



OKANAGAN NATION ALLIANCE

~Family Decision Making~

What is Family Decision Making?

Family Decision Making (FDM) is a circle where members of the child's family come together with significant others and members of the child's community who are, or might become, involved to assist the family to develop a plan to care for their children.

The circle is arranged and facilitated by an FDM coordinator. The family and FDM coordinator make the final decision about who participates, and it can be anyone who the family identifies as important to the child/ren.

What are the Strengths of FDM?

FDM promotes and develops the capacity of Indigenous families and communities to care for and protect their children, while supporting child and family development. FDM aims to avoid the need for court involvement, and ensures the family knows about and has access to resources and services that can help. FDM supports relationship building by helping families work out problems together. FDM recognizes and acknowledges the right and capacity of Indigenous families and communities to care for and plan for their children. FDM respects and understands Indigenous ways of being and knowing.

Referrals:

The program receives referrals from Bands, Friendship Centers, Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD) social workers, community organizations, or parents and family members.

Note: Children or families who are deemed to be at high risk prior to MCFD involvement will be placed in higher priority.

Roles:

- The FDM Coordinator is independent of the Band, Friendship Centre and Ministry of Children and Family Development. The coordinator works with participants to ensure balancing of the circle and that people can come together in a good way. The coordinator will also describe the process, legal process and options available.
- The role of the family at the FDM is to actively participate in planning for the children's safety, wellness, permanency, culture and any other area decided by the family to be appropriate and important. It also may include supporting the parents in developing a wellness plan.
- The formal support role at an FDM is to provide information and offer consultation and resources to family members.
- In situations where there is MCFD involvement, the MCFD Social Workers role is to agree to, support and resource family plans when all safety concerns have been addressed.

Family Decision Making is conducted in a circle format.

“The Circle process brings people together to collectively plan, make decisions and commit to action that will ensure the well-being of Aboriginal children, youth, families and communities” (Aboriginal Policy and Practice Framework, 2016).

Since this is a family-driven process the format is dependent on the family and community culture.

1st Round—Opening

Prayer / Smudge / Song
 Introductions
 Confidentiality
 Ground Rules

2nd Round - Information Sharing

Family Strengths
 Risks/Concerns
 Questions
 Sharing

3rd Round—Private Family Time

Discuss the Concerns
 Decide on a plan

4th Round—The Plan

Present the Plan
 Discuss the Plan
 Questions/Get
 Clarification
 Agreement to the Plan

Family-Driven Process:

The family will determine:

- Who will be invited to participate
- The location and food to be served at the meeting
- The culture and ceremony to be incorporated
- The use of any co-facilitators
- Elder involvement
- Support People
- Follow Up

Preparation:

The coordinator will meet with all participants to prepare them to attend the family circle. They will describe the process, outline what is understood as the needs of the children and the purpose of the circle, explain the rule of confidentiality, describe who else is attending and ensure the participants feel safe participating. The coordinator will work to ensure the family understands all the options available to them, understands the legal processes if applicable, is able to come together in a good, safe way and that the circle is balanced.

- FDM’s are not designed or expected to resolve every issue that a family may face.
- There may be a follow-up family meeting to review the plan and see how everything is going.
- FDM follows family process, as a result the circle itself may last anywhere from a couple of hours to one/ two days depending on the issues and how quickly everyone can reach an agreement.
- A written copy of the plan will be sent to all participants who attended the Circle.

History and Values of FDM

This program has evolved into what is now the Family Decision Making program to ensure that the Syilx perspectives and Syilx way is enacted, thereby strengthening families and creating a better future for all Indigenous children in Okanagan territory. This program is based on the principles of Enowkin'wixw, where family roles are viewed as equal in establishing common ground. The circle ceremony has protocols and is a sacred space to acknowledge differing perspectives. The Okanagan Nation Alliance is committed to ensuring that our captik^wł (stories), our nsyilxcən language, and our Syilx teachings continue to shape our path forward. It has always been the practice of the Nation to take care of and ensure that all children within our Nation and territory are protected and safe. For this reason, the program services all Indigenous children within the territory.

Program Goals

- To reduce the number of Indigenous children who are removed from their homes.
- To prevent occurrence and re-occurrence of child abuse and neglect.
- To strengthen and extend the support networks within and around the family.
- To divert cases from the court thereby reducing delays in decision-making and planning.
- To support the Indigenous community to build capacity and to create opportunities to respond to the needs of children and families. More Indigenous children will be placed in their community rather than in the care of strangers, as has been done in the past.

Want to make a Referral?

Please contact the Family Decision Making Program: FDM.Referral@syilx.org

Questions?

Please reach out to Brittany Wolsey, FDM Team Lead at FDM.Lead@syilx.org or 250-878-4085.

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