

# SELF-STUDY COURSE

## Understanding Team Decision-making

### 1.0 Training Credit

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#### **CREDITS:**

*State of Alaska Office of Children's Services OCS Staff Training Curriculum "Successful TDMs: Your Role in Family Engagement" 2025*

*OCS Child Protection Manual Policies and Procedures 2.8 Team Decision Making (Revision 1.16.25) and Draft of Domestic Violence Protocol for TDMs and CPS Manual, Sect. 2.2.4: Screening for Domestic Violence*

*Conversations amongst Statewide TDM workgroup, 2023.*

*Team Decision-making Training Manual, Annie E Casey Foundation 2018.*

If you wish to receive training credit for reading this self-study, please fill out the "CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING" Questionnaire" at the back of this course. Return the questionnaire to the Alaska Center for Resource Families for 1.0 training credit. The course is yours to keep for further reference.



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# Understanding Team Decision Making

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Team Decision Making or Child and Family Meetings are used in many child welfare systems to make best decisions for the placement of children and youth. Alaska began with the Team Decision Making (or TDMs) practice many years ago using a model from the Annie E Casey Foundation called *Family to Family*. Recent changes in practices adjusted the model to work better for the needs of Alaska, and to include TDMs in rural Alaska. TDMs are already fully implemented in Anchorage, Fairbanks, and Wasilla/Palmer. Starting in 2025, TDMs will be implemented and used in all OCS regions, including Western and Southeast.

## What is Team Decision Making?

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*Team Decision Making (TDM) uses a team of people to make placement decisions. TDMs are based on the belief that families are the experts on themselves, and engaging community supports can help a family be successful.*

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Team Decision Making (TDMs) meetings are used by the State of Alaska Office of Children's Services to engage the family, child (if appropriate), Tribal, resource families, and community members in a structured meeting to make the best possible **placement** decisions about the safety of the child. The idea is simple – gather the family and as many people as possible that are involved or concerned with a family's wellbeing. The goal of the TDM is to develop a plan that best protects the child, promotes stability, preserves family ties, keeps cultural continuity and identity, and safely reunifies families. Its main goal is making a placement decision based on safety.

TDMs are led by a trained facilitator and can include many participants. Families are crucial participants in a TDM and OCS seeks to use TDMs in all regions of the state. Team Decision Making meetings should happen in person whenever possible. However, in rural areas this may be challenging since trained facilitators may work in another region. In these cases, trained facilitators who lead TDMs remain in their primary field offices and facilitate meetings telephonically or via Zoom while the caseworker, the family, and the community supports meet in-person in the field office. It is a priority that the parents are able to be there.

TDMs are not legal proceedings though the legal parties may be invited to participate. TDMs are also not for developing the case plan, though the information from the discussion can be used in case planning. TDMs are focused on making safe placement decisions.



## When are TDMs held?

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*A TDM is held when there is a possible change in placement or when children and youth first come into custody.*

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TDM meetings are meant to be held before a change in placement for a child already in care. In emergency situations where the TDM is unable to be scheduled before the placement change, the TDM referral will be submitted within 1 business day and the TDM will be held at the earliest time when the parents are available.

There are several types of TDMs:

An Initial Removal TDM is held when a worker determines a need for an *in-home safety plan* (child will remain in their home of origin with additional supervision or supports) or *out-of-home safety plan* (child may be removed to a relative or foster home.).

A Change of Placement TDM is held when there is a potential change of placement, where additional supports may be needed in order to preserve a current placement, or if there is a possible move to a less restrictive level of care, such as a relative or reunification

A Trial Home Visit TDM is held when deciding to consider unsupervised visit or overnights or plans to reunify children with a birth parent.

Specialty TDMs may be held when a youth is exiting custody or reentering custody or regarding youth entering or exiting residential care.

