

STANDARD FOR INVOLVING FAMILIES THROUGH FAMILY GROUP DECISION MAKING MEETINGS

PURPOSE

The purpose of this standard is to provide direction and guidance to the Child and Family Services (CFS) program regarding involving families through family group decision making meetings. This standard is intended to achieve statewide consistency in the development and application of CFS core services and shall be implemented in the context of all applicable laws, rules and policies. The standard will also provide a measurement for program accountability.

INTRODUCTION

CFS implements Family Group Decision Making (FGDM), to involve the extended family system and their natural supports to make decisions, in partnership with CFS, and develop a service plan that the family and CFS agree to implement.

The purpose of FGDM meetings is to develop a service plan to ensure safety, permanency, and well-being for children, based on the knowledge, expertise, resources and strengths of the FGDM meeting participants (family members, fictive kin, informal supports, community members, CFS agency staff, service providers and others). FGDM meetings result in family specific solutions which can strengthen hope, facilitate change, and enhance the lives of families and children.

VALUES

The values associated with FGDM as defined through the American Humane Association in partnership with the Kempe Center:

- Children have a right to maintain their kinship and cultural connections throughout their lives;
- Children and their parents belong to a wider family system that both nurtures them and is responsible for them;
- The family group, rather than the agency, is the context for child welfare and child safety resolutions;
- All families are entitled to the respect of the state, and the state needs to make an extra effort to convey respect to those who are poor, socially excluded, marginalized, or lacking power or access to resources and services;
- The state has a responsibility to recognize, support and build the family group's capacity to protect and care for their young relatives;

- Family groups know their own histories, and they use that information to construct thorough plans;
- Active family group participation and leadership is essential for good outcomes for children, but power imbalances between family groups and child welfare agency personnel must first be addressed; and
- The state has a responsibility to defend family groups from unnecessary intrusion and to promote their growth and strength.

CORE ELEMENTS OF FGDM PROCESSES

To ensure the fidelity of the FGDM process in service planning, the following core elements (developed by the American Humane Association in partnership with the Kempe Center) must be adhered to:

- An independent (i.e., non-case carrying) Coordinator is responsible for convening the family group meeting with agency personnel.
- The child welfare agency personnel recognize the family group as their key decision-making partner, and time and resources are available to convene this group.
- Family groups have the opportunity to meet on their own, without the statutory authorities and other non-family members present, to work through the information they have been given and to formulate their responses and plans.
- When agency concerns are adequately addressed, preference is given to a family group's plan over any other possible plan.
- Follow-up processes after the family group decision making meeting occur until the intended outcomes are achieved, to ensure that the plan continues to be relevant, current and achievable, because family group decision making is not a one-time event but an ongoing, active process.
- Referring agencies support family groups by providing the services and resources necessary to implement the agreed-upon plans.

TERMS

Coordinator

A Coordinator plans, convenes and guides the process of the FGDM meeting, and is neutral and objective from the case. The Coordinator does not participate in making decisions, making recommendations, or offering opinions. The Coordinator must have completed training in the Coordinator role of FGDM.

Family Group Decision Making (FGDM)

Family Group Decision Making is a family-centered approach to develop a service plan which ensures safety, permanency, and well-being for children, based on the knowledge, expertise, resources and strengths of the FGDM meeting participants (family members, fictive kin, informal

supports, community members, CFS agency staff, service providers and others).

Relative

A relative is defined as a person related to a child by blood, marriage, or adoption (i.e. grandparent, great grandparent, aunt, great aunt, uncle, great uncle, brother-in-law, sister-in-law, first cousin, sibling, and half-sibling).

Fictive Kin

Persons having a significant, family-like relationship with a child, but who do not meet the definition of relative. Such individuals may include godparents, previous step-parents, clergy, close family friends, tribal members and others with an established relationship with the child.

