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North East Lincolnshire Council

Family Group Conference Service Policy and Standards

Updated by: FGC Manager

Date 2024



FAMILY GROUP

CONFERENCE SERVICE

North East Lincolnshire

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**SCOPE OF THIS POLICY**

This policy sets out the role of the Family Group Conference Service, its criteria and referral process.

**RELATED POLICIES**

Lifelong Links Policy and Standards 2024

Conflict Resolution Policy 2024

**RELEVANT GUIDANCE**

Family Rights Group Quality Standards

Family Rights Group Service Accreditation

**1. Introduction**

The policy reflects current good practice within the Family Group Conferencing Process and evidence-based research for national and internationally recognised bodies such as the UK’s Family Rights group. It will be regularly evaluated and updated to ensure best practice is integral to everything we do. This is a document which will ensure that no matter to whom the service is provided, they will experience all elements of the FGC process positively.

**2. What is a Family Group Conference?**

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.

The FGC process aims to empower families and to acknowledge and respect their strengths. It is an entirely voluntary process, and all participants are informed that they can withdraw consent at any time.

**3. Criteria**

The FGC service is available to, and this policy applies to, all families that are open to children’s services and have an allocated worker.

**3.1 Early Help step up to CIN**

Cases that have been open to Family Hubs/Early Help where outcomes are not being achieved and a referral to children’s services at CIN Level is being considered as the next option available. FGC would be offered at this point as the last resort at this level of intervention to be offered prior to a referral into Children Services.

Outcomes

* Significantly fewer children on CIN Intervention Plans over three-year period.
* Prevent children stepping up to a Children’s Social Care.
* Reduction in the number of families requiring intensive crisis support.
* Reduction in re-referral rates into children’s services.

**3.2 CIN – Step up to CP**

FGC to be offered to those families where the CIN plan is not having the required impact, where required change to reduce need is not happening or is not being sustained, where need and or risk is increasing and ‘step-up’ to Child Protection is being considered. If a family have not had an FGC before initial child protection meeting this is to be offered at this point.

Outcomes:

* A reduction in the number of children being identified as at risk or in need.
* A reduction in the numbers of CIN cases being subject to strategy meetings.
* A reduction in the number of children subject to a Child Protection plan.

**3.3 CP – Step up to Pre-Action or Care Proceedings**

FGC to be offered to those families where pre-action or care proceedings are being considered where required change is needed to ensure a child can remain living with their family. This is to offer the family the last opportunity to come together to safeguard their children, mobilise the family strengths access extra family support and ensure the child remains within their family network.

Outcomes

* Findings from a large-scale impact evaluation has demonstrated that FGCs at pre-proceedings stage can keep children/young people out of care.1
* A reduction in the time spent in care for young people.
* Opportunity for children/young people to enter or remain in kinship care placements.
* A reduction in the number of legal proceedings.

1. FOUNDATIONS. (2003) Implications for policy and practice. p5

**3.4 Where reunification is being considered**

FGC should be offered to every young person stepping down from a Care Order or S20 placement when returning home to family. This is to give the family the opportunity to plan reunification of the child into the family network looking at strengths and safety to put in place a long-term plan.

Outcomes

* Children/young people will live within their family network.
* Reunification with family increases a child’s sense of connectiveness which leads to stronger self-image and self-esteem.

**3.5 Unborn babies where a pre-birth assessment is being considered.**

Consideration should be given to convening an FGC in any case where there is a possibility that the parent may not be able to meet the needs of the unborn child.

Outcomes

* Babies will be able to remain in their family network where it is safe to do so.
* A reduction in the number of legal proceedings.
* Babies will have consistent family time with their mother and father where it is safe to do so.

**3.6 Open to Youth Justice Service**

Consideration should be given to convening an FGC for any young person and their family who are open to the youth justice service.

The youth justice worker assigned to the young person will continue to work with the young person/family until the FGC process is concluded. i.e. closed at request of family, FGC completed, review FGC meeting held.

Outcomes

* A reduction in the number of children re-offending and being involved in the justice system.
* Young people will be able to remain in their family network if it is safe to do so.
* Young people will have their family network to be able to support them to keep themselves safe and out of the justice system.

