

# Roles, Responsibilities and Tasks of the Caseworker in Support of Family Meetings

The role of the caseworker in family meetings is considered in three sections: Before, during and after family meetings.

## Before

- The caseworker will make a decision to pursue a family meeting process with a family based on the needs of the family and the criteria developed in the local district's approach to implementing family meetings.
- Because family meetings are voluntary, the referring caseworker is responsible for contacting key family members (typically the parents or guardians) to briefly describe the family meeting process and to ascertain their willingness to have a family meeting facilitator contact them about engaging the wider family circle as partners in creating solutions and making decisions.
- The caseworker provides a referral to the facilitator. This typically includes information such as family telephone numbers and addresses, the critical incident that led to the family's involvement with the local district, a synopsis of the major issues in the case, and the issues or decisions for planning consideration.
- Just before the family meeting review the case file and be able to answer questions from the family regarding process, legal status, and bottom line, non-negotiable items.

## During the Family Meeting

- It is important that the facilitator and caseworker work together to promote an atmosphere that allows the family to make decisions and take ownership of their plan and the child welfare concerns. The caseworker's tone during the family meeting is one that can either be an asset or create an "us and them" power differential that undermines the entire process.
- The caseworker should be present for all of the family meeting except for private family time, if that has been integrated into the meeting.
- At the family meeting, the caseworker is one of the key information providers to the family group. The caseworker summarizes the critical incident or decision point that precipitated the family meeting and outlines *all* major safety and

permanency issues that the family's plan must address, as well as key information and relevant timelines. Family members have the opportunity to ask questions and get clarification from the caseworker.

- Due to the emotional intensity of many family group conferences, coupled with the increased presence of the widened family circle, oftentimes the caseworker can feel as if he or she is in the "hot seat." Therefore, it is important for the caseworker to come prepared to directly and tactfully share very difficult information with the family.
- Be prepared to present the case in an impartial manner. Avoid editorializing or making value judgments on the facts of the case. It is important that a family meeting tone of "us versus them" does not emerge. 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 local district" or "the Court." This allows the caseworker to depersonalize the actions for themselves and the family.
- Be able to articulate any bottom line, 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 well-being needs of the family.
- The goal of the family meeting 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.
- The caseworker may need to work with the family to finalize the plan and locate resources that the family identified outside the scope of the meeting.
- If the final plan meets all safety and permanency considerations, it is the caseworker's obligation to accept it. If elements of the plan cannot be accepted, the caseworker is obligated to describe the agency's concerns. If the concerns cannot be rectified, it is the caseworker's responsibility to not accept the plan.
- If there is any uncertainty about the plan, the caseworker consults with the supervisor and other relevant service providers (e.g., schools, domestic violence).

### **After the Meeting**

- The caseworker is responsible for translating the decisions and plans that resulted from the family meeting into the case record in general and into the service plan in particular.
- The caseworker is responsible for monitoring and follows up with the family to support and ensure that the plan is implemented as envisioned.
- If there are barriers or difficulties with implementing the plan, the caseworker may need to request another family meeting to revisit the decisions and plans made by the family during the previous family meeting.

