information and make a final recommendation regarding the child's placement.</li> </ul> <p><b>After the Meeting</b></p> <p>The social worker completes all safety/action plan tasks assigned to the social worker within the timeframes specified, and monitors the follow through in open cases.</p>
<p><b>Supervisor</b></p> <p><i>Supervisors are strongly encouraged to attend FTDM meetings. When a supervisor is not present during a FTDM meeting the social worker will have the final decision-making capabilities if the consensus decision differs from the recommendation previously agreed upon by supervisor and social worker during the pre-FTDM consult. A supervisor's presence is <u>required</u> when the social worker has NOT been empowered with decision-making authority if consensus during the meeting cannot be reached around the</i></p>	<p><b>Before the Meeting</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The supervisor consults with the social worker about the appropriateness of scheduling a FTDM meeting. If the meeting is appropriate, the supervisor consults with the social worker and assists in identifying the family level and individual safety threats, protective capacities, protective factors, and other issues concerning placement.</li> </ul> <p><b>During the Meeting</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The supervisor is prepared to help set a tone of respect, open-mindedness, and creative problem solving. The supervisor is on time to the meeting and makes necessary plans to stay for the length of the meeting without interruption. The supervisor assists the team in developing a decision that maintains the child in the safest, least restrictive environment.</li> </ul> <p><b>After the Meeting</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The supervisor communicates with staff to ensure that</li> </ul>

<p><i>placement decision.</i></p>	<p>the placement decision and safety/action plan are followed.</p>
<p><b>Facilitator</b>  <i>The facilitator is a trained process expert who works with the social worker to lead the group through the decision making process. The facilitator is a full team member who, like other agency personnel, is responsible for high quality decisions.</i></p> <p><i>The FTDM facilitator is expected to seek review of the social worker's decision in situations where:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Consensus is not reached,</i></li> <li>• <i>He/she is unable to support the decision because of the belief that it a child is not safe or the threat of serious harm exists or violates law or policy.</i></li> </ul> <p><i>The facilitator provides a summary report to participants outlining the decision and action steps.</i></p>	<p><b>Before the Meeting</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The facilitator confirms the date and time of the FTDM meeting with the social worker and the supervisor.</li> <li>• The facilitator arranges for any security needs, language access, and disability access for the meeting.</li> <li>• The facilitator maintains necessary supplies for the meetings.</li> <li>• The facilitator arrives early to set up for the meeting.</li> <li>• The facilitator reviews the participants invited to the FTDM prior to the meeting in order to ensure a network of support for the child(ren) and family are present at the FTDM.</li> </ul> <p><b>During the Meeting</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The facilitator begins all FTDM meetings by emphasizing child safety and the need to develop a placement plan that will meet the child's safety needs in the least restrictive, least intrusive manner.</li> <li>• The facilitator reviews the purpose of the FTDM meeting and explains the ground rules.</li> <li>• The facilitator explains the necessity of privacy as well as the exceptions to confidentiality.</li> <li>• The facilitator remains focused and diligent regarding the safety concerns for the child.</li> <li>• The facilitator ensures that all participants have an opportunity to share their input and ask questions.</li> <li>• The facilitator utilizes group process skills to guide the meeting toward a consensus agreement on a plan to ensure the safety of the child(ren) in the least restrictive placement.</li> <li>• The facilitator utilizes charting methods in order to have a visual aid for the participants to follow the stages during the meeting.</li> <li>• The facilitator documents the Safety/Action Plan and makes copies for all participants.</li> </ul> <p><b>After the Meeting</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The facilitator enters the FTDM meeting results into Famlink within 5 working days.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Facilitator's Supervisor</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Facilitator's Supervisor will provide clinical supervision to the FTDM facilitator based on direct quarterly observations of FTDM meetings or by observations from a designated lead worker who has been trained to the FTDM approach by attending the FTDM training.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Area</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In the event consensus about the placement cannot be</li> </ul>

