



Icebreakers Procedure Manual 2011

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Introduction

Welcome to the Icebreakers Procedure Manual, a collaborative effort between Ayla Birth, Inc. and Washington County Department of Human Services.

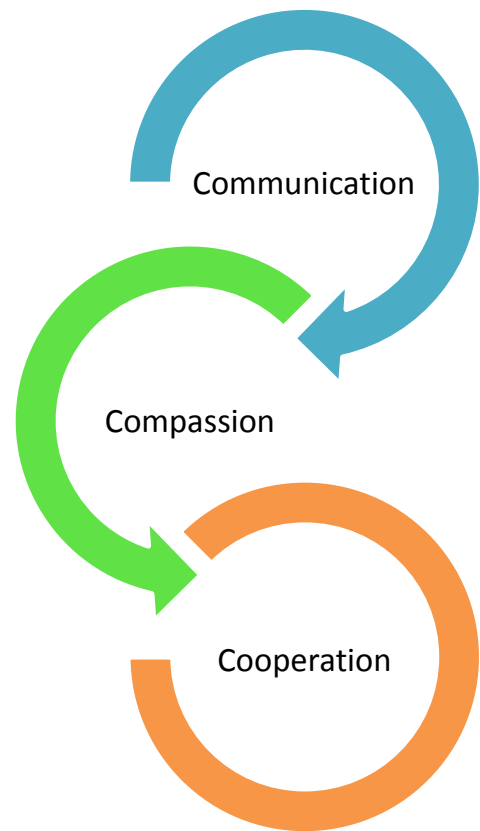
This manual has been created to assist Icebreaker Facilitators in preparing and conducting Icebreaker meetings.

Although many Icebreaker Facilitators have received additional training in mediation conflict management or other communications based training, the Icebreaker Program is designed so that anyone can facilitate an Icebreaker with the help of this manual, volunteer orientation, and completion of the online knowledge review, the link of which is found at the end of this manual.

It may also be helpful to participate in a role-play experience and observe an actual icebreaker before facilitating one. In addition, if you are unfamiliar with any terms in this manual, please check Appendix A for definitions.

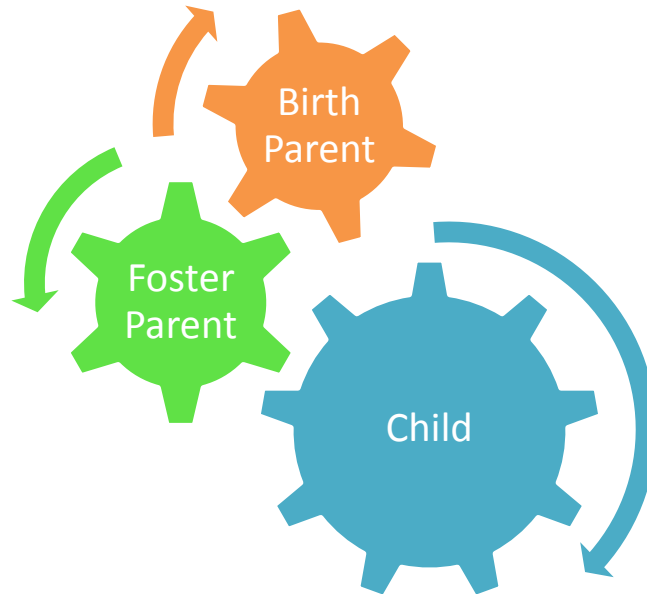
As a volunteer of Ayla Birth and/or Washington County, you are a mandatory reporter, which means you **must** report to the caseworker immediately of any suspected abuse, pursuant to Oregon law. For a detailed list of items you must report, please see Appendix C.

In addition to mandatory reporting laws, you are also required to keep all sensitive information confidential, including: names of parties to a case, contact or case information, and when and where meetings take place. If you have any questions about confidentiality requirements in the State of Oregon, please contact your volunteer coordinator.



About Icebreakers

What Are Icebreakers? Icebreakers are 30 minute meetings (per child) between Birth Parents & Foster Parents to help the child move through foster care.



