

**Cuyahoga County Division of Children and Family Services
(CCDCFS)
Policy Statement**

Policy Chapter: Case Review
Policy Number: 5.02.01
Policy Name: TDM/Staffings Policy

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Approved By: Thomas D. Pristow

PURPOSE: To involve birth/adoptive families and community members, along with resource families, service providers, and agency staff in a team decision-making process (TDM) to assure that the best possible decision is made on issues of **custody, placement, and permanency** for children. The focus is always on the safety and well-being of child(ren), and ensuring a network of support for the family. For the purpose of this policy, TDM meetings will be referred to as “Staffings”.

SCOPE: This policy applies to all Cuyahoga County Division of Children and Family Services (CCDCFS) staff that participate in staffings.

POLICY

CCDCFS uses TDM, or staffings, as the forum in which it makes all placement and custody related decisions. Staffings are multi-disciplinary meetings which involve the family, their support system, community partners, and other involved professionals in decisions around child custody and placement. All participants in the meeting are treated with dignity and respect as they share information about the family which relates to the protection and safety of the child(ren) and the overall functioning of the family. The family is viewed as the expert regarding their family and their input is paramount in making the best, least intrusive plan for ensuring care and safety of the child(ren). The ultimate goal of the meeting is for all participants to work collaboratively to develop and reach an agreement about a plan which protects the child(ren), stabilizes placements, reunifies the family, or promotes permanency for the child(ren).

PROCEDURES

For every family involved with CCDCFS, these are the required points at which a Staffing is required:

- Prior to removing and placing a child in out of home care, whether emergency or considered, and regardless of custody plan;

- Prior to requesting court involvement when removal is not requested; i.e. Protective Supervision;
- Prior to any change in placement of a child already in care;
- Prior to making a permanent plan, including reunification, termination of parental rights, guardianship, emancipation, or planned permanent living arrangement.

Change of placement and/or permanency recommendations may be made in a Semi-Annual Review (SAR) if key participants are present, except Reunification 2. A Staffing or SAR is required prior to any legal filing and/or placement request, except for motions to withdraw, extend, or terminate Court Ordered Protective Supervision. **A Staffing or SAR recommendation becomes the agency's official position, and is binding upon all agency participants, who are obligated to support it and carry out its elements. No change to the Staffing or SAR recommendation can occur without obtaining a Deputy Director override or scheduling a new Staffing.**

I. Triggers for the Meeting:

A. Initial Custody and/or Placement

To decide if a child can remain safely in their current home or needs to be removed and placed in an alternative setting, includes Juvenile Rule 6 (JR6), Intent to Grant, Power of attorney (POA) and private filings. Also, anytime a child is voluntarily placed out of the home for 30 days or more in response to agency involvement. **If emergency custody or placement occurs after hours, the Staffing is held the next business day.**

1. Staffing scheduled when the Worker of Record (WOR) assesses the **safety threat and/or risk issue as significant enough to consider discussion of a change in child(ren)'s living arrangement** and/or court involvement, or if the parent/caretaker of the child expresses fear or threatens to harm the child.
2. Below are some specific examples of presumed safety concerns which would trigger a staffing:
 - a) A new case is opened and the parent has had the previous child(ren) permanently removed from their care (Legal Custody to another individual, Permanent Custody or Adoption).
 - b) The parent has a child who is currently in the custody of a child protection agency AND the mother is pregnant and due within the next fourteen days or has recently given birth to another child.
 - c) Children in the family have experienced a previous serious injury or neglect (e.g. children left home alone, serious head injury, such as baby or skull fracture, unexplained or inflicted broken bones, failure to protect from serious harm, etc.)

B. Placement Preservation/Change of Placement

To decide if child can remain in current placement, possibly with additional supports and/or services; or to decide if child must move to another placement, why, where, when and with what services? or if child has already moved due to emergency, to ensure best possible adjustment to new placement.

1. Staffing scheduled **when potential disruption of placement is recognized, safety concerns exist, or a move from the current placement is believed necessary for the benefit of the child.**
 - a) Prior to all unplanned respite made during business hours. Private providers are permitted to schedule after contacting all parties and determining best date and meeting time.
 - b) In addition, all AWOL children will have a Staffing when they return, if a new placement is needed. The child must be present at the meeting.
 - c) Short term stays in acute care facilities (less than 14 days) for psychiatric stabilization or other treatment for illness/injury where the child is returning to their original placement **DO NOT** require a Staffing meeting.
2. If emergency placement change occurs after business hours, the Staffing is required the next business day.