## Who is Invited to the TDM?

*There is no limit to who may be at a TDM, but every effort needs to be made to have parents present.*

Every TDM participant is involved in developing a plan that best protects the child, promotes stability, preserves family ties, maintains cultural continuity and identity, and safely reunifies families. The goal of the TDM is to develop a plan for placement. Participants may include families, current caregivers such as foster parents, the youth (if appropriate), legal parties such as Guardians ad Litem and Tribes, relatives and supports for the family, community partners, services providers, caseworker or supervisor, and the TDM facilitator. It is important if the child or youth is a tribal member, that their Tribe is invited and participates.

Resource families are also valuable and key members of the TDM because they can give current caregiving information about how the child is doing. Community supports working with the family (such as therapist or Head Start staff) can also be valuable contributors.

Families and youth should have an opportunity if possible to have their identified supports present so they are not overwhelmed, or “outnumbered” by the professionals in the room. Parents and youth also have the right to ask anyone who is not a legal party to the case to be excused from a TDM.



### in Team Decision-Making

- *A group can often be more effective in making good decision than an individual*
- *Family are the experts on themselves*
- *When families are included in decision-making, they are capable of identifying their own needs and strengths*
- *Members of the family's own community add value to the process by serving as natural allies to the family and as experts on the community's resources*

Quoted From “Skills and Awareness Development of TDM Facilitation” Annie E Casey Foundation

## What happens at a TDM?

*TDMs are led by a trained facilitator, held in person and follow a six-stage strategy to lead the group toward decision making regarding placement.*

TDMs may be held out in the community close to where the family lives or a place where they feel comfortable. TDMs may also be held at the local Office of Children’s Services, Tribal offices, court buildings, or other community partners. There is a strong preference that these meetings are held in person with the family, caseworker and community supports present. If the facilitator is not in the region, they may join telephonically or on Zoom. These meetings may take place in the OCS office or in a community location. In some cases where it is not possible to meet in person, it may also be held telephonically or on an online platform such as Zoom if the parent has access to videoconferencing technology. When you are contacted to take part in a TDM, make sure to find out where the TDM is going to be held because it may not be held at the local OCS office.

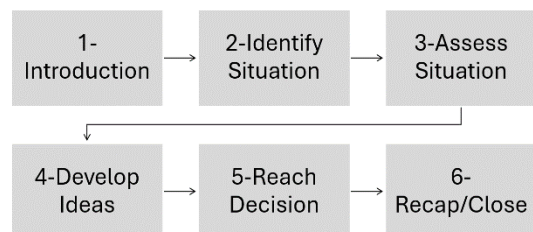
A TDM usually lasts 1 to 2 hours. The meeting is led by a trained facilitator who keeps notes and facilitates the discussion. This facilitator is not a case worker assigned to the case and is trained to guide the team through the decision-making process. If the facilitator is not located in the same community as the parents or the OCS caseworkers, they will lead the meeting telephonically or over Zoom. Ground rules are outlined and agreed upon to allow each person to have a voice, establish safety for each person in the room, and to establish that all information shared in the TDM remain private. A parent or youth has the right to request that any participant (outside of legal parties) be removed from the meeting.

### The Six Stage Process

The meeting is more than just a conversation or group discussion. It follows a specific pattern that allows the group to thoroughly explore the situation before jumping to a decision. The facilitator will often start by framing the goal and the purpose of the meeting and invite each party to share their perspective of the situation. The idea is to hear from all participants and share everyone’s information and insight.

The facilitator will lead the group through the problem-solving process to arrive at a placement decision that ensures the best interests of the child while maintaining safety in the least restrictive manner. Exploring the family’s strengths allows the team to build a plan for the child utilizing the family support system. This can be done through a variety of means including safety plans, relative placements, Tribal homes, or child specific licensed home. If none of these options are available, the team will explore placement in a non-related licensed foster home or facility.

### Team Decision Making



While consensus is ideal, it is not always possible. The process ensures hearing everyone’s voice at the meeting, exploring all ideas to ensure child safety in the least intrusive manner. If a consensus cannot be reached, OCS will make the final placement decision. If the result of the

TDM meeting includes a placement change for the child, the OCS caseworker will schedule a warm introduction between parents and caregivers when possible.



