

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT TDM

- 1. Does there have to be a full time facilitator? (Can't we just add this to someone's current job responsibilities?)**

TDM requires the ability to immediately provide a facilitated meeting when an emergency removal has occurred or is about to occur. It also demands a facilitator with a great deal of skill in managing complex, often emotional meetings, and a person who can devote their full and objective attention to the issues at hand. For these reasons, a full time facilitator who is a member of the public agency's staff is necessary.
- 2. What qualifications should the facilitator have/what level of staff?**

The agency must have the ability to select the facilitator(s) based on skills, values and experience. The facilitator should be a person who has had much experience in frontline child welfare social work, and who is respected by his/her peers for the experience. Many agencies position the facilitator job at or just below the supervisory level.
- 3. Should the facilitator be outside the assigned social worker's chain of command?**

Absolutely. They should have had no prior involvement with the family and have no stake in the outcome of the case. The facilitator needs to be open to a range of possibilities and to guide the team in reaching a child-specific safety plan.
- 4. What kind of training does a facilitator need to do the job?**

The Annie E. Casey Foundation's practice consultant team provides a 3-day facilitator training. It is a skills-based approach with an emphasis on the core values and concepts of best practices in child welfare, including teaming and family engagement. The training highlights the critical role of the facilitator in addressing high conflict and issues involving domestic violence by providing strategies for managing these difficult situations. Participants are provided plenty of opportunities for increased knowledge and skill-building in facilitating the six stages of the TDM meeting.
- 5. How does TDM differ from other teaming models?**

TDM shares nearly identical underlying values with similar approaches-values such as family empowerment, inclusivity of participants, and a strengths/needs focus. It differs primarily in the purpose (to make a placement-related decision) and timing (it must occur prior to the decision, or in the case of emergencies, prior to the court hearing.)
- 6. How much time should we plan on for each TDM meeting?**

1-2 hours
- 7. Can we promise confidentiality of the meeting to participants?**

Not completely. It is recommended that the meetings be framed in terms of respect, privacy, and sensitivity rather than confidentiality. Families are told that information may need to be shared outside of the meeting for case planning purposes, in litigation, or if a new allegation of abuse or neglect surfaces.
- 8. What are the pros & cons of having attorneys attend?**

It is unlikely that attorneys would be involved at the pre-removal stage.

However, legal and social work professionals may both gain in their knowledge of each other's field if attorneys participate in TDM. At times, lawyers may be able to clear up confusing legal issues or provide a realistic legal assessment and social workers may be able to enlighten attorneys about matters of risk, safety and permanency. It is critical to be clear about the roles of social work and legal staff, ensuring that each profession is opining on its area of responsibility and expertise. Participants may not be comfortable speaking freely in the presence of lawyers, and some lawyers may use the meeting as an opportunity for pre-trial discovery. You want to make sure that TDMs do not take on a quasi-legal tone which may put participants on guard about legal ramifications. TDMs are designed to be a family-empowerment experience. Each jurisdiction will need to weigh these pros and cons in order to make a decision that is most compatible with their system.

9. Who should make the decision if the group can't reach consensus? Is there an appeal process if someone in the group really objects to the final decision?

If the entire group cannot reach consensus, the agency social worker together with the supervisor makes the decision. Child Protective Services does not relinquish its legal responsibility to provide safety and protection. However, if the facilitator cannot support the decision/recommendation because it does not provide adequate child safety or comply with policy, they can request a review by a designated high level administrator within the agency. That person's decision on behalf of the public agency then becomes the agency's official position. The facilitator must be candid about his/her concerns while in the meeting.

10. What if one of the parents (or their support people) is believed to be mentally ill or violent?

Automatic exclusions of meetings for families with particular problems should be avoided as much as possible. When s/he schedules the meeting, the social worker should alert the facilitator to any known concerns regarding family violence or other potentially dangerous issues, and the facilitator can make provisions to ensure safety (such as having security personnel on call, or even excluding a particularly dangerous person.) If these concerns arise only after the meeting is underway, the facilitator and other meeting participants must utilize their best skills and judgment to determine if a meeting should be terminated, a participant excused, or security personnel contacted.

11. How do we get everyone to the table so quickly (i.e. pre-removal decision or the next working day after an emergency removal)?

The agency should have a strong infrastructure in place so that the individual social worker need not create a "new meeting" each time a TDM is required. A single point of contact receives the call requesting the meeting; that person arranges for the facilitator, the meeting room, and as many invitations as are feasible. S/he also schedules the meeting time, and provides all of these details to the requesting social worker immediately when the worker calls. Once it becomes known in the community that the agency holds these meetings as part of its everyday practice, external participants will anticipate last minute invitations and make provisions to be on call for emergency meetings. The value of providing such meetings to families becomes apparent to participants and outweighs their objections to being inconvenienced.

12. Is it possible to have the crisis worker who placed the child at the table on a next-day meeting? What about labor management issues/grievances if this requires them to work outside of normal shifts?

In many systems, it is not possible. The person who accepts the hand-off of the after-hours case should participate and share as much information as s/he can about the circumstances of the removal.

13. How does TDM help with identifying kin for placement & support?

During the TDM discussion of safe options and alternatives, a discussion with family members in attendance often leads to a much broader picture of the family's kinship network. Even if few family members are present, the team focuses on exploring all known kin and makes it a priority of completing the family assessment to identify all branches of the family tree.

14. If TDM is about the decision itself, how much case plan development can actually occur at the meeting?

That depends. At the very least, TDM emphasizes connecting parents with their most pressing service need before they leave the table. However, given the limited time and often emergent circumstances of the meeting, in-depth case planning is not a primary goal of most TDM meetings.

15. How can safety and risk assessment information be incorporated into the TDM meeting? Doesn't it intimidate families to talk about safety and risk issues in this setting?

A thorough discussion of risk and safety concerns, as well as the family's strengths and needs, is a part of every TDM meeting. If a safety/risk assessment tool or process is part of the social worker's assessment process, then s/he is expected to highlight the findings, however preliminary they may be, as part of the discussion. Facilitators assist in ensuring that safety and risk concerns are described in lay language, not jargon, and that clear connections are made between behaviors and risks to children ensuring that the jeopardy issues needing to be resolved are clearly defined.

16. Should children be included in the meetings? What age?

Evaluation of a child/youth's unique needs must be part of the placement decision. However, how this occurs should always be a case by case decision based on both chronological age and developmental readiness. There is often a benefit to having the child's "voice" at the meeting and their participation can be supported in numerous and creative ways. For youth in their teens it should be presumed that participating in TDM meetings provides an important vehicle for "voice and choice" which should only be denied under extenuating circumstances.