

DSS Policy and Procedure Guide

Division 03: Child Welfare

Chapter 12: Staffings, MDITs, Ice Breakers, TDMs

Item 004: **Ice Breaker Meetings**

Suggested changes send to: [DSS Child Welfare QA](#)

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All Child Welfare Programs: Training Materials

Policy

It is the policy of the Department of Social Services (DSS) to initiate family reunification and permanency planning as soon as possible through the use of “Ice Breaker” meetings. Ice Breakers are a first step in family engagement, as well as, the permanency teaming process. Optimally, these meetings will be the foundation for the decision-making team that will be involved with the family through out the Family Reunification process.

Purpose

The purpose of the Ice Breaker is to ease the child’s transition into a new home through the exchange of information about the child between the birth parent and the resource family and begin the permanency team dynamic between all involved parties, Social Worker (SW), Birth Parent, Resource Family, and youth, when applicable.

In addition, it is the beginning of building a partnership between the birth parent, resource family, and Social Worker.

Definition

Ice Breaker - refers to an initial team meeting between the birth parent, resource family, and the Social Worker.

Procedure

When to Hold an Ice Breaker:

- A child is initially placed in out-of-home care (foster or kinship). The meeting shall be held within **four** to **seven** calendar days of the out-of-home care placement.
- There is a placement change for the child.
- When a child is placed in a group home or residential treatment facility.
- When siblings are placed with different caregivers, each caregiver should have an Ice Breaker meeting with the parent(s). If multiple children are placed with one caregiver, one Ice Breaker meeting can be held with the caregiver and parent(s) to address all children in the home.

Scheduling an Ice Breaker:

- The Emergency Response Social Worker will give information on the Ice Breaker meeting to the parent if there is a decision to place the child in protective custody. The parent will be given a copy of the Ice Breaker Meeting Guide to review and bring with them to the Ice Breaker. The Emergency Response worker will put a flag on the 6169 form, requesting the Service Coordinator to schedule an Ice Breaker.
- When a child is initially placed in out of home care and the parents are invited to the Team Decision Making (TDM), the Ice Breaker will be introduced at the initial removal TDM. Parents will be given written information on the Ice Breaker process while they are waiting for their TDM to begin. The TDM group will briefly discuss the purpose of the Ice Breaker to the birth parent. The TDM facilitator will note on the TDM decision sheet that an Ice Breaker will be held.
- The parents will meet with the Service Coordinator as soon as possible after the Detention Hearing to schedule services, visits, and the Ice Breaker. The Service Coordinator will schedule the parents' Ice Breaker 30 minutes before the first visit between the parent and child. The Service Coordinator will contact the assigned Social Worker to tell them when the Ice Breaker is going to be held.

Location of Ice Breaker:

- The initial Ice Breaker Meetings in Emergency Response will be held at the D.S.S. office.
- Ice Breakers held after the case is transferred from Emergency Response may be held in the community or the resource family's home.

Social Worker's Role in the Ice Breaker:

- Ensure the Ice Breaker Meeting has been scheduled with the parent(s), caregiver, and when appropriate the child.
- Invite the Foster Family Agency (FFA) Social Worker, if applicable.
- Inform all participants about the purpose of the meeting, expectations, and roles including how they may participate to make the meeting successful.
- Facilitate the meeting, keeping the discussion focused on the child's needs.
- Allow everyone present an opportunity to speak.
- Establish and maintain a friendly, informal, child-focused environment that is conducive to forming a positive relationship between the birth parent(s) and resource families to appropriately share information about their children.
- Encourage birth parent(s) to appropriately share information about their children.
- Document the meeting as a contact in Child Welfare Services/Case Management System (CWS/CMS).
- Provide a copy of the Ice Breaker Meeting Guide to all participants.
- **If there is a need for an interpreter for the Ice Breaker, the ER SW will arrange for an interpreter.**

- The ER SW will ask the interpreter at the TDM if they can interpret at the Ice Breaker.
- If the interpreter at the TDM is not available to interpret at the Ice Breaker, the ER SW will contact the Service Coordinator who will use the Fresno County approved interpreter list to contact an interpreter.
- If the Service Coordinator can not locate an interpreter for the Ice Breaker, they will notify the ER SW. The ER SW will ask a certified bilingual SW in ER, a certified bilingual SW/SW Aide in Central Services Desk, or a certified bilingual office assistant in ER to interpret at the Ice Breaker.

Supervisor's Role:

- Supervisors will monitor their Social Workers to ensure an Ice Breaker is scheduled and held.
- Supervisors will model and coach their Social Workers on the Ice Breaker process.
- Supervisors will assist in facilitating the Ice Breaker if their Social Worker is not available.
- Supervisors will observe their Social Workers facilitate an Ice Breaker and interview participants after the Ice Breaker, as a step in their quality assurance role.

