

DCFS Internal Procedure 202: Team Decision Making™

08/29/2024

Team Decision Making™ is an evidence-informed practice with a defined protocol. It is used when a safety threat has been identified using the Division's approved SDM® safety assessment and a decision must be made about the placement of the children. An initial Team Decision Making™ (TDM) is designed to ensure all placement decisions regarding child safety are the shared responsibility of a diverse group of people.

202.1 Initial TDM Focus and Prompts

The focus of the initial TDM meeting is to ensure the safety and well-being of children while making every effort to keep their family intact. The group carefully reviews the threats to child safety, as reflected in the SDM safety assessment, and seeks to clarify relevant protective factors to build safety plans that will enable children to remain or immediately return home with appropriate support and services. When this is not possible, the team creates a plan that reflects the least restrictive option possible that will both keep the child safe and preserve and nurture the child's familial and community connections

The prompts for an initial TDM are:

- Parent action or inaction threatens a child's safety (safety threat identified)
- Possible court action sought or Judge orders child into care on a 72-hour hold
- Adoption/guardianship disruption

202.2: Team Decision Making™ (TDM) Participants and Their Roles in the Process

A. Caregiver

- 1) The caregiver who is the expert on the family and child(ren). He or she is essential to the TDM process.
- 2) The caregiver identifies and invites their support people to the meeting, with the Divisions, encouragement and support.

B. Children

- 1) Children aged 10 and over are required to be invited and encouraged and supported to attend unless a specific and credible reason exists for them not to participate.
- 2) Accommodation should be made for children to participate only in certain stages of the meeting if full attendance is not appropriate or they wish to participate in only some of the meeting.
- 3) If the child is unable to attend their voice should be represented in the meeting by the FSW. FSWs should use SOP tools such as Three Houses or Safety House to bring children's voices to the table.
- 4) Children under the age of 10 can participate in TDMs if it is in their best interest.

C. Extended family and non-related support people, including representatives from the family's community – *with the consent of the caregiver*. Parents are welcome to invite an attorney, but

they will not be invited to the TDM by Division staff. If a parent attends the meeting with an attorney, the Division will request to have an OCC attorney present.

- D. Professionals involved with the case (for example resource parents, service providers, MDT members, etc.).
- E. DCFS Staff
 - 1) The FSW who assessed the presence of a safety threat:
 - a. Initiates the TDM meeting as specified in section 202.4, *Initiation of a Team Decision Making™ (TDM) Meeting Referral*.
 - b. Prepares the caregiver, other family members, and members of the family's support network for the TDM meeting as specified in section 202.5 *Preparation for the Team Decision Making™ (TDM) Meeting*.
 - c. Takes the lead in the TDM meeting to discuss the safety threats and concerns as specified in section 202.7 *Conducting the Team Decision Making™ (TDM) Meeting*.
 - d. Maintains openness and receptivity to the input of team members regarding safety, stability, and out of home placement. This includes the recognition that the results of the TDM discussion may be a plan that permits children currently in care on a 72-hour hold to safely return home before the 72-hour hold expires.
 - e. Monitors the TDM plan for safety as specified in section 202.8, *Responsibilities Following the Team Decision Making™ (TDM) Meeting*.
 - 2) Supervisor of FSW who assessed the safety threat, or the Supervisor who approved the safety decision (if different):
 - a. Helps prepare the FSW for the TDM, including a pre-TDM conference as specified in section 202.5, *Preparation for the Team Decision Making™ (TDM) Meeting*.
 - b. Attends the TDM, actively participates, and supports the FSW as specified in section 202.7, *Conducting the Team Decision Making™ (TDM) Meeting*.
 - c. Maintains openness and receptivity to the input of team members regarding safety, stability, and out of home placement. This includes the recognition that the results of the TDM discussion may be a plan that permits children currently in care on a 72-hour hold to safely return home before the 72-hour hold expires.
 - 3) Area TDM Scheduler
 - a. Prioritizes referrals and schedules the date, time, and location of the TDM meeting.
 - b. Manages a TDM calendar that ensures that TDMs following a removal can be conducted before the 72-hour hold expires.
 - c. Invites Division staff and service providers, and notifies them of the date, time and location of the TDM.
 - 4) TDM Facilitator
 - a) Leads the group through a structured 6-stage process, focusing on child safety, and modeling respectful family engagement throughout.
 - b) Seeks to bring the group to a consensus decision regarding what plan will best balance the child's physical safety needs with the need for continuity in family relationships and assure that any placement is in the least restrictive setting possible that still ensures child safety.
 - 5) Others

- a. When a review is called by the TDM Facilitator, the Area Director or designee may be brought into the meeting as specified in section 202.9, *Review of a Team Decision Making™ Meeting Decision*.

