



Family Led Decision Making Guidance

Our approach to working with babies,
children, young people,
families and each other

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Our Vision

We want Newcastle to be a place where every child and family gets the help they need, when they need it. We will work together to make sure support is kind, quick, and focused on what families say matters most.

We'll build a system that:

- Puts families first.
- Helps early to prevent problems from getting worse.
- Works together across services.
- Builds trust and supports lasting change.

Every decision we make will start with the question: "How can we best support this child and family?"

How We'll Make It Happen

Better Services

- One Front Door: A single, easy way for families to ask for help and get support quickly.
- Family Help Teams: Join up Targeted Early Help and Child in Need service delivery into one service, delivering support into locality areas.
- Child Protection Teams: a joined-up approach to assessing and managing and reducing risk of significant harm to children.
- Child Protection Leads: Experienced social workers to guide and support when children are at risk, located within Multiagency Child Protection Teams including members from Police, Health & Education.
- Family-Led Decision Making: Use Family Group Conferences more often and include family led decision making in every area of our practice so families lead their own plans and decisions.

Stronger Workforce

- Train our workforce across the Children's Services system.
- Provide ongoing training in trauma-informed and restorative ways of working.

Clear Leadership

- Set up a Families First Strategic Board to lead the work, check progress, and make sure we stay on track; supported by a multiagency Steering Group and specific Working Groups.
- Use data and feedback to keep improving.

Measuring Success

- Fewer children going into care or needing Child Protection Plans.
- More families feeling happy and involved.
- Fewer repeat referrals and subsequent Child Protection Plans.
- Better school attendance and fewer exclusions.
- More families leading in the development of their plans.

Family Led Decision Making

What do we mean by Family Led Decision Making?

Family-Led Decision Making (FLDM) is a strengths-based, inclusive approach. It places families at the centre of planning and decision-making processes, recognising that they are best positioned to understand their own needs and solutions. When we talk about family-led decision making, this includes working with the whole family and wider network around a child, from relatives and friends to members of the community. Family Led Decision Making is an approach which is embedded across the children's services system involving a range of multiagency partners.

Why is it important?

Wider connections and solutions are important for every child and family we work with, across all our services. [The Children's Social Care National Framework \(2023\)](#) sets out our duty to work in partnership with families and their networks at every stage.

The framework sets out a commitment to always keep babies, children and young people within their families and wider networks, where safe to do so. Research tells us that children in our care can have lifelong disadvantage in terms of physical and mental health, educational attainment, employment, and stability of housing after care. Kinship care is evidenced to have several potential benefits for children. These include increasing their feelings of identity and belonging. Newcastle is committed to keeping children within their family network as much as possible and has developed its Friends & Family Team to support children remaining within their family network when it is deemed unsafe to remain within their parents' care.

A key principle of family-led decision making is having a good understanding of the family network to support children to remain in their family networks. To do this, practitioners must always remain inquisitive about family and community networks who can support children and their

