



**FAMILY GROUP
CONFERRING**
O F T O R O N T O



***“The service was amazing; it met all the requirements,
it could not have been better.”
(Family Group Member)***

Parents/Caregivers 2024

WHAT IS A FAMILY GROUP CONFERENCE?

Family Group Conferencing (FGC) brings together a family group, child welfare staff, and other service providers to develop a plan for the well-being and safety of your children.



Benefits of a Family Group Conference

A family group conference gives you, your family and friends a way to make a plan that will support the safety and well-being of your children.

This family group conference respects your family's wishes, and participation is voluntary. Parents/caregivers and children over 12 years of age must agree to have the conference and for their personal information to be shared with everyone invited. Benefits of an FGC:

- ✓ Children are safer.
- ✓ It ensures that your voice is heard.
- ✓ Decisions are made more quickly.
- ✓ Family relationships are strengthened by finding solutions together.
- ✓ Unhelpful family secrets are brought into the open and talked about
- ✓ Families can learn about new services and resources.
- ✓ It can decrease the need for court involvement.

FGC is an approved Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) method that child welfare/CAS consider when decisions need to be made about children. It recognizes that families have strengths and resources to solve their problems. What is talked about in an FGC is confidential and cannot be used as evidence in court.

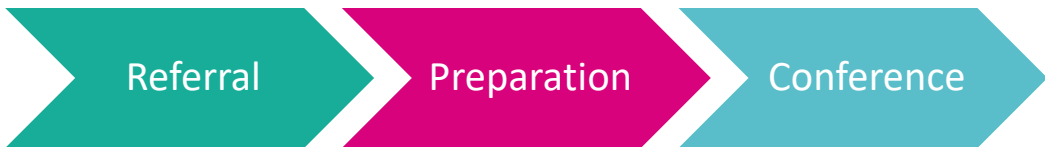
What is the Role of the FGC Coordinator?

The Coordinator is **not** an employee of child welfare and has **no** power to make decisions.

Their role is to:

- ◇ Bring together everyone who cares about your children's well-being.
- ◇ Create a space to discuss concerns safely, honestly, and respectfully.
- ◇ Ensure that everyone's voice is heard.
- ◇ Be neutral and assist your family and child welfare to agree to a plan.
- ◇ Ensure your family's culture is respected.
- ◇ Make sure your information is private.

Family Group Conferencing has 3 Phases



THE REFERRAL

The child welfare worker makes a referral after speaking with you, the parent/caregiver, and children over 12. Your consent to have a Family Group Conference is required unless child welfare/CAS are considered the children's legal guardians.

The Coordinator then meets with your worker to learn more about your family. They will ask about your family strengths, their worries, the goals for the meeting and the child welfare concerns that they would like your family to make a plan for.

The Coordinator ensures that the child welfare worker and their supervisor will work with your family on conference day to approve a plan that addresses their concerns.

THE PREPARATION

The Coordinator will meet with you to share information that helps you to decide if you would like to have a family group conference. They will tell you what child welfare shared in the referral meeting and explain what happens before, during and after the conference.

If you agree to move forward, the Coordinator will work with you to decide who should take part in the meeting. They are also responsible for preparing everyone invited to the

conference. They will meet with them, explain confidentiality, and ask everyone to agree to not talk about your family information or the meeting with anyone other than those who are invited to attend.

After a parent and child over 12 has given consent and other family members have been invited, it becomes a family group decision rather than a parental decision if the conference occurs.

If someone cannot attend the conference, the Coordinator will ask them to help by writing something to be read at the meeting or by joining the meeting by telephone or video call. This preparation phase can take from 3 to 8 weeks.



'Family members agree that the family group was able to resolve differences and come together for the best interest of the children.'

Who will be invited?

Family, Friends, Neighbours

Anyone that you consider family can be invited. This could be grandparents, aunts, uncles, neighbours or friends. These are the people that care about the well-being of your children and want to help.

The Coordinator will also ask them who else should attend. The coordinator will share with you before the conference who has been invited.

NOTHING ABOUT ME – WITHOUT ME!



Children and Youth

Children of all ages are encouraged to attend the conference. It is good for them to see everyone coming together and to know that unhelpful secrets are in the open. Having children attend also reminds the 'family group' that the children's well-being is the focus of decision making.

In-person meetings will have childminding provided in a separate room. This will allow your children to choose to participate or not, and to take breaks when needed.

Children's Lawyer

Child welfare must inform the Office of the Children's Lawyer (OCL) when they make an FGC referral. The OCL will decide if a lawyer will be assigned to support your children.

If an OCL is assigned, they will meet with the children privately and make sure they understand the goals of the conference. They will also ask about their hopes and wishes. The OCL will attend the conference to ensure that the child's voice is heard, but they do not join private family time.

