

A Family Group Conference is a way of providing families with an opportunity to get together to make the best plan for their children.

What is a Family Group Conference?

It is a meeting that can include the whole family and any friends involved in a child's life. Every family is different and has problems from time to time.

Why have a Family Group Conference?

Children/Young People and their families are generally in a good position to find their own solutions to their problems, provided that they have the necessary information available. Families may need information and services from more than one agency e.g. Children's Services, Education, Health and voluntary organisations in order to achieve this.

Who does what?

If the family and the agencies involved agree that getting the family together would be a good way to find their own solutions and create a plan to resolve them, then the agency will make a referral to the Family Group Conference Service.

An Independent Co-ordinator will then work with family members to make all the arrangements for the meeting to take place.

Preparation for the meeting

The Co-ordinator supports the child/young person and their immediate family to decide who to invite to their Family Group Conference. The best people to help children and young people are nearly always their own relatives and close family friends. Who comes to the Family Group Conference will be different for each family. Any worries can be discussed with the co-ordinator. In any discussion, it is the needs and wellbeing of the child or young person that is most important. The Co-ordinator arranges a suitable time and place for the conference, sends out the invitations and makes sure that everyone is clear about the purpose of the meeting.

How does the child or young person take part? Children and young people need to be involved in the Family Group Conference and their wishes and feelings taken into account by the adults. This will depend on their age and understanding. They can also have someone there who can help them put their point of view across. If there are any difficulties then the Co-ordinator will help.

What happens at the meeting?

■ **Information Sharing:** The family have the opportunity to discuss the information that agencies have about the child or young person, including their worries and concerns. After this, the family are told about services and support that may be available to help make their family's plan work. This part of the meeting is chaired by the Co-ordinator.

■ **Private family time:** The family members have time to talk among themselves and come up with a plan that addresses the concerns. We know that families don't always agree. The Co-ordinator can be called back to assist family members to reach an agreement about their plans if necessary at any time.

■ **Confirming the plan.** The family shares their plan with the Co-ordinator, who will support them to make sure that they have covered everything they needed to.

■ **Agreeing the plan.** When the family are happy with the plan, the agencies come back to the meeting to hear about it. Any services or support from the agencies which are needed to make the plan work are discussed. Everyone decides how they will check the plan is working and what they will do if it is not working.

The Co-ordinator will arrange to have the family's plan copied and sent out to everyone involved within 5 days.

The family's plan should be supported, provided that it is lawful and does not leave the child or young person at risk of harm. If this were to happen, it may then be necessary to have another Family Group Conference to change the plan to one that is safer for the child/young person.

■ **Reviewing the plan.** A review Family Group Conference or other meeting will always be offered to families within 3 months to check how the plan is working and to make new plans if necessary.