Division of Children and Family Services Protection and Safety Procedure Update # 16- 2015	
Regarding:	Family Team Meeting
Rescinds & Replaces:	Program Memos #2-2006; #8-2005
Date Effective:	June 15, 2015
Contact:	Chris Jones or Christine.Jones@nebraska.gov
Issued by:	Tony Green, Acting Director, Division of Children and Family Services

Philosophy:

Philosophy: The Division of Children and Family Services (DCFS) believes that families need to be directly involved in making decisions about their family and their children's safety, permanency and well-being. DCFS will help facilitate those conversations and decisions and help the family ensure that the right people are involved that can help them achieve their goals.

Definition:
A meeting with the family (biological or legal) and others who develop and monitor a plan for child safety, permanency and well-being and work toward sustainable change and support for the family and children. Additional members can include: informal supports (e.g., relatives, friends, peers, and pastors), DCFS Specialist and formal resources (e.g., professional service providers, teachers).

Procedure:

1. Family Team Membership

Members of the Family Team are identified by the family. This may include: extended family; friends of the family; other family support persons; Indian Custodians; Tribal representatives (when the child(ren) is/are Native American); therapists; school personnel; medical personnel; law enforcement; others as chosen by the family. In court-involved cases, the Division of Children and Family Services (DDCFS) Specialist will work with the family to include legal parties (i.e., parent's attorneys and Guardian ad Litem) and the child(ren)'s caretaker in the Family Team Meeting. Members of the Family Team may change as the family's needs change. At minimum, the Family Team Meeting must include the parent (biological, pre-adoptive, proposed guardian), the child as developmentally and emotionally appropriate and the DCFS Specialist.

Youth age 14 and older must have a case plan developed in consultation with the youth, and at the option of the youth, two members of the case planning team, who are not the caseworker or foster parent.[1]

Informal supports are important to the Family Team to support self-sufficiency of the family during the life of the case and after DCFS is no longer involved. The family should be encouraged to include at least one informal (unpaid) resource person identified by the family. If the family is unable to identify an informal resource, the team will assist the family/youth in locating or developing informal supports to be in place after involvement with DCFS.

The family chooses who is invited to participate in the Family Team Meeting. The role of the foster parent/out-

[1] Preventing Sex Trafficking and Strengthening Families Act October 23, 2014. [ACYF-CB-IM-14-03]

of-home care provider is specific to the child(ren). The family may elect to have the foster family or other meeting participants attend part of the meeting based upon the information and planning to be shared and discussed.

2. Frequency of Family Team Meetings

The team will establish the frequency of the meetings based on the needs of the family and progress toward achieving child safety, permanency and well-being. To maintain steady progress, Family Team Meetings should occur monthly, unless the family requests less often. Meetings should be scheduled to utilize everyone's time effectively and to ensure that it is not overwhelming to the family. There will be one Family Team for the family involved with DCFS unless there are safety or legal issues requiring separate meetings, such as no contact orders or situations that could be dangerous for some adults to attend the Family Team Meeting.

The DCFS Specialist will work with the family in setting up and conducting the initial Family Team Meeting. The Family Team Meeting must be held in sufficient time to complete the case plan within 60 days of opening the case. Critical decision points which would necessitate a Family Team Meeting include:

a. Developing the initial Case Plan,
b. Updating the Case Plan and the Permanency Goal
c. Prior to a removal of a child from home, or as soon as possible after an emergency removal,
d. Prior to a change in permanency objective,
e. Prior to returning the child home,
f. Prior to case closure, and
g. Upon request of the family.

The family team may also identify critical times unique to the family circumstances when a Family Team Meeting needs to be held.

