

## **FAMILY GROUP CONFERENCES**

### **Revised – September 2011**

#### **1. Introduction**

1.1 A family group conference (FGC) is a decision-making meeting in which a child's whole family network makes a plan about the future arrangements for the child to ensure that he/she is safe and his/her well-being promoted.

1.2 FGCs are designed as a respectful and empowering process in which the parents and members of the wider family are given clear information about the agency's concerns and are asked to produce a plan addressing those concerns.

1.3 It is essential that all parties are provided with clear and accurate information, which will make effective planning possible. The family is the primary planning group in the process. Family members need to be able to understand what the issues are from the perspective of the professionals.

The family and involved professionals should be clear about:

- what the professional findings are from any core assessment of the child and family
- what the immediate and extended family members understand about their current situation
- what decisions are required;
- what decisions have already been taken;
- the family's scope for decision-making, and whether there are any issues/ decisions that are not negotiable; and
- what resources are, or might be, available to implement any plan. Within this framework, agencies and professionals should agree to support the plan if it does not place the child at risk of suffering significant harm, and if the resources requested can be provided.

1.4 FGCs do not replace or remove the need for child protection conferences which should always be held when the relevant criteria are met. FGCs may be valuable, for example where:

- A plan is required regarding the future welfare of a child in need.
- Section 47 enquiries do not substantiate concerns about significant harm but where support services are required.
- During Section 47 enquiries an FGC plan should be considered as part of the planning to keep children safe
- A child protection conference decides that the child should not be the subject of a protection plan but that a FGC would be an appropriate route to formulate a family network plan as for a child in need.
- Where a child has a CP plan the FGC plan should be integrated with the CP plan so that workers and the wider family members are agreed on required outcomes for the children and are facilitated to work together to achieve them

## **2. Stages of FGC**

2.1 There are three distinct stages to each conference: information sharing, private family time and finalising the plan.

### **2.2 Information sharing should include:**

- The reason for the conference
- What the professional findings are from any assessments of the child and family
- What the family understands about their current situation
- What decisions have already been taken and what decisions are required
- The family's scope for decision-making and whether there are any issues/decisions that are not negotiable

### **2.3 Private family time**

2.3.1 Members of the family network are given time on their own to address the concerns raised and to identify resources/support required in order to draw up and implement a robust plan which addresses the welfare needs of the child.

### **2.4 The Plan**

2.4.1 Resources required to implement the plan are identified. Agencies and professionals should agree to support the plan within available resources provided they are satisfied that it does not place the child at significant risk of harm

- Contingency plans, monitoring arrangements and reviewing the plan should all to be discussed and agreed at the Family Group Conference.

## **3. FGC and Child Protection**

3.1 Some particular issues to consider are:

- The child's social worker should consult with police prior to a referral for a FGC if a criminal investigation is ongoing or prosecution pending
- Where court proceedings are pending, the Family Plan will need to be presented to the court before it can be finally agreed and the family will need to be aware of this.
- If drug/alcohol abuse or inter-generational sexual abuse is prevalent, caution is required when considering a FGC especially if denial and collusion are identified as features of the extended family dynamics.
- Consideration should be given to a referral for a FGC at each child protection conference as family circumstances may have changed
- With the consent of those with parental responsibility the FGC plan will be shared with the CP conference chair

**For information about FGCs in Buckinghamshire please contact:**  
The Family Group Conference Service office on (tel) 01296 319590