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**ORANGE COUNTY CHILDREN AND FAMILY SERVICES**

**TEAM DECISION MAKING PROTOCOL**

**TDM Strategy Team**

# ORANGE COUNTY CHILDREN AND FAMILY SERVICES

## TEAM DECISION MAKING PROTOCOL

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# Orange County Children and Family Services

## Team Decision Making Protocol

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### Family to Family and Team Decision Making-- Definitions

The Family to Family initiative is a value-based, principle driven program designed to improve outcomes for children in foster care by involving their family, extended support members and community in key safety and placement decisions. Based on the belief that children need a family, families need the support of strong, nurturing communities, and child welfare agencies can best help families by partnering with their communities, the Family to Family initiative is implemented via four key strategies.

***Building Community Partnerships*** enables the child welfare agency to reach out to individuals and other public and private agencies to build a strong, diverse network of supportive resources committed to helping children and families. ***Recruitment, Training and Support*** identifies and develops resource families that will support the reunification process, and also provide stable, caring home environments for children when they cannot remain in their own home. ***Team Decision Making*** brings key people together to discuss families' strengths and needs, identify and provide resources, and make strength-based plans that will provide for children's safety and make decisions regarding placement. On-going ***Self Evaluation*** gathers and analyzes outcome data, providing feedback that is used to guide Agency practice towards the goal of continuous quality improvement, resulting in improved lives for the children and families of Orange County.

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### Goal

The goal of TDM is to involve family and community members, along with caregivers, service providers and agency staff in all decisions regarding child removal, placement and reunification, and to ensure a network of support for children and the adults who care for them.

The focus of the TDM meeting is to preserve the family, and at the same time, provide for the child's safety and well being. When possible, the family and community's strengths are used to form safety plans that will enable children to safely remain or immediately return home with appropriate services. When this is not possible, plans are made that reflect the least restrictive placement possible for each child that will both keep the child safe, and preserve and nurture the child's familial and community connections.

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**Meeting Types and Requirements**

TDM meetings are required under each of the following circumstances (see Implementation Schedule for meeting availability):

**Child removals (Phase I):**

- Prior to removing a child, or
- Within one working day of an emergency removal

NOTE: When removing a child who has been released to parents through the Conditional Release Intensive Supervision Program (CRISP), a TDM removal meeting is to be held either before, or within one working day following the removal, depending on the child’s needs and the safety factors involved.

**Placement Changes (Phase II):**

- Prior to any change in a child’s placement, including:
  - Potential/requested placement changes
  - Emergency placement changes
  - Move to a concurrent planning home, unless change already planned in a prior TDM meeting
  - Move to an adoptive home, unless change already planned in a prior TDM meeting
- A TDM meeting is to take place as soon as possible following an unanticipated court ordered placement change

**Permanency (Phase III):**

- Reunification
  - Prior to a trial visit, or
  - Immediately following a court ordered reunification
- Prior to any hearing in which a permanency recommendation will be made
- By 9 months post-detention if a permanency TDM meeting has not yet occurred
- NOTE: The purpose of a TDM permanency meeting is to seek consensus regarding the child’s possible return home, reunification, guardianship, adoption or long term foster care.

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**Foster Care Investigations**

When children are removed from a foster home due to allegations of abuse or neglect by the caregivers, a change of placement TDM meeting is to occur within 3 days of removal. The meeting is to be scheduled and attended by the assigned social worker. Foster care or group home monitoring staff may attend the TDM meeting, depending on case circumstances.

The focus of the meeting is to be on the placement needs of the children, not the allegations. The caregivers may or may not be invited to attend the meeting. The assigned social worker is to make this decision, depending on the circumstances of the case, and the best interest of the children.

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## **Adoptions**

TDM meetings for adoptions will be held when:

- An adoptive placement, or a prospective adoptive placement, is at risk.
- There has been an emergency removal from a prospective adoptive placement.
- The adoptions application process is not progressing as scheduled, and a child has been placed in the home.

### Confidential Adoptions

TDM meetings for adoptive placements will be evaluated on a case by case basis, considering the potential value and possible consequences to the adoption process. Prospective adoptive parent's desire for confidentiality will be respected.

