

CWS4030W  
FAMILY PARTNERSHIP MEETING  
FACILITATOR TRAINING  
PARTICIPANT RESOURCES



VIRGINIA DEPARTMENT OF  
SOCIAL SERVICES



August 2021

## **A REALISTIC PREVIEW OF THE FACILITATOR POSITION**

### **AS A FACILITATOR, YOU WILL:**

1. Be viewed by colleagues as a leader and a spokesperson for the agency.
2. Have a highly visible and responsible position within the agency, but may not be responsible for a caseload of your own.
3. Use your experience and skill to be innovative and instrumental in engaging, encouraging, supporting and empowering participants in the Family Partnership Meeting.
4. Witness and participate in the creativity and the power of the group process.
5. Be able to demonstrate the values of inclusion, partnership, honesty and being strengths-focused at Family Partnership Meetings.
6. Often be energized (or exhausted) by busy, stress-filled days, with a schedule determined by the daily demand for meetings. To be flexible to accommodate families, your schedule may include evening/weekend work.
7. Be involved with the highest risk cases in the agency and share responsibility for ensuring that a high quality decision results from each Family Partnership Meeting.
8. Be prepared and focused at all meetings, and be ready to move quickly to work with the next team upon a meeting's conclusion.
9. Observe the presentation, behavior and skill of staff, both good and bad. You will be expected to assist, empower, model, monitor and coach, in addition to providing feedback to colleagues/supervisors about the quality of their work.

10. Be respectful and professional to others, even when their behavior is difficult. You will manage individuals (non-agency and agency) in a group when tension and emotion is high.
11. Need to be punctual for meetings and on the job as scheduled as a Family Partnership Meeting cannot be canceled due to the lack of a facilitator. When another facilitator is not available, you may be responsible for doing your colleague's work in addition to your own.
12. Have little to no control of your schedule, which means that personal plans, such as lunch, will be secondary to a request for a needed meeting.
13. If facilitation becomes your full-role, you will primarily be confined to the FPM room except for traveling to sites for meetings in the community.
14. Have to give attention to details in preparation for and during meetings, but be able to see the "big picture" and ramifications of decisions.
15. Work with diverse teams. You must be independent and strong enough not to be influenced by friendships or loyalties, but focus on facts and the needs of families and children. You must demonstrate fairness to all.
16. Be responsible for ensuring that concerns, strengths, and ideas are thoroughly discussed and considered in all decisions. You will be accountable for ensuring that knowledge of policies, standards of practice, laws, identification of risks, substance abuse, domestic violence, mental health, community and placement resources, etc. are factored into decisions.
17. Be responsible for quality control, objecting to a social worker's decision when necessary.
18. Have to work diligently with little recognition or appreciation for work well done, while sharing responsibility for decisions and dysfunctional meetings. You must invite feedback on your facilitation.

19. Possibly have limited peer support, due to few individuals doing facilitation or understanding the stress of your job.
20. Need to see trends, systems issues, service gaps, etc. and provide your insights to management.
21. Be asked to accept, support and lead special projects as needed for the department and agency.

## **COURSE COMPETENCIES**

1. The participant will review the purpose of the Family Partnership Meeting within the context of Virginia's practice model and recognize placement decision points in child welfare when the Family Partnership Meeting process is appropriate.
2. The participant will explore the logistics involved in planning, conducting, and debriefing Family Partnership Meetings and be able to identify and address potential barriers.
3. The participant will understand the multiple phases of the Family Partnership Meeting and learn to direct the meeting process by systematically moving the team through the problem solving model to reach consensus.
4. The participant will recognize the components of placement decisions that address child safety and risk factors and will learn to work with teams to create effective and measurable action plans.
5. The participant will learn to build effective teams by consistently conveying the values and mission of the Family Engagement Model and developing strategies to promote active, honest participation by youth, family members and their support systems, agency representatives, and stakeholders.
6. The participant will learn to create a safe, productive environment by developing awareness and sensitivity to emotions of meeting guests and the ability to manage conflict and challenging behaviors.
7. The participant will learn to consider the impact of trauma on children and families and conduct meetings with sensitivity to triggers and how to process any trauma issues.

## **LEARNING OBJECTIVES**

### **CWS4030W**

It is expected that as a result of participation in this course the participants will be able to:

- A. Identify the values, benefits, and goals of the Family Partnership Meeting and its role in the Virginia Children's Services Practice Model.
- B. Recognize how the process, policies, and procedures of the Family Partnership Meeting differ from other team meetings (e.g. FAPT, service planning committees, multidisciplinary child abuse/neglect teams).
- C. Explain the before, during, and after meeting roles and responsibilities of the meeting facilitator.
- D. Explain the before, during, and after meeting role of the social worker.
- E. Demonstrate the ability to welcome, engage, and involve all participants in the meeting process.
- F. Explain the role of the facilitator in understanding children, youth, and families in the context of their own rules, traditions, history, and culture and identify methods of enhancing cultural competence.
- G. Determine when and how it is appropriate for youth to be involved in meetings.
- H. Establish criteria for group conduct.
- I. Recognize how family dynamics impact emotional and physical safety.
- J. Explain the purpose and goals of Family Partnership Meetings to meeting participants.
- K. Identify the steps needed to facilitate a Family Partnership Meeting.

- L. Demonstrate how to help teams articulate family strengths and use these strengths in the development of the safety/action plan.
- M. Recognize how group dynamics affect a Family Partnership Meeting.
- N. Demonstrate the ability to pace a meeting, focus participants on strengths/concerns/ideas and move systematically to fully develop each stage of the meeting to reach consensus.
- O. Demonstrate the ability to discuss safety and risk factors in meetings and ensure they are adequately addressed in safety/action plans.
- P. Identify intervention strategies and skills to maintain comfort guidelines/ground rules, manage group dynamics, and deal with participants who exhibit difficult or dysfunctional group behaviors.
- Q. Produce a safety/action plan and summarize the meeting decision.
- R. Explain the significance of follow up conferences.
- S. Give and receive feedback to assist in team development and professional growth.
- T. Identify department of social services Family Partnership Meeting documentation guidelines/ expectations and parameters of confidentiality.
- U. Explain the importance of ongoing support, networking, mentoring and supervision for facilitators in achieving success and professional development.

## **FAMILY PARTNERSHIP MEETINGS CORE PROGRAM ELEMENTS**

**1. FOR ALL CRITICAL DECISION POINTS:**

- ❖ VERY HIGH OR HIGH RISK CHILD ASSESSMENT (all potential placement decisions)
- ❖ EMERGENCY REMOVAL (prior to initial removal hearing)
- ❖ PLACEMENT CHANGE/CHANGE OF PLACEMENT/DISRUPTION OR DISSOLUTION OF ADOPTION
- ❖ PRIOR TO CHANGE OF GOAL (Reunification, Placement With Relative, Adoption, Permanent Foster Care, Legal Emancipation/Aging Out of Foster Care/Independent Living)
- ❖ OTHER PERMANENCY PLANNING

**2. TIMING**

- ❖ HELD **BEFORE** THE CHILD'S MOVE OCCURS
- ❖ IN CASES OF IMMINENT RISK, BY THE NEXT WORKING DAY
- ❖ **ALWAYS** BEFORE THE INITIAL COURT HEARING IN CASES OF REMOVAL

**3. INCLUDES SIX DISTINCT STAGES:**

- ❖ INTRODUCTION
- ❖ IDENTIFYING THE SITUATION
- ❖ ASSESSING THE SITUATION
- ❖ DEVELOPING IDEAS
- ❖ REACH A DECISION
- ❖ RECAP/EVALUATION/CLOSING

**4. FACILITATOR**

- ❖ NOT THE FAMILY'S CASE-CARRYING FAMILY SERVICES SPECIALIST OR THE ASSIGNED SERVICES SUPERVISOR (i.e. Neutral)
- ❖ IMMEDIATELY ACCESSIBLE, TRAINED & SKILLED
- ❖ INTERNAL OR EXTERNAL

**5. TEAM PARTICIPANTS**

- ❖ IMMEDIATE AND EXTENDED MATERNAL AND PATERNAL FAMILY MEMBERS
- ❖ SUPPORT PERSONS IDENTIFIED BY FAMILY
- ❖ AGENCY REPRESENTATIVES
- ❖ COMMUNITY PARTNERS-HELPING AGENCIES, SCHOOL, GAL, CASA
- ❖ COMMUNITY REPRESENTATIVES

**6. THE GOAL OF FPM IS TO:**

- ❖ REACH CONSENSUS ON A DECISION REGARDING PLACEMENT



- ❖ TO MAKE THE LEAST INTRUSIVE/LEAST RESTRICTIVE PLAN WHICH PROVIDES SAFETY FOR THE CHILD(REN)

GENERATE IDEAS AND CREATE A SUPPORT NETWORK USING A TEAM APPROACH

### **QUESTIONS TO HELP FAMILIES IDENTIFY FORMAL AND INFORMAL SUPPORTS**

- When (the incident/call/crisis) happened, who was the first person you called?
- Are there family members who have been supportive and helpful over the years?
- It appears you've been able to cope with this situation for a long time. Whom have you relied on for help and support?
- Whom at your child's school do you trust? What have they done that has been the most helpful?
- Do you have neighbors who are aware of your situation and can help you?
- Are there any activities in your community for your child?
- Was there a professional you worked with who you really felt helped?
- Do you belong to a religious group? Have you ever? Would you want some help in order to reconnect with that community?
- Are there any supports/services you would be interested in joining in your community?
- Are there any professionals who you would like to have on your team because of their expertise? Who?
- Does your son or daughter have any friends who they listen to? Could that person be on your team?

## SENECA CENTER: FAMILY FINDING SEARCH TOOLS AND TIPS

### FREE SITES

#### Telephone Directories/Reverse Lookup

##### **411.com**

This site has both reverse phone and reverse address lookup. Also search for neighbors.

##### **Argali White & Yellow** (free/paid) ([www.argali.com](http://www.argali.com))

Directory lookup that searches and aggregates results from several web-based phone and email address databases, along with several other directory searches. Requires software download. Free version allows ten searches per month; paid version allows unlimited searching and is \$29.95 per user per year with quantity discounts.

##### **Anywho.com** (free/paid)

This is AT&T's online directory; advanced searches are done through Intellius. The site includes white pages and a people finder. Using the free portion, you can find towns and sometimes ages.

##### **Area Codes** ([www.allareacodes.com](http://www.allareacodes.com))

Look up area codes for all the states, cities, and other areas serviced under the North American Numbering Plan, including Canada.

##### **MSN white pages** (<http://msn.whitepages.com>)

White pages search, including reverse phone and address lookups

##### **Superpages.com**

Site includes yellow pages, people finder (including reverse phone number), and business search using a map.

##### **White Pages**

Superpages.com

Ultimate White Pages ([www.theultimates.com/white](http://www.theultimates.com/white))

Whitepages.com

##### **Yellow Pages**

Superpages.com

Ultimate Yellow Pages ([www.theultimates.com/yellow](http://www.theultimates.com/yellow))

Yellow.com

Yellowpages.com

#### Criminal Records

##### **Family Watchdog** ([www.familywatchdog.us](http://www.familywatchdog.us))

National sex offender registry

**Federal Bureau of Prisons** ([www.bop.gov](http://www.bop.gov))

Can **search for Federal inmates** incarcerated from 1982 to the present.