Where Are Icebreakers Held? Icebreakers are held at a DHS office, usually within 30 days of placement, but can be held at any time during the case.

What Kind Of Families Can Icebreakers Help? Families that are good candidates for Icebreakers are:

- Foster Parents or Birth Parents are willing to meet each other;
- Families where reunification in the future is possible¹; and
- Birth Parents who are not violent towards adult members of the community.

Who can run Icebreakers? Icebreakers are run by facilitators who have completed the DHS volunteer training (including background check) and the Icebreaker training.

Why are Icebreakers important? Icebreakers have been used all over the country, including Oregon, to improve outcomes for foster children. When families participate in Icebreakers, there is increased trust on all sides and children not only return home faster, but are more emotionally stable in foster care knowing their parents enjoy a civil relationship.²

¹ In certain cases, an Icebreaker may be beneficial even if there is no chance for reunification

² DHS Child Welfare Procedure Manual

http://www.dhs.state.or.us/caf/safety_model/procedure_manual/appendices/ch4-app/4-1.pdf



Section 1 - Preparing for the Icebreaker

A. Initiating the Icebreaker:

Any party can request an Icebreaker, but it is up to the Caseworker to approve the meeting. If you are contacted by anyone other than the Caseworker, you will need to gain approval to move forward from them. The Caseworker will then provide you with the phone numbers or other contact information needed to set up the meeting.

Questions you will need to ask the caseworker:

- Branch of DHS;
- First names and ages of child;
- How many parents are involved (if there are multiple children, there may be multiple foster parent placements, or multiple birth parents);
- If any of the parents should not be in the same room together³; and
- If it is appropriate to have the child present at the Icebreaker.⁴

³ In cases of domestic violence where one parent has a no-contact order against another, it may be necessary to schedule an icebreaker with each parent, *or* with only the non-offending parent.

⁴ Depending on the case, very young children are often brought to an icebreaker meeting for an extra visit.

B. Contacting the Parents

Call the Foster Parent first, as their schedule is likely to be more restricted than that of the Birth Parent. Explain the Icebreaker will take place at DHS and may or may not be attended by the caseworker. A sample call might go something like this:

“Hi, my name is Sarah from the Icebreaker Program and I’m calling regarding Kaden and Mackenzie. You were referred by their caseworker John to have a meeting with their Birth Parents about their current needs. Is this something you are interested in?”

It’s important each party understands the Icebreaker meetings are voluntary and no one is being forced to meet anyone else. This moves the meeting from something they “must” do to something they “want” to do. If either the Foster Parent or Birth Parent is not interested in meeting the other, thank them for their time and inform the Caseworker the Icebreaker will not proceed.

When you speak to the Foster Parent, try and get two or three dates and times that will work for them and give them a timeline for when you will call them back to confirm (usually three days). If there are multiple Foster Parents involved, call **all** the Foster Parents first before contacting the Birth Parent.

Once you have potential dates and times, contact the Birth Parent and see what they can attend. If there are multiple Birth Parents involved, make sure they can all safely be in the same room before scheduling on the same day.



Diffusing Anger

- No one wants to have to confront an angry parent, but a major role of the Icebreaker Facilitator is to diffuse angry situations.
- If you feel the conversation is getting emotionally charged or no longer focused on the child, make an “I” statement to get the meeting back on track.

