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March 16, 2009

To: Regional Managers  
Directors, Local Offices, Department of Child Services

From: James W. Payne, Director  
Angela Green, Deputy Director Practice Support  
Dave Judkins, Deputy Director Field Operations  
Department of Child Services

Subject: Expanded Use of Child and Family Team (CFT) Meetings  
DCS-09-02

The Indiana Department of Child Services (DCS) continues to implement and refine the Practice Model to provide the most engaging, respectful, and effective services to the children and families we serve. This Administrative Letter will provide clarification for the utilization of the Child and Family Team (CFT) Meeting as a primary Practice Model intervention with families during the assessment phase.

Currently, DCS has been utilizing the CFT process as a primary case management tool in an ongoing case. However, there are many advantages to the usage of this process at the earliest points of contact during the assessment. Through our experiences with the Practice Model, we have learned that engagement begins most often with the initial contact with the family. Moreover, the teaming process is one of the most effective ways to accomplish this with children and families.

DCS Family Case Managers (FCMs) and Supervisors will use the CFT Meeting process with children and families, including opportunities in the assessment phase. CFT Meetings should be held in all of the following situations, in addition to other times when engaging the members of the CFT would benefit child safety:

1. Assessing need for and/or preventing removal – CFT members may provide insight into protective factors, resources, and/or concerns that will lead to the most informed decision about whether removal is the best option;



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2. Identification of absent parents – CFT members may provide additional information to assist in the location of absent parents during the assessment phase. DCS requires that after an exhaustive search to locate an absent parent has occurred, the FCM must submit an Affidavit of Diligent Inquiry (ADI) to document for the court the efforts to locate the child’s parent and provide notice of court proceedings.
3. Safety planning – CFT members may assist in identifying family strengths and/or needs that may mitigate or remove risk;
4. Case and/or Service Planning – CFT members may provide information and perspective about the unique needs of the child and family to assist in developing Informal Adjustment (IA) activities or goals, recommendations for disposition, and case planning considerations such as educational, medical, behavioral and/or psychological needs, etc.; and
5. Exploring placement options – CFT members may aid in determining the least restrictive, most appropriate placement option by providing information about non-custodial parents, appropriate relatives, and/or absent parents, as well as by discussing priorities such as proximity of placement, placement of siblings, etc. Remember after an exhaustive search to locate an absent parent has occurred, DCS must submit an Affidavit of Diligent Inquiry (ADI) to document for the court the efforts to locate the child’s parent and provide notice of court proceedings.

The CFT will have a unique composition of members during the assessment phase. The following considerations should be considered in adapting the CFT process during the assessment phase:

1. **A lengthy prep is not necessarily required when utilizing the CFT process during the assessment phase.** During the assessment phase, FCMs are gathering the same information that is covered during the “prep” for the CFT process. It is important to realize that Teaming is not necessarily an event, but a process of utilizing the basic Teaming, Engaging, Assessing, Planning and Intervening (TEAPI) skills that each FCM has learned.
2. **Some families may identify a limited or no informal support system during the assessment phase.** As a result there may only be 2-3 individuals at the meeting. In these situations, DCS can engage and team with the family to identify a goal of expanding their informal support system which would increase the Teams membership. The key is to have a Team of key individuals that can support the family after DCS involvement ends.
3. **The composition of the Team may look different in the assessment phase.** These meetings may lack the formality of CFT meetings held later in the case because there are no flip charts, snacks, or formal agenda. The focus of the meeting will be the same: the creation of a functioning Team that can support the family so that well-informed decisions can be made to ensure the safety and well being of the child(ren) involved.

Updates will be made to Chapter 4 – Assessment of the DCS Policy Manual to reflect these important changes. If you have any questions regarding these changes please address them to the DCS policy mailbox at [DCS.Policy@dcs.in.gov](mailto:DCS.Policy@dcs.in.gov).

Sincerely,

James W. Payne, Director  
Department of Child Services



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