### **What Is The Role Of The Facilitator?**

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*The TDM is led by a skilled, immediately accessible, internal facilitator who is not a case carrying caseworker or line supervisor.*

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Facilitators set a tone of welcome, comfort, safety and openness for the meetings. They are trained to move the group through the problem-solving decision-making process in the time allowed and strive to develop consensus with participants. The meeting is led by a skilled internal facilitator, using the specific six-stage model listed above. If the facilitator is not located in the same community as the parents or the OCS caseworkers, they will lead the meeting telephonically or over Zoom.

The facilitator is not a case-carrying social worker or line supervisor, and is experienced in child welfare practice including laws, agency policies and procedures, community services and best practices. The facilitator is responsible for helping the group make quality decisions. The facilitator assists the group in balancing physical safety needs for the child and the need for continuity in family relations.

The facilitator's role is neutral; the facilitator is not a decisionmaker. The facilitator ensures participants understand the purpose of the meeting. Ground rules are outlined and agreed upon to allow each person to have a voice, address safety needs, and to establish that all information shared in the TDM remain private. Ground rules maintain that only one person speaks at a time and side bar conversations are not allowed.

The facilitator will take notes during the meeting and share those notes with all participants. At the conclusion of the meeting, they ensure a common understanding of next steps and provide a summary report to participants outlining decisions and actions.

### **What If There Is A History Of Domestic Violence Present In The Family?**

All families will be screened for the presence of Domestic Violence before a TDM is held. The caseworker must provide the TDM facilitator with information gathered from the domestic/family violence screening and assessment to help prepare for any dynamics and the safety of all participants in the TDM meeting.

If the caseworker has identified domestic/family violence as a contributing factor in the current safety threats affecting the child(ren), the agency may choose to conduct separate TDM meetings if deemed needed.



## How are Resource Parents Involved in TDMs?

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Resource parents provide information regarding child's adjustment, progress, and individual needs. Their presence is especially critical at any TDMs involving a placement change.

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During meetings, it is important that foster parents identify what they need to successfully care for a child. It is important that foster parents be actively engaged and treat all participants with respect. The foster parents can share their views about the child's needs with the team. If a child is making the transition into the foster family's home, foster parents can learn about the child's needs from the family and previous caregivers. Foster parents provide an integral role in supporting reunification, placement with a relative, or transition to a possible permanent home.

Resource families also need to understand that parents and youth have the right to ask anyone that is not a legal party to the case to be excused from a TDM. Resource families are not legal parties, so they may be asked to leave a TDM or not participate by a parent or child.

The meeting will strive to give everyone an opportunity to share ideas and participate and work to establish the best goal of appropriate placement for a child. Participants will have a "say," but not always have their "way." It is important to keep an open mind and a positive attitude and be appropriate in your participation.

In TDMs where the decision is to remove a child from a parent and place in out-of-home care, an introductory meeting should be scheduled by the PSS between the parent and the identified out-of-home caregiver. This meeting provides an opportunity for parents and foster parents to talk about the needs of the child.

### GUIDELINES FOR CONDUCT DURING THE TDM

- ▶ Find out where the meeting is and show up in person whenever possible.
- ▶ Be punctual, be present, be engaged.
- ▶ One person speaks at a time and no side conversations are allowed.
- ▶ Come ready to share information about the child and open listen to others.
- ▶ Show respect to all parties and stay open to all ideas presented during the process.
- ▶ NO ELECTRONICS (PHONES OR LAPTOPS) Any phone usage should relate to the meeting and all team members should be aware of activity.
- ▶ Remember to speak to the family, not the facilitator.
- ▶ TDMs are not confidential, but information from the meeting should not be shared and should be held private.
- ▶ Meetings strive to let everyone have a say and share information, but if a consensus can't be reached, OCS will make the final decision.