

Guiding Principles for Defining and Implementing a Model Family Court

Adopted by the Florida Supreme Court In re Report of the Family Court Steering Committee, 794 So. 2d 518, 522 (Fla. 2001)

Children should live in safe and permanent homes.

The needs and best interests of children should be the primary consideration of any family court. All persons, whether children or adults, should be treated with objectivity, sensitivity, dignity and respect.

Cases involving inter-related family law issues should be consolidated or coordinated to maximize use of court resources to avoid conflicting decisions and to minimize inconvenience to the families.

A key part of the family court process should be establishment of processes that attempts to address the family's interrelated legal and nonlegal problems to produce a result that improves the family's functioning. The process should empower families through skills development, assist them to resolve their own disputes, provide access to appropriate services, and offer a variety of dispute resolution forums where the family can resolve problems without additional emotional trauma.

Whenever possible, parties and their attorneys should be empowered to select processes for addressing issues in their cases that are compatible with the family's needs, financial circumstances, and legal requirements.

The court is responsible for managing its cases with due consideration of the needs of the family, the litigants, and the issues presented by the case.

There should be a means of differentiating among cases so that judicial resources are conserved and cases are diverted to non-judicial and quasi-judicial personnel for resolution, when appropriate and consistent with the ends of justice.

Trial courts must coordinate and maximize court resources and establish linkages with community resources.

The court's role in family restructuring is to identify services and craft solutions that are appropriate for long-term stability and that minimize the need for subsequent court action.

Court services should be available to litigants at a reasonable cost and accessible without economic discrimination.

Courts should have well trained and highly motivated judicial and non-judicial personnel.