Kin Caregiver or Foster Parents

Kin Caregivers/Foster Parents support the children before and after the conference and help them manage any worries they may have. Foster Parents do not participate in Private Family time, but Kin Caregivers do as they are also family members.

Professionals

If you are working with a counsellor or community service provider, the Coordinator may suggest they come to the conference or provide a report as they may have information that could help with planning.

Guest Speakers can also be invited to share information about services or issues that impact your family like substance abuse, grief or child development.

Support People

Family conferences can be emotional and sometimes it is the first time that everyone has come together after a difficult time. A support person who is a friend or family member may be invited to join the conference to help a family member feel confident, calm, or safe to share their thoughts. The support person and the person requiring support will agree to the support needed.

If there are safety concerns the coordinator will make a 'Safety Plan' to allow everyone to participate in a safe way.



THE CONFERENCE

The Family Group Conference takes place at a time that is best for your family. This can be day, evening, or weekend and can happen in person or by video call. The meeting can take 3 to 8 hours or more depending on your family's needs.

In person meetings can be held at the George Hull Centre or in a community setting that suits your family. If the meeting is in person, the Coordinator will arrange for a meal and refreshments.

Conference Day

Opening and Information Sharing

Your family can choose to open the day in a way that fits your family traditions, maybe a letter, prayer, or story. The Coordinator makes sure everyone knows each other, feels welcome, and understands the three parts of the day. They will also set guidelines for respectful discussion with your family.

Child welfare and any service providers will read their reports, and everyone will have a chance to ask questions. The child welfare 'Concerns to be Addressed' will be read and used by your family group to create the plan during Private Family Time.

Private Family Time

Your family group meets alone, without the coordinator or any professionals. You will work together to answer the 'Concerns to be Addressed'. This time is for your family to privately share a meal, talk and agree to a plan that you can follow through on.

If your family have questions, they can ask to speak with the Coordinator. A family member will be asked to take notes and present the plan to the child welfare staff during the review part of the meeting.

Review of the Plan and Closing

When your family group has finished writing the plan, the Coordinator, child welfare staff and the OCL will be asked to return to the meeting and hear the family plan. Child welfare may ask questions, and your family may need to return to Private Family time if there are still questions unanswered.

Child welfare will tell your family group in the meeting if they approve the full plan or parts of the plan. The Coordinator will write out the final plan, review it with the group, ask for feedback and close the meeting.

Once the plan is approved everyone who was at the conference will receive a written copy from the Coordinator.

Client Rights

As a client of The George Hull Centre, you have a right:

- ✓ To be treated with dignity, respect and without discrimination on the basis of race, religion, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, ability or socio-economic status.
- ✓ To privacy and confidentiality, except when we are required to disclose or share information because of legal or professional obligations.
- ✓ To receive service in program spaces that are safe, clean and accessible.
- ✓ To make a complaint if you are dissatisfied with the service you are receiving.

Confidentiality

Our policy is to keep information about your child and family confidential. Confidentiality means that information you share with your coordinator may be shared with their program manager for the purposes of case consultation or quality assurance but will not be shared with anyone else without your informed consent.

However, you should know that there are some circumstances in which we are required to disclose or share information because of legal or professional obligations. These are the circumstances:

- ✓ The George Hull Centre must obey subpoenas, but in Family Group Conferencing only your Family Plan can be shared.
- ✓ The George Hull Centre has the legal duty to report suspected child abuse and neglect to a Children's Aid Society.
- ✓ The George Hull Centre may at times share information with others in extreme situations such as threats of suicide or homicide or serious risk of harm to self or others.

Complaints or Concerns

The Centre provides clients with the best service possible. If you are ever dissatisfied with the service, you are receiving or think something needs to change, we encourage you to speak to your FGC Coordinator or the FGC Toronto Program Manager as a first step. If you are still dissatisfied, you are welcome to contact the Director of Prevention and Early Intervention Services and/or the Centre's Executive Director.

If you have questions or want to learn more about Family Group Conferencing, contact the FGC Toronto Program at (416) 622-8833 ext. 218 or FGC@georgehull.on.ca

Proposed Conference Dates: _____

Your FGC Coordinator is:

Name: _____ **Phone Number:** _____

Email: _____



GEORGE HULL CENTRE
FOR CHILDREN & FAMILIES

**Changing the
trajectory of children's
mental health.**

Our vision is mental wellness from infancy to adulthood.

Through clinical excellence and a continuum of mental health services, our mission is to reduce suffering, provide hope and enhance the quality of life of infants, children, youth and families.

Family Group Conferencing Toronto | George Hull Centre for Children and Families