CFS Social Worker

Child and Family Services (CFS) social workers are direct service personnel in the regional CFS offices including central intake workers, safety assessors, case managers, permanency/adoption workers, and licensing staff. CFS staff also includes individuals with whom the regional CFS programs have contracts to provide services.

Resource Parents

May include foster families, adoptive families, relatives, or fictive kin. The term broadly refers to anyone who provides a safe, stable, loving home for a child when the child's parents or guardians are unable to provide one.

IMPLEMENTING THE STANDARD

FGDM meetings can be convened anytime during the life of a case when decisions need to be made that influence the trajectory of the child welfare case. FGDM meetings are the preferred mechanism for developing family service plans; therefore, all families where a child has been determined to be unsafe will be referred to an FGDM meeting. The CFS social worker and his/her supervisor should consider the following questions in determining when it is appropriate to refer a family to participate in an FGDM for purposes other than service planning:

- Is the CFS social worker, who represents the agency, willing to be led by the family in decision making? The facts of a case may determine decisions and actions that must be taken. If a decision has already been made, or there is only one acceptable outcome, an FGDM meeting would not be appropriate. It is imperative that a meeting not be held for the purpose of justifying that decision or in an effort to get the family to agree with an agency-crafted decision.
- Are there safety concerns? The safety of all participants is paramount. In deciding whether to hold an FGDM meeting, the Coordinator is working to ensure that the FGDM meeting can be carried out safely. An FGDM meeting will not be held if there is serious concern that

any participant's safety would be at risk either before, during, or after the meeting.

I. FGDM Process

When utilizing FGDM meetings for the purpose of service planning, the following practice model must be adhered to in entirety for fidelity.

A. Referral Process

(1) Referrals for FGDM meetings for the purpose of service planning will be automatically generated from iCARE in situations in which a removal episode has been created or a child has been determined to be unsafe upon the closure of the comprehensive safety assessment. For those cases in which a family should be referred for FGDM outside of service planning purposes, the CFS Social Worker will use the approved written referral process.

(2) After a referral has been accepted, the Coordinator will contact the referring Social Worker to gather the following information before contacting the family:

- Circumstances for agency involvement
- Strengths/protective capacities of the family group as identified by the agency
- Concerns of the agency with respect to the child/ren safety, permanency and well-being
- Whether there are any domestic violence issues and/or court-sanctioned protective orders between family/participants that may prohibit an alleged perpetrator from attending an FGDM meeting
- The agency's identified purpose-understanding this will further be developed by the family
- Special needs of children or family group members
- Timeframes for completion of FGDM - understanding this process is designed to develop family service plans

B. Preparing the Family

(1) Once a family has been referred for an FGDM meeting, the CFS Social Worker should contact the parents or primary caregivers to describe the purpose of FGDM, and the agency's belief that the family group is viewed as a better decision-making agent than the agency itself. The CFS worker explores their interest in moving forward, and indicates that an independent Coordinator will be contacting them.

(2) As the Coordinator widens the circle of extended family members, the Coordinator will help the family define an agreed upon purpose of the meeting, provide the family with information that describes FGDM in oral and written communication, and explore the family's willingness and readiness to participate in the process.

(3) A successful FGDM meeting will be one where the participants want to be there and see the purpose of the meeting as relevant to their lives.

(4) FGDM is a group process and requires those connected to the child to participate in decision making. If those individuals initially cannot or will not participate, an FGDM meeting should not be convened. CFS workers should ensure that enough time and resources are dedicated in the preparation phase to seek out family group members and prepare them for their role in the decision-making process.