### Birth Parents

Prospective adoptive parent's desire for confidentiality will be respected. Therefore, birth parents may be exempted from attending adoption TDM meetings, on a case by case basis. Birth parents may attend through teleconferencing, when necessary and appropriate.

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**Exceptions**

**No parent available**

TDM meetings are not mandated for initial removals when both parents' whereabouts are unknown, reside out of the state or country, are incarcerated, and are unable to participate in the TDM meeting either in person or by phone. Staff are encouraged to schedule a TDM meeting even when parents are unavailable if circumstances are such that a group discussion of placement possibilities would benefit the child.

When staff choose to not schedule a TDM meeting due to absent parents, the assigned social worker is to call the TDM scheduler by the morning following the removal to report the reason for not scheduling the meeting.

If parents are scheduled to participate in a meeting, and then do not arrive on time, staff are to wait a minimum of 20 minutes before concluding the meeting. If a parent arrives after staff have left, the facilitator will advise parents that they have missed their meeting, but will also attempt to contact staff to resume the meeting, if possible.

**CAST Interview**

If a CAST interview is scheduled to occur following an emergency removal and prior to the detention hearing, a TDM meeting is not mandated.

**Placement Change Meeting**

A mandated placement change meeting may be exempted, with approval from the deputy director assigned to the social worker's program.

**"Safely Surrendered Baby"**

A child coming into custody through the Safely Surrendered Baby program will not have a TDM meeting unless the mother approaches the Agency to regain custody of the child.

**Wraparound Participants**

When a child is an active participant of Wraparound, the Wraparound Team is to meet regarding all safety and placement decisions for that child. Therefore, TDM meetings are not mandated for Wraparound participants.

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**Implementation Schedule**

Implementation of Team Decision Making meetings in Orange County will be phased in according to the following tentative schedule. **SSA management will make adjustments to the phase-in schedule, as necessary.**

<b>Phase I—Child Removals</b>		
<b>Case Circumstances</b>	<b>Location/Other Circumstances</b>	<b>Implementation Date</b>
Considered or emergency removal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All cities</li> <li>• Removed with SSA involvement</li> <li>• Includes accelerated petitions</li> </ul>	March 1, 2004 Voluntary
Other meeting types	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• As requested</li> </ul>	
Considered or emergency removal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Santa Ana, Anaheim, Garden Grove, Orange</li> <li>• Removed with SSA involvement</li> </ul>	July 1, 2004
Considered or emergency removal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All other Orange County cities</li> <li>• Removed with SSA involvement</li> </ul>	August 2, 2004
Emergency removal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All Orange County cities</li> <li>• Removed by law enforcement</li> </ul>	To be Determined
<b>Phase II—Placement Changes</b>		
Placement Change—Possible or Emergency	All cities	August 2, 2004
<b>Phase III—Permanency</b>		
Reunification with parents, including trial visits	All cities, schedule at least 30 days prior to trial visit, or immediately following a court-ordered reunification	October 1, 2004, voluntary January 3, 2005, mandatory

Permanency	All cities, case circumstances including reunification, adoption, guardianship and LTFC: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Prior to a hearing in which a permanency recommendation will be made</li> <li>• To occur no later than 9-months post-detention, if a permanency TDM meeting has not yet occurred.</li> </ul>	June 30, 2006
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**Confidentiality** The focus of TDM meetings is to reach a decision regarding child placement, including the option of the child remaining or returning home, if safe. The meeting is not an investigation, and a re-examination of the allegations is not to occur.

All information shared in a TDM meeting is considered confidential, and is to be treated with respect. Information learned in a TDM is not to be repeated or discussed unnecessarily. However, information discussed in a TDM may be disclosed in court proceedings, and it may be used for case planning purposes. All mandated reporting laws will be in effect, and if further abuse is disclosed, this information may be used in a subsequent investigation.

Limits of confidentiality will be explained to parents at the beginning of the meeting, and they will be asked to sign a release of information form (*Attachment I*).

