



What is a Family Group Meeting?

Helping families take action when a decision needs to be made.



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- Every family, at some time, needs to make big decisions about their children.
- By using a Family Group Meeting, Children 1st helps families to find their own strengths and solutions. Family members are the decision-makers rather than professional workers.
- Family Group Meetings are blame free and look towards the future rather than backwards to the past.
- The family choose whom they would like to invite to the family group meeting; this is usually those people who can help with information, advice or support. This often includes parents, stepparents, aunts, uncles, grandparents, next door neighbours & family friends (who feel like part of the family) to name a few.
- The family also choose which workers they would like to invite to the Family Group Meeting; this might include teachers, health workers, support workers etc.
- Children 1st brought the Family Group Meeting (sometimes known as a Family Group Conference) to Scotland in 1998.

Why hold a Family Group Meeting?

- Children and young people (from now on referred to as children) have told us that they feel special when their families come together to help them.
- Families are experts on themselves and are often the best people to make plans for their children.
- The meeting is a chance to take time out from busy family life, to talk about what is best for the child or young person.
- It's an opportunity to get everyone in the same room at the same time to hear and understand one another.
- Importantly, it creates a space where the child's voice will be heard.
- The meeting gathers everyone's strengths together to create one plan for the child or young person.
- In the meetings, families feel in control of making decisions with their children.
- Given information and resources, families make safe and unique plans with their children.
- The family can explore what support there is for the child or young person and their family within the community.
- The meeting can help families and workers work better together.

Who organises the Family Group Meeting?

- The meeting is organised by a Children 1st Coordinator.
- They have completed specific training to become a Coordinator.
- The Coordinator will be someone who is not already involved in making decisions about the child or family.

Getting ready for the Family Group Meeting

The Coordinator will work with the child and their parents or carers to plan the Family Group Meeting

This will include talking about:

- who the child and family want to invite
- what they want to say at the meeting
- where and when the meeting should be
- what refreshments there will be
- what else needs to happen to make the meeting safe and comfortable for everyone who will take part.
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The Coordinator will visit everyone who has been invited to the Family Group Meeting to help each person:

- understand how the meeting will work
- know what questions the family plan needs to answer
- work out what they want to say at the Family Group Meeting.

We are all different

The Coordinator will make sure that the Family Group Meeting is a comfortable space for everyone who is taking part; whatever their age, disability, gender, race, religion or belief, sex or sexual orientation. Coordinators work hard to make sure that everyone feels respected, included and safe.

Do children take part?

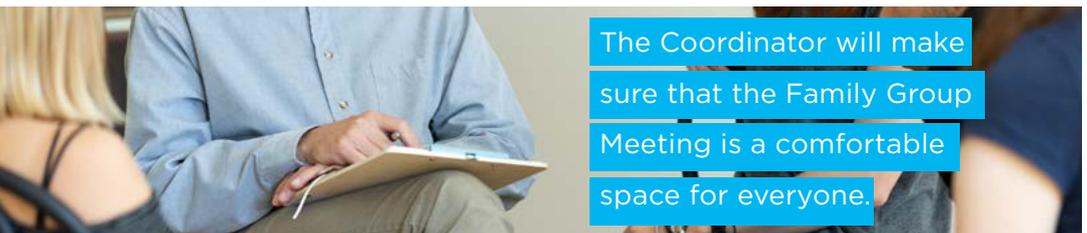
Children and young people usually take part in their Family Group Meeting. Their thoughts and feelings are very important when decisions are being made about them.

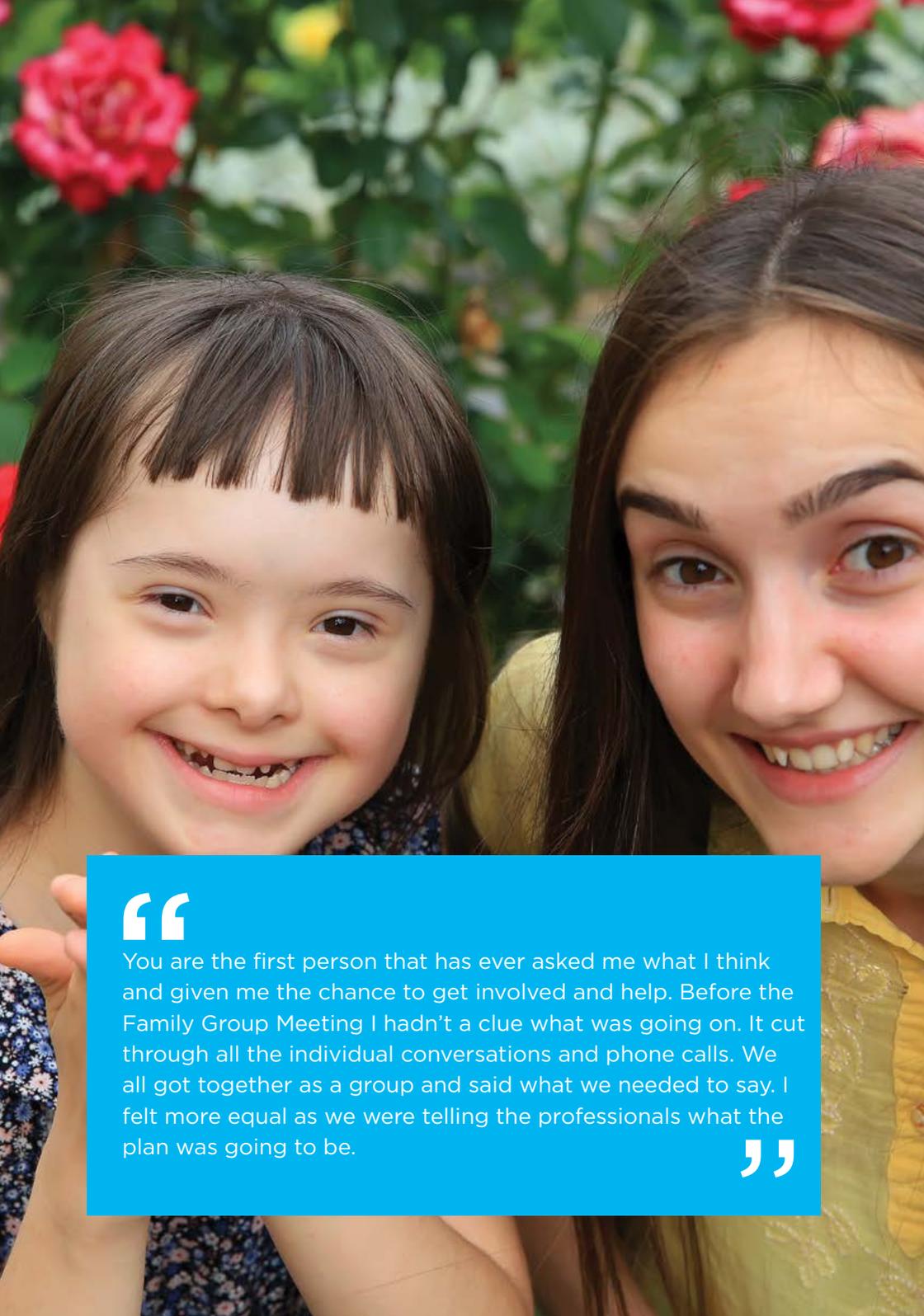
The Coordinator will help the child or young person work out if they want someone to help them with their meeting (sometimes known as an advocate or meetings-buddy) and, if so, who would be the best person to do this. This is often an adult that the child or young person already knows and trusts.

