Children’s Services Family Group Conference Procedure

**Version: FINAL**

**Approved by: Tom Stevenson**

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# **Document Purpose**



This document outlines the Surrey approach to Family Group Conferences (FGC). The circumstances in which they may be used is described along with the process for making a referral to the Family Group Conference Service

# **Scope of this procedure**

This procedure covers the operational accountabilities and responsibilities of staff within Surrey County Council Children’s Services. It is important that this document is considered alongside Surrey policies and procedures, listed below:

##### Policy & Procedure Repositories within Children’s Services

* [Surrey Children's Services Procedures Manual](https://www.proceduresonline.com/surrey/cs/index.html)
* [Surrey Safeguarding Children Partnership Manual](https://surreyscp.trixonline.co.uk/contents/contents)
* [Education & Lifelong Learning Policy Library](https://orbispartnerships.sharepoint.com/%3Au%3A/r/sites/education_and_lifelong_learning/SitePages/ELL-Policy.aspx?csf=1&web=1&e=4dLY30)
* [Health & Safety in CFLL](https://orbispartnerships.sharepoint.com/sites/cfll_hub/SitePages/Health-%26-Safety.aspx)
* [HR policies (A to Z)](https://orbispartnerships.sharepoint.com/sites/people_and_change/SitePages/hr-policies-a-to-z.aspx)
* [CFLL EDI Hub - Home](https://orbispartnerships.sharepoint.com/sites/cfll_equality_diversity_inclusion/SitePages/Home.aspx)

##### Legislation Related to this document

* Children Act 1989
* Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000
* Children and Social Work Act 2017
* Children Act 2004
* Equality Act 2010
* [Children's social care: national framework - GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/childrens-social-care-national-framework)
* [Working together to safeguard children - GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/working-together-to-safeguard-children--2)

**Acronyms, Language & Further Information**

**Acronyms within this document**

* Social Worker / Children’s Practitioner – Child’s Social Worker or an Early Help Children’s Practitioner operating within one of the pilot schemes
* SM - Service Manager
* TM - Team Manager
* PR – [Parental Responsibility](https://www.gov.uk/parental-rights-responsibilities)
* OT – Occupational Therapy

**Further Acronyms Used Within Children’s Services:**

[Acronyms and Glossary for CFLL (last updated Oct 24)](https://orbispartnerships.sharepoint.com/sites/education_and_lifelong_learning/_layouts/15/Doc.aspx?sourcedoc=%7B515BF9F4-3D88-470E-89C4-595A57CE2081%7D&file=Acronyms%20and%20Glossary.xlsx&action=default&mobileredirect=true&DefaultItemOpen=1)

## What is a Family Group Conference (FGC)?

FGC's recognise the rights and responsibilities of families to make decisions about their children and they provide a framework for families to exercise this responsibility. It is a means by which the local authority and a family can work together to safeguard and promote the welfare of children and young people.

At the FGC it is the family who make the plan to meet the needs of the child/young person, after first being told what concerns and issues a plan will need to address, what resources are available and what may happen if the current situation does not change. The role of the LA is to support the family's plan, wherever possible, unless the family plan does not address continued risk of significant harm.

FGC's recognise the strengths within the family and provide a forum for maximising the resources within that family. In doing so, FGC's bring benefits to a child/young person who should be cared for within the family environment wherever possible.

## Referring

#### 2.1 Why should I Refer?

Research demonstrates that FGC's help produce better outcomes for children and young people by keeping them within their family or community.

Meetings are based on our belief that by utilising this support, families can find their own solutions to difficulties and that children and young people have a right to have their families involved in the future planning about their care.

Feedback from children, young people and extended family members who have attended FGC's shows that they find them a far better way of expressing their wishes and feelings and having these heard.

Consideration should be given to FGCs as part of a support plan to families facing difficulties. FGCs should be considered where there is a likelihood of intervention to look at alternative support or care for children within the family.

[The Public Law Outline clearly](https://proceduresonline.com/trixcms2/media/22203/care-and-supervision-proceedings-legal-gateway-meetings-and-the-plo-jan-24-amended.docx) indicates that FGCs must be considered prior to any proceedings.

