



# CFE

## MEANINGFUL FAMILY MEETINGS:

A Collaborative Family Engagement Facilitator's Guide





**TEXAS**  
Department of Family  
and Protective Services

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# INTRODUCTION

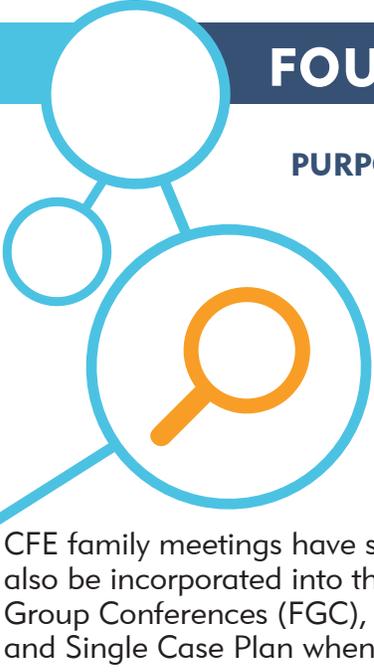
Thank you for wanting to be the best family meeting facilitator you can be. After reading this guide, you will be better prepared for planning and facilitating meaningful Collaborative Family Engagement (CFE) family meetings, either as stand-alone meetings, or as integrated parts of your existing meeting structure. This guide discusses the philosophy behind family meetings and how they are structured (and in which order), and offers tips for successful facilitation. It is supplemental to the full Collaborative Family Engagement (CFE) Manual, which you should read first.

A family meeting is a very important occasion that provides an opportunity for the family and their network to come together with child protection professionals to share and learn information, often for the first time. Such gatherings build trust and elicit support amongst all who are involved (or desire to be involved) in supporting the child or family. **They are a key part of fostering engagement.**

Just as importantly, family meetings provide the opportunity and space for the family to come together to heal and process the events that have brought Child Protective Services (CPS), Community-Based Care (CBC) providers and CASA to be involved, and to work together towards a safe resolution.

Use this guide for inspiration and to strengthen your skills and vision as a facilitator of this important work.





# FOUNDATIONAL INFORMATION

## PURPOSE OF FAMILY MEETINGS

Family meetings are the heart of the CFE approach, as this is where the real work happens—when the family, fictive kin and CFE team come together. These meetings support everyone to work collaboratively to meet the child’s immediate needs while they are in foster care. They also support everyone in planning and preparing for permanency, progressively engaging family and fictive kin connections into the process.

CFE family meetings have some unique agenda items and guidelines, which can also be incorporated into the CPS or CBC family meetings process, including Family Group Conferences (FGC), Permanency Conferences (PC), Circles of Support (COS) and Single Case Plan whenever possible.

## DEFINITION OF FAMILY

Based on principles of inclusion, the CFE team should be working to widen all team members’ definition of family. **The child, youth and their extended family group defines and decides who is “family.”** The family may include maternal and paternal relatives, friends, elders or religious figures in their community, and other natural support people who have a significant relationship with the child, parent or other family member. This definition should serve as a starting point from which the circle is widened to include as broad a definition of family as possible. It is the CFE team’s responsibility to ask about **both paternal and maternal** family members.

## CURRENT CPS PROCESS

Texas Child Protective Services (CPS) and Community-Based Care (CBC) providers have strong family meeting and permanency conference practices and processes in place. **CFE family meeting principles and agenda items are complementary to these practices and can be integrated into these existing practices.** Family meetings with CFE are encouraged to happen over the life of the case, usually at the initial FGC or PC, at the fifth-month FGC or PC and before the end of the case. However, they can be held at any time that all or any parties (including the family) request them.

## CFE IN CPS PROCESS OVERVIEW

From a CFE perspective, the first family meeting, when done in conjunction with the first PC or FGC where the Family Plan of Service is created, is intended for sharing information, and for identifying and engaging those connections that play an important role for the child and family. The second family meeting, often done at the fifth-month PC or FGC, continues to look at ideas from the family and other connections to support the needs of the youth and family, and to share ideas for permanency that are developed with the group as a whole. Finally, the third meeting, generally held near the end of the case, secures a commitment from the family and their connections to be part of a lifetime network and moves them to action in that commitment.