**4. Referral Process**

* The professional should complete the referral form and gain families’ consent.
* Referral sent to dedicated FGC Team inbox for consideration.
* Referral assessed by the FGC Team Manager against service criteria and if accepted, the family is allocated an FGC Co-ordinator.
* Within 7 working days, the coordinator will liaise with the social worker to hold a referral discussion to clarify information on the referral form.

Referral for an FGC does not mean that one will take place if it is agreed that it would not be appropriate following discussion between the referrer and the FGC team coordinator. A referral would not proceed if the family refused consent to share information that is relevant to safeguard the child/ren / young person.

It is important to appreciate that FGCs are not an emergency response. They are a planned process, and referrals are accepted against the referral criteria. The professionals involved should be clear about the desired outcomes and what options are not acceptable.

**4.1 Role of the Referrer**

* Ensure the referral is made in a timely manner and that the FGC criteria is met.
* Attend a referral meeting with the coordinator to discuss the referral form within 7 working days.
* Continue to maintain casework responsibility and working with the family and inform the FGC coordinator of any changes.
* Ensure they have been clear and honest with the family about the concerns you have for the child/young person.
* Obtain information and possible resources for the family plan, clarify issues such as funding and availability, seeking agreements from service providers.
* Provide the coordinator with full information such as risks identified.
* Attend the FGC to share concerns and what is working well and answer any questions the family may have and explaining what the consequences will be for the family if they cannot agree a plan.
* Remain onsite for the duration of the FGC, review and agree the plan so long as it does not put the child/young person at risk of significant harm and covers the issues raised.
* Monitor the implementation of the plan. The agreed family plan drawn up at the FGC will be shared at the next multi-agency meeting/forum (e.g. CIN ICPC, CLA review, Pre-proceedings or Court). Social workers should encourage families to bring their plan to the meetings as part of the empowerment process.
* Ensure any resources and support the referrer’s agency has agreed is being provided.
* Fill out FGC feedback forms.

**5. Stages of the FGC**

**Stage One - Preparation**

* Coordinator gains consent from the person with parental responsibility, young person, family members and the network as identified by the referrer and the family. Information is provided about the FGC process to allow all participants to make an informed decision about their participation.
* Co-ordinator works with the family to gain knowledge of the family support network using genograms and ecograms and gains their consent to contact the network. This could be family, friends, other professionals or any support person that participants feel they wish to participate.
* Co-ordinator visits the child(ren)/young person to gain Voice of the child/young person to prepare them for attending the Family Group Conference.
* Coordinator visits the family, extended family, friends, and professionals and prepares them for FGC.
* An Advocate is offered to the child/young person and family members if appropriate.
* Questions identified from the referral form are shared and discussed with family members and they have an opportunity to shape and amend them
* The date and time of the FGC and a neutral venue is agreed with the family, this includes decisions on refreshments for the meeting.
* Offer of a hybrid meeting (part in person, part online), made to all family members. If they cannot attend, agreement is made about how their information can be shared at the Conference.
* All efforts are made to include as many people as possible in the FGC. If an exclusion was to take place it would be based on the child's best interests. Examples could include: a person being a Person who Poses a Risk (PPR), risk of harm to the child / young person attending, a history of domestic violence and a severe power imbalance in the family such that the victims would be too intimidated if the perpetrator was present. Should this be the case, their input to the FGC process will be achieved in alternative ways, for example through letters or audio or visual recordings or as part of a shuttle conference where two separate rooms are used to agree a plan.

**Stage Two - The Conference**

* Information Sharing – on the current situation for the family and the worries/concerns raised by the social worker. This is the time when the network can ask questions and clarify possible outcomes.
* Private Family Time – Professionals leave the meeting for family time. Voice of child/young person and family members, discussion and agreement made, actions and contingency plan developed by family.
* Family Plan Shared – plan is agreed and confirmed by going through each point which will be agreed by the social worker/practitioner. A review of the family plan will be offered. There are no formal minutes of the FGC, the plan is the only record of the FGC.
* Family will be asked to appoint a monitor or link-person from within their network to ensure all agreed actions in the plan are fulfilled by family and referring agency.