**Scheduling** TDM meetings will be held throughout the day, Monday through Friday, except for County holidays. During the implementation process, it is tentatively planned that meetings will be scheduled for 10:00 a.m., 1:00 p.m. and 3:30 p.m., with exceptions for emergencies and special circumstances. The 1:00 p.m. time slot will generally be held open for emergencies, and for protective custodies occurring the previous night or non-working days. This meeting schedule will be evaluated and adjusted as needed.

**Scheduling—  
Initial  
Considered and  
Emergency  
Removals**

**Assigned Senior Social Worker:**

When there is a possibility a child may have to be brought into protective custody, or when an emergency protective custody has occurred, the assigned Emergency Response (ER) worker is to:

- Consult with his or her supervisor regarding the situation (for a possible removal).
  - Call the TDM scheduling desk and request a TDM meeting to be held that same day, or the next working day.
    - If completing the removal after working hours, leave a message on the Clerk's voice mail requesting that a meeting be scheduled for the 1:00 p.m. time slot the following day.
  - Notify TDM staff of any special needs or concerns.
  - If multiple time slots are available, give the parents a choice of the available times.
  - Fill out the back of the TDM brochure (Attachment II), indicating the date, time and location of the TDM meeting.
  - Give the brochure to the parents, explain the meeting, and encourage their participation.
  - Provide parents with a bus ticket, if needed.
  - Encourage the parents to invite extended family members and other support people to the meeting. Some possible support people for the parents to invite are:
    - Family, and non-related extended family members
    - Service providers
    - Substitute care providers
    - Clergy and other church personnel/members
    - Teachers/school staff
    - Any others who may support the parents and child(ren).
  - Ask parents if they would like a Parent Advocate to contact them and/or be available at the meeting (when Advocate is available). If parent agrees, notify TDM scheduler.
  - Discuss the meeting with the child. If appropriate, invite the child to the meeting (See Participants and Roles below for further information).
  - Encourage the child to invite support people (see list above for suggestions).
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**On-Call**

On-call workers completing an emergency removal during non-business hours are to complete the following procedure:

- Call the TDM scheduling desk at 704-8472 and leave a voice mail message to schedule a TDM meeting for the 1:00 p.m. time slot for the next working day.
  - When leaving the voice mail message, ER workers are to include essential client information, including any alerts, as well as a callback number for TDM staff to follow up with to acquire additional information, if necessary.
  - The ER/Intake worker assigned to the family is to call the TDM scheduling desk the morning of the next working day and confirm the meeting.
  - The ER/Intake supervisor will e-mail the case assignment information to the TDM clerk as soon as it is completed each morning.
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**Scheduling—  
Placement  
Change and  
Permanency  
Meetings**

The assigned social worker or supervisor may request a change of placement/reunification meeting or a permanency TDM meeting by calling the TDM scheduling desk. Placement change meetings will generally be held within 3 working days of the request for the meeting.

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**Meeting  
Notification/  
Invitation**

Meeting notification/invitations will be completed as follows:

<b>POSSIBLE PARTICIPANT</b>	<b>PERSON RESPONSIBLE TO NOTIFY</b>
Parents	Assigned social worker
Child(ren)	Assigned social worker
Other participants requested by the parents	Parents (pre-detention) Parents and assigned social worker (post-detention)
Participants requested by the child	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Child, or</li> <li>• Assigned social worker (if participant is known to the worker)</li> </ul>
Other agencies (e.g. HCA), CalWORKs staff, contracted service providers, CASA volunteers	Assigned social worker, or TDM staff, at the social worker's request
Parent Advocate	TDM staff
Other resource providers identified by TDM staff	TDM staff

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**Location** During the initial phases of implementation, TDM meetings will be held at Social Service offices. Community-based facilities may be identified for future use.

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**Security** Staff may consider the following special arrangements to address security concerns:  
Referring Social Worker:

- Alert TDM staff of any security concerns when requesting the meeting, or as soon as the concerns become known.
- Request that the TDM meeting be held in a Social Services office.