The search page is here: [www.bop.gov/iloc2/LocateInmate.jsp](http://www.bop.gov/iloc2/LocateInmate.jsp)

**VINELink** ([www.vinelink.com](http://www.vinelink.com))

VINELink is the online version of VINE (Victim Information and Notification Everyday), the National Victim Notification Network. VINE is a service through which victims of crime can use the telephone or Internet to search for information regarding their offender's custody status and register to receive telephone and email notification when their offender's custody status changes. If the inmate for whom you're searching is in custody at a corrections facility that participates in VINE, you should be able to locate custody information on VINELink.

**Email**

**About.com: Top 9 Tips to Find Anybody's Email Address**

([http://email.about.com/od/addresssearchtip/tp/find\\_email.htm](http://email.about.com/od/addresssearchtip/tp/find_email.htm))

**In addition to the actual tips to look for email addresses, there are multiple links to other search sites, and a list of related About.com articles.**

**Genealogy**

**Access Genealogy** ([www.accessgenealogy.com](http://www.accessgenealogy.com))

Search a wide variety of genealogical records

**Indian Tribal Records** ([www.accessgenealogy.com/native](http://www.accessgenealogy.com/native))

The Native American Rolls ([www.accessgenealogy.com/native/rolls.htm](http://www.accessgenealogy.com/native/rolls.htm)) contain records related to treaties, trade, land claims, Native American removal to Oklahoma, allotments, military affairs, military service and pensions, trust funds, and other activities.

**Latter Day Saints (LDS) Genealogy Search** ([www.familysearch.org](http://www.familysearch.org))

Genealogical records from the Mormon Church

**General Search Engines**

**Google** ([www.google.com](http://www.google.com))

General search engine. Try searching on a person's name. Sometimes you can find a current address, genealogy or other interesting information on individuals online. If you Google an address, you can obtain a map and/or satellite view of the location. This site is a favorite of Stanislaus. For more in-depth searching, try Google Advanced Search ([www.google.com/advanced\\_search?hl=en](http://www.google.com/advanced_search?hl=en))

**Mamma.com**

Another general search engine; good for preliminary information

## **Obituaries**

### **Obitsarchive.com** (free/paid)

Newspaper obituary search. Searching through ObitsArchive.com's vast collection of obituaries and death notices is free and unlimited. Users then pay to view a specific item.

### **Obituaries.com**

Links to obituary listing in the United States and Canada

## **People Finders**

### **123people.com**

People finder which searches "images, videos, phone numbers, email addresses, social networking and Wikipedia profiles and much more." Also does international searching.

### **Classmates.com**

Searches high school yearbook/class information

### **Federal Parent Locator Service** ([www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cse/newhire](http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cse/newhire))

Site for public use. This website is sponsored by the Administration for Children and Families. Los Angeles County accesses this site through their District Attorney's office. The site includes information from the child support services system, and the social security death index.

### **iSearch** (free/paid) ([www.isearch.com](http://www.isearch.com))

People finder with the option to search by screen name, in addition to name, email, and phone. Initial search is free; pay to view more detailed information supplied by Intelius.

### **Jigsaw** (free/paid) ([www.jigsaw.com](http://www.jigsaw.com))

Provides professional contact information, including names, titles, email addresses. Obtain information by purchasing it or by submitted others' contact information.

### **Peoplefinder.com** (free/paid)

This site is run by Intellius. Preliminary information is free; additional information costs (through Intellius)

### **Pipl.com**

People finder using more robust technology to search the "deep web," a vast repository of underlying content, such as documents in online databases. According to Pipl.com, general-purpose web crawlers cannot reach the deep web. Its content is estimated at 500 times that of the surface web, yet has remained mostly untapped due to the limitations of traditional search engines.

**Privateye.com** (free/paid)

The free portion lists places that people have worked, towns they have lived in, and possible relatives. The paid portion lists people the search subject has lived with.

**Spock.com** (free/paid)

People finder. The free portion searches social networking sites and the Web. Includes links to other sites.

**Wink (www.wink.com)**

People finder for the US, Canada, and UK. Includes email search and search of social networking sites such as Facebook and MySpace. Also search for people by school, interests, career, photo, etc.

**Zabasearch** (free/paid) ([www.zabasearch.com](http://www.zabasearch.com))

Search by name or phone number. Initial search is free; fee-based (through Intelius) for additional information.

**Public Records/Vital Statistics**

**blackbookonline.info** (free/paid) ([www.blackbookonline.info](http://www.blackbookonline.info))

This site includes links to several other search engines, including state, local, and federal information.

**CA State Vital Records** (free/paid) ([www.vitalsearch-ca.com](http://www.vitalsearch-ca.com))

Vital statistics for California: births, deaths, marriages, etc.

**Crimetime.com** (free/paid)

Geared for private investigators, this site includes links to public record searches and other information.

**Marriage Records**

(<http://www.knowx.com/mr/search.jsp?userid=guest&password=welcome>)

Included records for several states, including Florida, Nevada, Ohio, and Texas, and portions of California.

**Rootsweb Death Records** ([www.rootsweb.com](http://www.rootsweb.com))

Site also has links to several other genealogical/public records sites

- Social Security Death Index (<http://ssdi.rootsweb.ancestry.com/>)
- California Death Records (<http://vitals.rootsweb.com/ca/death/search.cgi>)
- Kentucky Death Records (<http://vitals.rootsweb.com/ky/death/search.cgi>)
- Maine Death Records (<http://vitals.rootsweb.ancestry.com/me/death/search.cgi>)

- Texas Death Records (<http://vitals.rootsweb.com/tx/death/search.cgi>)

**SearchSystems.net** (free/paid) ([www.searchsystems.net](http://www.searchsystems.net))

Very large public record directory online. Provides links to over 35,958 searchable public record databases, many of which are free. A good site for finding municipal records and death certificates. SearchSystems also offers a premium service, which is charged on a per-search basis: \$29.95/year or \$9.95/month. Recommended by Kevin Campbell.

**Social Security Death Index** (<http://helpdesk.rootsweb.com/ssdi>)

This link gives an introduction and directions on how to use the site. To bypass the instructions and go directly to the search page, go to: <http://ssdi.rootsweb.ancestry.com/>.

**SSN Allocation Table** ([www.ssa.gov/employer/stateweb.htm](http://www.ssa.gov/employer/stateweb.htm))

Shows the first three digits of assigned SSNs and the state or U.S. Possession in which the SSN was issued.

**Social/Professional Networking****Facebook** ([www.facebook.com](http://www.facebook.com))

Social networking site

**LinkedIn** ([www.linkedin.com](http://www.linkedin.com))

Professional networking site. Although it is free, you have to join to use the site.

**MySpace** ([www.myspace.com](http://www.myspace.com))

Social networking site

**Spokeo** ([www.spokeo.com](http://www.spokeo.com))

Social-networking aggregator; searches 43 major social networks. According to their website, "Spokeo is a friend finder/tracker that automatically brings you friends' updates across the Web."

**SUBSCRIPTION SITES****Accurint** ([www.accurint.com](http://www.accurint.com))

A division of LexisNexis. Key features include:

- People Search... locates neighbors, associates and possible relatives.
- Phones Plus... track down phone numbers not typically available to increase your chances of finding your subject. Access over 268 million non-directory assistance records, including cell phone numbers.
- People at Work... links more than 287 million individuals to businesses and includes information such as business addresses, phone numbers, and possible dates of employment.
- Relavint™... visually links individuals with businesses, addresses, relatives and vehicles.
- Advanced Person Search... helps find individuals when only old or fragmented data is available.



### **Ancestry.com**

Contains immigration, military, census, birth, marriage, and death records; Jewish family history; African American family history

- Offers 2 week free trial

- Pricing for U.S. only/worldwide searches:

- Annual membership: \$12.95/24.95 month

- Three months: \$16.95/27.95 month

- Monthly: \$19.95/29.95 month

### **Entersect ([www.entersect.net](http://www.entersect.net))**

Entersect Public Records (EPR) offers searches on a variety of public records with as little information as a name, social security number, or cell phone number.

- Individual searches range from \$1 to \$21, plus a one-time application fee of \$49

- No monthly service fee or minimum usage fee

### **Global-Locate ([www.global-locate.com/v4.1/page.asp](http://www.global-locate.com/v4.1/page.asp))**

Global-Locate, by Integrity, provides accurate address, phone and identification details on citizens of 207 nations. Powered by worldwide Government issued ID data, Global-Locate can help determine a current address, an active landline phone number, a cell phone number or an unpublished number, plus identity and age verification information such as date of birth, passport number or government-issued ID number, where available. Global-Locate was designed specifically for use by government, law enforcement and child welfare agencies to help locate individuals world-wide.

- Monthly fee of \$199/user for unlimited access; site pricing available.

### **Intelius ([www.intelius.com](http://www.intelius.com))**

People search, as well as background and criminal check

- Per-use fee for each report requested (\$1.95 for a people search report)

- 24-hour pass for unlimited search is \$19.95

- Quantity discount pricing is available; contact Intelius for more information.

### **Merlin Information Services ([www.merlindata.com/databases.asp](http://www.merlindata.com/databases.asp))**

A wide variety of searches available, including address, phone, social security number, court records, births, deaths, marriages, etc.

- Cost per search ranges from 25 cents to \$17.50, depending on the type of search

- People Finder unlimited for one user - \$999.00 annually

### **Obituaries ([www.obitsarchive.com](http://www.obitsarchive.com))**

Contains archived obituaries from 87 different newspapers in California alone There are also archives available from all other states. If your local newspaper is not included here, check with them to see about adding a subscription to their online archives, if available. Search by name,

publication date, or obituary text. (Single Article: \$2.95 100 articles every 30 days: \$19.95 (billed monthly))

### **The Work Number ([www.theworknumber.com/socialservices](http://www.theworknumber.com/socialservices))**

The Work Number is an income and employment verification service used by social service workers nationwide to determine eligibility for TANF, food stamps, low-income housing, welfare-to-work programs, cash assistance, Medicaid and other benefits. It's also used by Title IV-D directors to find child support evaders in cases where court orders have been established. The fee for a pay date summary (SSN Search) is \$3.00; the fee for an Income Verification is \$6.50.

### **US Search ([www.ussearch.com](http://www.ussearch.com))**

Provides a variety of search services on address, phone, social security number, email address, maiden name, criminal records, and court reports.

Cost per search ranges from \$1.95 (simple name and address) to \$295.00 (due diligence background check with criminal search)

### **Out of County Searches**

- Start by contacting Family Support Bureau to see if they have information. If they say the person is deported, then contact INS, but you will need the alien ID#. The only information INS provides is if the person has been deported and the date of deportation.
- Contact the appropriate consulate. Fax a letter to the consulate, providing all the information available. The consulate usually responds that family is not found.
- Finding relatives in Mexico often involves interviewing family members with whom you are already familiar.

### **TIPS FOR SEARCHING**

**When searching please keep the following in mind:**

- Information over one year old has limited viability, although if you have nothing else, you might try it.
- Pay for the father's search first, because you will get paternal side as part of relatives.
- Search for names in the following order: the subject, relatives, then neighbors. The category of "associates" is a last resort.
- Go through the report, and highlight the names of all possible leads. Make sure to mark the most recent address. Then, send out letters to each address at which the person is listed. You can use Postmaster letters to ask for forwarding information, etc.
- When looking at possible relatives, see if any relatives have shared an address. Try to figure out how they might be related.
- Finding homeless people is very hard.
- Do searches on the deceased - you can still get good relative information.

