

## You role at the meeting:

- Attend the meeting;
- Provide any additional information in a manner that is clear, concise and understandable;
- Explain what type of help and resources are available;
- Answer any questions that are asked of you;
- The family will then have private family time to discuss how they are going to help the child/ young person. You and the Coordinator will leave the room at this point, but you must remain available.
- Once the family has agreed a plan, you and the Coordinator will return to the room and confirm your support of the plan.
- Even if there is need for further agreement or negotiation of resources outside the meeting, the plan should be agreed in principle by the referrer. The only reason for not agreeing the plan is if it puts the child at risk of significant harm. Timescales and responsibility for specific tasks are agreed at this point. The outcome of the plan is dependent on the family and the professionals working together, and keeping each other informed about progress and problems.
- If requests are made for resources that cannot be agreed immediately then the professional will inform the family as soon as possible thereafter.
- The Coordinator ensures the plan is recorded and a copy goes to all of those invited to the Family Group Conference.

The Family's plan forms the basis of the future work with the child/ young person and the family. Professionals should support and implement the plan.

## Contact us



**01234 276643**



**01234 276586**



**Family Group Conference Service**

Bedford Borough Council  
Borough Hall  
Cauldwell Street  
Bedford MK42 9AP



**familygroupconferenceservice@bedford.gov.uk**



**www.bedford.gov.uk**



Family Group  
Conference Service



# Family Group Conference Service

A guide for professionals

## What is a Family Group Conference?

A Family Group Conference is a meeting where family members and friends make the main decisions. It is arranged and facilitated by the Family Group Conference Coordinator, who is not involved in making decisions about the child. Family Group Conferences are a means of enabling families to find solutions to their own problems within a professionally supportive framework. A family is defined as the child, the parents, extended family members and family friends.

## Why should I refer?

Family Group Conferences are based on a model which has been proven through research to help produce better outcomes for children and young people by keeping them within their family or community.

Family Group Conferences are based on the belief that families can usually find their own solutions to their difficulties and that children and young people have a right to have their families involved in their future planning.

Feedback from children and young people who have attended Family Group Conferences has shown that they find them a far better way of getting their wishes and feelings heard. The aim of the meeting is to empower the children and family to come up with an agreed, safe and sustainable plan that will resolve the issue and support change.

## Who can refer?

Currently only Bedford Borough Social Work teams can make a referral, but, Health Visitors, Teachers, Education Welfare Officers and other professionals can consult with a Social Worker who will then consider making a referral.

## Referral Criteria

The main criteria for a referral are whether there is a “significant issue / question that the family need to resolve” but should be considered in the following circumstances:

- Where children are being considered as in need of accommodation or are at risk of becoming Looked After;
- A Family Group Conference should be held prior to applications being made to Court;
- Where children are being considered for Initial or Review Child Protection Conferences or at any time when a child is subject to a child protection plan;
- At a Looked After Review or Planning Meeting when considering the needs of children already Looked After;
- Other situations can be considered on a case by case including contact arrangements, children subject to Interim Care Orders where ongoing family support has been assessed as being needed, or where the care plan indicates that neither parent would be a suitable carer and alternative carers are being sought. A Family Group Conferences should be considered alongside adoption and, in appropriate cases, long term fostering as alternatives.

## How to make a referral

Contact the Family Group Conferences Service on the telephone number below for an initial discussion. A referral form will then be sent to the Social Worker, who should complete this as fully as possible and return it to the Family Group Conference Service. An independent coordinator will then be allocated, who will make direct contact with the referrer. The Coordinator will arrange the venue and time of the Family Group Conferences following discussion with the family.

## Your role as a professional:

### Before the Meeting.

The Family Group Conference is a voluntary decision making meeting and therefore it is important that you:

- Obtain the family's agreement to having a Family Group Conference;
- Complete a Family Group Conference referral form;
- Meet with the coordinator to help formulate the questions for the meeting;
- Complete a report which outlines the concerns, reasons for wanting the Family Meeting and detailing your “bottom lines” – see guidelines;
- Share this report with the family 5 days before the meeting;
- Liaise with the Family Group Conference Coordinator in preparation for the meeting.