Family Group Conference Standards in Northern Ireland
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Section one

INTRODUCTION

1.1 What is a family group conference

The family group conference process aims to empower families and to acknowledge and respect their strengths.

A family group conference (FGC) is a process to engage the wider family in decision making. This process leads to a meeting in which a child or young person or vulnerable adult and the wider family and friends network come together within a supportive environment to make decisions which will ensure that the child/young person/vulnerable adult is safe and his/her wellbeing is being promoted.

1.2 When to use a family group conference

The family group conference process has the potential for a wide and flexible application across a number of areas - Childrens Services eg child welfare; juvenile justice and education and Adult Services eg disability; older people; criminal justice and mental health.

Family group conferencing should be seriously considered as a response any time a decision needs to be made to resolve a difficulty in relation to a child/young person/vulnerable adult. This may relate to support needs, protection from risk or need for care.

1.3 Why do we need to have standards

These standards have been developed to assist children, young people, adults and families as well as professionals both understand what a family group conference is and what they can expect if involved in one.

These standards identify the basic requirements that can be expected from a family group conference.

1.4 Who has developed the standards

The standards have been developed by the Family Group Conference Forum in Northern Ireland which provides a network for those interested in this way of working and offers training and support to those who deliver FGC services. The FGC Forum (NI) is a multi-agency and multidisciplinary body with representatives from Health and Social Care, Justice, Education, Voluntary Organisations and the Department of Justice.

The standards have been developed by drawing on current practice and learning in Northern Ireland through listening to what families and professionals have said. They also draw on learning from other countries.

We hope this is a document which will ensure that no matter to whom the service is provided, children, young people and vulnerable adults will experience the key elements of the process positively.

For Health and Social Care Trust professionals the standards should be read alongside FGC Regional Guidance for Children's Services.
KEY PRINCIPLES
OF THE FGC PROCESS
Section two

KEY PRINCIPLES OF THE FAMILY GROUP CONFERENCE PROCESS

2.1 The family group conference (FGC) process is a strengths based, solution focused way of working, which acknowledges the positives as well as addressing the needs and challenges in a family.

2.2 Children, young people and vulnerable adults are at the centre of the decision making process and have the right for their voices to be heard.

2.3 The FGC Co-ordinator is always independent of any professional involvement with the family. The independence of the Co-ordinator is a crucial factor in the process and this must be preserved.

2.4 Children, young people, and vulnerable adults have the right to have their families and other significant people fully involved in planning their future.

2.5 Families have the right and responsibility to be active decision makers about their family members. Given the relevant information, families can make informed, safe decisions about how the needs of a child/young person/vulnerable adult can be met.

2.6 Participation in a family group conference is a voluntary process for the child/young person/vulnerable adult and family members involved.

2.7 Each family is unique. Its culture and communication style is respected and embedded in the FGC process. Therefore, each FGC is unique.

2.8 The process of the FGC should be informed and styled by the family and the pacing of the process will depend on the specific needs and circumstances of the family.

2.9 Private time for the family is an essential component of the family group conference process.

2.10 The family group conference plan should be accepted and resourced by the referring agency unless it places a child, young person or vulnerable adult at risk of significant harm.
FAMILY GROUP CONFERENCE PROCESS

REFERRAL

1

Application form completed with consent. Referred to FGC Service Manager who allocates to an FGC Co-ordinator.

PREPARATION

2

Co-ordinator engages directly with child/young person/vulnerable adult, family, extended family friends and professionals and prepares them for FGC. Advocate offered to child/young person/vulnerable adult if appropriate. A neutral venue is agreed.
A review of the plan provides an opportunity to acknowledge what has worked and make changes where necessary

Family may choose to appoint a monitor or link-person from within family to ensure all agreed actions in the plan are fulfilled by family and referring agency

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A review of the family plan will be offered.

Family Plan – actions and contingency plan developed by family. Family plan shared with referrer to seek agreement

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Information Sharing by professionals

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Private Family Time – voice of child/young person/vulnerable adult and family members, discussion and agreement made

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Standard one
The FGC Service will provide a high quality service which works within the NI FGC Standards.

Standard two
The voice of the child/young person/vulnerable adult will be central to the FGC process and must be sought and heard at all stages of the process.

Standard three
Everyone participating in the FGC will be prepared and supported throughout the process.

Standard four
Families have a right to private family time within a safe and supportive environment in order to make decisions and plans.

Standard five
Families have the right to have safe plans agreed and resourced.

Standard six
Families have the right to be involved in the development of FGC Services.
Standard **one**

**THE FGC SERVICE WILL PROVIDE A HIGH QUALITY SERVICE WHICH WORKS WITHIN THE NI FGC STANDARDS.**

1.1 The FGC service will be delivered by an Independent Co-ordinator who will have no other professional role with the family and will have no involvement in any professional decision making for the child/young person/vulnerable adult or family.

1.2 The FGC Service will ensure that the Independent Co-ordinator will be trained in the FGC model and in the skills necessary to undertake the role.

1.3 The FGC manager will provide supervision to the Co-ordinator.

1.4 FGC managers will oversee and ensure a responsive and accountable delivery of the service.

Standard **two**

**THE VOICE OF THE CHILD/YOUNG PERSON/VULNERABLE ADULT WILL BE CENTRAL TO THE FGC PROCESS AND MUST BE SOUGHT AND HEARD AT ALL STAGES OF THE PROCESS.**

2.1 The Independent Co-ordinator will ensure that the wishes and feelings of the child/young person/vulnerable adult will be sought and represented in the conferencing process.

