

"ALL CHILDREN HAVE THE RIGHT
TO EXPRESS THEIR OWN VIEWS
IN ALL MATTERS AFFECTING THEM."

- UN CONVENTION ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD -



A BROCHURE ABOUT
**FAMILY GROUP
CONFERENCING**

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"EVERYONE SHOULD GET A CHANCE
TO EXPRESS THEIR VIEWS BEFORE ANY
DECISION IS MADE"



What is family group conferencing?

A family group conference is a meeting where the family comes together to make important decisions when someone feels the child's situation is difficult. It can be a good strategy for finding solutions when a child needs help. Family group conferencing is voluntary, and can be initiated by either the family members themselves or public officials. This brochure explains how a family group conference works. The model is most commonly used in connection with child welfare services, but it is becoming increasingly more common in other areas as well.

"WHAT CAN WE DO TO GET MINA TO
SCHOOL IN TIME?"



When can family group conferencing be used?

Family group conferencing is suitable for many different types of situations and for children of different ages. In Norway, child welfare services have applied this model for many years. Children and families who have had family group conferencing, often recommend it to others.

Examples of when family group conferencing may be suitable:

- Difficult everyday situations, for examples problems at school or in the child's free time
- When children live in an institution or are getting ready to leave the institution
- In emergency situations, where child welfare services have to intervene on short notice
- In situations where the parties need to establish a better contact arrangement
- When children need a foster home

WHO WILL TAKE MINA TO FOOTBALL PRACTICE?

MINA IS HAVING A DIFFICULT TIME WITH MUMMY AND DADDY NOT GETTING ALONG WHEN SHE HAS TO MOVE BETWEEN MUM'S AND DAD'S HOMES. HOW CAN WE IMPROVE THIS SITUATION FOR MINA?

ROB AND EWA CAN NO LONGER LIVE AT HOME.
WHERE WILL THEY LIVE?

ROB WANTS TO MOVE OUT OF THE FOSTER HOME.
WHAT DO WE DO?

Questions addressed by the family group conference

Well in advance of the conference, the child and its parents/guardians work with the public coordinator to prepare questions for the conference. Sometimes new questions emerge during the preparation for the conference.

One should make sure not to try to cover too much during the conference. Four or five questions are usually enough. The most important thing is to make sure that the questions are relevant for the child and those who helped prepare them.



Mum



Mina



Dad



Jorunn



Teacher



Case worker



Gunnar



Mona



Truls



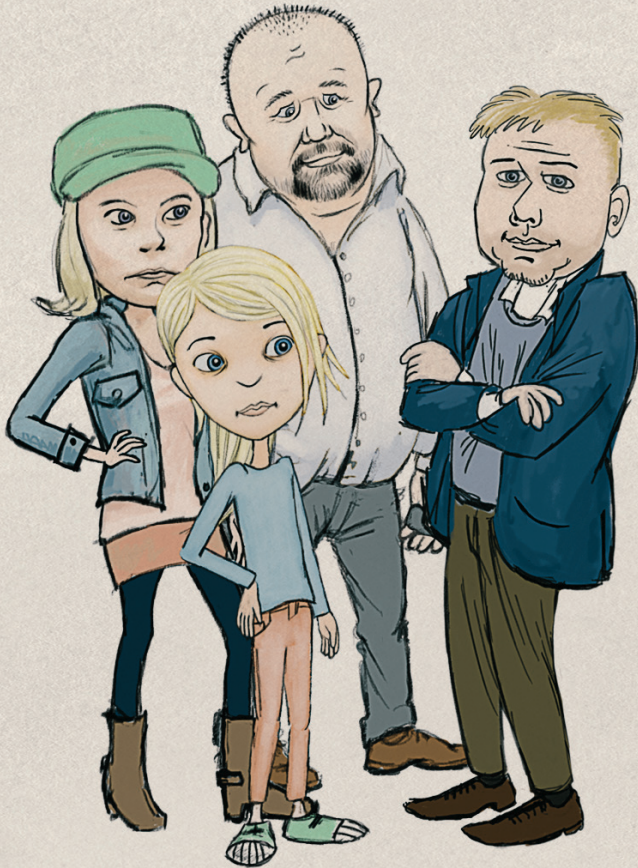
Helga

Conference participants

In collaboration with parents or guardians, the child decides who to invite to the family group conference. Participants can be family members, extended family, friends, neighbours or other important people in the child's life. Most people who are invited will attend if they can. If distance or other circumstances makes it impossible or difficult to attend, it is possible to participate over the telephone, or via e-mail, Skype or regular mail.

