

**MEMORIAL UNIVERSITY OF NEWFOUNDLAND
SCHOOL OF SOCIAL WORK**

FAMILY GROUP DECISION MAKING PROJECT

**MANUAL FOR COORDINATORS
AND COMMUNITIES:**

**THE ORGANIZATION AND PRACTICE
OF FAMILY GROUP DECISION MAKING**

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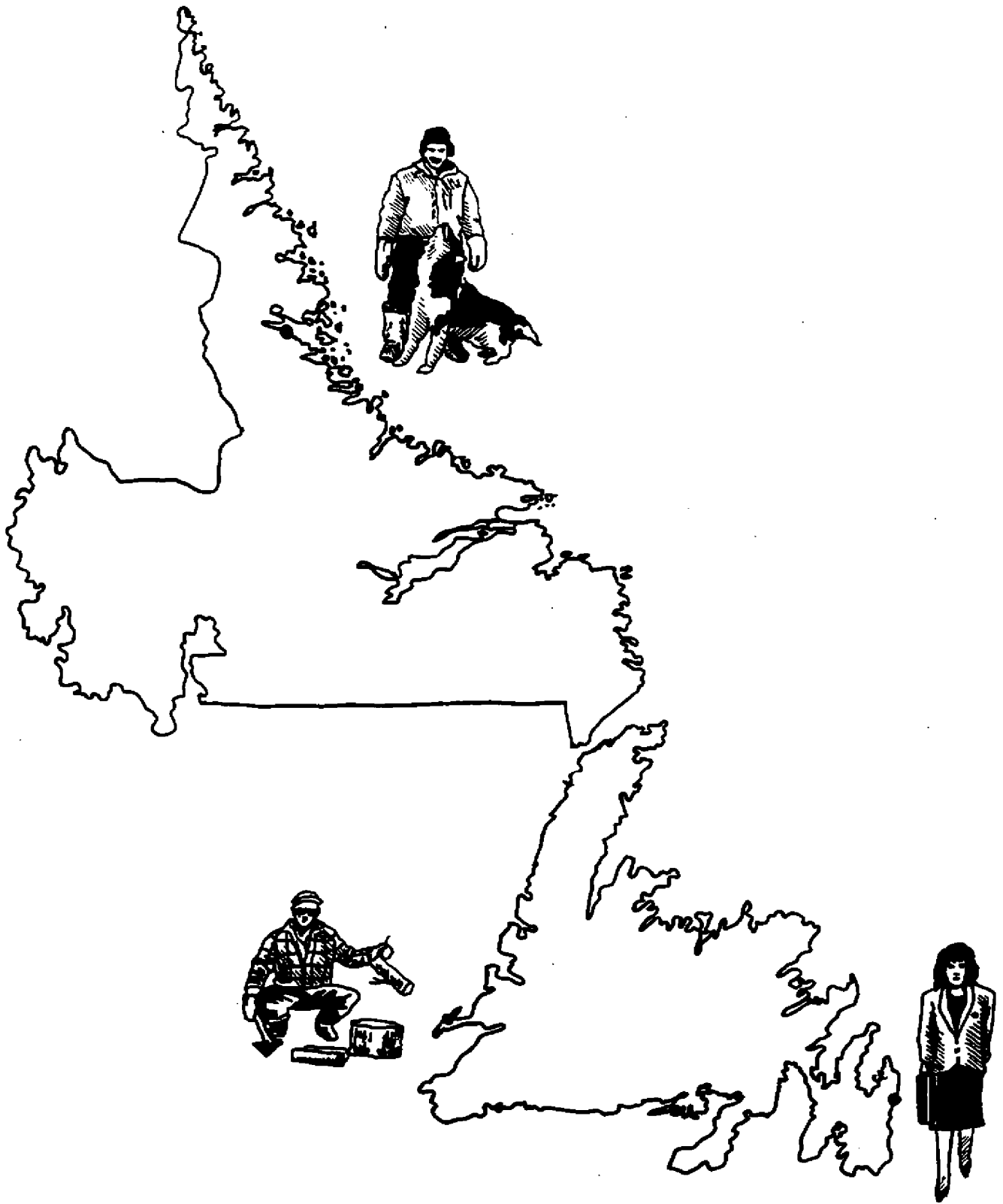
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To our partners

*Kathy Burford
Charley Pennell
Bob MacLeod*



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At first glance these acknowledgments may raise questions about why they are so long. There is one simple reason: it is quite impossible to carry out a project like this one without collaboration and partnerships. The debts incurred to people and organizations in bringing this project from its inception to close were initially large and grew throughout. The reader should understand that for every visible person in a project like this, there are a score of invisible ones who make it possible. If we have left anyone out, and we no doubt have, we apologize.

