# Family Group Conference (FGC) Guidance Questions

**Version: Final**

**Approved by: Tom Stevenson**

**Date: February 2025**

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## Introduction

This document is for guidance only and offers suggestions for questions during different scenarios during a Family Group Conferences (FGC). Questions support the family action plan development, which may not be as successful, or cover all the concerns that need to be addressed without specific and meaningful questions.

All questions should be adapted to the specific needs of the family. For example, where there is italic writing (For example *child / parent or carer)* is referenced, please remove and insert names/ correct scenario.

For ease of reference, you can click on the headings in the contents page which are hyperlinks and will take you to the required scenarios. Please be mindful that you may find relevant questions in more than one section.

The key underpinning to these conversations is to support people to feel heard and safe. Whilst a culture of openness, sharing and safety can’t be created overnight there are a few things you can do to make sure people feel able to talk more openly:

1. **Lead by example.** Be open, honest and empathetic. Consider your tone of voice and any individual needs to get the most out of the meeting.

1. **Set the scene**. Pre-face all meetings with a gentle reminder of any ground rules (agenda, bathrooms, breaks), share the purpose of the meeting, that people are allowed to share what they feel comfortable with, opinions should be respected even if you disagree, and where appropriate signpost wellbeing resources (linked at the end of this document).
2. **When challenging something that you don’t agree with**, challenge the idea or statement and not the person. This way people can share the background behind their thinking rather than feel like they need to defend themselves.
3. **Make space for emotions.** Don’t try and hurry feelings away or glaze over them, let people know that we’re all people and feelings are normal. Where emotions are affecting the running of the meeting or someone’s ability to communicate, then it may be helpful to offer a break or to get them a glass of water.
4. **Make sure people know they can step out if they wish and schedule breaks** if it is a longer session. (Meetings over 1 hour should have at least one 5-minute break). This might be for a variety of reasons but helps focus, accessibility, creating space for emotion and makes it normal for people to prioritise their needs.
5. **Remind people how valuable they are**, how important the attendees are. Talking about children and family life can make people very nervous. Make sure to reflect back to the person what they have shared. This will help with ensuring you truly understood what the person meant to say, plus it affirms a person’s position without agreeing with it.

**Questions should be:**

* **Written in plain English, or the families spoken or written language**. Aim to ask how they prefer to communicate and work in a manner that suits their communication style.
* **Clear and not too long**. This enables families to have a clear understanding of what is being asked of them. For most situations no more than 5 or 6 questions should be what you are aiming for in each session.
* **Ask one question at a time.** Questions within questions can be confusing for people to answer. Ask one question and where appropriate, empower the individual to share further information. For example, ‘How can you help *the parents* to keep the home clean and tidy and what can you do to support them to keep this going?’ Could become ‘what support can you give to *parents* to help them keep the home clean and tidy?

You can find more guidance about creating safe spaces and encouraging reflection here (via internal SharePoint site): [Tools for Talking - Resources for Team EDI Conversations v2.pdf](https://orbispartnerships.sharepoint.com/sites/cfll_equality_diversity_inclusion/documents/Resources/Tools%20for%20Talking%20-%20EDI%20Activities%20for%20Teams/Tools%20for%20Talking%20-%20Resources%20for%20Team%20EDI%20Conversations%20v2.pdf)

## Unborn Children

* Who can support *parent* to get ready for baby’s arrival?

For example, buying what the baby will need, organising the home and setting up any equipment.

* Who can provide advice and guidance to *parent* with their new baby?

For examples feeding / making routines / safe sleeping / settling baby / play activities

* What is the family plan around the birth of the baby?

For example, who might care for *the other children* / help *mother* get to the hospital / make sure she has what she needs?

* Who can check in with *parent* in the days and weeks following baby’s birth?
* What are the areas that *parent* might struggle with when the baby arrives and how can you support *parent* with these? Suggested edit: what do you think might be hard for *parents* when baby arrives? Follow up: how can you support *parent* with these?
* How will you provide emotional support for *parent/s*?