3. Elements of the Family Team Meeting Process

A. Preparation

1. **<u>Preparing the family</u>:** Planning for Family Team Meetings begins with engaging the family in the preparation process of determining the purpose of the meeting prior to the meeting taking place. All Family Team Meetings need to be related to safety, permanency and well-being.
   A. The DCFS Specialist will:
      1) Explain the purpose and expectations of the Family Team Meeting;
      2) Facilitate the Family Team Meeting and/or assist the family in leading their family team;
      3) Explain what information may be shared in furtherance of the Child Protection Act so that decisions can be made;
      4) With the family, identify who should be included in the meeting. Identify situations when there are concerns about potential family violence or participant safety, and determine need to have separate Family Team Meetings due to safety.
      5) Ask the family to bring a picture of the child(ren);
   B. The DCFS Specialist and the family will prepare a genogram to be placed at the front of the room to serve as a visual reminder of the purpose of the meeting.
   C. The DCFS Specialist should assist the family in selecting the location for the Family Team Meeting that is convenient for the family, can accommodate sitting room for all Family Team members and maintains confidentiality.

2. **<u>Preparing Participants</u>** The DCFS Specialist will inform Family Team Meeting participants why they have been invited to the Family Team Meeting and their role at the Family Team Meeting.
   Special attention will be needed during the meeting to help the team to come together and participate in supporting the family's goals.

3. **<u>DCFS Specialist Preparation</u>**
   A. The DCFS Specialist will coordinate with the family to establish the date, time and location, members to attend the Family Team, and agenda for the Family Team Meeting.
   B. The DCFS Specialist will send out the meeting invitation including the agenda and relevant information.
   C. The DCFS Specialist will assist the family to set up the room to encourage good discussion, participation, allow team members to see each other, and see any white board/posters.

D. The DCFS Specialist will ensure that the following items are at the meeting:
   1. Sign in sheets;
   2. Outline with a Purpose Statement;
   3. Court orders;
   4. Safety Plans;
   5. Confidentiality Forms.
   6. Genogram/ Eco-Map
   7. Tools needed for the discussion and planning such as poster board, white board, paper, markers, easel, encourage parents to bring toys if small children are attending etc.

E. The DCFS Specialist will work with his/her supervisor and/or Administrator to determine if there is a need for the supervisor to attend the Family Team Meeting.

B. Structure of the Meeting/ Agenda: The Family Team Meeting will be individualized to meet the unique needs of the family. The following items are a framework of a Family Team Meeting. Special attention will be needed during the meeting to help the team come together and participate in supporting the family's goals. The Family Team Meeting may include some or all of the following framework:

1. **Welcome** The family or their designee will welcome the participants and each participant introduce themselves to briefly describe how they are connected to the family, and their role in supporting the family.

2. **Confidentiality** The DCFS Specialist will ensure all members of the Family Team complete the Confidentiality Agreement and Sign In at the meeting. The DCFS Specialist will explain confidentiality to all the participants and request that each team member sign the confidentiality agreement. All participants will need to sign a confidentiality agreement, and those not party to the Juvenile Court case will need to sign in order to remain in the Family Team Meeting (unless otherwise required by contract, state or federal law).

3. **Purpose:** The DCFS Specialist, or their designated facilitator clearly explains the purpose of this Family Team Meeting to include: the child(ren)s permanency goal, the benefit of having a family team to support and assist with the permanency goal, the pre-determined agenda items and other agenda items to be added by Family Team members, expectations of attendance participation and support to the family during or after the Family Team Meeting. The DCFS Specialist will be clear about the purpose of the meeting to ensure that the scope of the discussion does not take a different direction. Prior to opening the meeting, the family will be asked if there are additional topics which must be resolved at the meeting not on the agenda.

4. **Ground Rules** The Family Team Meeting members will establish ground rules for the Family Team Meeting. The ground rules will be reviewed and modified as needed at each Family Team Meeting.

5. **Non-Negotiables** The DCFS Specialist and team members will be clear that there are some concerns that are non-negotiable. The Family Team members should be informed of the current safety threat(s), safety plan, and activities and/or strategies that maintain safety and/cannot be compromised. If the children are removed from the home, time frames to achieve permanency should be reviewed. Requirements ordered by the Court must be followed until such time the Court modifies its order.

6. **Family Story** The family may share their story and what is important to them in order to achieve the outcome of the Family Team Meeting. The family should not have to share all the details or make apologies.

7. **Cultural Considerations** Have the family share how their cultural perspective and how that may impact the purpose of the meeting.

8. **Strengths** The family and other meeting participants should describe their family strengths. Identifying strengths helps focus the group's thinking and builds the family's trust in the team members. Identifying

more specific strengths is more valuable to the family. The DCFS Specialist should share information they have gathered using the Family Strengths and Needs Assessment.