C. Preparation

Research has shown the success of an FGDM meeting depends on the thoroughness of preparation efforts. Meeting preparation is the responsibility of the Coordinator with cooperation from the CFS social worker, supervisor, other service providers, and family members. The following must be addressed and completed by the Coordinator during the preparation phase:

(1) Identifying Participants and their roles

FGDM is rooted in the belief that children are part of an extended family network and therefore are entitled to have members of their family group come together to create plans with and for them. Parents or relative caregivers may be reluctant to include members of their family and community in a meeting to discuss issues they consider personal and private for any number of reasons including a desire for privacy, embarrassment, self-protection, safety concerns, damaged relationships, or prior history of abuse. It is the responsibility of the Coordinator to understand the source of the reluctance and how those issues might be resolved to ensure the largest number of connections for the child attend the meeting. If the parent(s)/primary caregiver(s) decline to participate, it is the role of the Coordinator to continue the process with the rest of the family group. In these circumstances, the Coordinator makes the parent(s)/primary caregiver(s) aware that they will continue to proceed with the FGDM process.

Each participant at an FGDM meeting is a valued partner working toward child and family safety, permanency, and well-being. Each participant also has a distinct role and function during the meeting. All participants must understand their particular role and what is expected of them as well as what is expected of other participants.

(a) Children

Because family meetings are about creating viable, workable and transparent plans for children and youth, their involvement in the development and implementation of any plan is essential and critical. Issues of family and tribal culture and traditions require exploration, in recognition that these may impact how children and youth are part of the process the coordinator should ensure ***the question is not whether children and youth are involved in FGDM processes, but rather how they are involved***, in ways that respect them as individuals and the cultural groups from which they belong. Children contribute information regarding their ideas, perspective, and experience regarding their

family (resources, history, culture, care for each other) to assist in the development of a plan for their safety, permanency, and well-being.

With respects to any child 14 years of age or older the plan should be developed with the youth and, at the option of the youth, up to 2 additional members of who are chosen by the child, who are not the resource parent of, or CFS social worker, for the child in the development of the service plan. CFS staff may reject an individual selected by the child if the agency has good cause to believe that individual would not act in the best interests of the child.

The Coordinator can use a range of questions or ideas in their initial preparation visits with the child regarding their involvement in an FGDM meeting:

- What is the age and developmental level of the child?
- Explore the child's interest in participating. Is the child comfortable attending the meeting or do they want to give input in another way?
- What special issues (cognitive, behavioral, emotional) have the children and other family members expressed regarding the child's participation?
- What supports or preparation should be arranged to address the child's emotional needs before, during and after the meeting?
- What family member, preferably, is attending the FGDM meeting that can also serve as a support for the child to enable his/her participation?

If a child will not attend the entire meeting or any portion of the meeting, the following options should be considered to include the child's views and input:

- Audio/video tapes of the child;
- Designating a spokesperson for the child;
- Participation of the child by telephone;
- Letters or statements written by the child; and/or
- The child participating in only selected portions of the meeting (i.e. meal time).

(b) Family Members/Fictive Kin

Family members contribute knowledge and wisdom about their family (resources, history, culture, and care for each other) and lead the development of a plan for the safety, permanency, and well-being of their children that is acceptable to them, CFS, and the court when there is court involvement.

The Federal Fostering Connections legislation requires CFS to notify members of a child's extended family system of their involvement with child welfare. The Department must search for, identify and notify all adult relatives as defined in standard within 30 days of a child being taken into state custody to ensure relatives have an opportunity to provide support

through contact and/or becoming a foster parent, guardian or adoptive parent for their relative child. While the list of invitees must be developed collaboratively, the FGDM Coordinator in collaboration with CFS agency staff must ensure the circle of support for the child and family is adequate.

It is also the responsibility of the family, with the support of the Coordinator, to develop a list of family meeting invitees. The Coordinator contacts each person on the list and invites them to attend the meeting and prepares the individuals. FGDM meetings are a voluntary process where each participant ultimately decides on their individual level of participation.

(c) Friends and Other Support Persons

Friends and other support persons can lend support to the family group and may also identify possible resources. Their role at an FGDM meeting is to participate in the planning process for the child. Friends and other support people may participate in private family time only if the family requests their presence.

