

Family Group Conferencing: Information for Children and Young People



CHILD PROTECTION INFORMATION SHEET

What is a Family Group Conference?

- A Family Group Conference is a meeting called by the Department's child protection service when plans need to be made or reviewed for the future care and protection of a child or young person who has been at risk.

Who attends a Family Group Conference?

- The child or young person (if he or she is old enough and wishes to attend), immediate and extended family members, other close friends or support people, representatives of services working with the child or family members, child protection workers and the facilitator of the meeting. An advocate for the child or a family member may also be invited to help them to have a say

What is a 'facilitator' and what do they do?

- A facilitator is a trained professional who is not involved with the family situation. He or she is contracted by the Department to run the Family Group Conference. In order to prepare for the meeting, the facilitator will consult child protection and talk to the child or young person and other key family members.
- The facilitator invites everyone to the Family Group Conference and makes all of the necessary arrangements.
- Children, young people and family members can make suggestions to the facilitator about where they would like to have the meeting and what would make everyone feel as comfortable as possible.

What is the purpose of having a Family Group Conference?

- The purpose is to bring everyone concerned with the care, safety and health of a child or young person together so that they can contribute to a plan which will provide him or her with support and a secure environment in which to grow up.

What happens at a Family Group Conference?

- The Family Group Conference will have 3 parts and generally the whole process takes about 3 - 4 hours. If the situation is very complicated or the family is very large and the meeting concerns a number of children, it could take longer and even be split over a couple of meetings.
- Part 1 of the Family Group Conference is about Sharing Information. Everyone goes into one room and introduces themselves. The reason for the meeting is explained and workers from child protection and other support agencies give information to the whole group about their concerns, what they have done, what ideas they may have

and what support they can offer the family to help with developing their plan.

- If the child or young person is not present, or is not confident or able to speak, an adult who is acting as his or her advocate will talk on his or her behalf.
- **Part 2** of the Family Group Conference is about **Private Family Time**. All the people who are not part of the family (or close friends) will leave the room at this point but the facilitator and child protection workers will stay close by in case they are needed to help the family.
- This leaves you free as a family to use the information from Part 1 of the conference to discuss and decide on your plan for how you can support each other and use community and Departmental supports to meet the needs of the child or young person who is at the centre of the process.
- If you need any help during this part of the Family Group Conference, the facilitator or worker can come back in for a time but they will leave you in peace to talk in private and reach a decision as a family in your own time. You can take as much time as you like.
- **Part 3** of the Family Group Conference is about **Sharing the Family Decision**. This is when the family's plan for the future care, protection and safety of the child or young person is presented to the Department workers and the facilitator.
- It is important that the plan includes ideas about who will be responsible for seeing that it is carried out and it will be made clear that everyone understands what has been agreed before the Family Group Conference is finished.
- The plan may need to be approved by a senior manager in the Department. Once it is approved, your plan will be recorded and become an official document.
- The plan may need to be presented to the Court if an application or alteration to a legal order is part of the family decision.
- The Court does not need to know what happened at the conference as this remains confidential but it does need to know who was there and what decisions were made. Details of what is said at the Family Group Conference will not be used in Court. Only a record of the agreements or decisions of the conference will be given to the Court.
- After the Family Group Conference everyone who was present (and family members who could not be present) will be sent a brief report about the conference with a copy of the agreements and the decisions made at the meeting.