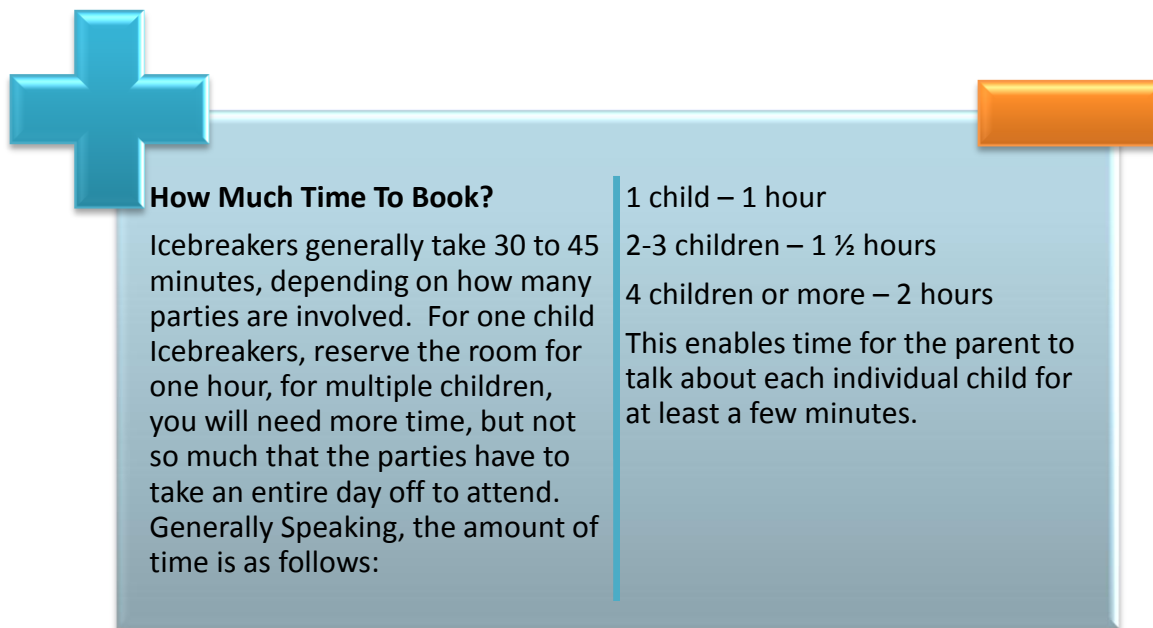
I Statements

- I statements are an assertive way to state a problem without blaming the other party. An example of an I Statement would be: "I feel this meeting may be getting off track. I would like to discuss Clara's school situation and how we can help her grades."

C. Booking the Room

Once you have a time and date, call the receptionist at the branch and reserve a room. If the receptionist does not schedule rooms at the branch, they should be able to direct you to the correct person. Immediately after reserving the room, contact the Caseworker and let them know the date, time and room, either by phone or by email. It is not necessary to hear back from the Caseworker, but it is necessary to keep them informed of when the meetings are. Often a Caseworker will not be able to get back to you regarding meeting information, but will attempt to attend if their schedule allows.

It is essential that you keep the Caseworker updated about the meeting, as circumstances of the case may change between the time you schedule and the time of the meeting.



How Much Time To Book?

Icebreakers generally take 30 to 45 minutes, depending on how many parties are involved. For one child icebreakers, reserve the room for one hour, for multiple children, you will need more time, but not so much that the parties have to take an entire day off to attend. Generally Speaking, the amount of time is as follows:

1 child – 1 hour
2-3 children – 1 ½ hours
4 children or more – 2 hours

This enables time for the parent to talk about each individual child for at least a few minutes.

D. Final Preparations

1. The day before the Icebreaker, call and speak to or leave a message with all parties confirming the meeting. It is not necessary to get a call back from anyone. Make sure you leave your number on the messages in case there are any cancellations.

2. Prepare a folder with the following documents (available in Appendix B):

- Names and phone numbers of all parties;
- Room diagram;
- Icebreaker Script;
- Feedback Forms (one for each person)
- *A Letter From Your Child's Foster Family*; and
- *All About Me* and/or *Snapshot of My Day*.

