

Family Group Conference

Operational Guidance

July 2022

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Role of Family Group Conference

Family group conferences (FGC) are used to encourage and empower individuals and families to be more resilient and help to prevent them from returning to services. For example, an FGC may be used to address a parental issue, such as a health or substance misuse problem, or to provide childcare and support for a single parent; to tackle a concern for a young person following parental separation; or to address school attendance issues, or behaviour problems at home or in the community.

The aim is for families to be at the centre of all decision making allowing them to take control of their own journey with the ownership of their plan on how to positively move forward. Families will ultimately gain the tools required to end the need for service involvement and stop 'the revolving door'. Preventing higher service cost intervention.

Gateshead's Family Group Conference Service comprises of a Team Manger, a Senior Practitioner, four full time FGC Coordinators and one part time FGC Coordinator.

The recent implementation of the new model to meet the growing needs of families in Gateshead with Children Service's involvement has been met positively across all services. The new model imposes FGC as an opt out service. Every family must be offered this opportunity, with detailed rationale submitted if they are not.

Role of the FGC Coordinator (FGC)

On receiving the allocation email the FGC will attempt to contact the referrer within 48 hours.

An initial conversation prior to any preparation starting with family will be held. The FGC process for agreeing, implementing, monitoring, and reviewing the plans will be made clear. This includes clarity of roles, explaining the FGC process, and any further information required about the referral. If contact cannot be made after two attempts the FGC Coordinator will seek advice from the senior practitioner who will also try to contact the referrer.

Once the initial conversation is held the FGC coordinator will attempt to contact members of the family with parental responsibility within 48 hours. They will introduce themselves, the service, their impartiality, and reason for the referral. Where engagement is proving difficult, contact will be attempted over a 14-working day period to see if successful engagement can be achieved. Notification will be sent to referrer detailing outcome and recorded on Mosaic in family group records.

Once contact has been made with parents and they agree to engage, wider identified family members will then be contacted. The option of an advocate for any family member including the children is offered.

Discussions will be held with all identified family members regarding the content outlined within in the referral. Options to address any concerns will also be discussed and considered. The FGC coordinator must gain the views of the wider support network and gain their offers of support while working closely with the family preparing them for the FGC.

This includes ground rules and clarity of professionals' roles. The process for agreeing, implementing, monitoring, and reviewing plan is made clear. The FGC coordinator will ensure written views are captured from family who cannot attend.

Involvement of children and young people is inclusive within the FGC, to gain their views and wishes, unless family or referrer state otherwise. To do this the FGC coordinators will visit the children at school, visit them at home or take them somewhere neutral where the child or YP will engage.

The FGC should be as inclusive as possible. The FGC coordinator must work collaboratively with the other professionals who are involved, explaining the process and their role within it. FGC coordinator will ask professionals attending to say what their involvement is with the family and how from their discipline they see the family addressing the concerns.

Throughout the preparation the FGC coordinator must risk assess and use professional judgement as to whether the FGC goes ahead. If they are happy that it will go ahead safely, they then negotiate and arrange the date, time, and venue of the FGC with everyone who is attending. Rooms must be booked accordingly and if late openings of council buildings are required, this is requested with facilities management.

The FGC coordinator arranges refreshments and ensures facilities are available and accessible.

If FGC is cancelled it must be rearranged asap. If the FGC is cancelled by family a second and third time the referral will then be closed.

The FGC coordinator must facilitate the stages of the FGC, addressing any issues of race, gender, culture or disability, risk assessing, monitoring family interaction, ensuring private family time is adequate and adhered to, monitoring breaks, ensuring every person has a voice and everyone is listened to. They need to ensure family are given time and space away from professionals to discuss the issues and decide how best they are going to address the concerns and move forward. At the end of the FGC the FGC coordinator must ask the referrer if on behalf of the local authority they agree to the family's plan.

The FGC coordinator will then type up the plan sending a copy to everyone who attended the meeting in the post. A copy of the family plan will be uploaded on to Mosaic in the child's family group records.

