

## 1

### Talk to the Social Worker about the referral

Several conversations with the social worker are very useful in preparing for the meeting. Regular contact can provide useful information about:

- Sudden changes in the status of the case
- Additional people who should be explored to come to the meeting
- Safety issues that may have come up
- If the social worker is prepared to share strengths and concerns in a way that the family can hear.
- If the social worker is able explore and support family ideas for the plan.

## 3

### Review the Purpose with the Referring Social Worker

A good purpose will be both clear and open ended. It should be something that both the family and the Department can offer input into planning and decision making. Some examples of good purposes include:

- Determining a good visitation plan for the children and their parents
- To review how the plan for John and the family is working so far
- To make a plan for closing John's case
- To make a plan for services while John is in foster care

(take a look at the handouts and flip charts from STS regarding good purposes and "sample good purposes").

## 2

### Read the Referral

Referral forms should have a place for information about the following:

- Proposed purpose of the meeting
- Names of potential family members to invite
- Any safety concerns
- Identified support persons for children who will be involved in the meeting

Times that the social worker IS NOT AVAILABLE for a meeting

## 4

### Clarify Who Should Come to the Meeting

Both the social worker and the family should have input in who comes to the meeting. When there are differences in opinion about who should come, they should be negotiated with the following issues in mind:

- You should try to have more family than professionals
- Think carefully about the purpose of the meeting to determine who should be invited
- Always checking with the parents to make sure that they are aware of and okay with the participant list. If they are not okay with someone, explore the reason further to see if a compromise can be made.
- Share the participant list with the parent and the social worker as it grows and changes so that there are no surprises about who is at the table
- Ask family members to share their ideas about additional family members who can be invited

## 5

### Check Safety Issues

Taking the time to properly assess safety is a must. Families can not be asked to come together if there is a fear of physical or emotional harm.

An unsafe environment will not promote healthy planning.

- Using the volatility assessment tool, explore with the social worker and the family members what it normally looks like when the family gets together.
- Make sure that the social worker has investigated if there are any assault charges with any of the potential invitees.
- Explore with the parents if there are any anger issues or potential safety concerns between their family and any of the professionals involved.

(over)

## 6

### Contact Parents and Family Members

Contact with parents and family members prior to the meeting can be useful in the following ways:

- It allows you to explore additional family members to invite by asking the family directly if there are additional people who should be invited to the meeting.
- It allows you to ask some of the basic safety questions of the family and assess the need for ground rules prior to the meeting.
- It allows you to explain your role as a facilitator and the structure of the meeting.
- If the family member feels inclined to share their concerns, it allows you to help them reframe their concerns in a way that will be helpful for the group process at the meeting.

- Make sure to explore emotional safety-especially with vulnerable populations such as children, mentally ill family members or developmentally delayed family members.
- Follow safety guidelines and policy regarding holding meetings in situations where there is known domestic violence.
- Explore with family members the need for ground rules at the meeting to help ensure a safer environment.
- Make sure that the social worker has investigated if there are any assault charges or protective orders against any of the potential invitees.
- Check with family members on what supports and protections they want at the meeting.

## 7

### Check with the Family Regarding their Desire to Open the Meeting with a Ritual or Have a Food at the Meeting that is Important in their Family Gatherings

Taking the time to explore with the family an opening ritual or a family food they would like at their meeting is a very powerful tool in emphasizing that it is THEIR FAMILY meeting.

- Prayer
- Song
- A family member expressing appreciation before the meeting begins

## 8

### Check on how the Children are Participating and Who are their Identified Supports

It is not a question of “if the children should be involved” but rather “how the children should be involved”. Some ideas for involving children are:

- Have them complete the “I want to say something” worksheet or a letter and have a support person share it at the meeting.
- Bring a picture of the children to the meeting.
- Bring artwork that the children have created to the meeting.

## 10

### Invitations

Written invitations can provide documentation for social workers as well as confirmation to family members and other participants. Invitations should include the following:

- Date, time and location of the meeting
- Directions to the meeting site
- A name and contact number in case there are any last minute changes
- Children involved in the family plan
- Childcare arrangements and information
- The proposed purpose of the meeting

## 9

### Identify the Best Times for a Meeting and Possible Locations

For most families, the DSS Office is not a neutral site for a meeting. Explore options in your community that will allow you to use space both during and after regular business hours. Some ideas are:

- Community centers
- Fire stations
- Police Stations
- Libraries

## 11

### Gather Your Supplies

Supplies may include:

- Confidentiality and release of information forms
- Paper and pens for participants
- Tissue
- Flip charts
- Markers

## 12

### **Prepare the Site**

You will want to make sure that your site has enough space for all of the participants to be comfortable.

- Let everyone know where emergency exits are located
- Make sure there are enough parking spaces
- Let everyone know where designated smoking areas are located

## 13

### **Welcome Participants**

As the neutral facilitator, you can do a lot to ease tension and nervousness by making a point to welcome participants as they come in the door.

- Greet each participant as they enter the meeting room
- Give each participant a firm handshake
- Warm smile