The advocate or meetings-buddy will:

- help the child or young person to get ready for their meeting (this includes helping them work out what they want to say and how they want to say it)
- support them during their meeting (or go in their place to read out their views if they don't want to go to the meeting)
- talk with them after their meeting about what happened at the meeting, what is in the plan and how they feel about this.

Adults are also allowed to have an advocate or meetings-buddy, if required.





“

You are the first person that has ever asked me what I think and given me the chance to get involved and help. Before the Family Group Meeting I hadn't a clue what was going on. It cut through all the individual conversations and phone calls. We all got together as a group and said what we needed to say. I felt more equal as we were telling the professionals what the plan was going to be.

”

What happens at the Family Group Meeting?

1 Information Sharing

The workers most closely involved with the family can say:

- what they think the strengths are in the family
- what they hope the family plan can make better for the child or young person
- what sort of help that they can offer
- if there is anything that cannot be in the family plan because it is not safe for the child or young person i.e. contact with a particular person.

1 INFORMATION SHARING



2 PRIVATE FAMILY TIME



3 AGREEING THE FAMILY PLAN

3 Agreeing the Family Plan

The family share their plan with the Coordinator and workers who were there at the beginning of the meeting.

Everyone agrees to the plan as long as it is a safe plan for the child and meets the child or young person's needs.

The family decide when they would like to review their plan and which family member and worker will work together to check that the plan is working

2 Private Family Time

The workers leave the meeting. The family group are left in private, for as long as they need, to talk about the information they heard and make a family plan.

The Coordinator and workers stay in another room. The family can ask them for information or support if they need it.

The Family Plan is a plan for the future. It is about what is best for the child or young person. It says:

- what needs to be done
- who will do it
- when it will happen
- what resources are needed.

It also says what should happen next if the plan does not work for whatever reason.

What happens after the Family Group Meeting?

Once the family have agreed on the plan, the Coordinator will type it up and send everyone a copy. The family group also decides if anyone else should receive a copy. The lead professional will also be asked to agree to support the family plan so long as it keeps the child safe.

The family and workers will work together to put the plan into action. The Coordinator will not be involved again until it is time for the Review Family Group Meeting.

The Review Family Group Meeting

The Coordinator arranges a Review Family Group Meeting at a time agreed by the family. This is usually a few weeks to a few months after the original Family Group Meeting.

The review meeting lets the family come together to:

- celebrate what has worked
- make sure everyone is still following the plan
- make tweaks and changes to the plan
- add new parts to the plan.

If anyone is worried that the plan is not working, or if there is a family crisis, then they can ask the Coordinator to organise a review meeting as soon as possible.

“The meeting was very relaxed and allowed time for our two families to meet and greet which helped us moving to sharing information stage. I felt relaxed and not threatened for the first time in the whole process. I was happy that we had the time to enjoy a little time for myself and my family to be able to relax and have something to eat and drink before we got down to work.

The Family Group Meeting allowed the families to work together and strengthened our resolve to make sure the children will now be safe. I felt empowered as opposed to my input being dismissed.

A very positive environment and allowed the paternal families to discuss feelings, emotions etc. in a relaxed manner”

Anne
(Social Worker)

“It was like six months work done in one evening because all of the right people were there at the same time. Before the meeting I was anxious and unsure only as I did not know the extended family and felt at times they were angry at me. Again this is tied in with social work and what you represent.

Children 1st Scotland's National Children's Charity

For more information about Family Group Meetings

T: 0131 446 2300
E: cfs@children1st.org.uk
W: www.children1st.org.uk

Parentline Scotland is our free helpline, email and web-chat service for anyone caring for or concerned about a child.
It's open Monday - Friday 9am-9pm, Saturday - Sunday 9am-12 noon.

T: 08000 28 23 33
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