INFORMATION SHEET

Engaging Families Virtually

Family Group Conferencing

Family Group Decision Making

Other Family Engagement Meetings

Remaining True to the Values and Principles

Table of Contents

National Center on Family Group Decision Making 2020   ***May 14, 2020 (v.2)***
Information Sheet for Virtual FGC/FGDM & Family Engagement Meetings

Page **2** of **18**

National Center on Family Group Decision Making 2020   *May 14, 2020 (v.2)*
Information Sheet for Virtual FGC/FGDM & Family Engagement Meetings

Page **3** of **18**

INFORMATION SHEET

Engaging Families Virtually

Family Group Conferencing
Family Group Decision Making
Other Family Engagement Meetings

Remaining True to the Values and Principles

I. INTRODUCTION

When families are involved in the child welfare system, they have the right to be involved in decisions that affect them whether or not they can be present in person at a meeting.

From time to time, including times when in-person contact may compromise public health, virtual Family Engagement meetings, and/or virtual Family Group Conferencing (FGC)/Family Group Decision Making (FGDM) may need to be offered. Providing services in this way requires additional attention to ethical, technological, privacy, informed consent, and practice issues. This Information Sheet will help you to think these aspects through carefully, while remaining true to the values and principles of FGC/FGDM and Family Engagement meetings.

We recognize that there is a need for many kinds of meetings including members of a family group and child welfare service providers. In this document, the term Family Engagement meeting is meant to encompass all the different kinds of meetings that are fully facilitated. FGC/FGDM, a family engagement process, is based on the values, principles and practices outlined in the *Guidelines for Family Group Decision Making in Child Welfare*.

In this Information Sheet, when there are specific practices related to FGC/FGDM, these will be identified and the term *coordinator* will be used. When the specific kind of family meeting is not identified, the information provided applies to both Family Engagement meetings and FGC/FGDM, and the term *coordinator/facilitator* will be used.

National Center on Family Group Decision Making 2020   *May 14, 2020 (v.2)*
Information Sheet for Virtual FGC/FGDM & Family Engagement Meetings

Page **4** of **18**

II. ETHICAL RESPONSIBILITIES

The over-riding responsibility in providing family engagement meetings virtually is to provide the same level of service as you would provide in person, including following all the ethical and legal requirements in your jurisdiction. These responsibilities apply to coordinators, facilitators, supervisors of the facilitators/coordinators, senior leadership, and funders.

Those providing family meetings need to ensure that the referring agency (such as child welfare) is willing to participate in meeting virtually and that the virtual platform meets the referring agency's legal and ethical requirements.

The ethical responsibilities of social workers when using technology in social work practice are contained in the following document: NASW, CSWE, ASWB & CSWA (2017), *Standards for Technology in Social Work Practice*.

Some of the standards that are particularly applicable to using technology to deliver family meeting include the following:

- ➢ Standard 2.01: Ethical Use of Technology to Deliver Social Work Services
- ➢ Standard 2.04: Informed Consent: Discussing the Benefits and Risks of Providing Electronic Social Work Services
- ➢ Standard 2.05: Assessing Clients' Relationships with Technology
- ➢ Standard 2.06: Competence: Knowledge and Skills Required When Using Technology to Provide Services
- ➢ Standard 2.07: Confidentiality and the Use of Technology
- ➢ Standard 2.09: Maintaining Professional Boundaries
- ➢ Standard 2.10: Social Media Policy
- ➢ Standard 2.11: Use of Personal Technology for Work Purposes
- ➢ Standard 2.12: Unplanned Interruptions of Electronic Social Work Services
- ➢ Standard 2.17: Primary Commitment to Clients
- ➢ Standard 2.18: Confidentiality
- ➢ Standard 2.21: Access to Technology
- ➢ Standard 3.01: Informed Consent
- ➢ Standard 3.02: Separation of Personal and Professional Communications
- ➢ Standard 3.03: Handling Confidential Information

National Center on Family Group Decision Making 2020   *May 14, 2020 (v.2)*
Information Sheet for Virtual FGC/FGDM & Family Engagement Meetings

Page **5** of **18**

III. TECHNOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

III.1. Virtual Platform

The virtual platform needs to have the following capacity:

➢ Private and secure;
➢ Ease of access for users;
➢ Video and audio capability for all participants;
➢ Multiple participants at the same time;
➢ A private space during FGC/FGDM private family time;
➢ Communication with host (coordinator) while in private family time;
➢ If possible, accommodate translation through captions or an app.

Depending on the requirements in your jurisdiction, the platform may also need to meet the requirements of HIPAA or other legislation.

