

Team Decision Making

TDM meetings are held whenever notice has been given that a child will be moved from their current placement. This includes foster home to foster home, foster home to mom's home, etc.

The most important aspect of the TDM for the CASA is to make sure the child/youth participates (age appropriate) and that their needs are paramount in all decision making. Offer your advice to the facilitator in the planning phase of what you think is the best way to engage the child/youth in the meeting and any characteristics that might be useful to know when leading this type of group. Your case supervisor can make this contact for you or provide you with the contact number and you can phone with your advice. The facilitator has an interest in your opinion and will value your input. Make sure that the child/youth is asked in the meeting, what they need to make the transition work. If the child/youth will not be attending the TDM meet with the child/youth before the TDM to talk about what is going to happen at the TDM and get their ideas on the concerns/ strengths/and ideas about what the child/youth thinks should happen around placement so that the child's/youth's ideas will be presented at the meeting. All topics that affect the child's/youth's placement and/or safety are acceptable to bring up during the meeting. If the child/youth is not involved in the brainstorming and planning of how to take care of the identified needs the entire transition is at risk. The meeting is designed to look at critical needs in a positive way. Sometimes, this can feel like 'piling on' as folks in the meeting with history of the child/youth not 'performing' as they would like can make their comments in a negative manner. If this happens, say something to reframe the conversation in a more positive light. You know the child/youth better than the facilitator who is probably meeting the child/youth for the first time and might not be in tune to how the child/youth is feeling. Many of our children are used to hiding their feelings. It may be appropriate to check in with the child/youth many times in the meeting to ensure that they understand what is happening and process any feelings as they come up. The facilitator will pick up on your comments and channel the meeting properly. If you think that advocating for the child/youth may bring you into opposition with what the child/youth wants, speak with your case supervisor prior to the meeting to strategize how best to bring this up and not jeopardize your relationship. It is possible to arrange that someone else at the meeting can bring up those issues.

The following was written by the Family to Family initiative as 10 tips for CASA. Family to Family is an evidenced based practice approach adopted by the State of California in the SIP (state improvement plan) to aid the state social service departments to get into compliance with the deficiencies found in the recent Federal review.

10 TIPS FOR CASA FOR EFFECTIVE TDM MEETINGS

1. Please attend the TDM. The participation of the CASA, as the child's independent advocate, is critical. Understand, however, that due to the often emergency nature of situations requiring a TDM, meetings can be scheduled quickly and with little notice. When scheduling the TDM the social worker must give priority first to the parents' attendance and then to other participants'.
2. Recognize the goal of a TDM is to involve parents, family/supports, caregivers, service providers, GAL, community partners, etc. with child welfare staff in an honest, open and thorough discussion that results in a high quality placement decision. Contribute information, ideas and recommendations in an effort to achieve the best decision that provides safety and protection for the child, with the least trauma.
3. Support the value of maintaining the best interest of the child as the focus of discussion. Recognize that 'best interest' means a decision that provides safety and protection in a placement at the lowest possible level of restrictiveness, and in the least intrusive manner. Never forget that, in most cases, children suffer emotionally when they must leave their families, and we must weigh that damage against the harm of their remaining in risky home situations.
4. Understand the consensus goal and cooperative intentions of every TDM. A decision that all participants can agree on and support is the objective for the meeting. If you have questions and/or concerns during the discussion, or as ideas are being considered, ask for clarification, indicate your issues and express your feelings so that you feel you have been heard.
5. Look for family strengths. Strive for a solution-focused approach, discussing the strengths and concerns particular to this family's situation. Suggest options to address the issues which build on family strengths. Work to develop a consensus decision that provides safety and protection for the child in the least restrictive way possible.
6. Offer your opinion, input, suggestions and recommendation while remaining open-minded, creative, flexible and receptive to the opinions and ideas of other participants.
7. Talk directly with family members and others during the meeting and listen carefully, considering the comments, suggestions and ideas of everyone present.
8. Accept as normal that everyone will not agree, emotions can run high, some individuals' behaviors will be difficult and the environment may be tense during many TDM meetings.
9. Maintain the privacy of information discussed at the TDM. Information should only be repeated outside of the meeting for case planning purposes or if necessary in court.
10. If you are unable to attend the TDM provide your concerns and recommendations to the social worker verbally or in writing in advance so that your input can be part of the meeting. If you are unable to be present, check with the social worker after the meeting regarding the decision/recommendation and plan of action.