C. Permanency Planning

To decide if child can safely return to own family; or to decide on alternative permanent plan if child cannot return to own family; or for older youth, to make best possible plans for independence including identification of supportive adults/family connections.

1. Reunification 1 -scheduled when the risk level is reduced and parental progress in ability to protect and provide safety for the child(ren) is recognized. Overnight or extended visits recommended to ensure a smooth transition.
Reunification 2 -scheduled when team determines child(ren) can safely return to their own family.
2. Other Permanent Plan (Termination of parental rights, legal custody) - Scheduled when lack of adequate progress in reducing risk and alleviating safety threats suggest the need for permanent placement plan/legal filing.
3. Planned Permanent Living Arrangement - Staffing scheduled when PPLA is being considered as an option pending another permanent plan.
4. Emancipation - Staffing is scheduled when teen has reached age of majority and/or completed their high school diploma or GED and a secure transition plan is in place. **If AWOL, the approval of the deputy is needed to terminate custody.**

II. Scheduling the Staffing:

- A.** In emergency situations, the WOR must contact the Case Review Department to schedule the staffing with the assigned primary or secondary facilitator (if available). In non-emergency situations, the family will be consulted prior to the scheduling of the meeting to ascertain the most convenient date, time and location for the meeting.
- B.** The WOR notifies the family of the scheduled staffing time and encourages them to bring family supports to assist in the decision making process. The Case Review scheduler will notify the GAL and Community Collaborative.
- C.** Follow-ups are scheduled by the facilitator for all safety plans and non-emergency custody filings to reevaluate circumstances and determine if more or less restrictive options should be considered.
- D.** The WOR must identify and notify the Case Review Unit of any special accommodations that may be required for the meeting (e.g. an interpreter will be needed, a larger room is required, separate meetings are required due to DV issues or No Contact/Protection Orders, the need for security presence). Attorneys, police officers, and detectives acting in official capacity are not permitted in staffing meetings.
- E.** All youth in custody age 13 and above are required to attend all Placement Preservation and Permanency Planning Staffings. WOR will contact the teen and discuss the purpose and the value of the meeting being held. If the teen is unable to attend the meeting due to the time and date, a request will be made reschedule the meeting. If the teen is unable to attend due to other reasons, then a Teen Waiver form is required to be completed by the WOR and approved by their Supervisor and submitted to the Case Review Unit at the time of the staffing.
- F.** Staffings will not be utilized to arrest a participant or to serve a warrant. Under no circumstance should a participant be arrested during the meeting. Decisions to arrest individuals in the building must be cleared through a CCDCFS Deputy Director.

III. Appeals:

The decision resulting from any staffing is ideally reached through consensus. When this can not be achieved because a CCDCFS staff member present at the staffing, and not directly responsible for the management of the case, does not believe that the decision meets the best interest of the child (ren) or the decision violates agency policy, an appeal meeting is held. Whenever possible, the appeal will be scheduled immediately, to include the participants from the staffing. The decision is

ideally a result of consensus, but when consensus cannot be reached, the Senior Manager facilitating the appeal is responsible for determining the final decision. That decision is binding unless overturned by a CCDCFS Deputy Director or Administrator.

IV. Delayed Filings:

When the Assistant Prosecuting Attorney (APA) and the Managing Attorney question the legal basis of a filing, legal action will be “delayed” and a meeting will be convened to clarify information and identify barriers to moving forward with requested legal action. If consensus cannot be reached and the legal team believes the facts presented do not meet the statutory requirements for a filing, the complaint or motion will not be filed unless issues are adequately resolved. If CCDCFS staff does not believe an acceptable safety plan can be crafted, the case will be presented to the CCDCFS Administrator for a final decision on how the agency will proceed on the case, from both a social work and legal perspective.

SEE ALSO:

Cuyahoga County Division of Children and Family Services Policies and Procedure Manual

Policy 2.03.07 Cases Involving Domestic Violence

Policy 5.02.02 Case Reviews/Semi-Annual Administrative Reviews

Policy 6.01.03 Placement into Out of Home Care Settings

Policy 6.01.04 Sibling Policy

Policy 7.01.05 Minor Parents and Their Children

Policy 7.06.03 Client Rights

Policy 7.06.04 Provisions for Clients with Limited English Proficiency (LEP)

FORM

Teen Waiver Form