

Family Network Meetings Protocol



Document control	
Status	Guidance
Effective from	6 November 2023
Who Must Comply with this Guidance?	All Children's Services Staff
Who must be aware of this guidance?	All Children's Services Staff
Review Frequency	12 months
Policy Lead and Approval Body	Aleksandra Zabielska
Produced By	Aleksandra Zabielska

Version Control				
Effective Date		6 November 2023		
Review Date		6 November 2024		
Review frequency		Annually		
Policy Owner (Name and Job Title)		Aleksandra Zabielska – Service Manager CHAD		
Policy Authors (Name and Job Title)		Aleksandra Zabielska – Service Manager CHAD		
Approval bodies		SLT		
Approval date		31 October 2023		
Version		1		
Version History				
Version	Date	Amendments Made	Requested by (Name and Job Title)	Amendments made by (Name and Job Title)

Family Network Meetings Protocol



Table of Contents

Table of Contents	2
1. Introduction.....	3
2. What is a Family Network Meeting?.....	3
3. Why have a Family Network Meeting?.....	3
4. Who is involved in a Family Network Meeting?	4
4.1 Child or Young Person’s Participation.....	4
5. When are Family Network Meetings held?	5
6. Where are Family Network Meetings held?	5
7. Preparing for a Family Network Meeting	6
8. Recording the Family Network Meeting.....	6
8.1 Bottom lines	6
9. Monitoring and reviewing the Family Network Plan	7
10. Resources	8

Family Network Meetings Protocol

1. Introduction

This protocol aims to provide guidance on how to deliver Family Network Meetings (FNMs) within BCP Children's Services.

The purpose of family network meetings is to support families to enable them to be more resilient and to help resolve family difficulties that are impacting on their children. The family network meeting may help problem solve, create plans and contingencies for when the family needs it. Family network meetings also form part of the pre-proceedings (PLO) process, although should not be restricted to being used just for this reason - they should be the early form of support that families can rely on.

2. What is a Family Network Meeting?

Family network meetings are not 'specialist', separate pieces of work outside of core business functions in working with families. They are not 'Family Group Conferences' which require an accredited FGC co-ordinator to deliver. There is no 'one size fits all' approach to family network meetings, and they may involve the wider family, friends, or others within the local community to support the family. Invariably, the 'family network' is likely to consist of those who know the family best and whom the family trust, and therefore often they can develop creative approaches to address any difficulties the family may be experiencing. They are a means to look at who surrounds a child and family and how they may offer support in times of need. FNMs help strengthen and co-ordinate this support by bringing the network together.

The level of the network's involvement will depend on the family's circumstances, and mutually what the network and family agree they can offer. Because the family network know the family best, it is not for Children's Services to create the plan, but for the network to work together to decide what may work best for the family with Children's Services co-ordinating and overseeing the process. Families can of course hold family network meetings without Children's Services involvement, and we would encourage this. The role of Children's Services is the facilitate the space in which the FNM can occur, and to support them to turn their thoughts and ideas into a tangible plan that is likely to address the need/concern.

There are three underlying values that should be present for FNMs – respect, responsibility and relationships. The facilitator may need to ensure that everyone is given equal opportunity to contribute, and to provide a strength-based approach as to how the issues are discussed and the plan then developed.

3. Why have a Family Network Meeting?

Research is clear in showing that families who have a strong family network around them are more resilient. They will have more resources around them, and people whom they can call on and trust. Family networks may prevent the need for professional support to be required, and therefore ensure that the human rights of the family to have a private family life can be achieved without statutory intervention. In addition, it supports the rights of the child to live with their family and, where not possible, with someone within their family network therefore aiding their sense of belonging and understanding of their identity.

Family Network Meetings Protocol

4. Who is involved in a Family Network Meeting?

The involvement of a naturally connected network is central to building family resilience. FNMs can include: parents/carers (including absent parents), extended family members, friends, neighbours or people in the community who are important to the family e.g. a Priest, Imam or football coach.

From our first contact with families via the MASH, we should talk to the family about their network and who can help support them. It is important to use questions that go deeper than simply asking 'who is in your support network?'.

