

Family Group Conference Process

Understanding the Family Group Conferencing (FGC) process helps you to support children, young people and families to participate in the process and develop successful family plans.

FGC comprises of five stages:

1. Referral

When there are decisions to be made for the safety and wellbeing of a child you are working with, consider if FGC is appropriate. FGC is voluntary so you must gain permission from the family to make a referral.

If they agree to participate:

- Discuss with the family what decisions need to be made at the FGC. The child must be at the centre of decisions made by family members.
- Consider whether there are any risk factors preventing some family members from attending.
- Be clear about the purpose of the FGC and explain the non-negotiables for the children's safety. Explain safety concerns in a way that family members will understand.
- Let the family know that the FGC facilitator is an impartial person whose role is to assist all to reach an agreed family plan.

The FGC facilitator can provide support to develop the non-negotiables (sometimes referred to as bottom lines).

Include a family genogram at the referral stage of the FGC to support the FGC facilitator to understand the family structure. Provide a list of family members or key people to be invited to attend. Further attendees may be identified during the preparation stage.

2. Preparation

The FGC facilitator will lead the preparation for the conference as outlined below:

- Inform all participants of the FGC process and what is expected from them at the conference. Participants may include family members, staff from FSPs, DCJ or other support agencies and any other people who are important to the child.
- Make sure all the participants have a clear understanding of the purpose of the FGC which includes the safety, risk and wellbeing concerns for the child or young person.
- Make sure the dynamics of the family, including any safety or risk issues for the participants are identified and addressed before the FGC.
- Liaise with the caseworker to make sure the views of the child will be heard in a safe and appropriate way.
- Explain confidentiality and ensure that all participants have signed the confidentiality agreement before attending.
- Liaise with the referring caseworker about venue, catering and travel requirements as required.

Children are encouraged to attend the FGC so their voice is heard. However, this is dependent on the nature of the FGC and on advice from the caseworker.

Where a child is unable to attend, ensure that their voice will be heard in another way. This may include helping them to write down their views, draw a picture or take photos.

The caseworker should talk to the family about the purpose of the FGC before the conference to help them feel at the centre of a process.

The preparation of the facilitator and caseworker should mean there are no surprises during the conference.

3. Conference

The conference has three components:

- Introductions and information sharing
- Family time
- Presentation of and agreement to the family plan.

Introductions and Information Sharing

The FGC facilitator will lead the process where all participants introduce themselves, explain their role and their relationship to the child and their family.

They will also establish the group rules and remind participants about the confidentiality agreement they have signed. The three stages of the conference, purpose of the FGC and non-negotiables for safety and wellbeing will be shared.

Service providers can offer information about how they can provide support to the family moving forward.

The FGC facilitator will write up the guiding questions to be resolved at the FGC. These help the family to know what to address in developing their family plan during family time.

Family Time

Family time is where family have the opportunity to develop their family plan without involvement from caseworkers or any other service providers.

There is no limit as to how long family can spend in family time. Family time will vary depending on the family and the safety, risk and wellbeing issues that need to be addressed.

During family time, all other non-family participants and the FGC Facilitator leave the room. They stay close by to answer questions from the family. The family may ask for help from the FGC facilitator during family time, however the facilitator should not remain in the room for extended periods.

Presentation of and agreement to the family action plan

Once the family plan is completed, the family will present the plan to the entire group for further discussion and agreement. The family plan must address all safety, risk and wellbeing concerns for the child raised in the information sharing stage of the conference.

All tasks, actions and decisions in the family plan must be negotiated and agreed to by all participants on the day. Ideally, the family plan will include contingency plans. If the FSP or DCJ are satisfied that the family plan addresses the safety and wellbeing concerns all participants are asked to sign the agreed family plan.

The FGC should occur within four weeks of the referral being developed, submitted and accepted by the FGC facilitator.

The FGC facilitator will type up the family plan as written by the family and distribute it to all participants within one week of the conference.

Confidentiality

Unless the participants agree, the family plan and conversations held during the FGC are confidential and therefore are not admissible in any subsequent legal proceedings.

4. Implementation of the Family Plan

The caseworker needs to integrate the actions from the family plan into the case plan or family action plan. The caseworker supports and monitors families to implement the family plan and fulfil any actions needed to support the successful implementation of the plan.

If the family plan is not working due to circumstances changing or if aspects of the family plan need to be altered, consider:

- alternative casework options
- referring to another agency to work with the family
- referral for another FGC

Review and update the case plan to reflect any changes.

5. Review of the Family Plan

A date for review of the plan should be agreed on at the conference and must occur within three months.

The caseworker will arrange and hold a meeting with the FGC participants to monitor progress of the family in actioning their family plan and measurable outcomes and changes. The review will also identify any extra actions required to overcome barriers to further progress, concerns, or risk.