The first time we wrote down the idea for using family group decision making in the province, it was attached to an appendix to a proposal for a family violence research centre. While that proposal was unsuccessful, we received so much encouragement for the idea of family group decision making in the appendix that we carried it forward. The following groups gave us financial support during the development of that original proposal and the money ultimately served the end of winning the grant for this project: at Memorial University of Newfoundland, the Faculty of Medicine, the Schools of Nursing and Social Work, and the Institute for Social and Economic Research; and at the provincial government the Departments of Health, Justice, and Social Services. Subsequently, Terry Stapleton, then Director of Child Welfare, was most generous in giving us a grant directly aimed at developing the proposal for the project.

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Members of the Port au Port Advisory Committee and Panel

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PREFACE

Background to the Development of the Manual

Our original intent for this manual was to be able to offer up the essence of what we learned about using Family Group Conferences (FGCs) to anyone who was interested in using the model in our home province. Hence, some ideas or expectations spelled out are quite specific to the legislative, social and economic context in which the project took place. For example, we refer throughout to *The Project*, since the manual represents how we operated during a demonstration project using the model in cases of family violence including child abuse and neglect and women abuse. Family group conferences have also been used by others to deal with young offenders (Longclaws, 1994; Maxwell & Morris, 1993). Another example is that in our *Project*, referring agents or organizations had to be willing to pay, when payment was necessary, for the costs of travel for extended family members to be brought together and for costs associated with carrying out the families' decisions. Having said that, we think there are some fundamental principles, or key ingredients, that would be essential to consider in any context. We overview those in Chapter One in the short version of what we mean when we use the term family group conference.

This is the third version of the manual. With the permission and support of the Department of Social Welfare in New Zealand, we borrowed heavily from their materials in the preparation of the first version. Written before our project started, it was used to guide our practice for the first six months. A second version incorporated our own experiences up to that point, and this one is being written at the end of the project.

Who Is This Manual Intended For?

This manual is intended for community or government groups who are interested in instituting family group conferences and for individuals who will be coordinating or participating in family group conferences. It is essential for considerable ground work to be done in working up to the use of this model in the community and with government. In Chapter Two, we summarize what we think needs to be done by way of preparation to use the model including planning and start-up activities as well as setting up an evaluation from the beginning. To provide guidance to coordinators and others involved, chapters 3, 4, 5, and 6 describe the practice from referral through to what is done after the conference is over,

and Chapter 7 is a sample family group plan. The appendices include further information useful for developing such a project and holding family group conferences.

How is the Manual Intended to be Used?

We hope that interested groups would first use the manual as a starting point for discussion. Chapter One is simply to answer the beginning questions for the person who has either never heard of a family group conference or who does not have time to read the whole manual. We would encourage people to read the Mission and Philosophy statements in Appendix A along with this chapter and discuss your own beliefs and assumptions. At some point in reading Chapter Two, it is our hope that you will make a list of who would have to be involved in your community? Who would need to be involved because they have special knowledge? Hold a special position from where they can support initiatives? Could sabotage the effort later if they were not involved? Who needs to be consulted from each of the perspectives involved and who do they think is important to involve? The remaining chapters are specifically aimed at groups who decide they want to carry out conferences and at the person who is designated to facilitate them.