For example –

- *Who would the child say are the most important people in their life?*
- *Who would you say are the people around you who you could ask for support?*
- *Who are the most important professionals involved with the child and family?*
- *If your child was worried, who are they likely to talk to?*
- *Who would be the first person you would phone, if you needed assistance?*
- *Who helps with the shopping, comes round if you are sick, comforts you when you need it, or takes the children out to give you a break?*

It may be that several questions need to be asked before a family member begins to think beyond their initial response, and it is important we enable that thought process to occur in a supportive way, giving the family time to identify possible support.

There are various family finding tools and techniques that can be used to help families identify their network i.e., safety circles, timelines, genograms, three houses, desert islands, and ecomaps (see [Partnership Academy](#) website for tools). Further information regarding tools, including working with fathers, can be accessed via practice fundamentals and lunch and learn sessions via Workforce Development (WFD).

Sometimes, parents may feel reluctant to involve others from their network. It is important to approach parents with compassion and appreciate how difficult it must be to ask for help from those close to you. However, there is a need for Children's Services to provide reassurance, and to explain what FNMs are, how they can support the family, and why this may be the best outcome for them. The safety circles and questions to assist in finding family networks are particularly useful tools to support a conversation with parents who are worried about involving other people.

4.1 Child or Young Person's Participation

Wherever possible, the child or young person should be involved in the process and able to invite those who they believe can support them. They will need sufficient time and support to help understand and prepare them for their family network meeting e.g., timing, who they would like to invite, solutions to worries etc.

Children should be encouraged to attend the FNM, which may be for all or part of it, as deemed appropriate. The practitioner should consider a variety of ways to aid participation if they are not attending - the child or young person may wish to write down their views or ask a trusted person to speak on their behalf. It is important their views and feelings are shared and taken into consideration throughout the meeting. Preparation work should be flexible and imaginative, to help children and young people express their views as fully as possible. The child or young person should agree who and what is to be shared on their behalf.

Family Network Meetings Protocol

Attention should be paid to the issues that children and young people see as important, which can often be different to the adults in their lives. Whether the child or young person is present or not, the practitioner should ensure that the child or young person remains at the centre of the planning. The use of an Advocacy Service (*for looked after children* or children subject to child protection planning) should always be considered as part of the process.

Every child within the family may have different views of their situation and therefore it is imperative that each child's views are fully heard and considered within the planning.

5. When are Family Network Meetings held?

FNMs should be the first consideration in providing support to a child and family and should occur as early as possible in becoming aware that the family requires support. They can be held at any time and by any involved professional and may be held more than once for a family.

FNMs must take place at the earliest opportunity if we are involved in or considering Care Proceedings (i.e., before child is discussed at LGM, during PLO process, etc) to look at who else in a child or young person's family network may be able to care for them or support them in any way if they are unable to remain with their parents.

FNMs also take place when the child or young person is at risk of entering care and before they are referred to the Keeping Families Connected Panel.

FNMs should take place where a young person, aged 16 and 17, is not living with those with parental responsibility (PR), including where they are homeless.

FNMs are required where there is possibility of reunification.

FNMs ensure that families are offered every chance of support, including coming up with their own plans for their own children in a way that is safe and meets the child's needs. FNMs may take place as one meeting, or in parts depending on the network's availability and the relationships within the network. If the family say they are not ready for a FNM, they should be encouraged to think about what they would need to be ready. It is important for the plan and the success of it to be considered during reviews (CIN, CGM, CIC reviews etc) and if necessary, a review FNM to occur.

6. Where are Family Network Meetings held?

FNMs are informal and take place at a location that the child and family feel most comfortable with. It could be at their home, at the home of someone within their network, or somewhere in the community. The meeting will take place physically, however where there are members of the family network living at a distance (but still able to offer emotional/ financial/ moral support) there will be a need to consider how to best involve them within the planning.

Family Network Meetings Protocol

7. Preparing for a Family Network Meeting

Helpful things to consider ahead of the meeting:

- What to discuss ahead of the meeting:

What's the focus of the meeting and what does the child and family want to get out of it? What does the network need from the Practitioner for it to go well?
- What family network members needs to know ahead of the meeting:

The purpose of the meeting, what will happen at the meeting, who will be there, where and when to arrive, and how long it will last.

Where the FNM is part of Children's Services reassurance that risks are being addressed, the practitioner must make clear what needs to be achieved within the plan for that assurance to be gained.
- Things to do within the meeting:

At the start of the family network meeting, the danger statement (or statements and goals appropriate to specific service areas) needs to be clear and what it is that the practitioner needs the family network meeting to address within their plan. Ensure that the bottom lines are clear and that these have been shared, and where possible, developed with the family. These are the non-negotiable things that must be addressed through the plan.

