Policy Attachment: 31.7

Subject:	**Stages of the Child and Family Team Meeting**

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION:

The Child and Family Team Meeting Process:

Child and Family Team Meetings will be considered as the family's meeting; they must be engaging and conducted in a way that addresses the relevant issues in the most sensitive, respectful manner possible. What follows are descriptions of the stages of a CFTM that are recommended to help the meeting progress logically; however, the need to engage and include the family and to come to a good decision are the primary requirements of a successful CFT meeting. It is recommended to have flipchart pages already prepared for recording the concerns, the family's strengths and needs, the team's ideas, and the action steps that will be developed by the end of the meeting. This visual tool helps to capture the vital information shared during the meeting and to keep everyone on track. The Child and Family Team Meetings will, to the extent possible, include the following activities:

1. Introductions

The facilitator of the meeting will open the meeting by welcoming all participants and identifying the purpose and goals of the meeting. There are several critical components to this stage of the meeting:

a) Introduction of all members present and their relationship to the family.

b) Establishing Comfort Rules: The facilitator will help the group to develop and agree upon guidelines or "comfort rules" for the meeting. These are collaboratively developed to help manage strong emotions and to keep the meeting focused on the outcome (e.g., speaking one at a time, using appropriate language and tone, being respectful of differences, etc).

c) A statement will be made to emphasize the desire that the child and family team will be able to come to a consensus decision that will meet the needs of the child and family in the least restrictive, least intrusive manner possible. However, the role of the Department and its responsibility for the safety of children and the timely achievement of permanence will also be made clear to the group.

d) Any non-negotiable issues, such as court orders, State laws, or DCS policies related to the safety and well-being of children, will be made explicit in the beginning of the meeting, as the facilitator helps the group define the scope and limits of the groups' decision-making.

e) There will be a brief discussion of confidentiality and family privacy, which specifies the conditions under which DCS will be unable to keep the proceedings confidential. Participants will be asked to agree to respect the privacy of the family before more information is revealed during the meeting.

Note: While a signed confidentiality statement is not legally binding, some regions may want participants to sign an agreement that they will maintain the confidentiality of the family and what is discussed at the meeting. See collateral documents for an example of a Confidentiality Agreement. The first page can be used to guide the discussion and be given to those that want a copy. After privacy and confidentiality is discussed, each participant can be asked to sign the second page that the FSW can keep in the case record.

f) Participants will be encouraged to ask any questions they have about the process or anything discussed, so far.

g) It will be emphasized that the family is the expert on their own needs and their own children and that the child and family team process is designed to elicit and build upon the strengths in the family.

2. Identify the Situation - The Family Story

a) The next task is to clearly identify the current situation; what precipitated the need for the meeting, and what decision(s) need to be made. The child and/or family can be invited to share their understanding of this, or the FSW can present this information if the family is uncomfortable beginning. If the FSW presents the situation first, the family will be invited to clarify or comment on anything the FSW presented before moving on. The Family Story will provide more background and history in the Initial and the Initial Permanency Planning meeting - for subsequent meetings, such as Permanency Plan Revisions or reviews, it will be more focused on the current situation, the progress made, and what obstacles remain to achieving safety, permanence and stability for the child.

b) To the greatest extent possible, DCS will support the child and parents/caregivers in sharing their story related to their current situation, their concerns, and in defining what they would like to see result from the meeting.

c) Every member of the team will be invited to contribute to the team's understanding of the immediate situation before the meeting progresses to the next stage.

d) Check for consensus that the present situation has been fully identified before moving on.

3. Assess the Situation – Identify Strengths and Needs/Concerns

a) Invite the family to identify the strengths, resources and capacities they have to help them address the concern(s). Encourage every member of the team to contribute to the list of strengths they see in this family and list these on flipchart.

b) Ensure that the team fully understands the safety and risk issues associated with the concerns presented; the impact these issues may have on the children involved; and the history of the family as it relates to the current situation. Identify any current stressors that may be exacerbating the problem.

c) Explore what services have been utilized to support this family and the effectiveness of those services so far. Help the family to identify any informal supports they have.

d) Encourage the family and the team to explore what underlying needs may be contributing to the issues or concerns presented. Help the child/family/caregivers to articulate what they need to address the concerns; for example, to take care of their children at home, or to maintain the stability of their placement.

e) Sensitivity and judgment will be exercised when families or youth are reluctant to discuss certain issues in the large group. It is good practice to provide alternatives in the event families are not comfortable addressing all of the issues with the entire team present.

f) The FSW will be prepared to give his or her recommendations on behalf of the department in the case.

4. Brainstorming Solutions

a) The group will generate ideas to address the concerns and needs identified, and be guided to think about how to utilize the family's strengths and resources to meet these needs.

b) Every member of the team will be encouraged to contribute his or her ideas and all ideas will be listed on the flipchart for consideration.

c) These ideas will help the group to develop a plan that will ensure the safety, permanence or well being of the children. Usually these ideas are in the categories of an alternative placement or custody; providing services to reduce the level of risk; or other actions that will increase safety and stability for the child.

5. Develop the Plan/Reach a Decision

a) Using these ideas, the child and family team will develop a plan to achieve the desired outcomes of the meeting and address the underlying needs of the children and family.

b) To every extent possible, families will play a significant role in development of plans/decisions. The department must remain open to the ideas of families, while maintaining the responsibility for safety, well-being and permanency.

c) When reviewing and assessing the ideas generated, the group will start with the least restrictive/least intrusive idea and ask whether that idea can provide the needed protection and safety. If it can, explore what supports will be needed to make it successful. If it cannot, then the group should move to the next least restrictive/intrusive idea to consider.

d) The group must ensure that any safety concerns are clearly addressed by the plan developed.

e) Once the most pressing safety concerns have been addressed, the group will refer to the list of child and family needs that have been generated and develop a plan to address those needs.

f) The plan that is developed will be specific, with tasks assigned to individuals and target dates for completion identified and recorded.

g) The team will assess what might go wrong with the plan and determine who will notify the Department if a particular step in the plan fails. The team will also discuss a contingency plan, in the event the group's plan is unsuccessful. Otherwise, the team may have to reconvene to devise an alternative plan.

6. Closing/Recapping the meeting

a) The facilitator will review with the group the plan that has been developed by recapping each task, the responsible party for each task and the assigned timeframes.

b) In CFTMs that are held for the purpose of developing a Family Permanency Plan, the plan will serve to document the CFTM.

c) For other types of CFTMs, the plan will be documented on the ***CFTM Summary (CS-0747)***.

d) The participating team members at the close of the meeting will sign the plan or the summary, which will be copied and distributed to the meeting participants.

e) The team will schedule any necessary follow up meetings.

f) The facilitator will close the meeting by thanking the team members for participating and acknowledge their contributions.