

Family Group Conference

Nebraskans ensuring the best outcome for children of families in crisis



Why an Independent FGC Coordinator?

In the Family Group Conference process, a trained coordinator who is independent of the case brings together the family group and the agency personnel to create and carry out a plan to safeguard children and other family members.

Independent coordinators have no other function in regard to the family for which they are arranging a conference. Providing an independent coordinator who is charged with creating an environment in which transparent, honest, and respectful dialogue can occur between agency personnel and

family groups signifies an agency's commitment to an empowering and non-oppressive practice.

Referring agencies support family groups by providing the services and resources necessary to implement plans that adequately address agency concerns. In assisting family groups in implementing their plans, agencies uphold the family groups' responsibility for the care and protection of their children, and contribute by aligning the agency and community resources to support the family groups' efforts.

In Nebraska, the independent FGC Coordinators are affiliated with the Office of Dispute Resolution (ODR)-approved mediation centers. ODR is part of the Administrative Office of the Courts, Nebraska Supreme Court.



Established Standards of Practice

Family Group Conference Coordinators and facilitators from Nebraska's six ODR approved mediation centers are highly trained individuals with proven proficiency in family conferencing decision-making strategies. Policies, protocols, and standards of practice for ODR-approved Family Group Conference Coordinators have been established, based upon the evidence-based best practices promoted by the American Humane Association's FGDM (Family Group Decision Making) Initiative.

All Family Group Conference Coordinators affiliated with ODR-approved mediation centers have a minimum of 60 to 100 hours of foundational training in basic and family mediation training as well as specialized training in child abuse and neglect, juvenile justice system, domestic abuse, family systems, group facilitation, and Family Group Conferencing. On average, the training and apprenticeship regimen requires two to three years to complete. Most FGC Coordinators have a professional background in child welfare, law, family science or related fields. Continuing education is required to maintain FGC Coordinator status.



For more than a decade, the ODR-

approved Mediation Centers brought together over ten thousand extended family members and friends to plan for over 2,000 children using Family Group Conferencing.

"It was all about the child. The care of the child and her needs were addressed.

Now her life can change for the better."

"The most positive aspect of an FGC is that we made the plan as a family."

"Thank you for everyone's support. Mediation has succeeded in keeping a family together and they are thriving!"

Parent's statement: "After the drug bust in our home, the FGC coordinator made sure my relatives and their Dad's family all came to the Conference. We all agreed I would have the chance to get drug treatment, and the kids could keep seeing both sides of the family while they were in foster care. Now I'm clean and the kids are back with me, and the case is closed."

FAQs

What is the goal of an FGC? The goal of a Family Group Conference is to engage the active participation of the child's extended family in order to create a family plan for the child. This includes addressing the "critical issues" that have placed the child at risk in order that a larger, more lasting informal safety net and family-based plan can be achieved for the child's safety, permanency, and well-being.

What are the findings on the FGC process? Some of the international outcome findings by the American Humane Association show:

- Family members are satisfied with the process
- Promotes child and family well-being
- A balance in number of family members and professionals is needed
- FGCs increase involvement of fathers and paternal relatives
- FGCs compare favorably in providing for child safety
- Provides timely decisions and results
- Reduces family violence
- Families develop plans that are seen to be safe, yet are rich, diverse, and original
- Family members come when invited even though it can be stressful
- Children either attend part or all of the conference or through a spokesperson
- Social workers and service providers are satisfied with FGC
- Keeps siblings and families together and creates stability for children
- Increases family supports and helps family functioning
- Family members perceive they have considerable voice and decision-making authority

Does FGC help achieve CFSR outcomes? Yes, at least in two measureable areas, with others potentially affected. FGCs achieve CFSR #14: preserving connections for children (continuity of family relationships) and CFSR #18: involving parents and children in the case planning process.

Is there a cost savings when this process is used? FGCs are shown to provide a cost savings as well as shown to be cost neutral. Cost savings occur both from having an increased number of children being placed with extended family members instead of foster care and from decreasing the amount of time in care when used as a front-loaded process in the early part of the child welfare case.

How does FGC enhance child welfare services? Social workers benefit from hearing the best thinking of the family group members on how to provide for the safety and care for the child. Rather than negotiating case decision in a hostile environment, the social worker can make an FGC referral. Family group members not only contribute their strategies but also their resources - resources the case manager may have had no other way to connect to.

Does referring a case for FGC with an independent coordinator change the case worker's responsibility? Not at all. In fact, using an independent FGC coordinator helps to reinforce the role of the child welfare worker. They retain their functions as both child protectors and family helpers.

How does an FGC differ from a Family Team Meeting (FTM)? (a) FGCs typically use an independent coordinator rather than a service provider as the facilitator allowing for the ability for more neutrality, trust-building, and engagement with the family. (b) FGCs always involve an extensive search for extended family members. (c) FGCs allow for comprehensive preparation (10 and 25 hours) prior to the Conference. The FGC Coordinator works with each family member, child, and participant to create the optimum decision-making forum. (d) The family meets in "Private Family Time" during the FGC as a family empowerment and decision-making crucible. (e) Family culture is embraced and encouraged.

When is the best time for an FGC? At any time during the child welfare proceeding, depending upon the desired outcomes. Is successfully used for Voluntary Child Welfare Cases. Please consult with an FGC provider to help assess appropriate use of the Family Group Conference for a child.

