

Tips for Telephonic CFT Meetings

Facilitating Child and Family Team (CFT) meetings by telephone can be a challenging but important part of helping children and families with their support needs. Whenever possible meetings should be facilitated and attended in person; however, telephonic CFT meetings can be successful and allow many to participate that otherwise could not. When team members cannot participate in person, they should be reminded to be mindful of the challenges this presents. People on the phone miss the benefit of nonverbal cues present in the room that may lead to disengagement, disruption, and miscommunication.

1. **Engagement** prior to and between CFT meetings is even more important with telephonic meetings. Extra effort to connect with each team member must be made, prior to the meeting to help them be prepared to participate. It is also important to discover any items that team members feel are important to make sure these issues are addressed.
2. Use a conferencing method that allows for **easy participation** of all team members. Conferencing should allow all members to hear one another. They should also allow for the meeting to start on time.
3. The facilitator should be comfortable using any equipment for conference calls and allow adequate **time to connect** all participants. **Higher-tech** options for team meetings may include the use of video conferencing if available.
4. Send any **paperwork** or documents that will be used during the meeting ahead of time to each participant. Discussions that reference paperwork can be difficult if everyone has not had a chance to review them since they cannot be distributed in person at a telephonic meeting.
5. Arrange for the team to meet together **in person** periodically when possible, even if this involves some travel on the part of participants.
6. Consider preparing someone to **co-facilitate** who can be present at the meeting. For example, a therapist or CPS Case Manager may be willing to take responsibility for keeping a pulse on the mood in the room or keeping the team responsive to people's body language. Pre-meeting planning between facilitators would need to occur to clearly define roles.
7. Facilitators should formally remind participants of **confidentiality** and ensure all participants' **attendance** is recorded.
8. Set clear **ground rules** at the beginning of the team meeting to avoid pitfalls (such as avoiding talking to the phone rather than addressing all conversations to the group; handling interruptions effectively; how the team will make sure everybody gets heard)
9. Know and use proper **phone etiquette**. For example, each time an individual speaks, they may need to identify themselves so others on the call know who is speaking.
10. **Facilitation** of the meeting must be conducted more assertively by the facilitator in order to ensure the meeting runs smoothly, that needs are explored, a specific action plan is developed, and that input of all team members is considered. The temptation can be for a facilitator to be more passive when the meeting is held telephonically.
11. Clearly establish the **purpose** of the meeting at the start of each CFT meeting. This is an important way to get teams on track when they are not able to interact in person.
12. The voice of the facilitator has to take the place of any **visuals** that would normally be used, such as creating lists on flip chart paper outlining progress, needs, or options. A talented facilitator compensates for this barrier by using words to accomplish the same purpose as visual aids. For example, the facilitator may summarize the list of options and ask each team member to jot them down on a pad of paper in front of them.
13. Actively seek the **input of the family and child** throughout the meeting. Their involvement can easily be lost during a telephonic CFT without a facilitator that continually seeks their involvement and input.
14. **Follow-up** with written documentation for team members of any agreed upon actions steps within 5 working days of the meeting.