

Participating in Family Meetings: Information for Parents and Family Members

What is a Family meeting?

- It is families being in charge of their own lives. Family Meetings are meetings where families and their relatives make plans for the well being of their children. Family Meetings may be helpful if your family is involved with DSS or Court.
- With the help of caseworker and a family meeting facilitator your family meets with relatives, friends and other support people at a Family Meeting to create a plan that is in the best interest of your children.
- Family Meetings is used to empower your family to invest in their own strength and energy to create a workable plan rather than having professionals setting up a plan and the family not being able to make it work.
- The Family Meetings process helps to create cooperation, collaboration, and communication between families and professionals.
- Family meetings are intended to increase the use of kinship care, capitalize on family strengths, and create a partnership and shared decision-making process between the family and DSS.
- A unique aspect of the Family Meetings process is a time for a facilitated discussion of family strengths and concerns.
- There will also be a time whereby as a family you will consider the information presented, deliberate, and make decisions that are then presented the professionals for discussion and approval.

What will I be asked to do before the meeting?

- You will be asked if you would be interested in participating in a family meeting based on the information presented to you here and by your caseworker. If you agree or are willing to consider a family meeting, you will be asked to meet with a family meetings facilitator.

- The family meeting facilitator or your caseworker will work with you or ask you to make a list of relatives and supportive friends to invite.
- You will be asked to come to the conference, share your views, and openly listen to others
- The facilitator will want to meet with you and other family members to prepare you for the meeting. This will involve a description of what will occur during and after the meeting, discussion of everyone's roles, explore any concerns or fears related to the meeting and how you feel about the idea of the family meeting?
- You will be asked about where and when you would like to meet. You will be asked about what type of food you might like to bring or have at the meeting. You may also be asked about any family rituals that you would like conducted and honored at the family meeting.

What will happen at the family meeting?

- You will be asked to be a key participant and ultimately, to make decisions and plans to achieve safety, permanency and well-being for your children and family.
- The meeting may involve the following parts:
 - 3 Welcome, Introductions and an Opening Ritual
 - 3 A review or development of an agenda for the meeting
 - 3 A discussion of the concerns that prompted the meeting and child welfare bottom lines and non-negotiables related to child safety, permanency and well-being
 - 3 Identification of individual and family strengths
 - 3 Discussion of needs and concerns
 - 3 Private family time (may be optional)
 - 3 Discussion of the family plan
 - 3 Finalizing of decisions
 - 3 Summary and farewell
- Many of the aspects of discussions during the meeting will be posted on flip charts for all to see.
- The physical and emotional safety of all involved with the family meeting will be of utmost concern.
- You and your family will have the major voice. Professionals are present primarily as resources when needed.

- As with all child welfare activities, your confidentiality will be protected and you and your caseworker will control what and how information is shared outside of the family meeting.

What will happen after the meeting?

- After the family meeting, the caseworker and others (as determined during the meeting) will support you in implementing the plans and decisions that you developed during the family meeting.
- The plans will be incorporated into your service plan and may be communicated to the family court as needed.
- If there are challenges to implementing the plans and decisions the resulted from the meeting, another meeting may be convened if it is felt that it can assist you in achieving your goals for the safety, permanency and well-being of your children or youth.