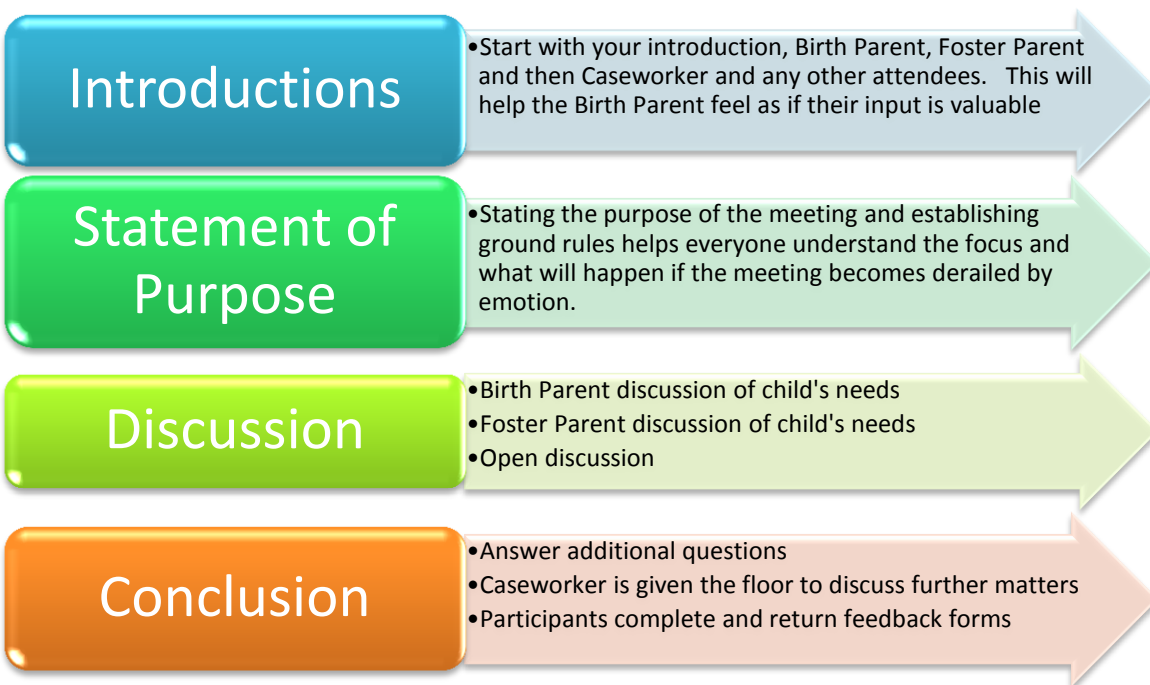


Section 2 - Facilitating the Icebreaker

On the day of the icebreaker, you will want to arrive 15 minutes before the scheduled meeting. This is to make sure there are no problems with the room or there have been any cancellations through DHS. This will give you time to call the other parties and cancel. If you meet anyone in the lobby, do not discuss the case or any specifics regarding the child.

Once everyone has arrived, hand out *A Letter From Your Child's Foster Family* to the Foster Family, *All About Me* and/or *Snapshot of My Day* to the Birth Parents or children and *About Icebreakers* to everyone. Explain that these documents are to help them if they get stuck on what to talk about.

Begin with the introduction and statement of purpose found in the Icebreaker Script. A copy of this script is available in Appendix B.



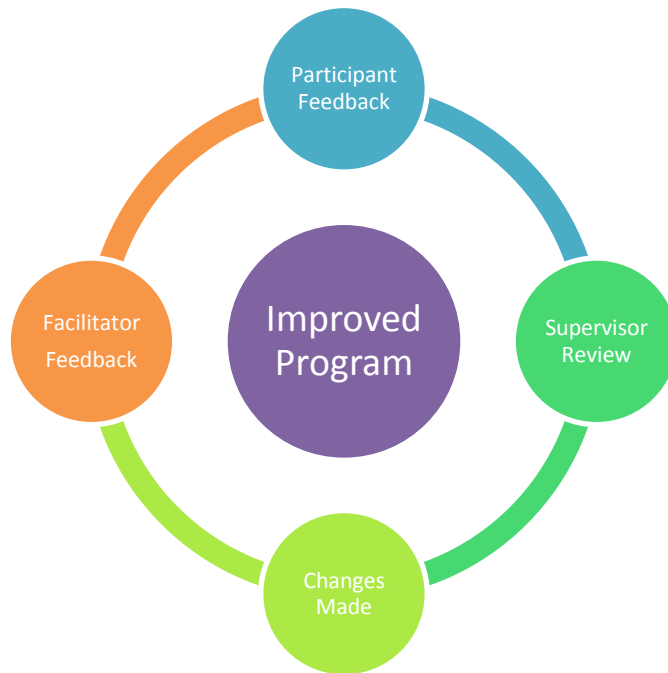


Section 3 – Tracking Participant Experience

The Feedback form is often the only way we can know whether or not the program is working, or what needs to be changed if it is not working. The feedback forms also provide data for our county, state and national agencies as to the effectiveness of Icebreakers.