TDM Facilitator:

- Alert the Special Officer of any security concerns.
- Arrange seating to provide quick access to the door.
- When serious concerns are present, consider arranging for the person to participate from another location through a conference call.
- See Domestic Violence and Special Circumstances sections below for further information.

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**Participants and Roles—  
Parents, Family and Other  
Support People**

Non-CFS participants at TDM meetings may include the following. Please see the “Special Circumstances” section below for further information.

- **Birth parent(s)**
  - The expert on the child and family—essential to the TDM process.
  - Provides consent for release of information
- **Child**
  - Assigned Social Worker to discuss option of attending with all children age 10 and over.
  - Assigned Social Worker to discuss meeting with younger children, obtaining child's input regarding the issues to be discussed, as appropriate.
  - Some circumstances to consider when deciding if a child should attend:
    - ◆ Child's choice—child can decide not to attend.
    - ◆ Circumstances—parent's emotionally abusive or hostile towards the child, mental illness, sexual abuse, domestic violence.
    - ◆ Child's developmental age, to be considered as well as his or her chronological age.
- **Caregiver**
  - Provides information on the needs of the child
  - Active participant in sharing placement options
- **Extended family and non-related support people**
  - May attend with the parent's consent.
  - Provides support to the child, parents, and/or caregiver, and to help generate positive options for the child's placement and safety needs.
- **Community service providers**
  - Includes Regional Center Placement Coordinator, when applicable.
  - May attend with the parent's consent
  - Provides support and information regarding needed resources and services.
- **Parent advocate**
  - Invited by TDM facilitator
  - May attend with the parent's consent
  - Provides support and resources for the parents.
- **Child Advocate/CASA**
  - Provides support for the child, as needed.
  - Provides information regarding needed resources and services.
- **Law Enforcement**
  - At parent's request only.
- **Attorneys**
  - Not to attend at this time, due to CFS policy that staff may not interact with client attorney's without County Counsel present.
  - This policy is to be reviewed after implementation.

**NOTE:** Please see "Special Circumstances" below for further information regarding participants.

**Participants  
and Roles—  
Facilitator**

- SSSS, trained to provide TDM meeting facilitation.
  - Assigned to families throughout the life of the case, when possible.
  - Participating team member
  - Focuses other participants on the purpose of the meeting and the well-being of the child(ren).
  - Encourages all participants to plainly voice all applicable concerns, while maintaining an environment of respect and safety.
  - Encourages consensus.
  - Provides a copy of the meeting summary report to participants
  - Must seek a review if he or she believes the decision will not keep the child safe or violates Agency policy.
  - Responsible for data entry of some meeting and outcome information (See Documentation section below).
  - Will attempt to contact the assigned social worker prior to the meeting.
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**Participants  
and Roles—  
CalWORKs  
Staff**

Each CalWORKs district office has a designated TDM liaison and back-up liaison. Contact the TDM manager for specific information regarding liaisons. The liaison is available to:

- Locate the assigned CalWORKs case manager
- Assign a Case Manager, as needed
- Coordinate the assignment of an Initial Services Worker
- Coordinate with Behavioral Health Services when mental health services are needed
- Coordinate with the Domestic Abuse Services Unit (DASU), when applicable

CalWORKs case managers and other staff may attend TDM meetings on an as-needed and as-available basis. Their role in the meeting includes:

- Share pertinent information about the family (e.g. history of services provided, family composition, strengths, needs and concerns)
  - Provide information regarding family's eligibility for CalWORKs aid and services.
  - Provide information and referrals for available resources.
  - Coordination of services with CFS staff and other services providers.
  - Assist parents with CalWORKs application.
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**Participants and Roles—  
Assigned Social Worker**