# PRINCIPLES OF EFFECTIVE FAMILY MEETINGS



## FAMILY-CENTERED

- Meetings should be welcoming to all.
- The family's network is invited to help create a supportive environment in which the family can discuss their needs and worries.
- Ideally, 70% of attendees are natural supports or family members. The other 30% may be professionals whose role is time-limited to the case. Efforts are made to achieve this attendance ratio, but the meeting may still occur if the ratio is not met.
- An effective meeting recognizes that families have the ability and responsibility to safely plan for their children, and that they have a right to do so.
- A beneficial meeting recognizes that families are the experts on their lives and what their family needs, and that information may be needed from professionals to make informed decisions.
- Families, children and youth should be respected and helped to decide what services they need, based on their strengths and resources.
- Families and their networks should answer questions first.
- Recognize and honor that each family has their own unique culture and customs which the child needs and has a right to maintain while in foster care.
- Avoid using professional terms that families may not understand readily; if professional terms are used, ensure that explanation is given.
- Understand and acknowledge that "bad behavior" in family meetings (blame, yelling, threats, swearing, etc.) may be a trauma response and/or a result of grief and anger, and approaching that from a trauma-informed lens might be helpful to facilitation and family engagement.
- When meeting in person, the meeting location should ideally be determined with input from the family.
- Meetings should ideally be set for a time that works not just for the professionals, but also the family and their network.



## COLLABORATIVE DECISION-MAKING

- An effective meeting emphasizes developing a partnership between families and CPS, CASA, CBC providers and other departments and agencies that serve them, so that service planning and decision-making become a collaborative process.
- A useful meeting will encourage families to connect with the resources available in their communities.
- Parents and youth help determine the invite list to the meeting, and/or ideally consent to who will be there.
- Meetings should be focused on the future, not the past. Meetings should be solution-focused, not blame-focused. Aim to be strengths-based and future-focused as much as possible.





## TRUST-BASED APPROACH

- A transparent meeting agenda is in place through the use of agenda headings which enable all participants in the meeting to see the agenda ahead of time and throughout the meeting.
- Meeting agendas are provided in the family's preferred language, when possible.
- Translators are arranged and provided at the family meeting when required.
- If possible, notes are written on flip chart paper, white boards or are projected onto a screen so all participants can see what is being written down. Notes should be provided to the meeting attendees, as well as the plan that the family, child and CFE team develop.
- If the meeting occurs virtually, the screen may be shared to show the agenda and the notes as they are being taken.
- When occurring in person, the family meeting setting should be arranged in a holistic way, with chairs in a circle or semi-circle with no tables. If this is not possible, care should be taken to intermix seating between professionals and the family/support network.
- Both positive and negative feedback should be shared in a fact-based way; this helps the family receive the information in a meaningful way.
- Particularly in a Family Group Conference, families should be offered the opportunity to have private "family time" to process information shared.
- A confidentiality form should be signed by all attendees at the beginning of the meeting.
- Trauma-informed elements are provided, such as:
  - Snacks and water,
  - Fidgets for self-regulation, and
  - Tissues.





# STRUCTURE OF FAMILY MEETINGS

Every time we meet with a family, it is an **opportunity** to identify who is in the child's network and work towards building and strengthening that network. Family meetings can be held without parents' involvement, if needed, with the focus of the meeting being on the child. Discussion of the child's network ideally starts at the earliest possible point of our work; from the moment we start working with the family. The Department is required to hold family meetings as per the Texas Family Code Sec 263.009. These are referred to in the law as permanency planning meetings.



## AGENDAS FOR MEETINGS

Most CPS and CBC family meetings have agenda items that must be covered, and CFE elements can easily be blended into these existing agendas. In line with Family Group Decision-Making (FGDM) best practices, facilitators can and should adjust the agenda as necessary based on the situation and family needs. The overarching goals of the CFE agendas and elements are to ensure that the child remains connected while in foster care, a support network is engaged, and the family is involved in the planning and decision-making process. There is benefit in having extended family and the support network attend the meetings so they can hear the information that is being shared with parents, which supports all involved to make the best decisions for the child's safety and permanency.

## BLENDING CFE ELEMENTS INTO THE FAMILY GROUP CONFERENCE (FGC)

Of all of the CPS family meetings, the FGC is best set up to incorporate elements of CFE. The format easily adapts to blending in CFE elements, as many of the same topics are covered. The meetings should be held for 90-120 minutes on average.

Following are the agendas for FGCs that have CFE items included. When possible, the agendas should be flexible and tailored to the needs of the family.

## INITIAL FGC AGENDA WITH CFE ELEMENTS

1. Purpose of Meeting
2. Introductions/Hope for Meeting
3. Information about the Child (name, DOB, culture, any other info needed)
4. Strengths of Family
5. Reason for Removal
6. Legal Timelines
7. Discuss Other Concerns
8. Hopes and Dreams
9. Community and Education Support
10. Child's Needs and Concerns
11. Permanency Goals
12. Parent's Family Plan of Service

13. Biggest Unmet Needs Statement
14. Connectedness Map
15. Set Date for 5th Month Meeting Action Plan for Keeping Network Involved



