

Practice Standards for Family Group Conferences

'Family Group Conferences promote working WITH families, not doing TO or FOR'

In 2009, the Eastern and East Midlands Regional Network of Family Group Conference Services decided that the increased use locally and nationally of Family Group Conferences required a clear set of practice standards to ensure high quality and effective service provision. These principles were revised in 2018.

The Practice Standards set out in this document have been agreed by the following service providers:

- Bedford Borough FGC Service
- Bracknell Forest FGC Service
- Buckinghamshire FGC Service
- Central Bedfordshire FGC Service
- Coventry FGC Service
- Hertfordshire FGC Service
- Luton FGC Service
- Milton Keynes FGC Service
- Northamptonshire FGC Service
- Oxfordshire FGC Service
- Peterborough FGC Service
- Warwickshire FGC Service
- Windsor and Maidenhead FGC Service

Safe and effective plans require many views to consider, and change risks.

1. PRINCIPLES FOR FAMILY GROUP CONFERENCES (FGCS)

The key principles throughout the FGC process are as follows:

Empowerment - through the affirmation of the family, that they are the primary decision makers.

Participation - the priority of participation of children, young people and all family members.

Impartiality - both in terms of the process and the role of the Co-ordinators.

Flexibility and Availability - to the children's and family's needs in terms of all aspects of the process.

Information - clarity of resources, timescales, roles and viewpoints of the information givers* and family** members.

Confidentiality - respect of the privacy of the child and their family within the family network and to allied information givers.

Equal Opportunity - in terms of the whole community in all its diversity.

* Information givers are those representatives from services involved in the care and assessment of the children concerned

** Family also relates to other significant people in the child's life that the family may wish to include e.g. friends/neighbours

2. THE REFERRAL

Principles

An FGC is always offered to a family as a voluntary process.

The referring agencies need to demonstrate clarity of purpose for the FGC.

The FGC services will set out clearly at point of referral the principles and ethos of the process the referrer and family are entering.

Practice

The willingness of key family members for a referral to be made must be sought by the referrer prior to referral.

The referral must identify clearly what issues the referrer wants to present to the family.

The referrer must be clear about what their agency would consider unacceptable for the child or young person.

The FGC Service will require some background information, including regarding wider family, during the referral.

The FGC Service will require some information explaining what decisions the referrer has made and could make about each child or young person.

The referrer must be clear about what will happen next if the concerns are not resolved.

3. PREPARATION FOR THE FGC AND THE ROLE OF THE CO-ORDINATOR

Principles

Adequate preparation of all participants must take place in order for a FGC to proceed effectively.

The FGC Co-ordinator maintains an impartial mediating role throughout the preparation.

The Co-ordinator will take the lead in preparing both family members and information givers.

The Co-ordinators will be flexible and adaptable to the needs of each family.

Practice

The Co-ordinator will visit each potential attendee to prepare them, wherever this is practically possible.

The Co-ordinator will ensure each participant is fully conversant with the FGC process and the issues.

The Co-ordinator role includes listening to all the viewpoints and facilitating each person to ensure their voice is heard in a way that they want, even when unable to attend. This may include the use of advocates, interpreters and other supporters.

The Co-ordinator will relay important queries and information between participants with their permission to enable the most effective meeting for everyone.

The physical and emotional safety of participants is paramount in deciding who attends, how the meeting is chaired and where the FGC is held.

There must be ongoing risk assessment by the Co-ordinator to ensure everyone's safety.

The Co-ordinator will ensure the timing and location of the FGC is based on the availability, location and needs of the family.

During the FGC the family should be given all the time, space and amenities necessary to enable them to complete their plan.

Some services may be able to assist in getting family members to and from a FGC, including travel costs, childcare and other practical assistance as required.

The Co-ordinator will seek the permission of the young person or adults with Parental Responsibility to share information with other family members.

4. THE MEETING

Part 1 Information Sharing

Principles

Families, children and young people have the right to clear and relevant information. The meeting should be strengths-based and solution focussed.

Practice

The Co-ordinator, as Chair, ensures there are introductions, the process is clarified and ground rules are agreed.

The referrer will present information about the reasons for their involvement, the issues to be addressed and resources available in a clear, concise and jargon-free manner.

The family will be given every opportunity to ask all the questions they have of services.

