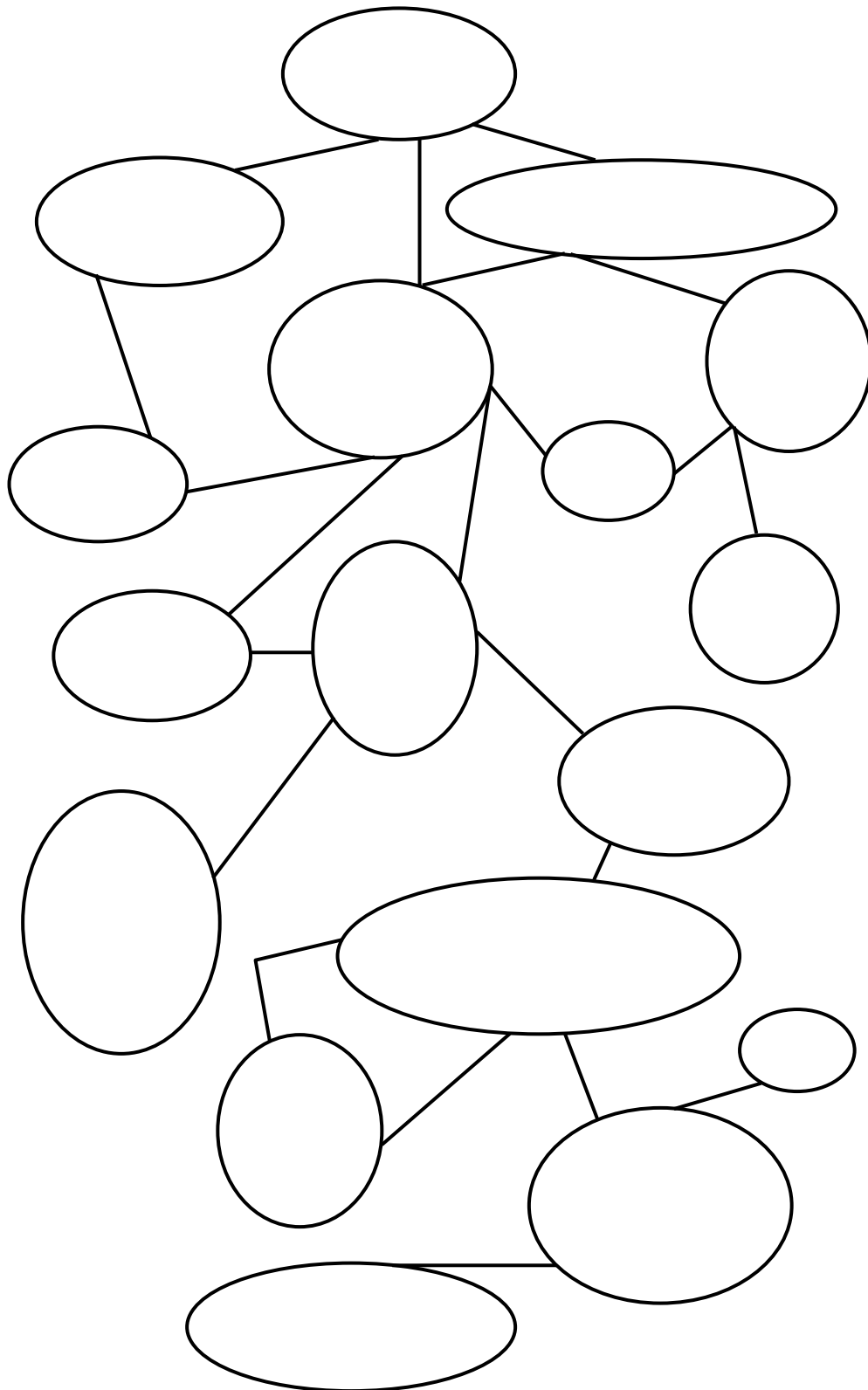


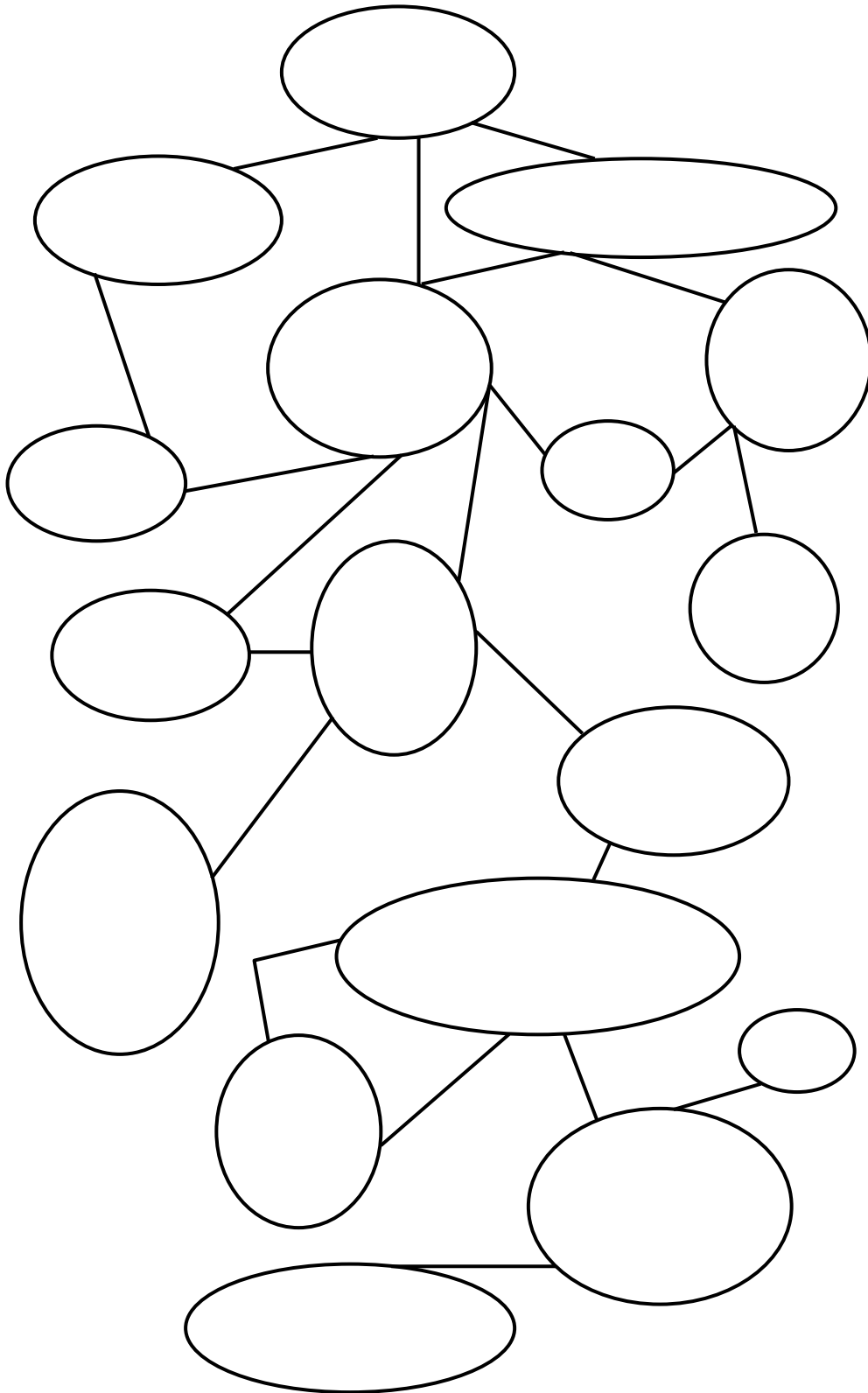
BRAINSTORMING TOOL

Families Involved in the Child Welfare System



BRAINSTORMING TOOL

My Family



Your Family's Influence

The purpose of this exercise is to explore our own family backgrounds and traditions, and their impact on our current social work practice.

1. Who do you consider to be in your family?
2. What is the cultural background of your family (race/ethnicity, religion, etc.)?
3. How do you see your cultural background affecting decision making in your family?
4. How has kinship care played a role in your family?
5. What traditions make your family unique?
6. How did/does your family make decisions?
7. How have your family experiences impacted your life and work? How do they impact your views of Family Group Decision Making?
8. If a child in your family required out-of-home placement, how would your family make decisions regarding this?