The practitioner needs to ensure that the agenda for the meeting is clear prior to the meeting and shared again at the start of the meeting.

8. Recording the Family Network Meeting

Record the information that comes out of the meeting to include a clear plan of action that covers everything the network agree to undertake.

The information that comes out of the FNM is recorded on a drop-down case note 'Family Network Meeting' and the Word document attached to Mosaic as Family Network Meeting/date.

The key things to record include bottom lines, timeline, who's involved in the plan, and safety plan.

8.1 Bottom lines

Professional bottom-lines are the minimum that must happen for Children's Services to be satisfied that the child's needs are met/will be met. If the family's plan does not meet the bottom lines, we must be clear with the family and what actions we will take. Equally, if the plan put in motion does not work, we need to be clear about what the contingencies are.

A FNM template is available as a Word document form which may be used as a prompt during the meeting. The plan in its entirety (bottom lines, timeline, who's involved in the plan) must then be printed out to give to the family.

Family Network Meetings Protocol

9. Monitoring and reviewing the Family Network Plan

Families need to be able to show that they can implement the family network plan and demonstrate its efficacy. If the child is allocated a worker, then there needs to be enough support and monitoring of the plan to satisfy the worker that it is addressing the needs. This may require family network meeting reviews, check-ins with the child, the family, the network and other professionals.

The level of support and monitoring must be determined by the level of risk. Where there is a high level of risk, there will be a need for a high level of professional monitoring initially. If the network is able to demonstrate that they can implement the plan and keep the child safe, the level of professional monitoring can start to reduce, and monitoring can gradually start to be handed over to people within the family network. This should always happen in a planned and structured way.

For family network planning to be meaningful, parents need to be given a chance to succeed. If parents make mistakes, the response should be measured and proportionate and should be approached as an opportunity to help them think through what went wrong, to deepen their understanding/insight and to reflect on what needs to happen in the future, which includes reviewing their plan. Encourage the family to take ownership, make decisions and be solution focussed when challenges arise and reflect on any successes.

Family Network Meetings Protocol

10. Resources

One Page Summary

Why Have a Family Network Meeting?

- **Benefits:** Builds family resilience, reduces need for professional intervention, supports family's rights.

Who is Involved in a Family Network Meeting?

- **Participants:** Parents, extended family, friends, community figures.
- **Engagement:** Searching questions, identify crucial people, professionals involved.
- **Child Participation:** Should be encouraged and prepared to enable full participation.

When are Family Network Meetings Held?

- **Timing:** Early in family support process, always before Legal Gateway Meetings.
- **Risk of Care:** Where there is a risk of child being accommodated.
- **Reunification:** When possibility of reunification is being considered.
- **Flexibility:** There is a need to adapt to family needs and circumstances.

Where are Family Network Meetings Held?

- **Location:** Informal, family's choice (home, community), where they feel comfortable.

Preparing for a Family Network Meeting:

- **Logistics:** Arrange date, time, venue, consider accessibility.
- **Focus:** Define meeting purpose and family goals.
- **Communication:** Inform participants, share agenda.

Supporting the Family Network Meeting:

- **Format:** Informal, circle seating for inclusivity.
- **Introduction:** Introductions, purpose, ground rules.
- **Information Sharing:** Share concerns, safety goals, strengths, bottom lines.
- **Questioning Approach:** Encourage dialogue, insights, solutions.
- **Developing the Plan:** Collaborative identification of actions.
- **Testing the Plan:** Assess thoroughness, clarity, SMARTness.
- **Scaling Question:** Gauge confidence in the plan.
- **Agreement and Monitoring:** Agree next steps and review process.

Recording the Family Network Meeting:

- **Documentation:** Consider use of flipchart paper and pens for visuals.
- **Plan of Action:** Record agreed actions, responsibilities, timeline.
- **Safety Plan:** Detail responses to specific concerns.
- **Bottom Lines:** Be clear about minimum requirements and what actions we will take to ensure child's safety.
- **Contingencies:** Consider Safety Action Plan breakdown scenarios.

Note: This One Page Summary provides an overview of the Family Network Meeting process. For detailed implementation and guidance, refer to the full text of the policy.