

Good Communication Practice in Family Group Conferences (FGCs)

Helping everyone to understand, to participate, and to have their say



Across New Zealand Family Group Conference Coordinators, Social Workers, Lawyers and Police are beginning to collaborate to plan, and support, FGCs that meet the speech, language and communication needs of everyone involved.

What are these wonderful practitioners doing to get such great results, and how are they doing it?

“That was the best FGC ever in my whole career almost nine years as a youth justice coordinator ... You know, we need to have this kind of FGC from every single kid that we deal with.”

FGC coordinator ”



1: Simple words and phrases

2: Simple diagrams and pictures

3: Write the KEY WORDS



*Plan your communication – providing information in all 3 ways
= 3 chances to give, and to get, the information you need*

Before the Family Group Conference:

Meet to discuss

- the communication demands of the Family Group Conference – identify the words, information, options, opportunities and consequences that need to be clearly understood

- the speech, language, and communication strengths and needs of the young person, victim, and whānau
 - the things that you have noticed about their communication
 - the things that they have told you – things that make it easier, or harder for them to understand, participate and have their say
- how you and the young person or victim can plan, and prepare in advance, resources that will help to make sure their views are expressed (how they feel, what needs to be in the plan). For example:
 - Visuals to help the victim to talk about the impact of what happened and to help the young person see the impact of what happened



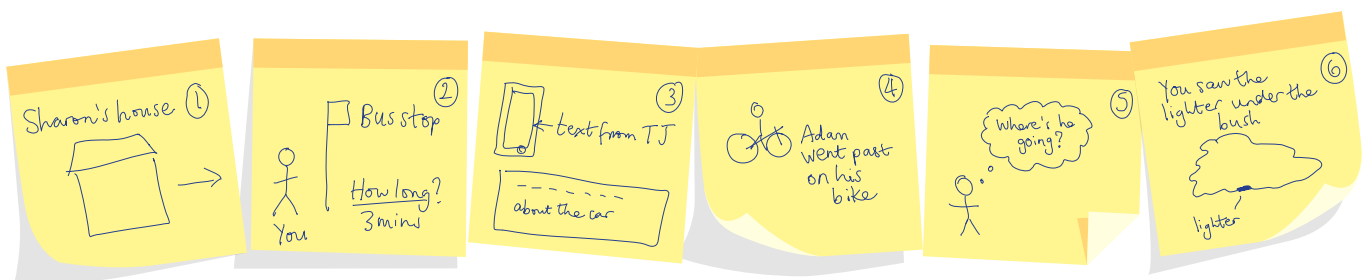
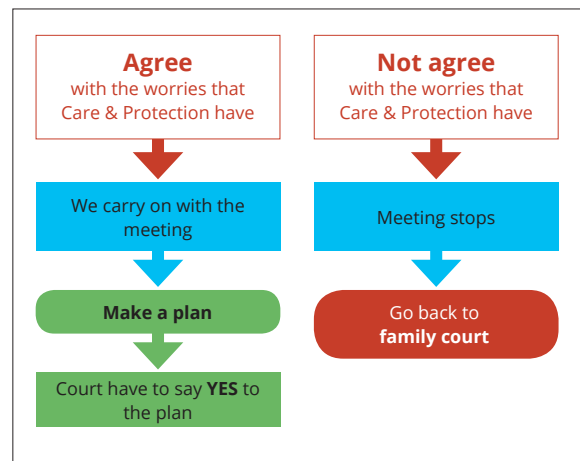
- Visuals to help the young person talk about their life, why they did what they did, what would make a difference for them



- whether or not you need communication assistance from a speech language therapist to help you plan your communication and/or to help you mediate communication during the FGC
- the best possible way you can run the FGC given what you know about the communication demands, and communication needs above

