



CONVENE: BEST PRACTICES FOR INTEGRATING CFE INTO FAMILY MEETINGS, FOR CASA

KEY PHILOSOPHIES OF CONVENING WITH FAMILY:

- Every time we meet with a family, it is an opportunity to identify who is in the child's network and to build and strengthen that network.
- CPS has a process in place that involves Permanency Conferences (PCs), Family Group Conferences (FGCs) and Circle of Support meetings (COSs). These meetings offer CASA and the CFE team the best opportunity to engage with the family/youth.
- Discussion of the child's network should ideally start at the earliest possible point of our work, from the moment the CASA advocate meets the family for the first time. If parents will not participate, meetings can be held with the youth and/or network, and the discussion should focus on the child.
- DFPS is required to hold family meetings/PCs per the Family Code Sec. 263.

ENGAGEMENT BEFORE OR DURING ADVERSARY HEARING:

- CASA can meet with parents early on (prior to or during Adversary Hearing) to look at natural support for the children and family that might be invited to the initial meeting, utilizing the connectedness map or a genogram. Provide them a CFE parent card to help explain the meetings and share contact information.
- The focus at this point ideally would be the children's connections: who are they connected to, who will they miss, who do they want to see and spend time with?
- The Adversary Hearing is an emotional time for families, so we should try to be sensitive to the trauma they are experiencing and know it may be difficult for them to "hear" us at that moment.
- CASA can partner with the Ad Litem, parents' attorneys and CPS to ensure they understand the purpose of inviting the network to the FGC/PC.
- CASA can discuss the benefits of an FGC/PC and the ability for parents to invite whomever they choose and the importance of bringing their support system.
- In cooperation with family and the other professionals involved, CASA can offer to call those in the child's network to invite them to attend the first meeting either in person, via phone or virtually.
- CASA may partner with the Family Group Decision Making (FGDM) facilitator to ensure discussion of the child's network is part of any CPS meeting during the life of the court case.

ENGAGEMENT AT THE FIRST MEETING:

- Whether it is a PC or an FGC, discussion of who is in the child's network can be discussed. A connectedness map may be completed with the family to achieve this. The key questions, "Who does the child love, and who loves this child?" are to be the focus. This question may be adapted to focus on support to the parent, etc. as needed.
- A plan may be developed collaboratively with the family, CASA, CPS and legal professionals with specific action of how the child can safely remain connected to their network through visits, calls, letters, video calls, etc. Those people in the network ideally will be at the first meeting.
- Get contact information for those not at meetings so follow-up can occur with the network.
- Get consent from parents on inviting and communicating with the network.

ENGAGEMENT AFTER THE MEETING:

- CFE team members can follow up with network members who have committed their time to a task on the action plan, to help ensure timely action and follow through on the commitments made.
- Network members are to be invited to any further family meetings held.
- Discussion of how the network is engaged and whether commitments are being made with the child and family can be discussed at all future meetings. Additional network members may need to be added.

PRINCIPLES OF EFFECTIVE FAMILY MEETINGS, FOR CASA



TRAUMA-INFORMED

- Snacks and water provided.
- Fidgets and tissues available.
- Recognizes that relationships are central to healing.

FAMILY-CENTERED

- The family's network is invited to help create a supportive environment in which families can discuss their needs and worries.
- Recognizes that families possess critical information about their family that will be needed to make well-informed decisions, and it is important that families be given the opportunity to share this information and be part of the solution process.
- Respects families, children and youth and helps them decide what services they need, based on their strengths and resources, to meet the needs of the children or youth and ensure their safety.
- Emphasizes the family's responsibility and right to care for and provide a sense of identity for their children.
- Supports the family and their network to answer questions first, and tries to be strengths based as much as possible.
- Acknowledges and respects that each family has their own unique traditions and customs which the child needs and has a right to maintain while in foster care.
- Avoids using professional terms that families may not understand readily, or if professional terms are used an explanation is given; All needs of the family are met.

COLLABORATIVE DECISION MAKING

- Emphasizes developing a partnership between families, DFPS/SSCC, CASA and other departments and agencies that serve them, so that service planning and decision-making become a collaborative process.
- Encourages families to connect with the resources available in their communities; the family's network is invited to meetings with parents' involvement and their participation is supported.
- Meetings are focused on the future, not the past, and are solution focused, not blame focused.

TRUST-BASED

- A flexible, transparent agenda using headers is provided so the family can see in advance what will be discussed.
- If possible, notes are written on flip chart paper or projected onto a screen so the family can see what is being recorded; notes should be provided to the family.
- Holistic set up, with chairs in a circle or semi-circle with no tables—if not available, care should be taken to intermix seating between professionals and family/support network.
- Both positive and negative feedback/information can be shared in a fact-based way; this helps the family receive the information in a meaningful way.
- Families may need "family time" to process information shared, which may not occur at the time of the meeting.
- Confidentiality of information that is shared in the meeting needs to be maintained.

Visit [TexasCASA.org/Program-Portal](https://www.texascasa.org/Program-Portal) for more CFE resources.



COLLABORATIVE FAMILY ENGAGEMENT