### **5TH MONTH FGC AGENDA WITH CFE ELEMENTS**

1. Purpose of Meeting
2. Introductions/Hope for Meeting
3. Updates Since the Last Meeting (parents/children)
4. Review of Strengths, Hopes and Dreams, Community and Educational Support
5. New Concerns
6. Review of Unmet Needs Statement
7. Review of Family Plan of Service
8. Updates/Changes on Permanency Goals
9. Permanency Plans Generated by Network (A, B, C)
10. Tasks to Support Plans Generated by Network
11. Review Action and Plan New Items
12. Do We Need to Meet Again at 9th Month? If So, Set Date

### **BLENDING CFE ELEMENTS INTO PERMANENCY CONFERENCES (PCS)**

While FGCs are ideal for blending CFE elements, PCs can also be utilized if necessary. The PC agenda is not as flexible as the FGC agenda, and there is usually a set time frame for the PC to be held in. For these reasons, and to better plan for and support the family, scheduled PCs on CFE cases should be changed to FGCs whenever possible. This is allowed by CPS policy, which also elaborates that FGCs are the preferred type of family meeting (see CPS Handbook 6251 Overview of Permanency Planning Meetings – Types of Permanency Planning Meetings).

The agenda that follows shows where CFE elements could be blended into the existing agendas. CASA and caseworkers often meet with parents and the Attorney Ad Litem after the PC and elements that were not covered in the meeting can then be reviewed. Also, visits are often held after the PC so caseworkers and CASA can take that time to observe the visit and complete tools with the child or parents to gain additional information.

The following key elements are applicable to blending CFE elements into PCs:

- Semi-circle
- Neutral facilitator
- Transparent agenda
- Connectedness Map (for children, can be completed by parents at the meeting)

- Action plan can be created
- Discussion of next meeting and date setting
- An FGC can be set if the parents have many support members that they would like to bring to their 5th month meeting

### **PC AGENDA WITH CFE ELEMENTS (SAME AGENDA IS USED FOR BOTH INITIAL & 5TH MONTH PC)**

1. Conference Information
2. Conditions of Participation
3. Conference Participants' Signatures
4. Children's Placements and Permanency Goals Details
5. Removal Information and Legal Status
6. Child's Well-Being and Permanency Status
  - Child's placement
  - Needs and concerns (educational, medical, mental health, behavioral, therapeutic, developmental, dental, vision, hearing needs, etc.)
  - Services received
  - Connectedness Map
  - Discussion of family and fictive kin and if family searching is needed
  - Biggest Unmet Needs Statement
7. Family Plan of Service
  - Family progress on service plan
  - Strengths of family
  - Barriers to achieving family reunification
  - Support network the family can currently utilize if necessary, to successfully complete service plan
  - Connections of parents
  - Tasks/services or court orders on the service plan that need to be modified
  - Family visits
  - Family resources to address identified needs/concerns
8. Legal Permanency Barriers
  - Permanency options
  - Strengths of permanency options (in 5th month PC)
  - Barriers to achieving permanent placement
9. Strategies and Actions to Overcome Permanency Barriers
  - How can we use the network to overcome those barriers?
10. Permanency Conference Timeline and Date of Next Permanency Conference
  - If a network exists, should an FGC be held?



### **THIRD FAMILY MEETING AGENDA (SAME FOR FGC OR PC)**

1. Purpose of Meeting
2. Introductions/Hope for Meeting

3. Updates Since the Last Meeting (children/parents)
4. Review of Permanency Plans/Action Items
5. Review of Biggest Unmet Needs Statement
6. Lifetime Network Calendar



## CFE FAMILY MEETINGS

There is also an option to hold a CFE family meeting that is not merged with a CPS/CBC family meeting. If the family requests to meet again outside of the CPS/CBC family meeting schedule, or if the CFE team, family or others feel that it is in the best interest of the case to hold a separate meeting utilizing the CFE agenda, that is always possible. When needed and when technology is accessible, a CFE family meeting can be held virtually. This can have the benefit of avoiding asking the family and professionals to travel, take time off from work or arrange childcare.

The suggested meeting agendas that follow are flexible and can work together to best fulfill the needs and purpose of the meeting, as well as be adaptable to where the case is at in the court timeline and any other family meetings that are to occur.

### FIRST CFE FAMILY MEETING AGENDA

1. Purpose of Meeting
2. Introductions (name, relationship, hope for meeting)
3. Formulation Activity (name of young person, DOB, etc.)
4. Strengths and Needs Inventory (of child and/or family, depending on who the planning is for)
5. Safety
6. Biggest Unmet Needs Inventory
7. Biggest Unmet Needs Statement development
8. Pending Questions: Do we need to meet again? Who is missing? Action plan to be done by next meeting and date of next meeting to be set.