Part 2 Private Family Time

Principles

Families must be given a chance to meet on their own without the Co-ordinator or staff from agencies being present.

Private Family Time is an integral part of the FGC process and is a proven method for families to develop their Family Plans regarding their children.

Practice

The Co-ordinator needs to clarify the expectations of the family during Private Family Time before leaving the room, including the writing of a plan.

Advocates can be part of Private Family Time, but must focus on supporting their identified child/adult.

The Co-ordinator and referrer must be available to offer ongoing support, throughout the period of Private Family Time.

Families are encouraged to have Private Family Time.

Part 3 Agreeing the Plan

Principles

The final part of the meeting is to check the family members' agreement of their plan.

The Family Plan belongs to the family and uses their own words.

The referrer needs to agree to the Family Plan in principle.

Practice

The Co-ordinator will support the family to consider the reality and achievability of their plan. There may be additions made to the family's plan with their consent to clarify content, intent and record further decisions made by the family as they agree the plan.

The referrer should not agree to the plan if it leaves the child at an increased likelihood of suffering significant harm.

The Family Plan is the only record to come out of the FGC.

A copy of the Family Plan will be sent to all participants.

5. THE ROLE OF THE CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

Principles

The voice of the child is central to the FGC process and this must be reinforced at all times.

Children and young people have the right for their voices to be heard.

Children and young people have the right to be consulted about who they regard as their family.

Practice

Children and young people must receive clear and accessible information about what a FGC is and what role they may choose to play.

Children and young people will be consulted by the Co-ordinator about where and how the meeting will take place.

All children and young people whatever their age and level of understanding have a right to attend some or all of their meeting. If they do not attend, the Co-ordinator will explore with the child/young person ways of ensuring their views are heard, for example through informal supporters, formal advocates, written or pictorial submissions.

The potential for emotional harm for a child or young person attending their FGC will be a paramount consideration for the Co-ordinator in planning the meeting.

6. THE ROLE OF FAMILY MEMBERS

Principles

Family members must be prepared to look at what needs to happen to meet the needs of the child(ren)/young person.

Family members will be encouraged to draw up, agree and carry out a plan with child(ren)/young person.

Family members should take part constructively with respect for all and with their focus on the child.

Practice

Family members should identify the significant family/friends who will attend the meeting.

They need to request any information they require to assist them in making decisions and plans.

They will develop a plan that meets the needs of the child(ren)/young person and is acceptable to the involved agencies.

They will consider monitoring arrangements to check that the plan is working.

They should consider holding and attending a review meeting to update the plan as necessary.

7. THE ROLE OF CHILDREN'S GUARDIANS

Principles

If appropriate, the purpose of the Guardians attendance is to provide the family with any information they may need.

Practice

If it is decided the Guardian should attend, the Coordinator will liaise prior to the meeting and the Guardian will only attend the information sharing part of the meeting.

8. THE ROLE OF ADVOCATES

Principles

Participants may be offered support to express their views in a FGC, including through formal advocates or informal supporters or by the FGC coordinator.

Practice

The Co-ordinator will prepare any advocates or supporters for the process.

The Co-ordinator will inform all participants regarding the attendance of advocates / supporters, taking into account issues of confidentiality and suitability to undertake the role.

In discussion with the family and the coordinator, advocates / supporters can join Private Family Time (or part of it), with the agreement of all participants. They may or may not be part of some or all of the Private Family Time.

9. RECORDING OF INFORMATION

Principles

The only record of an FGC is the family's plan. No minutes of a Family Group Conference are taken and the only record of a FGC should be the family's plan.

Practice

The Co-ordinator will ensure there is no minute-taking or recording of discussions during a FGC beyond the Family Plan.

Any written submissions to FGC's by family members will be kept on file with the Family Plan with their permission.

Working notes of Co-ordinators are not filed, due to the Co-ordinators neutral facilitative role.

A file will be held by a FGC service for each family and in general containing:

- The referral form.
- The Family Plan with any written submissions
- The report the referrer provides for the family.
- Children's wishes and feelings
- Any child protection or health and safety concerns highlighted through the FGC process and action taken.
- Names and contact details of participants.

A database will be held for each FGC service for performance management purposes.

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Available in audio, large print, braille and other languages