

A guide for referrers and service providers

Family Group Conference Service

'Families making decisions'

What is a Family Group Conference?

- Essentially it is a decision-making and planning meeting that puts families in the driving seat.
- All families encounter problems from time to time. Every family is unique, with its own culture, personalities, dynamics and history. An FGC uses the family's own skills, strengths and personal knowledge to resolve difficulties for their children/ young people. An independent coordinator facilitates and chairs the meeting.
- The role of referrers and other agencies is to provide information and resources to enable the family to make a safe plan.
- The family will have private time to produce their plan. The family's plan will be agreed and supported by referrers if it keeps the child/ young person safe from significant harm and the resources requested can be provided.
- The family will put their plan into action with support from the referrers and other agencies.

Why should I refer?

Family Group Conferences (FGCs) 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.

It enables children and young people to make choices and have their say about decisions that affect them.

FGCs enable real partnership working by addressing the power imbalance that families experience when working with agencies. This allows communication and cooperation within the family and with Children's Social Care and other service providers. This is affirming and can lead to positive change.

The meeting belongs to the family.

When should I refer?

FGCs work best as early as possible for families experiencing difficulties.

FGCs should always be offered:

- to avoid the risk of accommodation or when a child/ young person becomes Looked After by the Local Authority;
- prior to or during Safeguarding and Child Protection procedures;
- prior to or during Care Proceedings (Public Law Outline).

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 and youth crime;
- clarifying contact and planning for the independence of Looked After Children.

How do I refer?

- Talk with the parent(s) and child/ young person. Offer the FGC explaining the importance of the family's role in decision-making.
- Some families don't appear to have a large family network. Don't be put off by this. The coordinator will identify and invite all relevant family members.
- Complete a referral form and send it to the FGC Service by email (address overleaf).
- Please provide information on the family's strengths as well as the concerns for the child/ young person. If you want a quick response or the FGC is urgent, please precede the referral with a phone call (telephone number overleaf).
- If the family want to know more, you can request a FGC coordinator visit prior to their decision to go ahead.

What happens next?

A coordinator will contact you to arrange a referral meeting. This is an opportunity to discuss and draft your report. You will share this report with the child/young person and those with parental responsibility.

Your report will include the family's strengths as well as your agency's "bottom line". You will ask those with parental responsibility to sign that they agree to share the information with everyone involved in the FGC.

Please send a signed copy to the FGC Service (address overleaf).

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

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

What is my professional role for an 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 agency's "bottom line", what needs to be resolved and your professional assessment (referral meeting);
- discuss with the family what needs to be in the report before you write it and bring this information to the referral meeting;
- identify resources and strategies your agency may realistically offer;
- remember to provide the family with all the information needed in a jargon free way.

No new information is to be given by agencies on the day of the FGC or at the Review FGC.

What are the four stages of the FGC?

Stage 1 - Information Sharing:

The coordinator chairs the information sharing stage. Be prepared to talk about your report, the needs of the child/ young person, and the strengths of the family as well as what needs to change. Explain your role and the type of help and resources that you can offer. Be clear about the agency's "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 plan.

Stage 3 - Clarifying the plan:

The coordinator rejoins the family assisting them to clarify, fine tune and record their plan. Once the family is in agreement with their plan, they invite the referrer and other agencies to rejoin the meeting.

Stage 4 Agreeing the Plan:

The family share the details of its plan with the agencies. Everyone negotiates the resources requested, the monitoring arrangements and when to review the plan. Your role is to agree the family plan if it keeps the child/ young person safe from significant harm, addresses the agency's concerns and is lawful. Be clear with the family if agreement depends on consulting with managers, the outcome of assessments or a Court Hearing. Say how long these decisions will take and then inform the family and coordinator of the outcome in writing. If parts of the plan are not agreed, say why and give the family an opportunity to plan again.

Everyone has the opportunity to complete an evaluation form.

After the FGC:

- the coordinator will distribute the plan within five working days;
- the plan will form the basis of your agency's future work with the child/ young person and family;
- the child/ young person and their family will need the service providers' support to implement their changes;
- the process for the Review FGC is the same. Research suggests it is best held within three months;
- the coordinator will contact you to arrange the Review FGC and request an updated report from you.

"A positive family response to a very difficult situation" - Teacher

"The comments back from the teacher and EWO were fantastic" - Parent

"The family considered the questions and reached a solution-focused, supportive plan" – Grandparent

"A lot of unresolved problems were brought into the open and discussed. I think they all feel a lot closer as a family unit" – Family Friend

"Brilliant family discussion and plan which has worked extremely well and is evident in the changes in the children" – Social Worker

"Dad was calm and listened to his daughter who was able to tell her dad some home truths without him going off the deep end" - Advocate

Milton Keynes Family Group Conference Service

A Family* Group Conference (FGC) is a way of giving a family the opportunity to get together to make the best plan possible for their child or young person's welfare and future well-being.

*Family always refers to wider family and friends.

For further information:

If you need any further information or there is anything you are concerned about, you can speak with your coordinator.

Family Group Conference Service, Rivers ACE Centre, Trent Road, Bletchley, Milton Keynes MK3 7BB

Entrance via car park on Humber Way, MK3 7PH

Telephone: 01908 392241

Email: FGC@milton-keynes.gov.uk

Online: www.milton-keynes.gov.uk/FGC

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Available in audio, large print, braille and other languages