Research indicates that children are best placed in their own families, but if that is not possible then the next best option would be a placement within their community and maintaining contact with family members. Further information on the aims and benefits of FGCs are available via [Helping families Helping children - Family Rights Group](https://frg.org.uk/?_gl=1%2Ad5ct0q%2A_up%2AMQ..%2A_gs%2AMQ..&gclid=Cj0KCQiA7se8BhCAARIsAKnF3rxUY8t0niKGEQNDRU-QZIgBOQFxadI_zV6njqVP_2yI-m8iBgYcUusaAkx4EALw_wcB)

It is an aspiration that an FGC is offered to every family who comes to the attention of Surrey Children’s Services.

#### 2.2 Family Referral Criteria

A child or young person has unmet needs which could be met by the family

* Support from the family could prevent a child suffering significant harm.
* Holding an FGC may prevent a child becoming Looked After.
* There is a real chance that a meeting could assist in the child leaving care to return to the care of their family or friends.
* An FGC could assist the care plan in legal proceedings.
* Parents/carers must provide informed consent for a referral to be made for an FGC.

**Before a referral** is made the referrer must discuss the possibility of using an FGC with the child and their family and **gain their consent,** informing them that they can withdraw consent if they wish to at any point.

#### 2.3 Who can Refer?

* A social worker
* Children's practitioner – if they are part of the Early Help pilots within Adolescent Early Intervention Service West, and Intensive Family Support Service)

All other professionals (e.g. health visitors, teachers, children's outreach workers and others) can consult with a one of the professionals listed above, who will consider making the referral.

#### 2.4 Making a Referral

The social worker/children's practitioner will

1. Share the benefits to the family of holding an FGC (see section 2.2)
2. Provide further information to the family, child/young person and anyone else with parental responsibility (PR). See leaflets: [FGC Information Leaflet](https://proceduresonline.com/trixcms2/media/23995/family-group-conference-team-family-leaflet-web-link.pdf) (English) ([Children and Young People](https://proceduresonline.com/trixcms2/media/23994/family-group-conference-team-child-and-young-persons-leafelt-web-link.pdf))
3. Confirm with the family that they want to be referred.
4. Confirm with the child/young person that they want to be referred.

##### 2.5 Referral process part 1

1. Request and undertake an initial consultation between the social worker/children’s practitioner and the FGC Duty Coordinator.
2. Request an initial consultation by emailing fgc@surreycc.gov.uk. This will cover reasons for FGC request. See: [Family Group Conference Referrer Flowchart.](https://proceduresonline.com/trixcms2/media/23996/family-group-conference-process-flowchart-for-referrers-jan-25.pdf)
3. Agree if appropriate to proceed with the Stage 2

##### 2.6 Referral process part 2

1. The social worker/children’s practitioner will update the family and confirm they are still happy to proceed to the next part, which is the family consultation stage.
2. Family consultation will include the social worker/children’s practitioner, the family, and FGC Duty Coordinator. The professionals will agree who will lead on defining and agreeing the questions and goals for the FGC.
3. All the information from stage one and stage two of the consultation process will be uploaded and saved in Wisdom by the consulting FGC Coordinator.
4. **Referral undertaken by social worker**: the social worker will complete the FGC Referral form in the LCS record. Once the form has been completed and approved by the referring team manager, it will be sent to the FGC Triage Worktray in LCS and picked up by the FGC Service.

**4a. Referral undertaken by a children’s practitioner**: will complete the FGC Referral form as a Word document. Once the form has been completed and approved by the referring team manager, it will be emailed to the FGC Inbox fgc@surreycc.gov.uk and picked up by the FGC Service. Note, this is only relevant for those working in the pilot teams, referenced in section 2.3.

1. Where there is more than one child in the family subject to FGC, the form must be combined, to include each child prior to completion.

##### 2.7 What to expect next

An FGC Coordinator will be allocated to a family within 5 working days of receiving a completed referral.

The FGC Service will send an email to the social worker/children’s practitioner and their team manager to confirmation the details of the allocated FGC Coordinator, the process and timeline.

Thereafter, the allocated FGC Coordinator will liaise with the social worker/children’s practitioner as the FGC intervention progresses.