## COMMUNICATION SKILLS FOR EFFECTIVE FACILITATION

**Active Listening:** Trying to see the problem the way the speaker sees it. This requires entering actively and imaginatively into the other person's situation and trying to understand a frame of reference different than your own. (Reflective listening)

**Clarifying:** Interpreting ideas or suggestions; Clearing up confusion; Defining and explaining terms, jargon, acronyms; Indicating alternatives and issues confronting the group. Example—"I don't understand. Did you say...?"

**Collaborating:** Working together; assisting; "Let's see if we can work on this together."

**Confronting:** Pushing others to acknowledge problems, feelings, or behaviors, when other less directive interventions has failed to. It may increase resistance if not successful, difficult to use without an established and supportive relationship.

**Crediting:** Recognizing the contribution and efforts of a person. It is giving credit where credit is due and remembering to do it.

**Empathizing:** Entering the feeling or ideas of another, to put oneself in another's shoes.

**Encouraging:** Friendly, warm and responsive to others; Accepting others; Asking for responses, ideas, feelings of all participants. Example—"Tell us more..." "You were saying..." "Describe..." "Is there some other points of view on this subject?" "Is there something we haven't thought of?"

**Establishing Rapport:** *Developing a relationship or connection with another person. Showing others that you are willing to listen, inviting them to say what's on their mind. Use person's name.*

**Harmonizing:** Attempting to reconcile disagreements and find areas of commonality; Getting people to explore their differences. "Sounds as if you have the same goal, but different ideas how to get there...."

**Interpreting Verbal Statements:** Exploring and clarifying statements so that the meaning is understood.

**Interpreting Nonverbal Cues:** Translating the non-spoken messages, provided by body language and paralinguage—the inflections and other vocal and gestural nuances added to language to convey meaning. Body language includes facial expressions; eye contact and movement; head, arm, and hand movements; and body postures and shifts. Whether automatic or learned, body language can corroborate or contradict what a person says or doesn't say in words.

**Linking:** Joining parts together to assist in making connections and build understanding. “Sounds like your thoughts/ideas are similar to what X had to say.”

**Negotiating:** Discussing to build agreement, asking for what you want and listening to the other person. The secret of successful negotiating is listening.

**Paraphrasing:** Checking communication accuracy between speaker and listener. Saying back to the speaker, in your own words, your understanding of the message you heard. “If I understand correctly, you are saying....”

**Reality Testing:** Checking if the idea is sound and can be implemented. Is it viable?

**Reframing:** Describes a techniques used to help create a different way of looking at a situation, person, or relationship by changing its meaning. Reframing transforms negatively-charged statements into statements of positive intent. Listen for the unspoken concern and reconstruct the statement to address the concern. Caregiver says: “As I’ve said before, she will be home by 10pm, or I’ll set curfew even earlier and take away the car.” Facilitator reframes: “You need to know she is safe, and not on the road after a certain hour.” Another example, “Everyone says she is hopeless.” Facilitator responds: “You feel she is capable of doing more” or “You would like her to put more effort into....” Reframing a statement with the positive intent gets to the underlying need or worry by creating a different way of looking at a situation, person, or relationship by reconstructing its meaning.

**Reflecting/Mirroring:** Sharing or repeating what you heard or saw in person’s communication.

- **Reflecting Content**
  - Stating opinions and facts of the person’s message.
  - Identifying content and feelings in the person’s message
- **Reflecting Feeling**
  - Accurately identifying, labeling and conveying an understanding of what the person is feeling and why s/he is feeling that way.
  - The person’s emotional state and then communicating your understanding.

The facilitator may also comment on either the content or the process of the meeting and asks the group to respond. “I notice that we’re only talking about foster care placement, is there any other option?” (content focus) or “We agreed to hear everyone out, and there seems to be a lot of interrupting going on? How is this affecting participation?” (process focus)

- Convey understanding and build relationships.
- Encourage the family member to continue talking.
- Clarify for the family member and for the worker.

- Focus discussion.
- Help focus worker concentration.
- Buy time when the worker does not know what to say.

**~You may combine both content and feeling reflection~**

**Relieving Tension:** Alleviating or lessening the level of emotional stress or anxiety. “There are a lot of strong feelings being expressed. Maybe we all need to take a deep breath for just a moment.”

**Silence:** Powerful quiet. Ask a question, pause, wait, say nothing.

**Strength-Based Interviewing:** Respectfully questioning to allow families to recognize and be recognized for their strengths. This involves listening, observing, complimenting, encouraging, asking, and talking about successes.

**Summarizing:** Pulling together related ideas; May assist with keeping discussion on track. Helping to concisely organize information. Restating suggestions/ideas after the group has discussed them. Example—“Let me see if I understand you correctly. So far, you said that....”

**Supporting:** Assisting or aiding either verbally and/or non-verbally, nodding head, saying “Ok,” “Thanks,” “That’s a great idea” etc.

## SOLUTION-FOCUSED STRATEGIES IN FAMILY PARTNERSHIP MEETINGS

This concept is not just a matter of using techniques or different types of questions. In order for a strengths-based philosophy to *really* work, one must understand and embrace the philosophy. It is a way of thinking about situations, about people (co-workers, customers, etc.) AND about our interactions with them (i.e., do you believe people have the capacity to resolve their problems? Can a father who hits his child be a good parent? If someone uses drugs, can they still contribute to the lives of others?).

For professional child welfare staff, it is a sense that our job is not to solve people's problems, but rather to help them rediscover their solutions. We must recognize that we do not *know* the answer and have confidence that we do not *have to know* the answer.

The questions (miracle, scaling, exception, etc.) and techniques (compliments, language, etc.) are merely tools to make these beliefs come alive.

**Problem-solving is "other" guided.** An example is your best friend coming to you and saying, "Here's the deal....what should I do?" You give the answers. You see the picture on the puzzle box and proceed to put the puzzle together.

**Solution-finding is done together.** An example is your best friend saying, "Here's the deal, what should I do?" You start to find out more about "the deal". How did it happen? What did others think about it? Did anything like this happen before? What did s/he do about it then? Together, you try to figure it out. It is the pieces of the puzzle given to you slowly and you working with your friend to put the picture together one piece at a time until a recognizable scene emerges.

In FPM, you have the ability to truly be curious. You don't know about the situation. The image is brought forward through the worker's description, the family and their supports recounting details, the community representative's query, and through your questions and summary. It is a prime opportunity to use this approach as everyone explores a safe placement alternative.

**Solution-Defining:** These questions help family members define who, what, why, where, when and how of the problem and the solution. It helps to identify the nature of the problem and the solutions, as well as who else is interested in this problem or has information that might be helpful in solving the problem. It helps to provide a video replay of how and under what circumstances the problem occurs. This is done by first asking the question such as "*Under what circumstance is this likely to occur?*" and then following up with the statement "and then what happens, and following that response to say "and then what happens". This sets the condition for the family member to provide a video replay of the circumstance under which the problem exists.

**Examples include:**

- Under what circumstances is this likely to occur?
- When this happens (your husband loses his temper and threatens the children), what do you do?
- What are the positives for you in continuing to stay in this relationship?
- Who else is concerned about this problem in your family?
- What would have to be different for you not to be afraid?
- How often did it happen last week?
- Who was there when it happened?
- Where were you when Johnny had his temper tantrum?

**Past Successes:** Through the interview process, you can focus on a family's past successes, that is, when the family member was functioning well enough not to require child protective services intervention. It is empowering to the family member to realize that there was a period in his/her life when s/he was more successful than s/he feels at this moment.

**Examples of past success questions include:**

- It's not easy to raise three children on your own. How did you do it?
- After having been through what you've been through, how did you find enough strength to keep pushing on?
- What do you need to do so that you'll feel good about yourself and in control of your life again?
- What would it take for you to bring back the confidence you had when you were in high school?

**Scaling Questions:** Scaling questions are a clever way to make complex features of a family's life more concrete and accessible for both the family and the facilitator/team. Scaling questions can be used to assess self-esteem, self-confidence, investment in change, prioritization of problems, perception of hopefulness, etc.

**Scaling for the team's sense of success**

- "On a scale from 0-10, 0 meaning no chance it will work and 10 meaning this is the best thing since sliced bread, what is everyone's sense that this plan will be okay in keeping the children safe?"

**Scaling for confidence**

- "From 0-10, Mrs. Johnson, how confident are you that you can do what you said by next Monday?" (Follow up)
- "What will it take for you to feel more confident?"
- "Is there anything that your sister can help you with to achieve that?"

### **Relationship questions and scaling**

- “What would the children say is the most important this we talked about today?” (It gets to the real need and keeps everyone focused on the purpose of the meeting.)
- “How would the children rate this plan on a scale from 0-10?”
- To the parent, “How would your mother/brother/sister rate how well you are following through with your treatment plan, from 0 (not at all) to 10 (everything is accomplished)?”

**Exception Finding Questions:** Exceptions are times when problems could have happened but did not. In the past there may have been similar circumstances to the present, but maltreatment did not occur. Essentially, you are trying to discover how the patterns around the problems are different, especially what is different when the problem does not occur. In addition, problematic behaviors usually happen only within certain physical, relational or social contexts. It is important to find out in detail what happens when the person does not have the problem. That information can be used to identify the abilities the family uses successfully in one setting. You are trying to determine how the patterns around the problems were changed and can be changed in the future.

- When the problem is solved, how do you think your relationship with your son will be different? What will you be doing then that you are not doing now?
- I can see you have every reason to be depressed. When do you suppose you get a little bit less depressed?
- Can you tell us how you were able to get the kids off to school every day, even with so much going on in your life? (Indirect compliment)
- What would have to happen for you to do it more often?
- You are saying that you didn’t drink for five days last week. How did you do it?
- Tell me what is different for you at those times when you don’t lose control.
- How do you explain to yourself that the problem doesn’t happen at those times?
- How did working with that counselor make a difference?
- To the worker, “You mentioned that there are times when Ms. Johnson has kept everything under control. What do you think helped her to do that?”



**Miracle Questions:** The miracle question literally asks family members to disregard their current troubles and for a moment imagine what their lives would be like in a successful future. It also helps family members look at a more hopeful future. These questions help them vividly envision or imagine positive outcomes that can become part of the change process. Possibly questions:

- Suppose one night there is a miracle while you are sleeping and the problem that brought you to child protective services is solved. What do you suppose you will notice that is different the next morning that will tell you the problem is solved?
- If you had three wishes, what would they be?
- If you had a magic wand and could grant yourself one thing that would solve the problem/meet the need that your family is now facing, what would you wish for?
- If you could paint a picture for me of what your family would be like if all this were solved, what would that picture look like?

Follow-up questions include:

- If the miracle happened, what will be the first thing you notice?
- If the miracle happened, what will be the first change you notice about yourself?
- If you were to take these steps, what would you notice different around your house?

