

Early Help family group conferences

Information for taking part

Family group conferences – family and friends making decisions together



Early Help family group conferences

As members of a family we all can find ourselves having things to sort out, or be at points in time when decisions need to be made.

Whether we are in difficult times, struggling to manage our children or needing support with making plans for our children, Early Help family group conferences (FGCs) can be a useful option.



Why hold a family group conference (FGC)?

An FGC is free and is an independent meeting organised for you with the family and friends you want to have there. It is a chance for you all to take time out from busy family life, to help come up with solutions and a plan to deal with whatever is going on.

What family members said after taking part in an FGC:

“It got to the heart of the matter.”

“With everyone in the room, no one could go away saying they did not know what was going on.”



What Camden young people said:

“Everyone spoke and listened to each other.”

“It gives you a chance to think about what is happening and plan to make things better.”

“It gives you a space to talk, helping with confidence and being able to look at the future.”

“It promotes togetherness and helps young people.”



Who should come to a family group conference?

You decide who is invited to the meeting. The best people will be those who know you and care about you - your family, plus friends and neighbours who feel like your family.

There may also be some professionals who could attend to help with information and advice - for example, teachers, mentors or health professionals.

Who organises a family group conference?

The meeting is organised by a trained independent co-ordinator. This is someone who is not from the professional network or involved in the decision-making. Their job is to make sure that the meeting runs smoothly. The co-ordinator will meet you and your family to plan and prepare for the meeting.

It is important that during an FGC the family group makes the decisions.

“The co-ordinator was really supportive and helpful.”

Family member who took part in an FGC

“The co-ordinator was sensitive and was skilful at chairing.”

Professional who joined an FGC



What happens if I agree to take part in a family group conference?

Your co-ordinator will talk to you about who you feel is in your family network and arrange for them to be invited. After discussing it with you, the co-ordinator will arrange a time and a place for the meeting, organise refreshments and a crèche for any younger children. The meeting will, whenever possible, be in the language you use at home.

“It reminds me of other cultural family meetings back in my country of origin. It was very important for all of us to have a co-ordinator from our own background. It made everything easy, and there were no barriers of language and culture.”

Family member

The co-ordinator will make sure that the child or children's views are heard in the meeting. Where appropriate, they may arrange for someone to support the child in the meeting, or to speak for them.

“An advocate is available for young people, which means there is a voice for the child.”

Teacher

Are FGCs confidential?

The FGC service won't talk about your problems to anyone unless you ask us to do so. An FGC is confidential, except in situations where there is a risk of serious harm to a child. You only tell us what you need to and nothing more.

What happens at a family group conference?

There are three parts to an FGC. The co-ordinator will always be available to help sort out any problems.

Part 1 Information-giving

This part of the meeting is an opportunity for you to get information from any professionals attending (if you wanted to invite them – remember the family decides who comes to the meeting). There will be lots of chances to ask them questions and to be clear about what they are saying. They will then leave the meeting.

Part 2 Private family time

You, your family and friends will be left on your own, without the people who work with you, so that you can talk about the information that you heard in the first part and make plans together for you. The co-ordinator and other information givers stay in another room.

Part 3 Explaining your plan

Your family will share the plan with others at the meeting, including any information givers who were there at the beginning of the meeting.

What happens to your plan after the meeting?

The FGC co-ordinator, with your agreement, can type the plan up and distribute it to all participants.

For the plan to succeed, everyone needs to put into action all that has been agreed, including professionals who have made agreements. Later on, another FGC can be held to review the plan and see what still needs to be decided.

“I feel at least some form of dialogue has now begun and hopefully we can begin to work together as a family for our child’s sake.”

Family member

Remember, it is your decision whether or not to have an FGC. Most families tell us it made a difference to them.

Examples of where Early Help FGCs can help:

- drawing up plans for children with special educational needs and disabilities
- support for new parents and those with children under five
- reducing antisocial behaviour from young people in the community
- ensuring that children whose parents are seriously ill continue to receive the care they need
- supporting a parent with a mental or physical disability
- helping relatives to care for children or young people
- improving school attendance
- addressing problems caused by divorce or separation
- supporting young carers and their families.

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