

A guide to



**Family Group Conferences
for referrers and professionals**

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A photograph of a family group conference. A woman in a white shirt and jeans, a young boy in a yellow shirt, and a man in a brown sweater are seated at a white table. A professional in a light blue shirt is also seated at the table, facing them. The professional is holding a pen and a clipboard. The family members are looking at the professional and smiling. A speech bubble is overlaid on the image, containing text about family group conferences.

"Family Group Conferences promote working with families, not doing to or for. You cannot change the past, but you can learn from it and change the future."

What is a Family Group Conference?

A Family Group Conference (FGC) is a family-led decision-making meeting.

It is a way of allowing a family to get together to make the best plan possible for their child or young person's welfare and future wellbeing, and safety, but putting families in the driving seat.

We promote sustainable outcomes at the earliest possible point to avoid children and their families needing further children's social care involvement, where it is safe to do so.

FGC is a broad term and can include: parents, a child or young person, extended family, and close family friends. In an FGC, family members and friends will come together to discuss difficult situations that a family is facing, and they will talk about decisions that can be made to ensure the wellbeing of children and young people, and how they can sort out any problems.

FGCs also work well in:

- Supporting families to improve relationships and/or cope better with family crisis
- Dealing with the risk of exclusion from school, poor attendance, Harm Outside the Home (HOTH) and youth crime
- Clarifying contact with family and siblings, planning for the independence of children and young people already in local authority care.

Why should I refer?

Family Group Conferences can help families to find their own solutions with support from partner agencies. The process uses the strengths and resources of the family to ensure their ownership of the plan.

FGCs enable children and young people to make choices and have their say about decisions that affect them. They enable real partnership working by addressing the power imbalance that families experience when working with agencies. This allows communication and cooperation within the family, children's social care and other service providers. This is affirming and can lead to positive change, strengthening the safeguarding network around them.

The meeting belongs to the family.

When should I refer?

Family FGCs should always be offered:

- To avoid the risk of accommodation or when a child/young person becomes looked after by the local authority
- Before or during safeguarding and child protection procedures
- Before or during care proceedings (Public Law Outline)
- To promote reunification to a child or young person already in local authority care, where it is safe to do so.

How do I refer?

- Talk to the parent(s) and child/young person and offer the FGC, explaining the importance of the family's role in decision making processes. The FGC is a voluntary process, and families must give permission to participate.
- Some families do not always appear to have a larger family network. Please do not be put off by this. The coordinator will undertake exploration work with the family, children and young person to identify and invite all relevant family, friends and community members agreed by the family to participate.
- Complete a referral form on ICS. Please provide clear and full information on the family's strengths as well as concerns for the child/young person, and provide information on family members if known, as well as other key agencies and professionals working with the family, child or young person.

What happens next?

An independent coordinator will contact you to arrange an initial referral meeting. This is an opportunity to discuss and draft your questions for the FGC and provide any key updates to the coordinator.

You will discuss with the coordinator the information that you will be sharing at the first stage of the FGC meeting, which those with parental responsibility are fully aware of.

Your information sharing will include the family's strengths as well as your "bottom line" – what is not acceptable, and what contingency planning children's social care will put in place if concerns are not addressed by a safe and sustainable FGC Plan.

Please send a signed copy of the parent or carer's consent to the coordinator.

The coordinator has a neutral role. They will support you in preparing for the FGC and provide relevant information, while remaining impartial and independent throughout the process, including during the preparatory work.

The coordinator will visit the child/young person and the family to prepare them for the FGC. They will offer an advocate to the child, young person and/or vulnerable adults and request contact details of the wider family, friends and community networks. The coordinator will also prepare all participants involved in the FGC and book the venue and set a time and date, ensuring maximum family participation.

There is a possibility that FGCs will have to take place outside of normal office hours due to the family's work obligations and other key commitments; therefore, some flexibility is required by all attendees to ensure the FGC goes ahead.

The coordinator is independent of case management and decision-making.

What is my professional role for a FGC?

Professionals with key information, who are working with the family, will attend as part of their normal professional duties. If the FGC is held "out of hours", the coordinator will negotiate timings and attendance with all involved.

