



Nebraska Office of Dispute Resolution Collaborative Judicial Child Welfare Practices

Collaborative judicial child welfare practices are court-referred facilitative approaches that can be used to achieve permanency for children, improve timeliness, engagement of families in decision-making, and strengthened family systems throughout the child welfare or juvenile case.

- ⇒ Immediately upon removal – protective custody hearing
 - ⇒ Pre-adjudication
 - ⇒ Pre-disposition
 - ⇒ 12-month review hearing
 - ⇒ Pre-termination of parental rights
 - ⇒ Other key decision-making points

Types of collaborative practices available through Nebraska's Office of Dispute Resolution– approved mediation centers*:

- ❑ **Pre-hearing conference facilitation – initial removal (PHC):** immediately preceding the initial protective custody hearing, a day-of-court use of neutral, knowledgeable child welfare facilitators to assist in facilitating a brief (30-45 minute) conference to address key preliminary issues with parents, child welfare, attorneys, guardians ad litem.
- ❑ **Pre-hearing conference facilitation – twelve month permanency review (PHPR):** optimally scheduled 60 days prior to twelve-month permanency review court hearing, this court-ordered off-site facilitated prehearing conference for the parents, child welfare, attorneys, GALs requires the parties to confront critical permanency decisions and action steps.
- ❑ **Facilitated prehearing conference of termination of parental rights matters (PHTPR):** optimally scheduled 60 days prior to a TPR trial date, this court-ordered off-site facilitated conference requires parents, attorneys, GALs and other professionals to confront the critical issues and determine next steps in a termination of parental rights matter.
- ❑ **Child dependency mediation (CDM):** small, one-to-one private problem solving between family members and providers, or family members themselves.
- ❑ **Family group conferencing (FGC):** New Zealand model for child abuse, neglect, and vulnerable teen cases in which family connections and decision-making are essential elements. This family-centered approach may be used at any stage of the child welfare process. An engaged family and network of others creating a family plan for permanency, addressing critical safety issues, is the outcome.
- ❑ **Expedited FGC (EFGC):** A family group conference specially created for use in Nebraska cases at the initial removal stage.
- ❑ **Juvenile collaborative practices:** Working with youth in either delinquency or other matters through mediation, victim offender dialogue, FGC, and other restorative justice approaches.

Collaborative practices are those in which:

- ✓ Family members are empowered to make decisions
- ✓ Children's voices are at the center of the process
- ✓ Relationships among family members and friends are strengthened
- ✓ Cases reach permanency more quickly when mediated
- ✓ Specially trained and experienced independent facilitator or mediator convenes and facilitates dialogue

Research shows that:

- ✓ Children achieve permanency more quickly in mediation or collaborative intervention than in non-mediated cases
- ✓ Reduction of re-abuse rates for children occurs more often in FGC cases than non-FGC
- ✓ Increase of using extended family members care for children at risk in FGC cases
- ✓ Reduction in the number of multiple placements – FGC plans create stability for children

American Humane Association, www.fgdm.org

**As funding and other resources are available.*

Nebraska Office of Dispute Resolution and its ODR-approved mediation centers partner with:

Nebraska Juvenile and County Courts
Nebraska Center on Children, Families and the Law (NCCFL)
Nebraska Through the Eyes of the Child Initiative
American Humane Association Family Group Decision-Making Program (AHA FGDM)
National Child Welfare Collaborative Decision-Making Network (NCWCDMN)
Association of Family and Conciliation Courts (AFCC)

For more information, please contact:
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