

# LIFE VALUES IN ACTION

## *Leveraging Intensive Family Engagement*

LIFE

CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE

### Asking, Learning and Preparing

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FEFs (Family Engagement Facilitators) talk to families before case planning (LIFE) meetings to explore/discover their preferences. This is done throughout the case because a family may feel more comfortable expressing their preferences over time. Examples:

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Family, friends or other support people they would like to have at the meeting.

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The use of honorifics, how various family members prefer to be addressed.

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Religious/spiritual beliefs, practices, holidays, and expectations as they relate to preferences for meetings/gatherings.

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Needs for a youth who identified as part of the LGBTQ+ community (e.g., pronoun usage, restroom facilities, service providers).

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Parent's/youth's cultural background and their perspective.

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### Acknowledging and Incorporating

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During meeting, FEFs, providers and other participants incorporate the family's preferences and acknowledge the validity of other perspectives. This includes FEFs bringing knowledge, or inviting others with knowledge, about culturally-specific services and providers.

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Meeting began with a prayer as the parent requested during preparation. FEF invited the minister from the parent's church, as the parent had requested, and the minister led a prayer at the beginning of the meeting.

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Attendance at meetings reflected diverse and expanded definitions of family and kin.

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Meeting time was used to discuss cultural practices and preferences for youth in care (e.g., hair and skin care, dietary needs are legitimate and not "extras").

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Different methods of presenting information to families were used during the meeting (e.g., visuals, non-bureaucratic language).

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FEF de-centered white, middle class characterizations of a "home" and "parenting" to make room for other perspectives (e.g., "This doesn't have to look like the house with the picket fence. That's not what's meant by home-like setting.>").

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FEF conducted meeting in family's preferred language and had translator for English speaking participants.

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FEF made culture an explicit part of the discussion (e.g., put it on the agenda).

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FEF asked about and used preferred honorifics (e.g. addressing dad as Mr. [Name] rather than Dad).

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LIFE Team discussed the possibility of psychological evaluation being conducted by a culturally appropriate provider.

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FEF questioned the implications of dominant cultural expectations for community visits and cost/other hardships for parents (e.g., paying admissions to events or facilities; allowing the family to share unstructured time together).

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FEF/LIFE Team had knowledge of culturally-specific services and providers (e.g., languages spoken).

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## Identify Strengths

Family, friends or other support people they would like to have at the meeting.

Meeting agenda item was devoted to identifying parents' and children's strengths.

During meeting, FEF had posted on the wall a running list of Mom's and children's strengths.

## Express Hope, Effort and Progress

FEF and other providers highlighted what was going well for family, expressed their belief that the parent could achieve goals and expected outcomes, spoke positively about the future.

PM (Parent Mentor) highlighted parents' progress and attested to parents' strengths by referring to their own similar experiences. "I know how hard that is because I've been there."

Providers acknowledged the parent's role in the child's strengths, progress, and resilience during the meeting. "Your child is doing so well in foster care because of the kind of mother you've been to her."

FEF and A&D (alcohol and drug) treatment provider recognized parent's knowledge and expertise on A&D recovery as a functional strength (i.e., transferrable to other areas of life).

FEF modeled strengths-based language early in the meeting and the rest of the LIFE Team emulated them throughout the rest of the meeting.

Documentation in meeting notes when team acknowledges parent progress, concrete steps/efforts related to action items for parents (e.g., a list of places called about housing, not just that parent reports making calls every day).

## Redirect, Interrupt, and Reframe

FEF reframed a parent's rejection of/objection to a service as a strength.

Parent was acknowledged as "knowing her child" when they objected to therapy for her child with behavior problems in the foster home. "My child is acting out because she is traumatized by being away from me. I don't want her pathologized for normal behavior."

FEF acknowledged parent as an advocate for their child when they expressed anger & concern about their child's safety & needs.

LIFE Team recognized as a strength Mom's honest admission that she was not ready to have children back home, noting that it would prevent premature reunification and return to care. Planning focused on a reunification plan that would not overwhelm her.

Youth shared challenges in residential care and FEF reframed as making progress in self-knowledge and honest self-reflection without invalidating the youth's experience.

## Setting the Tone during Preparation

FEF asked everyone to bring at least one strength to the initial meeting.

FEF talked to caseworkers outside of meetings about their frustrations with parent and challenges in the case, giving the caseworker a chance to be heard. FEF pointed out something positive about the parent that the caseworker may not have known and empathized with their challenges to help them come to meetings with a more positive outlook.

Families need to know, understand, and have time to prepare for the topics being discussed.

FEF spoke with youth in advance of meeting to get their thoughts on agenda, action items, etc.

Before meetings, FEF (or PM) and Mom wrote down a list of things Mom wanted to talk about and brought it to the meeting to help Mom stay focused.