**Stage Three - Implementation and review of the plan**

* Plans are distributed to all family network members involved in the family plan. A separate plan is made for the child /young person using appropriate child friendly language.
* Coordinator contacts family network members and professionals to gain an update on the current situation.
* A review meeting of the plan provides all family network members and professionals with an opportunity to acknowledge what has worked and make changes where necessary.
* Once the plan is reviewed and updated the FGC service will close to the family.
* All participants will be sent feedback surveys to complete to help the service identify any improvements that might be made.

**6 FGC Timescales**

* Cases will be allocated within 5 working days
* Referral discussions will take place within 7 working days from allocation
* The FGC meeting will be convened within 6-8 weeks
* Review meetings if appropriate will be convened between 8-12 weeks after the initial FGC meeting.

The individual needs of the families means that the timescales may need to be more flexible.

**7. Recording and Information sharing**

The FGC co-ordinator will record on Liquid logic following normal recording policy. If this is only open to a youth justice worker and has no social worker or early help worker, the youth justice worker will record on their case recording system Child View at these points.

* Referral allocated to FGC worker – name of co-ordinator and date.
* FGC meeting or mediation held – date and outcome and attach plan or agreement.
* Review meeting held and outcome – amended plan attached.
* FGC, mediation or lifelong links closed and outcome.

Any other significant points will be discussed with the youth justice worker and the FGC co-ordinator to action. i.e. voice of the child, safeguarding.

The FGC service's primary function is to facilitate the Family Group Conference and any recording will relate solely to the conference. A record is maintained on Liquid Logic; however, this is held separately on the system from the main case record. If information is given which relates to concerns for a child's or other person's safety this information will be sent to the social worker for them to record.

The referrer will be responsible for recording their involvement with the FGC and the outcome of the conference. Coordinator’s will be expected to record information on Liquid Logic, including a copy of the family's plan. It is the referrer's responsibility to share all key documentation including relevant sections of the plan with Legal Guardians and the court.

The FGC co-ordinator will have no responsibility for the case holding of this family. They are an independent co-ordinator with no decision making and do not attend any other professional meeting.

**Appendix 1. Family Group Conference Flowchart**

Fits FGC Criteria, Allocated coordinator meets with referrer to discuss the referral form and gain consent to share.

Does not fit FGC criteria,

Contact referrer to discuss why FGC is not appropriate.

Coordinator organises the date, time and venue for the FGC in collaboration with family and professional .

No Consent inform referrer that FGC cannot proceed.

Close case and social worker to consider alternative support

Referral sent to FGCReferrals@nelincs.gov.uk

Meet with the family to discuss FGC, gain consent from all participants to share their information and participate in FGC.

Evaluation, feedback, and closure of case

Hold the Family Group Conference, agree plan create and circulate to FGC participants.

Hold the Review meeting and circulate the updated plan to FGC participants.

Family and professionals unable to agree a plan

FGC Team Manager to assess referral against criteria

**Appendix 2. Guiding Principles of the Family Group Conference Process**

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.

Children and young people are at the centre of the decision-making process and have the right for their voices to be heard.

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. All staff are supervised by an experienced FGC Manager, trained in FGC, lifelong links, and conflict resolution mediation skills. The FGC manager does not have any direct, previous, or current involvement in any case decision making for any young person or child.

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.

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.

Participation in a family group conference is a voluntary process for the child/young person and family members involved. All those involved are informed that they can withdraw their consent to participate at any point.

Each family is unique. Its culture and communication style are respected and embedded in the FGC process. Therefore, each FGC is unique.

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.

Private time for the family is an essential component of the family group conference process.

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.

The coordinator will inform families about how and where their information will be stored and shared with.

**Appendix 3. 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.

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| 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 are not 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.

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| 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 young people and for any participants who require it throughout the FGC process.  2.3 The Coordinator will ensure that the views of those children and young people unable to, or who do not wish to attend the FGC are gathered and shared at the meeting.  2.4 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.

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| 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 and technological 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 Coordinator, where appropriate, will use technology (i.e. Teams, Zoom What’s App) to ensure that family members and young people have access to the FGC preparation and meeting.  3.7 The Co-ordinator will assist the professionals in preparation for their role in the FGC process.  3.8 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.

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| 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.

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| 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, in the format they request as soon as possible after the meeting. If necessary, plans will be translated into other languages.  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 development of FGC Services.

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| 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 and technological 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. |