

# Family group conferences

Information for family, relatives and friends



# Family group conferences – family decision-making

As members of a family we all can find ourselves having things to sort out, or be at points in time when decisions need to be made.

Whether we are in difficult times, struggling to manage our children or needing support with making plans for our children, Family Group Conference (FGC) can be a useful option.



## Why hold a family group conference (FGC)?

An FGC is free and is an independent meeting organised for you with the family and friends you want to have there. It is a chance for you to take time out from busy family life, to help come up with solutions and a plan to deal with whatever is going on.

### What a family member who took part in an FGC said:

“It got to the heart of the matter.”

### What young people who took part said:

“Everyone spoke and listened to each other.”

“FGCs give everyone a chance to think about what is happening and plan to make things better. It gives a space to talk, helping with confidence and being able to look at the future. It promotes togetherness and helps young people.”





## Who should come to a family group conference?

You decide who is invited to the meeting. The best people will be those who know you and care about you - your family, plus friends and neighbours who feel like your family, as well as professionals who can help with information and advice.

“With everyone in the room, no one could go away saying they did not know what was going on.”

**Quote from a family member who has been part of a family group conference.**

## Who organises a family group conference?

The meeting is organised by an independent co-ordinator. ‘Independent’ means someone who is not involved in the decision-making. Their job is to make sure the meeting runs smoothly. The co-ordinator will meet you and your family to plan and prepare for the meeting.

It is important that during an FGC the family group makes decisions together.



**What a family member who took part in an FGC said:**

“The co-ordinator was really supportive and helpful.”

**What a professional who participated in an FGC said:**

“The co-ordinator was sensitive and skilful at chairing.”



## What if I agree to take part in a family group conference?

Your co-ordinator will talk with you about who is in your family network. Whenever possible, everyone important to the child will be invited. After talking with you, the co-ordinator will arrange a time and a place for the meeting, refreshments and crèche for any younger children. The meeting will, whenever possible, be in the language you use at home.

### What a family member said:

“It reminds me of other cultural family meetings back in my country of origin. It was very important for all of us to have a co-ordinator from our own background. It made everything easy, and there were no barriers of language and culture.”

The co-ordinator will make sure that the child or children’s views are heard in the meeting. Where appropriate, they may arrange for someone to support the child in the meeting, or to speak for them.

### Teacher:

“An advocate is available for young people which means that there is a voice for the child.”

## Are FGCs confidential?

We won’t talk about your problems to anyone unless you ask us to do so. What is discussed is confidential, unless there is a risk to a child. You only tell us what you need to and nothing more.



# What happens at a family group conference?

There are three parts to an FGC. The co-ordinator will always be available to help sort out any problems.

## **Part 1** Information-giving

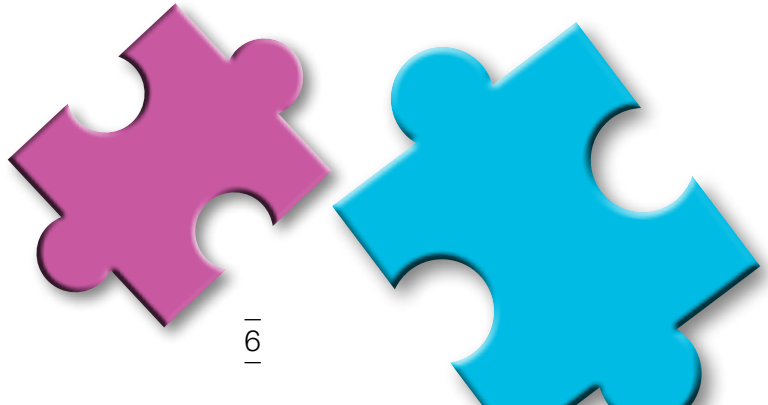
This is the part of the meeting where you get the information you need to make a plan. A professional most closely involved with your family or who has suggested the FGC, can explain why they are worried about your child and tell you the sort of help that they can offer. There will be lots of chances to ask them questions and to be clear about what they are saying. They will then leave the meeting.

## **Part 2** Private family time

You, your family and friends will be left on your own, without the people who work with you, so that you can talk about the information that you heard in the first part and make plans together for you. The co-ordinator and other information givers stay in another room.

## **Part 3** Explaining your plan

Your family will share the plan with others at the meeting, including any information givers who were there at the beginning of the meeting. The plan is usually agreed as long as what it says is needed and it is a safe plan for you and your family.



## What will happen to your plan after the meeting?

Whenever possible, family services and social work should respond to your plan at the end of the meeting. If this is not possible, the social worker will make sure a decision is reached about your plan quickly.

Family services and social work will only disagree with your plan if they think it puts your child or children at risk in some way. The help asked for in the plan will be provided unless it is unreasonable or is unnecessary for the plan to be implemented.

If your plan is not accepted, you might decide to hold another FGC to think how you could change it. Once the plan is agreed, family services and social work will work with you to put the plan into action. For the plan to succeed, everyone needs to put into action all that has been agreed. Later on, another FGC can be held to review the plan and see what still needs to be decided.

### Family member:

“I feel at least some form of dialogue has now begun and hopefully we can begin to work together as a family for our child’s sake.”

Remember, it is your decision whether or not to have an FGC. Most families tell us it has made a difference to them.



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