

# FAMILY GROUP CONFERENCING

A decorative graphic consisting of a solid teal horizontal bar that transitions into a white background. On the right side, there are three horizontal lines: a top teal line, a middle white line, and a bottom teal line.

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# History of the Family Group Conference (FGC) Model

- The development of Family Group Conferencing in New Zealand is based on practice in the indigenous Maori community, in which decisions about children have traditionally been made by the wider family group.
- The traditional influence of kinship groups on the family in Maori society was recognised as a neglected support resource in child welfare and this neglect resulted in a significant over-representation of Maori children in out of home placements in the child welfare system.
- Family Group Conferencing practice is derived from the New Zealand Children and Young Persons and their Families Act 1989.
- Following the implementation of Family Group Conferencing in New Zealand, there has been a dramatic reduction, both in the existing number of children placed under guardianship of the Department apart from their families; and in new cases of children being placed in longer term substitute care.

# 3 stages of the Family Group Conference

## Stage 1 - Information Exchange

- Professionals provide information to family members. Family members ask questions to clarify issues.

## Stage 2 - Private Family time

- The family are given private family time to discuss this information and begin to make a family plan for the young person/child.

## Stage 3 - Consolidation of Family Plan

- The family present their plan. If all agree (subject to bottom lines), the plan is adopted.
- The convenor writes up the plan and sends a copy to everyone involved in the Family Group Conference.

# Preparation Stage 1

The convenor meets with the carer or parents of the child or young person first to discuss:

- The purpose of the referral to FGC to develop an understanding of a common goal and purpose for the conference. There needs to be a clear purpose for the convenor to contact friends and family members.
- To identify significant family members and friends who may be able to contribute to a plan for the future of the child or young person.
- Development of 'bottom lines' from the family and or the professional involved.
- Establishment of a meeting time, venue, child care arrangements, catering etc.

# Preparation Stage 2

- This involves the convenor meeting with individual family members and friends to gather information about the family from their point of view, hear their story and their ideas about the family plan to be developed for the child, young person and their family.
- Identify areas of agreement and conflict between family members
- Single sessions, mediation, mini-conference meetings may be necessary to prepare family members & friends to be in the same room.
- Family members/friends/professionals are prepared for the Family Group Conference meeting i.e. Professionals are briefed about what information should be provided at the conference.