

Tips for CFT Meetings when Children Live in Multiple Geographic Areas

Sometimes the biological parent of a child (and their CPS caseworker when applicable) live in a different city than one or more of their children who are receiving behavioral health services. For example, the mother may live in Flagstaff, while one of her children is placed in Prescott and the other in Show Low. Multiple placement locations can be a challenging dynamic for CFT facilitation.

The following are ideas and tips regarding how teams can address this situation effectively. Teams form around the individual child, but there is also a need to recognize a larger 'Team' concept that recognizes the strengths and needs of the whole family. This will involve a higher degree of coordination of care to ensure all the individual teams are moving toward the overall family goal.

1. **Define the Team(s).** Each child may have their own CFT with different team members, but the family as a whole needs to be considered a unifying part of all of the teams. Facilitators of a team that involves only one child of a larger family system need to frame the work of that team in the context of the larger team which consists of the family and all of the children, regardless of their placement locations.
2. **Coordination** between teams and facilitators prior to respective meetings is critical to ensure plans are complimentary, family-friendly and working toward the same goals.
3. **Family-Driven.** Ensure that the team is still driven by the needs, strengths, culture and preferences of the family rather than the treatment professionals associated with the child's remote placement. The temptation may be to turn to the placement as the experts on the situation. However, the CFT process does not center on professionals. The family needs to know they are at the head of the process, even if their child lives in a different city.
4. **Engagement** must take a high priority in CFTs with multiple geographic locations. Teams with poor engagement often struggle to get the various team members out of their established roles and into more flexible, supportive roles. Teams that are cohesive and have experienced high quality engagement are able to break out of their traditional roles and work together creatively. For example, one CFT that was very cohesive was able to get team members to volunteer to drive the child from his remote location to visit his family on weekends. The team members did this as something above and beyond their job duties because they were so committed to success for the family and were excited about the creative plans they generated in the team.
5. Arrange for the larger team to meet together **in person** periodically when possible, even if this involves some travel on the part of some of the team members. Team facilitators may have very different styles, so defining roles and how the meeting should be structured is important to agree on in advance.
6. Establish a clear, agreed-upon **vision** of the larger team. The vision will help shape the direction of the team over time. For example, if the remote placements are temporary and the vision is to reunite the family, the team may proceed very differently than if the vision is for the children to remain in different locations for a longer period of time.
7. **Balance the team** with as many natural supports as possible. Because of the multiple placements, there are likely to be a number of professionals involved on the team. This needs to be balanced with a number of friends, family members or others in the life of the family so that their views are represented as a substantial part of the team process.
8. Consider ways to create contact between teams and **support participation** from other areas by using video-conferencing and speakerphones when in person participation is not possible.
9. Facilitating CFTs with participants on the phone can be challenging. Be sure to reference the 'Tips for Telephonic CFT Meetings' guide to help make these meeting more family friendly and productive.