



# One minute guide

## Family Group Conference (FGC) Service

No. 3, February 2021

### What are Family Group Conferences?

Family Group Conferences (FGCs) are at the heart of our restorative approach to support families when there is a safeguarding issue. They aim to help families develop their own solutions to the difficulties they are facing.

An FGC is a meeting where a child's wider family come together, talk about concerns and make a plan for the future care of the child. FGCs are intended as a respectful and empowering process in which parents, children, wider family members and family friends are given clear information about safeguarding concerns and are asked to produce a plan to address those concerns. Every family is unique. FGCs use a family's own skills, strengths and personal knowledge to resolve difficulties. A major benefit of FGCs is that the child or young person participates and can influence the plan being made for them.

Each FGC is coordinated by an accredited FGC coordinator, who is independent from the social work service or other services. The coordinator is neutral, with no case management or decision making responsibilities. Most families and workers value this independence. A key element of FGCs is private family time, which allows the family to make plans without professionals being involved in their decision making.

### Why do we have Family Group Conferences?

The idea behind this key restorative approach is 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. The model was first developed in New Zealand and is currently being used in a number of different countries as well as many local authorities across the UK.

Our FGC work is part of a wider investment in early help services, seeking to ensure that families receive the right level of support at the right time, which helps to prevent problems from escalating.

Our ambition is to ensure that:

- Families, whose children might otherwise be removed from their homes (taken into care), are supported to develop an alternative solution before such action is taken.
- Families are supported to develop solutions in any circumstances where there is a safeguarding issue. Safely reducing the need for children to be looked after is a top priority for our city.

In Leeds, families have an entitlement to an independent offer of an FGC. Where it is safe to do so, FGCs are offered at key points where decisions need to be made regarding safeguarding and promoting children's welfare. The aim is to promote partnership working between agencies and families.

FGCs are internationally recognised as an evidence-based method of working with families and are central to our commitment in Leeds to work with children, young people and their families to help them find solutions to their difficulties.

## Family Group Conferences in Leeds

Leeds now has a relatively large FGC service, which expanded in 2016 with support from the DFE's Innovations Fund under our [Family Valued](#) innovation programme. There are three FGC teams in the city aligned with CSWS areas. A Lifelong Links team has also been established to deliver FGCs for Young People in care.

Current priorities for FGC work are children who are at risk of going into care, unborn babies where a pre-birth assessment is being undertaken, children where a child protection conference is being considered, family reunification after a period in care, families affected by domestic violence, and young people in care who wish to connect with their extended network. FGCs can also be offered as an alternative to an Initial Child Protection Conference in some cases.

Referrals for FGCs are mainly made through the child or young person's social worker or Early Help Lead Worker. Leeds FGC service also make independent offers of FGC for children affected by domestic violence and abuse through the daily MARAC arrangements.

## Key Contacts and more information

You can contact the FGC teams directly:

ENE – 0113 3786291 Nicola Lines

SOUTH - 0113 5350781 Bernie Jackson

WNW – 0113 3782471 Nic Bonham

There is a chapter in the Leeds Online Procedures Manual: [Family Group Conference Service](#)

And you can also visit the Family Rights Group website:

[Family Rights Group – Family Group Conferences](#)

The use of FGCs in the UK is encouraged by central government, and the promotion of FGCs as a key tool to involve families is mentioned in a number of policy documents including:

Children Act [1989](#) & [2010](#);

[Public Law Outline](#) 2008 (revised 2014);

[Family Justice Review](#) 2011; and

[The Munro Review](#) 2011.

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