



### **How to prepare yourself for an FGC**

Usually CYF will call the FGC, there are certain times you can demand one; however this is in reference to when CYF have decided one needs to be held.

FGC stands for Family Group Conference, just as it looks, it's a meeting where all those involved in the welfare of a children are gathered together to decide on the future for the child/ren involved. Some refer to it as Fore Gone Conclusion, because it's generally believed that CYF have already decided what must happen and are holding the meeting to make sure those involved in the welfare of the child agree with CYF.

Involved in the FGC, will be the convener of the meeting, usually a supervisor, the CYF Social Worker involved with the child/ren, Counsel for child (C4C), sometimes their school is involved, medical professionals. Also invited are members from both sides of the family, grandparents. Often Aunts and Uncles – as I said before, anyone who is involved in the welfare of the child.

CYF send out the invitations, in writing, to the meeting, if there is anyone in particular you want invited, give CYF their name and address in plenty of time. You are able to take a support person into the meeting also, this person is there to support YOU and will not be required to speak, unless they want to. The children do not attend the meeting. Put aside the whole day for this meeting, you will need time to prepare yourself before it and to run it back and forwards in your mind after it has finished.

CYF will want you, and those at the meeting, to decide that the child is in need of care and protection (C&P). However, there are many ways to say NO. By agreeing the child needs C&P you are agreeing the child is unsafe and the next step will be signing the child over into the custody of CYF or into Home for Life (HFL). It does not mean that always but it does mean A. The children can be held in care until a court date and a judge may decide. B. That the social worker may take other steps to continue with their path. C. They decide it's all in the 'too hard basket' and return the children due to not having enough evidence.

So, FCIS can help you set yourself a plan for the future, it should start before the FGC. It should include as many parenting programs you can find, Incredible Years can be found in most areas and your FCIS support person can point you in the right direction to get on board with one of the courses. D&A (Drug and Alcohol Courses are also a must if there has been drug or alcohol involvement.

Personal Life Coaching, as opposed to counselling, though often some counselling is good for you. Counselling is about looking back over your shoulder and talking about the things that happened that got you to the place you are at and how you feel about it all. Whereas a Life Coach will look at supporting you to be able to move forward instead of obsessing on what is happening now.

Also looking into employment prospects can carry some weight at an FGC, showing a sign of maturity. Look for something different, woman can be involved in anything, how hard can plumbing be? Water follows pipes, the wages are good! ECE (Early Childhood Education) is being taken up by Joe & Josephine Blogs in high numbers, the pay is low, and the numbers looking for work will be high.

All these things are about recognising that you are striving to make a better life for yourself, which is what CYF want to see.

Your FCIS support worker will support you in finding these courses and even apprenticeships if you wish. They will also talk to you about how to set out a reliable and child focussed access/visitation plan for the child, this must take the child's school holidays, birthdays, Christmas, Easter and Mums, Dads and g/parents birthdays into consideration also.

Being prepared is being half way there.

Arrive early. Do not be late. This is an important meeting. Do not drink alcohol or use drugs, have your mind clear. You have arrived at the designated place for the FGC. Don't rush yourselves, take your time, and go to the toilet before you go into the meeting room.

It is also important to bring evidence that an allegation is untrue. Be sure to make photo copies and just bring a copy. (do not bring important documents as these can be easily misplaced or forgotten)

Choose your seat carefully; discuss this with your support person before you arrive at the FGC. Try to place yourself so your support person/people sit between you and any 'antagonists', in a protective position.

There will firstly be introductions, just your name and what connection you have to the child/ren concerned. This will start with the convener and the social worker, don't be shy, speak up, speak clearly, and be confident. Initially you will hear the concerns from CYF, they will talk over all the information they have, do not feel you cannot ask questions if there's anything you do not understand.

They will not like it if you take notes, however, I sometimes write down points I need to ask questions about later, so, if you feel you need to take notes, just let them know you want to remember them for later.

