



MEMORANDUM

David A. Hansell
Commissioner

William Fletcher, LCSW
Deputy Commissioner

Frank Cresciullo
Chief Operating Officer
Division of Child Protection

150 William Street
18th Floor
New York, NY 10038

TO: ACS Division of Child Protection
Family Team Conferencing
Prevention Service Agencies
Foster Care Agencies
Parent Advocate Providers

FROM: Frank Cresciullo - Chief Operating Officer
Division of Child Protection

DATE: March 21, 2020

RE: Emergency Guidance for Family Team Conferencing During the
COVID19 Pandemic

In light of the current COVID19 pandemic, we are providing the following guidance to safeguard the wellbeing of the families and children we work with, as well as our conferencing and CPS staff and provider agency staff. This guidance will be updated as necessary in the coming weeks.

This emergency plan serves to provide guidelines and technical assistance regarding COVID19 safety precautions relative to family conferences facilitated by ACS.

Effective immediately, when a conference request is received, ACS Family Team Conferencing (FTC) schedulers and managers will arrange conferences to take place via video-conferencing or over the telephone for the following conference types:

- Initial Child Safety Conference (ICSC) related to emergency removals
- Elevated Risk Conference (ERC)
- Pre-Birth Planning Conference (PBP)
- Trial Discharge Conference (TD)
- Final Discharge Conference (FD)

ACS is suspending the following conference types:

- Post Removal Conferences
- Follow-up Child Safety Conferences.

In addition, until further notice foster care and prevention agencies may facilitate the following conference types without ACS involvement, and may use video-conferencing or conference calls to do so:

- 12 month Permanency Conferences
- Placement Stability/Disruption Conferences
- 30-45 day Planning Conferences
- Service Termination Conferences (ACS will continue to facilitate STC's for very high-risk families determined to need a change in service provider)

The exceptions to the above guidance are cases of severe abuse/neglect allegations such as sex/ physical abuse and domestic violence, and planned removals. In these types of cases, if we cannot determine if it is safe to conduct a conference via video or phone, then we must conduct a face to face conference.

For example:

- If we encounter families experiencing current domestic violence, either as alleged on the SCR report or discovered by CPS during the investigation, we want to ensure the safety and well-being of families during the Family Team Conferencing process. The ACS Case Practice Guideline requires a separate conference for each parent in cases of domestic violence. A conference involving a case of domestic violence can be held via video or phone conference when the survivor is residing in a DV shelter or the person causing harm is confirmed to be incarcerated and the CPS team has determined that it is safe to move forward with a video or telephone conference.
- In the case of a planned removal, a conference may be held via phone or video only when CPS staff can ensure that they have immediate access to children if the conference outcome is a remand. If CPS does not have immediate access to the children, then a face to face conference is required.

When a face to face conference is required and it is determined that the family is experiencing health-risk factors associated with COVID19, then the CPS team must determine the safest course of action. In such cases CPS should develop a course of action with their borough and central office leadership.

Advance Screening for when a face to face conference is required

The current intent of advance screening is to assess family members for symptoms, rather than exposure. As screening guidelines are subject to change, it is important to note that screening families for potential exposure is no longer needed or advised.

When scheduling a conference, the CPS assigned to the family must make diligent efforts to contact the family to pre-screen for any potential risk of COVID-19. The CPS should ask a parent or caregiver the following questions:

- Does anyone in your household have symptoms of a respiratory infection (e.g. cough, sore throat, fever, shortness of breath), or
- Has anyone in your household been directed to self-isolate or self-quarantine by a medical professional?

If the parent or caregiver answers “yes” to either of the above questions, the CPS should:

- Direct the parent or caregiver to remain at home with their household members and contact their medical professional, if they have one.
- If the parent or caregiver needs help finding contact information for their medical provider/doctor, case planners should try to assist by conducting online searches.
- If the family does not have a primary care doctor or has been unable to reach their doctor, the family should contact 311.

If the parent or caregiver answers “no” to the advance screening questions (i.e. reports that no one in the household has symptoms and they have not been directed to self-isolate or self-quarantine) then the CPS must arrange an in-person conference.

If Foster Care and Prevention agencies determine that facilitation by ACS is required for a specific family, ACS will provide such facilitation and, as with the above conferences, will do so via video-conferencing or over the telephone unless a face to face conference is required. The current Division of Prevention Services (DPS) business process remains in place. The Office of Preventive Technical Assistance (OPTA) will continue to provide support for the following categories:

- Child turned 18 (The only child in the home turns 18 and that child is not on trial discharge)
- Family moved out of jurisdiction (the family is not residing in the 5 boroughs)
- Whereabouts are unknown
- Children are placed in foster care

If a provider is concerned about a child's safety, are unable to gain access, and have reasonable cause to suspect a child is abused or maltreated, as a mandated reporter the provider should call the New York Statewide Central Register of Child Abuse and Maltreatment (SCR).

The Parent Advocate provider agencies will be alerted to ICSC’s by phone or e-mail as far in advance of the conference as possible; and Parent Advocates will participate in the ICSC (ideally including the pre-meeting with the parent) by phone or videoconference only until further notice.