Follow up: What might you notice if they are struggling with their mental health?

## Parents who need extra support

For example, Neglect issues, practical or emotional parenting skills

* What help do you think would make a difference to *parent* so that they can…: - (*insert areas of concern* for example Get *child* to all *his* health appointments).
* Follow up: Who in the family can help with this?
* What signs will there be in *child* and *parent* that the support is helping? Follow up: What will you do if the support isn’t helping?
* How can you build on what support has been tried and work towards (*insert outcome*)?
* How will the family make sure the home is kept warm; *the children* have clean bedding and clothes and there is enough food for them to eat?
* How can the family make sure the home is safe and secure for *the children*?
* How can the family make sure *the children* are watched and kept safe within the home?
* How can the family make sure that *the children* are protected from unsafe adults visiting their home?

(For example, adults using drugs / alcohol, mental health problems, violence)

* How can the family help to keep the children safe when out and about in community?

For example, how will the grown-ups know where the children are when they are playing outside?

* What support can you give the *parents* to keep the home clean and tidy?
* What support can you give *the parents* to declutter the home and maintain it?
* Who can help *the parents* to put daily routines in place?

For example, bathing, mealtimes, bedtimes.

* Who can help to make sure the *children* are given nutritional/healthy foods at regular mealtimes? How might they give this support?
* Who can help to get the *children* to school/nursery regularly and on time? What days and times are you able to offer your support?
* Who can help *the parents* to notice when *the children* have been good or done something well?  What can you all do to show that you are pleased with them?
* Who can help with getting the *children* to all health appointments and make sure medical attention and advice is taken when needed?
* How will the family make sure that *the children’s* medical needs are met every day? For example, making sure glasses are worn, taking medicine, applying cream.
* How can the family support *the children* to make and keep positive friendships?
* How can the family support *the children* with their schoolwork?

## Behaviour management

* What rules and boundaries do the family think might be helpful and who can support parent to put them in place?
* What support can the family offer parent/child when feeling overwhelmed and struggling manage their feelings?
* Who can help manage conflict/ disagreements that might happen without taking sides?
* Who can offer parent/child a space to cool down/time to themselves when needed?

## Parents who are experiencing domestic abuse

* Do you have any ideas that might help stop/reduce the ‘*problem of arguments/fighting’*?
* How can the family network support you to reduce/stop *‘problem of arguments/fighting’* to keep the children safe?
* What could you do as a family to improve relationships and get on better with one another?
* What would *your child* say is their greatest worry?  Do they know who they can talk to about this?
* What is your plan for keeping the children safe from hearing, feeling, seeing their *parent* fighting with *partner*?
* If you had concerns for the safety of *a child*, what would you do? For example:
* Where is a safe place that *the children* can go?
* What is a safe word that *the children* can use to tell you that they feel unsafe?
* How might you share those worries?
* How will you make sure that *child’s* contact with *parent* is safe and they have a positive time together?  Consider:
  + What are the arrangements for family time with *parent* and how will the family respond if family time is not going well?
* What support does *parent/carer* feel that they need to have positive, safe and consistent contact with *the children*?
* Are there times or triggers where the problem of arguing/fighting is more likely? What actions can you take to keep yourself safe at these times?
* How have you been manging the risks so far? What do you need from other people to keep this going?
* Who from your network are you able to safely contact if you feel a situation is getting worse? How will you contact them? What do you need them to do? Is there a safe place you can go to if necessary, and how can you get there, keeping child safe?
* What have you already thought about or tried, to keep you and your family safe?  What support do you need from your network to start or maintain this?
* How are your experiences most impacting you and your family? What would you like to be different? What can your network do to help and what do you need from others? For example, are there any support services you would like somebody to help you refer to?
* If something were to happen, what support do you need from others to help you?
* How will you know if your family plan is working? Who from the network will monitor it and make sure it will be effective? (Please keep in mind that it can take time for people to remember to take different actions in a crisis and for things to change).

