

London Borough of Sutton Family Group Conferences

Bitesize Briefing For Professionals



What are Early Help Family Group Conferences?

Family Group Conferences (FGC'S) are a family-led planning meeting in which the whole family network comes together to make and agree a plan to resolve an issue or problem. Family meetings are the heart of Suttons restorative approach to support families where there are developing issues or concerns. A family meeting is a voluntary process led by family members, and is an opportunity for the wider family to come together, talk about the issues or concerns, identify solutions and create a family plan to resolve them. The process is designed to be respectful and empowering, focussing on the families own skills, strengths and detailed family knowledge to resolve difficulties. The family including the children, family friends and other close relatives work together facilitated by a coordinator to address the identified issues in a safe, supported environment where the family members are the decision-makers rather than the professionals.



Why do we have family meetings?

Working restoratively with families has a proven track record of achieving successful outcomes and reducing the need for statutory interventions. Family meetings are used by families to help them to identify their own issues and to work out their own solutions. Research tells us that people are more productive, cooperative and make positive choices when people in positions of authority do things with them, rather than to them or for them. Family meetings reduce escalation, as they promote the idea of collaborative decision-making, partnership, personal agency and active participation to empower and enable families to create an achievable family plan that addresses their needs.



When might a family meeting be appropriate?

- When there has been has a family breakdown in relationships and/or communication
- Where there is parental conflict
- Where there are issues around contact with the child
- Where there may be a need to restore communication between family members in order to reach the point of a Family Group Conference
- Where support from the wider family could help create and sustain improvements, reduce or deescalate concern
- Where a child or young person meet 2 or more Early Help criteria
- Where there is a risk of a child coming into care
- Where an Initial Child protection Conference in being considered



How does a family meeting work?

Preparation

Before a family meeting can take place, an extensive preparation phase is undertaken. This allows the coordinator to meet with and invite family members, explore the issues to be discussed, plan the date and venue and liaise with any relevant professionals. During this time the coordinator will undertake direct work with family members and children and young people to ensure their views are represented

Information Giving

The family meeting – Part 1

The Reason for holding the meeting is explained, and issues for discussion set out and where appropriate ground rules agreed. Information from any invited professionals is shared with family. The family are able to ask any questions before the professionals leave the meeting.

Private Family Time

The family meeting – Part 2

The coordinator and any other professionals that were invited leave the meeting and the family are left alone in private to talk about the information they have heard and discuss possible solutions. The family create and agree on a family plan to address the issues, including what to do if the plan doesn't work or breaks down.

The Family Plan

The family meeting – Part 3

Family share the plan with others at the meeting, including those who were there during information giving. The plan is agreed, and with permission the coordinator will type it up and shared with all participants.



Important Information & Referrals

- The process can take up to 8 weeks and is an essential element of a successful family meeting.
- The team work across both early help and statutory cases.
- After the initial family meeting, a review will be undertaken after 6 weeks to review the plan and see what still needs to be decided.
- The process is voluntary and families should be willing to take part in a family meeting.
- Where families refuse consent you should consider the reasoning behind this and if the concerns for the child indicate that a referral should be made to the Children's First Contact Service (CFCS) for possible statutory interventions.

To make a referral to the project you must complete the 'Children's First Contact Service (CFCS) Referral Form. This is an online google referral form to access support and services from Children's Social Care for families within Sutton. You can access the form here: [Children's First Contact Service Referral Form](#)

For more information about the FGC's please contact the Children's First Contact Service Team by telephone on 020 8770 6001 or by email childrensfirstcontactservice@sutton.gov.uk

Related Bitesize Briefings are available including 'Children's First Contact Service' and 'Restorative Process'