

What is a family group conference?

A family group conference (FGC) is a meeting to make plans and decisions about a child. It is convened and run by an independent co-ordinator.

'Family' is defined broadly, to include the child, parents, extended family, including those from a distance, with other adults and friends who are concerned and care about the child.

The role of professionals at the FGC is to provide information and consultation rather than to influence or make decisions.

At the FGC, the family will have private discussion time to produce their plan to meet the child's needs. The family's plan should be accepted, supported and resourced provided it does not put the child at risk of harm.

Why should I refer?

FGCs are based on the principles of partnership in the Children Acts 1989 and 2004, and Education Acts.

They can help families to find their own solutions with the support of professionals. The process aims to use the strengths and resources of the family, ensures their ownership of the problem and its management, and respects and works compatibly with each family's culture and values.



Planning

After 'private family time', the co-ordinator, referrer, and others who can stay, return to agree the details of the family plan, any resources required, and the monitoring and review arrangements. Once it is endorsed and agreed the plan is accepted unless it leaves the child at risk of significant harm.

Agreements will be reached as to how the plan will be monitored and reviewed.

After the FGC

The co-ordinator distributes the family plan within 5 working days. This plan forms the basis for future work with the child and family. Participants will be asked to complete an evaluation form.

All need to support, resource and implement the plan.

Review FGC.

The co-ordinator will offer the family a review and may agree a date at the initial FGC.

For more information, contact the

Family Group Conference Service
Children's Services,
Clarendon House
Monarch Way
Winchester
SO22 5PW

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01962 876355 / 876356

Upon request, the information in this leaflet can be produced in other formats (e.g. large print, audio tape) and other languages.

Family group conferences

A guide for referrers and service providers





Who can refer for an FGC?

Any Children's Services staff in a case-holding role e.g. social workers, also education welfare staff, schools, and other education staff may refer.

When should I refer?

When simpler solutions, or planning meetings, have not resolved problems and a plan or decision needs to be made about a child or young person, then an FGC referral may be made. An FGC should always be offered when:

- There is a request for a child 12 + to be accommodated
- Non-school attendance is leading to parental prosecution
- A year 1 - 8 child is permanently excluded from school

An FGC may also be referred in other cases, e.g.

- child protection
- placement breakdown / leaving care
- any other situation where family support or increased contact may improve a child's well-being.

How do I refer?

- Talk with the family. Raise the possibility of holding an FGC, its principles of involving the wider family (without discussing who should be invited) and the family's role in decision-making.
- Gain their signature to sharing the information on the referral form and prepare them to expect contact from a co-ordinator.
- Don't be put off if there doesn't appear to be a large family network. The co-ordinator will identify and invite all relevant family members.
- Complete a referral form and send it to the FGC service (address overleaf).

Referral forms are available in Children's Services offices, schools and on-line as well as from the FGC service direct.

Please ensure telephone numbers are included wherever possible. If you want a quick response, please precede the referral form with an e-mail or phone call.

What happens next?

A co-ordinator, whose role it is to convene the FGC and who is independent of any other involvement with the case, will contact you to discuss the referral, and then visit the child and family at home and map out the family network. They will meet or speak to family members and prepare them for the FGC, and ensure that a supporter or advocate is offered to the child, and any vulnerable adults. The co-ordinator will book a neutral venue and arrange the FGC at a time and place that allows for maximum family participation.

Professionals with key information are asked to attend as part of their normal professional duties. If an FGC is held 'out of hours', the co-ordinator will negotiate timings and attendance with all involved.

What is my professional role at an FGC?

Before the family group conference

Liaise with the co-ordinator in preparation for the FGC and agree what issues the family need to resolve. Avoid making other formal plans except in an emergency. Discuss the information you will be bringing with the family in advance.

Assess the child's problems.

Identify resources and strategies you and your agency might realistically offer (think creatively!)

At the FGC

- Provide information which is clear, specific, relevant and free of jargon.
- Explain your role and the type of help and resources which you can offer.
- A very brief written report or a few 'bullet points' on a prepared flip chart will help the family.
- Any legal or safety limitations need to be explained.
- Be willing to answer questions from the family and clarify points for them.
- Once the 'information-giving' stage is over, the professionals and co-ordinator will leave the family to discuss and plan in private.

