

The Four Stages of FGDM and Related Roles

It is vital to the Family Group Decision Making practice to remember always that the family's overall role is primary decision maker throughout the process and that they have the power throughout the process.

Stage 1: Referral

Family

- voluntarily agrees to take part in the FGDM process
- signs any necessary releases
- offers a preliminary list of meeting participants
- creates potential purpose statement with the referral source

Referral Source

- exhibits the practice values
- identifies family groups to participate in FGDM
- introduces the FGDM process to the family
- describes to the parents or primary caregivers the purpose of FGDM
- answers questions that the family group may ask
- secures any necessary releases/consents
- creates potential purpose statement with the family
- makes the referral
- introduces the family to the coordinator
- makes diligent efforts to locate parents or primary caregivers to discuss with them their interest in FGDM
- introduces the concept of the family meeting and the role of the coordinator to children
- supports the family

Coordinator

- communicates with the referring worker before engaging the family group to gain information that will benefit the preparation process
- reaches agreement to move forward with planning the family meeting
- secures any necessary releases/consents
- introduces and further explains FGDM processes and related roles to participants
- reaches agreement with the family about how best to proceed
- protects the family group and children's privacy
- makes diligent efforts to locate parents or primary caregivers to discuss with them their interest in FGDM

The Four Stages of FGDM and Related Roles (cont'd)

Stage 2: Preparation

Family

- decides who will be part of the meeting and signs any necessary consents or release of information forms so that the coordinator can conduct the necessary preparation activities, including contacting others
- identifies strengths and concerns
- decides if childcare will be needed during the meeting and who will provide childcare

Referral Source

- supports the family
- maintains contact with and assists the coordinator with any questions they might have
- attends the pre-conference
- identifies resources
- offers strengths and concerns
- identifies Bottom-Line Concerns
- assists in identifying the purpose for the meeting

Coordinator

- positions the family as the leader of the FGDM process
- assists the family in identifying who should attend the meeting, including family who may otherwise be overlooked
- asks each family member who is part of their family group, for the purpose of reaching out to these individuals as potential participants for the family meeting
- invites family members to participate in the FGDM process, at which time explaining the reason the agency received a referral and that the family is convening a family meeting and describing the process to invitees
- shares information about the FGDM process and the family meeting with the child to make decisions about the child's participation
- identifies a support person for the child/youth and/or caregiver (if they wish to have one)
- clarifies who the support person(s) will support and their role
- identifies any family rituals that may be carried out at the meeting (e.g., prayer, song, a reading, a statement, etc.)
- ensures that all persons can participate safely
- prepares everyone who will be involved in the meeting
- assists the family in making arrangements for childcare during the meeting, if necessary
- builds a climate of physical and emotional safety
- explains to the family the role of mandated reporters and offers that several will be present during the family meeting who will be asked to identify themselves

The Four Stages of FGDM and Related Roles (cont'd)

- considering culture, finds out how the family would like the room arranged for the meeting
- assists in the identification of and confirms the shared purpose for the family meeting

Coordinator (cont'd)

- schedules the family meeting
- sets the location for the family meeting
- secures meeting location and makes arrangements for food

Service Provider

- supports the family
- attends the pre-conference
- identifies resources
- offers strengths and concerns
- assists in identifying Bottom-Line Concerns
- assists in identifying the purpose for the meeting

Stage 3: Family Group Decision Making Meeting

Family

- determines how the meeting will be opened
- decides how everyone will be introduced
- leads the child welfare agency in decision making
- identifies/revisits strengths, concerns, and resources
- decides who will participate in Private Family Time
- decides the process that they wish to use in planning for the child during Private Family Time
- uses the information provided and chooses what is right for them
- creates a plan that will address the concerns
- presents their initial plan to the coordinator, referring worker, support people, and other service providers
- determines the viability of the plan in achieving the purpose of the family meeting
- decides whether to return to Private Family Time to have further deliberations if the plan is not agreed upon by both the family and the agency

Referral Source

- supports the family
- shares only what is necessary to remind the group of the circumstances that led to the meeting
- offers strengths and resources
- provides Bottom-Line Concerns
- does not talk about the family during Private Family Time
- remains available during Private Family Time to clarify any information previously provided or answer any questions the family may have

The Four Stages of FGDM and Related Roles (cont'd)

- assists in determining the viability of the plan in achieving the purpose of the family meeting
- decides whether to accept the family's plan
- along with the facilitator/coordinator, explains to the family group what happens following the family meeting