For further guidance regarding referrals, please see [Family Group Conference Consultation Process.](https://proceduresonline.com/trixcms2/media/23997/family-group-conference-consulation-process-jan-2025.pdf)

#### 2.8 Managing Risk

Throughout the FGC process we will be mindful of potential risks to children and those participating in the FGC, as well as any risks identified by professionals and the family or child/young person.

We will take measures to discuss and manage these risks with the social worker/children’s practitioner. The FGC Coordinator will discuss with the social worker/children’s practitioner any risks that need to be considered, where appropriate, prior to holding the FGC

The aim is to hold a whole family meeting which may include both maternal & paternal family networks. This will be undertaken in the safest possible way.

There may be occasions when the FGC Coordinator and the social worker/children’s practitioner will decide that there is a need to hold separate Maternal & Paternal FGCs.

There may also be a need to exclude an individual / individuals from the FGC process due to the significant risk factors. Examples of these scenarios are:

* Adults who are considered a risk to children, as determined by the social worker/children’s practitioner who is referring the family for an FGC.
* Individuals with a history of aggressive behaviour towards other family members and/or social care professionals.

Where possible, and where safe to do so, views and wishes will be gathered from those participants that cannot attend the FGC, and their views will be shared at the FGC by the FGC Coordinator.

## Before the Family Group Conference

The FGC Coordinator will visit the child/ren/young person, family, and any other family network members at their homes, or at an agreed location. The coordinator will explain the process and help the family to identity who to invite into the network meeting.

#### 3.1 Initial visit to those with PR

At the initial visit the parents/carers will be asked to agree and sign consent to proceed with the FGC intervention, which includes the sharing of key questions, concerns, and goals for the FGC, with their network.

The FGC Coordinator will encourage the parents / family to comment / identify any further strengths / concerns & what they would like to achieve by having a family meeting.

It is important that all participants are aware of the concerns to enable them to offer the most appropriate support to the child/ren going forward.

#### 3.2 Inclusion of Children

FGC Coordinators will gain consent of parents/carers to meet with the child/ren to explain the FGC process, explore their wishes and feelings, identify who they would like to attend the meeting and where possible and appropriate invite and prepare them to attend the FGC.

They will spend time with the child/ren to gather their wishes and feelings and agree with how these will be shared. This could be through a letter to their family, a picture/drawing, photographs, or recording a video. Consideration will also be given to calling into the meeting by phone or video.

Children/young people will be asked:

* If they would like to talk through what is an FGC and the purpose of it.
* Why the child/young person’s family are being invited to the meeting – what is the purpose of meeting.
* Where they would like to meet the FGC the Coordinator.
* If they would like to share their ideas on how the meeting should look (location / venue, who should attend and what they want covered).
* If the child/young person does not want to attend themselves, ask if there are questions or topics they want discussed.

Children/young people that do not want to attend:

* Will have their wishes and feelings shared by the FGC Coordinator
* Have a visual representation of the child/ren/young person on display (photo and/or drawing).
* Will have the outcome of the meeting shared. The Child friendly plan is shared in-person by the allocated FGC Coordinator. This will include aspects of the outcome of the meeting and the information shared will be age appropriate

#### 3.3 Inclusion of adults

Following the initial visit and the work with the children the FGC Coordinator will contact all the family members/network to explain and plan the next steps, which will include confirming availability.

* + The FGC Coordinator will look to undertake home visits to explain the purpose, process and agree timing.
	+ Where face to face visits is not possible (e.g. due to location/safety) phone or video calls will be arranged.
	+ Any family/network members who are unable to take part, their wishes and feelings will be gathered in advance and shared at the FGC.

If individuals are not able to attend the FGC, they will be supported in attending virtually by teleconference or video conference.

Vulnerable adults may need support to attend/take part in an FGC. Where this is the case the FGC Coordinators will ensure that they are able to play in active role throughout the FGC process, e.g. identifying an advocate or another family member who can support etc. If there are language needs, then interpreters or signers will be used throughout the process to support the individuals to play a full part in the FGC process.

