

Family Group Conferences



'Your family, your conference, your decisions'

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WHAT IS A FAMILY GROUP CONFERENCE (FGC)?

A family group conference is a way of giving families the opportunity to come together to make a plan to ensure the welfare and future well being of the Children and young people involved.

All families come up against problems from time to time. We believe children, Young people and families know themselves best.

You and your family have a unique history and understanding about each other and what will work for you. Therefore you are the best people to make choices about how you can address issues to improve future outcomes for your children.

A Family Group Conference can only go ahead with you and your family's consent - It is your meeting.

It is a meeting for you and your family. The process is facilitated by someone called a coordinator. You will be able to make the choices about who needs to come to your conference, where it will be held and at what time.

The coordinator is independent of any decision making in regards to your children. They are purely there to help you get ready for your family group conference.

The coordinator is there to support YOU in making DECISIONS about YOUR FAMILY.

HOW CAN A FAMILY GROUP CONFERENCE HELP ME?

A Family Group Conference can help sort out:

- **Where a young person will live.**
- **How to keep them safe and healthy.**
- **Problems with exclusions or attending school.**
- **Help with the family to communicate more effectively, cope better and improve relationships.**

It will also enable you to know what support is available to you and your Family from professionals and you will be able to say what support you feel you need. It will help your family to help you and your children, in the way that you feel will be best for you.

It will also help your children and young people to express how they feel about the situation and explain what they would like to see happen in the future.

WHO COMES TO THE FAMILY GROUP CONFERENCE?

The coordinator will visit you and explain fully what happens at a Family Group Conference and answer any questions or deal with any anxieties you may have. They will listen to you and share with you their understanding of the issues the family group conference needs to look at and make a plan for.

The coordinator will want to meet your child or young person to explain the family group conference process. It is important for the child or young person to understand and take part in the family group conference in whatever way they feel comfortable with.

When the coordinator meets with you they will ask you to identify the family members you feel should attend the conference. They will then make arrangements to meet with them individually to explain how the family group conference works and the issues to be focussed on.

You can also identify any friends you may feel would be helpful to you and your family in making a plan.

You decide who attends, including professional agencies to be invited. The time and day of the conference as well as the place it will be held at, as long as it is a neutral place. Conferences are not held in anyone's home (the coordinator can help you to find possible places to have the meeting).

The coordinator will send invites to all the people you have identified.

The agency who first suggested the FGC to you will come and take part in the meeting. They will explain their concerns (the coordinator will have already shared these with you so there will be no surprises). You will have an opportunity to ask them questions.

WILL THEY LISTEN TO ME?

It is vital that everyone has a say at the conference and the coordinator will ensure that any child, young person or vulnerable adult will have an advocate to help them explain how they feel about the situation. They will meet with them before the family group conference to explore their wishes and feelings and will support them in attending the conference. At the conference, if the child or young person doesn't feel confident to tell their family how they feel, the advocate can do this for them.

The child or young person's wishes and feelings are extremely important and will also be taken into consideration when making your family plan.

WHAT HAPPENS AT THE MEETING?

Family Group Conferences take place outside the home at a time and place to suit the people who want to attend.

The outline for the meeting will be:

INFORMATION SHARING

The coordinator will welcome you all to the family group conference and family will have the opportunity to introduce themselves. The referrer will share what they feel the family need to discuss and plan for. Any other professionals present would give information about any support they can provide. The referrer will then pose questions for you and your family to consider. You will have an opportunity to ask questions before the professionals leave the room, and you will then have private family time.

PRIVATE FAMILY TIME

This is a great opportunity to talk about your situation and find answers to the questions posed by the referrer. The role of the family is to decide the best way forward for your child. This is the time you will have to:

- Answer the questions.
- Make and agree a plan
- Decide who does what
- Decide how you can check the plan is working
- Identify what other support you might need from the professionals

To enable you to write up your family plan paper and pens will be provided.

You can take as long as you need in private family time, as there is no time limit.

CLARIFYING AND AGREEING THE PLAN

When you have an agreed a plan the coordinator and the referrer will go through your plan with you to ensure you have answered all the questions, and that you have all agreed to it.

The referrer will agree to the family plan as long as it is not considered unsafe for the child or young person; if the professionals consider a plan is unsafe for a child they will explain why and the family will be given the opportunity to change the plan.

A date for a further meeting to review how things are going will be set, but you can call a review meeting at any time if things are not going to plan by contacting the referrer or coordinator. One of your family members will be asked to volunteer to be the family monitor, whose role is to keep in contact with all involved and oversee how the family plan progresses. They can also make contact with the coordinator if they feel the review meeting needs to be brought forward.

WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?

A copy of the plan will be distributed to everyone involved. For the plan to Work, everyone must be 100% committed to the plan and everyone must do their part to make it happen.

The review meeting is an opportunity for the family to come together again, discuss how well their plan has worked and make any changes necessary, to ensure the family plan is effective long term.

Give it a go....it works and it is a great opportunity to make your own plans, in your own way with your own family and you will have the security of knowing someone is with you in the process (your coordinator).

CONTACT US

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