(d) CFS Social Worker

The CFS social worker participates in the FGDM meeting, monitors the progress of the plan by identifying the agency's critical concerns that a plan must address, contributes knowledge about agency and community resources that can be used to support plan implementation, and completes all designated follow-up tasks. The CFS social worker may be called upon to answer questions about agency interventions or provide other information. Most importantly, if the developed plan meets the agency's stated concerns, the CFS social worker must accept it. This plan becomes the workable service plan that all parties (agency, family members) agree to implement. With their supervisor, the CFS social worker authorizes agency resources to carry out the plan where needed. The CFS worker must plan time accordingly to allow for them to stay for the whole FGDM process, understanding that they will excuse themselves for the private family time before returning.

(e) Multidisciplinary Team Members

Multidisciplinary team members, as defined in the Child Protective Act, contribute knowledge and legal expectations about safety, permanency, and child well-being. They may be asked to provide information related to the child protection system, the law, or answer questions about critical concerns and interventions.

(f) Coordinator

The Coordinator uses their knowledge, experience, and skills to direct the meeting process to ensure the process is safe and fair. The Coordinator is not invested in a particular outcome, and is responsible for creating an environment that provides transparent, honest and respectful dialogue between agency personnel and family group

members.

(g) Service Providers

Other than the CFS agency staff social worker and his/her supervisor, who have a meaningful relationship with the family, other service providers can be invited to the meeting. In an effort to not overwhelm the family, the number of service providers should not outnumber family members. Service providers share information about services and resources. The primary role of service providers is to offer information and options for the family to consider, rather than make recommendations.

(h) Resource Parents

May include foster families, adoptive families, relatives, or fictive kin. The term broadly refers to anyone who provides a safe, stable, loving home for a child when the child's parents or guardians are unable to provide one. The role of the resource parent(s) during the FGDM process is to provide the FGDM team with updated information regarding the child/children's status and needs.

(2) Safety Considerations Regarding Participants

- Although the purpose of FGDM meetings is planning and decision making, meetings are also opportunities for candid discussion and expression of emotions, such as grief, shock, loss, anger, and fear. Because of this, planning and arranging to create a safe setting for all participants is necessary. The issues of conflict and historical/potential violence must be addressed by the Coordinator with family members prior to deciding to convene the meeting. To assess potential volatility and plan for a safe meeting, the Coordinator should ask questions such as:
 - Tell me about your family. How does everyone get along?
 - Do you have any worries about having a meeting? What are they?
 - What do I need to know to help make the meeting go smoothly?
 - What happens when people in your family disagree about something?
 - How do your family members deal with anger?
 - Do you have any concerns that people may get upset at the meeting? What might happen if they do?
 - Is there anyone who does not get along with anyone in particular? Who are they?
 - What is the conflict about? What happens?
 - Has anyone in your family ever hit or hurt anyone else? What happened?
 - Is there a history of violence in your family? Has anyone been arrested for violence toward others?
 - Would you recommend ground rules be set for the meeting in order for everyone to be safe and feel comfortable?
 - What else can we do to help make sure everyone is safe and feels comfortable?

- When there is a history of violence or concern for potential violence, the following should be considered in collaboration with the CFS agency social worker and Coordinator:
 - Include making a safety plan for all family members in the purpose of the meeting;
 - Arrange for security/law enforcement to be present in the building and available to protect participants;
 - Select a safe, neutral location for the meeting;
 - Identify support family members who may feel threatened or are likely to become agitated;
 - Use a co-facilitator;
 - If the family group determines that they would like group agreements or ground rules, the family group (rather than the Coordinator or service providers) develops what those agreements or rules will be, and how they will enforce them.
 - Ask select individuals to participate through pre-meeting interviews, written statements, or conference calls instead of attending the FGDM meeting;
 - Arrange for a private check-in after the meeting with participants that are identified as vulnerable;
 - Arrange for vulnerable family members or those in conflict with one another to arrive at and leave the meeting separately and at different times;
 - Arrange for vulnerable family members and participants to leave the meeting escorted by staff or security personnel;
 - Arrange for the CFS social worker to make a follow up face-to-face visit with vulnerable family members within 24 hours of the meeting; and/or
 - Decide to not convene the meeting.