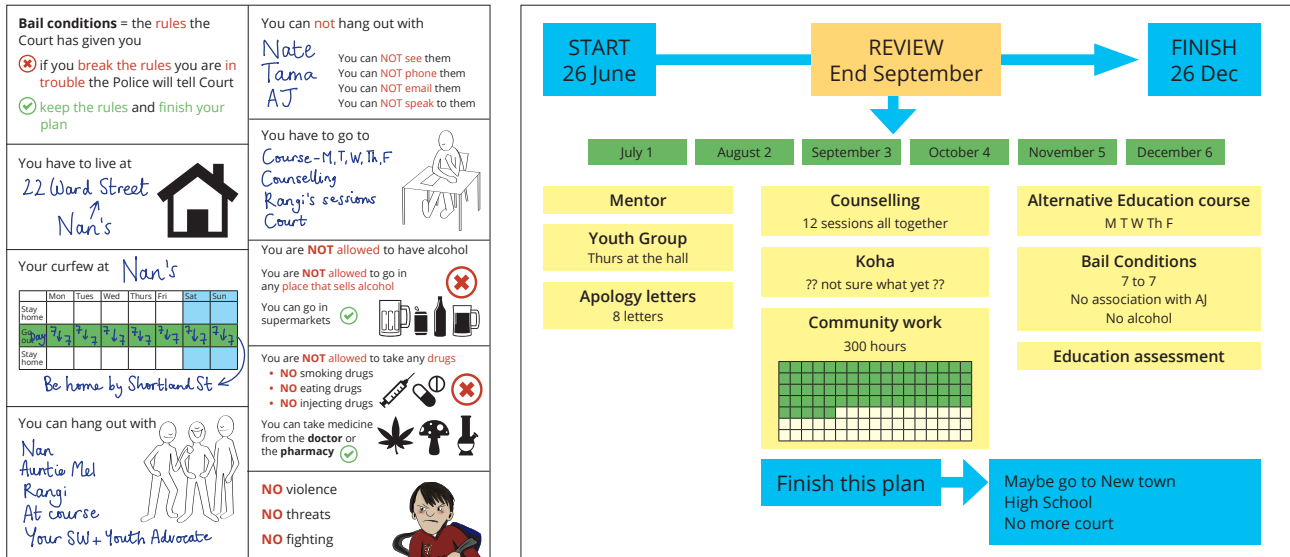
During the Family Group Conference:

- Include good communication practice in your Ground Rules – make sure that everyone knows it is ok to say “I need break” or “Sorry I missed that. Say it again” or “I don’t know what you mean”
- **Signpost topics**
Visually orient everyone to each topic as you introduce it by using pictures and/or writing key words relating to the topic on a whiteboard. When the topic is finished say something like “we’ve finished talking about _____. Now we’re going to talk about” and put up a new visual or key word to represent the new topic
- Draw **flowcharts and diagrams** to show processes as you talk about them. They are a great way to make sure that options, opportunities and consequences are all made really clear
- Use **Comic Strip Conversations** to explore information that comes up during the meeting



After the meeting:

- Create a short, communication-friendly version of the Family Group Conference Report and Plan that provides the information that everyone really needs to know
- Create visual versions of things like bail conditions, timetables, and organisers



- Save copies of the resources you used to demonstrate your good communication practice in the child, or young person's file

“Generally the FGC's got a lot of legalese, complicated words and processes I think we lose our families and kids very early on in the piece ... Because the presentation (FGC) was simplified in terms of language and ... pictures helped (the young person) piece everything together ... you could see that he was able to make an informed decision”

Most of our kids would benefit from this style FGC.

Youth Aid Officer

What else are practitioners doing to make sure that FGCs represent good communication practice?

- Asking peers or Talking Trouble speech-language therapists to observe one of their FGCs and give them feedback on how they mediated communication during the meeting
- Sharing stories of their good communication practice during FGCs – telling colleagues what they did differently, and the impact it had
- Sharing ideas and resources around good communication practice

How can you contribute to this good communication practice?

What are you going to...

