

Department of Public Health and Human Services – Procedure



Category:

Child and Family Services Division

Procedure:

Family Support Teams (PRO)

Procedure Number

1. PURPOSE

The Child and Family Services Division (CFSD) recognizes that removing a child from their parent can impact that child's self-esteem, security, stability, learning abilities, development, parent and natural connections. However, CFSD also recognizes that leaving a child in an unsafe situation can put that child at a higher risk of the above-mentioned impacts and, in severe situations, can even be the cause of serious injuries or death.

CFSD developed a process, Family Support Team (FST) Meetings, as a tool to fully engage families, community partners, natural supports and CFSD staff. These meetings are intended to keep children in their home, or to reunify families in a timely manner by implementing support services while engaging parents in the process of assessment, service planning and their individualized case plan when applicable.

FSTs are successful when the following outcomes have been met:

- Parents, natural supports, community providers and children, when appropriate, are engaged in their case to the extent that they are indicating they feel valued as a team member;
- Opportunities have been created for meaningful engagement with parents to advocate for the needs of their children and themselves.
- Collaboration with community providers has been strengthened as reported by CFSD staff and community providers; and,
- Appropriate services, including targeted evidenced based programs that meet the specific needs and characteristics of the parent and those necessary to help the children from coming back into state care, are identified and implemented.

2. SCOPE

This procedure applies to all cases in which an FST is utilized due to either a parent entering into a:

- Protection Plan; or,
- Prevention Plan.

[Hyperlink Protection Plan Procedure will be added when available](#)
[Hyperlink Prevention Plan will be added when available](#)

3. RESPONSIBILITY

It is the responsibility of the Child Protection Specialist (CPS) to ensure the parent is engaged and prepared for the FST, and the meeting is coordinated in compliance with this procedure.

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It is the responsibility of the FST Facilitator to schedule, promote effective engagement of the parent and other participants, facilitate the FST meeting, provide follow-up task assignments to all participants, educate and mentor CFSD staff around the FST and document the outcomes.

4. DEFINITIONS

Montana Definitions and Acronyms

5. PROCEDURE

- A. Upon the onset of a Protection or Prevention Plan, the CPS will:
- Engage the parent by providing them an overview of the FST process.
 - Have the parent sign the FST Screening Tool/Release of Information (ROI) upon the parent's decision on participation.
 - Engage the parent in identifying their natural supports.
 - These natural supports and their contact information will be added to the FST Screening Tool/ROI.
 - Provide the completed FST Screening Tool/ROI to the FST Facilitator immediately.
- B. Immediately upon receiving the completed FST Screening Tool/ROI the FST Facilitator will reach out to the CPS for consultation. The FST Facilitator and CPS will fill out the FST Referral form to be used, as a decision-making tool to determine if the parent meets the criteria to have an FST. The criteria to be used to determine FST participation is:
- The parent agrees to work with the CPS to complete the Family Functioning Assessment (FFA);
 - The parent resides in a place that allows for the establishment or sustainment of an In-Home Protection Plan and that is safe for service providers to enter, unannounced or announced, to assist the parent and children in support services; and,
 - The parent agrees to cooperate with service providers and follow the recommendations of the service providers.
- C. The FST Facilitator will make outreach to parent, community partners, identified natural supports and CFSD staff to schedule the FST.
- The FST should be held within 72 hours of a Protection Plan or Child Welfare Prevention and Support Services Plan being put in place.
 - The FST Facilitator will engage the parent and assess whether the children should participate in the FST by screening for the following: age

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appropriateness, child’s comfort level, and the child’s willingness and ability to self-advocate. A child could opt to provide a written summary prior to the meeting to the FST Facilitator instead of participating in person.

- D. The FST Facilitator ensures the meeting is held with the parent, children when applicable, community partners, identified natural supports and CFSD staff. The FST Facilitator provides opportunities for and encourages:
 - a. The parent to provide a summary of their understanding of why CFSD is involved, to discuss any service needs or concerns they have identified for their parent and to advocate for those needs without judgment;
 - b. The CPS to provide the CFSD’s perspective of is involved and, if applicable, to discuss the process of transitioning from an Out of Home Protection Plan to an In-Home Safety Plan;
 - c. Providers to share their expertise, explain their specific services and share a timeline of when they could start supporting the parent;
 - d. Whenever possible, for the CPS to complete referrals to providers during the meeting, but no later than twenty-four hours after the FST concludes; and,
 - e. Describing to the parent the purpose of a Family Engagement Meeting (FEM) and the scheduling of this meeting with the parent pursuant to the FEM procedure. [Hyperlink to FEM procedure will be added when available](#)

DI. FST Facilitator documents in the tracking log and in the electronic case record the FST meeting information and outcomes (including the sign in sheet, FST referral form and other pertinent information).

DII. If the parent has opted to not participate, or the parent did not meet the criteria, the FST Facilitator and the CPS worker will make another attempt to engage the parent by reaching out to the parent and discuss the benefits of the FST within fifteen calendar days to reassess and offer the FST again to the parent. The FST Facilitator will document the outcome of this outreach.

6. RELATED DOCUMENTATION

[Hyperlink FST Screening Tool/ROI form will be added when available.](#)

[Hyperlink the FST Referral Form will be added when available](#)

7. RELATED FEDERAL OR STATE GUIDANCE (IF APPLICABLE)

This is a procedure that falls under the authority of CFSD to intervene with families while engaging them and preventing children from entering into foster care.