

	INDIANA DEPARTMENT OF CHILD SERVICES CHILD WELFARE MANUAL	
	Tool: Domestic Violence and Child and Family Team (CFT) Meeting Considerations	Effective Date: April 1, 2012
	Reference: 5.A (Chapter 5 – General Case Management)	Version: 2

Domestic Violence and Child and Family Team (CFT) Meeting Considerations¹

DCS will carefully assess the appropriateness of holding a CFT Meeting with both the non-offending parent and alleged domestic violence offender present. Reasons why holding a joint meeting would **not** be appropriate include, but are not limited to:

1. The non-offending parent does not want a meeting because he or she feels that they or the children would be in danger or because he or she feels intimidated and therefore unable to represent what they feel is in the child's best interest;
2. The non-offending parent has secured a "no contact order" and the meeting would be a violation of the order;

Note: DCS may request that the court lift the "no contact order" for the time of the meeting if holding a joint CFT Meeting is in the best interest of the family.

3. The FCM believes the non-offending parent or the child could be in danger if the meeting took place;
4. The family of the non-offending parent or the alleged domestic violence offender either denies or enables the abuse;
5. The FCM believes the parent alleged to be the victim of domestic violence or the child could be placed in danger if the meeting took place; or
6. The alleged domestic violence offender denies that domestic violence is an issue or that domestic violence has not occurred when evidence states otherwise (i.e. police reports, visible bruises, etc.).

Note: It may initially be inappropriate to have the parent alleged to be the victim of domestic violence and alleged domestic violence offender attend the same CFT Meeting. Prior to each meeting DCS should evaluate the option of having the parent alleged to be the victim of domestic violence and alleged domestic violence offender attend the same CFT Meeting. Other options may be considered, such as a conference call with the alleged domestic violence offender. If there is a court order in place, permission can be sought from the court for the alleged domestic violence offender to be on the phone for a CFT Meeting.

Questions to determine if a CFT Meeting should be held with both the non-offending parent and alleged domestic violence offender present:

1. Is the non-offending parent afraid of the alleged domestic violence offender?
2. Is the alleged domestic violence offender threatening to harm the non-offending parent, the children, or himself?
3. Are the severity and frequency of the violent incidents escalating?

¹ Adapted from the Indiana Department of Child Services (DCS) *Creating Solutions and Planning for Change* training curriculum

4. Have the children been used to threaten the non-offending parent or keep the alleged domestic violence offender from inflicting further violence? How?
5. Does either parent have access to weapons?
6. Have weapons been involved in prior assaults?
7. Has the criminal justice system been involved? If so, are there pending charges or is there a probation or parole officer assigned to the case?
8. If the alleged domestic violence offender has participated in some type of education or treatment program, how has he responded to that intervention?
9. What has been the extent of the non-offending parent's injuries? Have there been injuries requiring hospitalizations?
10. Is either parent chemically dependent?
11. Is there a history of mental illness?
12. How safe does the non-offending parent feel having the alleged domestic violence offender physically present during the meeting?

Prior to deciding to hold a CFT Meeting, the Family Case Manager (FCM) should answer:

1. Are there orders prohibiting contact (protective order, restraining order, no contact order)?
2. Do they live together?
3. Is domestic violence a topic that has been addressed publicly with him², the police, a judge, the FCM, or other family members? If yes, how did the alleged domestic violence offender react?
4. What are her goals for having him present? Goals for not having him present?
5. What is the biggest fear if he does participate?
6. What is the hope if he is there?
7. Is he involved in any services? For how long?
8. Are there any current stressors in his life that might make him more violent?

If it is not appropriate for the alleged domestic violence offender to be present at a CFT Meeting with the non-offending parent, consider for him to still be involved in the process. Options include, but are not limited to:

1. Videotape responses to the questions being asked in the meeting, and inform the participants of his desires and/or wishes;
2. Allow him to participate in some or all of the meeting via telephone;
3. A criminal justice representative, a domestic violence perpetrator specialist, and/or a substance abuse counselor may attend the CFT Meeting as his representative;
4. Write a letter containing responses to the questions being asked in the meeting to be read by a representative; and/or
5. Holding two (2) separate meetings.

If the non-offending parent and alleged domestic violence offender will be attending the same CFT Meeting:

To prepare the non-offending parent for the CFT Meeting:

1. Are there any specific topics to avoid during the meeting?
2. Are there safety concerns about anyone else who might attend the meeting?
3. Does she want to discuss the domestic violence in the meeting?
4. How safe does she feel discussing the domestic violence with him present? Without him present?
5. If the children will be present, does she want to discuss the violence?

² For the purposes of this tool, the alleged perpetrator will be referred to as 'him' or 'he' and the non-offending parent will be referred to as 'she' or 'her.'

