

## I. ICEBREAKER MEETING GUIDELINES

### **Definition:**

An icebreaker meeting is a facilitated, child- focused meeting held shortly after a child is placed in out-of-home care to provide an opportunity for birth parents and foster parents (or other caregivers) to meet each other and to share information about the birth family, foster family, and most importantly, the needs of the child. This meeting is the beginning of establishing communication and building a relationship between the child's parents and caregivers.

### **Purpose:**

- To provide an opportunity and setting for the foster parents and birth parents to meet
- To begin establishing communication and a relationship between the child's parents and caregivers/ foster parents
- To share information that will help the foster parents/ caregivers to support the child in care
- To reduce parents' anxiety about their child's placement and well-being
- To reinforce the parent's role(s) as "parent" and establish foster parents/ caregivers as part of the team working to support the child and reunify the family.
- To reassure the children that their parents and caregivers are all working together to provide for their care, giving children permission to adjust positively to their placement while maintaining their relationship with their parents.

### **An Icebreaker Meeting is held when:**

- A child is placed in out-of-home care (foster or kinship), or
- A child is making a placement change (birth parent with new foster parent/ caregiver)

### **Attendees:**

Birth Parent(s), Foster Parent(s) or other caregivers, child's social worker, and the child when appropriate\*. The meeting is considered completed if at least one of the child's parents attend; however, it is considered best practice for both birth parents and both foster parents/ caregivers (if applicable) to participate in the same meeting (or separate meetings, if needed).

\*Children may attend the meeting, as appropriate. This decision is made by the caseworker in consultation with the child and other participants. Regardless of whether a child is to attend or not, he or she is to be informed of the meeting and should be helped to understand that the meeting does not determine if the child is to return home, rather that it is focused on sharing information about the child's needs. The caseworker can have the child fill out the "All About Me" questionnaire in advance of the meeting (different options for younger and older children).

Issues to Consider when deciding whether a child should attend:

- Child's physical and developmental age
- Child's desire to attend
- Parent's ability to stay positive and child-focused during the meeting
- Child's comfort level regarding meeting with his/ her parents, including ability to separate from the parents at the end of the meeting

### **Participant Preparation:**

The caseworker is responsible for preparing participants for the content of the meeting, including information they may not want to share, prior to it being held. Issues to be discussed include:

- Purpose of the meeting
- Importance of staying child-focused.
- What the meeting is (an opportunity to share vital information about their child and for all parents to form a partnership) and is not (not a discussion of the allegations or whether or not a child will return home).
- Foster parent share information about their family with the “Meet Our Family” document
- Birth parent(s) share information about their family and child(ren), parents may wish to bring a favorite toy, blanket, book, and/or photos for the child.
- Short-term visitation plan.
- For temporary/emergency placement, a supervised comfort call is held within the first 12 hours – supervised by the caseworker

**Meeting Logistics:**

- Scheduled by the child’s caseworker
- Takes place within 7 days of the out-of-home placement, can be in conjunction with the first visit
- Takes place at the agency or a neutral location
- Lasts about 30 minutes
- Scheduled to be held before the placement when the placement is a planned transition
- Alternate form of a meeting (phone, video, in writing) is arranged if a face to face meeting is not viable (e.g. parent incarcerated, in rehab, etc)
- “Child Health/ Social History” form, if not completed at removal and discussed during a comfort call, will be provided (by the caseworker) and completed for each child by the birth parent and brought to the meeting
- Caseworker document information gathered during the meeting on the “Icebreaker Meeting Report” Form
- Social worker make copies of the completed “Child Health/ Social History”, “Meet Our Family”, “All About Me”, “Co-Parenting and Co-Sharing of Information Agreement”, “Icebreaker Meeting Report”, and “Icebreaker Meeting Evaluation Form” to distribute at the meeting/ at the end of the meeting to all participants (file in parent assessments section of the case file)
- AA in each office will scan meeting evaluations to Icebreaker Evaluation folder on the RR shared Drive

**Safety:**

The caseworker will implement alternate methods for sharing information if there are serious safety concerns for any party.