



Camden

Children's Safeguarding and Family Help

Family Group Conference procedures

Camden's Children and Learning Directorate uses relational practice as the foundation for all our work. Our integrative relational practice framework is based on our values, and is designed to help achieve the Directorate's purpose: to work with children, families and communities to make a positive, lasting difference to their futures, so they have the best start in life.

We recognise the impact of structural inequalities on the lives of the children and families we work with and as a service we will embrace inclusive, anti-discriminatory and anti-racist practice based on our values and our mission to champion social justice.

Our practice framework centres on honest and compassionate relationships with those we serve and with each other. It is an expectation that all Directorate policies and procedures are implemented in line with our practice framework, and that any actions within policies and procedures reflect its ethics, values and practice expectations.

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1. Introduction

A FGC is a meeting of family members and others close to the family to talk about the needs of the children or young people and make plans for them. It is a chance to get together, find out what is happening and think what is best for children who face some kind of difficulty.

This document sets out the procedures for holding a FGC and should be read together with the *Family networks and family group decision making* policy. [Family Networks and Family Group Decision Making](#)

2. Who can use the service

A FGC will be considered for any family who already has involvement with Children's Safeguarding and Family Help (CSFH) or early help services and where a plan needs to be made for a child.

3. Trigger points for referring a family for a FGC

FGCs are useful whenever a decision about a child has to be taken. The FGC service encourages referrals at an early stage of CSFH involvement with a child and their family, even as soon as an assessment is completed.

A family's use of a FGC is voluntary, however FGCs **must** be offered to families at these points:

- where the child is subject to a child protection plan
- when a child is at risk of entering care.

FGCs may be offered and should be considered at the following points:

- when a plan needs to be made about the future of a child in need
- when accommodation is requested or discussed
- when a decision is made that a plan for a child's permanence (long term future care) needs to be made
- when a child is looked after and aspects of the care plan need deciding
- whenever family and friends care arrangements are being considered for a child regardless of their looked after status

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- where there has been a significant event for the family and additional resources or support may be required e.g. expected new birth, family illness.
- whenever a looked after child is returning home in order to ensure the family are supported to care for the child
- when a 16/17 year old presents as homeless as part of the mediation service to look at whether they can remain at home or live with another family member
- when planning contact for CLA in order to improve placement stability
- when planning early help interventions, for example support for a young carer.

4. Who can make referrals for a FGC and what are the criteria for referral?

- ❖ **Family members & children & young people** currently involved with CSFH can refer themselves for a FGC either via their social worker or directly to the project manager. Their social worker will need to complete the FGC referral record on MOSAIC (see appendix 2).
- ❖ **For early help cases** the lead professional, the MASH social worker or early help worker can make a referral to the FGC service requesting a FGC for the purpose of planning support for the child and family.
- ❖ **Social workers** should refer to section 3 for details of mandatory and voluntary trigger points for offering a FGC.
- ❖ **Workers from other agencies** can ask the social worker, early help worker or MASH social worker to make a referral for a FGC where it is thought a FGC would help in planning. They can also raise the possibility of a FGC at any multi-agency meeting such as a strategy meeting, a core group meeting, a child protection conference, a network meeting, a multi-agency planning meeting for CLA, or a statutory CLA review. The purpose of the FGC and the baseline for the plan can then be discussed at that meeting.

If agreement cannot be reached about the family's eligibility for a FGC or the usefulness of a FGC, workers from other agencies can contact the FGC manager directly. The manager will then discuss the possibility of a FGC with the social worker.

Social workers, MASH workers and early help workers should make a referral via MOSAIC using the referral record (see appendix 2) available in the FGC episode *Referral response to offer workflow*; this should be tasked to FGC service manager. Please refer to the flowchart at appendix 1 for further details.

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6. What will happen once a referral has been made to the FGC service?

If the **referral** comes from a **social worker, MASH team or early help worker** they will be asked to complete a referral form and return it to the FGC manager via MOSAIC. The referral form includes information about other key workers involved with the family including their consent for the referral (see section 7. Please note that this is a **voluntary service**).

The FGC manager will then allocate an independent co-ordinator who best matches the family's ethnicity, language and religion and/or the family's preference in these areas, as listed on the referral form.

