



Family and Friends Network Meetings



All families have ups and downs. When times are tough asking for help from family and friends is an important way of looking after children and families. Sometimes this support comes from specialist services and professionals. This can be important but in the long run we know that most of us get the best support from the people who care about us most; our friends, families, and the community we live in.

Family and friends network meetings set aside time with the network of family and friends, to focus and talk openly about any difficulties happening in the life of the child/children and their family. This focused discussion is about planning together to make things better. The reasons for holding the meeting will be different for everyone.

Why do we need these network meetings?

Family and Friends Network Meeting are about the strengths and resources in one's network of family and friends. This means involving the people who know and care about a person and their children best, when they need help in family life.

Family and friends networking can help us talk about things that are hard to deal with and find answers together. Everyone has different strengths. A parent/s and their network of family and friends will all bring different strengths to family life.

Getting together the people who care about a child and working out how to get the support they need can be a big relief. The network understands the family background, their beliefs and what works best for the family. They know the strengths, knowledge, and skills that each family members brings.

Family, friends, and members of the community may already support the family. They probably have people they call on in emergencies or just enjoy being with. If we are unsure on who these people may be, these questions, found [here](#), may assist in helping identifying them.

Parent/s can plan with their network, how they will deal with problems and manage the challenges the family faces with their help. This will help parent/s and child/ren all feel better and more positive about the future.

When to hold network meetings?

Everyone finds things hard at times. No one should feel bad about asking for help. Getting support in place is an important first step to things getting better. A family network meeting can help you plan how you will get back on track. Family and friends network meetings must be held within first four weeks on transfer into Family Safeguarding Teams, if not held as part of the most recent [Child and Family Assessment](#) within the Assessment & Intervention Service. A Family and Friends Network Meeting should also be convened in emergency situations where there are immediate safeguarding concerns (family and friends' placement); they can also be used within assessments.

Further guidance on our expected time lines for Family and Friends Network Meetings can be found [here](#).

Agenda:

Family meetings work best when there is good preparation beforehand. Follow the agenda below as a guide to how to run this meeting. It is important that children's thoughts, worries, and feelings are known and part of the discussion.

Starting the meeting (5-10 minutes):

1. The chair welcomes everyone; discusses and agrees ground rules which may include:
 - People should treat each other with respect, use calm voices and only one person should talk at any time.
 - Keep the needs of the children at the centre of the meeting.
 - If anyone gets upset or frustrated agree that they can take a break and re-join when they are calm.
 - No one should offer to do more than they can deliver on. It is important that the help will be there as agreed.
2. The chair confirms the difficulties and worries for the children, sharing the voice of the child
3. The chair asks the family to discuss between them the strengths and support available in the network of family and friends. Choose who from the network is going to take notes and write up the plan.

The meeting (40-50 minutes):

The aim of bringing the network together for this meeting is to make a safe plan that addresses the worries. The network should be given the choice of whether the professionals remain and support the family in creating their plan or leave the family to complete alone. If the network wish for the professional(s) to leave then the network need to be provided with clear bottom lines of the chair's expectations for ensuring safety.

The network should be provided with the following template on A3 paper (and pens):

Who will do what? (Practical and emotional support)	
How will they do it?	
How often will they do it? (Days/times/frequency)	
Where will they do it? (At family's home/at network members home/community)	
When will they start to do it?	
Discuss and agree a plan B – in case of an emergency: What if... what will we do ...? Our emergency actions if the main plan doesn't work for some reason or something unplanned happens for the child	

Ending the meeting (5-10 minutes):

1. The Chair should ask the family network to feed back the support plan; and the chair should check that all areas where support is needed have been covered.
2. Re-cap on who is going to do what and advise the network they will shortly receive a hard copy of the plan on the relevant minutes template, [here](#), within 5 working days
3. Agree a date for another family meeting to see how things are going if necessary.

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