Further information on creating an accessible and supportive environment:

* [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)
* [Family Group Conference Questions](https://proceduresonline.com/trixcms2/media/24003/family-group-conference-questions.docx)

## **Planning the FGC Meeting**

The FGC Coordinator will arrange a venue and time that is most convenient for the majority of the family, ensuring the child/young person’s views are considered too.

* **Venue** - a neutral venue, i.e. not belong to Children's Services or a family home. To maintain impartiality and support empowerment for the family to find their own solutions.
* **Timing** – many FGCs are held in the evenings after work, and at weekends occasionally if this enables key members of the family network to attend.
* **Notification of FGC** - Each family/network member will receive an invitation to the FGC, outlining meeting details as well setting out the questions to be addressed at the FGC Invites are offered verbally and reconfirmed in writing, usually via email.
* **Remote Attendees** - those not able to physically attend will be provided with a variety of options to attend. Where attendees struggle to access the venue, the social worker / practitioner and FGC coordinator will consider if to request funding from the service budget for transport.
* **Accessibility & supporting everyone to contribute** - Additional needs, such as hearing, sight, processing or mobility, must be discussed during the planning stages and the FGC arranged accordingly. The child / young person and/or family network may request signers and interpreters, or they may require additional time to process information (mental health / neurodiversity).

## **Structure of the Family Group Conference**

The FGC Coordinator chairs the FGC and the allocated social worker/children’s practitioner, or a duty social worker/children’s practitioner, must attend the FGC.

The structure aims to ensure inclusion, success, and empowerment for all participants. FGCs have three stages to the meeting, Information Sharing, Family Time (without professionals) and Agreeing the Plan. Further information is provided on each stage, below.

* **Highlight Family Strengths:** Find out and document family strengths, providing praise and positives in reports.
* **Use Clear Language:** Avoid jargon, acronyms, and professional language that is hard to understand. Use simple language to explain situations and their implications for the child/family.
* **Contextual Understanding:** Try to understand and include the context for observed behaviours. Show empathy and understanding as to why someone might be behaving in a particular way, during that period, rather than just stating it as a fact.
* **Clear and Kind Communication:** Write in plain English and ensure concerns are shared in clear and simple language but be kind and remember we’re human. Be transparent about the sources of information and why certain details have been included or omitted.
* **Collaborative Writing:** Think with the family about how to address difficult or sensitive issues. Be clear about what information needs to be shared and why, including sharing reports with the family ahead of sending them to others.
* **Avoid Repetition:** Don’t keep repeating the history over and over again.

#### 5.1 Information Sharing Stage

The social worker/children’s practitioner will outline the reasons for the FGC, which will include the strengths, concerns and bottom line *(the bottom line is – the set actions that the family and network members are expected to achieve to ensure that the safety and wellbeing of the child/ren remains paramount. This is a non-negotiable expectation to avoid further intervention or legal proceedings e.g. child/ren being taken into care)* and key questions and goals for the FGC.

The information sharing stage will also include the opportunity for the family to ask as many questions as they need to enable them to make a safe plan.

This will be the time when the children will be supported to share their wishes and feelings if they are in attendance. If the children are not attending the FGC Coordinator will share their wishes & feelings and ensure that the focus of the FGC is kept on the children.

#### 5.2 Private Family Time Stage

The family will be given private time without the professionals in the room to decide what actions they can take to assist the child.

The process may take a few hours to complete and therefore refreshments will be provided, and the family can take as many breaks as they wish.

The FGC Coordinator and social worker/children’s practitioner will be available to answer questions from the family during private time if the need arises.

#### 5.3 Agreeing the Plan

After the family has finished their discussions and agreed on a plan to help the child or young person, the FGC Coordinator and social worker/children’s practitioner will return to the room. The Family Plan will then be read out loud by either the FGC Coordinator or a family member.

Any additional information required is gathered by the FGC Coordinator and written into the plan.

There is also space on the plan for the family to add any additional comments that they would like included.

Any resources or support need from Children's Services will be discussed and agreed. The social worker/children’s practitioner will have spoken to their manager prior to the meeting /or be able to access management support / decision making if the family have a request that they would like to incorporate into the plan.