III. 2. Telepresence: Feeling as if you are present with no artificial distance between you*

There are some additional considerations when interacting with participants virtually rather than in person. These include the following:

➢ Look directly at the camera and lean forward on occasion;
➢ Be 10% more active/lively than usual to be as effective as in person;
➢ Pay attention to lighting so that your face is not in a shadow;
➢ Pay attention to the backdrop behind you – clean and plain; blue is the optimum color; avoid background pictures;
➢ Don't have your camera facing the door;
➢ Gaze angle – eyes should be in upper third of the screen; don't be looking down at the bottom of the screen;
➢ Dress professionally – avoid loud colors, checks, stripes, jangly jewellery;
➢ Be aware of your own hygiene;
➢ Minimize background noise as much as possible; use noise cancellation for microphone if available;
➢ Check audio continuity and clarity; if there is echoing place some pillows near the microphone;
➢ Avoid shuffling papers, sniffling, tapping fingers or pen, filing nails, typing and so forth.

*With thanks to the American Psychological Association, Telepsychology Best Practices 101.

National Center on Family Group Decision Making 2020　　　　　　　*May 14, 2020 (v.2)*
Information Sheet for Virtual FGC/FGDM & Family Engagement Meetings

Page **6** of **18**

III.3. Family Group's relationship with technology

Standard 2.05: Assessing Clients' Relationships with Technology, provides the following guidance: *…social workers shall consider clients' views about technology and the ways in which they use technology, including strengths, needs, risks and challenges.*

Part of the interpretation of Standard 2.05 includes the following: *…social workers should consider relevant needs, risks, and challenges, such as clients' reluctance to use technology; difficulty affording technology; limited computer knowledge or fluency with technology; and the risk of cyberbullying, electronic identity theft, and compulsive behaviors regarding the use of technology.*

When participants speak different languages, creativity will be needed so that all are able to participate and understand the various functions used in the virtual platform.

III.4. Problem solving limited internet access or other technological barriers

Standard 2.21 provides the following guidance: *When appropriate, social workers shall advocate for access to technology and resources for individuals, families, groups, and communities who have difficulty accessing them because they are a member of a vulnerable population such as people with disabilities, limited proficiency in English, limited financial means, lack of familiarity with technology, or other challenges.*

Coordinators/facilitators have considerable skill in problem-solving challenges for participants being able to participate in family engagement process. The guiding principle here is that poverty, geographical location, or other reasons limiting a participant's access to the technology needed to join the meeting should not be a reason that a person cannot participate.

Some possibilities include providing/lending a device to a participant; providing internet access; providing a space in the agency with a computer and internet access; identifying hotspots in the community; and exploring programs such as Medicare or other government initiatives that may assist a person in having access to a device and the internet.

National Center on Family Group Decision Making 2020   *May 14, 2020 (v.2)*
Information Sheet for Virtual FGC/FGDM & Family Engagement Meetings

Page **7** of **18**

IV. PRACTICE CONSIDERATIONS

IV.1. Coordinator/facilitator's competence in practicing virtually

1. The coordinator/facilitator must learn how to use the technology competently in order to provide support to participants while each learns how to use the technology. This includes the steps to place participants in a separate space or breakout room and the steps for how the plan will be written.

2. The coordinator/facilitator needs to have a plan to address any interruptions in the technology so that the family meeting can continue. Preserving an audio connection may be more important than maintaining a video connection.

3. The coordinator/facilitator must maintain clear professional boundaries.

4. Groupwork practice in the virtual setting requires the coordinator/facilitator to adjust and learn new skills in engaging with family meeting participants and in navigating conflict when it arises.

   Some suggestions to consider when navigating conflict within a virtual group setting include the following:

   ➢ Set group guidelines or ground rules together about how the group wants to navigate conflict when it arises, including how and when to use the mute function;
   ➢ Resist the temptation to take more control than the coordinator/facilitator would take during an in-person meeting;
   ➢ Take breaks, as decided by the group;
   ➢ Prior to the group meeting, make a plan with participants who may already be in conflict with each other so that they know what to do should conflict arise. This may include the assistance of a support person.

IV.2. Privacy

1. Initial questions each time you have a virtual meeting with a participant:

   ➢ Are in a place where you will have privacy during our conversation?
   ➢ Can you tell me if anyone else may be able to hear our conversation?
   ➢ Do you have any worries about meeting virtually?

National Center on Family Group Decision Making 2020   ***May 14, 2020 (v.2)***
Information Sheet for Virtual FGC/FGDM & Family Engagement Meetings

Page **8** of **18**

2. Pay attention to noises or other cues that someone else may have entered the room and ask about it. You could ask if someone has entered the room or other clarifying questions.