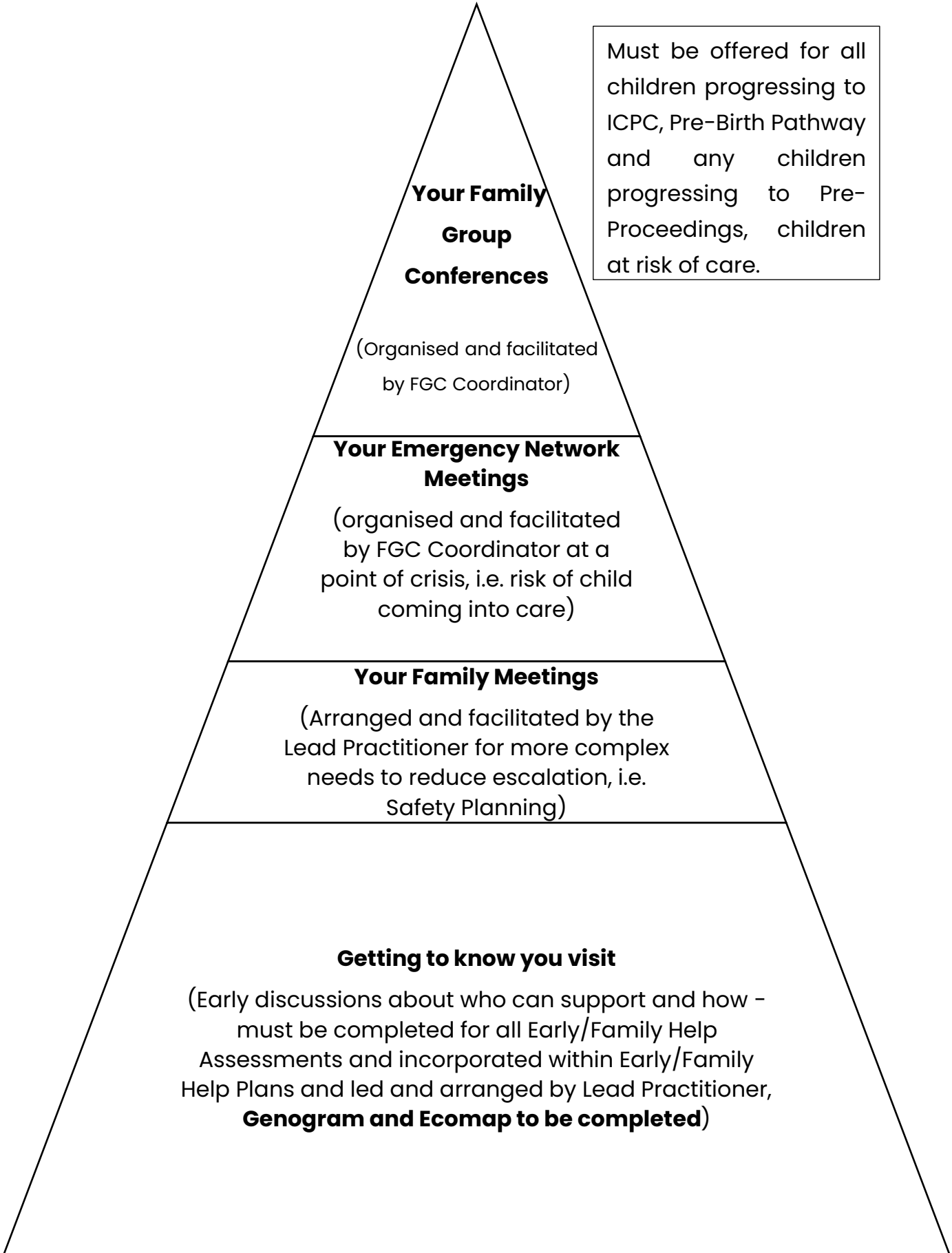
families, including fathers, male partners, relatives, friends and those within the wider community network. The enablement of using the family and wider networks to provide solutions to safeguard children is a strengths-based approach to practice.

Family Meetings

All practitioners will work in partnership with families and collaboration will be at the core of what we do from the start of any involvement with a family. Family help will be at the forefront of our work and an annotated genogram will start the discussion and process early.

There are different types of meetings we can have with a family and depending on the nature of involvement and how urgent support is required will depend on what type of discussion or meeting is appropriate.

This is a helpful diagram to show the meetings and when it may be appropriate.



Must be offered for all children progressing to ICPC, Pre-Birth Pathway and any children progressing to Pre-Proceedings, children at risk of care.

Your Family Group Conferences

(Organised and facilitated by FGC Coordinator)

Your Emergency Network Meetings

(organised and facilitated by FGC Coordinator at a point of crisis, i.e. risk of child coming into care)

Your Family Meetings

(Arranged and facilitated by the Lead Practitioner for more complex needs to reduce escalation, i.e. Safety Planning)

Getting to know you visit

(Early discussions about who can support and how - must be completed for all Early/Family Help Assessments and incorporated within Early/Family Help Plans and led and arranged by Lead Practitioner, **Genogram and Ecomap to be completed**)

Getting to know you discussions/meetings

Any practitioner can have a conversation with a family to discuss family solutions including strengths and needs and how their network could help. This can be an ad hoc informal discussion with family members, who may be present on a visit, or a more formal, arranged meeting for a specific need. Family discussions/meetings are important in terms of gathering information and exploring the family's network. Tools such as genograms, eco-maps, child's voice resources will be used in partnership with the family to understand their lived experience and will be used to inform assessments and developing plans.

Your Family Network Meetings

The next level would be a Family Network Meeting, which again can be held by any practitioner led by the family to create a clear plan of what they would like to achieve. Family Network meetings are available to all families involved with an Early Help Assessment & Plan, Family Help Assessment & Plan and Child Protection Enquiry and plan. It is the responsibility of the lead professional to progress this.