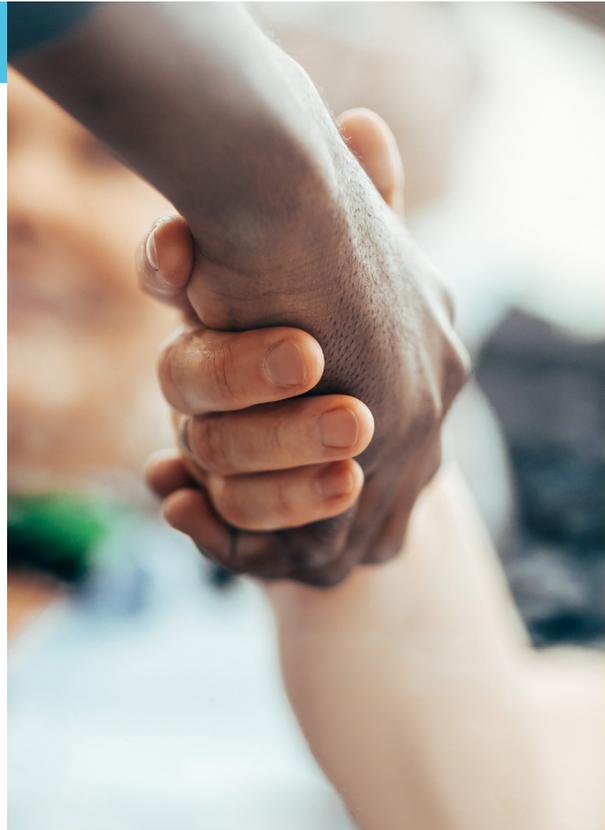
### SECOND CFE FAMILY MEETING AGENDA

1. Purpose of Meeting
2. Introductions (name, relationship, hope for meeting)
3. Updates Since Last Meeting
4. Review Strengths and Needs Inventory
5. Review Biggest Unmet Needs Statement
6. Family Plans to Meet Unmet Needs (discuss strengths, needs/worries, safety factors for each plan/offer of support presented)
7. Evaluation of Plans/Offer of Support

8. Lifetime Network
9. Pending Questions: Do we need to meet again? Who is missing? Action plan to be done by next meeting and date of next meeting to be set.

### **THIRD CFE FAMILY MEETING AGENDA**

1. Purpose of Meeting
2. Introductions (name, relationship, hope for meeting)
3. Discuss Lifetime Network purpose/considerations
4. Review Biggest Unmet Needs Statement
5. Updates Since Last Meeting
6. Create Calendar of Support, Discuss Upcoming Opportunities for Support
7. Action Steps Before Next Meeting
8. Scale Permanency Efforts
9. Discuss Needs (health, education, safety and legal, etc.)
10. Schedule Next Meeting (if needed)





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# ACTION PLANS & CALENDARING



The use of action plans and calendars is a concrete way to move the lifetime network formed in the family meetings to action. These tools help the network be accountable to the youth and family and the plan that they have made.

The purpose of the action plans should be to ensure the child **stays connected to the network** while in foster care and that the network is supporting the parents or caregivers in some specific way. Action plans should utilize the key ideas of SMART goals:

- Specific
- Measurable
- Attainable
- Relevant
- Time-based

*Example: Grandma will call Johnny every Sunday evening between 7-9 p.m.*

The Calendar is a tool that is used in the last family meeting and is created to capture the lifetime network's **commitment** to the child and/or to the parents to ensure that they stay connected to the child, support the child and keep the child out of future CPS care. At minimum, a calendar of connection is created for a four-week period, but longer is preferred. Lifetime Network plans to be put on the calendar should aim to:

- Focus on action.
- Be accepting of the child or youth.
- Be flexible.
- Be consistent.
- Be mutually supportive of other network members.
- Be hopeful.



## NOTE-TAKING

- A note-taker should be available, if possible, to capture the information discussed in the family meeting. For CFE elements blended into FGCs and PCs, the information can be noted on the forms provided.
- If no note-taker is available, someone from CASA or a member of the team can be asked to write the notes on flip chart paper during the family meeting to help the facilitator.
- If CASA or a member of the team is unable to take notes, the offer can be extended to other participants in the meeting, including family, as a way of increasing participation and power in the meeting.
- There may be times when the facilitator will need to both take notes and facilitate the family meeting.



## CONFIDENTIALITY



- Standard agency confidentiality forms should be explained to, and acknowledged by, all meeting participants before the meeting commences.
- If new allegations of abuse or neglect are shared during the meeting, by law, this information has to be shared and reported.
- Confidential information about the family and children may be shared at a family meeting. It is important to note that while candid, honest communication is encouraged in family meetings, the notes from the meeting do become a part of the case files and may be made available to all parties and attorneys on the case.
- Family and network members are encouraged to not share what was discussed at the family meeting outside of the meeting, unless it is important and helpful for other family or network members. This will allow family group members to speak as candidly as possible.
- Parents have the right to specify who is or isn't a part of their service planning discussion, and arrangements should be made to respect their wishes.
- It is best practice for meeting participants to avoid negatively discussing people who are not at the meeting themselves.