These types of parties often participate:

- The child
- Parents/guardians. If they do not wish to attend, they can consent to a family group conference being held without their presence
- Family members, extended family, friends, neighbours and others the child or its parents/guardians wish to invite
- The coordinator, who is helping the family plan and execute the conference
- Other professionals the child, its parents/guardians or public partner (e.g. child welfare services) wishes to invite



Coordinator

The coordinator is there to help the family plan and execute the conference. The coordinator is independent, and has no prior knowledge of the family's history. He or she is not there to reach any conclusions about the case, but to help the family with the practical things before and during the conference.

Most coordinators have other jobs. They come from a variety of social and educational backgrounds. What they have in common is that they like working with people and family group conferencing.

The coordinator's responsibilities:

- Work with the child and the parents to identify conference participants
- Handle the practical aspects of executing the family group conference
- Invite and talk to conference participants beforehand, so that they are prepared
- Find out who is going to be the child's buddy, the moderator and the secretary
- Act as moderator during parts 1 and 3 of the conference
- Present the family's plan

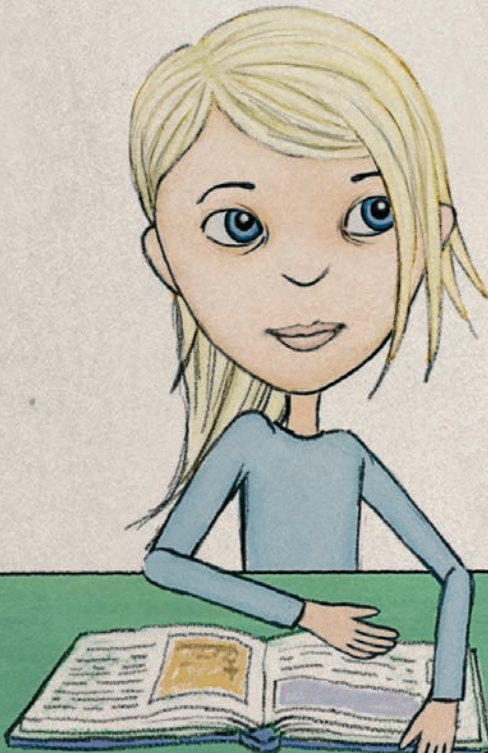


Professional representatives in family group conferences

Professionals involved with the child and the family are invited to participate during the first part of the conference. The child and its parents help decide who to invite. Examples of professionals who often get invited include kindergarten or school staff, health care professionals, representatives from the educational and psychological counselling service, family counselling services or welfare services, or any others who know the child and who are able to express an opinion on the child's situation.

Input from professionals is important for the family to arrive at the best possible plan. Invited professionals are encouraged to maintain a “resource focus”, even if these areas also may be problematic. The parents and the child shall be informed of the content of their presentation beforehand. In addition, any information presented by the professional should be brief and made available in writing, so that the family can have it in front of them when they move on to the discussion in private.

"I WAS THE ONE WHO DECIDED WE SHOULD HAVE A FAMILY GROUP CONFERENCE. WE CONCLUDED THAT IT WAS THE BEST WAY FOR US TO DISCUSS WHERE I AM GOING TO LIVE."