CHAPTER 1

OVERVIEW OF THE FAMILY GROUP CONFERENCE

Definition & Purpose

A Family Group Conference (FGC) is a particular kind of meeting between members of a family and members of their extended kinship group. Family Group Decision-Making (FGDM) is simply a term we use to describe the process that starts with a referral, moves to a conference, and involves monitoring and evaluation. The aim is to provide an opportunity for a family experiencing violence to meet with their relatives, and their friends if they want to include them. At this meeting, the family becomes involved in making a plan to stop the abuse or other ill-treatment between its members. The FGC involves family and friends in resolving the abuse¹ rather than leaving the decision-making entirely in the hands of the legal authorities and service providers. The meeting, however, is not a free-for-all. In our use of the model, everyone is given a great deal of preparation, support and protection so that all family members can be both safe and informed in having a say in the decision-making. Agencies refer families to the project because they are concerned about the protection and care of some family members and because they are prepared to support the families in taking initiative for formulating a plan to prevent further abuse.

Effective Implementation

An effective FGC is one in which plans are established to provide for the safety and good care of those who have been abused or are at risk of further abuse. The process should uphold the integrity and dignity of the family group by helping them take the initiative in planning how to resolve the violence in their family. The abusers are to be held accountable for their actions, and their constructive participation in resolving the family violence is to be encouraged. For the project to be effective and culturally sensitive, community ownership and control must be fostered.

The project coordinator can promote effective FGCs by working with families in

¹The term “abuse” refers to physical violence and other forms of maltreatment.

such a way that:

- ◆ the integrity and dignity of the family will be maintained;
- ◆ the survivors' safety and care needs will be met;
- ◆ the abuser is held accountable and responsible for the abuse; and
- ◆ the sense of togetherness and pride of the community is promoted, and respect for cultural considerations is evident.

Main Stages and Key Elements

Referral to the Project

Families are referred to the project by agencies that are willing to use the plans developed at the FGC as well as the costs associated with holding the conference. Referrals cannot occur until after the investigation and assessment of the family situation has been completed and a clear care, protection or safety concern has been identified.

Key elements for referring agents:

- assessment completed;
- clear care, protection, and/or safety concern established;
- necessary information forwarded to coordinator;

Key elements for coordinator:

- assessment of suitability of referral;
- ensure all necessary information is received from referring agent;
- initial contact with a key family member (usually the mother or non-offending parent);

Preparation for FGC

The project coordinator explains the FGC process to the family members, consults with them about who will attend the FGC, prepares all family members and professionals who will be attending the FGC for their role in the conference, and makes necessary travel and other arrangements.

Key elements for preparation:

- understanding the dynamics of spousal abuse and child abuse, particularly in ensuring the safety of women and children during the FGC process;
- taking time and care in selecting, locating and inviting family members;
- dealing with tensions between family members in order to get as many of them as possible to the conference;
- giving them adequate information about the FGC process;
- deciding who is to be included and who, if anyone, is to be excluded;
- securing views of family members who are unable to attend the FGC and members who have been excluded;
- agreeing on a suitable location, date and time for the FGC;
- considering cultural sensitivities and family traditions;
- clarifying roles of professionals at the FGC;
- presenting issues surrounding research and evaluation of the project;
- consulting with the Community Panel;
- ensuring that support persons for family members at risk of abuse and/or young people under 16 are in place.

Holding the FGC

At the beginning of the conference, the coordinator will give introductory remarks and go over the process. Investigating authorities will then lay out information on their findings. Other relevant information will be presented at this time (guest speaker, information about available community resources). The professionals will then leave the family to deliberate in private. Once the family members have developed a plan, they will present it to the project coordinator, who ensures that the plan includes necessary protective and care measures and monitoring steps. The main stages are:

Introduction and explanation of the process- Key Elements:

- communicating with the family in such a way as to maximize the possibility that they will see themselves as having valuable input into the decisions and that they have something important to offer;
- establishing a climate of respect for the family members to engage in discussions among themselves and with the authorities in the final stage of the conference.

Key elements for information giving:

- ensuring that verbal presentations or background reports are given in “user friendly” terms but that they are none the less factual, clear and specific;
- information givers should include elements the family need to address in their plan in order for it to be approved by their agency. If the bottom line they have in mind is unchangeable, they should say so, and not leave the family to play “guessing games” (i.e., “This father will be permitted only supervised access to this child”);
- clear explanation of why it is necessary to have a report made by the coordinator of “excluded” or otherwise absent members views;
- seeking the family’s agreement or disagreement that a care and protection problem does exist.