3. Request that participants do not record the meeting. The requirements verifying that the meeting is not being recorded will vary by jurisdiction.

4. The coordinator/facilitator will not record the preparation meetings or the family meetings without the consent of all participants.

IV.3. Informed Consent & Confidentiality

1. Standard 2.04: W*hen providing social work services using technology, social workers shall inform the client of relevant benefits and risks.*

   ➢ Possible Benefits:
      Access to social work services that may otherwise be unavailable
      More timely response to a need for a meeting
      Reduced travel costs and travel time for participants
      Ease of accessibility when technology and internet are available

   ➢ Possible Risks
      Potential for technology failure and interruption of services
      Potential for confidentiality breaches

2. The family group determines whether they want to participate in a virtual meeting.

3. The family group needs to be aware that decisions may be made through other processes where they have less influence if they decide not to proceed with a virtual meeting.

4. Standard 2.18: *Social workers who use technology to facilitate supervision, consultation, or other confidential meetings shall use appropriate safeguards to protect confidentiality.*

   ➢ All documents containing confidential information that are shared electronically must be encrypted (Standard 2.07). The coordinator needs to ensure that the recipient can open the document and also that support is available if the recipient is having difficulty accessing the information.

National Center on Family Group Decision Making 2020   *May 14, 2020 (v.2)*
Information Sheet for Virtual FGC/FGDM & Family Engagement Meetings

Page **9** of **18**

> ➤ All other requirements regarding storage and transmission of electronic records must be followed. These may vary, depending on the jurisdiction.

5. If a signature is needed on a document, there are applications from Adobe Connect, DocuSign etc. that can be used. Whatever method is used, it needs to be flexible and easy enough to be used across different devices such as laptops, tablets, cell phones and so forth.

V. PREPARATION OF ADULTS (FAMILY MEMBERS, SERVICE PROVIDERS AND GUEST SPEAKERS)

V.1. Preparation for all adults who will participate virtually

1. Confirm the identity of the participant before sharing any confidential information.

2. If the meeting is going to be recorded, obtain consent from all participants.

3. Ask participants to be in a private place during both preparation and during the meeting since the conversation may contain confidential information.

> ➤ Ask participants to speak loudly and clearly;
> ➤ Ask participants to let you know when they are having trouble hearing you.

4. Be prepared to help participants understand how the technology works, how to join the meeting, or any other support they may need in order to feel comfortable meeting in this way.

> ➤ Practice the various functions of the virtual platform that may be needed during the conference.
> ➤ See Standard 2.05 for additional considerations.

5. Plan if there is a technology interruption (including if the coordinator/facilitator has a technology interruption).

6. Discuss any possible safety concerns a participant may have and create a plan to address the concerns, given the parameters of meeting virtually.

7. Discuss any other concerns the participant may have about meeting virtually.

National Center on Family Group Decision Making 2020   *May 14, 2020 (v.2)*
Information Sheet for Virtual FGC/FGDM & Family Engagement Meetings

Page **10** of **18**

8. Discuss how private family time during FGC/FGDM will work within the virtual platform.

9. Follow the usual preparation processes, including:

   ➢ Share information about the meeting process;
   ➢ Share the relevant child welfare information, including the planning questions;
   ➢ Discuss what is expected of them and their role during the meeting.

V.2. Technology conversations with parent(s) and the extended family group

1. How does the family group want to make sure everyone is heard and so that one person is speaking at a time?

2. Discuss how to use the chat function so it meets the family group's needs.

3. How does the family group want to take breaks when meeting virtually?

4. Discuss how to ensure private space for smaller group or 1-on-1 conversations.

5. Discuss how the family's culture will be woven throughout the process in a virtual format. How does this conference reflect the uniqueness of the family group?

6. How does the family group want written information shared in as secure a manner as possible during the meeting:

   ➢ On the virtual platform?
   ➢ E-mail?
   ➢ Other?

7. The written documents may include the following:

   ➢ Information brochures
   ➢ Planning questions
   ➢ Reports
   ➢ Purpose of the meeting

8. For FGC/FGDM, the coordinator discusses the options available within the virtual platform for documenting the Plan and comes to consensus with the family group prior to the FGC/FGDM about which option is preferred.

National Center on Family Group Decision Making 2020　　　　　　　　　*May 14, 2020 (v.2)*
Information Sheet for Virtual FGC/FGDM & Family Engagement Meetings

Page **11** of **18**

For example, some of these options may involve screen sharing, a handwritten Plan that is shared verbally during the third part of the FGC/FGDM meeting, or using the chat function.