Leaflets outlining Family Group Conference and Mediation can be sourced through Claire Soulsby (clairesoulsby@gateshead.gov.uk) or Bev Coombs (beverleycoombs@gateshead.gov.uk)

Case Intake Procedure

SGCP Teams, A&I Team, CCIN Team and CWD Team, Looked After Children's Team, Targeted Family Support Team and Specialist Support Team all refer via Mosaic. The referral form can be sought in the child's family group records via the following: Current work > square with green + > referral for family group conference/mediation.

Once the referral form is complete, they reassign to the FGC Virtual Worker. This will be triaged by the senior practitioner/team manager. If accepted, it will be allocated to an FGC coordinator. If not accepted, it will be closed if family do not wish to engage or returned if more information on referral form is required. An email is sent to the referrer with the FGC coordinator's details, explaining the preparation period will begin once an initial conversation has been held between them.

The referral pathway allows for individual team data to be collated specifically evidencing the volume, source, transition point and if the 'opt out' option is used. **If the 'opt out' option is used the referrer must add an FGC case record on to Mosaic with the rationale of why the referral is not being made.**

Analysing this data to obtain whether FGC is being implemented at the right time for families to achieve the best outcome is vital to achieve the overall aim. Equally data collected on the result of the FGC will indicate effective service delivery and areas of improvement.

When to refer:

- At the start of Child in Need/Child Protection process
- Prior to the signing of a section 20
- Before or during Family Proceedings
- At crisis point
- To resolve conflict
- When kinship care is required
- Placement stability is uncertain
- Prior to children returning home
- Support Care Leavers Transition
- To make a care plan/support plan/safety plan
- At transition point or escalation
- To reduce the risk of re offending
- At the point of case closure

Initial Contact Procedure

Referral Received into Family Group Conference (FGC) virtual mailbox



– Reads through referral and commences Triage process:

- Referral Details
- Family Details
- Why FGC is requested – inclusive of Focus, Strengths, Concerns, Bottom Line – *inclusive of families understanding of what has been shared should FGC be declined / not progressed*



- Manager will contact referrer and Quality Assure (QA) referral form content – check all information is correct, family have given consent and understand FGC detail, Family members subject to referral is correct and all to be involved are included.
- Manager will contact primary family members (those that have PR status) and check understanding awareness and readiness to engage with FGC process



Allocation e-mail to be sent to FGC coordinators detailing the following:

- Childs/ren names and Mosaic reference number
- Referrer contacted and QA completed – named social worker/other professional can be included
- Primary family members contacted – (PR status)

Timescales:

The referral will be allocated within two weeks of submission.

Preparation will start immediately after the FGC coordinator has held an initial conversation with the referrer.

FGC will be facilitated within 4-6 weeks of allocation.

All families from SGCP Teams, A&I Team, CCIN Team and CWD Team will be offered up to three review meetings each 6-8 weeks apart.

All families from Looked After Children's Team, Targeted Family Support Team and Specialist Support Team will be offered one review meeting 6-8 weeks after the initial FGC.

Expected outcomes

- Families take responsibility for their journey rather than the agency
- Families gain a better understanding of the agencies concerns, available resources and options available to them
- Positive partnerships between the family, community and services are built up
- A decision-making process providing a safe forum for the family to come together
- Transparency and accountability for all involved
- Engages agencies in clear planning process
- Children have increased contact with members of the extended family and feel listened to
- Results in clear decision-making processes and an agreed plan

Confidentiality and Information Sharing Agreement

Sharing information safely is essential when working with families. It is important to have a clear confidentiality and information sharing policy to help establish a legal framework for handling and sharing information both internally and externally to the service.

It is important to demonstrate safe decision-making. This means that information shared, and actions taken need to be necessary and proportionate in protecting the families worked with.