(3) Coordinator Preparation

During the preparation phase of the FGDM process the following information must be gathered by the Coordinator with assistance from CFS social worker and family members:

(a) Purpose

The purpose of the meeting should be primarily defined by the parents/caregiver. The purpose is clearly defined and agreed upon by all participants. The purpose should be clear, simple and jargon-free. It should be stated open-ended to allow many possibilities for planning and decision making. All pertinent information related to the purpose, concerns and decisions to be made should be shared with every participant as they are being prepared for the FGDM meeting. No one should be hearing the information for the first time at the family meeting.

(b) Invitations

Make sure the members of the extended family group have been fully

identified, invited, and contacted. As necessary, send written notices and/or make telephone reminders.

(c) Location and Time

The family group should determine the location of the meeting. A location and time conducive to the attendance of as many participants as possible is best practice. There are considerable advantages to holding the meeting at a neutral location chosen by the family.

(d) Emotional Supports

Participant identified resources for emotional support must be available both during and after the meeting. In order for support people to attend private family time, they must be considered part of the family by the family group. If a family member selects a case worker, therapist or other professional to be his/her support person, who is not considered part of the family group, those in need of support will be encouraged to choose a second support person from the family group for private family time.

(e) Interpreters

Arrangements must be made for language and cultural interpreters, as necessary. Interpreters must be neutral to the family and their situation. Family members must not be used as interpreters. Family determines the preferred language for the meeting, so interpreters may be needed for service providers rather than family members.

(f) Special Needs

Arrangements must be made for any participant requiring assistance with mobility, language, literacy, or other special needs.

(g) Expert Presenters

Anticipate the family's service needs and, with the family's permission, invite service providers who are not already involved in the case to attend part of the meeting to speak about specific topics for which the family would like in-depth information and deeper understanding, in addition to possible services or resources that are available.

(h) Food

During preparation, the Coordinator should ask the family what food and beverages should be provided to help set a tone of hospitality and comfort. Given the important role food plays in most cultures, the family should always be consulted about what foods

to provide.

(i) Family Traditions

The meeting should be started, ended, and conducted in ways that honor and conform to the family's culture. For example, some families may wish to begin and end the meeting with a prayer or song.

(j) Travel/Transportation

Ensure barriers of distance or lack of transportation do not inhibit the involvement of extended family members' participation. Assisting with transportation or arranging participation by video conference would be preferred for individuals who would be required to travel long distances to attend the meeting. Telephone conference can be used if preferred method is not feasible. This is a workable solution when there are individuals who cannot travel due to distance and/or incarceration.

(k) Childcare

Assist meeting participants in arranging care for their child(ren). Providing or reimbursing for childcare may be considered.

D. Structure of the FGDM Meeting

NOTE: When utilizing FGDM meetings for the purpose of service planning, the following practice model must be adhered to in its entirety for fidelity.

The agenda for meetings are determined in the preparation phase with the families and will include the following format:

(1) Opening

The family group determines how the meeting will be opened. In some instances, the family group may choose to open the family meeting with a ceremony, prayers, blessings of children or other ways that fit with the family's culture and tradition.

(2) Introductions

The family group decides how everyone will be introduced, including whether name tags or some other form of identification will be used. Introductions include how each person is connected to the child or youth and the family. Introductions begin with the Coordinator, family members and family members' support people, and then with the service providers in attendance.

(3) Purpose

The Coordinator must clearly articulate the purpose of the family meeting as agreed upon during the preparation phase. When families, their support people and service providers have a mutual understanding of the purpose, the family meeting is likely to flow more smoothly. The purpose is developed during the preparation phase in partnership with the family and the child welfare agency representative.