**Coping questions:** Help examine with people how they manage difficult times and things they might like to change but can't right now. Coping questions help you to find the areas of resiliency that support people in troubled times. These questions can also help you to identify the personal strengths and other resources that people use to cope and can use to make advances. Coping questions in combination with other questions such as the miracle questions or scaling questions can help you identify what needs to happen to keep coping in the most productive way. Examples of coping questions include:

- What has and is making it possible for you to cope?
- How do you keep making it work for you and your family?
- I'm sure there are days you want to pack it up and leave. What helps you stay?
- There are lots of things people are asking you to do for your children.
- What helps you meet those demands?

**Compliments:** Indirect statements which imply something positive about the person.

Example: "According to everyone here, you have made a lot of positive changes. What do you think is the most noticeable to your children?" To the foster parent, "How did you know to contact the worker when things weren't going well?"

## WHAT CAN I DO WHEN DEALING WITH EMOTIONS AND DIFFICULT BEHAVIORS?

The following strategies are applicable when encountering many forms of challenging behavior and resistance in a FPM:

- Recognize, describe, and legitimize emotions and actions—directly and indirectly-often, acknowledging an emotion can be the quickest way to enable a party to move on.
- Keep the focus on the goal—to make the best possible decision that protects the child while being least intrusive and least restrictive.
- Listen/Hear
- **Acknowledge the emotion, try to understand and encourage the person to describe their emotion, if they are able, and chart. Often participants are willing to move on if they are visually affirmed they have been heard.**
- Accept emotions, controversy and disagreement as natural and to be expected.
- **Stand in the other person's shoes.**
- Ask the individual “what do you need”—recognize the family's expertise.
- **Communicate cooperative intentions.**
- Explain the purpose of the meeting.
- **Identify and clarify areas of disagreement and differences.**
- Encourage understanding and acknowledgement of all ideas and positions.
- **Negotiate over issues.**
- Stay flexible and assist the group to do the same.
- **Establish and refer to ground rules.**
- Give all the information on decision making, e.g. consensus goal, but agency will make final decision if unable to reach group consensus.
- **Provide tissues, water.**

### DON'T:

Immediately Interrupt; **Take it personally.** Be critical of the person. **Judge, label, accuse or insult;** See ideas and decisions as win/lose situations; **Get too concerned, too soon and/or act too quickly.**

The following strategies are specific to various emotions and/or difficult behaviors:

### A GROUP MEMBER IS EXHIBITING DIFFICULT INDIVIDUAL BEHAVIOR

- When it is a staff member, you might want to approach the person in private, point out the problem, discuss and coach them in more desirable behavior. Approach as an ally, not as an authority.

- Try not to judge the behavior as right or wrong.
- Attempt to maintain the balance between protecting the group from the distracting behavior and protecting the individual from undue attack.
- Accept the behavior. Describe it. Ask about it.
- Legitimize their feelings, perceptions or rights.
- Refer to the comfort agreements/ground rules if needed. Allow the group to self-monitor, if able.

**OTHER TYPES OF INDIVIDUAL BEHAVIORS MAY INCLUDE:**

**MONOPOLOZING/DOMINATING THE DISCUSSION**—*speaking too often, long or loud, making it difficult for anyone else to participate.*

- **Stop the person, thank them for their input and inform that we need to hear from everyone.**
- Remind of time limit.
- Break eye contact. Stop giving focused attention.
- Summarize what the person has said and move to someone else.
- Give the person a time limit.
- **When you know in advance this may be a problem, propose in the ground rules that “everyone monitor air time.” Explain that may mean less talking for some and more for others.**

**NON-PARTICIPATION/WITHHOLDING**—*being unable or unwilling to speak up.*

- **Recognize and acknowledge that the process and/or discussion can be overwhelming and intimidating.**
- Recognize that participation is individual. Goal is that each person says everything that he wants to say and is listened to during the meeting.

- Determine if the participation is unbalanced due to too many staff or professionals present.

Resource D-1

Page 3 of 9

- Invite person to participate. When they speak be attentive and an active listener.
- Understand that some people may not be able to participate due to cognitive/emotional issues.
- Ask easy questions (yes, no) or questions that allow person to be the expert or speak with confidence. “Can you tell us about what your child...?”
- Thank them for participating.

### **THREATS/PHYSICAL ATTACKS**

- Set ground rules at the beginning and reiterate as needed during meeting.
- Stay calm and confident, monitor your tone of voice—speak calmly.
- If there is a threat to other person, determine if the person is fearful. Assess if they feel this is a real threat and ask what they feel they need to do.
- Remove others from the room if possible.
- Offer individual a chance to leave room/dismiss if too volatile.
- If information is known up-front, may put security on alert.
- Call security. Use security measures. Police report.
- “Trust your gut” Be self-aware.

### **BLAMING OTHERS, ATTACKING, CRITICIZING OR PICKING AN ARGUMENT**

- Describe the behavior in a nonjudgmental manner
- Redirect, to focus on the issues at hand, resolutions
- Ask client what they could have done to change situation

- Indicate that we are not here to point fingers, but to make the best safe plan for children.

- Establish a clear plan for how to make better choices in the future to eliminate further blaming of others
- Describe the behavior in a nonjudgmental manner
- Stop the argument. Ask for and record a statement of each individual's position. Engage other group members in discussing their positions
- Ask the person what the group could do to respond to their concern

**DENIAL/MINIMIZATION**—*being unable to recognize or acknowledge concern or seriousness of problem*

- Ask for their perception. Ask clarifying questions to raise their awareness level.
- Repeat, clarify purpose, focus. Stress why safety concern is of importance to agency.
- Emphasize effects of the caregiver's actions on children. Explain possible consequences.
- State facts.
- State the differences and ask why.
- Look for what is in common.
- Acknowledge.

**LYING**

- Respectfully confront with evidence.
- Allow the person to explain, share their feelings.
- **Have others share what their experience was regarding the topic.**
- Acknowledge the disagreement, difference, and inconsistency. Ask the person if they can assist the group to understand why.
- **Don't have to address if not helpful to the process of the meeting.**

## **CRYING**

- Acknowledge feeling and pain.
- Offer tissue.
- Ask if they need a moment.
- Encourage a family member to comfort, if appropriate.

## **HOSTILE/NEGATIVE/ANTAGONISTIC Demeanor**— *Negative expressions can be either verbal or nonverbal*

- Acknowledge the person's point of view. Listen.
- Recognize and acknowledge the anger by a reflective statement, remain calm, soft voice.
- Clarify reason for anger and attempt to deal with underlying reasons.
- Give an opportunity to vent and check for safety of all.
- Make a point of thoroughly paraphrasing the individual's view the first couple of times the person speaks. Stick very close to their exact wording.
- Point out the negative pattern.
- Ask if there is any part of the discussion/work being done, which the person feels positive or good about.
- Explore alternative solutions while allowing the individual to state what the worst consequence could be.
- Ask for their opinions about what is needed. Record the opinions. Ask the group to respond.
- Remind of comfort agreements/ground rules.

### **YELLING/SCREAMING**

- Ask everyone to take a deep breath to regain calm and remind why everyone is here. Restate meeting purpose & goals.
- Speak in calm voice. Don't allow yourself to be pulled in.
- Remind why we are here, what we must accomplish and important that they participate in helpful manner.
- Value feelings, reframe.
- Let everyone express their feelings to the extent possible—may be loud, animated.
- Stop/pause, silence, breathe and refocus.

### **LEAVING THE ROOM**

- Ask another team member to check on the person (a support person).
- Invite the person to return.
- Watch for signs of escalation and give permission to leave.
- Thank them for coming back. Validate feelings.
- Encourage the person to stay.
- Acknowledge consequence— the meeting will continue without their input.
- Remind others why we're here.

### **TALKING OFF THE SUBJECT—*being out of synch and appear to be talking irrelevantly***

- Understand that issues being dealt with are emotional and the individual is under a great deal of stress. Ask and answer questions that will assist.
- Consider that there may be other issues—mental health, substance abuse, etc.
- Try to direct the person or the group to come back to their point.
- Explain how the group planned to proceed and let the individual know the group will get to their issues.



### **HOPELESS/OVERWHELMED**

- Review strengths/better times.
- Offer support systems to help.
- Let person know that agency wishes to help through this time. Give an opportunity to discuss how they feel about the situation.
- Acknowledge difficult situation and assist in identification of support systems.
- Identify options to reduce stress and improve coping skills.

### **INAPPROPRIATE LANGUAGE**

- Remind of ground rules and explain that the language may be offensive/ condescending.
- Consider the context.
- Monitor group's reaction.
- Sometimes "let it go."

### **PASSIVE-AGGRESSIVE BEHAVIOR**

- Stress importance of everyone's input and participation in decision.
- Engage as much as possible in discussion—continue to ask for input, opinions and clarifying points.
- Address solution-seeking questions to that person in hopes he/she will engage.
- Make everyone feel and know that each person's opinion matters and everyone should respect one another.
- Ask questions that would prompt the person to own their feelings and direct them appropriately.

## **NONVERBALS AND INDIRECT VERBALS**

- Recognize incongruent behavior, comments.
- Comment on what it looks like.
- Provide an “I” message.

**INTERRUPTING OTHERS**—*cutting off others who are speaking or jumping into a conversation too soon, disrupting the sharing of information and showing disrespect for the other person. Interruptions can be verbal or disruptive, distracting nonverbal.*

- Stop the interrupter and ask the person to wait while the speaker completes their thought.
- Ask if the interrupter would like to write down their thoughts to ensure that they don’t lose them and then to share rather than interrupt.
- Remind of the comfort agreements/ground rules.
- Be neutral and consistent. Don’t allow some to interrupt and not others.

**HAVING SIDE CONVERSATIONS**—*making private comments or carrying on another discussion with their neighbor*

- Ask them to stop. Point out how it distracts.
- Ignore it if it appears to be beneficial or necessary for the family member.
- Ask them to share.
- Ask if they can hold it until....
- Ask the group if they can hear one another.
- Stop the conversation and look at the people talking.
- Repeat the topic under discussion and ask if everyone can focus on it and have just one conversation at a time.
- If staff, in addition to intervening as above, address outside of the meeting.

**INSERTING PERSONAL AGENDAS**—*repetitiously inserting a concern or a disagreement*—“Yeah, but....”

- Acknowledge the concern and comment.
- Paraphrase or record the point, thank the person and move on.
- Ask the person what they want the group to do with the information.
- Give the person a time limit.

**REPEATING THE SAME POINT OVER AND OVER**—*not being able to let go of something. (This is a variation of inserting a personal agenda)*

- Acknowledge the importance of the point and the person’s passion, advocacy and/or determination—chart their point. Often participant’s are able to move beyond a point if visually affirmed they have been heard.
- Demonstrate that the person has been heard and the point charted.
- Explain when the point will be dealt with
- Ask if the person can let it go for now
- Give the person a final time-limited opportunity to make their pitch.

### **SAMPLE QUESTIONS FOR PREPARATION INTERVIEWS**

The following are sample questions that may be used in preparation interviews. These are not steps; they are just some possible questions you might want to use.

#### ***To any of the participants (including DSS staff):***

- FPMs come from the heart and can be emotionally charged. What might be some of your concerns?
- Considering we are bringing together a lot of folks, what can go wrong? What are your concerns?
- What is the family doing at this time that may help the family achieve its goals?
- Can you identify functional strengths now (and possibly jot them down in preparation for presenting them at the meeting)?
- Can you be prepared to discuss the needs of the family? Do you understand the difference between behavior and needs?
- Do you have any concerns about your participation on the team?
- What value do you see yourself bringing to the team process?
- Do you need more information about the role of the facilitator?