After the icebreaker is completed:

- Get feedback forms from all parties
- Do not look at feedback forms while participants are in the room.
- Send the feedback forms to your supervisor along with any observations you have regarding the Icebreaker.



Thank you for reviewing this manual. To complete your training, please visit www.aylabirth.org/icebreakers.html to complete the self-test. Please note that you must achieve a score of 100% to pass the test, but you may take the test as many times as you wish.

If you have any questions, please call Anne Lenzi from Ayla Birth at (503) 476-1165 or Nicole Hall from DHS at (503) 681-6949 or email icebreakers@aylabirth.org

Appendix A – Definitions

- A. **Birth Parent** – The Birth Parent is the person whom the child lived with prior to being taken into DHS custody, *or* the legal parent of the child, who may not be living with the child prior to being taken into DHS custody but was not deemed able to care for the child at this time.
- B. **Case Worker** – A Caseworker is a PS Worker or Permanency Worker assigned to the child who is the subject of the Icebreaker.
- C. **Child** – A child or children currently in Foster Care.
- D. **DHS** – Department of Human Services, the agency responsible for overseeing children in Foster Care for the State of Oregon.
- E. **Facilitator** - Facilitators are individuals who have completed the DHS volunteer training, passed a background check, and completed the Icebreaker training.
- F. **Foster Parent** – A Foster Parent is the person or people who live with the child at the current time. The Foster Parent can be a relative or a non-related individual.
- G. **Icebreaker** – Meeting between the Birth Parent and Foster Parent to discuss the current needs of the child. The Icebreaker is not court ordered or supervised, although a Caseworker may attend at their discretion.
- H. **Social Services Assistant (SSA)** – SSA’s are the people who come in the most frequent contact with the Birth Parent, Foster Parent and Child. They are responsible for transporting the Child to visits, as well as supervising visits between the Child and Birth Parent.

Appendix B - Forms

A Letter from Your Child's Foster Family

(This is a sample of some of things to discuss during the Icebreaker Meeting)

Greetings Parent(s) of (child's name) _____ Date: _____

Our names are (first names) _____.

_____ lives with (#) _____ other boys/girls, whose ages are (ages) _____. We also have (#) _____ pets, who are (description) _____.

We have been foster parents for (#) _____ years. We decided to become foster parents because _____

Our favorite thing about (child) _____ is _____.

We have been struggling with (any issues) _____

We are looking forward to working with you in making our home happy for (child) _____ while he/she stays with us.

Important info about me!

(Here is a sample of some of the things to discuss at the Icebreaker)

My name is:	
My birthday is:	
I like to eat:	
I don't like to eat:	
My favorite toy/activity is:	
My religion (if any) is:	
I am good at:	
I need help with:	
Things that scare me are:	
My family members are:	
My house:	
Allergies:	
Medicine:	
Things I need to go to sleep:	

Snapshot of My Day (young child)

(Here is a sample of some of the things to discuss at the Icebreaker)

I usually wake up at:	
The first thing I want to do when I wake up is:	
The next thing I do is:	
Other things I do in the morning:	
I take my morning nap (if still taking naps):	
After my morning nap:	
I eat lunch at:	
I take my afternoon nap:	
I have my afternoon snack:	
After my snack:	
I eat dinner at:	
After dinner, I like to:	
My bedtime is at:	
Before going to sleep, I like to:	

Snapshot of My Day (school-aged child)

(Here is a sample of some of the things to discuss at the Icebreaker)

I usually wake up at:	
The first thing I want to do when I wake up is:	
The next thing I do is:	
Other things I do in the morning:	
I like to get to school by:	
After school, the first thing I do is:	
I do my homework when:	
I eat dinner at:	
After dinner:	
My bedtime is at:	
Before going to sleep, I like to:	

Icebreaker Script (for facilitators)

(Before the meeting begins, exchange the Letter from Foster Parents, All About Me, and Snapshot of the Day with the birth and foster parents and explain these are tips on what to discuss if they wish)

INTRODUCTIONS:

Thank you for coming to the icebreaker meeting today. My name is (first name) and I am the facilitator. This meeting is voluntary and anyone may leave the meeting at any time for any reason. However, notes taken at this meeting will be provided to the case worker for (child).