(4) Guidelines for Discussions

The Coordinator will discuss the list of guidelines developed by family members during the preparation time. At this point in the family meeting, family group members may elect to brainstorm a list of guidelines for respectful discussion. In keeping with the family-led principle, family groups (and not service providers) determine if this is something that would facilitate their conversation and if so, what gets listed.

(5) Information Sharing

The purpose of the information-sharing phase of the family meeting is for service providers to give the family group all of the agency-held information the family group needs in order to assume leadership in developing their solution to the issues presented, keeping in mind the purpose of the meeting. The family consults with the service providers to make sure that the family group has all the information they need before going into their private family time. While the flow of information is predominately from the service providers to the family, family groups often ask for clarification and/or question the information presented to them. The information-sharing phase is comprehensive yet concise. During this phase, the CFS social worker and service providers discuss their involvement with the family.

The Coordinator asks the referring worker to share all of the relevant information with the family group that will be essential for the family's deliberations. This includes the agency's concerns, the legal issues and the timeframes that must be met for the agency to agree to any plan. Because the Coordinator has discussed the reason for the family meeting during preparation, the family group is not surprised by the information shared by the referring worker. Receiving information ahead of time gives families the opportunity to think about solutions before attending the family meeting. It is reasonable, however, to expect that the referring worker will further detail and update, at the family meeting, the core information previously shared.

- Confidentiality in the FGDM Meeting

The CFS social worker and Coordinator can share information necessary to obtain benefits or services, or perform normal business processes of the Department. In order to determine what disclosure is necessary to invite participants to attend the meeting, the CFS social worker and Coordinator should ask themselves what disclosure of information is "minimally necessary" and would therefore be considered "need to know."

The child(ren)'s parents or legal representative should understand critical issues related to the case and their situation will be discussed during the FGDM meeting. Case specific information will be shared with family members and others invited by the family because that information is necessary in order to proceed with participation in FGDM and develop a plan which sufficiently addresses the child(ren)'s safety, permanency, and well-being. Service providers and other non CFS agency participants who are not identified as part of the family must understand they agree not to re-disclose information shared during the FGDM meeting, unless guided to do so as part of the FGDM meeting plan. (See Standard for Confidentiality for more information on issues related to confidentiality and disclosure of information

<http://healthandwelfare.idaho.gov/Portals/0/Children/AdoptionFoster/Confidentiality.pdf>).

Referring workers and other agency representatives do not predetermine the plan before the family meeting, and must agree to engage with the family group in a manner that is respectful, collaborative and open to the family's expertise and ideas to protect their children. Referring workers may have recommendations for the family to consider in private family time about specific items for inclusion in the plan. However, they refrain from sharing such opinions with the family group. It may be helpful for the referring worker to provide his or her core concerns and any legal issues in writing for the family's use in private family time.

During this information-sharing phase, the CFS worker and other service providers should share both informal and formal community resources and supports available to the family.

Immediately following this process, the Coordinator asks the family group if they have the information they need to transition to private family time.

(6) Private Family Time to Develop the Plan

Providing family groups with the time to meet on their own allows them to utilize their knowledge and expertise in a comfortable setting and do so in ways that are consistent with their family culture.

- During the family meeting, the Coordinator reintroduces the family meeting process to the family group, confirms who the family agrees will participate in private family time and reaches agreement on the participation of individuals who may fall outside of the "family network." Information shared in private family time belongs to the family group, and thus is considered privileged and not admissible into any legal proceedings, should anything be divulged by a participant. Private family time is used for family members and participants they identify as "like family" to meet alone and develop a plan to address the critical concerns identified earlier in the meeting. The use of private family time will be agreed upon prior to the meeting with clear expectations and assurances for participant safety. No one with a professional relationship with the family is allowed in private time. Certain participants in the family meeting are not included in private family time even when the family would like to include them. Foster care providers, unless they are kin, for example, do not participate in private family time because they are part of the agency's child welfare team.