## Parents who are experiencing mental health difficulties

* What help does *parent* need to help them manage their mental health? Who in the family network can offer this support? For example, practical support such as attending appointments, taking medication on time.
* What signs might the family network notice if *parent’s* mental health started to get worse? What are the signs that you would notice in yourself? What actions would you take as a family?
* How do *parent’s* mental health challenges affect *child/children*? What do you notice about *child/children’s* behaviour and/or mood? How can you support them?
* Do *child/children* know who they can talk to if they are worried about *parent’s* mental health/behaviour/mood? What is their biggest worry?
* What changes would you and others notice when you are struggling? What support is needed and who will help?
* Who can babysit/care for *child/ren* to give *parent* a break?

## Parents who have learning difficulties

* What help does *parent* feel they need to look after child?
* How do the family think they can support *parent* to take care of child? Who can help and what can they do?
* How can parent be supported to go to meetings and appointments? Who can help them to share their thoughts and feelings?
* Who can help *parent* to understand the worries for *child*?
* How can *the parents* and family help *child* with their schoolwork and friendships?
* How can the family help *parent* to make and keep daily routines for *child*?

For example, bedtime, bath time and mealtimes.

* How can the family help *parent* with making rules and encouraging good behaviour for *child*?
* How can the family help *parent* to understand the changing needs of child as they grow?
* How can the family make sure that child gets opportunities to play and have fun with their parents and wider family?

**Baby specific:**

* How can *parent* be supported to learn about *baby’s* needs? For example, breast or bottle feeding, night feeding, bathing, sterilising, safe sleeping.
* How can *parent* be helped to get everything ready for baby’s arrival?
* How can *parent* be supported to think about how baby is feeling?
* How can *parent* be supported to get help with any worries for the baby’s health?
* How will the family know if things are getting too much for *parent*, and how might they be able to help?

**Please also consider questions in the neglect section if appropriate.**

## Parents who have difficulties with drugs and alcohol

* What support does *parent* feel they need to help them *drink less/reduce their drug use*?   For example, practical support attending appointments, accessing services, childcare, encouragement.
* Has anything worked in the past for *parent* to make positive changes? How can you support *parent* to try these again?
* What challenges have stopped *parent* being able to reduce/stop their *alcohol and/or drug use*? What help does *parent* need to remove these challenges?
* What is your plan to keep *child* safe if parent continues to use *drugs or alcohol*?
* What signs might you notice if *parent* started to use *alcohol/drugs* again? What would you do? How would you make sure *child* is safe?
* How do you think *child/children* are affected by *parent’s* *alcohol/drug* use? What do you think they would say?
* How can the network make sure that *child* is protected from unsafe adults visiting their home? For example, adults using drugs or alcohol, violence.
* What is the network’s plan to keep *child* safe, if *parent* wants to use drugs or alcohol, where can *child* go?
* Does *child* know who they can talk to if they are worried or feel scared?  Do they know how they can contact you?

## Young people who are experiencing difficulties

For example, self-harming, going missing, exploitation

* What support can you give to *child/young person* to help them to stop (*going* *missing*/*self-harming, truanting from school?)*
* How can the family keep the *child* safe? For example, how will you know where they are and who they are with? What might you need to do in different scenarios?
* Does *child/young person* know who they can speak to about any worries they have?
* What are the signs or changes you might notice that show *child/young person* might need your support?
* Who is able to offer *parents/carer* support in caring for *child/young person*? What does this support look like and how can it be offered?
* If there was a crisis or emergency within the home, or things are becoming difficult, what will you do? For example who is able to offer immediate support or safety?  Which family member/s can offer *child/young person* a safe place to go to?
* If *child/young person* does go missing and is refusing to return home, what support can you offer to make sure *child/young person* is safe?
* What will you do if you have any concerns for *child/young person* safety or welfare?
* What does *child/young person* think needs to happen to make things better for them? What could *child/young person* do to help?
* What help and support would c*hild/young person* like from their family?
* Who can help *child/young person* access support services for their *mental health/ drug* use etc.?
* Are there situations or times that trigger *worrying behaviours* and what can you do to support with this?
* How can you keep *child/young person* safe online?