9. **Needs** The family and other meeting participants should describe any identified needs the family may have. The DCFS Specialist should share information they have gathered using the Family Strengths and Needs Assessment. Addressing the identified needs should help the family increase their Protective Factors so that they can provide for the safety, permanency and well-being of their children.

10. **Case Planning** At the initial Family Team Meeting, identifying the family's strengths and needs will lead to the development of the family's case plan. The DCFS Specialist, with the assistance of the family member(s), will develop goal(s) and strategies to improve family functioning and child safety. This discussion will include how to overcome any barriers the family may be facing and identifying any necessary services and supports, both formal and informal. Discussion must include any expectations or requirements the family has with other Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services programs; work; school etc. It is important that all aspects of the family's life that may impact their ability to provide for their child's safety, permanency and well-being are taken into account.

    For youth age 14 and older, the case plan must document the child's education, health, visitation, and court participation rights, the right to receive a credit report annually, and a signed acknowledgement that the child was provided these rights and that they were explained in an age appropriate way.[2]

11. **At subsequent Family Team Meetings** DCFS Specialist and Family Team members will review the goals and strategies of the case plan and determine any needed adjustments to the goals and/or strategies, additional services needed, or assistance needed from family members.

12. **Evaluation and conclusion** The team is encouraged to set the date for the next meeting and identify additional team members if necessary. The DCFS Specialist will ask the team members to provide feedback regarding the meeting- what went well and improvements to be made in future meetings. Notify Family Team Members in writing of the next steps and their responsibilities prior to the next Family Team Meeting. Revise case plan and/or seek Court's approval if a Court case.

C. **Follow Up and Documentation:** The DCFS Specialist will take the information provided during the discussion and put it in writing for the parents to review.
Within 7 days following the Family Team Meeting, the DCFS Specialist will:
1. Send the parents copies of the case plan (if created or amended during the meeting).
2. Document the Family Team Meeting in N-FOCUS in the Family Team Meeting Narrative.
   The DCFS Specialist will document the following:
   a) Name and role participants of the meeting;
   b) The child's Permanency Goal
   c) Efforts DCFSS made to engage mother, father or children in the development and progression of the case plan
   d) When and where the meeting occurred;
   e) The purpose of the meeting;
   f) Discussion of the meeting topics. Include clear documentation of the family and child's voice on the discussion items. This could include input gathered outside of the meeting.
   g) Assignments of tasks including who is responsible and any time frames established.
3. Scan the Agenda; Sign In Sheets; Confidentially Agreements and any other materials provided at the meeting into N-FOCUS.

[2] Preventing Sex Trafficking and Strengthening Families Act October 23, 2014. [ACYF-CB-IM-14-03]

Family Team Meeting **MC #:**_____

Family Name: _____ **Date:** _____

Family names potentially discussed today: _____

CONFIDENTIALITY AGREEMENT

- I understand Nebraska DHHS Children and Family Services family team meetings are held for the purpose of developing, assessing, and updating the family case plan, and discussing the family's progress in enhancing a parent's ability to protect a child. **I hereby agree that I will not disclose any of the information discussed in today's meeting regarding any of the above-named individuals, unless necessary for mandatory reporting or updates to the court regarding court orders only.**
- Further, I understand that if I contract to provide services to any person named above and disclosure of information is necessary to initiate or facilitate these services, I am not released from this agreement, but must obtain any additional authorizations or releases of information that may be required by law.
- I am aware that if any information discussed at today's meeting includes (a) alcohol or drug abuse treatment or (b) educational records, that both of these sources are protected by state and/or federal law regarding further disclosure, and will require additional written consent of the individual (or as otherwise permitted by federal law governing the confidentiality of alcohol and drug abuse patient records and/or education records) prior to further release of this information.

*****I acknowledge that by initialing below, I agree to the Confidentiality Agreement*****

Print and Sign	Role with the family	Initials

Informal Supports (Who else would you like to attend):

_____

_____

Next Family Team Meeting:

Date/Time: _____ Location: _____

Notes:

_____