V.3. Preparing the Parent(s): Additional Considerations

1. If children are living with the parent(s), have a conversation with the parent(s) about their dual role during the meeting. How will the parent(s) feel able to focus during the virtual meeting?

2. How will the parent(s) support the participation of the child(ren) virtually, including providing technological assistance as needed?

3. If the parent wants a support person who does not live in the same home, how will this happen, given the technological options?

4. How would the parent(s) prefer information to be shared about them during the meeting?

V.4. Preparing the Kin Caregiver: Additional Considerations

1. Have a conversation with the kin caregiver(s) about their dual role. How will the caregiver(s) feel able to focus during the virtual meeting?

2. How will the kin caregiver(s) support the participation of the child(ren) during the virtual meeting, including providing technological assistance as needed?

V.5. Preparing the Non-Kin Foster Parent: Additional Considerations

1. Have a conversation with the foster parent about their dual role. How will the foster parent feel able to focus during the virtual meeting?

2. How will the foster parent support the participation of the child(ren) during the virtual meeting including providing technological assistance as needed?

3. If the child wants to participate in FGC/FGDM private family time, how will the foster parent support the child's participation while not attending or listening to the private family time themselves?

National Center on Family Group Decision Making 2020   *May 14, 2020 (v.2)*
Information Sheet for Virtual FGC/FGDM & Family Engagement Meetings

Page **12** of **18**

V.6. Preparing the Support Person: Additional Considerations

1. If someone wants a support person who does not live in the same home, how will this happen, given the technological options?

2. For FGC/FGDM, given that private family time is for the family group only, if the support person is not a family member how will they be available to the person being supported during private family time, given the technological options available?

V.7. Preparing Community Leaders, Service Providers & Guest Speakers: Additional Considerations

1. Discuss how much of the meeting will each person be attending. At least one child welfare staff person needs to attend the entire meeting. This staff person needs to have enough authority to make a decision about accepting the plan.

2. If someone is only attending part of the meeting, how they know when it is time for them to join the meeting?

VI. CHILD/YOUNG PERSON PREPARATION

VI.1. Why is Child/Youth Voice and Participation Needed?

Social Work Code of Ethics* requirements:

➢ Participate together in setting and evaluating goals, including the enhancement of one's functioning and strengthening of one's capacity to adapt and make changes.

➢ Respect and facilitate self-determination as well as encouraging children/youth to decide which issues they want to address as well as how to address them (depending on agency/legal mandates).

➢ Provide children/youth with accurate and complete information regarding the extent, nature and limitations of any services available to them.

* Code of Ethics, Ontario College of Social Workers and Social Service Workers

National Center on Family Group Decision Making 2020   *May 14, 2020 (v.2)*
Information Sheet for Virtual FGC/FGDM & Family Engagement Meetings

Page **13** of **18**

VI.2. What the research* says about telemental health services for children/youth

➢ Comparable to in-person service for assessment, psychological testing, outcome evaluation, pharmacotherapy and psychotherapy;

➢ Therapeutic relationship is preserved;

➢ Effective for both individual and group work;

➢ Adapt best practices from the in-person setting;

➢ Preliminary evidence: youth experience less self-consciousness, increased personal space and decreased confidentiality concerns due to the provider being in another place.

You can find many additional resources from the American Telemedicine Association, particularly the *Practice Guidelines for Telemental Health with Children and Adolescents*.

VI.3. Logistics for children participating in virtual meetings

1. Discuss with the caregiver (who lives in the same residence) about the logistics of the child/youth's access to technology and knowledge about its use.

2. Discuss with the caregiver about how the child/youth will have a private space for the preparation meeting and for the FGC/FGDM.

3. Share the purpose of the FGC/FGDM with the caregiver, prior to meeting with the child/youth.

4. Discuss with the caregiver about how to support the child/youth before, during and after the meeting. What is the safety plan if the child/youth needs additional support?

5. Have a plan to contact the caregiver during the meeting with the child/youth if needed.

National Center on Family Group Decision Making 2020   *May 14, 2020 (v.2)*
Information Sheet for Virtual FGC/FGDM & Family Engagement Meetings

Page **14** of **18**

VI.4. Questions for caregiver about the child/youth's participation virtually

1. What is the role of the caregiver regarding child's involvement in the meeting?

2. Clarify the system's expectations of caregiver regarding their caregiving responsibilities to children/youth during meeting.

3. If the caregiver is the parent, how will the parent manage their parenting responsibilities during the meeting?

4. How does the caregiver feel about the child/youth participating in the meeting?

5. How do caregivers balance their own participation/agenda and their views about the child's participation/what the child wants to say?

