

A MESSAGE TO OUR CAREGIVERS ABOUT TDM...

Why we need you to participate:

We recognize you, the caregivers of our children, as critical members of the team that will make placement decisions. Team Decisionmaking (TDM) meetings require that you will be invited to attend any meeting when a child in your care is being considered for a move to another placement, to be reunited with his/her birth family, or when a decision about an alternative to reunification must be made. It is imperative that you participate in these meetings. You have been parenting this child, and therefore your information, insights, and ideas are terribly important. We know that your commitment to the child's well being and safety will assist us in making a decision that will best meet the child's needs.

Who will be at the meeting, and when is it held:

Our TDM meetings may include you as the caregivers, plus birth parents and their support persons, service providers, community representatives, the child's guardian ad litem and involved members of the agency staff. The child's social worker will schedule a meeting whenever it appears that a decision regarding continued placement in your home needs to be made. We are committed to holding meetings before a child is moved, so that together, we can make a careful and planful decision that best meets the child's needs, while always being mindful of safety and protection issues.

What happens at a meeting:

- **Placement Preservation/Change of Placement:** If a child is at risk of disrupting from your home, we want to determine if additional supports and/or services to the child (or to you) might stabilize and maintain the placement. We will need your input to make this decision. If the child must move to another placement, we want to have your assistance to ensure that the child's next placement is successful; we also need your advice to make the change with as little trauma for the child as possible. We want the children in our care to experience as few moves as possible (and ideally, have but a single out of home placement) before they achieve a permanent family placement through reunification or another plan.
- **Reunification:** When it appears that the child can be reunited with his family, we again need your involvement. We want you to assist the team in determining that the supports the child will need to have a safe and successful reunification are in place. We want to discuss the transition plan for the child, including such issues as school change, medical record transfer, continued contacts with friends and with you and your family, etc. We want to hear if you have any concerns that need to be addressed regarding the reunification plan, and if you are willing to continue to be an 'extended family member' to the child and his/her family in the future.
- **Alternatives to Reunification:** And if your foster child cannot be reunified with his/her birth parents, and a discussion about adoption or legal guardianship must be made, your input will also be critical.
- **Older Youth Leaving the System:** Finally, if your teenage foster child is facing emancipation from the system, your involvement in the planning that must take place to prepare him/her will be essential. All youth who leave the system without a permanent family must have supportive adults on whom they can rely in the future – and former foster parents are among our best members of the "circles of support" on which young persons leaving the system can turn to as they navigate life as an adult.

We hope that the TDM process will support our children and their families, but also our caregivers. We need to have you continue as our partner in strengthening families and protecting children. Thank you for all you have done and for your assistance in the future.