

Washington County Department of Social Services has proudly offered Family Group Conferences since 1997. The goal of the Family Resolutions Project is to support and guide families, including extended family members, to provide their own resolutions when there is a child welfare issue, given their own strengths, resources, culture and relationships. A Family Group Conference is a meeting held to bring a family together with service providers and other support persons for the purpose of providing information about the welfare and safety of the a child/family member and to make a plan to address those concerns. It provides families and service providers an opportunity to use a family's unique strengths and knowledge of each other to achieve a plan that supports the child's/family's best interest.

People attending the FGC may include: friends/neighbors, relatives, physicians, school personnel, therapists, caseworkers, probation officers, members

of religious or community groups and any other persons who can provide information and support.

As a result of the Family Group Conference, family members will design a plan that meets the needs of the children, parents, and family. At the same time, the plan is also expected to meet with the bottom lines and safety concerns of the Department of Social Services. The conference is coordinated and facilitated by a Family Resolutions Coordinator.

WHAT IS A FAMILY RESOLUTIONS COORDINATOR?

A Family Resolutions Coordinator is a neutral person who assists the family in planning their conference.

Some of the Coordinator's tasks are to:

- Work with family to develop an invitation list and arrangements for FGC.
- Contact and brief persons that are on the family's list of invitees. FRC

will also contact service providers that work with children and family.

- Assist in setting the time, place, childcare arrangements, food, etc.
- Meet with agency personnel to help prepare them to assist the family in making an effective plan.

The Family Group Conference is conducted in three stages.

Stage I – Information Sharing

Service providers and other resources/ supports discuss the family's strengths and concerns. They explain their role in the child/family's life and offer relevant information about the services that they provide. Family is encouraged to ask questions and gather as much information as possible to help them develop their plan.

Service providers also present the bottom lines that they are asking the family to plan for.

Stage II – Family Meeting

Service providers leave the room to let the family discuss the information that

they have heard and create a plan that addresses the bottom lines.

Family Resolutions Coordinator and a caseworker remain outside to answer any questions, to clarify any issues and to be available to the family should they need help.

Stage III- Writing and Finalizing the Plan

Families are given as much time as they as they need to develop a plan; most meetings last from 1 to 3 hours. When the family feels that they have a workable plan, they call the Coordinator and the caseworker back into the room to make sure that the plan meets the bottom lines. The coordinator makes sure that he/she has an accurate understanding of the plan so that a final draft can be written and distributed to all participants.

Who Gets Referred?

- Families with children in risk of foster care placement.
- Families with a court ordered removal.
- Families where traditional casework has had minimal success.

A follow-up conference can be scheduled to complete a plan or to evaluate and change plans that are in place.

Elevated Risk Conferencing and Family Team Meetings have been added to the Family Resolutions Program. Elevated Risk Conferences will be called when there is an immediate need for intervention to keep a child or children safe. The meeting will be held within 72 hours of referral.

Family Team Meetings will be held whenever a child is placed in Preventive Respite to plan for the return of the child to their home.

Elevated Risk and Family Team meetings are similar to Family Group Conferences in that they pull together family resources to plan for the safety of children. The meetings will be run in three phases:

- Information Sharing and Questions. Bottom Lines will be given.
- Family time: plan will be developed to address the bottom lines.
- Finalizing the plan. Offering a second meeting if appropriate.

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FAMILY RESOLUTIONS PROGRAM



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