

Lived Experience Design Project

Workshop #4 Family Group Conferencing

Acknowledgement of Country

The Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare and Parent Advisory Group would like to acknowledge and pay respect to the past, present, and emerging traditional custodians and Elders of this country on which we work.

We also acknowledge the injustices and trauma suffered as a result of European settlement, the Stolen Generations, and other policies such as the forced removal of children from their families, communities, culture and land.

We respect the resilience of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community in the face of this trauma and respect their right to, and aspiration for, self-determination and empowerment.

Agenda

Welcome and Acknowledgement of Country (5 min)	PM/NT
Introductions (5 min)	All
Our Tasks and What is Family Group Conferencing? (10 min)	Max
Overall Impressions (10 min)	Sarah
Connection Conversation Considerations (10 min)	Sherie
Encouraging Participation and Identifying Supports (10 min)	Alysha
Summary and Further Recommendations (10 min)	Lex
Ten Tips for Working with Birth Parents (10 min)	Tammy
Question and Answer Session (30 min)	All

What you asked us to do

You asked us to consider the following three questions:

- 1) How might families be informed about the program?
- 2) How might families be encouraged to participate in the program?
- 3) How can families be supported to identify the informal and formal supports to invite into the program?

Resources you provided us

- Pilot overview (previous slide)
- Connection conversation guide
- Meeting Conversation Guide
- Fact Sheet – Families
- Fact Sheet – Children and Young People
- Family Agreement Template

Our understanding of Family Group Conferencing

- 2-year pilot program ending 30 June 2024
- Aims to disrupt the re-reporting cycle
- Operates on a voluntary basis; engagement is by consent
- Sits earlier and is out of the child protection scope
- Report was made to child protection but child protection has closed the case and referred the family on to a Family Group Conferencing convenor
- Family Group Conferencing Convenors are DFFH employees

Overall impressions

- FGC is a form of Early Help that has the potential to help families
- Early Help aims to strengthen people's capacity to:
 - identify their support needs;
 - build on their strengths;
 - self-manage where appropriate/feasible;
 - effectively harness and leverage their personal and community capital and resources;
 - access help when they need it.
- The Early Help definition wants families to make the most of the networks and resources available to them before seeking support.
- Definition tends to assume all families have access to similar resources and support, but some families are better at resource management.
- Fails to account for the many inequalities that exist on the ground.

Overall impressions

- First conversation is critical.
- Attend to emotion of Child Protection report directly.
- Ask and listen to family member about what is going on from their perspective.
- Can't necessarily assume Family Group Conferencing will be a useful tool for this particular family.
- Initial and subsequent conversations with the convenor will be a process of working this out.
- Diversity of convenors is required - in particular, Aboriginal staff to work with Aboriginal families.

Connection Conversation Tips

- Build rapport and don't be too formal
- Explain they are not a Child Protection worker
- Offer options for discussing Family Group Conferencing at another time
- Ask parents about their situation
- Engage by listening and not being too solutions-focused
- Help parents to consider the value of early help
- Be clear the program is voluntary
- Acknowledge this could be scary, overwhelming for families
- Help parents to see this as an opportunity to think about ways they can access more support, make things better/easier

Encouraging Participation

- First and subsequent conversations critical
- Convenor must build rapport quickly
- Ten Tips for Working with Birth Parents Resource
- Need to work out whether Family Group Conferencing is likely to be beneficial for this particular family
- Consider providing an information pack for parents
- Language of current resources (e.g. fact sheets) require modification
- Consider incorporating more visual elements into resources
- Consider the role of peer support/contact in the program
- Feedback or videos from peers could indicate quality and safety for parents

Summary of Feedback

Current resources suggest:

1. Talk to parent about Family Group Conferencing
2. Encourage them to sign up
3. Identify who else should participate

We recommend instead:

1. First conversation is critical - focus on building rapport
2. Explain to parent what has happened (report to Child Protection etc).
3. Acknowledge emotions, reassure and support
4. Let them know there is a free program you can offer them
5. Offer to call back, suggest they access (informal or formal) support
6. Ask if parent would like to talk about what is going on or learn more about the program
7. Work out whether Family Group Conferencing is likely to be beneficial by learning more about the family and their networks of support
8. Use this information to encourage participation (if relevant).

Further Recommendations

Other things to consider include:

- Ensuring Aboriginal staff available for Aboriginal families
- Update resources to be less bureaucratic and more parent and child friendly (this includes fact sheets, connection conversation guide, family agreement template)
- Consider using videos and images in resource materials for parents
- Consider an information pack for parents
- Consider a peer contact or peer support program and including peer feedback for parents
- Consider providing/adapting the Voice of Parents “Ten Tips for Working with Birth Parents” resource for convenors

Voice of Parents – Ten Tips for Working with Birth Parents

1. Remember that parents are people, and they are important to their child's wellbeing
2. Emotions of parents need to be acknowledged and supported
3. Consider an information pack for parents
4. Connect parents with services ASAP
5. Ask parents questions and explore their preferences
6. Make pro-active efforts to involve parents and other key people in decision-making processes
7. Interventions need to be time-sensitive
8. Invest in long-term relationships
9. Allow space for the parent to advocate for themselves
10. Treat parents with respect

Question & Answer

Thankyou