# FACILITATION TIPS

All facilitators should keep some specific things in mind to have a **successful meeting**. These points will help meetings be productive and positive for both family members and professionals.

- Be aware of group dynamics and manage them as necessary.
- Ask everyone to turn cell phones on silent, put laptops away, etc.
- Treat remote participants who are on the phone or computer with the same level of engagement as those in the room.
- The meeting should be conducted in the family's native language if possible (CPS/CBC has a duty to ensure communication needs of the family are met, including scheduling a foreign language or sign language interpreter whenever needed).
- Ask the family if they have a cultural or otherwise significant way they would like to begin and end their meeting.
- Ask the participants if they have a picture of the child that can be shared during the meeting.
- Set ground rules so all participants understand expected behavior (See Appendix B).
- Facilitate with empathy.
- Utilize active listening.
- Ask probing questions that lead to discussions.
- Paraphrase to ensure understanding.
- Redirect negative energy to a more positive tone.
- Summarize points.
- Give positive encouragement for participation, especially for quieter members.
- Manage time effectively.
- Gauge energy level and utilize facilitation tools such as Connect and Engage 100, if necessary.
- Be flexible and adapt as necessary.
- Stay neutral, except about the need for connection, safety and permanency.
- Recognize that relationships are central to healing.
- Provide trauma-informed elements, such as:
  - Snacks and water,
  - Fidgets for self-regulation, and
  - Tissues.
- Starting with family members first, offer all participants an opportunity to answer questions and speak to agenda items.
- Utilize the "elephant in the room" header to bring awareness to sensitive topics that may or may not be known by the facilitator.
- Redirect participants' attention back to the purpose and hopes for the meeting and ground rules if discussions go off track.





# PLANNING FOR FAMILY MEETINGS



## LOCATING FAMILY & NETWORK MEMBERS TO INVITE TO THE MEETING

There are **many tools available** that can be used to help the family network and CFE team identify and locate family and other supportive individuals. Strategies to find and search for family may include:

- Asking family for contact information
- Using social networking sites
- Accessing other Internet-based technologies such as White Pages, Google, Seneca Search and Connect Our Kids
- Case mining through current and previous DFPS and CASA records

**At all times**, parents (if involved) should be aware of any family members or support people that are going to be approached for involvement, to ensure the **integrity and transparency** of the process. It is also important to encourage a relative or fictive kin caregiver to bring their own support network to the family meeting. Refer to the CFE Manual for further information on family searching. As much advance notice as possible should be given to invitees to support them to take time off work as needed or make other arrangements, such as transportation or childcare.

## INVITING FAMILY MEMBERS/SUPPORT

The CFE team should **decide together** who will be contacted, how, and by whom. It's important to always communicate and involve the entire CFE team in the decision about whom to reach out to, once family and fictive kin have been located. There are many factors that need to be taken into consideration before attempting contact, and some members of the team may be aware of information that others are not. The CFE team, along with the facilitator, should **follow up with invitees** to confirm the date, time and location of the meeting. The purpose of the meeting can again be stated, along with the importance of attending. For permanency planning meetings, the parents and foster parents/caregiver must have at least two weeks' notice.

If a CFE team member is unsure about contacting a certain person, the rest of the team should attempt to understand where these concerns are coming from. Ideally, the team would share the task of contacting those on the invitation list, and when possible, encourage family members to also invite others on the list, or those who have been missed.

Sample scripts for both telephone and written messages have been provided in the CFE Manual, Appendix, handout #4. Note that these are guides to provide ideas for initial contact and should not be read or written verbatim. They should be personal and tailored to the family. Scripts can be discussed with the CFE

team so the group can problem-solve potential barriers or questions in advance of making contact. When in doubt, always **err on the side of caution** and do not share information about the child or family if confidentiality is in question (also see discussion of confidentiality in Chapter 4 of the CFE Manual).

## SCHEDULING THE FAMILY MEETING

The date and time of the meeting has an impact on who will be able to attend, and ideally the meeting would be scheduled through a **family-led process**, with their input. It should be designed to accommodate the family's schedule as much as possible. Virtual and phone options should always be offered to increase the ability of the network and professionals to participate. Holding the meeting in a location that is neutral and accessible to the family, if possible, is important to make the family feel welcome and comfortable.





# PREPARATION OF PARTICIPANTS IN FAMILY MEETINGS

## PREPARATION OF THE CFE TEAM/PROFESSIONALS

A CFE team meeting should be held (in person or via phone or video chat) prior to any family meeting to discuss the purpose of the meeting and who will be attending. The purpose of CFE should be reviewed and an action plan that needs to be completed should be discussed. This will ensure all team members and professionals have the same information prior to attending the family meetings. Team meetings should be held prior to subsequent family meetings to provide updates and offer a chance to connect and collaborate. If the family meeting facilitator is not able to attend the CFE team meeting, the notes should be sent to them so they are prepared to most effectively facilitate.