#### **Additional questions that can be asked:**

#### ***To the parent(s):***

- What would you like to have happen as a result of this meeting?
- Who are the people who care about you...your family...your child? (Please, see questions to Help Families Identify Formal and Informal Supports Handout for additional suggestions)
- Who would you want to be at your team meeting?

- If we invited all the people who care about your family to come to a meeting, what would be some good things that might come from their participation?
- Where would be the best place for the FPM? Best time to include all of the extended family and/or natural supports?

**Additional questions that can be asked:**

***To the children:***

- What is the best thing that you can tell me about yourself?
- What is your favorite color? Subject in school? Person? Sports figure? Musician?
- Who is your best friend and why?
- Who do you enjoy hanging out with and why?
- If child cannot be at the FPM, ask “What would you like the people at the meeting to know about you or your family?”

**Additional questions that can be asked:**

***Additional questions for the Social Worker and Supervisor:***

- Is this your first FPM? If yes, give an overview of the FPM process and roles. If this is not their first FPM, ask how other FPMs have been handled in the past and if there were concerns with the process.
- What are the issues defined by policy, law and/or court order that must be addressed in this FPM?
- Have you staffed this case with your supervisor? Ask if both Social Worker and supervisor are in agreement with the purpose of the meeting? Is there a shared vision for outcome (this is not to mean decision but “we know the meeting is successful if we walk away with a plan that provides this... or we are able to decide this...”)

**Additional questions that can be asked:**

## PLAIN TALK IN THE FPM PROCESS

Plain Talk is a direct and honest method of communication that is necessary for real systems change. Plain Talk requires the speaker to clearly, fairly, and candidly state their position while being respectful and inviting a response from the other party. Plain Talk in FPM is critical to ensure that all issues and concerns are shared openly so that there can be discussion and understanding. Plain Talk makes the FPM richer by fostering the healthy conflict that can produce innovative solutions.

The following are suggestions to develop a stronger FPM process by supporting Plain Talk. The facilitator plays a lead role in modeling these behaviors.

**Be respectful of the person.** Respect is the foundation for straight talk. Demonstrate sensitivity, courtesy, and politeness. Allow others to have varying opinions and feelings. Appreciate diversity and differences, maintaining your excitement to learn about other races, cultures, ethnicities, genders, religions, life-styles, etc.

**Provide complete, clear, honest, and fair information.** Direct candid, unambiguous, jargon-free and understandable language is essential. Avoid unclear “mushy” statements. The goal is to develop full and meaningful comprehension of the issues. Allow adequate time to permit a dialogue. Plain Talk is not a “dump and run” technique.

**Use words that support cooperation, not confrontation.** Utilize words, phrases, and strategies that stress positive intentions and goals. Be sensitive to words that can be emotionally charged or easily misinterpreted. Strive for understanding and productive outcomes.

**Address the issues, not attacking or blaming the person, and look for solutions.** Avoid a win-lose mentality. Focus on behavior, not personality. Adopt the attitude of concentrating on the concern and needs while seeking ways to resolve them that are mutually acceptable whenever possible.

**Keep your emotions under control.** Model positive behavioral, attitudinal, and verbal responses. Take responsibility for your emotions, responses and actions.

**Invite responses/rebuttals/questions and listen attentively.** Use active listening and ensure understanding by asking for clarification. Keep an open mind and closed mouth when others speak- resist the temptation to interrupt with evaluative, critical, or negative remarks. Listening is an extremely important skill in straight talking.

**Accept conflict and differences as an opportunity.** Deal with the productive conflict that is provoked by straight talk. FPMs are prone to disagreements and conflict is a natural consequence of the purpose and interaction of the process.

**Involve the individual(s) as a partner in the decision-making process.** Embrace others as full and functioning partners in meetings. Encourage their participation and ideas. Aid and empower others to find solutions that utilize their strengths while truly addressing the issues.

**Ask open-ended questions.** Use them to prevent misunderstandings, clarify, and gain insight. Open-ended questions promote the sharing of information, eliminate assumptions and demonstrate interest in the feelings, views, and attitudes of others.

**Maintain eye contact.** Your body language is important, with eye contact often most critical. Look directly without staring. Increasing eye contact may improve your listening ability and encourage responses based upon the speaker's total message.

**Pace the message.** Speed up or slow down if necessary to ensure your information/message is being received. Recognize that the emotion-charged situation can affect comprehension, ability to respond and participate. Use strategies that aid the individual and/or team.

**Be timely.** When addressing concerns with colleagues outside the meeting, do not let issues "collect". Request and offer timely feedback though not necessarily immediately.

**Use "I" language.** "I" statements explain how you feel, even when speaking for the FPM team in a meeting, e.g. "I am not sure that we understand what you said."

**Commit and work at Plain Talk practice.** Talking plain doesn't mean it is simple. It requires dedication to excellence to consistently ensure that the communication in the FPM process is based upon honesty and full disclosures.

<b>SKILL</b>	<b>PLAIN TALK</b>	<b>LESS EFFECTIVE</b>
<b>Complete, clear, honest and fair information</b>	"We are here to talk about your daughter's safety in light of the concerns that she may have been sexually abused. There is some medical evidence that Mary has been raped. The medical examination showed that..."	"We are here to talk about the allegation of sexual abuse. We believe your daughter may have been violated."
<b>Words that support cooperation, not confrontation</b>	"We want your children to remain in your care. We believe that together it may be possible to design a plan that will keep the children safe and with you."	"If you don't cooperate and do as we have directed, we will have to take court action."
<b>Address the issues, not attacking/blaming but looking for solutions</b>	"Leaving the children alone to meet with your drug dealer meant they were left alone when the fire started. What do you think needs to be done to make sure this will never happen again?"	"What were you thinking? How could you think it is okay to leave a 6-month-old and 2-year-old alone while you go to get some meth? Your children are lucky to be alive!"
<b>Invite responses, rebuttals, questions and listen</b>	"I can see that you have something you want to share. We would all like to hear what you have to say."	"If you don't speak up, we will have to make this decision without you, so you'd better say something now."
<b>Accept conflict and differences as an opportunity</b>	"It's apparent that there are different points of view about what happened. There does seem to be agreement about...and that's good. Let's talk more about the issues that are in dispute."	"You need to get yourself under control or we really can't continue. If you won't admit to what happened, we probably can't help you."
<b>Involve individuals as partners in decision-making process</b>	"We want to hear your ideas. You may have the best suggestions for resolving this..."	"What you need to do is..."
<b>Ask open-ended questions</b>	"Can you tell us more about...?" "What was it like before you started using meth?"	"Is that correct?" "So it seems like once you got addicted, you were no longer able to parent."
<b>Pace the message</b>	"It's important that we all understand what is being said. If at any time anyone wishes anything repeated or explained, please say so. I may request clarification too." "Do you understand what is being said?"	"We don't have much time and we have to keep this meeting moving." [Ignore verbal cues.]
<b>Be timely</b>	"Today I noticed that..."	"Every time you come to an FPM, you always."



<b>Use “I” messages</b>	“I feel like we are losing focus on what’s best for the children. I’d like to return to that if we could...”	“You seem not to care what’s in the children’s best interest/not be worried about protecting them.”
-------------------------	--	---

## STRENGTHS-BASED ASSESSMENT

- Our dominant practice has focused on defining “problems” and giving “advice” – this weakens rather than strengthens people (empowers the problem, disempowers the person).
- Families must be strong to protect children.
- Family partnership promotes ways to insure safety by encouraging use of resources & strengths of families, friends, relatives, and communities.
- Looking for strengths generates cooperation, positive energy, creativity.

## UNDERLYING VALUES & BELIEFS:

1. **Families have strengths and can change;** they deserve respect; they are our allies and best resource.
2. Strengths are what ultimately resolve issues of concern; we must **set up opportunities for families to show their strengths.**
3. Building on strengths is an advanced skill; we’re all good at finding weaknesses (a national pastime.) Requires **a different set of skills:** listening, patience, not giving up on people, moving at others’ pace, not getting sidetracked by “problems,” connecting with people’s pain, giving credit, seeing crisis as opportunity to grow, willingness to step out of a one-up position. The need to control others weakens people.
4. **Language reflects thinking;** must change it as our thinking changes. “Problem” = an energy drainer, carries shame, blame, guilt; leads to taking one-up positions, labeling, making negative assumptions when people are hesitant to share “problems.” Problem focus is a stuck position.
  - Try “issues of concern” rather than “problem”; it can take discussion to a more workable level and open avenues to the good will behind difficulties that families experience.
  - “Options” rather than “advice”; options provide choices and choices empower (when families choose own solutions, they bring special energy and commitment) .
5. **Listening** is the centerpiece. Jung: “The first act of love is listening.”

6. **Respect is the active ingredient** in strengthening families. Ask “if this were my family, or my children, how would I like to be treated?”
7. Explore **reservoir of strengths in family, extended family, and community** to resolve issues of concern.
  - To discover strengths: we listen, observe, compliment, encourage, ask, and talk about things going well & successes.
  - Talk about “exceptions” to concerns—instances when they are able to deal w/ concerns and can recognize they already have some skills.
  - Treat them as experts in their own lives. A respectful question is “What is your best thinking about how to make things better?” Listen to their ideas, support them when you can. Look for good intent in every idea and build on it.

**THE FAMILY PARTNERSHIP MEETING IS A TOOL  
TO FIND AND BUILD ON THE FAMILY’S RESOURCES**

- Its purpose is to give the family a specific opportunity to share their best thinking about working out solutions; gives them an opportunity to bring in their support systems (neighbors, relatives, friends) to help with solutions.
- Must prepare families for meeting—one of greatest challenges to use of this tool in public child welfare setting, with high caseloads and overburdened workers.
- Because safety is always of primary importance, must make plans that lessen risk, maximize protection for child, and offer support to family and social worker. Create strength oriented, visual agreement and share copies; make a safety plan simple and easily monitored. Extend the circle of people who care, create partnerships of people who agree to help in specific ways, ensure family not being overloaded with services or obligations.
- Process can strengthen social workers as well as families: make job more pleasant and optimistic, families like having strengths acknowledged, credit for positive efforts goes to families, who often appreciate support of social worker.

**SAFETY AND RISK ASSESSMENT INFORMATION AT AN FPM:  
PRINCIPLES GUIDING THE WORK**

**All families have strengths and needs. Respect the unique individual, cultural, and ethnic realities of each family member.**

Families can use their significant strengths and supports to address concerns, when they have been empowered and encouraged. Family strengths can be enhanced and change can happen.

**Families are the experts on their family and their change process; families know more about their situation than anyone.**

**Families are able to formulate their own goals and build their own solutions; families tend to maintain the solutions they create.**

Safety and risk concerns will be identified and thoroughly discussed to allow understanding.

**All FPM discussions, especially those addressing the need to remove a child from his/her home, will have safety and risk issues as their foundation.**

Presentations of risk factors will be understandable and describe how the behavior/issues can affect the child.