Where there are complex family dynamics, an FGC Coordinator will be available for consultation and to facilitate when needed.

They will:

- Enable and support colleagues with Family Meetings/Network Meetings
- Provide ongoing advice to colleagues about exploring and promoting family inclusion/family-led decision making
- Raise the profile of multi-agency networks
- Be trained in group facilitation

In addition to FGC Coordinators, Early Help Advisors will be available for consultation and support. They will be the first point of contact for externally held Team Around the Family Meetings (TAFs).

Your Emergency Family Meetings

- Emergency Family Meetings must be considered when a family are in 'crisis' or an incident has occurred and a child/children are at 'imminent' risk of being accommodated by the Local Authority.
- The Emergency Family Meeting may not have all the features of a Family Group Conference (FGC) but should aim to facilitate the best quality dialogue between family members and the service.
- Private family space should be offered but is not essential if felt inappropriate by either family or professionals due to the lack of preparation time. Ideally these meetings are aimed at addressing immediate safety and practical needs then working towards a fuller FGC once an interim plan is agreed and in place.
- The FGC Co-ordinator may be required to facilitate the EFM if family do not feel sufficiently prepared/able to come up with a plan themselves in private family space.

Your Family Group Conference

Your Family Group Conferences (FGCs) are a more formal, detailed process, run by the FGC Coordinators. Your Family Group Conference Coordinators are independent, neutral, and are trained according to the Family Rights Group Practice Standards. For more information, please read the information on the [Newcastle City Council website](#).

The Family Group Conference is the family's meeting.

In Newcastle, there is a mandatory FGC offer for any child who is subject to a Child Protection Plan and/or at risk of becoming a Child in Care; this includes Public Law Outline. It is the responsibility of the allocated practitioner to make the referral to FGC.

If you aren't sure which route to take, an FGC Coordinator can provide support and advice.

Remember that a family can have an FGC at a later date even if they have had a Family Meeting/Network Meeting.

Holding a Family Meeting

These meetings can be organised for children or families within any part of the Children's Services system.

When? Think early: don't wait until difficulties increase. With consent, these meetings can be arranged at any point. This includes during the assessment/review process or when the family mention a support network which could be built on.

They can be arranged in response to a particular need or change in family circumstances. For example, to coordinate support with routines, parenting, health and mental health needs, to plan for upcoming transitions, or to inform a safety plan.

Tips – Always think family

- Encourage and allow families to bring someone to support them if they would like. "I will invite his health visitor. Who else can join us?".
- Give plenty of notice so all attendees have time to make arrangements and be flexible about plans. Your Family Meeting/Network Meeting may form part of the planned assessment/review meeting, or could be part of a pre-meeting, to agree support roles as part of the plan.
- Where English is not someone's first language ensure an interpreter is available. If you are struggling to find an interpreter, seek support through an Early Help Advisor.

- Note the opportunities or strengths within the family and network. For example, are there people who are strong advocates of a child or parent? Are there people with resources or skills that would be helpful? This not only shows families a strengths-based approach but can help them connect their strengths with ideas.
- It is important not to just rely on direct questions or one-off conversations. Use observation and information from wider connections at each stage of our involvement.
- If your visit is planned, stick to the agreed time/day. Keep communication with the family and network open and regular.
- Develop your understanding of the culture and religion of those you are working with, as a source of support and potential resource.
- Collate information about community resources/settings as a team and share information about your experiences of community support in supervision and team meetings. Your local family hub can provide support.

Direct work tips and tools

- Explore with children the safe, trusted people they can talk to – you can complete a ‘hand of safety’ to do this. Write their details down. When did they last see them, and do they know when they will see them next?
- Are there aspects of your work you can complete alongside the trusted people in their life?
- Create opportunities where family networks can have fun together, bond, or share skills. For example, you could help plan a picnic, or a visit where a family member shows a parent how to prepare a bottle.



Management oversight

Managers will model thinking about family and wider connections:

- Provide opportunities for your team to connect with each other if they want to, for example, a team tea break or walk at lunch. We can best support connections if we are connected too.
- Include whole family and network planning in team meetings and case supervision.
- The Family's networks will be considered and evidenced at every decision-making point through the children's services system.

Planning

- Involve whole families and networks in safety and contingency plans. Ensure everyone has a copy and is clear on their role. Practitioners should ensure any plans are recorded on Eclipse and detailed within the overall family plan.