Important points to explain to clients

It is important that families understand the agreement they are entering into so that they can give *informed consent*. The Family Group Conference coordinator will explain the reasons why information might be shared and how the service will treat the sensitive and personal data it is given.

Information will be stored on Mosaic case management system.

Case Management Procedure

Stage 1

- The service will collect data from the family group conference referral form. This should be completed by the referring agency.
- Initial contact (follow procedure) with family is to advise on the process of family group conferencing. FGC will explain what support is available, confidentiality and information sharing including the right to access the file under Freedom of Information.

Stage 2

- Following the initial contact procedure an FGC conference will be convened with a view to completing a family plan.

Stage 3

- FGC preparation 4-6 weeks – individuals family members are contacted and FGC process discussed

Stage 4

- FGC held and process undertaken – plan drafted

Stage 5

- Review preparation – family work to implement their agreed family Plan

Stage 6

- Review held 6-8 weeks after initial FGC

Stage 7

- Closure summary

Stage 8

- Closed on Mosaic.

Creating the Family Plan

Discussions will be held with all identified family members regarding the concerns outlined in the referral. Options to address the concerns will also be discussed and considered. The FGC coordinator must gain the views of the wider support network and gain their offers of support while working closely with the family preparing them for the FGC. This includes ground rules and clarity of professionals' roles. The process for agreeing, implementing, monitoring, and reviewing plan is made clear. The FGC coordinator will ensure written views and offers are sought from family who cannot attend.

They must work with the children and young people age appropriate, to gain their views and wishes, unless family or referrer state otherwise. To do this the FGC coordinators will visit the children at school, visit them at home or take them somewhere neutral where the child or YP will engage with them.

The FGC should be as inclusive as possible. The FGC coordinator must work collaboratively with the other professionals who are involved, explaining the process and their role within it. They will ask professionals attending to say what their involvement is with the family and how from their discipline they see the family addressing the concerns.

Throughout the preparation the FGC coordinator must risk assess and use professional judgement as to whether the FGC goes ahead. If they are happy that it will go ahead safely, they then negotiate and arrange the date, time, and venue of the FGC with everyone who is attending. Rooms must be booked accordingly and if late openings of council buildings are required, this is requested with facilities management.

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The FGC coordinator will then type up the plan sending a copy to everyone who attended the meeting in the post. A copy of the family plan will be uploaded on to Mosaic in the child's family group records.

Direct work with children

- Discuss the parameters of the work, explaining the type of work that will be undertaken and the reasons that the work is important. During these discussions it will be helpful to gather information on the child's interests, and also whether there are any specific issues the client would like to be explored with the child.
- Consider whether contact should also be made with any other professionals involved with the child(ren).
- Consider the most appropriate setting to undertake the work. Many children are anxious about the safety of their parent and therefore may be more comfortable at home, for others the home may be distracting as they see themselves in a different role there.
- Developing a rapport and relationship with the child is central to the work. Unless the child is comfortable, they are unlikely to share their feelings and concerns. For initial sessions work may need to focus on engagement and 'getting to know you' exercises to give reassurances of what the FGC is about and aiming to achieve. Confidentiality should also be explained to the child at the outset.
- Where appropriate it can be beneficial to help the child express their feelings and concerns to their parent, either directly or indirectly.
- In some cases there may also be a need for further professional intervention, in which case an onward referral should be made.

All direct activity should be recorded on Mosaic using the relevant case recording on the child's record.

Guidance on Case Reviews

A review meeting will be offered to family. The process of this meeting will be explained to all involved and arranged. The FGC coordinator will then facilitate the review meeting and complete evaluation forms with family. A copy of the reviewed information will be sent out in the post to all who attended the FGC review. A copy of the reviewed information will be uploaded on to Mosaic in the child's family group records. Once the referral is closed a closure summary is added to Mosaic by the FGC coordinator.

Case Closure Procedure

As a result of a case review of the family it may be appropriate to close the case.