This stage could take an hour or more .. information from all those involved needs to go on the whiteboard, and all those with an interest in the wellbeing of the child needs to be controlled enough within themselves to be able to ask others their thoughts.

Start your questions with positive statements, I appreciate you being here ..... or thank you for your input, can I ask ..... If directing your query to one of the parents, use respect .. never forget, every piece of body language and word you are using is being scrutinised by CYF Social Worker & the Convener of the FGC.

After this stage there will be a break, bikkies and a cuppa and you can go outside and stretch your legs, gather your support people to work out your next step.

*Now is the time to look at your plan FCIS has helped you with and work it into and around what has been put before you. The aim, if at all possible is to ensure the child is safe and home!*

*Your preparation should help you here, if there are drugs issues, all those accused of using drugs should have had at least one drug test to show either usage or not.*

*Mum and Dad should have already started parenting programs, Incredible Years is about the best New Zealand offers, and however, there are many parenting programs.*

*Counselling also should have been started, and one step up from counselling is "Life Coaching" - counsellors will support in dealing with the past and present, Life Coaching will help to move forward. Often at this stage, with these issues, our mind becomes obsessed with what's happening, trying to focus on anything else ALWAYS moves into this issue in our minds!*

*Your plan, if there are allegations of child abuse, will also have moved those involved into "anger management" courses, and "Making better choices" .. Making better choices is a great program for those who are involved in violent relationships. CYF like to see that every step is being taken to make changes in your life, to make a better life for the children.*

Don't forget before going back in, to visit the toilet!

When you return to the room, the SW & Convener will give you a little talk about what this next step is, and leave you to your family discussion.

At this point someone needs to be in 'control' of the discussion. Aggression, finger pointing and accusations must be put aside; this is not about YOU or those there, but about the child and its continued safety! Keep reminding yourself of this point. You can either stand up and take the control yourself or ask someone you trust to do the job. Ensure you have a different whiteboard coloured marker so your comments on the whiteboard stand out from what they have written on it.

Again, at this stage CYF will want you to agree that the child/ren in question are in need of C&P!! Most often on agreement of that, the child will be placed in a care situation. If it is felt this is best for the child, your aim is to have them placed in a family/whanau placement, rather than outside the family/whanau. This is important, important for the child to be able to maintain family ties and friendships. Discuss the points raised by CYF & the convenor step by step .. find alternatives, look outside the box, keep the child's safety in mind, paramount.

Part of the child's safety is also around access, if there has been proven violence by someone close to the child/ren, visitation must be supervised; try to encourage this to be in a neutral place, park, playground etc. CYF may want this to be in their offices for a while, that allows them to observe bonding and any issues that they may want to take note of. Be reasonable in regard to access/visits, they are not about the adults, they are for the children.

Your statement at the end of the meeting should read something along the lines of either, 'This child is in need of C&P' or 'This child is in need of C&P, there is no need for uplift as 'these things' have been put in place to ensure their safety' or 'This child is in need of C&P, has already been uplifted, we have decided that Mum/Dad, either or/both, does need to follow up on drug assessments, counselling, parenting courses – (anything else you have agreed on) with a review of the situation in 6 months. (6 months is standard for review) Agreement that after that 6 months, providing all the boxes are ticked, that the child be returned home, with review by visiting SW every 3 months, on appointment.

When you have everything covered on your whiteboard, you can call the SW & convener back into the room. They will look over what you have written and discuss it with you, perhaps suggesting changes, or additions, these points should also be discussed and decided upon.

The convener then hand writes the points into her book. This is when some things might change. As said before, they have an idea what they want to happen and may either put in some things you haven't covered, or change some things you have asked for. She/he will read it back to you, please listen carefully and be sure nothing is changed without your approval.

The meeting will finish. Keep your polite manner, thank all who have come in support of the child/ren and leave with your dignity attached.

FCIS hopes these notes will support you through your FGC, with pride, consensus, dignity & hope. Be sure to have talked to your advocate about anything you have concerns around in regard to the FGC, we are here for you and to help you focus on the child/ren.