6. How will caregiver know if the meeting is safe enough for the child/youth?

VI.5. Preparation of children/youth: Some things to talk about

The same principles apply to preparing children/young persons as have been discussed about preparing adults. These include the following:

➢ Teach the child/youth how to use the virtual meeting platform.

➢ Is the child/youth consenting to participate virtually in the preparation and family meetings?

➢ Is child/youth participating through their own choice? Can the child/youth say what they want/need to say during the virtual meeting?

➢ Does the child/youth feel like they have to please the adults?

➢ How will the child/youth participate during the virtual meetings?

➢ How does child/youth want issues about them discussed?

National Center on Family Group Decision Making 2020 *May 14, 2020 (v.2)*
Information Sheet for Virtual FGC/FGDM & Family Engagement Meetings

Page **15** of **18**

VI.6. Child/youth safety planning

1. In planning for child/youth safety during a virtual meeting attention needs to be given to who determines what 'safe' is including the perspectives of the child/youth, the caregiver, the system, and the family group.

2. Safety planning needs to be explored with child/youth, including support before, during and after the virtual meeting. These may include things like safe words or safe gestures. What does support look like to the child/youth?

3. Does the child/youth want a support person during the virtual meeting? What does the child/youth hope this support person can offer?

4. How will people know if the virtual meeting is safe enough for the child/youth?

VII. THE FGC/FGDM OR OTHER FAMILY ENGAGEMENT MEETING

VII.1.. Discussions during the first part of the meeting

1. How will each participant ensure privacy so that confidential information can be shared? How will they manage one person talking at a time so that everyone can hear?

2. How will they reduce background noise – muting themselves unless speaking is one possible solution.

3. How will the group know who is speaking – does the person need to state their name first?

4. How will the group let the person speaking know if they are having trouble hearing what is being said?

5. If a guest speaker will be joining the meeting, let the group know what time this will be happening.

6. How will participants have the information they need about various topics such as substance abuse or child development as well as other documents they need during the meeting?

National Center on Family Group Decision Making 2020   *May 14, 2020 (v.2)*
Information Sheet for Virtual FGC/FGDM & Family Engagement Meetings

Page **16** of **18**

7. During a FGC/FGDM, prior to the family group going into private family time, ensure they understand how to write out the plan within the context of the virtual platform.

VII.2. Coordinator/facilitator virtual responsibilities

1. Checking to see if the participants able to hear each other and understand the information being shared?

2. Reminding the group about how they decided to manage one person talking at a time, as needed.

3. Checking that the technology is working properly for everyone on phone/video.

VII.3. Private Family Time during the FGC/FGDM

1. The coordinator (as the host of the virtual platform) ensures all the family participants are in a separate space in the virtual conference, such as a breakout room.

2. Review with the family members how the coordinator can be reached should there be questions, technological challenges or when they are ready to invite the non-family members back into the meeting.

3. During private family time, additional virtual separate spaces may need to be available for those who are not family members such as service providers, for a private conversation between two participants, or for other reasons.

4. When private family time has finished, the coordinator ensures that all family participants have left their private space and rejoined the large group.

VII.4. Review and Acceptance of the Plan

1. The coordinator/facilitator provides a way for the Plan to be visible to all participants during the final phase of the meeting.

   ➢ The coordinator/facilitator needs to be aware of the possibilities within the virtual platform so that this can happen.

National Center on Family Group Decision Making 2020   *May 14, 2020 (v.2)*
Information Sheet for Virtual FGC/FGDM & Family Engagement Meetings

Page **17** of **18**

2. The coordinator/facilitator ensures that there is a way for the written Plan to be saved in the coordinator/facilitator's computer.

VII.5. Feedback/Evaluation Forms

The coordinator/facilitator ensures that there is a confidential process in place for participants to complete the feedback/evaluation forms that are used when the meetings are fully in-person. Options may include using survey monkey by putting the link in the chat box, using a polling function of the virtual platform, e-mailing/texting the link to participants, or mailing a paper copy.

VII.6. Distributing the Plan

Be mindful about maintaining confidentiality when distributing the Plan. If in doubt, follow your usual practice when the meeting has been held in person rather than virtually.

VIII. FOLLOW UP AND REVIEW OF THE PLAN

Depending on what the group has decided about how and when to follow up and/or review the Plan, the virtual processes already described are available to guide the coordinator/facilitator.

National Center on Family Group Decision Making 2020   *May 14, 2020 (v.2)*
Information Sheet for Virtual FGC/FGDM & Family Engagement Meetings

Page **18** of **18**