STATEMENT OF PURPOSE:

We are all here for the same reason, to help (child) during the time they are in foster care.

This meeting will be focused on the child and **only** the child. This meeting is a judgment-free space and we are not here to talk about why the child has come into foster care, or when the child will return home. There will be time to discuss why the child came into care and when they can return home at the Safety Meeting. If anyone wants to discuss other matters, I will remind you that we are here to discuss the child only. If any party is unable to keep the focus on the child, they will be asked to wait in the lobby until the meeting is over.

I ask that we agree before the meeting to treat each other with respect and dignity during this meeting. Do you agree?

Let's begin the meeting by introducing ourselves and roles, first name only please? (5 minutes)

Birth Parents, would you like to tell the Foster Parents a little bit about your family and your child? This is also the time to let the Foster Parents know if there is anything special you want or do not want for your child, such as hair cutting or painting fingernails. (15 minutes)

Foster Parents, would you like to fill the Birth Parents in on how (child) is doing in your home? This is also the time to ask any questions you have regarding the child. (15 minutes)

Optional: I have spoken to your case worker and we are in the process of setting up visitation. The case worker will also get back to each of you on the best way for you all to communicate with each other, which can be by letters, email, phone calls, or by face to face meeting before or after visits.

Does anyone have any questions or comments before we close the meeting?

Thank you all for coming to the icebreaker meeting. (Hand out feedback forms to all parties, once the forms are completed, fold them over and put them in your folder, do not look at them until after the meeting)

Icebreaker Feedback Survey

Please provide us with feedback on your recent Icebreaker meeting.

1. Date of Icebreaker Meeting _____

2. I am a

- Biological Parent
- Foster Parent
- Case Worker
- Other

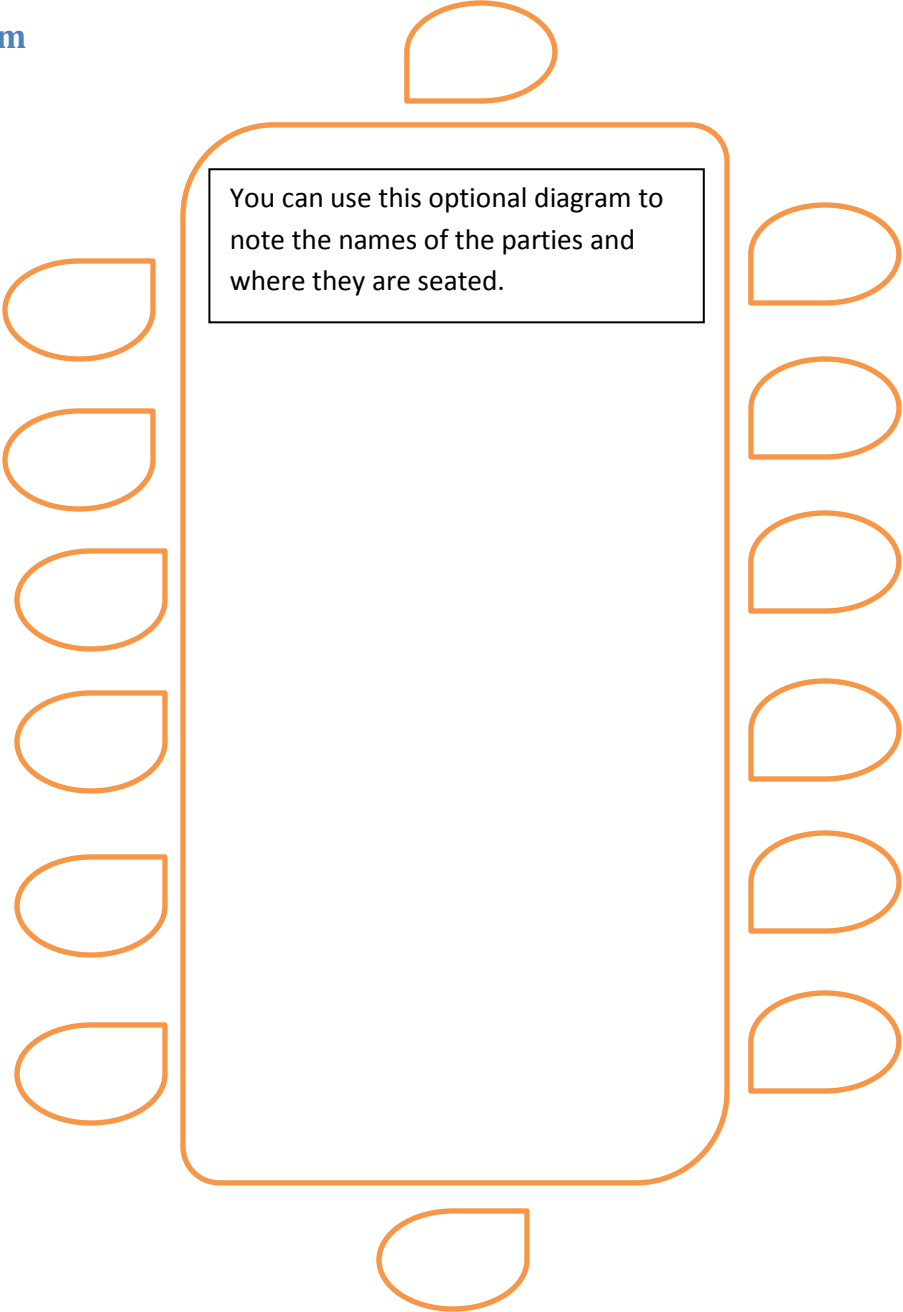
3. Please rate your feelings on the following statements:

