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# Family Group Decision Making in West Dunbartonshire

## Brief Guidance for Referrers

### What is Family Group Decision Making?

Family Group decision making is a structured process leading to a family group meeting (FGM).

The family meeting can shape the direction and content of planning and decision making for children and content of planning is led by families as far as is safely possible, and within the legal constraints of each situation. Meetings are prepared and convened by co-ordinators who are independent of case management.

### Who can refer?

Professionals or teams in a case-holding role can refer. Family members and other professionals can prompt referrals. Referrers or a consistent representative from the referring team must be prepared to see the process through to a family meeting.

### Where should a referral be considered?

When a child or young person:

- may be referred to the reporter.
- needs a family plan about their safety and protection.
- may be accompanied.
- is accommodated.
- will be moving home or between placements.
- needs a plan when there are complex contact arrangements.
- needs a new permanent home base.
- needs a plan for support or a decision which involves practical partnership between family members and professionals.

### What are general aims within every FGM?

- Supporting families and children to make plans guided by them.
- developing the strengths within the family as well as addressing apparent risks to children.
- focussing on future action rather than blame for the past.
- focussing on the child's views, experience and needs.
- building co-operation between key family members and professionals.
- complementing or diverting from statutory processes as appropriate for each child.

### How do you refer?

If the key family members involved are willing to consider the idea, contact the FGM co-ordinators on 01389 608005 for an informal discussion. Don't be put off if the there does not appear to be a large family network. Let key family members know that the co-ordinator will be in touch.

### The co-ordinator will:

- Specify information needed from you before getting started.
- Identify, prepare and invite family members and relevant others.
- Explore the best way for each child to be involved in the process.
- Identify anyone's need for an independent advocate.
- Arrange a neutral meeting venue.
- Co-ordinate, summarise and record the meeting itself.
- Co-ordinate follow up meetings when this is agreed

### What happens at the meeting?

There are three stages to the meeting:

- **Introducing and information sharing**  
The referrer will be asked to explain briefly if there are any safety or legal parameters to what the family can decide.
- **Private family time**  
Family members have opportunity to debate their own concerns and recommendations.
- **Planning**  
Agreements and disagreements are summarised and a plan is put forward, summarised by the co-ordinator and supported by professionals involved - unless there are significant safety concerns or further assessment is needed.

### What happens after the meeting?

- The co-ordinator distributes the plan to all involved within three working days. When participants agree and when relevant, a copy can go to the Reporter or Children's Hearings or Looked After Review.
- When agreed, a follow up meeting or meetings may be set up to review or progress the plan.
- Family members or professionals can contact the co-ordinator to suggest a re-referral when a crisis or change in circumstances means a new direction is needed.