



Family Group Conferences Information for Referrers and other service providers

Family Group Conferences (FGC) have become familiar to many people working with children and young people in this country and internationally. Although they have traditionally been involved in work with children and families, they are equally applicable to any situation where decisions need to be made about the safety and welfare of a family member, and a plan needs to be established and negotiated. Daybreak has also pioneered the use of FGC to address situations of domestic violence and abuse of vulnerable adults. FGC encourage a holistic approach to problem solving and although firmly focused on the person for whom the meeting was called, will seek to take account of the needs of other family members, where they are relevant to the problem to be addressed.

FGC are based on a set of basic principles and beliefs that include the following:

- that it is the members of the extended family who have the intimate knowledge about their own family, including who is safe and who is not safe around vulnerable people
- that members of the extended family tend to have a life-long commitment to each other.
- that we are all more committed to carrying out plans for our own welfare and for that of our family if it is us who make the decisions, and not merely expected to carry out the decisions made for us by others.
- that good decisions are made on the basis of high quality information, and that therefore meetings need to have the benefit of openness, honesty and clarity.
- that people work better together if there is a principle of mutual respect, which is an important statement of our humanity
- that if we identify and work with the strengths of a family, we are more likely to achieve a good outcome.

Family Group Conferences are a meeting of the extended family network and friends together with those working professionally and directly with the family. They are essentially decision making or planning meetings which take place in order to address a particular concern.

Central to the process is the empowerment of any service user who is vulnerable, or who may have difficulty expressing their views. This may be a victim of abuse, an older person, a child or someone with a disability. A crucial element of Family Group Conferences is ensuring that the voice of the vulnerable person is heard and that they are enabled to participate fully in the process. This may be by the use of a trained advocate, or by the

support of a friend or family member who will be prepared by the coordinator to help them undertake this task.

Preparation for the Family Group Conference

One of the essential requirements in the FGC process is the preparation period. The coordinator will visit the service user and the family members they wish to involve, to introduce him/herself, explain the process, and identify and help overcome any barriers to a productive meeting. He/she will discuss the concerns that need to be addressed, and who should be invited to take part. The service user and family will be asked to consider where and when they would like the FGC to take place.

Preparation is important and can take around 3 to 6 weeks. It is also during this time that the coordinator will discuss with the service user if an advocate or support person would be helpful, and an appropriate person will be identified and helped to prepare for this vital task.

What happens at the FGC?

There are three parts to the meeting:

1. Information Sharing. The first part of the meeting involves everybody: the service user and their family and friends, the referrer and other professionals working directly with the family. Information about the concern is shared and any identified resources or support options. The family are encouraged to ask questions for clarification. This part of the meeting is chaired by the coordinator, who facilitates the FGC process.

2. Private Family Time. The second part of the meeting, and what distinguishes it from other meetings, is the private family time. All the professionals, including the FGC coordinator withdraw to another room and the family meets on their own to make their decisions and plans.

3. Agreement of the Plan. The third part of the meeting takes place when the family has made a plan and they present this to the referrer and any other relevant professional for agreement. This part of the meeting is also facilitated by the coordinator.

Review arrangements:

A Review or follow-up meeting is usually held in around 6 - 12 weeks, to monitor the progress made with the plan, and to address any outstanding issues. Timing will depend on individual circumstances.

There is a considerable body of research both in the UK and internationally about family group conferences that addresses both the process and their outcomes. It shows that families are overwhelmingly positive about the model and that it is very successful in achieving good outcomes for children and young people. Our work with families experiencing domestic abuse is also achieving excellent success rates, and has been shown to reduce incidents of further abuse and in some cases the need for police action.

Daybreak's pioneering work in using FGC in cases of elder abuse, and for other vulnerable adults facing difficult decisions, is demonstrating that the model can be applied to other age groups, and is effective as a decision making tool in a much wider context.

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FGC uphold all the principles and requirements of the Mental Capacity Act 2005. With their focus on empowerment and safeguarding through working together, FGC enable service users, supported by their families, to make their own decisions - a key requirement for Personalisation. FGC can also be appropriately used as a Best Interests decision making meeting, where it fulfills the requirement for wide consultation with those who know the service user best.

Daybreak provide Family Group Conferences, Community (Restorative) Conferencing, training, support and consultation throughout the UK. For more information contact us at:

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