The Family Group Conference

Nebraska's ODR-approved mediation centers, in partnership with Nebraska Health and Human Services and Nebraska's courts, have provided Family Group Conferencing (FGC) for children and their families since 1998 to the present.

FGC offers a child-centered approach for decision making around a child's safety, permanency, and well-being for children involved in the legal system, particularly in child abuse and neglect cases and juvenile justice matters. This process is based on the belief that families and communities must partner together to ensure the best outcomes for children.

Family Group Conference is a family-driven, professionally-infused, comprehensive decision-making process. A qualified FGC Coordinator, proficient in family conferencing decision-making strategies, meets individually with children, their parents, other kinship members, friends, and child welfare members during an extensive preparation period (from 10 to 25 hours) in order to prepare each person for the full-day gathering to discuss critical issues, explore strengths and concerns for the child and family, and allow for private family



During private family time the family discovered many secrets and decided to tell the case manager that the child was not safe with any family member. The family's plan, rather, was for guardianship of the child by a non-relative. This plan was agreed upon by HHS, family members, and the court.

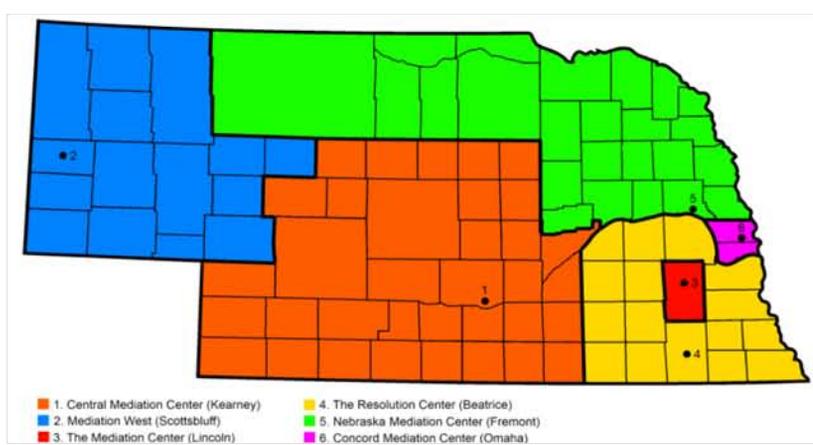
Actual FGC Case Study

time and decision-making. The family, along with their support network, craft an initial plan that is then shared with the professionals who work collaboratively with the family to ensure it is attainable and meets the highest standards for achieving the goals of safety, permanency, and well-being.

Nebraska's FGC model is endorsed by and taught to Nebraska ODR mediators by the American Humane Association. Nebraska FGC was initiated by the Administrative Office of the Court's Court Improvement Project with the Nebraska Center for Children, Families, and the Law in 1998. FGC is recognized as a "Best Practice" by the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges.

“FGC processes are not therapeutic interventions or forums for ratifying professionally crafted decisions. Rather, FGC processes actively seek the collaboration and leadership of family groups in crafting and implementing plans that support the safety, permanency and well-being of their children.”

American Humane Association



Nebraska's ODR-approved Mediation Centers

Family Group Conferencing, Pre-Hearing Facilitation, and Child Welfare Mediation Resources

Nebraska Office of Dispute Resolution-approved Mediation Centers. Contact the center listed below that serves your county to schedule mediation, family group conferencing, and other collaborative processes at the location most convenient to you.

Central Mediation Center, Kearney

info@centralmediationcenter.com

www.centralmediationcenter.com

Adams, Blaine, Buffalo, Chase, Clay, Custer, Dawson, Dundy, Franklin, Frontier, Furnas, Garfield, Gosper, Greeley, Hall, Hamilton, Harlan, Hayes, Hitchcock, Howard, Kearney, Lincoln, Logan, Loup, McPherson, Merrick, Nuckolls, Perkins, Phelps, Red Willow, Sherman, Thomas, Valley, Webster, Wheeler counties

800-203-3452

308-237-4692

Concord Mediation Center, Omaha

ctierney@concord-center.com

www.concord-center.com

Douglas and Sarpy counties

402-345-1131

Nebraska Mediation Center, Fremont

jmarhof@qwestoffice.net

www.nebraskamediationcenter.com

Antelope, Boone, Boyd, Brown, Burt, Cedar, Cherry, Colfax, Cushing, Dakota, Dixon, Dodge, Holt, Keya Paha, Knox, Madison, Nance, Pierce, Platte, Rock, Stanton, Thurston, Washington, Wayne counties

866-846-5576

402-753-9415

The Mediation Center, Lincoln

info@themediationcenter.org

www.themediationcenter.org

Lancaster County

402-441-5740

Mediation West, Scottsbluff

phebbert@mediationwest.org

www.mediationwest.org

Arthur, Banner, Box Butte, Cheyenne, Daves, Duel, Garden, Grant, Keith, Kimball, Morrill, Scotts Bluff, Sheridan, Sioux, Thomas counties

800-967-2115

308-635-2002

The Resolution Center, Beatrice

trc@bvca.net

www.theresolutioncenter.org

Butler, Cass, Fillmore, Gage, Jefferson, Johnson, Nemaha, Otoe, Pawnee, Polk, Richardson, Saline, Saunders, Seward, Thayer, York counties

800-837-7826

402-223-6061



Nebraska Office of Dispute Resolution, (ODR)
State Court Administrator's Office, P. O. Box 98910, Lincoln, NE 68509-8910
402-471-2766; deborabrownyard@nebraska.gov www.supremecourt.ne.gov

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