If agreement cannot be given immediately by the social worker/children’s practitioner for these resources then a date will be identified by when the social worker/children’s practitioner will have a decision about them.

There will need to be provisional agreement by the social worker/children’s practitioner at the meeting for the plan (on behalf of Children's Services), unless it places the child or young person at risk of significant harm. If for any reasons the plan cannot be agreed (e.g. awaiting outcome of Court) then a date will be set out on when the plan will be agreed and how this will be shared with the family/network.

The FGC Coordinator will support the family in identifying who within the family will monitor the Family Plan and what actions will be taken if the plan is not working as planned.

Agreement will also be made as to well how the plan will be supported/monitored, e.g. at Team Around the Family/Child in Need/Core Group meetings.

The FGC Coordinator will check whether the family wishes to have an FGC Review and if so, set this for a date agreed with the family. Important dates such as court hearings will be considered, including religious festivals etc.

Before the meeting ends the FGC Coordinator will ensure that everyone has the correct contact details to communicate with each other following the FGC.

At the end of the meeting, the FGC Coordinator will also hand out [Feedback Forms](https://forms.office.com/e/ZuwHycEiuD) to the family members and the social worker/children’s practitioner, who will be asked to complete the short form and return it to the FGC Coordinator. This will be followed up by the FGC Service.

The feedback will be used to evaluate the service and inform any changes. Following the meeting the FGC Coordinator will type up the Family Plan. The FGC Service will quality assurance the plan.

The FGC Coordinator will send out the Family Plan to all attendees of the FGC. The FGC Coordinator will attach a copy of the Family Plan to the child's LCS/EHM case record.

## **Review**

One of the aims of the FGC is to support and empower families to take forward their family plan, to monitor this, review it and change the plan as needed, in the future. All the families will be offered an FGC review. This usually takes place about 3 months after the first FGC. It is the expectation that the social worker/children’s practitioner are in attendance of the FGC Review meeting, to check the progress of the Family Plan with the family. If the family decides to not have a review meeting this is relayed to the social worker/children’s practitioner, and the review is then cancelled as it is a voluntary process.

Prior to the review the FGC Coordinator will contact the social worker/children’s practitioner to discuss what has worked well in the plan and what still needs to happen. At the review the family and social worker/children’s practitioner will add to these points and draw up questions for the review based on what difficulties the family still need to address.

The rest of the review will follow the same process as the initial FGC.

It is unusual to offer further reviews unless it is of particular value to the child or young

## **Evaluation**

An annual report will be produced that will evaluate effectiveness of the FGC Service; this includes looking at the outcomes for children that have had an FGC.

An evaluation of the feedback forms completed by the family members and the social worker will also be made annually.

## **Closure of FGC Service Involvement**

The involvement of the FGC Service will end after the Review FGC has taken place or if it is agreed that a Review FGC is not necessary.

It is the responsibility of the children's social worker/children’s practitioner to monitor a family's plan and to work with the family to ensure that a plan continues to be successful.

## **Roles and Responsibilities**

The roles of the Manager for the FGC Service, social worker /children’s practitioner for the child/young person and FGC Coordinator are quite distinct.

#### 9.1 Role of the Children's social worker/children’s practitioner

The role of the social worker/children’s practitioner is to:

* **Provide Information:** Ensure that the children and the family receive appropriate information regarding the FGC purpose and process, including providing FGC information leaflets.
* **Gain Consent:** Obtain consent from those with parental responsibility (PR) to make the referral to the FGC Service.
* **Request and Attend Consultations:** Request and attend consultation stages one and two.
* **Complete Referral Form:** Fill out an FGC Referral Form on LCS (for social workers) or a Word document (for children’s practitioners).
* **Collaborate on Concerns and Goals:** Work with the FGC Coordinator and the family to outline concerns and strengths and agree on key questions and goals for the FGC.
* **Maintain Communication:** Keep in regular contact with the FGC Coordinator during the process of organising the FGC.
* **Explore Resources:** Investigate available resources and services to potentially support the family's plan.
* **Attend the FGC:** Be present at the FGC from beginning to end.
* **Present Information:** Share key information during the Information Sharing Stage and answer any questions the family may have.
* **Clarify the Process:** Clearly explain to the family the process of agreeing on their plan and what will happen if a plan cannot be agreed upon at the meeting.
* **Complete Feedback Form:** Fill out the [Feedback Form](https://forms.office.com/e/ZuwHycEiuD)
* **Monitor the Plan:** Oversee the implementation of the family's plan.
* **Attend Review FGCs:** Participate in any Review FGCs.