6. What if the child or other parties bring it up?
7. What has she already discussed with the children regarding the violence?
8. How have the children been impacted by the violence?
9. What will the impact be on the children if the violence is discussed in the meeting without the alleged domestic violence offender present? With him present?
10. How will he react if his violence is brought up?
11. What has happened in the past when his violence has been discussed? Afterward?
12. Are there community or family members he will know at the meeting? How will others feel about that?
13. Does the non-offending parent want someone who is an expert in dealing with domestic violence present at the meeting? Someone she is working with? How will he react to that?
14. Does the non-offending parent feel that she can safely speak out about her wishes and concerns if they are different from those of the alleged domestic violence offender?
15. How will the facilitator know if she begins to feel afraid during the meeting? Can they plan to signal each other if she begins to feel afraid?
16. Of all the people she wants to invite to the CFT Meeting, whom has she discussed the domestic violence? What have their reactions been? Have they been supportive?
17. What does she think the reaction at the CFT Meeting will be to the disclosure of the violence? Will they support her need to be safe and his need to be nonviolent?
18. What does the non-offending parent fear could go wrong at the meeting? What would be the consequences?
19. To avoid surprises, what else does the facilitator need to know about her and her family? If, for example, an aunt is invited, what might she tell the group that might be a surprise?

To prepare the alleged domestic violence offender for the CFT Meeting:

1. Are there any specific topics to avoid during the meeting?
2. Would it be helpful if a service provider could attend the meeting?
3. If the non-offending parent wants to discuss the domestic violence, during the meeting, how will he handle that?
4. Are there community or family members that he wants at the meeting? How does he think she will react to that? Will these other people support her need to be safe and his need to be nonviolent?
5. Have any of the people attending the meeting seen his behavior escalate when disagreements arose in the past? Will this be a fear or concern of others at the meeting? How can those issues be addressed?
6. How can the alleged domestic violence offender let the facilitator know if he needs a break during the meeting because of the topics being discussed?
7. If it has been agreed that he domestic violence will not be discussed, how will he respond if another party brings it up during the meeting?
8. What has happened in the past when the violence has been discussed?
9. What has he discussed with the children regarding his violence?
10. How have the children been affected by his violence?
11. What might the impact on the children be if the violence is discussed in their presence during the meeting?
12. How can he convey to the non-offending parent that she can safely speak out her wishes and concerns if they are different from his?
13. What does he fear could go wrong with the meeting? What might the consequences be of that?
14. To avoid surprises what else does the facilitator need to know about him and his family?

To prepare team members for the CFT Meeting:

1. What might go wrong if both the alleged domestic violence offender and the non-offending parent are present in the meeting?
2. Ask questions about their safety so that they can fully participate in the meeting.

Considerations for involving children in the CFT Meeting:

1. Are they developmentally capable of participating?
2. Will they benefit from the meeting?
3. Will the meeting cause further trauma to the child?
4. Can they help achieve the desired outcomes for the meeting?
5. Consider how the children's presence may inhibit honest conversation by the adults.
6. Consider how the children will feel about discussing the violence in front of the alleged domestic violence offender, if they are present.
7. Consider how the children are likely aware of the violence.
8. Consider how the children may want to be heard about how the violence has impacted them and they may be concerned for everyone's safety.

Note: An option may be to have children participate in only parts of the meeting.

During the CFT Meeting:

1. The facilitator has the difficult task of finding a balance between what family members want to talk about and ensuring that issues impacting family safety are adequately addressed;
2. Be observant of the verbal and non-verbal interactions between team members; and
3. Be observant of signals established ahead of time with the non-offending parent and/or alleged domestic violence offender that conflict is escalating or there is a threat during the meeting.

If conflict escalates during the meeting:

1. Implement the predetermined safety plan.
2. Consider safety first, you may need to stop the meeting immediately and call the police.
3. Call a break to allow de-escalation.
4. Have the person who is getting angry or escalating the conflict leave the meeting with someone who can help them manage their emotions or stop the meeting.
5. Empathize with the fear or pain the key players are expressing; do not confront the abuse directly; remind them that the meeting participants are there to provide them with support and resources.
6. Without discounting harm the past violence has caused, focus on solutions for the future.
7. If you perceive that tensions are escalating to the point of danger, check with the non-offending parent using the prearranged signal.
8. Often the meeting does not necessarily need to be stopped, however, you will need to use your skills or the skills of others on the team to manage the emotions and de-escalate the conflict.
9. It may be necessary to call a break to allow for everyone to calm down. During the break, take the opportunity to assess with the non-offending parent and alleged domestic violence offender, separately, to determine whether or not the meeting can safely continue.
10. It may be beneficial to have prescheduled breaks during each meeting to allow an opportunity for the facilitator to check-in with both parents individually to see if they are feeling safe enough to continue the meeting.

Continue the meeting if:

1. The non-offending parent says she wants to continue and she feels safe doing so.
2. The facilitator believes that reconvening will not jeopardize anyone's safety.
3. It appears that the alleged domestic violence offender is constructively managing his emotions.
4. The facilitator and non-offending parent believe continuation of the meeting will be productive and the safety of her and the child will not be compromised.

After the CFT Meeting:

The FCM and FCM Supervisor should be aware that when the alleged domestic violence offender feels that his authority or control over the non-offending parent has been threatened, the violence may escalate. This may be caused by any domestic violence intervention, including a CFT Meeting. It is crucial that follow-up occur with the non-offending parent as soon as possible after holding a CFT Meeting. This will allow the FCM to assess any impact the CFT Meeting may have had on the non-offending parent and child.

The FCM should contact the non-offending parent within 24 hours after the CFT Meeting and ask questions such as:

1. Have you been afraid of the alleged domestic violence offender since the CFT Meeting?
2. Has he been or threatened to be violent since the CFT Meeting?
3. What was the impact of the disclosure on you, on him, and on the child?
4. Did you discuss the CFT Meeting with him?

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