2.2 The Co-ordinator will ensure that advocacy is available for those who require it.

2.3 The Co-ordinator will ensure that the views of those unable to attend are shared at the meeting.

2.4 Where the child/young person/vulnerable adult chooses not to be or is unable to be present at the FGC, the Co-ordinator will share the family plan with them and ensure their understanding of the content.

"**FOR MYSELF, I THOUGHT IT WAS VERY HELPFUL AND I WAS GLAD TO SEE I HAD PLENTY OF SUPPORT.**"
---
Foster Carer

"**WE WERE GRATEFUL TO THE FGC SERVICE. THIS WAS VERY GOOD IN SORTING THINGS OUT FOR OUR FAMILY. WE FELT THAT OUR VIEWS WERE TAKEN INTO CONSIDERATION.**"
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Family Member
EVERYONE PARTICIPATING IN THE FGC WILL BE PREPARED AND SUPPORTED THROUGHOUT THE PROCESS.

3.1 The Co-ordinator will confirm the reasons for the referral with the person(s) central to the process and with their agreement share the information with the wider family network and professionals.

3.2 The Co-ordinator, with the child/young person/vulnerable adult and carers will explore those they wish to invite to the conference.

3.3 The Co-ordinator will use a range of creative methods to ensure that all contributions are sought and shared, and will ensure that the views of those unable to attend are shared at the meeting.

3.4 The FGC will be held in the first language of the child/young person/vulnerable adult, and attention will be given to any significant cultural issues.

3.5 The Co-ordinator will ensure that all children/young people/vulnerable adults and families will be prepared and supported to participate fully in the FGC process.

3.6 The Co-ordinator will assist the professionals in preparation for their role in the FGC process.

3.7 The Co-ordinator, at the end of the process, will ensure that all participants have understood what has been decided.

“VISITS TO THE FAMILY PRIOR TO THE MEETING WERE VERY HELPFUL. IT WAS ALL MADE CLEAR AND EXPLAINED WELL.”

Family Member
Standard four

FAMILIES HAVE A RIGHT TO PRIVATE FAMILY TIME WITHIN A
SAFE AND SUPPORTIVE ENVIRONMENT IN ORDER TO MAKE
DECISIONS AND PLANS.

4.1 The family group conference will be agreed at a date, time and venue that suits the family.

4.2 The Co-ordinator will ensure that there is a neutral venue which is suitable for the family to discuss issues in private and that there is sufficient time made available for the family to do so.

4.3 The Co-ordinator has the responsibility to outline the expectations of behaviour in the meeting. The Co-ordinator will ensure that “ground rules” are established and adhered to so that all participants can feel safe and respected and their views heard.

4.4 The Co-ordinator and other relevant professionals will be available to the family for clarification or to provide information if required during private family time.

4.5 Only exceptionally if requested by a family member will a Co-ordinator/other professional be present during private family time for a prolonged period. This will only occur with the agreement of the family.

4.6 It is important to include all those identified by the family – however the Co-ordinator will assess any safety issues before the meeting and plan how these can be managed. In exceptional cases this may result in a family member not being invited to attend the meeting and their views represented in another way at the meeting.

“This way of having meetings is much better because there are no social workers there and we could talk without some social worker shouting at me. They should use these types of meetings all the time.”

Young Person

“The best bit was knowing that my family cared about me. FGC is a good method of sorting out a family problem.”

Young Person
Standard five

FAMILIES HAVE THE RIGHT TO HAVE SAFE PLANS AGREED AND RESOURCED.

5.1 The family plan is the only written document to be produced by the FGC. The Co-ordinator will ensure that all participants receive a copy of the plan as soon as possible after the meeting.

5.2 The referrer will agree the plan as long as it does not place the child/young person/vulnerable adult at risk of harm and will consider any resources identified by the family.

5.3 If there is to be a delay in agreeing the plan the family need to be informed of the reasons and a timescale agreed.

5.4 The referrer will support the family to carry out their plan and ensure that any resources agreed are provided to the family in a timely way.

5.5 The family may choose a monitor/link-person who, along with the referrer, ensures that the family plan is being followed.

"RESOURCING THE FAMILY’S PLAN IS IMPORTANT FOR FAMILIES AS IT IS THEIR FAMILY’S COMMITMENT TO GIVE SUPPORT. FAILURE TO RESOURCE OR SUPPORT CAN DETERMINE THE OUTCOME FOR THEM AND THEIR CHILDREN.”

Social Worker

Standard six

FAMILIES HAVE THE RIGHT TO BE INVOLVED IN THE EVALUATION AND DEVELOPMENT OF FGC SERVICES.

6.1 Services will routinely seek feedback from all participants and these views will be used to inform and develop practice.

6.2 The FGC Service will use creative methods to ensure the views of the child/young person/vulnerable adult are sought and heard.

6.3 Participants can raise concerns or provide feedback about their involvement with the FGC process and this will be dealt with in a constructive way.

“I THOUGHT IT WAS A VERY GOOD WAY OF WORKING. IT’S VERY SORRY ON CHILDREN TO BE SEPARATED FROM THEIR FAMILIES AND IF THEY CAN THEY SHOULD STAY WITH THEM. OFTEN, AS WITH OUR CASE, IT IS EXTENDED FAMILY THAT DO THE CARING AND THEY NEED TO BE INVOLVED. THIS TYPE OF MEETING ALLOWED THIS TO HAPPEN.”

Family Member
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