<b>Administrator</b>	<p>reached between staff the area administrator is available for a FTDM meeting review. The area administrator, or designee (if AA is unavailable), will be brought directly into the FTDM meeting either in person or by phone for the review process. The area administrator will make the placement decision after hearing the information presented at the FTDM. <u>That decision will be final.</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The area administrator provides guidance for compliance with the FTDM Policy and Practice Guide.</li> <li>• When an area administrator is directly supervising the FTDM facilitator, the AA will demonstrate comprehensive knowledge of the FTDM Policy and Practice guide.</li> </ul>
<b>Regional Administrator</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The regional administrator provides guidance to area administrators to assist with FTDM Policy and Practice Guide compliance.</li> <li>• The regional administrator reviews the FTDM data with the area administrators to consider utilization, compliance and outcomes.</li> </ul>
<b>Parents/Legal Guardians</b>	<p>The parents or legal guardians are recognized as the experts on the family’s needs and protective capacities. Their presence and involvement is integral to the meeting. However, if they are not in attendance the meeting must still take place. The parents are strongly encouraged to attend and to bring additional relatives and/or support persons to the meeting.</p>
<b>Child/Youth</b>	<p>Children/youth age twelve and over or as developmentally appropriate, should be invited and supported to participate and attend the meeting. Children younger than age twelve should be considered for participation on a case-by-case basis. If child/youth cannot attend, or is not age-appropriate, and there are no other designated representative for the child at the table, the social worker should obtain the views of the child prior to the FTDM meeting and voice them at the table unless it poses a safety risk to the child.</p>
<b>Extended Family and Non-Relative Supports</b>	<p>Extended family members and non-relative supports can be invited by parents or Children’s Administration to provide support, assistance or resources to the child and/or the parent(s). They also participate fully in developing ideas and reaching a placement decision during the FTDM meeting.</p>
<b>Current caregivers, kin providers, foster family members</b>	<p>Current caregivers, kin providers, foster family members assist in providing information regarding child(ren)’s adjustment, progress, needs; and in developing ideas and reaching decisions. Typically these participants would be invited for FTDM placement preservation or placement move meetings.</p>
<b>Community Representative</b>	<p>Community Representatives are defined as members of the family’s community, whether based on neighborhood, ethnicity, religion or other natural connections. They are invited by the agency, based on an existing partnership, to provide support,</p>

	resource expertise, cultural understanding, and an external perspective to decision making. Community Representatives should be invited to all FTDM meetings with the permission of the parents, but especially to those that involve an emergent or potential removal of a youth from his/her birth family. (e.g. a Veteran Parent located in a family's neighborhood)
<b>Service Provider</b>	Service Providers, currently or previously involved with the family, may include, but are not limited to, chemical dependency professionals, domestic violence experts, mental health clinicians, public health nurses, educational providers, CASA/Guardian Ad Litem volunteers, and private agency staff.
<b>Tribal Representatives</b>	Tribal representatives are invited when the family is eligible to be, or is a member of a tribe or band, or identifies with a specific tribe or band. If the family identifies as Indian, but is not a member or eligible for membership in a tribe, the social worker will make efforts to identify and invite a LICWAC member to be present at the FTDM meeting.
<b>Attorney</b>	Attorneys may be present in a support role. These meetings are not legal proceedings and are not court actions.
<b>Confidentiality</b>	The confidentiality of information shared at the FTDM meeting cannot be guaranteed. Privacy and respect are emphasized, but parents must be 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. All participants will be asked to sign a Confidentiality Statement form at the beginning of each meeting. This form should be filed in the case file.
<b>Excluding Participants</b>	<p>Certain circumstances may require that an individual be excluded from participation in the FTDM meeting. Those circumstances include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• When there is an on-going police investigation and the facilitator is advised that inclusion may jeopardize the investigation</li> <li>• When domestic violence is indicated, the alleged perpetrator should not be present with the alleged victim</li> <li>• Participation would result in violation of a no-contact order</li> <li>• It has been determined that participation could create an unsafe situation for other participants</li> </ul> <p><b>If exclusion of a participant may be necessary, those with concerns should consult with the FTDM facilitator.</b></p>
<b>The Review Process</b>	<p>A review of the FTDM meeting placement decision can only be initiated by an agency staff person and only:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Because of a concern with the safety/action plan proposed that is not aligned with current policy or law.</li> <li>• A Children's Administration staff member feels that a lesser restrictive, less intrusive placement option is adequate to</li> </ul>

	<p>keep the child safe.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The request for review is scheduled immediately, before the meeting concludes.</li><li>• In the event that no consensus has been reached by the end of the meeting. In this situation, the area administrator, or designee (if the AA is unavailable), will be brought directly into the meeting either in person or by phone and will arbitrate the review process and make the placement decision. <u>That decision will be final.</u></li></ul>
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