## PREPARATION OF FAMILY/NETWORK

Preparation involves working with parents and children to ensure that the family and support members involved in their lives are identified and invited to participate in the family meeting process. The CFE team should begin to work with parents and caregivers at the earliest point possible to explain the family meeting process and encourage them to bring support people to the meetings. As the CFE team members meet with family and utilize engagement tools, they can ask questions such as:

- Who else is a part of your family?
- Who do you turn to when you need support or help?
- Who attends family weddings, funerals, reunions or other major events?
- Who loves your child? Who cares about you?

The family, particularly fathers and paternal relatives, are often overlooked. The CFE team should utilize engagement tools and family searching as needed and talk to the children about family and others whom they are connected to. Engagement tools such as genograms, connectedness maps, and Circles of Trust can be useful.

**THE EMPHASIS SHOULD BE ON INCLUDING FAMILY MEMBERS INSTEAD OF EXCLUDING THEM.** If family members or professionals recommend the exclusion of a certain individual from the family meeting, the CFE team can work to clarify why anyone might be excluded. There should **not be exclusions** unless safety concerns are present during the meeting or a person's presence would be so detrimental to the meeting as to make it unproductive. Court orders, such as restraining orders, also must be considered—though even then, that person's participation should still be considered via phone call or virtual meeting.

**It is important prior to each family meeting that family and other invitees understand the purpose of the meeting, who will be invited and what will be covered during the meeting.** This gives another opportunity to talk about the importance and benefits of the support network attending the meeting. Ideally, this

initial meeting would be done face-to-face, but it can be done via phone or video chat. Items to share when doing preparation for the family meetings:

- Purpose of the meeting and why they are invited.
- Agenda and set-up of the meeting.
- What to expect during the meeting.
- Their role in the meeting.
- Basic information on how the child welfare system functions so they understand the importance of family meetings.
- Everyone else who has been invited to the meeting, whether attendance is confirmed or not.
- Their thoughts on any safety concerns or aspects of family dynamics, etc. that may impact or impede the success of the meeting.
- Their ability to express any safety concerns they have about attending the meeting and a plan to address those concerns.



## PREPARATION OF THE CHILD/YOUTH

**The CFE team should discuss in the CFE team meeting how best to amplify and involve the child's voice in the family meeting process.** Ideally, children and youth are encouraged to attend their family meetings whenever possible and appropriate. The child may attend in person or share their voice through tools like the Circles of Trust or Three Houses. Some considerations to determine how best for a child to participate in their family meeting are:

- Whether the child wants to participate.
- If so, whether they prefer to participate in person or virtually.
- Behavioral, developmental or mental health needs.
- Age of the child.
- Family's thoughts on the child's participation.
- Potential for the process to be helpful for the child, including the views of the child's therapist, if relevant.
- Who will be present at the meeting and their relationship with the child.
- Support needed by the child before and after the meeting.

Once it has been determined whether and how the child will be able to participate in their meeting (either in person or virtually), the child then should be prepared to attend and participate. The child should be made aware of who will be at the meeting, the purpose of the meeting and what their role is in the meeting. The child should sit beside a person of their choice during the meeting, which may be determined beforehand to ensure the child is not put on the spot in front of their network at the meeting. There should be a plan in place for the child to leave the meeting should it become too difficult or stressful for them, or should they request to leave for any reason. A consideration could be made as to whether the child's therapist (if applicable) should attend the meeting to help support them.



## FOLLOW-UP AFTER FAMILY MEETINGS



After each meeting, an Action Plan, or a “to be done before next meeting” list will have been created. **The role of the CFE team is to share in these responsibilities, when appropriate, and to help support the family and network members to adhere to their commitments to support the child and/or family.** The team can work with family and the network to help them overcome obstacles to fulfilling those commitments. If commitments are not being met, this should be a discussion point at the next family meeting.



## CONCLUSION



It's **not always easy** to facilitate family meetings that are family-focused and create a positive space that fosters involvement from all in attendance. **The work you do as a facilitator is critical to the engagement of the family and their involvement in the planning and decision-making in the child's case.** This work is a vital support for the connection they can have with one another and the child. Thank you for all that you do, and for taking the time to read this guide. If you have any questions or need additional resources or information, please contact us at [cfeteam@texascasa.org](mailto:cfeteam@texascasa.org).







## APPENDIX A: TERMS TO KNOW

**70/30 Ratio:** The ratio of caseworkers/professionals to family members or naturally occurring support people present in a CFE family meeting. Connections are considered naturally occurring if they will be involved after the case ends. Ideally, in CFE family meetings, 70% of attendees should be family members or naturally connected and only 30% should be professionals.

