

# Cafcass family group conference service

Working together to  
resolve family conflict



Putting children first  
in family courts

# What is a family group conference?

When parents decide to separate or divorce, children may feel loss, anger, sadness and even guilt. They may feel these things less if parents work together to agree on contact and residency arrangements.

A family group conference offers a unique opportunity for parents, children, other family members and friends to get together and discuss how to sort out any problems. Holding a family group conference is one way to make it easier for parents to make a mutually agreed plan for their children, rather than go through acrimonious and expensive court proceedings.

## Preparing for the conference

Following a referral from your Family Court Adviser, an independent family group conference co-ordinator will arrange to meet with you. 'Independent' means someone who has not worked with your family before. All family group conference co-ordinators have received special training.

The co-ordinator will help you to decide who needs to be invited to the conference and arrange where and when it will take place. Everyone will receive a letter confirming the time and place for the meeting.

Depending on your child's age and understanding, the co-ordinator may ask them about their wishes and feelings. It is very important that children are encouraged to attend the meeting. Children can have their own support person (advocate) to help them to participate.

## Who should attend?

Whoever you think would help you to make the best decisions about your children. This could be family members, friends or neighbours. You could also request that professionals who know your child well (such as teachers, health visitors or social workers) attend. The professionals can only share their professional opinion and will not make any decisions at the family group conference. Where possible, everyone important to your child should be invited.



# On the day...

## Information sharing

The first part of the conference is about information sharing. The co-ordinator will ask everyone to introduce themselves. If there are any professionals present, they will provide information that will help you to make a plan for your child. There will be lots of opportunities to ask them questions.

## Private family time

This is the crucial part of the meeting. Your family and friends will have the opportunity to have private time to discuss and agree a plan. At this point the professionals and the co-ordinator will leave, so that you can:

- discuss the information you have been given
- agree a plan
- decide who will do what
- discuss how you will ensure that the plan works well
- work out who will help you if the plan does not work well.

You can take as much time as you need to discuss these issues. The co-ordinator will be close by and you can ask for support if you wish. If you are having difficulties in reaching an agreement, the co-ordinator will help you.

## Agreement meeting

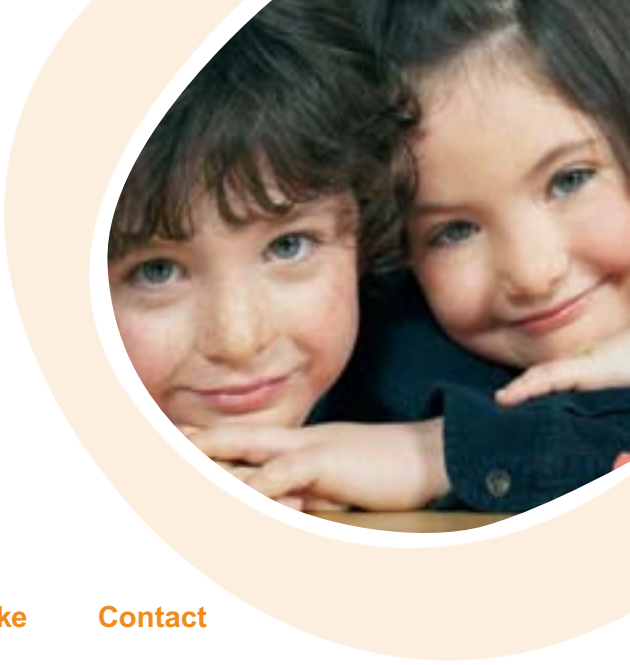
Once you have agreed on a family plan, the co-ordinator will invite the professionals back to join the meeting. The co-ordinator will then share the plan with everyone present.

You will also discuss whether you should set up a meeting in six to eight months to review the plan. If you require any support or services in order for the plan to work, your Family Court Adviser will help you to arrange this.

The professionals or the courts will only disagree with your plan if they think it puts your children at risk. If that happens, the co-ordinator will ask you to reconsider it.

**Everyone, including children present at the meeting, will sign the family plan. A copy will be submitted to the court as the agreed family plan.**





# Feedback

## How can I give feedback or make a complaint?

We want to know what you think about family group conferences. After the conference you will be given a feedback form to complete. Your comments will help us to improve our services, so we would be grateful if you could take a few moments to complete this.

We are also looking for families who are willing to talk to people who are thinking about having a family group conference and would like to talk to someone who has been through it already.

If you are unhappy about the way your family group conference was organised, you can contact the managers of the family group conference service. They will be able to discuss your concerns and, if necessary, assist you in making a complaint through the Cafcass complaints procedures.

## Contact