The co-ordinator will make contact with the social worker or early help worker within three days of receiving the referral from the FGC manager in order to arrange a referral meeting. This meeting will cover:

- basic information about the process of organising a FGC and the social work/early help role & responsibilities
- any additional information needed re addresses/contacts
- writing the report for the FGC which should include clarification of CSFH concerns, questions for the family network to help shape their plan, the CSFH "baseline" and any resources (see Appendix 3 and guidance)
- an initial discussion regarding resources that can be anticipated at this stage the family may use in their plan and the need for the social worker to investigate those resources with the Resources team
- any information about safety with regards to family members or workers e.g. any threats or actual violence in the past, level of current stress.

As a result of the **referral meeting** the social worker or early help worker should prepare a report for the FGC. This report needs to be shown to those with parental responsibility, and if appropriate any subject young people over the age of 12 to ensure they understand the purpose of the meeting and obtain their agreement to share the information with their family network. Once the report is signed, the social worker should inform the co-ordinator so that the co-ordinator can start organising the FGC and contacting the family network.

The co-ordinator will subsequently make arrangements with regard to the FGC as rapidly as possible, given the family circumstances and needs. The aim will be to hold the FGC within 4 to 6 weeks of the co-ordinator receiving the referral although delays can occur. This may be due to how soon the social worker can meet with those with parental responsibility to review the report and sign it, the level of engagement of the family network and the size and location of the network.

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During the process of preparation the co-ordinator will keep the social worker or early help worker informed of general progress of the arrangements with the family, although not the details of individual contacts. In particular they should be in contact about negotiating possible dates for the meeting, likelihood of major delays in the meeting or if it looks unlikely that a meeting will occur. The social worker or early help worker will keep the co-ordinator informed of any changes in the family's situation.

The co-ordinator will establish with the family what information they need to have presented at the meeting and therefore what workers or information givers they wish to have invited to the meeting.

The **co-ordinator** is responsible for the following while organising the meeting:

- identifying and contacting all family members and encouraging and supporting their attendance
- ensuring that the views of the child(ren) are presented to the meeting including considering the use of advocates
- identifying, inviting and preparing additional information givers that will be helpful to the family in making their plan
- making practical arrangements for the FGC e.g. neutral venue, refreshments, travel arrangements.

Once a date for the meeting has been agreed the co-ordinator will prepare all workers and information givers for the meeting. The co-ordinator will ensure that they all understand the structure of the meeting and their role and provide them with guidance about preparation of their information for presentation to the family. This may be in the form of a short report to accompany their verbal presentation.

Any written reports should be shown to the parents and current carers and if appropriate the child. How this should be done should be agreed between the co-ordinator and the author of the report.

At the FGC itself the co-ordinator will

- structure the meeting according to the basic FGC model (see appendix 4)
- ensure that the Information Giving stage and the Sharing of the Plan are focussed on the needs of the child
- remain available in the same premises as the family throughout the Private Time although they will not be part of the private time
- support the family in feeding their plan back to the social worker and any other workers

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- raise the issue of how the family's plan is going to be monitored and reviewed and offer the option of a review FGC.

Social workers, early help workers and other information givers will attend the first part of the meeting to share their information and discuss and answer any family questions.

While the family is in private time the social worker, early help worker and possibly other key resource providers will remain in the same venue to be available to the family to provide additional information or answer any questions.

At the end of the FGC, in cases where CSFH are involved with the family, CSFH is responsible for deciding whether the plan keeps the child safe and/or contributes to better outcomes for the child and therefore whether it should be accepted. All agency workers and their managers are responsible for supporting the family's plan within agreed resources if it does not put the child at risk of significant harm. Line managers are invited to FGCs, but if a line manager can not attend, it is helpful if they can be available on the phone so that the social worker could potentially agree the family's plan on the day.

If there is a debate about whether the family's plan keeps the child safe, or if the plan is substantially different to the existing plan for the child, the social worker should ensure that the appropriate decision making meeting is convened as soon as possible. This might for example be a review child protection conference, a meeting with legal services or referral of the matter to a court hearing.

At the end of the FGC the co-ordinator will encourage all those invited to complete a Feedback Questionnaire, which is then returned to the FGC manager.