**Biggest Unmet Needs Statement:** A statement created in the family meeting about the biggest unmet needs of the child, including permanency needs. The goal of the lifetime network is to help meet the defined needs.

**Calendars & Calendaring:** A concrete way to move the lifetime network formed in the family meeting process to action; holds the network accountable to the youth's wishes and plans for the future, through the use of a calendar to schedule.

**CFE Family Meeting Bottom Line:** The concept that all CFE meetings should be transparent, have a neutral facilitator, and, when possible, follow the 70/30 rule and have a holistic room set-up.

**CFE Team:** The child welfare professionals and volunteers who work together to facilitate Collaborative Family Engagement. A CFE team includes: a CASA advocate, a CASA supervisor, the caseworker (CPS or Community-Based Care provider), their supervisor, a neutral family meeting facilitator, and care coordinators. Other team members may include important people like parent(s)' attorneys, attorneys ad litem (AALs), foster parents or other caregivers, therapists, teachers, etc.

**Circle of Support (COS):** A meeting that is held for a youth in foster care by CPS/CBC as early as age 14; the Circle of Support develops a plan for the youth's transition to a successful adulthood, as well as connects the youth to supportive and caring adults when the youth leaves foster care.

**Collaborative Family Engagement (CFE):** A structured approach undertaken by volunteer and staff child welfare professionals to work together to engage caring and positive adults to support children who are in the foster care system, with the goal of ensuring that all children have meaningful connections, during their time in care and after.

**Community-Based Care (CBC):** A community-based approach to foster care and other child protective services, previously delivered by DFPS. A single nonprofit contractor in each designated geographic area creates a network of services, foster homes and other living arrangements and, when ready, provides case management for each child as well. CPS works with each contractor (Single Source Continuum Contractor or SSCC) to carefully manage the transition from traditional foster care to community care so that children are not affected negatively. See also Single Source Continuum Contractor.

**Connect & Engage 100:** A brainstorming tool in which participants quickly think of 100 ways in 10 minutes to support and engage the child and decide which of these things they can commit to doing. An action plan is created from this list. Can be adapted for more or fewer ideas in more or less time.

**Connectedness Map:** A visual representation engagement tool, with the child or parent at the center surrounded by connections. If few connections are listed, this indicates an urgent need for connections.

**Connection-informed Care:** Keeps the knowledge of the importance and benefit of positive and healthy connections and relationships in mind and in practice when working with those who have experienced trauma, and/or who are disconnected.

**Family Group Conference (FGC):** A meeting held by CPS once a child comes into state care, where the family is brought together to discuss the issues identified in the affidavit; CFE elements can be blended into these conferences.

**Family Group Decision-Making (FGDM):** The umbrella term for the family meeting process used by DFPS that aligns well with CFE. Like CFE, FGDM places the family/community at the center of the decision-making process for the child's well-being.

**Family Meeting Toolkits:** Toolkits available for family meetings that include all supplies necessary such as flip charts, meeting headings (which form the agenda), markers, tape, fidgets and more. These can be found at CPS offices or by asking your CFE Coach.

**Fictive Kin:** Individuals who have a nonfamilial relationship with the child and may include stepparent, godparent, friend or community mentor such as a teacher, coach, neighbor, a close family friend, etc.

**Four Cs:** The core concepts of Collaborative Family Engagement (CFE).

**Collaborate:** The use of teams and greater collaboration between systems to involve families and build networks.

**Cultivate:** The use of connection, engagement and search tools to find and engage families.

**Convene:** The bringing together of families, with an emphasis on their involvement in the planning and decision-making process through the use of family meetings.

**Connect:** The end goal of CFE; a lifetime network of supportive relationships for the child and their parents.

**Lead Family Member:** The person who has key insight into and knowledge of the family structure (e.g., the person who would arrange a family reunion, have contact information for relatives, etc.).

**Legal Permanency:** Achieved when a child has a permanent legal connection to another individual, through such processes as reunification, adoption, legal guardianship, custody, etc. See also: relational permanency.

**Lifetime Network:** A system of support for the youth in foster care that includes family, community members and fictive kin who are invested in the youth's long-term mental, physical and emotional health, permanency and well-being, even after they exit the system. See also: natural support.

**Natural Support:** A person who has a relationship with the child and family that is naturally occurring and is not contingent on being in a service role. See also: lifetime network.

**Neutral Facilitator:** A neutral party in a CFE meeting who takes notes and runs the meeting; a person who is neutral about the outcome of the case but who is not neutral about the child's need for safety, well-being, community and permanency.

**Permanency Conference (PC):** A meeting held by CPS/CBC that examines the options for permanency for a child in care; CFE elements can be blended into these meetings.