FEF ensured family's questions were answered as thoroughly as possible, or asked others to define and explain the meaning of agency terms and acronyms (and discouraged their use).

FEF anticipated confusion, asked clarifying questions, summarized & rephrased, asked if question was answered, etc.

## Creating Space and Opportunity for Choice

FEF invited parents to speak first. Throughout the meeting, FEF asked if parents agreed or had any questions before moving on to the next topic.

LIFE team worked to find places where there was room for parent or youth choice, and then presented the opportunity during the meeting. (e.g., youth decided where they wanted to go to school and discussed challenges and benefits.)

LIFE Team asked youth about what worked for them regarding visits with parents.

Differences between permanency options are explained to youth and they are given the opportunity to think about, decide and express what they want.

FEF asked youth if she wanted to keep Mom on the meeting invite list and youth said yes.

FEF acknowledged that even though Mom's parental rights were terminated she can still be involved in the youth's life. However, it was the youth's choice how involved she wanted her to be.

Youth was asked about their schedule, needs and preferences, and these are considered when meetings and other things were being planned.

Parents & youth participated in meetings in person, over the phone or by having a provider (e.g., FEF, caseworker, CASA) share their input for them.

## Supporting Family Voice

Family voice is supported through preparation, encouragement, and acknowledgement. Parents and youth have the experience of being heard.

FEF was creative and persistent in developing a relationship with the youth.

FEF treated parents as experts on their own children.

- Encouraged parent to share information with foster parents to offer insight into child's behavior.
- Asked Mom if she would like to give an update about her children, thereby acknowledging that she knew her children better than anyone else and understood their needs.

FEFs acknowledged parents' contributions to the discussion, validated parents' experiences, and allowed time for Dad to respond.

## Documenting Family Voice in Meeting Notes

Quotes from parents exemplifying a shift in thinking or attitude.

Parent requests for services or asking when/if a referral had been made or a service will start (documents when a delay is on the DHS side).

When parent requests are granted or denied (e.g., a change in visitation plan).

## Preparation: Knowing What's Going to Happen

FEF met with parents to plan and prepare for an upcoming meeting.

FEF discussed ground rules at beginning of meeting to help parents understand how meetings work.

Having agenda posted during the meeting allows parent to know what is coming.

Caseworker clarified how the parent could stay involved in planning and in their child's life after the case moved to the concurrent plan. The DHS process for referrals for services after court approved concurrent plan was clarified, and the parent was encouraged to continue working towards getting healthy so that they could have a healthier relationship with their child.

LIFE Team discussed with the family what the Citizen's Review Board would be like the next day.

FEF asked caseworker to explain what parent could expect to hear at court.

FEF checked in with parents to see if they had questions and understood what was happening.

To build trust and set boundaries, PMs are clear with parent about what they can and can't do.

LIFE Coordinator told people who they are and what they are doing, informed parents they would get a copy of the notes.

## Control Whenever Possible

FEF learned where family was most comfortable and moved meeting to that location.

FEF provided the opportunity to contribute to ground rules to promote a sense of control and safety.

Caseworker, in Spanish, told Dad she was going to sit on the other side of the table from him because his attorney will likely want to sit next to him.

Relationships between relatives and youth were discussed when planning for visits, information sharing.

Parents & youth were asked about/encouraged to invite people they would like to have at meeting.

Parents & youth were asked if they wanted separate meetings, who they would like to attend.

## Emotional Support/Psychological Safety

LIFE staff smiled and welcomed family when they come to meetings.

PM and other support people attended Mom's meeting, provided emotional support and helped to get clarity around steps toward reunification with her children.

FEF set up pre-meetings with caseworker and PM, which

- Allowed PM to know about, prepare parents for, and support them through difficult discussions.
- Alerted caseworkers to parent's questions so they could come to the meeting with information.
- Provided opportunity for FEF to talk to caseworkers to prevent tension during meeting.

In anticipation of a challenging meeting, FEF made time in the agenda for processing emotions.

FEF kept meetings on track, interrupted negativity and focused on moving things forward.

FEF and other providers validated families' strong feelings. They made it clear that strong feelings are OK, and encouraged breaks if needed. PMs accompanied parents when they needed to leave the room or take a break.

Posted ground rules included "permission to take breaks" and "solution-focused, not blaming."

FEF checked in with parent when they seemed overwhelmed, encouraged them to talk about how they were doing, and asked if they needed to take a break.

After relationships and trust developed over time, FEF made space for parents to talk about their struggles and how team could help/problem solve.

FEF framed concurrent planning as a backup plan that any parent would be wise to make in case something happened that would prevent them from parenting. PM said, "Everyone needs a backup plan."

When youth was confronted in a meeting about something foolish he had done, he felt supported and more relaxed when FEF invited others to share foolish things that they had done as adolescents.