

Protocol for Father Engagement

Best Practices for Engaging Fathers in Case Planning

Agency Protocol

- A. In most cases the **caseworker should visit the father in his home**. In almost every dependency case, the mother's home is visited and assessed.
- B. The caseworker should **engage the mother about the importance of having the father involved** in the case planning. Caseworkers should be trained on engaging mother.
- C. Father should be included in all **permanency planning** and other team meetings. The caseworkers should ensure that father receives notice of all meetings.
- D. If paternity was not established at the onset or if the father was not located at the onset, **once father is identified and located, the family service plan should be revised to include him**. The caseworker should fully assess a father's needs and create a family service plan with goals specifically tailored to the father's needs and issues.
- E. Utilize practices such as **Family Group Decision Making**, which are designed to engage the family. Make sure the father and paternal relatives are invited to the family conference and assist him/them in getting there.
- F. The caseworker shall **maintain regular contact** with the father.

Role of the Court

- A. At every review, the **judge or master should ask whether father has been included in the case planning**, and if not, why father was not included.
- B. If father is not involved, **the judge or master should engage mother as to the importance of having father involved** in the case planning.
- C. At every review, the **judge or master should examine the family service plan** to ensure that it includes father and is specific to the issues at hand.
- D. The judge or master should insist that caseworkers make good faith efforts to engage and support father throughout the case.
- E. If possible, the **dependency court judges should decide the issue of child support** to reduce the financial impact that may impede the father's willingness to participate in case planning or to meet the child's need.
- F. The court order should reflect that father is required to participate in case planning and that the agency is required to include him in the case planning.
- G. The court should make sure that **the paternal family has been considered as placement resources**, if necessary and direct the agency to complete assessments of the paternal relatives.

Role of the Parent Attorney

- A. **Good legal representation** should result in better engagement. Parent attorneys should be trained on engaging fathers. The goal is to **establish a solid attorney-client relationship** that will promote honest communication.

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- B. The parent attorney should **encourage the father to participate in the case planning** and should work with the father to identify family service plan goals.
- C. The attorney should **contact father to remind him** to attend planning meetings.

Engaging Fathers in Delivery of Services

Agency Protocol

- A. The agency should **identify services that are currently available for fathers** and assess the **"father-friendliness"** of those services.
- B. The agency should **partner with community providers** and organizations to create and develop father-focused services.
- C. Once father has been located, the agency should immediately begin to develop an appropriate visitation plan for father.
- D. The caseworker should assist father in establishing individual goals that will facilitate permanence for the child. The caseworker should be an "active listener" in assessing what services father needs. The agency should **make a "real assessment" of a father's needs** and create a family service plan with goals specifically tailored to each father's needs and issues.

Role of the Court

- A. The court should **partner with community providers** and organizations to create and develop father-focused services.
- B. The judge or master should **ensure that the family service plan has "real goals" for father**. At every review, the court should examine the family service plan to ensure that it includes father and that it is not a boilerplate family service plan.

Role of Parent Attorney

- A. The attorney has a responsibility to **advocate for appropriate services** for fathers. The attorney should insist that the agency provide all necessary referrals for services.
- B. If father has not been offered the necessary services, the attorney should **request that the court enter a finding of "No Reasonable Efforts."**
- C. The attorney should meet with father to identify case goals and **empower father to direct the course of the representation**.

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Engaging Father in the Court Process

Protocol for the Agency

- A. The caseworker should **send notice** to and advise father of all court proceedings.
- B. The caseworker should engage father about the importance of attending court proceedings and **encourage his attendance and participation**.
- C. The caseworker should advise father verbally and in writing of his right to be represented by an attorney and should **explain to father the importance of having legal representation**.
- D. The caseworker should **provide father with information on obtaining representation**.
- E. The caseworker should **provide father with copies of all court orders and addenda**.

Protocol for the Court

- A. When a father's work schedule will not permit him to attend court hearings, or if father resides out of the county or state, **the judge or master should allow the father to appear and participate by telephone**.
- B. If father is located, but does not attend court hearings, the **court should require him to be subpoenaed so that the court can ensure his appearance**.
- C. Judges and masters should **treat fathers with respect** and acknowledge his importance to the legal proceedings and to the child. The judge or master should **take time to explain issues** such as the nature of the proceedings, the importance of fathers, permanency issues, ASF A timelines, a father's legal rights, and the potential role of the paternal family with respect to the child.
- D. At every hearing, the judge or master should **give father the opportunity to address the court**.
- E. The judge or master should **ask father if he is satisfied with the services that have been provided** or if he needs additional services.
- F. At the conclusion of the hearing, the judge or master should **explain to father what is expected of him** with respect to the family service plan and visitation.
- G. The **court order should set forth in clear and concise language what is expected** of father and it should also reflect that father is required to participate

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H. in case planning and that the agency is required to include him in the case planning.

Protocol for the Attorney

- A. The attorney should **maintain contact with father** and communicate with him prior to the hearing to ensure that father received notice and to determine whether father will attend the hearing in person or by other means.
- B. The attorney **should explain the purpose of each hearing** and provide father with sufficient information to make informed decisions at each stage of the proceedings.
- C. The attorney should **work with father to identify case goals** and empower father to direct the course of representation.
- D. The attorney should **ensure that father's position is communicated** to the court.
- E. The attorney should **provide father with copies of all court orders** and explain the orders to father, if needed.

-The Administration of Pennsylvania Courts, 2011