The allocated family group conference co-ordinator will:

Stage 1

Using the guidance notes provided the case closure summary form must also be completed on Mosaic, and all open Mosaic assessments closed, before approval will be given for closure.

Stage 2

The case will be signed off on Mosaic by the line manager following quality assurance checks. Reasons for closure and any recommendations must be documented fully.

Stage 3

Inform the referring agency of the case closure and the reasons for this via alert

Stage 4

An evaluation form (appendix 5) will be completed by the client following case closure wherever possible to continuously evaluate and improve the service. Results from the survey will be collated and reported as part of the performance management process.

Appendices

Appendix 1 – Referral form

Appendix 2 – Confidentially and Information Sharing Agreement

Appendix 3 – Evaluation form



FAMILY GROUP CONFERENCE & MEDIATION SERVICE REFERRAL FORM

**Family Group Conference &
Mediation Service**
Gateshead Council
Chowdene Children's Centre
Waverley Road
Gateshead
NE9 7TU

Tel: 0191 433 4567
0191 433 4573

REQUEST FOR FAMILY GROUP CONFERENCE

Where and with whom does the child/children live?

If this is a placement what is the current status? i.e. Interim/Stable/Long Term/Fragile please explain:

Who has Parental Responsibility for the Children?

Is there an open assessment?

Are there any Legal Orders in place for the Children? If yes, which Local Authority Solicitor is involved?

Are there Child Protection concerns? Has there been a Child Protection Conference?

Please give details including dates of any Registrations, Category and date of Review Conference:

Are Legal Proceedings being considered?

Why is a Family Group Conference required? Please give details of the focus for the meeting.
Please list the Family STRENGTHS, current CONCERNS and BOTTOM LINE of Children Services:

PLEASE NOTE information in this section will be shared with all family members prior to FGC.

Focus
Strengths
Concerns
Bottom Line of Children Services
Any issues for the safety of workers? Please consider the following - Lone Home Visit Risk, Advise Joint Worker Visit or Office Visit, Risks to Worker, Animals:

Consent

Please indicate that consent has been obtained **FROM ALL FAMILY MEMBERS LISTED WITHIN THIS REFERRAL** for this referral to be made and for relevant information to be shared with family, services and agencies

Select from the drop-down boxes below

Parent/Carer: Choose an item.

Young Person: Choose an item.

This referral can now be sent to fgcandmediationservice@gateshead.gov.uk

REQUEST FOR MEDIATION

	Party 1	Party 2
Title		
First Name		
Surname		
Address (including Postcode)		
Telephone No : Home/Work/Mobile		
Email Address		
Relationship to Child		
Does Client have specific needs? (please state)		
Had Mediation before? If Yes, please state who with?		
Availability of client		

	Party 3	Party 4
Title		
First Name		
Surname		
Address (including Postcode)		
Telephone No : Home/Work/Mobile		
Email Address		
Relationship to Child		
Does Client have specific needs? (please state)		
Had Mediation before? If Yes, please state who with?		
Availability of client		

Issues

Issue	Please select in the relevant boxes below			
Anti-Social Behaviour	Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>	No	<input type="checkbox"/>
Behaviour	Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>	No	<input type="checkbox"/>
Communication	Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>	No	<input type="checkbox"/>
Criminal Activity	Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>	No	<input type="checkbox"/>
Drugs/Alcohol	Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>	No	<input type="checkbox"/>
Education	Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>	No	<input type="checkbox"/>
Family Carers	Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>	No	<input type="checkbox"/>
Friends/Associates	Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>	No	<input type="checkbox"/>
Housing	Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>	No	<input type="checkbox"/>
Relationship	Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>	No	<input type="checkbox"/>
Respect	Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>	No	<input type="checkbox"/>
Rules/Boundaries	Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>	No	<input type="checkbox"/>

Please explain why you are making this request for Mediation?

Any issues for the safety of workers? If yes, details of the safety issues below

Consent

Please ensure you have discussed this referral with ALL clients recorded above and they ALL have agreed to request being made.