- The Coordinator, referring worker, GAL, and other service providers do not participate in private family time. The Coordinator's role is to protect the integrity of the private family time process. If the family pauses during private family time, the Coordinator is available to answer any questions about the family meeting process while the referring worker and other service providers are available to clarify any information previously provided or answer any questions the family may have. The Coordinator, referring worker and other service providers are physically accessible and closely available to the family group. They may sit in another room of the meeting space, be outside or leave the meeting space altogether, staying nearby and accessible by phone. Independent of their location, the family needs to perceive its space as private. Based on the principle of respect for the family group, this is not a time for the service providers who are not part of private family time to discuss the family as a group or as individual members or to discuss what occurred in the family meeting thus far.

(7) Presenting the Plan

The family presents the plan they have developed. The CFS social worker provides feedback to the family about the proposed plan relative to the agency's previously stated concerns. It is the Coordinator's job to negotiate an agreed upon plan between CFS and the family group. While the plan may require some modifications if agency concerns are not addressed, preference is given to a family group's plan over any other plan, as long as it does not compromise a child's safety. Families lead the decision making but the plan must be one to which the family and the child welfare agency agree. Service providers, beyond the referring worker and child welfare agency, agree to the provision of services, but are not involved in agreeing to the plan.

(8) Finalization of the Plan

It is the responsibility of the CFS social worker to accept the plan at the FGDM meeting. The Coordinator will not approve, veto, or express an opinion on the plan. Plan acceptance will be given if the CFS social worker can answer yes to the following questions:

- Does the plan address the identified safety threats and increase diminished protective capacities?
- Is the plan feasible?

The CFS social worker should accept the plan before the meeting is adjourned. In some cases the plan may need to be accepted conditionally, pending fiscal and court approval. Ensure this is communicated to the family during the preparation and planning phase of FGDM and again before private family time. A supervisor should be available, in person or by phone, in the event the CFS social worker has questions or needs consultation regarding plan acceptance. Participants are advised that the accepted plan will be written up and distributed, within 3-5 days, to the immediate family and anyone who is in attendance.

Ultimately, it is the agency's responsibility to ensure services and resources are aligned with community supports that are available to uphold family groups in implementing the agreed upon plans.

From time to time, a plan may require agreement from law enforcement, CASA, the prosecutor, and/or the defense attorney. If the court has jurisdiction over the case, final approval of a service plan developed during a FGDM meeting is made by the presiding judge.

(9) Closing

The Coordinator reiterates the agreed on next steps, and family members make closing remarks. The family may choose to end with a family tradition such as a prayer or song.

E. Steps Following the FGDM Meeting

Follow-up processes continue after the family group decision making meeting occurs until the intended outcomes are achieved to ensure the plan developed is sufficient, recognizing that family group decision making is not a one-time event, but a process.

- Results of the FGDM meeting will be documented both in a written plan and a meeting summary. The plan will contain all action items, timeframes, tasks and services. A responsible party(s) will be identified for each task and/or service and for monitoring the progress of the plan. The resultant plan from the FGDM meeting becomes the agency service plan.
- The Coordinator is responsible for writing and distributing the plan within 3-5 working days of the meeting. The plan will be distributed to the immediate family and participants who are identified in the plan. The FGDM summary and plan will become part of the CFS case record.
- In situations where FGDM was held to develop a service plan that will be submitted to the court for approval, the meeting will be conducted in a timeframe that allows CFS to receive the plan and summary ten (10) days prior to the Service Plan Hearing. If the schedules of participants do not allow for the full ten (10) days, the documentation must be provided to the CFS social worker no later than eight (8) days prior to the Service Plan Hearing.
- If the plan is not being carried out, the CFS social worker is responsible to address concerns with those identified as responsible. Required intervention could include working with the family and other resources to meet again and revise the plan.

