Welcome and Introductions

Learning Objectives

- Refresh your knowledge of the Team Decision Making™ (TDM) model
- See TDM as a potentially viable evidence-informed practice under the Family First Act

What Is an Initial TDM Meeting?

A facilitated meeting to determine if a child needs to be separated from their parent(s)/primary caregiver(s) due to parent(s)/primary caregiver(s) behavior(s) that threatens a child’s safety.

The meeting seeks to make a “live” decision and is intended to occur before a child leaves their home. If it’s an emergency separation, this may be either within 72 hours or prior to any court hearing.
TDM and Other Models Share Core Values

- All families have strengths
- Families are experts on themselves
- Families deserve dignity and respect
- Families can make well-informed decisions

Family involvement in decision making improves outcomes
- Teams are more capable of decision making than an individual
- Children’s voices need to be heard
- Community members serve as natural allies and community resource experts and add value to the process

A Little More Detail, Please . . . TDM Is:

- An informal, social work-driven decision-making process for child welfare agencies regarding the need for out-of-home care for children
- An internal agency practice, usually invisible to the court
- A process that seeks consensus whenever possible
An opportunity to thoroughly examine a family’s strengths and needs while assessing safety threats and risk factors.

A meeting that supports careful examination of questions with legal impact, including reasonable efforts and concurrent planning.

A forum that provides solid preparation for workers who will present the agency’s recommendations to court personnel.

How Are Family Meeting Models Different?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Purpose</th>
<th>Timing</th>
<th>Authority for Ultimate Decision</th>
<th>How Success Is Measured</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>Not Voluntary</td>
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Team Decision Making: Goal

To involve parents/legal caregivers and extended families, community members, resource families, service providers, and agency staff in all decisions regarding the need for a child to leave the home; and to ensure a support network for the child and the adults who care for them.
Team Decision Making: Five Key Elements

Key Element 1
A TDM meeting includes the child and caregivers and is held for all decisions regarding possible separation of the child from their home and decisions about a potential placement change.

Why?
Equity: All families deserve to participate in a way that includes their voice and meets their needs.

Key Element 2
A TDM meeting is held before the child is moved—or in cases of emergency separations, by the next working day—and always before the initial court hearing in court-involved cases.

Why?
Engagement: TDM meetings embody team partnerships to address crisis, providing the agency and court with best thinking on next steps for the family.

Key Element 3
Families are encouraged to invite anyone in their support system, and public agencies strive to include community members who may bring valuable contributions to the discussion.

Why?
Inclusivity and Transparency: Support networks and communities share responsibility for contributing to the best decisions for the family. TDM meetings tap into the energy and creativity of the group, and early inclusion sets the stage for ongoing engagement.
Key Element 4
A skilled internal facilitator leads the meeting, using a six-stage meeting structure. The facilitator is experienced in child welfare practice and is not a case-carrying social worker or line supervisor.

Why?
Fairness: The same process is offered to everyone. Facilitators manage the process, modeling respect and interpersonal skills.

Key Element 5
Information about each meeting—participants, location, recommendations—is collected in a timely manner and linked to child and family outcomes data to ensure continuing data-informed evaluation of the TDM process and its effectiveness.

Why?
Self-Evaluation and Sustainability: The TDM process allows child welfare agencies to use data to better understand what works and helps to ensure positive and sustainable practices.

A TDM Meeting Is Also . . .

1. Not “the family’s meeting”—it has a different primary purpose
2. On the continuum of family meetings included in most agencies’ practice models
3. A practice that affects individual families AND broader system goals
4. Intended to ensure the best possible decision or recommendation regarding where a child can safely live
System Barriers That TDM Can Mitigate

- High caseloads
- Inexperienced caseworkers
- Lack of quality supervision
- Goal confusion
- Multiple, competing priorities
- Negative media climate
- Fear of public criticism
- Unclear voluntary OOH placement policy
- Poor relationships with court partners
- Inadequate data and analysis to guide policy and practice

TDM Design Supports Critical Best Practices

- Brings communities of color to the table and develops long-term safety nets
- Engages extended families and enhances use of kinship care
- Creates potential to lessen racial disparities in removal decisions
- Addresses rights of youth to “voice and choice”
- Ensures thorough, fair, consistent, respectful process
- Sets tone for engagement of family with team going forward
Implementing TDM

1. Identify project manager and create steering team
2. Design a communication plan
3. Assess existing team processes
4. Develop work plan with timeline
5. Analyze numbers
6. Review emergency and after-hours procedures
7. Build firewalls
8. Address logistical details
9. Develop agency protocol
10. Ensure robust data collection
11. Identify TDM staff
12. Train and develop facilitators
13. Educate staff and partners

14. Monitor practice

15. Support development

16. Preserve high standards

TDM Practice: A Deeper Dive

- Process
- Participants
- Roles and Responsibilities
- Levels of Decision
- Impact and Outcomes

Safety and Risk

Threat to Safety

Risk
Timing of Initial TDM

**Goal:** To meet before any child must leave home!
- Address family crisis versus discuss how to react to it
- Engage with family at most critical point
- Manage situation before court process takes charge
- Ensure everyone fully understands voluntary placements

Four Components of a “Live” TDM Meeting

- **Inviting Atmosphere:** This is one of openness.
- **Timing Issue 1:** The investigation, at minimum, is underway, with initial contacts made and initial information collected and assessed.
- **Timing Issue 2:** Meeting happens prior to the child leaving home when possible, to minimize potential for trauma due to unnecessary separation from parents.
- **Timing Issue 3:** Meeting happens before court hearing or prior to other binding action via court order.