**The quality and quantity of information available for the safety and risk assessment can expand if family engagement skills are practiced.**

The agency's structured assessment tool is utilized in the meeting to highlight a family's unique characteristics, examine its protective capacity, and explore the child's well-being including the trauma of separation.

**Discussions will be strengths-based and solution-focused. Capitalize on what has worked so far.**

Safety issues can indicate the need for immediate action.

**Action plans will be designed to provide safety in the least restrictive, least intrusive manner for the child.**

Recommendations/decisions will be doable and address safety concerns and risks discussed at the FPM.

**Safe solutions will be found in partnership among parents, extended family members, child welfare staff, and other formal and informal supports like counselors, teachers, neighbors, pastors, friends, and neighbors.**

## **UTILIZING SAFETY AND RISK ASSESSMENT INFORMATION AT A FAMILY PARTNERSHIP MEETING**

### **FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS REGARDING SAFETY AND RISK ASSESSMENT AND FPM:**

#### **1. What is safety and risk assessment?**

‘Safety and risk assessment’ refers to a structured method of gathering and analyzing information necessary to identify immediate safety threats, and to classify the levels of risk for re-abuse or neglect which are present in families served by child welfare. Safety and risk assessment decision making tools typically assign risk ratings based on research reflecting the predictive value of the presence of certain facts or clusters of facts. Information is collected to develop a picture of a child’s maltreatment, including type, frequency and severity of occurrences. Additional details about the child, information regarding the adults in the household, and family functioning are evaluated and strengths which have relevance as protective factors are also gathered and analyzed. Both risk and safety issues are captured by examining elements, individually and together.

#### **2. What is the difference between assessing safety and assessing risks at an FPM?**

Assessing safety at a meeting requires examining what must be done immediately to protect the child from abuse/neglect. The focus is on identifying the factors that place the child at danger of serious harm at the present time, as well as the presence of protective factors to counterbalance threats to safety. Assessing risk at a meeting involves predicting the likelihood of future harm due to abuse/neglect by the parents. Assessing risks requires examining past and present behaviors of the parent(s), both positive and negative, to reasonably foretell the likelihood and severity of future harm to the child.

#### **3. How is safety and risk assessment used in FPM?**

Family Partnership Meetings provide the forum for child welfare staff to discuss risk and safety issues with family and others, and to participate in placement-related decision-making. The concept of risk assessment is the foundation for all meeting discussions regarding child removal, reunification or other permanency planning decisions. It is important to remember that all risk/safety discussions should occur within the broader context of child well-being, which must always reference children’s emotional needs and the trauma of separation.

#### **4. How much family history must be discussed at an FPM?**

It is essential that all factors that impact upon the health, welfare and safety of the child are considered when making a placement decision, because such decisions must be grounded in careful assessment of immediate safety issues and predictions of future risk. In order to make such an assessment, the team must examine past events and history, as well as the present situation that resulted in the need for a meeting. All history relevant to abuse and neglect of the child, as well as any history of A/N by every adult with access to the child, is important because the past is sometimes our best predictor of the future. Examining the history of a family's past must also include circumstances when they were functioning healthily. If the meeting discussion only focuses on the present circumstances, the future well-being of the child may be in jeopardy since the magnitude of future risk, or the potential to build upon past strengths, may not be understood. The challenge for a facilitator is to ensure thorough discussion of concerns while remaining strengths-based and solution-focused.

#### **5. What are the safety and risk issues that must be decided at an Initial Removal Family Partnership Meeting?**

Participants at the Initial Removal meeting must decide how to protect the child from serious harm at this time—can the child safely remain home with protective supports? Or must the intervention include temporary removal from the home while remedial services are provided to the parents? Discussion at an Initial Removal meeting focuses on the precipitating event and immediate safety issues in addition to an evaluation of the factors that put the child at risk of future abuse/neglect. Strengths must be examined in the context of their relevance as protective factors in relation to immediate concerns. The assessment of future risk is based upon both the current factors and history.

#### **6. How is safety and risk assessment used at a Reunification Family Partnership Meeting?**

When a child is removed from his/her parents' custody, the goal is usually to reunify him/her as soon as the parent(s) can provide adequate care, protection and stability. A recommendation for reunification is based upon an assessment that risk has been reduced during the child's out of home stay: i.e. that the parent(s) are currently able to provide safety, and the risk of future A/N is low enough to justify return of the child. Discussion at a Reunification meeting focuses on the present familial situation to assess for safety. This includes an examination of the effectiveness of services or other interventions in eliminating the safety concerns that were present at the time of removal, and a prediction of no/low risk of future serious abuse/neglect.

## 7. A summary of the safety and risk issues for different types of FPM meetings:

<p><b>SAFETY ISSUES RISK ISSUES</b></p> <p><b>Initial Removal FPM</b>  <b>DETERMINE:</b> Present serious harm and/or High probability of future serious abuse/neglect dangerous conditions based upon present situation and past history</p> <p><b>FOCUS:</b> Child—what needs to be done now? Parent(s)—what must change for the future?</p> <p><b>DECIDE:</b> Immediate response to present <b>and</b> Priority services to address risk/needs and situation reduce future risk of abuse/neglect</p>
<p><b>Reunification FPM</b>  <b>DETERMINE:</b> Significant positive impact No/low probability of future serious on concerns by services or otherwise that abuse/neglect resulted in placement and home presently safe</p> <p><b>FOCUS:</b> Child— safe return to parents' home Parent(s)—have successfully addressed all issues that harmed and put child at risk of A/N</p> <p><b>DECIDE:</b> Parent(s) able to provide safe home <b>and</b> Positive prediction of parent(s) ability to for child at this time maintain safe, nurturing, stable environment long-term</p>
<p><b>Other Permanency Plan</b>  <b>DETERMINE:</b> Little or no change by parents High probability of future serious abuse/neglect regarding concerns that resulted in placement and safety issues remain</p> <p><b>FOCUS:</b> Child— unsafe to be in parents' care Parent(s)— traits, behaviors, conditions remain as issues that endanger child persist that indicate likelihood of additional serious risk of harm if child in their care</p> <p><b>DECIDE:</b> Long-term protection plan in nurturing, stable environment</p>

## 8. What are the Facilitator's responsibilities regarding safety and risk at a FPM?

- Ensure all safety issues and risk concerns are shared and thoroughly examined.
- Ensure discussion of risks and safety issues is understandable.
- Ensure impact of risk behaviors upon child is clear, especially to parents: "connect the dots."
- Ensure specific and behaviorally descriptive explanations of concerns and expectations.
- Ensure all views regarding safety and risks are heard, clarifications provided and questions answered.
- Ensure family strengths, particularly those that address safety and risk issues, are recognized.
- Ensure thorough discussion of history remains strengths-based and solution-focused.
- Ensure all adults in home and having child access are assessed and discussed.
- Ensure "reality test" of ideas to address both immediate safety needs and future risks.
- Ensure meeting decision provides safety in least restrictive/intrusive manner for child.

**9. What are the benefits of using a safety and risk assessment tool?**

Safety and risk assessment tools offer an objective, comprehensive format to aid social workers in fairly and consistently evaluating safety concerns and predicting the degree of future harm that may result without successful service intervention. Future risk of additional harm is suggested when identified elements are not effectively remedied based upon an analysis of historical and current information. The tool can assist social workers to organize and structure their Family Partnership Meeting presentation. Use of an assessment tool contributes to the recognition of strengths that can be used to impact upon safety, risks and needs. The tool provides a source to measure change during CPS intervention and to evaluate progress. Finally, safety and risk assessment may provide a method of countering personal bias, which is believed to be a contributing factor in the overrepresentation of children of color in out of home care.

**10. What is a social worker expected to present/be prepared to discuss at a Family Partnership Meeting?**

The social worker who requests the meeting, as case manager, must be able to summarize the highlights of the safety and risk assessment tool in a way that is succinct and understandable to lay people. S/he must share information (current and historical), offer ideas, and propose recommended solutions. S/he must also listen and consider the information and ideas of other participants. The worker is typically the source of much of the information that the team must examine and analyze when deciding how to provide safety and protection for the child, although in an emergency meeting, there may be limited information available. The worker and facilitator must ensure ample opportunity for the family to offer their views and guidance.



## CRITICAL DISCUSSION ISSUES AT HIGH RISK AND/OR INITIAL REMOVAL FPM

**Why** does the caseworker feel that removal of the children must be considered? What are the **safety factors** suggesting removal is necessary to ensure safety? **What must change** to keep the children safe?

What is the **parents' understanding** of the situation—perception/response to the agency's recommendation? What does the family believe are their needs? What are the **family's ideas** on how to ensure their children are safe and protected?

What are the **family's strengths?** (Family's point of view and others) What elements were present when things went well for this family? Can any of those elements be reinstated now? **Family's support system**—family and community. Identification of relatives—maternal and paternal.

What information can other participants provide regarding the family's strengths and needs? What have been the **"reasonable efforts?"**

How **verifiable and accurate** is the information being shared? What **information is missing** today? How can missing critical information be obtained immediately? Should an interim plan be made and a follow-up meeting scheduled?

What **services or strategies** can meet the family's immediate needs? How can linkage to critical services be made **today?** Which services/strategies will help in meeting longer-term needs? Have we explored **informal, natural and/or neighborhood-based supports** for the family, in addition to traditional services?

If a safety plan is considered, how will the children's **safety be assured 24/7?** Who will provide **monitoring?** Are the oversight persons present and **able to commit** in writing? When and how will the safety plan be reviewed? Consequences if plan not followed.

If the decision is made to remove, have we **carefully explained** to the family the agency's rationale for recommending removal, the role of the agency vs. Court in decision making, parental legal rights, ASFA timeline, case planning obligations and generally what to expect? Have we attempted to ensure the information was understood and answered questions? What **level of care** does the child need? What placement options are there? **Siblings** together? **Kinship** (paternal as well as maternal)? Relatives' attitudes regarding the situation, willingness to protect, cooperate with agency? Supports for relatives? Special needs/considerations?

If children are to be removed, ensure social worker schedules **first visits** and discusses transition issues. How will the children's **relationship with the community** be maintained?

Family team meeting/"**icebreaker**" scheduled for birth and foster parents to meet and share information about the child?

Adapted from Annie E Casey Foundation--FamilytoFamily Initiative

## **CRITICAL DISCUSSION ISSUES AT PLACEMENT PRESERVATION/DISRUPTION FAMILY PARTNERSHIP MEETING**

### ***DOES THE PRESENT PLACEMENT MEET THE CHILD'S CRITICAL NEEDS?***

#### **If YES**

Can additional services and/or supports maintain the placement?

Are all of the child's needs being met currently? If not, which are not being met? What are the barriers to meeting the child's needs?

Are all of the caregivers' needs for support and/or services being addressed? What are the barriers to meeting the caregiver's needs?

What services/supports are needed for the child and caregiver(s)? How soon can they be provided? Who is responsible to ensure the implementation?

What is the plan for support in a crisis? Is respite appropriate and available?

#### **If NO or if caretaker is unwilling to maintain child in the placement**

Is a change in the level of care or type of placement needed? What is the least restrictive type of placement that will keep this child safe and support the case plan goal?

Are all of the child's needs being met currently? If not, which are not being met? What are the barriers to meeting the child's needs?

What services and/or supports (for child and/or caregiver) are needed? How will the needed services and/or supports be provided? Who is responsible to ensure the implementation? How can stability be maintained for the child?

