

FAMILY GROUP CONFERENCE SERVICE

North East Lincolnshire

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North East Lincolnshire Council

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Section One

INTRODUCTION

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

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 is safe and his/her wellbeing is being promoted.

1.2 **When** to use family group Conference

The family group conference process has the potential for a wide and flexible application across other areas - Children's Services e.g. child welfare, juvenile justice and education and Adult Services e.g. 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. This may relate to support needs, protection from risk or need for care. (*Appendix 1*)

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.

1.4 **Who** has developed the standards

These standards have been developed collaboratively by the North East Lincolnshire Family Group Conferencing Team following extensive review of the available literature and research. This included existing policies and procedures where FGC has been successfully implemented, published research, and recommended guidelines from lead groups both nationally and internationally. These include Family Group Conference Forum – Northern Ireland, Family Rights Group (UK), American Humane Society, Eigen Kracht (FGC) – Netherlands, Kent and Leeds Family Group Conferencing Services and Hertfordshire Safeguarding Children's Board.

The standards reflect current good practice within the Family Group Conferencing Process and evidence-based research and as such are ever evolving. They will be regularly evaluated and updated to ensure best practice is integral to everything we do.

We hope this is a document which will ensure that no matter to whom the service is provided, they will experience the key elements of the process positively.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES OF THE FAMILY GROUP CONFERENCE PROCESS

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

2.2 Children and young people 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 and young people have the right to have their families and other significant people fully involved in planning their future ensuring that they do not compromise the safety of the child/ren.

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 can be met.

2.6 Participation in a family group conference is a voluntary process for the child/young person 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

Stage One

Referral

- Referral form completed with families' consent.
- Referral sent to dedicated FGC Team inbox for consideration.
- Referral assessed against our access criteria and if accepted the family is matched with an FGC Co-ordinator.

Stage Three

The Conference

- **Information Sharing** - by professionals
- **Private Family Time** – voice of child/young person and family members, discussion and agreement made, actions and contingency plan developed by family
- **Safety Plan Shared** – plan shared with referrer to seek agreement
- A review of the family plan will be offered.

Stage Two

Preparation

- Co-ordinator engages directly with child/young person/family, extended family, friends, and professionals and prepares them for FGC.
- Advocate offered to child/young person if appropriate.
- A neutral venue is agreed.

Stage Four

Implementation of the plan

- 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

Stage Five

Review of the Plan

- A review of the plan provides an opportunity to acknowledge what has worked and make changes where necessary

Section **Four**

FAMILY GROUP CONFERENCE STANDARDS

Standard **One**

The FGC Service will provide a high quality service which works within the North East Lincolnshire Council FGC Standards and reflects national and international guidance and good practice.

Standard **Two**

The voice of the child/young person 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 North East Lincolnshire Council FGC Standards and reflects national and international guidance and good practice.

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 not be involved in any professional decision making for the child/young person 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 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 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

Standard **Three**

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 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 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.

Standard **Four**

Families have a right to private family time within a safe and supportive environment to enable them 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/ another 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.

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 only if 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.

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 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.

Family Group Conference Flow Chart