**Permanent Managing Conservatorship (PMC):**

**Without termination:** Custody of a child is given to DFPS, a relative or other party, but the parents' rights are not terminated. In this situation, the parents may retain visitation privileges or other rights decided by the court. A child in this type of custody is not available for adoption.

**With termination:** Custody of a child with all rights of both parents terminated for all time. A child in this type of conservatorship is available for adoption.

**Relational Permanency:** The long-term relationships, with family or fictive kin, which help a youth feel loved and connected and are a vital part of the CFE approach, specifically the lifetime network. See also: legal permanency.

**Right to Know Principle:** The Geneva Convention principle that families have the right to know what happened to relatives who were displaced during war. Article 26 states: "Each victim has the right to know the truth regarding the circumstances of the enforced disappearance....and the fate of the disappeared person."

**Single Case Plan (SCP):** Both a meeting model and a new, integrated way of developing and documenting the Child's Plan of Service (CPOS). The SCP meeting acts as the initial permanency planning meeting and utilizes the expertise and principles of Family Group Decision-Making (FGDM). At the SCP meeting, the CPOS is developed with input from all appropriate family members and stakeholders, and the Family Plan of Service is developed, as well. The SCP model will provide a more formal process to engage parents in permanency planning for their child and ensures that all parties are collaborating on the development of the child's service plan. Once implemented, residential providers will have access to IMPACT (CPS' data information system) which will allow for joint development of the child's plan of service by the CPS caseworker and the residential provider.

**Single Source Continuum Contractor (SSCC):** The contractor chosen by DFPS to implement community-based foster care and child protective services in their assigned region. See also: Community-Based Care.

**Temporary Managing Conservatorship (TMC):** The legal term used for temporary placement of a child in the foster care system, in which the state temporarily takes charge of meeting the child's physical and emotional needs.

**Trauma-informed Approach:** Keeps the impacts and effects of trauma in mind and in practice when working with those who have experienced trauma.



## APPENDIX B: GROUND RULES FOR EFFECTIVE MEETINGS

1. Please respect the privacy of the family and what is discussed in this meeting.
2. We respect each other's views/perspective.
3. Focus today is in the present and what is in the child's/youth's best interest, not what happened in the past.
4. No blaming; be respectful of others.
5. Everyone is given a chance to share.
6. Cell phones on vibrate, please.
7. Meeting length will be no longer than 90-120 minutes.
8. Goal is to understand the present and plan for the future.
9. Take space as needed, take care of yourself.
10. Be honest.



## APPENDIX C: CONFIDENTIALITY FORM\*

Please note that this is a guide, and the standard CPS confidentiality form should be used.

PARENT/YOUTH/CHILD'S NAME

DATE OF MEETING

CFE TEAM NAMES

FACILITATOR'S NAME

TYPE OF MEETING

### CONSENT

Everyone attending this family meeting is consenting to participating in today's meeting and respecting the children/youth and family's privacy. If another meeting is held, relevant and needed information may be shared with people attending who were not at today's meeting, including who was present today and the main points of planning.

We are here to focus on the children/youth and their immediate needs that will support permanency and enhance family connections. We are not focusing on the past, but focusing on where we hope to go. Thank you for all attending and being so committed.

The meeting notes taken by the facilitator are the only notes to be taken and become part of the record. All participants may have a copy, for the purposes of supporting their planning for the child/youth/family.

### SIGNATURES OF ALL PRESENT AT MEETING:

\_\_\_\_\_

Name

\_\_\_\_\_

Date



## APPENDIX D: FAMILY MEETING PREPARATION CHECKLIST

ACTION ITEM TO BE COMPLETED	YES	NO	NOTES/COMPLETED BY
CASA advocate to meet with parents at Adversary hearing or as soon as case has been selected for CFE to discuss the family meeting process and who the parents would like to invite. Utilize parent postcard.			
CFE team works with facilitator to see if a CPS family meeting or PC is already scheduled. If no CPS meeting is scheduled, a CFE family meeting should be scheduled.			
CFE team meets ideally two weeks prior to family meeting to discuss who is attending, time and location of meeting, purpose of meeting and who will follow up with invitees regarding details of the meeting.			
Determine child's involvement in process and sharing of information. Prepare child or youth if attending.			
Prepare parents for FGC with CFE: confirm date that works best for them, encourage to invite other support people, discuss sharing of info and confidentiality. Utilize connectedness map if necessary, to help identify invite list.			
Prepare participants for family meeting: notify of date, time, notification and who else is attending; will be future focused, purpose of meeting, confidentiality.			
Ensure facilitator is aware of who has been invited to meeting and confirm location.			
Set up room holistically with transparent agenda.			
Assign note taker if one is not provided to transcribe notes on whiteboard or flip chart paper.			



**TEXAS**  
Department of Family  
and Protective Services



**TEXASCASA**  
Court Appointed Special Advocates  
FOR CHILDREN