**Section 315.120 Family Meetings**

Family meetings are a tool intended to engage the family in the planning process. Therefore, caseworkers shall make intensive efforts to persuade and encourage parents, including non-custodial parents, to attend the family meetings, especially during the first 90 days, by explaining to them the importance of the family meeting and of attending and cooperating with the process. Casework staff should make every effort when planning family meetings to be flexible and attempt as much as possible to schedule meetings at a time and place where parents can attend, preferably in the parent's home. Staff shall take into consideration parents' work schedules, transportation issues, availability of interpreters (if the parents' primary language of communication is other than English), and any other barriers that might prevent parents from participating. Parents shall be reminded of the court admonishment to cooperate with the Department and that refusal or chronic failure to attend family meetings may be considered by the Department and the court as a lack of reasonable progress. After reaching agreement with the parents on the date, time, location, and participants of the family meeting, the caseworker shall send a confirmation letter to the parents. Caseworkers shall document in the case file all attempts to include parents in the family meetings. Failure to attend family meetings shall also be documented in the case file.

a) Initial Family Meeting

1) The initial family meeting must occur in time to ensure submittal of the service plan to the juvenile court no later than 45 days after the child's placement and includes at a minimum:

A) the caseworker;

B) the child's custodial parents;

C) the non-custodial parent with the following conditions:

i) there is no danger of violence between the parents; and

ii) no confidential information concerning the custodial parent, such as mental health information, may be shared with the non-custodial parent, unless the custodial parent consents in writing to the sharing of such information as provided in 89 Ill. Adm. Code 431 (Confidentiality of Personal Information of Persons Served by the Department of Children and Family Services). If the custodial parent does not consent to the release of confidential information, the meeting shall be conducted in segments, with the non-custodial parent excluded from any discussion that includes the information about the custodial parent that is confidential;

D) the casework supervisor.

2) In addition, at the supervisor's discretion and with the signed consent of the parent, the following may be invited:

A) appropriate extended family members including non-custodial parents who are not interested in seeking custody;

B) foster parents and relative caregivers (see subsections (f), (g), (h) and (i));

C) service providers; and

D) the child, if emotionally and developmentally appropriate.

b) Purpose of Initial Family Meeting

The purposes of the initial family meeting, to be conducted by the casework supervisor, are to:

1) share information among all participants;

2) review the initial and comprehensive assessments;

3) develop Visitation and Contact Plans;

4) discuss and prepare the initial service plan; and

5) determine the permanency goal.

c) Ongoing Family Meetings

1) Following the initial family meeting, family meetings will be conducted on a flexible schedule, but no less than on a quarterly basis (at least four times a year approximately three months apart). The ongoing family meeting shall include at a minimum:

A) the caseworker;

B) the child's custodial parents;

C) the non-custodial parent with the same conditions as specified in subsection (a)(1)(C);

D) the casework supervisor at the supervisor's discretion. However, the supervisor must attend if the non-custodial parent will be attending the meeting when the non-custodial parent presents a safety concern.

2) In addition, at the supervisor's discretion and with the signed consent of the parent, the following may be invited:

A) appropriate extended family members, including non-custodial parents who are not interested in seeking custody;

B) foster parents and relative caregivers (see subsections (f), (g), (h) and (i));

C) service providers; and

D) the child, if emotionally and developmentally appropriate.

d) Purposes of Ongoing Family Meetings

The purposes of the ongoing family meetings are to:

1) assure disclosure of the expectations of all parties;

2) assess reasonable efforts on behalf of the Department or the purchase of service agency;

3) assess reasonable progress on behalf of the family;

4) assess whether the plan is serving the health, safety, and best interests of the child;

5) provide support for decision making that recognizes the child's sense of time, including whether the permanency goal and time frames for achieving the goal should be continued, and whether services and service providers are effective;

6) share information among the participants;

7) evaluate whether the identified behaviors and conditions are being addressed and whether the parents are engaged in the change process;

8) review, modify or develop Visitation and Contact Plans;

9) engage in planning that involves addressing the needs of the child with appropriate services and establishing realistic time frames for achievement of tasks and goals; and

10) review clinical material by various service providers. Clinical reports should be obtained and collateral contacts completed prior to the staffing. Professionals should have discussed findings and recommendations with the client/family prior to the meeting to promote open and honest discussion.

e) Prior to inviting foster parents/relative caregivers to the initial family meeting, the caseworker must consider the statutory requirement that protects foster parents'/relative caregivers' names, addresses and telephone numbers from disclosure. Such information regarding the foster parents/relative caregivers shall not be disclosed to the child's parents at the initial family meeting that occurs in time to ensure submittal of the service plan to the juvenile court no later than 45 days after placement.

f) In deciding whether to invite the foster parents/relative caregivers to the meeting, the caseworker shall take into consideration the level of violence or tendency toward violence displayed by the child's parents. This shall be assessed as the caseworker is conducting the comprehensive assessment in accordance with Section 315.100. The caseworker shall use information from:

1) Department safety and risk assessments;

2) the social history, including information such as the parents arrest history, history of domestic violence, and court records; and

3) the caseworker's own observations.

g) Information concerning the level or tendency toward violence of the parents may be shared with the foster parents/relative caregivers to help them decide whether to attend the initial family meeting. In no event shall the address and telephone number of the foster parents/relative caregivers be disclosed at the initial family meeting.

h) For all subsequent family meetings the same violence factor shall be considered when determining whether the foster parent/relative caregiver should attend and whether there is any danger to the foster parent/relative caregiver by attending the family meeting.

i) The participants in the family meeting will attempt to reach decisions and agree on recommendations by consensus. If a consensus cannot be reached, the final decision rests with the supervisor on all meetings.

j) Documentation of the meeting and report of the recommendations/decisions is to be made and included in the case record.

k) Parents have the right to appeal decisions with which they disagree in accordance with 89 Ill. Adm. Code 337 (Service Appeal Process).

(Source: Amended at 40 Ill. Reg. 743, effective December 31, 2015)