Ice Breaker Process

The Social Worker will use the Ice Breaker Meeting Guide to facilitate the meeting. The structure of the meeting is as follows:

- Introductions
- Purpose of meeting
- Ground Rules
- Complete Ice Breaker Meeting Guide
- The Social Worker will ensure that all participants receive a copy of the Ice Breaker Meeting Guide

After the Ice Breaker Meeting

Document the Ice Breaker meeting, or why it didn't occur, in the Contact Notebook in CWS/CMS. Note the following information:

- Children who are the focus of the meeting.
- Attendees.
- Participation of the resource parent and parent(s): as demonstrated by their openness to share about the child and themselves, body language, involvement in conversation.
- Document **in the narrative and in the appropriate notebooks** any medical, behavioral, educational information not previously disclosed.
- **In the Contact use the Associated Services tab to add a service (click the "+")**

- Service Category-“Family Engagement Efforts”
- Service Type-“Meeting with Foster Parents and Family”
- Service Recipient-Click the “+” and select the Parent(s) and/or Child(ren)’s Name(s)
- Provider-Select the Service Provider “radio” button
- Provider Name
 - Name-Click Search Icon
 - Service Provider Category-Family Preservation
 - Agency Name-Icebreaker
 - Click OK
 - Select Provider Name-”Fresno Icebreaker”
- If an “Icebreaker” is offered but the parent declines the offer do the previous steps but also click the “radio” button “Offered but not delivered” and narrate the reason.
- Complete the “Ice Breaker meeting Guide” Template (fillable version) and import it into CWS/CMS.

Data Collection:

- Supervisors will review the case file prior to transfer to Family Reunification to ensure the Ice Breaker has been held, or is scheduled. The case will not be approved for transfer until the Ice Breaker is scheduled, if deemed appropriate.
- Program Managers will review Ice Breakers in monthly conferences with Supervisors. Supervisors will be able to discuss in conferences the number of families that had Ice Breakers, the number of families who did not have Ice Breakers, and the reason for not having an Ice Breaker.

Attachments:

- Ice Breaker Desk Guide (Attachment “A”)
 - Ice Breaker Meeting Guide (Attachment “B”)
- Click [here](#) to access a “fillable” version of the Ice Breaker Meeting Guide Template.

Ice Breaker Desk Guide

Reasons to Hold an Ice Breaker

1. Reassure the child that their birth parent(s) and the resource family are working together to care for them.
2. Give the child permission to adjust positively to their placement while maintaining their relationship with their parents.
3. Reduce the parents' fears about their child's placement and well-being.
4. Reinforce the birth parent's expertise as "parent of the child", and establish the resource family as part of the team working to support the child and reunify the family.
5. Share information that will help the resource family support the child in care.
6. Provide an opportunity to build a supportive working relationship among the child's birth parent(s), the resource family, and the Social Worker.
7. Initiate a team that will work together on behalf of the child and birth family
8. Provide an opportunity for the resource family and the Social Worker to obtain information regarding the child from the experts, the birth parents.
9. Reduce the likelihood of placement disruptions.

Expected Outcomes from the Ice Breaker

1. Children will adjust more readily to the out-of-home care placement
2. Ice Breakers will facilitate the continuity and preservation of family relationships
3. Ice Breakers will decrease the time to achieve family reunification, or permanency.
4. There will be increased stability in the child's placement and school performance when an Ice Breaker is held.
5. Improve the child's/youth's school performance.

Special Considerations for Ice Breakers

- A. There will be occasions when Social Workers need to consult with their supervisors on whether or not it is appropriated to hold an Ice Breaker. They will consider the following:

1. Is the birth parent(s) able to remain focused on the child?
2. Does the birth parent(s)' mental illness hinder him/her from actively participating in the meeting?
3. Is the birth parent(s) available (incarcerated, whereabouts unknown).
4. Does the birth parent(s) arrive to the Ice Breaker under the influence of drugs and/or alcohol?

5. Can the birth parent(s) be prepared to present themselves in a positive manner at the time the Ice Breaker is held?
6. If it is determined not to hold an Ice Breaker, flag the case and give the reason why. The Family Reunification worker will reassess if an Ice Breaker can be held at a later date.

Ice Breaker Meeting Guide

Date: _____ **Case Name:** _____

Child(ren)'s Name:	Date of Birth	Child Present at Icebreaker
		<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
		<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
		<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No

Participants:

***Please remember that this meeting is to discuss the needs of the child. It is not to discuss case planning, services, or arrange visitation.*

Introductions~ Parent shares with Resource Parent their child's likes, dislikes, special needs, etc.

1. Name or Nicknames:

2. Food Likes/Dislikes:

3. Comfort Items: (bedtime story, songs, prayer, etc.)

4. Sleep Patterns:

5. Clothing: (favorite things to wear, needs help dressing)

6. Dental/Medical History: (shot records, allergies, appointments, glasses, medications)

7. Behavior: (specific behaviors the child may exhibit nightmares, bed wetting, temper tantrums)

8. School: (any books that need to be returned, reports/projects due, favorite teacher, favorite subject)

9. Religious Affiliation:

10. Friends in school or in the neighborhood:

11. Any additional things that will make the child more comfortable while they are in out of home care.

12. Resource Parent discusses their home, family, basic home routine, rules in the home, what brought them into fostering parenting.