YOUR FAMILY GROUP CONFERENCE

<i>Element</i>	<i>What would you want the FGC coordinator to know about your family?</i>	<i>How would your family influence this element?</i>
<i>Preparation</i> (who, where, when, food, linguistics, traditions, family leadership, invitations, information)		
<i>Conference</i> (needs, seating, information sharing, private family time, family leadership, family dynamics, conflict, decision making style)		
<i>Follow-up</i> (monitor/contact person, plan implementation, review FGCs)		
<i>Inclusion of Family Culture</i> (threading it throughout the process)		

ESCOBAR-PEREZ FAMILY SCENARIO

Sandy, 30, has been involved with the child welfare system throughout her life. Recently, a number of circumstances have recently come to your attention regarding her four children. You and your supervisor will have to make some decisions as to what to do next.

As a result of concerns raised by neonatal staff at the time of her daughter, Teresa's birth (now 8 months,) a public health nurse has been regularly visiting Sandy. The nurse has now contacted you because of Teresa's failure to put on weight. Teresa lies lethargically in her bed and seldom moves or cries. A doctor has examined Teresa and confirms that she is significantly underweight and developmentally delayed. The nurse suspects that when she is not in the home, Teresa is given little comforting, is not regularly fed, and is left unattended for extended periods.

Sandy's son, Juan Carlos, aged 12, was brought to the office by Sandy and his stepfather, Tomás. You were called to the reception area when it was filled with angry shouting from both Sandy and Tomás. They are blaming "the welfare" for all of their problems. You have an interview with them in which they tell you that Juan Carlos has caused major damage to the family car by pouring sugar in the gas tank—the latest in a string of offenses, which include truancy, experimenting with drugs (marijuana) and alcohol, and theft.

Juan Carlos has involvement with juvenile probation, initiated by the school after he came to school "high" after partaking in a drug/alcohol session with some friends (whose parents are also concerned about their children's behavior and who phoned Sandy to tell her that it was Juan Carlos who initiated these parties.) The couple tells you that Juan Carlos is no longer wanted, and upon his release from the detention center, should be sent to live with "his real father."

You have been working with Rosalía, Sandy's eldest child, aged 14, for some time—initially because she was refusing to do what her parents wanted around the home, and they asked for your assistance to control her. She appears to you to be a very unhappy girl. She says she is not permitted by her stepfather to have any friends and is required to dress and cut her hair in a style that deeply embarrasses her. She wants to go and live with her birth father's family but has been banned from having any contact with them. She is currently confined to her bedroom for two weeks after tattooing herself on the face and hands. She has confided with you that, unless she can leave home, she intends to take her own life.

Sandy and Tomás's daughter, Luisa, is age 10. The guidance counselor at Bear Valley Elementary contacted you with two concerns. Luisa was seen by the Physical Education teacher to have long, diagonal bruises on her back. The bruises appeared to be a week or two old and consistent with a beating with a stick or strap. Despite all attempts to find out from Luisa how she got the bruising, she insists that she doesn't know. Both Sandy and Tomás insist they were unaware of the injury until it was brought to their attention by you. The second concern raised by the school was that Luisa's report card indicates she has had 14 changes of school—enrollment has been organized by many different people due to

previous foster care placements. Although a bright child, Luisa is behind grade level because of the frequent moves.

Currently, Rosalia lives at home with Sandy and Tomas; Juan Carlos was placed in a youth detention center one week ago, and he is due to be released in two weeks; and Luisa and Teresa are living together in a non-relative foster home, where they have been since the reports regarding Teresa's development and Luisa's bruises were made (within days of each other) one month ago.

PREPARING THE PLAYERS – GROUP 1

Preparing and Working with Parents and Stepparents

After the Escobar-Perez case was referred to an FGC, one of the first tasks of the coordinator is to work with the parents (in this case, initially, Sandy and Tomás) to develop a list of invitees for the FGC.

Discuss some strategies that could be used in the following scenarios.

1. Sandy feels ashamed and embarrassed that the public child welfare agency is involved in her family's life. She doesn't want too many people invited to attend.

2. In talking with Sandy and Tomás about "widening the circle" of invitees to include the paternal relations of the two eldest children, Rosalía, 14 and Juan Carlos, 12, they indicate that she's had minimal contact with, and received no support from, Eduardo's extended family over the past 10 years.

3. Sandy is afraid that if Eduardo, Rosalía and Juan Carlos's father, can be located and wants to come to the FGC that:
 - a) It will cause more disruption and confusion in the kids' lives (the "walk in, walk out" factor.)
 - b) There will potentially be violent outbursts between Tomás and Eduardo.

