

The Family Decision Making Conference

What is a Family Decision Making Conference?

A Family Decision Making Conference is a meeting held to improve the safety, permanency, and well-being of children by building alliances between families, the community, and HCJFS. The Conference is a structured process which identifies and taps resources within the family system while assisting the participants in developing a plan that meets both safety and permanency concerns. Parents, extended family, professionals, and other resource people are invited to attend a Family Conference. This meeting is an opportunity for families to have input and take an active part in the plans and decisions that affect their children and relatives.

Remember: a Conference is **not** a court hearing.

When is a Family Decision Making Conference held?

Family Decision Making Conferences are held at critical moments in Children's Services case. Critical moments can include:

- 1) An assessment that shows a child is not safe in his/her home.
- 2) Problems that arise in a child's foster care placement, indicating a potential threat of disruption in the child's current living situation.
- 3) Permanency planning must be discussed with the family.

How does a Family Decision Making Conference work?

The Children's Services case worker will contact the parents, extended family members and other professionals to discuss the need for a Conference and to schedule a suitable time. The Facilitator will send a letter and brochure describing the process to the family.

A Family Conference has three parts:

- *Introductions and Ground Rules* – Everyone is introduced, roles are defined and ground rules are established.
- *Presentation of Genogram, History, Strengths and Safety Concerns* - A genogram, or family tree is reviewed and the strengths of the family and

safety concerns for the child are discussed. The desired outcome is that the family will have a clear expectation of what the professional members of the group are seeking in a safety plan or a case plan.

- *Decision Making/Information Management* – The group develops options to address the concerns that have been raised and the family considers these options. The family uses the options to assist in developing two plans that will be implemented concurrently, Plan A and Plan B.

Everyone at the meeting is asked to sign a Determination Sheet stating the plans developed during the meeting. Everyone is then given a copy of the Determination Sheet.

What happens after the Family Decision Making Conference?

The Children's Services caseworker follows up with the children and family to make sure the plan developed during the Family Conference is being followed.

Why is a Family Decision Making Conference necessary?

A Family Decision Making Conference has many benefits, such as:

- Improving the safety and well being of children.
- Identifying the family's strengths and resources and using these in developing a plan to meet children's needs.
- Giving families the opportunity to participate decision making process.
- Helping to keep children with their family.

What if the parents or family members do not come to the Family Decision Making Conference even though they were invited?

The Conference will still be held. If a family member cannot physically attend but still wants to participate, a conference call using speaker phone can be used to allow for their input. A plan will be developed and decisions regarding the children's protection and safety will be made. If a family member refuses to attend/participate he/she loses the opportunity for input.