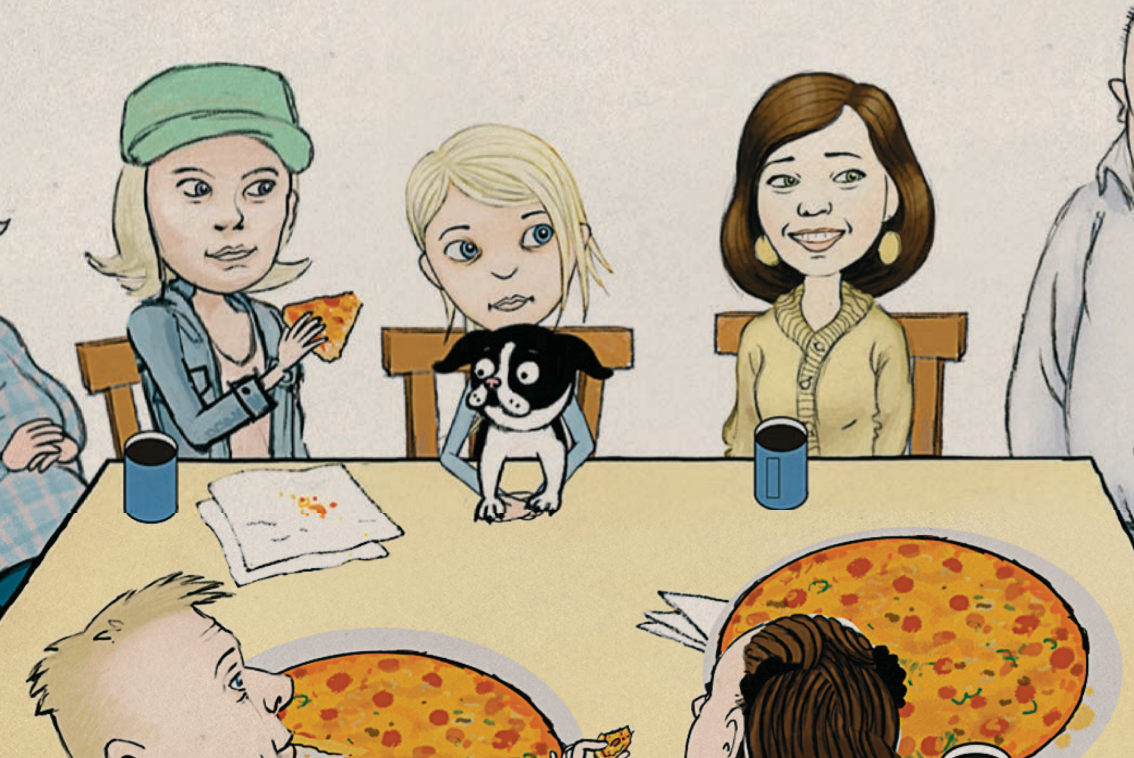
The process before and during the family group conference

Normally, it takes about four to eight weeks from the decision is made to have a family group conference until the conference is held. The conference may be held sooner in emergency situations. The family group conference is held in a suitable location.

The conference consists of three parts:

- All participants are present for **the first part**. The family gets information from professionals, which gives them a solid foundation for developing good solutions.
- During **the second part** of the conference, the family members discuss the situation without any representatives of public agencies present. During the preparations for the conference, the coordinator has consulted with the family to identify the child's buddy and the moderator and secretary for the conference.
- During **the third part** of the conference, the family presents its plan. If the conference concerns a child welfare case, child welfare services will consider the family's suggestions.

"IT WAS NICE TO TALK ABOUT MYSELF TO
MY FAMILY AND FRIENDS. I WAS ABLE TO
SAY WHAT WAS ON MY MIND."



Follow-up family group conference

After the family group conference, the plan has to be put into action. Experience tells us one or more follow-up family group conferences are often necessary. The plan needs to be evaluated, and sometimes it may be necessary to change things that haven't been working out very well and do more of what has been working.

A family group conference isn't just a meeting; it's a process for further collaboration. The follow-up family group conference is normally scheduled at the first family group conference. We recommend not letting too much time pass between the conferences.

HELLO!



Buddies and the children's listening bear

In Norway, the general consensus is that children should be heard and be allowed to take part in any decisions affecting their lives. This principle is incorporated into a wide range of legislation, including the Child Welfare Act, the Kindergarten Act, the Education Act, the Children Act and the Patients' Rights Act.

Children are aware that they can't always get what they want, but it's important both to get information and to express one's opinion. Children who are going to be participating in a family group conference choose a buddy to support them. The buddy is usually a family member. When it is difficult for the child to express its opinion, the buddy can assist the child.

Some children may need a little encouragement, and may want to bring a listening bear to the family group conference. Listening bears in family group conferences have very special ears that are especially sensitive to the child's thoughts and questions. The listening bear can be the child's friend, support and assistant before and during the family group conference. The listening bear is also always available for a good hug when the world is feeling just a little bit like a scary place.



Want to know more?

Most Norwegian municipalities are familiar with family group conferencing, and the method has become increasingly more common outside child welfare cases as well.

We have made two short videos about family group conferencing. These videos explain how a family group conference works, and have been recorded in many different languages. Find the videos here:

www.bufetat.no/barnevern/familieraad



Norwegian Directorate for Children,
Youth and Family Affairs