I/We agree for this referral to be made and for relevant information to be shared with services and agencies.

Select from the drop down boxes below

Party 1: Choose an item.

Party 2: Choose an item.

Party 3: Choose an item.

Party 4: Choose an item.

This completed referral can now be sent to fgcandmediationservice@gateshead.gov.uk

Family Group Conference

CONFIDENTIALITY AND INFORMATION SHARING AGREEMENT

- Our aim is:
 - To support you in whatever choices you make
 - Inform you of choices that are available to you
 - To create a safe environment for you to disclose sensitive and personal information
 - To respect your decisions
- The information below outlines how we will treat the information that you give us about yourself, your family and others and your circumstances.
- **It is important for you to read this information sheet and that a Family Group Conference Co-ordinator also explains it to you. When you have read and understood the agreement sign and date it on the next page.**

You consent to information being shared

OR

There is a risk of harm to you or your children

How will we treat any information that you give us?

We will use information you give us to help keep you and any children safe, we will also use this information to improve the service we offer you and others:

- Generally, the information that you share with us about yourself, your family and others and your situation will be treated as confidential by the Family Group Conference Co-Ordinator.
- There may be times when it is useful for someone from the Family Group Conference Co-Ordinator to share information about you with other agencies and we will ask your permission for this.
- **Information can be shared without your permission if you or your children are at risk of harm.**
- You have the right to access your file – your Family Group Conference Co-Ordinator will advise you of the process.

Improving the service we offer you:

- So that we can try to improve the service we offer, we might need to make your details and information you give us anonymous so that we can share it with agencies and researchers outside of our service. This helps us to monitor our performance, understand more about family group conference and mediation and the best ways to improve the lives of people who experience it.
- When we share information in this way the identities of our clients and their children will never be revealed.
- You can choose if you are happy for your information to be made available for these reasons. If you decide to say no, this will in no way affect the service that you receive.

CONFIDENTIALITY AND INFORMATION SHARING AGREEMENT 2/2

So that we know you have read and understood this agreement please answer yes or no to each statement by placing a cross in the box. It is important that you answer yes or no to each statement.

- | | Yes | No |
|--|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| The confidentiality and information agreement has been explained to me. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| I give permission for anonymised information about me to be used by other agencies and researchers for the purpose of monitoring and research. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| I understand that information about me will be held confidentially unless I give my permission for it to be shared with others. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| I understand that there are exceptions to this and in the event that I, or my children are at risk of harm, information about me can be shared without my permission. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

Please sign and date the agreement:

Signature.....Date:.....

Print name.....

Family Group Conference Co-Ordinator
Signature.....

If agreement explained and consented to over the telephone:

Family Group Conference Co-Ordinator
signature.....Date:.....

Agency name	Agency contact	Permission to share information (Yes or No)	Date	Date of review



Family Group Conference Family Feedback Form

Family Name.....

Consent to Evaluation Yes No

What were things like for your family before the meeting?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

(Worst it could be) (Best it could be)

What was your understanding and expectations of the Family Group Conference?

FGC Date.....

Review Date.....

Review Meeting	
Telephone Call	

Did you speak with the Family Group Conference Coordinator and did they prepare you for your Meeting?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

(no and not prepared) (yes and fully prepared)

Did you understand what the meeting was about?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

(not at all) (fully understood)

Did you feel safe and listened to in the meeting?										

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
(not at all)										(definitely)
W Was the child's 'voice' heard in the meeting? (if your child was present)										

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
(not at all)										(definitely)
Was your family time private?										

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
(not at all)										(definitely)

Did you feel included in the meeting?										

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
(not at all)										(definitely)
Did you agree a Family Plan?										
Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>										
Were you treated with respect by your co-ordinator?										

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
(not at all)										(definitely)

What are things like for your family now?										

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
(Worst it could be)										(Best it could be)

Was the plan helpful for you and your family?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
(not at all) (definitely)

Is there anything else you would like to say?.....

Thank You For Your Feedback