4. Even though Sandy and Tomás don't particularly like each other's friends, they are inclined to include them for the FGC. Work with them before the FGC on including/excluding friends from the "private family time" stage.

PREPARING THE PLAYERS – GROUP 2

Preparing Children

Three of the children, Rosalía Perez (14), Juan Carlos Perez (12), and Luisa Escobar (10), are old enough to be involved in the FGC.

1. Luisa is a shy, somewhat reserved girl. To fully participate in and feel safe during the FGC, she will need some additional support. Discuss strategies to involve Luisa that keep her feeling safe and secure.
2. Rosalía is depressed, has suicidal ideations, and is difficult to engage in conversation. She wants to attend the FGC, but has said she's not going to talk; she only wants to hear what's being said. How do you specifically prepare her for the FGC? Knowing that she is suicidal, if Rosalía wants to leave the FGC, what do you do as the Coordinator?
3. Juan Carlos doesn't want to attend the FGC to hear how everybody hates him and blames him for all of the family's problems. How do you explain the process to Juan Carlos so that he reconsiders the value of his attendance, not only for himself, but also for others?
4. How do you prepare the other invitees to ensure that they are sensitive to the children's feelings and presence at the FGC?

PREPARING THE PLAYERS – GROUP 3

Preparing and Working with Professionals

There are a number of professionals involved with this family. In addition to the FGC Coordinator, there are the DSS caseworker, probation officer, public health nurse, and school guidance counselors.

In preparing these professionals, how do you:

1. Explain their role during the FGC?
2. Underscore the importance of succinctly and respectfully presenting their concerns to the family during the FGC?
3. Help them to express their “critical concerns” to the family so that the family understands what their plan must address (avoid “setting up” the family)?
4. Work with the DSS caseworker (who has never referred a case to an FGC before) around being open to the family’s plan and using his/her veto power sparingly?
5. Redirect a professional during the information stage when s/he starts presenting their opinions and ideas for the plan?

PREPARING THE PLAYERS – GROUP 4

Preparing Extended Family Members

The Escobar-Perez family has many branches. For this FGC, Sandy, Tomás, and Eduardo's extended family members are going to be represented.

1. What can you do during the preparation phase to encourage feelings of cooperation between the various extended family members who don't know each other very well?
2. What can you do at the beginning of the FGC to increase the comfort level between the various extended family members that can also serve to limit finger pointing?
3. During the preparation phase, Tomás's brother, Estéban, continues to bring up the past and that he never approved of his brother's marriage to Sandy. The Lord, though, wants him to attend the FGC to protect those children. How do you work with Estéban so that he focuses on the present and not the past?
4. While this FGC will have its awkward moments, since many folks do not know one another, and those who are familiar with one another haven't seen each other in a long time, what can you do as the Coordinator to capitalize on this family's concern for the children to enhance their communication and connectedness after the meeting?
5. How do you work with some of Eduardo's extended family, who has had virtually no contact with him in over 10 years, and who are upset about his "running off" and his unwillingness to take care of his children?

PREPARING THE PLAYERS – GROUP 5

Preparing and Involving Incarcerated Persons

Arnold Sundell, Sandy's youngest brother, is incarcerated in the state prison for aggravated robbery. He has spent most of his adult life in custody as a consequence of his persistent sexual and violent offending.

1. What are some reasons for including him or his perspective in the FGC?
2. What could you do to ensure that he or his perspective is represented at the FGC?
3. How would you explain the purpose of, and the reason for, holding the FGC?
4. What if, upon approaching this person about the FGC, he becomes verbally hostile and isn't interested in participating?
5. Arnold sends a letter to be read at the meeting that both dredges up the past and shows his love for his family. When and how is the best way to incorporate his "say" during the FGC?

(Group 5 continued) *Preparing and Involving Persons with Disabilities and/or Language Barriers*

Big Ed, Eduardo's father, is partially deaf.

1. Upon approaching Eduardo Perez, Sr. about attending the FGC, you discover that you are having trouble communicating because of his deafness. What would you do?
2. How can you accommodate for Eduardo, Sr.'s hearing difficulties if he were to attend the FGC?
3. You find, as you start preparing Eduardo, Sr. and his wife for the FGC, that she does most of the talking for him, since he often doesn't hear your questions the first time. It is difficult to get answers from him, as he passively allows his wife to talk for him. How do you get him more involved?
4. Upon further conversation, Eduardo, Sr. reveals that he does not believe that professionals should be involved in family concerns. If there are going to be social workers, probation officers, and school counselors at the FGC, he doesn't want to attend. How do you explain the pivotal role professionals play in the process?

