

## CHILD INCLUSION ASSESSMENT FOR FAMILY-CENTERED MEETINGS\*

Remember that it is not a question of *whether* a child will participate in the process, but *how*. The following questions will help you determine how the child should be involved.

- How old is the child?
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- How does the child *want* to participate?
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- What special needs are there? Developmental and cognitive abilities? Special mental health diagnoses that are difficult to manage in group settings?
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- What does the family think?
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- Is there potential for the process to be therapeutic for the child? What does the child's therapist think?
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- What family members are present?
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- What kind of support network will the child have?
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- Who will be the designated support person?
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\* Adapted from North Carolina Family-Centered Meetings Project, 3/2003 *Nothing About Them Without Them: Children's Participation in FGDM December 3, 2007 Teleconference*

### Idea List

Bringing a child's voice and presence into the room is one of the key aspects of ensuring the success of your meetings. With older children, it will be more possible to bring a specific message from the child about what is happening and their feelings about it. With infants and toddlers, it is enough to remind the participants of their presence so that they can maintain focus on the purpose of the meeting. Here are some ideas to get you started:

<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Bring a picture of the child, or child and family</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Child can draw a picture of their feelings or their message</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Videotape of the child</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Audio recording of child's message to the family</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Read child's favorite story</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Conference call</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Bring a piece of child's clothing</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Attend only a part of the meeting</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Note cards from "baby" with "I love you" message</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Make a message card</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Bring one of child's toys</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Use one-step removed approach (puppet, toy, etc., sends the message)</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Tell a story about the child</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Child can appoint a designated spokesperson</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Use empty chair technique</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Complete worksheet "I want to say something!"</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Name card technique</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Light a candle to symbolize child's light</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Use a baby's voice worksheet</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Play child's favorite song</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Child can write a letter</li></ul>	

I Want to Say Something

Hello Everyone.

I heard about the family meeting today and, because I will not be there, I have some things I want you to know.

- When I think about what's going on in my family, I like that:

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- What I don't like about what's happening is that:

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- My feelings right now about it are:

- 
- So this is who I think should be there:

Because:

- 
- And these are the people I think should *not* come:

Because:

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- I want you to know that the good things about my family are:

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- Things that worry me about my family are:
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- So this is what I especially want my \_\_\_\_\_ to know:

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- And this is what I really want my \_\_\_\_\_ to know:

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- And for all of you who are there, I would like to tell you that:

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- When you all work on figuring this out, this is what I hope for me:

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- And this is what I would like to see happen for all of us:

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- Thank you for:

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*Signed:* \_\_\_\_\_

### Tips for Preparing Children for Family-Centered Meetings

Below, you will find several tips and guidelines for preparing a child to attend a Family-Centered Meeting. These are specific ideas that will help you before arriving at the meeting itself.

- Explain the purpose, what is going to happen, what it will look like to them, what to expect.
- Anticipate the questions and provide answers.
- Allow ample time for the child to ask what s/he wants to know.
- Help find an understanding that his opinions will be extremely important but that it may not always turn out exactly how the child would like.
- Once you feel the child understands the process, you may ask:
  - How do you think it should go?
  - What would you like to tell your family?
  - What will help everyone feel comfortable?
  - Do you want to come?
  - Who do you want to come with you?
  - Who do you not want to come with you?
  - What would you like everyone to know?
- Acknowledge that it may not be easy to hear some things and provide reassurance for his safety.
- If possible, give the child enough time to think about and prepare what she would like to say.
- Allow opportunities to rehearse, role play, and practice.
- Reassure child that you will do everything possible to make sure s/he feels comfortable and safe.
- Present many options and alternatives for attending, especially if child changes his mind about being physically present.

### Tips for Child Inclusion During and After the Family-Centered Meeting

Below you will find additional tips to guide you during the process of the meeting itself, as well as follow-up ideas.

- Designate a support person for the child; have them sit together.
- Privately review signals and cues with the child before the meeting.
- Monitor the child's nonverbal behaviors as they provide important cues into what s/he is feeling.
- Establish and review ground rules with the special needs of the child emphasized.
- Keep conversation oriented to his level of understanding.
- Be conscientious about the adult/child ratio and how that feels to a child – acknowledge it.
- Pay special attention to the room itself. Include fidget toys, crayons, markers, paper, coloring sheets, stuffed animals, books to read, Legos, etc.
- After the meeting, do a final, brief check in with the child.
- Spend some time with the child to check in about the experience.
- Ask for his/her thoughts, opinions, feelings.
- Commend him/her for the good job she did in such an unfamiliar situation.
- Offer encouragement for the child, the family, and the plan created.
- Thank child for participating, letting him/her know that the plan could not have been so nicely developed if it were not for his voice.

### Preparing the Support Person for a Child Within the FGC Process

Below you will find additional tips to guide you during the process of the meeting itself, as well as follow-up ideas:

- Explain the meeting purpose, process, and role of support person.
- Help them understand the honor and responsibility attached to the role of support person.
- Explain the importance of their role to enhance the experience of safety by a child before, during, and following the FGC.
- Understand their relationship to the child.
- Identify their specific support role (support, voice, message bearer, safety guide, etc.)
- Support people often have a dual role. Discuss the difference between supporting a child's presence or being a child's voice vs. expressing their own opinion. Assist them in differentiating these and help determine how they will reasonably achieve both.
- Provide tips for the inclusion of a child in an FGC or a child's voice in the FGC process.
- Prior to the FGC, a support person should meet with a child to prepare for the meeting. Things they may discuss include:
  - What is the role of the support person (before, during, and after the FGC)?
  - What would you like to tell your family? Do you want help with that?
  - What will help you feel comfortable?
  - Do you want to come?
  - Where do you want to sit?
  - Do you want to have a cue to let me know if you feel uncomfortable?
  - What do you want to do if you feel uncomfortable?
  - Do you want to write down what is important for your family to hear? (Draw pictures, etc.)
  - Inform them that you will help them understand the decisions the family makes during the meeting.
  - Identify level and quality of contact you will have immediately after the FGC.