

The Family Meeting: Why, What and How?



Guidance for Social Workers

Why hold a Family Meeting?

All cases in pre-proceedings or care proceedings will require a Family Meeting. These are crucial in order to identify family members and other connected people who might be able to provide support or even alternative care for the children that you are working with.

Supporting and empowering families to find their own solutions is integral to social work – the Professional Capabilities Framework describes how Social Workers should use their *“judgement and authority to intervene with individuals, families and communities to promote independence, provide support and prevent harm, neglect and abuse”*.

Recent case law has also confirmed that Social Workers need to work with family members and seriously consider whether they can provide *good enough* care to meet the needs of the child – adoption should only happen when *“nothing else will do”* (Re B & Re BS).

South Gloucestershire Council has signed the Pre-Proceedings Protocol for Avon, North Somerset and Gloucestershire which states that *“in deciding whether proceedings should be issued, family meetings / family group conferences must be considered as a means of identifying any available potential carers amongst the friends and family of the children and of their existing carers”*

Some families will not be able to support or provide alternative care to the children that we work with. In these cases, it is critical that assessments are undertaken without delay in order that permanence for the child can be achieved.

There are some occasions that Family Meetings may not be appropriate, for example if a family are fleeing so called honour based violence or they have no support. Some families may refuse to participate or report that there is no family available. This should be clearly recorded in the minutes of the Legal Planning Meeting or the Pre-Proceedings Meeting.

When should a Family Meeting be held?

A Family Meeting should be held within 5 weeks of the initial Legal Threshold Meeting.

How should a Family Meeting be convened?

The Letter before Proceedings currently says *“At the [Pre-Proceedings] meeting we will want to talk to you and your solicitor about who might look after your child if the Court decides that it is no longer safe for you to do so.”*

At the Pre-Proceedings meeting the Manager who is chairing will ask the parent(s) who they would like to be assessed as potential carers for the children and who else might offer support. The manager will make clear to the parent(s) that potential carers need to be identified now. The date of the Family Meeting will be set at the Pre-Proceedings Meeting. The parents, by identifying family members at this stage, give the Local Authority consent to invite their relatives to the meeting.

Invitations will be sent to family members and will include an agenda. The agenda should follow the template (attached).

Not all information (for example convictions) can be shared at Family Meetings. Use supervision with your manager to plan what and how information should be shared.

At the Family Meeting

Family Meetings can be chaotic and stressful. They also involve relinquishing a level of control particularly if there are large numbers of extended family attending. Meetings with families that are potentially intimidating or aggressive should be chaired by a Manager. Meetings for families that are chaotic or particularly large will require a second worker. Supervision can be used to emotionally and strategically prepare for the meeting.

As the family will have seen the agenda they will probably have some ideas about what they think. They may have already discussed it. The Social Worker should give a brief summary of the concerns as in the agenda. Then, one by one, ask the questions on the agenda. Give the family plenty of time to discuss each one and keep them focused on one at a time until they have answered it.

Your Family Meeting regarding [insert child(ren)'s names and DOBs]

Agenda

1. Introductions

We will do a round of introductions and complete a family tree.

2. Why we are having this meeting

[Insert brief reasons for calling the Family Meeting here]

The Social Worker will explain this in more detail at the meeting and what Social Care are worried about. You will have the opportunity to ask questions.

3. What [Insert parents' names here] think needs to happen.

[Insert child(ren)'s names here]'s parents will have the opportunity to explain what they think the current circumstances are and what needs to change.

4. What the family think needs to happen.

The extended family will be give the opportunity to feedback to Social Care and [Insert child(ren)'s names here]'s parents about what the current circumstances are and what needs to change.

5. The Pre-Proceedings Process

The Social Worker or Manager will explain what the pre-proceedings process entails and what we expect of the parents and the family.

6. What, if any, can each family member do to support [insert child(ren)'s names here] and their parents?

7. Is anyone willing and able to offer permanent care for any of the children?

8. What will happen next?

The Social Worker or Manager will explain what assessments, will take place. They will provide information about how kinship carers can be supported (including financially) and what legal orders may be needed. The Social Worker may discuss whether court action is required by Social Care or the family.