Service specific guidance

Community Early Help/Family Hubs

- Consider how the setting can be accessible to a range of people with different needs and circumstances.
- Try to advertise through a range of channels, from digital platforms to community noticeboards. Work with partners who can share details too – for example, nursery managers in your area.
- Allow and encourage people to bring a family member or friend with them if possible.
- If you plan groups, think about the purpose of your criteria and whether they positively help build connections; if not, make sure they don't unnecessarily exclude people who could benefit and contribute.
- Create opportunities for visitors to the family hub to learn from each other and or share experiences, and/or mix informally.

Family Help

- Allow and encourage members of the wider family and network to be present at visits and attend meetings. Decision on who attends family meetings should be agreed by parents/carers.
- Offer to complete an annotated genogram and ecomap with every family. Upload it to the 'Documents' section on recording system- Eclipse of a child's file and add a case note signposting to it.
- Ensure plans are detailed and developed in collaboration with the family and their network. Family network plans will be embedded within the early help and family help plan and review documents.

Child Protection/Safeguarding

- Allow and encourage members of the wider family/network to be present at visits.
- Encourage families to identify people who can attend meetings.
- Child Protection Lead Practitioners and Team Managers will ensure a Family Meeting/Network Meeting is offered and coordinated where wider support could have a positive impact on the family's circumstances.
- Ensure plans are detailed and developed in collaboration with the family and their network. Plans will be embedded and reviewed within Child Protection Plans.

Children in Care and Care Leavers

- Family time is an opportunity to observe and explore family connections and opportunities for family safety or reunification
- If a reunification assessment is being completed, an offer of FGC will be made to the family.
- Social Workers/Leaving Care Support Officers can request My Support Meetings to bring together a young person's network to support with independence.
- When young people leave care, they may need support to identify risks and keep themselves safe and help them identify safe people who they can share concerns with.
- Independent Reviewing Officers should ensure that wider support networks are involved in support and planning and can prompt social workers to coordinate a Family Meeting/Network Meeting/My Support Meeting where needed.
- A Family Meeting/Network Meeting can help bring birth and foster family together to plan around family time when there are issues. They can also help plan around resolving missing episodes where children seek time with their birth family.

Front Door Service

- Gather information about who is in the family and network, and what support they offer. Ensure recorded relationships and contact details are up to date.
- Review previous plans, including family/network or FGC plans, to be aware of potential support and offers of alternative care and support.

Kinship Care

- The support network around a kinship carer is crucial, and must be explored during assessment, in addition to speaking with all household members and acquiring references. This network will be a big part of a child's life, into their future, and will also provide invaluable emotional and practical support to the carer.
- Pull in the wider network to support a kinship carer, providing them with information of what services are available both from the local authority and community, helping them plan as a team. This can happen through a Family Meeting/Network Meeting.
- Support children to maintain connections with important people in their life.

Unaccompanied Asylum-seeking Children

- Take a trauma informed approach as they have likely experienced significant separation, loss, and possibly threats regarding their family if trafficked. They will need proactive support with building wider connections to guard against the risk of exploitation and build supportive relationships.
- Engage network where this can be found, e.g. uncle and cousins in a different part of the country – plan with them, how they will keep in touch and enhance the young person's sense of identity and belonging.
- Hold a Family Meeting/Network Meeting where young people are in shared living accommodation and there are issues that need to be addressed – a clear plan can help resolve potential moves.
- Independent Reviewing Officers can check plans considering young people's wider connections and can prompt social workers to coordinate a Family Meeting/Network Meeting where needed.

Youth Justice

- The development of more positive relationships can be key for children at risk of, or involved in, offending behaviour. This can include parents/carers and family members but also other adults within the community, as well as professionals.
- A Family Meeting/Network Meeting could be held to plan around preventing re-offending, or when a young person will be returning home following a period of detention.

How will we know the impact of taking a family-led decision-making approach for children and families?

We will know that this approach has supported strengthening family and network relationships when more children are able to safely remain or return to their family or wider network.

Partner agencies and families will see:

- Families feeling valued, included, understood and listened to
- Records and reports including details of a child's whole family and network, and their role, right from the start of our involvement.
- Assessments balancing family needs with strengths and resources.
- Plans will be family led and include specific measurable actions and support from family and network members.
- Supervision will include consideration of the wider network.
- Practitioners will be liaising closely with community and agency partners for every family.
- Sustainable plans
- Reduction in risk – children remaining within their family's network.
- Fathers and male carers routinely included with FLDM.