Initial TDM Meeting Prompt

- **Caseworker:**
  - Assesses child safety in the home
  - Consults with supervisor
  - With agreement, initiates process to schedule TDM meeting
  - Informs parent/primary caregiver and encourages them to invite supports
  - Invites ALL at the meeting to explore the best and least-restrictive way to ensure safety
Who Participates in an Initial TDM?

- Parents/caregivers and family members
- Facilitator, caseworker, supervisor
- Others may include:
  - Child age 12-plus; others based on age and appropriateness
  - Supports, whether extended family or nonrelative
  - Attorneys for parents and children
  - Grassroots community partners
  - Formal community partners, especially other professionals

Facilitator Roles and Responsibilities

A Facilitator:

- Guides the group through a structured six-stage process, modeling respectful family engagement
- Collaborates with other agency staff to make quality decisions
- Asks questions, summarizes, makes observations, and contributes knowledge, as needed
- Seeks to guide the group to a consensus decision
- Clarifies and articulates the team decision and next steps
- Provides written meeting summary to all participants
Worker’s Role BEFORE the TDM Meeting

- Consults with supervisor
- Informs, invites, prepares family
- Encourages family to invite others for support
- Informs, invites, prepares youth

Determines how youth’s voice will be heard if not participating
Prepares with supervisor
Develops clear, behavior-specific description of safety concerns
Consults with facilitator about safety check-in

Supervisor’s Role BEFORE the TDM Meeting

Discusses with worker the safety threats, protective capacities, and consideration of child separation to decide if TDM meeting is needed.
Helps worker prepare to state the conditions necessary for the child to be safe in the least-restrictive setting possible.
Helps worker feel confident presenting and participating in all stages of the TDM meeting, including a review if consensus can not be reached.

Worker’s Role DURING the TDM Meeting

- Partners with facilitator
- Explains what prompted the meeting
- Presents relevant case information/history as related to current threats to safety
- Explains concerns using behavior-specific language

Explores family strengths and protective factors
Contributes and considers all options discussed at the meeting
Participates in decision making if consensus cannot be reached, makes final recommendation

Straight Talk!
Supervisor Role DURING the TDM Meeting

• Supports and coaches worker
• Participates in discussion
• Supports review process, if applicable
• Serves as role model

External Partners in TDM

1. Support persons invited by the family—as many as they like and whoever they are

2. Service providers, either formal or informal, who work with the family currently or potentially; invited by anyone; from the community or an agency

3. Grassroots community representatives invited by the agency as potential supports for families

Role of Other Professionals in TDM

This includes attorneys, GALs, CASA, service providers, mental health workers, and school personnel (prior to protective custody, parental consent is required for all people outside the agency)

• Actively share information and insights regarding child and family needs and strengths, as well as resources and services
• May provide support for the child or parent, as needed
Stages of the TDM Meeting

1. Introduction
2. Identify Situation
3. Assess Situation
4. Develop Ideas
5. Reach Decision
6. Recap/Close

The Path of Decision Making in TDM

- Caseworker focuses on safety first—parent behavior and impact on child
- Caseworker leads team in safety threats discussion
- Family understands safety concerns and behaviors that need to change
- Team explores relevant strengths that could serve as protective factors
- Team develops ideas to reduce or eliminate safety threats
- Team strives for consensus on least-restrictive way to keep child safe
- If no consensus, worker or supervisor makes final recommendation

Consensus in TDM Meetings Is Intended to:

- Ensure everyone feels heard
- Offer an opportunity to hear different views
- Highlight the agency’s value to engage in a more collaborative decision-making process
- Establish a commitment to uphold the decision after the meeting

“Consensus in the TDM meeting process does not equal unanimity”
Levels of Decision Making in a TDM Meeting

- Team reaches consensus on recommendation. If they can’t . . .
- Facilitator determines if agency staff agree. If not . . .
- Facilitator invites worker to make a decision.

If Agency Staff at the Table Cannot Support the Decision:

- That staff person requests a review meeting, which is held immediately. And then . . .
- Review decision becomes agency’s final position; all staff must support it and carry it out.

How TDM Can Improve Outcomes for Children

- Decrease congregate care placements
- Decrease lengths of stay in out-of-home care
- Increase initial placements in kin and foster family settings
- Increase likelihood of reunification with parents within a year
- Increase likelihood of permanent placement with kin within a year

Source: 2000 Family to Family (F2F) evaluation (Teal, 2013)

Child Trends Evaluation of TDM

The Annie E. Casey Foundation contracted with Child Trends to conduct a five-year randomized, controlled evaluation of TDM in two medium-sized Missouri counties.

- Data collection began in February 2017 and ended in January 2019.
- Evaluation results are expected by the end of 2020.

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