**Referrer Guidelines and Worksheet**

**Referrer's Guide to a Family Group Conference**

* **Prepare ahead of time -** Find out who will be there. Liaise with the coordinator about what issues the family may bring up, what resources they may request. Makes notes of what you will say. If you need to say something sensitive or contentious, try to ensure the family is aware of this before the meeting. Discuss with the coordinator how this could best be achieved.
* **Greet everyone -** Make it a point to greet family members, especially reach out to anyone who may be uncomfortable with you.
* **Consider where to sit -** Preferably next to a family member, not with other professionals or next to the coordinator. Avoid “us and them” situations.
* **Give relevant information and brief case synopsis -** Avoid jargon or “fuzzy language”. Written information that can be left with the family about resources can be useful. Be respectful. Be clear and open and prepared to answer questions.
* **Prepare to stay for the whole meeting -** Allow enough time. Ensure mobile phones are switched off in stages 1 and 3.
* **Avoid “us versus them” discussions with other professionals. -** Be positive about the family and potential outcomes
* **Give immediate feedback to the plan -** Approve of as many things as possible. If you cannot agree to something in the family's plan explain why not. If you need to check with someone else for approval (e.g. your manager), tell the family when you will do this and when you will get back to them. In most cases it is expected that plans will be agreed on the day.
* **Do not direct the plan -** Remember this is the family's meeting. Think about offering options rather than telling people what you want to happen.
* **Be prepared for criticism -** Yours is one of the hot seats at the FGC. Since you are seen to represent the agency and the family’s entire history with it, you are likely to be blamed or criticized. Be open about things that have gone wrong in the past.
* **Don't be defensive -** Not everyone will like you or agree with your ideas. Listen well. Acknowledge feelings or ideas that are different from your own.
* **Be prepared to witness extreme emotions of distress or anger -** FGC are often very emotional, and families often express feelings that you may not always see in regular casework. Plan to have someone to talk to afterwards. Schedule time with the coordinator to debrief afterwards.

**Preparing for a Family Group Conference**

(A worksheet for Referrers)

**Service User name: Date of FGC:**

What is the reason for the FGC? (Why did you refer for a FGC?)

What are the essential facts of the case that everyone at the FGC needs to know? (Be brief.)

What are my (or the department's) concerns? (Remember families are more likely to respond to “concerns” than to “problems”)

What are the families’ strengths?

What options or resources can be offered? (Include, if appropriate cost implications, time scales, referral procedures.)

What are the essential issues that need to be addressed in the family plan? (Do not prescribe the plan, simply list the issues).

Are there any legal restrictions, or anything which cannot be agreed or provided? (Include if appropriate, what will happen if the family do not agree a plan – i.e. what is the bottom line?)