202.3: Time Frames for Team Decision Making™ (TDM) Meetings

- A. An initial Team Decision Making™ (TDM) meeting is held in the following time frames:
 - 1) When an immediate safety plan has been put in place, a TDM meeting is held as quickly as possible but *no later* than three (3) days after a safety threat was identified and an immediate safety plan was put in place (ideally within 48 hours).
 - 2) If the children were removed from their home on an emergency basis:
 - a. Ideally, conduct the TDM within 24 hours:
 - i) If the decision at the TDM is that the child remains in an out of home placement then complete the affidavit, including that a TDM was held.
 - ii) If the decision at the TDM is to implement an immediate safety plan allowing the children to return safely to their home:
 - 1. Do not complete an affidavit of removal.
 - 2. Complete an Immediate Safety Plan and monitor according to Policy II-D: Investigation of Child Maltreatment Reports.
 - b. When the TDM cannot be completed within 24 hours:
 - i) Complete the affidavit of removal and hold submission of the affidavit to OCC until after the TDM is held within 48 hours.

202.4: Initiation of a Team Decision Making™ (TDM) Meeting Referral

- A. The FSW who assessed the presence of a safety threat or threats that necessitated the TDM:
 - 1) Initiates the referral for a TDM meeting through an email, or phone call to the TDM Scheduler within *two (2) hours* of identifying a safety threat and making a safety decision.
 - a. Uses TDM Scheduling Form (CFS-356) to provide the TDM Scheduler with the information needed for the Scheduler to complete his/her tasks. It should be sent as soon as possible.
 - b. Because fidelity to the TDM model requires the facilitator to be an objective individual with no prior role in the case, it is very important that the FSW, Supervisor or any other Division staff person does not discuss case details or provide a copy of the Immediate Safety Plan to the Facilitator before the TDM meeting. Note: The TDM Facilitator may be given information on the safety threat identified.
 - c. Notifies the family and their supports of the date/time and location of the TDM.
 - 2) Notifies and initiates TDM referrals made after hours, on weekends, or during holidays, through email. When the FSW emails the area TDM Scheduler during these situations and has not heard back by 8:00 a.m. the next business day, the FSW will contact the DCFS Facilitator Supervisor by phone or email with the referral information.
- B. The TDM Scheduler
 - 1) Reviews the referral for basic information about the case and its urgency, collects information about any issues that may affect scheduling, such as a history or present concern around family violence, need for language interpreter, childcare needs, etc.

- 3) Determines the need for separate TDM meetings if the referral form indicates that a family has a history of domestic violence, or if the FSW suspects such activity.
- 4) Assigns the date/time/location for the TDM and notifies Division staff and ensures they know the day, time, and location of the meeting.

202.5: Preparation for the Team Decision Making™ (TDM) Meeting

- A. The FSW who assessed the safety threat and initiated the request for a TDM:
 - 1) Prepares the caregiver, children, and other family members for the TDM meeting.
 - a. Informs the caregiver that they are required to attend the TDM meeting and explains the purpose and goals of the TDM meeting.
 - b. Helps the family identify people they would like to attend the TDM as their support to help plan for safety. These people may be both formal and informal support. Uses a genogram, circles of safety and support, support network grid, or ecomap to assist in identifying and developing the support network with the family.
 - c. Collects contact information for people the family plans to invite and ensures they receive an invitation to the meeting.
 - d. When an immediate safety plan is in place, explains that people who have a role in the immediate safety plan must attend and participate in the TDM meeting and gathers their contact information to invite them to the TDM meeting.
 - e. Notifies caregiver and invites children aged 10 or older, developmentally appropriate children under age 10, and members of the family's support network to the TDM meeting.
 1. Ensures that the voices of all children are heard at the TDM meeting by using SOP tools such as Safety House or Three Houses.
 - f. Assesses the need for childcare arrangements during the meeting and works with the Scheduler to coordinate childcare arrangements.
 - 2) Assesses the presence of actual or suspected domestic violence in the family, including whether either caregiver has a domestic violence safety plan in place.
 - 3) Determines if there are any court orders in place relating to the safety of adults and/or children in the family.
 - a. Clarifies the current custody, placement, and contact with non-custodial parents or caregivers for the child(ren) in the family.
 - b. Determines whether there are any court orders related to domestic violence in the family.
 - c. Determines if there are any court orders related to an adult family member's access to and contact with any children in the family.
 - 4) Assesses for affiliation/identification as an American Indian or Native Alaskan by any member of the family and notifies the tribe of the meeting.
 - 5) Confers with their supervisor or the supervisor who approved the safety decision to prepare for the TDM meeting.
- B. The Supervisor of the FSW who initiated the TDM meeting or the Supervisor who was involved in the safety decision will:
 - 1) Confer with the FSW prior to the TDM meeting.