PREPARING THE PLAYERS – GROUP 6

Preparing and Involving Support Networks and Other Key People

The possible people to invite to the family meeting include two of Sandy's friends, two of Tomás's friends, and Sandy's foster parents.

1. When you approach Sandy's friends about the FGC, they both immediately defend Sandy, saying no matter what happens, they would not support Tomás taking the children. In fact, they say, Sandy should just take the children and "skip town." How do you respond?
2. When you approach Tomás's friends, they tell you that they think Tomás is honest and hard working, but they don't want to get in the middle of any "marital problems." How do you respond, and what do you think they could contribute to the FGC?
3. How do you explain the importance of the "private family time" stage of the FGC to individuals who the family may decide not to include in this discussion?
4. Some "support people" may feel that if they aren't welcome to develop the plan, that they shouldn't take time out of their busy day to attend this FGC. How can you explain the important role of these individuals?

SITUATIONS THAT REQUIRE CAREFUL CONSIDERATION PRIOR TO MOVING FORWARD WITH AN FGDM*

When a Coordinator is unable to:

- Invest necessary time to adequately prepare participants.
- Gain buy-in to support widening of the circle.
- Engage participants in embracing philosophy.
- Set aside Coordinator bias.
- Gain participant “buy in” on FGDM focus on child.
- Get informed consent of participants.
- Access adequate support for participant to insure their safety (e.g., no one is willing to take role of support person.)
- Create a physically and emotionally safe FGDM meeting environment.
- Maintain control of FGDM process (e.g., FGDM meeting swarmed by the uninvited extended family of foster parents.)

When a Referring Social Worker is unable/unwilling to:

- Articulate and define a clear purpose.
- Refrain from delineating predetermined outcome.
- Be honest about their or the system’s bottom line.
- Present all the salient case information/facts that are relevant to a safety concern.
- Empower family in the FGDM process.

When a parent(s) or other participant(s) is (are) unable/unwilling to:

- Refrain from making active threats.
- Refrain from physical or emotional violence.
- Make an informed consent to participation.
- Be capable of clear thought/reason (unless they have identified a support person to act on their behalf.)
- Attend the FGDM without being under the influence of alcohol or other drugs.
- Attend (when multiple key participants are unavailable for a variety of reasons.)

Other situations:

- No well-functioning family able to be identified after an exhaustive search (e.g., extended family members have active and chronic mental health concerns present.)

* Developed in partnership with Michigan FIA, and The Skillman and Grand Rapids Foundations, 2001.

Preparation Steps Prior to the Conference

Caseworker and Guardian ad Litem:

- ❖ Prepare to briefly discuss reason for case involvement with human services.
- ❖ Acknowledge client's and family's strengths and accomplishments.
- ❖ Clearly and specifically identify concerns and protective issues about the case that need to be addressed.
- ❖ Provide information about available resources that could help in addressing the identified concerns.
- ❖ Communicate any bottom-lines that would need to be included in the family plan for your approval.
- ❖ After family plan is presented, be prepared to clearly communicate your approval of the plan, or if you disapprove, explain your concerns and stance.

Preparing Family Members:

- ❖ Review the Family Group Conference process.
- ❖ Review family's specific roles at the Family Group Conference.
- ❖ Review how the case came to the Department and why it was referred for a FGC.
- ❖ Review initial goals of Family Group Conference and clarify if they may have additional goals for the conference.
- ❖ Find out if there are any additional family members, friends of family, support people and/or support systems.
- ❖ Get input regarding time and place for conference as well as for foods and rituals.

Preparing Service Providers:

- ❖ Review referral with providers, get their perspectives of case situation.
- ❖ Obtain names of family members, and others connected to child/family.
- ❖ Are there any restraining or no contact orders?
- ❖ Review Family Group Conference process.
- ❖ Get buy off to proceed with Family Group Conference.
- ❖ Review what their specific roles will be at Family Group Conference.
- ❖ Clarify goals of the Family Group Conference.
- ❖ Prepare them to present:
 - How the case came to the Department (caseworker)
 - The strengths and accomplishments of the family
 - Issues/concerns/needs of the children
 - Bottom lines