

# Family group conferences

Anyone can talk to a lawyer for free at Tasmania Legal Aid.

To get free legal information call 1300 366 611, drop into our Hobart or Launceston office (no appointment necessary) or use the Legal Talk chat function on our website. We are open Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm.

A lawyer can listen to your story and help identify the next steps you can take.

Child Safety may ask family members and others together to discuss how to keep a kid safe.

## What is a Family Group Conference?

A family group conference is a meeting that Child Safety has to talk about keeping kids safe. People who are a part of a family group conference include:

- Family members
- Child Safety workers
- The kid
- A child advocate (such as a lawyer)
- Support people
- Foster carers
- Other professionals – such as teachers, psychologists, social workers

A person called a Facilitator will organise the time and place for the family group conference and be there too. Their job is to make sure everyone has their turn to say what they want to say.

## What is a Family Group Conference for?

A family group conference is about getting the people who know things about the kid to talk together to work out how to best keep the kid safe. This will go into making a plan which will need to be written down.

Child Safety workers will talk about what they are concerned about, and everyone else at the meeting will talk about what support is available. The aim is for everyone to understand what Child Safety is worried about, and how a plan can be made to keep the kid safe.

## What key questions are asked in a Family Group Conference?

There are 4 key questions that are asked in a family group conference. All the talk will all focus on these questions:

1. What is Child Safety worried about the kid and the family?
2. What is working well in the family?
3. What needs to happen to make sure the kid is safe in the future?
4. How safe is the kid, from zero (very dangerous) to ten (the kid is safe)?

## What happens at a Family Group Conference?

Everyone who goes to the family group conference will tell others who they are, how they know the kid, and what they think they may be able to do to help the kid be safe.

Child Safety will explain why they think the kid is not safe.

There will be times when family will be able to talk to each other and with the kid without everyone else listening in. Family members will be asked to think about a plan to keep the kid safe.

## What happens after a family comes up with a plan?

After the family has made a plan to keep the kid safe, the facilitator will bring everyone else back together to hear what is in the plan. There might need to be more than 1 plan for different parts of the family. If no plan is made this is noted.

The plan will be written down and everyone will be asked if they agree with the plan. The plan might need to change so that everyone agrees. Once everyone agrees with the plan, they will be asked to sign it to show they agree.

## What happens if a family cannot agree on a plan?

It is normal for family members to disagree with what is best for the kid. It is not always possible for everyone to agree to a plan.

If a family can't agree on a plan the facilitator may find a new time and date for another family group conference to meet again, or they may write a report to explain to Child Safety that everyone could not agree on a safety plan.

If Child Safety get a report that says that the family can't agree on a plan, then Child Safety will start the legal process to get a court involved.

## What happens after the family group conference has ended?

If everyone agrees on a plan it will be checked by Child Safety or a magistrate to make sure it is the best plan.

If the plan is not approved a time for another family group conference may be made.

If Child Safety don't agree with the plan, then they will start the legal process to get a court involved.

## What if someone can't get to the family group conference?

If someone can't get to the family group conference they can talk to the facilitator. The facilitator will make sure the thoughts of someone who can't be at the family group conference are shared to everyone either by reading out a letter or statement, or sometimes by arranging a telephone call.

## What if 2 people from the family don't want to see each other at the family group conference?

All family members are welcome at the family group conference. Separate family group conferences can be made for separate family members as necessary. The facilitator can help arrange what is going to work best. No-one can be told not to go just because others don't want to see them there.

However, if there is a Restraining Order or Family Violence Order that protects a family member from another the facilitator will need to decide whether it is okay for everyone to be there.

**This is written for people who live in or who are affected by the laws of Tasmania, Australia. The law changes all the time – this information is not legal advice. If you have a legal problem, you should talk to a lawyer before making a decision about what to do.**