#### 9.2 Role of the FGC Coordinator

The FGC Coordinator is independent from statutory decision-making processes. The role of the FGC Coordinator is to:

* **Conduct Consultations:** Carry out the consultation process, including stages one and two.
* **Initial Contact:** Contact the parents/carers/persons with PR and the child/young person within five working days of allocation.
* **Explain the Service:** Meet with the parents/carers/persons with PR and the child/young person to explain the FGC Service and ensure that the family wants an FGC.
* **Identify Support Network:** Work with the family to identify their support network.
* **Support Child/Young Person:** Help the child/young person attend the FGC and/or express their views, wishes, and feelings where appropriate.
* **Identify Advocate:** Find a supporter/advocate for the child/young person if they need or want one.
* **Prepare Family Members:** Ensure all family members are prepared for the FGC.
* **Schedule the FGC:** Ensure the FGC takes place within the 30 working days timeframe.
* **Arrange Logistics:** Organise a venue for the meeting as agreed with the family, including transport and any interpretation services.
* **Maintain Communication:** Keep in regular contact with the social worker/children’s practitioner throughout the process of organising the FGC.
* **Chair the FGC:** Lead the FGC meeting.
* **Support Plan Development:** Assist the family in developing their plan if they want support.
* **Record the Plan:** Document the family's plan to be presented back to the FGC.
* **Monitor Arrangements:** Ensure monitoring arrangements for the family's plan are in place and agree on a date for a Review FGC.
* **Distribute the Plan:** Arrange for the family's plan to be copied and sent to all attendees within five working days of the FGC.
* **Provide Feedback Forms:** Distribute feedback forms to all FGC attendees.

#### 9.3 Role of the FGC Team Manager

The role of the Manager for FGCs is to:

* **Receive Referrals:** Accept referrals for an FGC and ask for more information if needed.
* **Allocate FGC Coordinators:** Assign an FGC Coordinator within 5 working days.
* **Initial Contact:** Contact the social worker/children’s practitioner within 5 days of receiving the referral.
* **Oversee FGC Coordinators:** Supervise the work of FGC Coordinators, including regular check-ins.
* **Support FGC Coordinators:** Help FGC Coordinators with any issues that come up during their work, including safeguarding concerns.
* **Respond to Queries:** Address any questions from social workers, children’s practitioners, or family members.
* **Collate Feedback:** Gather feedback forms from families, children, social workers, and children’s practitioners to ensure high standards in the FGC Service.
* **Review Feedback:** Consider the feedback and take any necessary actions to improve the service.
* **Communicate Actions:** Inform families and professionals about any actions taken in response to feedback.

## **Additional Information**

For more information on the FGC service, please visit the:

[The Family Group Conference - Surrey County Council](https://www.surreycc.gov.uk/children/support-and-advice/young-people-and-their-families/the-family-group-conference)

[Family Group Conference Team and Young Persons Leaflet](https://proceduresonline.com/trixcms2/media/23994/family-group-conference-team-child-and-young-persons-leafelt-web-link.pdf)

[Family Group Conference Team Family Leaflet](https://proceduresonline.com/trixcms2/media/23995/family-group-conference-team-family-leaflet-web-link.pdf)

[Family Group Conference Referrer Flowchart](https://proceduresonline.com/trixcms2/media/23996/family-group-conference-process-flowchart-for-referrers-jan-25.pdf)

[Family Group Conference Consultation Process](https://proceduresonline.com/trixcms2/media/23997/family-group-conference-consulation-process-jan-2025.pdf)

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| **Title** | **Family Group Conference Procedure** |
| **Purpose** | To outline the Surrey approach to Family Group Conferences (FGC). The circumstances in which they may be used is described along with the process for making a referral to the Family Group Conference Service. |
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