



What is a family group conference?

What family or friends caring for children need to know

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A family group conference (FGC) is a family-led decision making and planning process whereby the young person, parents and wider family group make a plan for the child or young person where there are concerns about the child's welfare or safety. A family group conference (FGC) lets families meet together and begin to plan how to improve the situation.

Family Group Conference is a model of working with families which aims to:

- Give family members a key and central role as decision makers.
- Enable the full participation of parents and wider family members in planning for the safety and wellbeing of their children.
- Ensure that children have a voice in the making of plans about them.

Your social worker can arrange for you and your family to meet with an independent co-ordinator.

You and the co-ordinator will plan together who to invite, and they will prepare everyone for the meeting. The co-ordinator will encourage the child or young person to be at the meeting too.

How does it work?

There are three stages to a family group conference.

1 Information giving:

This stage is planned by the co-ordinator in advance. At the start of the meeting you sit down with your family, the social worker and co-ordinator to share information about the child or young person including the concerns about their welfare or safety. The social worker will be able to tell you about services, resources and support that are available. This is a good time to clear up any questions you might have.

The beginning of the conference is chaired by the co-ordinator. S/he will make sure that everyone present understands the purpose and process of the FGC and agrees how the meeting will be conducted, including any explicit ground rules desired and agreed by the family.

The social worker will then give information to the family about:

- the reason for the conference;
- any child welfare concerns that will affect what can be agreed in the plan, including their 'bottom line' requirements to ensure the child is safe (e.g. that the child must not have contact with a particular person);

- information about resources and support they are able to provide; and
- what action will be taken if the family cannot make a plan or the plan is not agreed.

Other agencies could also be involved at this point to share any relevant issues and most especially to inform the conference about the type of support or services they could provide.

The child/young person and family members may also provide information, ask for clarification or ask questions.

2. Private family time:

Once the social worker has provided this information, they, together with any other information givers and the co-coordinator, leave the family to have time to talk among themselves and come up with a plan that addresses the concerns raised in the information-giving part of the conference, identifying resources and support which are required from agencies, as well as within the family, to make it work.

The family has three basic tasks:

- agree a plan that meets the needs of the child or young person;
- agree what to do if things don't work out as expected; and
- agree how to monitor and review the plan.

The co-ordinator will stay nearby to answer any questions. It is important that the family takes as much time as they need to talk things through without any staff being present.

3. Agreeing to the plan:

Once the family has reached agreement, the co-ordinator will re-join them to hear what has been said and arrange any extra help that can be provided. At this stage everyone will know the expected timescales, who is responsible for different aspects of the plan and how things will be monitored. It is the social worker's task to finally approve the plan.

There is a presumption that the family's plan will be agreed by the social worker unless there is evidence that it would put the child at risk of significant harm (e.g. it does not take account of the social worker's 'bottom line.')

Contingency plans, monitoring arrangements and how to review the plan also need to be discussed and agreed. The co-ordinator will ensure that everyone gets a copy of the plan.

Where the plan is not agreed by the social worker the reasons for not accepting the plan must be made clear immediately by the social worker and the family should be given the opportunity to respond to the concerns and change or add to the plan.

Once the family plan is agreed by the social worker they will ensure that the plan is subsequently incorporated into the Child's Plan (this may be a Child Protection Plan. Involvement of the extended family in this process aims to ensure that everyone is clear what the concerns are and how the family and professionals are going to work together to reduce these concerns and keep the child safe.

As circumstances change during the course of a case there may need to be a further review FGC to consider new issues/circumstances that were not addressed at the earlier FGC.