What is the transition plan with the current caregiver for the child's move? Can the child be in his home community? What is the plan for support in a crisis?

Is there anything else that should be done for the child and/or caregiver(s)?

ALSO

#### **If placed through a network provider:**

Have they fulfilled contract expectations—support to family, contacts, reports etc.?

#### **If placed in an agency foster home:**

Does the assigned worker support the foster family's view of the situation? If not, why not?

Adapted from Annie E Casey Foundation--FamilytoFamily Initiative

## **CRITICAL DISCUSSION ISSUES AT THE REUNIFICATION FAMILY PARTNERSHIP MEETING**

What is the present situation?

Have all risks and/or safety issues that brought the child into placement been reduced or eliminated? How?

Are there any other issues or concerns that have been identified or need to be addressed?

What services have been completed? What behavioral evidence or observation exists to indicate that the services were beneficial and addressed risks and safety issues? Explain

What services are continuing? (for child, parent(s))

Have all individuals in the home and/or having access to the children been assessed for risk factors to the child? Are there any concerns that need attention?

What is the present level of risk to the child? Is it acceptable?

Are living conditions, childcare, financial, health care (including dental and mental health), educational issues adequately addressed? If not, how will they be addressed? Are there any other needs?

What supports are in place to assist the parent(s) upon the children's return?

Are supports needed to assist the children upon the return?

Are additional community services and/or supports needed? What?

How will they be provided? Will these services protect the child and strengthen the family?

Is everyone involved with this family supporting reunification? (e.g., service provider(s), Guardian ad Litem, resource placement) If not, why not? How are their concerns being addressed?

How have transition issues been planned for: e.g. school change, medical record transfer, continuing contact with former caregiver(s) and family, friends, etc? Will the caregiver family provide ongoing support to the birth family? How? Is lifebook available/given?

- **What problems can be anticipated upon reunification?**
- **What are the plans to address them should they materialize?**
- **How long will the agency remain involved with the family?**
- **How will the decision to close the case be made?**

Acknowledge and celebrate accomplishment!

**CONSIDERATIONS AT OTHER PERMANENCY PLANNING FPMs IF THE RECOMMENDATION IS FOR TERMINATION OF PARENTAL RIGHTS...**

1. Have we carefully assessed the children's attachment to their parents? Have we really wrestled with the issue of emotional damage of permanent separation vs. risk of harm if parents' rights aren't terminated?
2. How strong is our case for termination of parental rights? Has each element of the case plan been carefully pursued? Has our social work staff carried out all its obligations competently and in good faith? Have we made reasonable efforts [and beyond] to reunify this family?
3. What are the children's chances of having another permanent family if their birth parents' rights are terminated? What is the agency's commitment to ensuring they are adopted by another family/or have another strong, nurturing family relationship to grow up in?

**IF THE RECOMMENDATION IS FOR TRANSFER OF GUARDIANSHIP OR LEGAL CUSTODY TO A RELATIVE OR OTHER PARTY...**

1. Has the potential guardian received a thorough and complete explanation of the rights and responsibilities associated with legal custody/guardianship?
2. Does the potential guardian understand that the agency intends for him/her to raise this child until age 18, and to provide parental guidance and family support to this child for life?
3. What are the plans for continuing contact between children and birth parents/extended family? Is there a need for protective orders or other structured guidelines for contact?
4. Is there a need to ensure child support is in place? Is the legal custodian capable of providing for the children financially?
5. What supports are available through the agency and/or community to support the guardian, short and long term, as they raise the children?

**IF THE RECOMMENDATION IS FOR LONG TERM FOSTER CARE/PLANNED PERMANENT LIVING ARRANGEMENT...**

1. How does this situation match the statutory guidelines for use of PPLA? Is this truly the kind of circumstance envisioned by the legislature for use of PPLA?
2. How can the agency justify not continuing to work toward finding a permanent family

for children?

3. Have all family members been fully explored and re-explored for their potential as caregivers? How long ago were they assessed? Is reunification possible with the proper supports? What is the current risk to children if placed with parents or extended family?
4. Has there been a thorough investigation of all the caring adults who have ever touched children's lives? Former teachers, foster caregivers, friends of caregivers, neighbors, scout leaders, et al – in short, have all 'circles of support' been explored
5. If children placed in PPLA status, how will the agency ensure that s/he has a significant and positive adult relationship as s/he grows up?

#### **IF RECOMMENDATION IS LEGAL EMANCIPATION OF OLDER YOUTH...**

(NOTE: if the agency has a separate meeting to assist youth with planning for independence, ensure that it is integrated with the Permanency Planning FPM so that there is comprehensive planning and no redundancy.)

1. What are this youth's hopes and dreams for the future? How can we best support those?
2. Who will serve as this child's "family" now and in the future? Who are the significant adults in his/her life who will provide care, concern, physical and emotional support? Who are the positive peers in his/her life and how will they stay connected?
3. What services has this youth had to ensure s/he has the skills and knowledge to live independently? (E.g., Independent Living or similar programs)
4. What are the youth's plans for financial independence, housing, education and/or employment, medical care, transportation, etc.? Are they viable?
5. What is the youth's fall-back plan or safety net? To whom can s/he turn, and how, if things don't go well?
6. What post-emancipation supports and services are available? (e.g., Chaffee funds, agency re-engagement, community services)

**SAMPLE SUMMARY REPORT**

DATE: \_\_\_\_\_

**PURPOSE OF MEETING**

- ☐ EMERGENCY REMOVAL  
☐ CONSIDERED REMOVAL  
☐ PLACEMENT CHANGE  
☐ PERMANENCY PLANNING  
☐ FOLLOW-UP

FAMILY NAME: \_\_\_\_\_

FAMILY CASE NUMBER: \_\_\_\_\_

SOCIAL WORKER: \_\_\_\_\_

SUPERVISOR: \_\_\_\_\_

FACILITATOR: \_\_\_\_\_

**CHILDREN DISCUSSED AT MEETING:**

\_\_\_\_\_ DOB: \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_ DOB: \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_ DOB: \_\_\_\_\_ DOB: \_\_\_\_\_

**SITUATION THAT PROMPTED MEETING:**

\_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

**DECISIONS RESULTING FROM MEETING:**

PLACEMENT: \_\_\_\_\_

CUSTODY: \_\_\_\_\_

**ACTION STEPS:**

<u>WHO</u>	<u>WHAT</u>	<u>BY WHEN</u>
------------	-------------	----------------

SIGNATURES OF PARTICIPANTS:

SIGNATURE DOES NOT IMPLY AGREEMENT
------------------------------------

### SUGGESTIONS FOR WRITING SUMMARY REPORT

1. **PRELIMINARY**—write only demographic information on the form in advance.
2. **CONFIRM**—spelling of names and birth dates with the family if any doubt regarding correctness.
3. **UNDERSTANDABLE**—sentences do not have to be complete, merely understandable to all parties. Limit abbreviations, acronyms, jargon and vague words.
4. **READABLE**—write legibly, ensure copies can be read.
5. **WRITE DECISION**—only when consensus that decision provides safety and protection in least intrusive/least restrictive manner. Do not write prematurely.
6. **STATE ON REPORT**—placement and custody status even when decision about placement and/or custody is not changed. Decision must focus on safety and protection in least restrictive/intrusive manner.
7. **WHO, WHAT, WHEN**—must be identified in action steps to address the current situation and provide stability.
8. **CONTINGENCY PLANS**—are acceptable when anticipated, discussed, documented and very time-limited.
9. **READ**—the decision to the group upon completion before requesting participants to sign.
10. **ENSURE UNDERSTANDING**—of decision including action steps.
11. **SIGNATURE**—indicates presence/participation in the meeting, not agreement with decision. An individual may refuse to sign.
12. **SAFETY PLAN DOCUMENT**—when developed/revised during the meeting, attach to the FPM summary report.



13. **COPY**—the summary report at the conclusion of the meeting and distribute to all participants. Hand copies to family and guests before staff.
14. **REVIEW**—when consensus cannot be reached with the group including the participating agency staff, the caseworker makes the final decision. If a review of the decision is requested by a CPS participant, the facilitator writes the social worker's decision and indicates the review/appeal status on the form.

**BOTTOM LINE**— every summary report must include:

- **Placement and custody decision.**
- **Action steps to support the decision.**
- **List of participants.**

## IF I ONLY KNEW THEN WHAT I KNOW NOW

Have you heard the old saying “Hind sight is 20/20?” Here’s an opportunity to get some words of wisdom *before* you begin facilitating FPMs. Ask yourself: “How can I encourage the use the best practice by co-workers and foster skills of less experienced staff?” Some of their responses are listed below.



### PREPARATION

- They can let clients know ahead of time what to expect at meetings
- Before the FPM we can speak with Family Services Specialist to make sure all processes are completed. With less experienced staff, work with them through the process and have their direct supervisor in the meeting. Talk to them about the case before the FPM to see what they believe are the issues the family needs to work on for the safety, well-being and permanency of the children
- Invite new staff to attend FPMs, pass out the FPM brochure to workers so they can give to the family before the facilitator calls to meet them
- Do a “dry-run” with Family Services Specialist to get them comfortable with areas where they need to “speak up” with concerns/needs/areas of growth



- Better time management. Completing meetings well in advance of due date.
  - Skipping preps are not an option for a good FPM. Just practice good time management.
  - If necessary a brief prep interview is conducted with the family on the day of the meeting if the family cannot be located prior.
- Thoroughly assessing the family
  - Making more organized attempts at doing prep interviews with all age appropriate children
  - Sometimes when pressed for immediate action and attempts have been made to try and conduct prep interview but unsuccessful, carefully review case history, attend transfer staffing and if possible just prior to going into FPM ask if family has any concerns or questions for the department they want noted
  - Ensure that prep interviews are always done in person, not on the phone
  - Mail the FPM pamphlet with a letter to schedule a prep interview.
  - Doing thorough prep interviews with Family Services Specialist
  - Try to find out the schedules of the families so you know when you can get in touch with them
  - Making joint home visits with Family Services Specialist’s; phone preps if not able to do in person; sending letters to absent parents requesting their written participation
  - FPMs flow better when the families are more engaged and aware of what’s going on. They are not caught off guard by the questions that they are asked during the FPM.

- When facilitators engage the families before the FPM, they build a better rapport which keeps the families from being defensive. Also it gives the facilitators the opportunity to earn a little about the families' personalities so they will have an idea of how to engage and approach the family members.