Before the FGC you will:

- Liaise with the coordinator and agree your “bottom line” – what needs to be resolved.
- Discuss with the family what needs to be part of the information sharing before you write it and bring this information to the referral meeting and present it in the information stage of the FGC.
- Identify resources and strategies your agency may realistically be able to offer.
- Remember to provide the family with all the information needed in a jargon free-way including acknowledge family strengths, and the positive outcomes already achieved.

No new information should be given on the day of the FGC or at the review.



What are the four stages of an FGC?

Stage 1: Information sharing

The coordinator chairs the information sharing stage. Be prepared to talk about Children's Social Care concerns, the needs of the child/young person, the strengths of the family, as well as what needs to change, why and how this will be supported. Explain your role and the type of help and resources you can offer. Be clear about your "bottom line". Be willing to answer questions and clarify points to enable the family to make their own plan.

Stage 2: Private family time

All agencies, including the coordinator, leave the family to privately discuss and produce their solutions to come up with their FGC plan.

Stage 3: Clarifying the plan

The coordinator and referrer rejoins the family, assisting them to clarify, fine tune and record their plan. Once the family agrees with any amendments, additions, they present their plan.

Stage 4: Agreeing the plan

The family share the details of their FGC plan. Your role is to agree the family plan if it keeps the child/young person safe from significant harm, addresses your concerns and is lawful.

Be clear with families if agreement depends on consultation with managers, the outcome of assessments, consultation with other agencies or a Court Hearing. If parts of the plan are not agreed, say why and give the family an opportunity to plan again, or provide them with dates and times you will come back with this key information.

The family will then be asked to put forward a monitor or monitors. This will be a neutral person who is not the parents. They will speak with the child or young person and other key family members to ensure that agreements made within the FGC Plan are undertaken, and if not, find out why and put in a contingency plan to ensure the plan remains achievable.

Everyone has an opportunity to complete an FGC feedback form at this point or told how they can complete feedback at a later time.

After the FGC

- The coordinator will type up and distribute the plan within five working days of the FGC or FGC Review Taking place.
- The plan will form the basis of your future work with the child/young person and family and be presented at key panels and forums and feed into Child Protection Plans, Children in Care (CIC) Reviews and indeed within the Public Law Outline process to evidence the collaborative restorative process and their valid contributions to positive outcomes and actions to be taken forward as well as showcase the voice of the child.
- The child/young person and their family will need the service provider's support to implement their changes as agreed in their FGC Plan.
- The process for the Review FGC is the same. Research suggests it is best held within 8 weeks of the FGC taking place.
- The coordinator will contact you, the family and other key professionals to arrange the Review FGC and request updated information from you, including any new information.

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

Q: How long will the process take?

A: It usually takes between 4-8 weeks to organise a family meeting, then another 8-12 weeks to see if the plan is successful.

Q: What meetings will the coordinator attend?

A: For an FGC coordinator to remain independent, they cannot attend Common Assessment Framework (CAF), Child in Need (CIN), safeguarding conferences or strategy meetings.

Q: What will happen with safeguarding concerns?

A: We will pass on any safeguarding concerns to the relevant professional or social worker as soon as possible.

Q: Will you share case notes?

A: The FGC Coordinator will not share case notes unless there is a safeguarding concern.



Feedback

“It was quite a great first-time opportunity for me to participate in an FGC. My observations on the positives include the fact that it was hosted in a community centre, this takes away the tense atmosphere that meetings held at offices usually impose on some families.”

It was also positive that it was a family led process that gives ownership to the family in making decisions that affect a child. Additionally, it also provided an opportunity for the wider family to ask questions to the social worker on issues they had queries on. Your facilitation as a coordinator as well helped the families both on the point of neutrality and ability to create an environment where families remain respectful but comfortable to speak.

Referring social worker

“As a way of feeding back, I found that the meeting was well structured which enabled me to contribute positively despite this being my first FGC meeting. You were also patient, allowing the family time to formulate their own plan which we were able to build on. I found this restorative whereby the families are given opportunity to develop and own their plan which they are then likely to comply with.”

Referring Social Worker

“Excellent 5 Stars: Very understanding and respectful and was a pleasure to talk to and made me feel at ease. 10 out of 10 what an amazing person I can't praise her enough; you need more JC's.”

Maternal grandfather

Contact us

There are several ways you can get in contact with us:



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