Coordinator

- may be present at the beginning of the meeting to introduce the facilitator and co-facilitator
- may remain until the end of the meeting to explain what happens following the meeting

Service Provider

- offers strengths, concerns, and resources
- shares information relevant to the purpose
- remains available during Private Family Time to clarify any information previously provided or answer any questions the family may have (assuming that they remain for the entire meeting, as they are permitted to leave when Private Family Time begins)
- assists in determining the viability of the plan in achieving the purpose of the family meeting (assuming that they remain for the entire meeting, as they are permitted to leave when Private Family Time begins)

Facilitator

- arrives at the family meeting venue early to have the space fully prepared and organized
- remains neutral throughout the meeting
- keeps everyone focused
- ensures safety
- identifies the location of bathrooms, telephones and child care
- re-outlines for all participants how the family meeting will proceed or operate
- reviews the FGDM process with the family group
- explains his or her role to guide a productive family-led process and describes the roles of the referring worker and other service providers
- clearly articulates the purpose of the family meeting as agreed-upon
- offers guidelines for discussion
- discusses the mandatory child abuse and neglect reporting laws and asks all mandated reporters to identify themselves
- gets a commitment from the referral source that they are willing to support the family plan if it adequately addresses concerns
- gets the commitment from the family to stay and take as much time as necessary to create the family plan
- solicits strengths and concerns/revisits previously identified strengths and concerns
- ensures that all participants have an opportunity to speak

The Four Stages of FGDM and Related Roles (cont'd)

- monitors group dynamics
- confirms who the family agrees will participate in Private Family Time and reaches consensus on the participation of individuals who may fall outside of the “family network”
- may offer the family options to use or not use as the family sees fit during Private Family Time
- ensures that service providers, with the exception of the referral source, know they are free to leave and that they will receive a copy of the plan
- ensures the family understands the expectations of Private Family Time
- protects the integrity of the Private Family Time process
- remains available during Private Family Time to answer any questions about the family meeting process
- supports the family and the child welfare agency representatives in reaching consensus about the plan through a flexible negotiation process, while making sure that the family’s central decisions are upheld
- asks the referring worker or whoever has the authority to accept the plan to state very directly whether he or she agrees with the plan
- when the family and child welfare agency cannot agree on the plan, asks the family how it would like to proceed, offering a few options such as returning to Private Family Time, reconvening at a later date, bringing additional people or needed information to the family meeting, conducting further preparation, agreeing to disagree or using another process such as mediation
- at the close of the meeting, reiterates the agreed-upon next steps
- along with the referral source, explains to the family group what happens following the family meeting
- asks the family if there is a special way that they would like to conclude the family meeting
- ensures that participants complete surveys before they leave the conference

Co-facilitator

- scribes
- helps monitor group dynamics
- seeks clarification to ensure that recorded information is accurate

Support Person

- introduces him- or herself and his or her special role, which may be followed by the coordinator further explaining the purpose of this role
- accompanies the person he or she is supporting to the family meeting
- provides emotional support to the person he or she is supporting
- ensures that the family member’s voice is heard
- represents the voice and perspective of the person he or she is supporting, if asked by that person to do so
- shares his or her own perspective as a member of the family
- monitors the emotional and physical safety needs of the person he or she is supporting during and after the family meeting, requesting breaks if necessary

The Four Stages of FGDM and Related Roles (cont'd)

- leaves the room with the person he or she is supporting if that person needs or desires to exit the family meeting
- encourages those who have caused harm to accept responsibility and build accountability for their actions
- supports behaviors that heal and promote positive, healthy relationships

Stage 4: Follow-up

Family

- implement their plan
- support one another
- holds themselves and each other accountable for their role(s) in their plan
- monitors the plan in partnership with the child welfare agency to ensure progress and accountability
- identifies the possible need for additional family meetings

Coordinator

- ensures the family meeting plan gets created and finalized through any required formal processes in the child welfare agency
- distributes the plan to every participant who attended the family meeting

Referral Source

- supports the family
- continues the partnership with the family group to implement the plan
- continually asks the family if the plan is working the way the family wanted and expected it to work, and facilitates adaptations and changes
- monitors the plan in partnership with the family group to ensure progress and accountability
- connects the family with any services that the family identified in their plan
- arranges follow-up meetings if the family identifies the need

(Adapted from the American Humane Association and the FGDM Guidelines Committee, 2010).