Within three working days of the FGC occurring the co-ordinator will circulate a copy of the plan to all those invited to the meeting and to the FGC manager.

Feedback from participants will be collated, basic management information recorded and fed back to the steering group to contribute to the development of the service.

The **decision for a review to take place** can be made either at the initial FGC with all participants agreeing or after the FGC when the family or social worker or early help worker find that the original plan is not working or the plan needs to change because the child's situation has changed (i.e. assessment of a family member has led to decisions being made for placement of a child with them and the review would be looking at specific supports for that carer/ contact between child and relatives).

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A review is an opportunity to review the initial plan or create a new plan. It is not an opportunity for any of the participants to have a general update meeting with each other facilitated by the co-ordinator.

The **date of the review** can be set at the initial FGC. Three months tends to be the average although this can vary depending on case planning, court dates, or review child protection conferences. It is expected that the co-ordinator will contact the family and professionals three to four weeks prior to the review date.

The **decision to go ahead or cancel** a review is based on the decision of all participants (professionals and key family members). Ultimately, if the plan is working then there is no need for a review. If either the family or the social worker state that there is no need to review, the co-ordinator will check with the other party to ensure there is agreement. Since this is a voluntary process, if the family do not agree with the social worker and believe that a review is required then the co-ordinator can assist the family in seeing the value in reviewing, but ultimately, the decision to cancel rests with the family.

7. Practice guidance for social workers and early help workers

Obtaining agreement and consent.

Social workers and early help workers should gain the consent of families for the FGC process to go ahead at the same time that they share the social work report with the family. The following guidance has been written in order to reduce delays in sharing reports and obtaining consent.

Social worker's and early help workers must have reports for FGCs written in a timely way and these must be shared with the family, preferably by meeting with them, to check for accuracy and gain consent.

However, if this will cause unnecessary delay, the report should be sent to the family together with a covering letter (see appendix 5 for the template) and a self-addressed envelope for them to return the signed report to the allocated social worker. The covering letter explains the following:

- The social worker will telephone the family within 2 days of them receiving the letter to check if they are in agreement with the contents and are agreeable for the FGC to progress going ahead.
- If the social worker is unable, despite all attempts, to make contact with the family to confirm the above or where the social worker does not receive back a signed

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copy of agreement and consent within 3 days, it will be assumed that the family are in agreement with the contents and that they are also signing up to an FGC taking place.

The social worker must record on file actions taken to obtain consent and any discussion that confirms family agreement and consent.

Use of Interpreters

When referring for an FGC, social workers, early help workers and their manager should consider if there is a need for an interpreter and include this information in the referral to the FGC co-ordinator. All interpreters must be appointed from council approved suppliers and should have a recent DBS disclosure.

Use of Advocates for children

As above, when referring for an FGC, social workers, early help workers and their manager should consider whether the child's views can only be represented via an advocate and include this information in the referral.

Quality Assurance and follow up by FGC coordinators

Six weeks after an FGC has taken place, the co-ordinator will email the allocated social worker or early help worker, copying in the team manager and FGC manager, to ask for a written update on progress on the recommendations made in the conference. Social workers and early help workers should respond to these requests promptly so that the FGC service can formally track the usefulness of the FGC process as part of the formal quality assurance of the service.

Appendix 1

Flow chart of FGC process



- **Offer FGC** to the Family
- **Referral** on Framework-i (Episode: FGC referral response to offer)



- FGC Manager sends an email (CC'ing you in) **allocating an Independent FGC Coordinator** who does all the meeting organising.
- FGC coordinator and social worker meet together to write the one page **Social Worker report for the FGC** which is the agenda for the meeting.



- **Social worker shows the family the FGC report** and the family sign it. If time for the FGC is short this report can be posted and agreed over the phone.



- **FGC coordinator undertakes preparation for the FGC** meeting all the key family members concerned and organising the date time and venue.



- **On the day, the coordinator Chairs the FGC** with the social worker sharing concerns, current information and answering questions. The family then have private family time - their job is to make a plan to be agreed on the day if possible. The FGC coordinator types up and distributes this plan after the meeting.