## THE MEETING PROCESS

- Reminding co-workers that we should treat the families the way we would want our family treated
- Remember this could be my family in this situation
- By continual teaching, training and motivating them about how important FPMs are to help them know what the family is feeling and what is needed
- By utilizing the FPM model correctly and explaining/displaying its use for those who are less experienced and "interested". Unfortunately everyone does not embrace the usage of FPMs according to the model and/or State policy
- Consistency
- Continue to teach and preach that the meeting is a solution focused one where the team decides what is best for the family and not the Case manager or Supervisor
- Stick to FPM agenda and keep safety factors priority at all times
- By not cutting corners myself
- Follow the template
- Show the importance of a quality FPM sets the foundation for an ongoing successful resolution. Saves everyone time if done correct the first time.
- To continue to engage everybody in the process in order to get a clear picture about the family's dynamics
- The FPM model works!! I have used it for the past 5 ½ years. I am not tempted to take short cuts because of the disservice it may cause for the family and their resulting family plan. I also believe that it is vitally important for FPM Coordinators to respect, use and encourage others to use the FPM model correctly to foster continuous buy in and respect for the work of FPMs
- Stay true to the model – don't take shortcuts
- Encourage the use of new ground rules for each FPM
- Keep asking for timely referrals
- Start FPM on time-with or without the Family Services Specialist; don't let "sidebars" take over FPM
- Continue to schedule around family's lives/work schedule
- In order to maintain the integrity of FPMs I don't skip any areas



## TEAM WORK

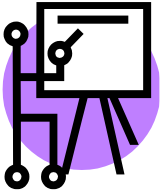
- Encourage supervisors to get all workers involved in process
- Continue to engage and have open discussions about what team work truly means
- My coworkers are used to the FPM format now and pretty good at sticking with it. It helps keep us all focused. Sometimes they are helpful because they can fill in with questions that need to be addressed that I did not know to ask. We keep each other focused on creating the plan to strengthen families.
- By carrying a caseload myself it helps with my co-workers respecting the FPM process. With less experienced staff everyone must develop an attitude that it can work and explain how and the families can speak to how



- Encourage staff to provide enough information on the referral for the facilitator to be able to get in touch with proper people. Ask staff to assist in notifying family at times. Discuss the importance of all pieces in the “puzzle” that lead to a successful meeting that in turn usually leads to a successful case and plan of protection for children.
  - Lead by example and show them what happens when you don’t follow best practice
- 
- Model the correct behaviors since many people learn by watching others at work or in action. Do the right work the right way.
  - Be the expert on FPMs in your office and know when they are required and what is allowed. Be open with each other about the case and work together to get the prep scheduled and the FPM completed
  - Work closer as a team and do not feel you need to do everything by yourself. Reduce duplication of service.
  - I am always around to help in any way necessary. I mentor new Case managers as needed and like to help them with being new on the block
  - Just continue to try to work with staff and lots of prayers!
  - Sharing information from FPMs
  - Better time management and relationship with those who work in the field so that there is limited “emergencies” where policy and best practice is jeopardized
  - Constant communications with case manager since clients are hard to track down.

Continue to get approaches from fellow colleagues and get a feel for what is/is not working with families.

## TRAINING

- In-house training can encourage the use of best practice by co-workers and to foster skills in less experienced staff
  - Allow less experienced staff to co-facilitate and assist them in the learning process
  - Quarterly and regional meetings for facilitators to come together to brainstorm obstacles and reinforce principles behind why we do things the way we do. And somehow involve supervisors and directors
  - Allow them to practice, since practice makes perfect
- 
- Practice yourself; set an example; encourage less experienced staff
  - Review procedure. Have someone to observe an FPM and critique how the facilitator and co-facilitator handle group dynamics

## ON-GOING CHALLENGES

- I have been assigned other duties and serve multiple counties; therefore I no longer have the time to conduct prep interviews. This is frustrating because I am no longer able to build trust and the start of a relationship with our clients. I have to try at the FPM to address some things that I would have normally been able to address at a prep interview. I am trying to do the best I can.

## **QUALITY DECISIONS**

### **SOME OF THE KNOWLEDGE AREAS THAT WILL NEED TO BE REPRESENTED AT THE MEETING TABLE TO ASSURE GOOD OUTCOMES**

- Statutes/regulations (federal, state, local).
- Agency policies/procedures.
- Foster care rules (licensing, kin care, etc.).
- Safety and risk assessment decision making practices.
- Safety planning rules/regulations.
- Other system mandates and protocols (e.g. mental health, mr/dd, alcohol/drug, domestic violence, juvenile probation, criminal prosecution, etc.).
- Resources, both internal and external to agency.
  - Traditional/non.
  - Specific to family's community.
- Cultural differences (especially for those populations most represented in the communities served).
- Other.





# Solution-Focused Questions

The use of Solution-Focused Questions is a foundational skill and strategy of best practice that helps the worker explore with a family those things that are working well, what we are worried about, and what needs to happen next.

## ENGAGEMENT AND SOLUTION-FOCUSED QUESTIONS

- Engagement is the central Practice Profile to help ensure child safety, permanency and well-being. Engagement is the art and skill of interacting with a family in ways that move them toward greater readiness for their own active participation in making change.
- Without engagement, families may complete required steps or services, but the chances are greatly reduced that they will genuinely internalize the need for change and make lasting, meaningful change. Skilled engagement, therefore, is critical to child safety.
- Effective engagement also helps individuals with a history of trauma step out of “fight/flight/freeze” mode so that they can access their best thinking.
- Masterful use of questions is one of the most effective engagement strategies, and an intervention in and of itself.

## THE THREE QUESTIONS

- The Three Questions are a deceptively simple framework for exploring strengths, concerns, and necessary next steps with a child, a parent, a family, their network, reporting parties, collaterals and anyone else involved in a case.



- The Three Questions are a component of many other best practice strategies, including:

- Guiding the discussion in Child and Family Team Meetings (CFTM), Family Partnership Meetings (FPM), or Group Supervision.
- Completing the Three Houses with children or youth: House of Good Things = working well, House of Worries = what we’re worried about, House of Hopes & Dreams = what happens next
- Providing a framework for intake/screening questions
- Guiding other conversations or meetings with parents, youth, collaterals or agency staff

## SOLUTION-FOCUSED QUESTIONS

- Solution-focused questions are an effective strategy to have conversations with people about what is already working well, or has worked well in the past, in order to successfully engage families, build their hope and belief that change is possible, and focus their energies on positive change.
- The solution-focused approach is based on a simple idea with profound ramifications: that what we pay attention to grows. This highlights the need to ask families and others about safety as rigorously as we ask about danger and risk, because identifying where there is already safety or has been safety in the past holds the solutions, at least in part, to future safety.
- Solution-focused questions also help us conduct a rigorous, balanced assessment by evoking discussion with network members, collaterals, and other agency staff about acts of protection and family strengths, rather than focusing solely on what isn’t working, which leaves us with only half of the picture.
- Solution-focused interviewing is also an excellent strategy to use with youth to help them focus on their strengths, build confidence in their skills, and guide them toward positive choices.
- Solution-focused questions can also be used with resource parents or service providers to guide conversations about a child’s or youth’s behavior, with the goal of stabilizing a placement or identifying additional supports that may be needed.

## TYPES OF SOLUTION-FOCUSED QUESTIONS

**Past Success Questions** ask individuals to recall when things have been better and what made that possible. The person may remember when he/she has been able to cope with a problem or been able to solve it. Remembering one or more past successes is likely to increase the confidence and hopefulness of the individual and usually helps people find ideas to take a step forward.



**Example:** “It’s not easy being a single parent. How do you do it?”

**Example:** “After you lost your job, how did you find enough strength to keep moving forward?”

**Example:** “What would it take for you to bring back the motivation you had last month to get to meetings?”

**Exception Questions** ask individuals to think about times when the problem could have been happening, but was not, so they can explore what, when, where and how they were able to achieve success. They help people remember that the problem has not always been present, or can help clarify that there was no me when the problem was not happening, which is also important information.

**Example:** “Was there a time that you (mom) were able to stay clean and sober? How were you able to achieve that? What was it like to parent your kids when you weren’t drinking?”

**Example:** “Was there a time in your relationship that you (dad) were not using violence or making mom stay away from her family and friends? What did your relationship look like during that time?”

**Example:** “Are there times that (your foster child) is not acting out? What does his behavior look like at those times? What is happening in the home, at school or in his life when he is at his best?”

**Coping Questions** ask people to reflect on how they were able to make it through something difficult, painful or challenging without resorting to problem behavior. Coping questions help build people’s sense of self-efficacy and resilience and also show us what strategies they used for success.

**Example:** “Wow, it’s amazing that your sister died and you were still able to stay sober during that time. How were you able to manage that?”

**Example:** “It shows so much strength that you got yourself and the kids out of the house after your boyfriend started using again. How were you able to do that?”

**Position (or Relationship) Questions** ask a person to think about a situation or problem from someone else’s perspective, or by putting themselves in the other’s shoes. This helps them understand the impact of their

actions or behavior on another person and see it from their eyes. Position questions can help build empathy and understanding of how one’s own actions affect another person.

**Example:** “If your son were here, what do you think he would say about how your drug use affects you as his dad?”

**Example:** “If your mom were here, what do you think she would say about the kind of relationship she wants for you and your children?”

**Example:** “If you put yourself in my shoes as the worker, what would you be worried about?”

**Preferred Future Questions** ask the person to think about what the best possible future would look like if they were able to change their issue or problem. They help build a vision for what things will look like when the problem is no longer happening, and assist in setting goals.

**Example:** “If the best possible future happened and your child welfare case was closed, what would your life look like? Where would you be living? What would you be doing? How would you be parenting your children?”

**The Miracle Question** is a special type of preferred future question that can help people get clarity on how the problem impacts their daily life and what life would look like without the problem happening.

**Example:** “Imagine you woke up tomorrow and a miracle had happened over night, and all the trouble was gone. How would you know it was over? What would be different that would tell you the problem was no longer happening? What is the first thing you would be doing to start the day? What would the rest of your day look like? What would things look like for your children?”

**Scaling Questions** are a powerful, flexible strategy that can be adapted to many situations to help gauge or clarify a person’s (or all team members’) perspective on an issue. The important thing about scaling questions is not necessarily the number that someone picks, but rather the chance to explore with them the reasons that they picked that number.

Follow-up questions are the key; for example, asking someone what it would take to move them up one number, or why they picked that number and not a lower



or higher one. Follow-up questions help us get to the underlying reasons for someone's perspective and explore next steps.

Scaling questions can be used to scale many different areas, including but not limited to:

- Willingness
- Confidence
- Readiness
- Agreement

For example, how willing is someone to participate in a safety network, how confident are FPM participants that a plan will keep a child safe, how ready is a parent to make a change, how much do team members agree with the decision a team is making.

**Example:** "On a scale of 1 to 10, where 1 is that you are not at all ready to stop using drugs, and 10 is that you are completely ready, where would you rate yourself today? How did you pick a 9? What would it take to move you from a 9 to a 10?" (Or: "Wow, you're very ready — what made you pick a 9 and not a 8? Have you ever been at a 9 before? What were the steps you took at that me?")

**Example:** "On a scale of 1 to 10, where 1 is that you have no confidence that this plan will keep the child safe, and 10 is that you are completely confident the plan will keep the child safe, where would you rate? How did you pick a 4? What puts you at a 4 instead of a 3? (Or: "What would you need to see happen to be at a 5 instead of a 4? What would you need to see happen to be a 6?")

## APPRECIATIVE INQUIRY

Appreciative Inquiry is a term that is often used interchangeably with solution-focused approaches.

Appreciative inquiry is based on the belief that what we pay most attention to has the best chance of growing. Fundamentally, appreciative inquiry is the concept that asking questions about *what is working* is more effective in creating change than focusing our attention primarily on the problem.

It goes beyond work with families. Appreciative inquiry is also an approach to supervision, coaching, and organizational change that mirrors solution-focused questions to help workers pay attention to what they are doing well and the good things they are already doing that they can use to grow their skills. It is an important parallel process for agencies.