



Family Group Conferences



A Family Group Conference (FGC) offers parents, children, other family members and friends, the opportunity to get together and discuss how to sort out any problems they may be having. It is one way to make it easier for families to agree a plan for their children, rather than go through the courts. FGCs are mostly used in cases where families are having problems agreeing where children live (residence) and who they see (contact).

Preparing for the conference

Following a referral from your Cafcass worker, a family group conference co-ordinator, who hasn't worked with your family before, will arrange to meet with you. All family group conference co-ordinators have received special training.

The co-ordinator will help you 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 of the meeting.

Depending on your child's age and understanding, the co-ordinator may ask them about their needs, wishes and feelings. It is very important that children are encouraged to attend the meeting. Children can have their own support person, such as a family member or other chosen adult, to help them to participate.

Who should attend?

Where possible, everyone important to your child should be invited. This could include family members, friends or neighbours. You also have the option to ask professionals such as teachers and health visitors to attend. The professionals can only share their professional opinion and will not make any decisions for you at the Family Group Conference. Your Cafcass worker will also be there to provide their support.

Getting started

The co-ordinator will ask everyone to introduce themselves and will help the group to agree on the ground rules and agenda for the day. 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 some 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 all ensure that the plan works well.

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

Agreement meeting

Once you have agreed on the family plan the co-ordinator, Cafcass worker, and any other professionals that you invited to attend, will rejoin the meeting. The co-ordinator will share the plan and ensure that everyone present understands what will happen. Everyone, including the children present at the meeting, will sign the family plan. The plan will feature in the report that your Cafcass worker then writes to the court. The court will read the plan and make the final decision about what it feels is best for your children.



Notes



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