- Requests meeting.
  - Encourages parents to invite support people to the meeting.
  - Invites service providers and others to the meeting (post-detention).
  - Invites parents and other possible participants known to the Social Worker.
  - Must attend the TDM meeting.  
**Exception:** A designated ER/Intake worker will be assigned to attend the TDM meeting when a removal is completed by an on-call worker or by police only.
  - Notifies the child’s assigned attorney of the TDM, when the child has a representing attorney.  
NOTE: This is a notice only; it is not intended to ask permission for the TDM, nor is it an invitation to the attorney to attend the meeting. Provides a thorough report regarding the safety concerns that brought the family to the attention of the agency.
  - Provides information regarding the family's strengths.
  - Maintains receptivity to group input regarding safety and placement planning.
  - Presents own thoughts regarding safety and placement plans.
  - Makes final decision (along with his or her supervisor, when present), if consensus cannot be reached.
  - Files a copy of the TDM Meeting Plan in the child's service folder.
  - Follows up with participants who left the meeting early regarding any decisions that were made, if necessary.
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**Participants and Roles—  
Senior Social Services Supervisor**

- Are to attend at least one TDM meeting with each of their workers, preferably the first TDM meeting scheduled for that worker.
  - Are to attend TDM meetings with new workers until the worker is sufficiently trained.
  - Are encouraged to attend TDM meetings whenever possible.
  - Maintains receptivity to group input regarding safety and placement planning.
  - Presents own thoughts regarding safety and placement plans.
  - Participates in group discussion to generate appropriate safety and/or placement plans for the child.
  - May not request a review of the decision if not in attendance.
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**Participants and Roles—  
Other CFS  
Staff**

- Placement Social Worker, when one or more of the children may need a medical placement.
  - Public Health Nurse, when health issues are present.
  - CRISP Supervisor and/or Social Worker, if there is a strong possibility CRISP will be recommended.
  - Adoptions workers with secondary assignment, when adoption issues are to be discussed.
  - Other CFS staff may attend, as appropriate.
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**Pagers/Cell  
Phones**

All TDM participants are to turn their pagers and cell phones off, or to silent (not vibrate) mode.

The TDM facilitator will remind participants about this policy at the beginning of each meeting.

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**Special  
Circumstances**

The following circumstances may require special arrangements for the TDM meeting. Consultation with the assigned Social Worker, the Senior Social Services Supervisor and the meeting facilitator is to be considered.

- Domestic violence
    - See Domestic violence section below.
  - Sexual/emotional/on-going abuse
    - Consider the needs of the child(ren) and family when arranging TDM meetings for these sensitive situations.
  - History of violence
    - The person with the history of violence may need to participate through a telephone call, or by providing written input.
    - Alert the facilitator and Special Officer if there are any concerns regarding possible violence.
  - Criminal prosecution possible or in progress
    - Consider consulting with the Detective/Investigator involved.
    - Consider limiting discussion of allegations or other sensitive information that may affect a potential hearing.
  - Incarcerated/hospitalized parents
    - Consider a conference call or written statement from the parent.
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**Domestic  
Violence and  
Sexual Abuse**

When there is current or historical domestic violence or sexual abuse within a family scheduled for a TDM meeting, the following procedures will be observed:

- Referring Social Worker to request a secure site for the meeting (e.g. SSA offices with security).
  - Alert the Special Officer of possible increased security needs.
  - Restraining orders—the restrained person is not to attend a meeting with the protected person.
  - The offender may participate from another location via conference call, if telephone contact is not prohibited as a condition of the restraining order.
  - Consider security for the meeting, and for participants when walking out to their cars.
  - Arrange for a domestic violence or sexual abuse advocate to attend the TDM meeting, if the victim agrees and an advocate is available.
  - Remember that the best way to protect a child exposed to domestic violence is by helping the abused parent to stay safe by forming a safety plan.
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**Meeting  
Steps/Process**

TDM meetings will generally be structured as follows:

- Parents will be greeted and asked to sign the release of information form. Their interest in having a parent advocate or other community service provider attend will be obtained, if an advocate/service provider is available.
- The facilitator will begin the meeting by explaining the purpose and meeting guidelines.
- All meeting participants are asked to present the family's strengths and needs.
- The SSW defines the issue to be discussed/resolved in that meeting.
- The facilitator encourages direct, respectful discussion, focused on the purpose for the meeting.
- Consensus is sought, and final decisions are formulated.
- The meeting will generally take 1 hour, and is to be concluded within 1-½ hours.
- The facilitator records meeting information and decisions on the TDM Meeting Summary form, obtains each participant's signature, and gives a copy to each participant before they leave.