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	N/A
The facilitator was clear on the purpose of the meeting					
The documents were easy to understand					
I feel this meeting helped the child					
I feel more comfortable with the parent/foster parent					
I would recommend Icebreaker meetings to others					

Other Comments:

Thank you!

Room Diagram



Appendix C - Mandatory Reporting

Mandatory Reporters must report the following pursuant to ORS 419B.005:

(A) Any assault, as defined in ORS chapter 163, of a child and any physical injury to a child which has been caused by other than accidental means, including any injury which appears to be at variance with the explanation given of the injury.

(B) Any mental injury to a child, which shall include only observable and substantial impairment of the child's mental or psychological ability to function caused by cruelty to the child, with due regard to the culture of the child.

(C) Rape of a child, which includes but is not limited to rape, sodomy, unlawful sexual penetration and incest, as those acts are described in ORS chapter 163.

(D) Sexual abuse, as described in ORS chapter 163.

(E) Sexual exploitation, including but not limited to:

(i) Contributing to the sexual delinquency of a minor, as defined in ORS chapter 163, and any other conduct which allows, employs, authorizes, permits, induces or encourages a child to engage in the performing for people to observe or the photographing, filming, tape recording or other exhibition which, in whole or in part, depicts sexual conduct or contact, as defined in ORS 167.002 or described in ORS 163.665 and 163.670, sexual abuse involving a child or rape of a child, but not including any conduct which is part of any investigation conducted pursuant to ORS 419B.020 or which is designed to serve educational or other legitimate purposes; and

(ii) Allowing, permitting, encouraging or hiring a child to engage in prostitution, as defined in ORS chapter 167.

(F) Negligent treatment or maltreatment of a child, including but not limited to the failure to provide adequate food, clothing, shelter or medical care that is likely to endanger the health or welfare of the child.

(G) Threatened harm to a child, which means subjecting a child to a substantial risk of harm to the child's health or welfare.

(H) Buying or selling a person under 18 years of age as described in ORS 163.537.

(I) Permitting a person under 18 years of age to enter or remain in or upon premises where methamphetamines are being manufactured.

(J) Unlawful exposure to a controlled substance, as defined in ORS 475.005, that subjects a child to a substantial risk of harm to the child's health or safety.