



Gladys Carrión, Esq.
Commissioner

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October 24, 2016

Dear Provider Agency Executive Director:

I am writing to inform you of proposed changes to Family Team Conferencing effective October 24, 2016 and invite you to review and submit comments.

Family Team Conferencing is one of three major components of Improved Outcomes for Children (IOC). After a planning and pilot phase, IOC was rolled out system-wide in 2009. IOC changed the relationship between ACS and the provider agencies by vesting the authority and responsibility for case management decisions with the provider agencies.

IOC has been described as a “three-legged stool” comprised of: 1) Case Management Delegation, 2) Enhanced Monitoring and 3) Family Team Conferencing. These systemic changes were made with the expectation that such shifts in practice would result in timelier, better-informed and more flexible decision-making which would positively impact the children and families in ACS’ care.

In 2014, ACS conducted an assessment of IOC’s effectiveness with the participation of over 100 stakeholders, including provider agency leadership and staff, families, the advocacy community, the Council of Family and Child Caring Agencies (COFCCA) and ACS staff.

Based on this assessment, ACS has begun to invest greater resources in supporting ongoing quality improvement in several ways, including:

- launching the Collaborative Quality Improvement (CoQI) initiative;
- increasing consultation and support on individual cases through ACS Senior Practice Consultants and increased staffing in ACS’ Office of Shared Response dedicated to provider agencies;
- increasing program-level technical assistance through the Division of Preventive Services’ Office of Preventive Technical Assistance (OPTA) and the Division of Family Permanency Services’ new Office of Strategic Program Support;
- expanding access to Clinical Consultants, and
- strengthening professional development and training through the ACS Workforce Institute.

At the same time, ACS has recognized that all of our child welfare programs should be better aligned with a shared lens of safety, permanency and well-being, no matter where a family or young person is in our continuum. To that end, in 2014, ACS integrated our child welfare divisions under a single umbrella to standardize practice, promote collaboration, and maximize resources.

Current FTC Practice

ACS recognizes the importance of collaborating with families and young people to identify and address their needs, while building on their strengths. Family Team Conferences (FTC) are important opportunities to bring together family members, young people, extended family, caseworkers, parent advocates, child advocates and support figures to develop plans to keep children safe, support well-being, and achieve permanency.

Each year, ACS and our provider partners facilitate thousands of FTCs across the child welfare continuum, including Initial Child Safety Conferences to permanency planning, preventive service, elevated risk, service termination, placement preservation, Trial Discharge and Final Discharge conferences - 17 different types of conferences in total. In some cases, ACS facilitates conferences, while others are facilitated by our providers.

Proposed FTC Changes

Using the foundation established over the last two years, ACS is planning to make four significant changes to Family Team Conferencing to improve operations and practices by streamlining conferences, strengthening the role of the facilitator, and ensuring greater support to our provider partners.

- **Integration of ACS' Family Team Conference Under Child Welfare Programs:** Currently, FTC staff operate within multiple ACS Divisions (e.g. Preventive, Child Protection, Foster Care) and only facilitate conferences within their respective program area. Through integration, ACS conference staff will be trained to facilitate conferences across the continuum so that the shared lens of safety, permanency, well-being, stability, and equity are consistently aligned no matter where a family is in the process. In addition, instead of multiple conference protocols, there will be one protocol and training curriculum for all facilitators, including provider agency partners.
- **Streamlining Conferences to Better Support Families and Providers:** Based on a review of Family Team Conferencing practice, conducted in close collaboration with preventive and foster care providers, ACS has identified fifteen (15) necessary conferences to support families during periods of heightened risk, planning, and/ or case changes. This ensures conferences are held at the most appropriate times and center on meaningful engagement with families. ACS will support providers by facilitating up to ten (10) of these conferences, including Trial and Final Discharge, and Service Termination. The attached policy and materials describe the range of changes to the conferencing continuum.

Please note in particular changes to Preventive STCs and Foster Care Trial and Final Discharge conferences. As described in the notice sent to providers on October 4, 6 and 7, 2016, ACS began facilitating Service Termination Conferences, as well as Trial and Final Discharge Conferences, involving high risk families as an interim step. Beginning on October 24th, as ACS proceeds toward full implementation of this policy:

- Preventive providers must request an ACS review to determine if an ACS-facilitated Service Termination Conference is required.
- ACS will facilitate all Trial and Final Discharge Conferences. Please note that providers must comply when the court orders a discharge, whether or not a discharge conference has been held. However, in such cases providers must proceed with ACS to organize a conference following the court ordered reunification to ensure needed services are in place.

The ACS facilitators will play an active role in supporting case planning, developing safety plans and referrals, as well as addressing challenges, particularly in complex cases. To that end, ACS has hired an additional 28 FTC facilitators, bringing the total to over 200 staff. Each borough will have a dedicated team to facilitate conferences across the continuum. In addition, providers will be able to better access ACS' Clinical and Investigative Consultant Units, as well as our relationships with other city partners.

- **Management Review Process:** In the event that consensus cannot be reached during an ACS-facilitated conference, ACS has revised the Management Review Process (excluding Child Safety Conferences) in order to guide resolution. The criteria for triggering a management review is when consensus cannot be reached; in instances involving issues of health, safety, and/or risk; or when there is a violation of policy or regulation. The Management Review Process sets forth a procedure for ACS and provider agencies to resolve concerns within their respective leadership in a timely manner.
- **Older Youth Conferencing:** Acknowledging the special needs of older youth, ACS's Office of Older Youth will now collaborate with foster care provider agencies to offer specialized support for conferencing. The Office of Older Youth will facilitate all conferences with a focus on a goal change to Another Planned Permanency Living Arrangement (APPLA) or for youth with a permanency goal of APPLA.

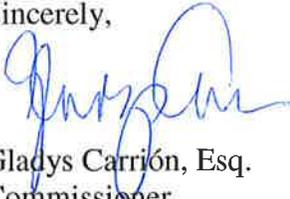
ACS is eager to implement these changes to strengthen our practice and build on lessons learned over the last decade to help foster the conditions that promote positive outcomes for families and young people, and provide

greater support for all parties. This is challenging work and through these improvements, we are confident that FTCs will ultimately be more responsive to our families and young people.

Over the last ten months, ACS has begun laying the foundation to implement these changes expected early this fall, including transitioning ACS conference facilitators under a single unit, convening integrated borough-based conference debriefings to discuss best practices, and developing trainings through the ACS Workforce Institute.

As an important stakeholder, I invite you and your staff to review the draft policy and protocol. We value your feedback and welcome your comments, via email to draft.policy.comments@acs.nyc.gov, no later than November 28, 2016. Comments can also be sent by mail to: ACS Policy Unit, 150 William St., 17th Floor, NY, NY 10038. Enclosed you will find the draft policy, *Child Welfare Programs' Integrated Family Team Conference Policy*, and its attachments.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Gladys Carrión", is written over the typed name.

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Enclosures