**Meeting  
Guidelines**

At the beginning of each TDM meeting, the facilitator will explain the following meeting guidelines. Additionally, the meeting guidelines will be posted in each of the TDM meeting rooms. At the beginning of each meeting the facilitator will review the guidelines and ask each participant if he or she would like to add anything, and to make a commitment to follow the guidelines for the meeting.

1. One person speaks at a time.
2. Be respectful, direct and honest with others in the meeting.
3. Please do not blame or shame others for their opinions.
4. It is OK to disagree with others within the limits of respect.
5. Every participant has the opportunity to speak and ask questions.

Suggested revisions:

1. One person speaks at a time.
2. Be respectful, direct and honest.
3. Do not blame or shame others.
4. It is OK to disagree respectfully.
5. Everyone has the opportunity to speak and ask questions.
6. We talk directly to one another, not about one another.

**PLEASE PARTICPATE FULLY IN THE MEETING.  
THE SUCCESS OF THIS MEETING IS UP TO ALL OF US!**

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**Decision  
Making/  
Consensus**

The goal of the TDM meeting is to reach group consensus regarding safety and placement decisions for the child. Reaching consensus may be facilitated by focusing on the purpose of the meeting, positive brainstorming, and actively sharing the common goal of doing what is best for the child.

Reaching consensus does not necessarily mean that each participant totally agrees with everything; however each participant has consented to the plan and agreed to support the decision made by the team.

Decisions are to be made according to the following hierarchy:

- Group consensus
- CFS core staff attending the meeting consensus
  - Core staff are the assigned social worker, his or her supervisor and the facilitator.
- Assigned Social Worker/Supervisor (if attending the meeting) decision.

NOTE: Please see the Review section below for further information regarding decision making in TDM meetings.

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**Review Process** Core CFS staff members attending the TDM meeting may ask for a review of the decision when consensus is not reached. Reviews are to be requested before the end of the meeting.

Reviews may be requested when a staff member believes that the decision:

- Is not safe for the child.
- Is not the least restrictive placement that adequately protects child safety.
- Violates Orange County CFS policies or child welfare regulations or law.

Reviews are to be completed by the program manager of the Social Worker's assigned program. If unavailable, another program manager will be consulted according to the manager on duty schedule. Program managers are to respond to a request for review as soon as possible. The reviewing manager's decision is to be made within 30 minutes of the request for review so meeting participants can know the plan before leaving.

When talking with the reviewing manager, the facilitator is to explain the circumstances of the case, the concerns, and the contested decision. This is to be done within the group, with the reviewing manager either to come to the meeting room, or to participate via speakerphone.

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**Meeting  
Process  
Feedback**

TDM meeting participants may contact the TDM manager if they would like to provide input regarding the TDM meeting process. Input is to be confined to meeting process issues, such as the meeting format, timing and structure. Decisions reached by the TDM participants are not to be re-examined as a part of the feedback process.

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**Documentation**

TDM facilitators are responsible to complete the Meeting Summary form and the required data entry forms for each meeting:

- Complete the Meeting Summary form and give each participant a copy.
  - Enter the meeting as a contact in CWS/CMS.
  - Complete the TDM data entry forms.
  - Forward applicable information to the Placement Unit.
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**TDM Check Points**

The following procedures will be put in place to ensure that TDM meetings are being scheduled and held as required:

**Emergency placement (removals) meetings**

- The TDM scheduling clerk will review a copy of the Dependency Intake Log each morning to determine if all CFS-involved removals from the prior day have been scheduled for an Emergency Placement TDM meeting.
- If a meeting is not scheduled for an Emergency Placement TDM, the clerk will call the assigned emergency response social worker to coordinate the meeting.

**Placement change meetings**

- To be determined

**Permanency meetings**

- To be determined

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**Forms**

<b>Form Name</b>	<b>Form Number</b>
TDM Meeting Face Sheet	
TDM Meeting Summary	
TDM Brochure	
TDM Release of Information	
TDM Meeting Feedback	

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