- **An FGC review meeting should happen** to see how the plan has been implemented
- **Social Worker** is responsible for uploading all FGC documents including the FGC plan onto Framework-i

Appendix 2

**Camden Family Group Conference Service
Referral Form**

Child/children's Name(s):

DOB:

Social Worker's Name:

Tel No:

Fax No:

E-mail:

Name of SW Team & Workplace Address:

Supervisor's name:

Tel No:

Genogram/ Diagram of family network (Include all known extended family and any significant friends)

Please attach diagram if not able to insert it into this text box.

Race/Ethnicity of Key Family Members:

Race/ Ethnicity of child:

Religion(s) of Family Members:

First Language of Family:

Communication Issues: Yes/No

With which members of the family have you discussed an FGC?

Which family member/s with parental responsibility has agreed?

What preferences have the family expressed regarding the co-ordinator e.g. race, ethnicity, gender etc?

Legal Status of Child: PR with parent / Res Order/ accommodated (sec. 20/ ICO / CO/ other – please state)

Reason for Need for Plan (mark all relevant categories)

Revision of service plan for child in need / Child subject of a core assessment/ Child subject of protection plan / Risk or likelihood of Accommodation / Likelihood of care proceedings / Child newly Looked After / Child on I.C.O. / Revision of Care Plan / Permanency planning/ Other

Source of Referral Recommendation (mark all relevant categories)

Family group conference

Family led / Social worker / CP conference / Child Care Planning Panel (CCPC) / Court / LAC review / Other – please state

Please state with whom the child/ren are living now:

Brief history of reason for Social Care involvement.

What needs (Safety, Health, Education, Social) of the child(ren) do you think are not being met?

What are the outcomes you would like the family's plan to achieve for the child(ren)?

What will CSFH do if there is not a Plan that addresses these issues?

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Please list addresses and telephone numbers of key family members and significant adults identified in the genogram. (Please give whatever information you have: the co-ordinator will ask the immediate family for more information). Also give details of key professionals whom the social worker feels may have information helpful to the family in making their plan.

Is there any history of physical assault, verbal aggression or racial abuse by any family members towards workers? YES/NO

Has social worker been involved in an FGC before? In Camden In another authority
No

Signed:

Social Worker:
Manager/Supervisor:

Team

Date:

Date:

Please return this form to
Tim Fisher, FGC Manager - Family Group Conference Service, Children & Families,
Tel 020 7974 2335/1051 Fax 020 7974 6708
e-mail fgc.crowndale@camden.gov.uk

Appendix 3

Social Work Report for Family Group Conference on *list names of child/ren*

Brief statement of reasons for social work involvement

Current Concerns

What strengths do you see in the family?

Questions for FGC

Resources available

What will CSFH do if a plan is not made and agreed?

Signed and dated, _____ (social worker)

Yes, I give consent to the FGC co-ordinator to distribute this report to other FGC participants. *Please note that the co-ordinator will meet with you prior to sharing the report with anyone in order to determine who you would you like to attend the fgc.*

Signed and dated, _____ (adult(s) with parental responsibility)

Camden Family Group Conference Service Guidance for Presenting Information to a Family Group Conference & Headings for your report

The “Information Sharing” part of the Family Group Conference is chaired by the Co-ordinator. Similarly to other meetings you will give your information verbally in the meeting itself. Then the co-ordinator will ensure that family members have a chance to question you about your information and ask about other things that they need to know.

Written reports from you and the other information givers help you to organise your information and help families to prepare for this first part of the meeting and possibly in creating their plan. The co-ordinator distributes the report to all participants. Please note that you are responsible, as the author of the report, of showing the report to those with parental responsibility and any young people who subject of the fgc.

You will be writing this report with the co-ordinator at your initial referral meeting.

Research has shown that families appreciate

- ✓ Having written reports from information givers
- ✓ Reports that are not too lengthy
- ✓ Having the report to read prior to the meeting
- ✓ Having information in the report that they can make use of in their plan.

The type of report that it is helpful to present to the family is different to the reports that you are asked to present to other meetings such as Child Protection Conferences. The following points may help you in writing your report.

The size

Aim for one or two A4 sheets of paper – using headings listed no page 3.

The content

Outline your **current and brief** concerns about the child(ren) - rather than a detailed history of how the current situation has arisen. Bullet points work well.

State your experience of family **strengths and successes** as well as what you are concerned about.