F. Plans Not Accepted at the FGDM Meeting

If the family is unable to develop a plan which the CFS agency can accept, the plan will be developed between the parent(s) and the CFS agency. In those cases, every effort should be made to engage the family in the planning and decision making process.

G. Additional Points in a Case to Consider an FGDM meeting

The use of FGDM throughout the lifetime of a case can be very helpful in making important case decisions. An FGDM meeting may be used at the following points in a case:

- Developing a safety plan including safety services and assigning safety monitors to address identified safety threats;
- Developing a transition plan to prepare and plan for significant changes, transitions, or events; and
- Developing a permanency plan

NOTE: When utilizing a FGDM meeting for purposes other than service planning there may be variance from the FGDM model in order to meet the specific needs and circumstances of the case.

II. Principles of FGDM Meetings

The following table identifies the principles of family-centered practice and how each of these principles is applied in a FGDM meeting.

Principles of Partnership in Family-Centered Practice	Application in FGDM Meetings
1. Everyone desires respect. All people have worth and a right to self-determination and to make their own decisions about their lives. All opinions and views should be treated with respect. True partnership is impossible without mutual respect.	The child's parents work with the Coordinator to identify members of the extended family and informal networks who can be invited to participate. The child's parents decide if they wish to participate in the FGDM meeting. FGDM meetings emphasize the strengths, knowledge, resources, and experience of all participants. The Coordinator works to create a respectful environment.

<p>2. Everyone needs to be heard. Seek first to understand through empathic listening motivated by the listener’s desire to truly understand someone’s point of view by entering their frame of reference without a personal agenda.</p>	<p>At the FGDM meeting, in developing the plan, all participants identify resources (formal and informal) that can meet the needs identified in the plan. The role of the FGDM Coordinator is to make space in the meeting for all participants to be heard and understood. It is the responsibility of the attending CFS social worker to objectively review the family’s preferred plan and communicate any concerns to the family group.</p>
<p>3. Everyone has strengths. All people have resources, past successes, abilities, talents, dreams, etc. that provide the material for solutions and future success. Identifying both strengths and concerns provides a more balanced, accurate, and hopeful picture of the present and the future.</p>	<p>The purpose of FGDM meetings is for the family group and the child welfare agency to reach consensus on the case plan, with the family group’s preferred plan being paramount. The plans that emerge from FGDM are based on the strengths, resources, and experience of family members and other support persons, as well as those of the agency, community and their service providers.</p>
<p>4. Judgments can wait. Withholding judgment means staying open to all information, even information that doesn’t fit with our preconceived notions of how things should be, allowing information to shape thinking and decisions.</p>	<p>FGDM meetings encourage the child welfare agency to share their concerns in a transparent way with the family group. The family group, then, in private family time has a chance to consider the information in the creation of the initial plan. The CFS worker then has the opportunity to reach a negotiated consensus on the plan, during the plan finalization stage. The important tenet is that throughout the process, all participants consider all available information before drawing any conclusions or making a decision.</p>

<p>5. Partners share power. Power differences can create barriers to partnership. It is the CFS social worker's responsibility to promote a relationship that supports sharing of power with the family.</p>	<p>In FGDM meetings the participants share power. Through shared power the participants become more invested in following the plan that is developed during the FGDM meeting. Sharing power also means that the family and the agency also share the responsibility for the safety, permanency and well-being of the child.</p>
<p>6. Partnership is a process. Partnership requires openness, effort, patience, understanding, good will, and hard work. Learning to be partners is not always a smooth, conflict-free process. Sharing important goals helps partners move through difficult times and learn from mistakes.</p>	<p>FGDM meetings provide an opportunity to enhance partnership between participants. The plan developed during a FGDM meeting serves as the ongoing case plan that all parties commit to working on. Therefore, it serves as common ground for the ongoing working relationship of the family, the agency, and the community.</p>

Any action taken not consistent with this standard must be pre-approved by the FACS Division Administrator or designee. The action, rationale and approval must be documented in the file.