## Families where there are concerns around sexual abuse

**Note - We refer to offender in this document as the person who has sexually abused the child. This should be replaced with their name.**

* How do you see family time happening between *child* and *offender?*? How often will this happen, how long for, where this will take place, how and who will be making sure *child* stays safe?
* What ideas do you have to keep *child* safe when they are *having contact/living* with *offender*? Can their support network manage any times which may be riskier? (For example, bath time, bedtime, going to the toilet).
* What are the signs and triggers that might increase the risk of re-offending? (For example, isolating self, spending more time online). What will *offender and/or their support network* do?
* What behaviour or signs would you notice about *child* which may cause you to be worried about their contact with *offender*? Who is most likely to notice any change in *child* and what action should they take?
* What does *child* understand about the situation? Follow up: do they know who can they talk to if they are worried?
* What ideas do you have to keep other children safe who visit the home both now and in the future? For example sleep overs/friends visiting the home and family gatherings.
* Who can provide emotional support and encourage *offender* to access professional help?

## Families who are in public law outline, edge of care proceedings or rehabilitation

* What are you worried about for *child/children*? Follow up: how do you think this could be changed for the better?
* What could you do to support the *child/children* to continue to live with their *parents*?
* Do you have any ideas to improve the care of *child/children? How can you help with putting these ideas into action?*
* What is the family arrangement if emergency, short- or long-term care is needed for *child/children*? Who can provide the care described, and for how long? What support would they need from family and what is the backup plan if this can’t continue for any reason?
* How do the family propose to support *the parents* if the plan is for:
  + The parents to live together.
  + *Child/children* to live with mum/dad separately?
  + *Child/children* to live with another family member? What support will *child* need? What support will *other family member* need?
* Please talk us through how will you support *child/children* to return home? For example, who can provide time-out, telephone support or practical help? We need to be specific about who will do what and when.
* What other support or services (if any) would *parent* need to make *child/children* going home successful? Follow up: who can support with this?
* What does *child* think will make things better? Follow up 1. How can this be taken forward? Follow Up 2. Who can support with this?

**Please refer to other sections where necessary**

## Change in care

* How will family time happen for *child* with their *maternal/paternal* family? Consider how often and where family time will take place?
* If family time is being supervised by a family member, how will they make sure that *child* stays safe?
* Who can support *child* in understanding why they have moved to live with *carer*?
* How will you all explain to *child* about moving to live with *the new carer* and answer any questions they might have?
* How will you help *child* to know where they came from and what’s important to their family and identity? For example, festivals, food, language, religion or family traditions
* How will you support *child* to understand their *life story*, *family background, and experiences?*

## Other questions

* Is there anything else you would like to add to your family action plan?
* Do you have any questions about what we’ve agreed today?
* Who will share your family plan to *child*?
* Who will monitor the family plan and report any concerns?
* What is the family plan if there is an emergency and short- or long-term care is needed for *child*?
* Who can provide this care, and for how long?
* What support would they need from family and what is the backup plan if they cannot continue caring for *child* for any reason?

## Further Support for the Family Network

* Parenting advice from child mental health experts, includes video tips for parenting and wellbeing resources for the whole family -[**Place2Be: Parenting Smart: Articles**](https://parentingsmart.place2be.org.uk/)
* Support for you and your family: See a list of organisations and further information in Surrey -[**Support for you and your family - Surrey County Council**](https://www.surreycc.gov.uk/children/support-and-advice/young-people-and-their-families)

**Document and Version Control Information**

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| **Title** | Family Group Conference Questions | **Version** | V2 |
| **Purpose** | To provide a suggested set of questions to utilise during a Family Group Conference. | **Date** | February 2025 |
| **Updated by** | Linde Webber | **Status** | **Final** |
| **Approved by** | Tom Stevenson | **Review frequency** | **12 months** |
| **Next review date** | February 2026 |  |  |