- 2) Ensure the FSW can present the safety threat(s) identified and can describe in behavioral terms the parental actions or inactions that led to the child(ren)'s safety being threatened.
- 3) Confer with the FSW to assess whether children under age ten (10) are developmentally able to understand and participate in the TDM meeting. Discuss ways to ensure the voices of all children in the family can be heard at the TDM meeting.
- 4) Ensure the pre-meeting Safety Check-In is completed as set out in section 202.6, *Safety Check-In Prior to Team Decision Making™ (TDM) Meeting*.

202.6: Safety Check-In Prior to Team Decision Making™ (TDM) Meeting

- A. When both caregivers plan to attend the TDM meeting, there is a pre-meeting Safety Check-In, regardless of whether there is domestic violence or suspected domestic violence occurring in the home.
- B. Before the TDM meeting starts the FSW who assessed the safety threat or the Supervisor who approved the safety decision conducts the Safety Check-In before the meeting.
- C. The FSW or Supervisor conducting the Safety Check-In will:
 - 1) Meet with each caregiver before the TDM meeting begins and assess their concerns for safety.
 - 2) If either caregiver expresses concerns for safety, determine:
 - a. The person(s) whom the caregiver does not feel safe around.
 - b. How best to have a conversation about the child's exposure to domestic violence.
 - c. How participants will know if the offending caregiver's behavior is escalating.
 - d. Any topics that should be avoided. Discussions about the behavior or lack of behavior that caused children to be unsafe cannot be avoided.
 - e. A mutually understood code word, statement, or signal to indicate the need to take a break or separate meeting participants.

202.7: Conducting the Team Decision Making™ (TDM) Meeting

The Facilitator will:

- A. Ensure that caregivers and youth are seated first.
- B. Stay attuned to safety through all stages of the meeting.
- C. Lead the meeting using a structured process which uses a six (6) stage model.

The FSW will:

- A. Explain what prompted the meeting.
- B. Present the relevant case information/history as related to current threats to safety.
- C. Explain concerns using behaviorally specific language.
- D. Explore family strength and protective factors.
- E. Contribute and consider all options discussed at the meeting.
- F. Participate in decision making; if consensus cannot be reached, make the final recommendation.

The FSW Supervisor will:

- A. Support the FSW, participate in discussion, coach the FSW as needed and serve as a role model in the process.

202.8: Responsibilities Following the Team Decision Making™ (TDM) Meeting

- A. The TDM Facilitator will:
 - 1) Immediately following the TDM meeting, debrief the meeting with the FSW and supervisor, seeking and providing feedback about the process, not about case specifics. If not possible immediately after the meeting, schedule a time to conduct the debriefing within twenty-four (24) hours.
 - 2) Input the required data into the Division's information management system for each meeting within two (2) business days.
- B. The FSW Who Initiated the Request for a TDM Meeting will:
 - 1) Continue to monitor the TDM Action Plan throughout the completion of the investigation and/or until another FSW is assigned to monitor the plan.
 - 2) Update the Immediate Safety Plan (CFS-200) if needed based on the outcome of the TDM meeting.
 - 3) Enter all information in the Division's information management system including address/telephone number for family, demographics, and completed safety assessments.
 - 4) If the child was removed on a 72-hour hold and the plan is for the child to remain in the Division's custody, update the affidavit to reflect that a TDM was conducted and coordinate with OCC on filing for the Emergency Hearing.
 - 5) If a TDM Action Plan is not functioning as planned at the 14-day review, the FSW will reconvene the original support network to review and reinforce the plan with child safety as a primary focus.
 - 6) If at 30 days the TDM Action Plan is still not functioning as planned, FSW will file a 30-day petition with the courts.
- C. The Supervisor of the FSW initiating the TDM will:
 - 1) Ensure the FSW implements the TDM meeting's recommendations and action steps.
 - 2) Provide feedback to the FSW and facilitator.
- D. The TDM Scheduler will:
 - 1) Follow up with the FSW at 14 and 30 days to track outcomes of the TDM Plan.

202.9: Review of a Team Decision Making™ (TDM) Meeting Decision

- A. Review of a TDM meeting decision may be requested by any Division staff person in attendance who is concerned the decision:
 - 1) Leaves a child unsafe,
 - 2) Is not the least restrictive placement that assures safety, or
 - 3) Violates a policy or law
- B. The staff member requesting the review will:
 - 1) Notify the entire TDM team of the intent to seek a review prior to the end of the TDM meeting.
 - 2) Following the Facilitator's explanation of the review process, present a summary of the meeting and reason for the review to the TDM Reviewer (Area Director or designee)
- C. The Facilitator will:
 - 1) Notify the appropriate Area Director or designee.
 - 2) Explain the review process to the TDM group (group must contain all the TDM participants).

- D. The Area Director or designee will:
- 1) Join the meeting in person or by conference call during the meeting.
 - 2) Listen to both the summary of the plan and the summary of the concerns with the plan.
Determine whether adjustments need to be made to the decision.
 - 3) After the review, the decision is final. All Division staff are expected to support and implement it.