Be clear about **what needs to change (your concerns)** for the children and within what time-scales.

State what is **unacceptable** in the plan e.g. placement with a family member who is a schedule one offender.

State **what will happen** if your concerns are not addressed in their plan or if the family is unable to make a plan. It is important to be clear about what you have the powers to do about your concerns. This will differ according to your statutory status in the situation e.g. whether you have a care order, whether you would apply for one, would you call a CP conference, if there is no action that you could/would take, although you would remain concerned.

State what **resources** could be available to support the family’s plan, any limitations on resources (including resources of time), time scales for accessing resources and procedures for getting access to them.

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General Issues

Your overall aim is to give your information in a way that is **clear and understandable** to the family. No jargon and using full names rather than acronyms is helpful, i.e. instead of CP write child protection.

There should be no “surprises” for the family members with whom you have been working- information should be **up to date** but not new.

You will need to ensure that your report is available in the family’s first language – the co-ordinator can help you with this.

Be **specific** in your statements e.g. not “Lyndon has missed school a lot”, rather “Lyndon has been absent from school for 13 sessions in the last term”.

Write in a **clear, simple** way - no jargon, with explanations of any professional terms.

Keep your explanation about your concerns **centred on the needs of the child** rather than what you feel the adults should do and on the problem rather than anticipating solutions e.g. not “mum needs to get Darren to school more often” rather “How can the family ensure that Darren is taken to school every day? “.

The questions are not intended to be assessment related, but rather focussing on a plan that the family can create in response to your concerns.

N.B. Co-ordinators can not begin to organise the fgc until those with parental responsibility have read and signed the report. Please keep the co-ordinator informed of your progress and pass on the signed report to the co-ordinator.

If you have any questions, please contact:

Rob O’Grady, Camden Family Group Conference Service Manager

020 7974 2335

Appendix 4

What happens at a Family Group Conference?

The co-ordinator will be there with you to help the meeting run smoothly

- **Information Giving**

This part of the meeting is for the family to get the information they need to make a plan. The information givers/professionals explain what they are concerned about for the child and give information about the sort of help that they can offer. There will be lots of opportunities to ask questions and to be clear about what they are saying. The professionals then leave the room.

- **The Private Family Time**

This part of the meeting is for the family network to discuss the information they have been given and make a plan. When they are ready the co-ordinator will leave them in private, as a family, to talk things through together. The family network use this opportunity to decide what is the best way forward for their child. They will need to

- ✓ Agree a plan
- ✓ Decide who will do what
- ✓ Decide how they can check that the plan is working

If they need more information the co-ordinator will always be on hand to help with this. Families may not always agree. If this happens the co-ordinator will try to help the family come to some agreement.

The family network may take some time to discuss the situation and decide on the best solution. There is no need to hurry. The co-ordinator will make the participants feel as comfortable as possible and make sure there are things for the children to do if necessary.

- **Feeding Back the Family's Plan**

When the family has worked out its decisions and plans, the co-ordinator will help write it down. The information givers return to the room. Professionals can disagree with the family's plan if they feel it would put the child at risk. This part of the meeting is to make sure that every one is clear what has been agreed.

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Appendix 5



Director Martin Pratt

20/03/2025

Family Group Conference Service
Children, Schools and Families Directorate
London Borough of Camden
Town Hall
Judd Street
London WC1H 9JE
Tel 020 7974 2335
Fax 020 7974 6708
fgc.crowndale@camden.gov.uk
www.camden.gov.uk

Dear XXXXXXXX

Please find enclosed the Social Work Report for the Family Group Conference. The report lays out our concerns and the questions we would like your family to answer at the FGC. This report ideally needs to be signed by you before the report can be shared with other participants and before the conference can be arranged. I have enclosed a self-addressed stamped envelope for your convenience. Please return to me as soon as possible.

I will contact you within 2 days of sending the report, to check you are in agreement with the report and the FGC process.

If I am unable to reach you, or have not heard from you to query or challenge the contents of the report within 3 days of sending it, I will assume you are in agreement with the contents of the report. An independent FGC coordinator will shortly be in touch to begin arranging the conference. FGC coordinators work to your availability and can arrange visits and the conference out of working hours if desired.

Kind Regards,