Key elements for family deliberations:

- separate rooms where members can caucus or go for a breather;
- presence of support person(s) for young people, anyone at risk of abuse at the FGC, and/or abusers requiring someone to help them maintain self-control

Key elements for negotiating the plan:

- these plans need to be recorded clearly and in detail including provisions for reviewing, evaluating and monitoring the plan.

After the FGC

The project coordinator presents the plan for approval by the investigating authorities at the end of the FGC. When possible, approval is obtained before the conference ends. If accepted, the referring agency is responsible for its resourcing. Implementation of the plan is monitored, and regular review meetings are scheduled. When necessary, another FGC may be convened. All persons in attendance at the FGC are sent a copy of the plan.

Key elements for after the family group conference:

- quick turnaround time from decision to effecting the plan, including any necessary agreements.
- implementation of monitoring and review measures by investigating authorities and family members as outlined in the plan of the FGC.

CHAPTER 2

COMMUNITY AND PROJECT DEVELOPMENT

Community Development

Community Consultation

- ◆ The first step in implementing a Family Group Decision-Making model is to determine if local people are interested in using it in their community.
- ◆ From the outset, the project must consider cultural factors that need to be addressed in particular communities.
- ◆ By developing contacts with key individuals within the community (i.e., persons who are generally respected and trusted by community members and who are knowledgeable about what is happening in the community), a process can be developed to ensure that the right people and groups are consulted and are involved in setting up the service.
- ◆ Such groups would include public authorities, potential referring agencies, government representatives, and community groups concerned with addressing the issue of violence in the community. Specifically, representation should be sought from:
 - Police
 - Parole
 - Probation
 - Office of the Crown Prosecutor
 - Child Welfare
 - the local women's shelter
 - women's support/advocacy groups
 - recognized cultural leaders/spiritual advisors
 - the education system
 - the health system
 - counselling agencies
 - community mental health centres
 - drug dependency services
- ◆ Consultation can take place according to a process developed with the local

group. From these consultations a planning committee should be formed that is representative of all the stakeholders in the community.

Project Development

Mandate of the Planning Committee

- ◆ To develop a mission and philosophy statement for the project. This will become the framework to enable the committee to develop appropriate policies and protocols for the project (see appendix A for an example of a mission and philosophy statement developed by the planning group for the demonstration project in Newfoundland & Labrador, Canada).
- ◆ To ensure that an understanding of the dynamics of family violence, and particularly the fact that the vast majority of victims of violence are women and children, is kept at the forefront at all levels.
- ◆ To ensure that cultural sensitivity is maintained.
- ◆ To develop any required legal understandings and/or necessary undertakings with local authorities, and in particular with the Office of the Crown Prosecutor, to ensure that the project complements rather than conflicts with the due process of the legal system.
- ◆ To develop partnerships among all agencies who could potentially refer to the project and/or who have resources to fund the costs of holding the conferences and carrying out the plans of these conferences. Guidelines and policies will need to be negotiated with these agencies and clearly written so that coordinators, families and referring agencies are clear about the limits of available resources and about who approves what travel or plans within what turn-around time. In the case of a time-limited demonstration project, it is essential that funding for carrying out plans continue past the end of the project.
- ◆ To decide what the administrative structure for the project will be and to develop this structure. This includes:
 - Ensuring that project administrators are in place;
 - Supporting administrators, especially during the project development phase;
 - Deciding on the committee structure required both for the overall project

and at each project site (e.g., a protocol committee, a local advisory committee, and a community panel). The planning committee may essentially divide into the protocol and advisory committees, or the agreed-upon equivalent committees, to ensure continuity and effective use of human resources. Whatever structure is adopted, it is important that local committees have input into planning for the greater region/province/state.

- ◆ To decide where the project should be located-within a government agency (e.g., Child Welfare) or in an arms-length community-based agency. This would involve considering the benefits and problems of both possibilities (e.g., the project may be able to use space in a government agency without additional cost to the project for rent; however, families may be more hesitant to participate if it is located inside an agency they do not trust).

Initial Tasks of Project Administrator

- ◆ Ensuring office space and necessary equipment is secured.
- ◆ Setting up an accounting system for funds, and overseeing the work of an administrative assistant.
- ◆ Hiring staff for the project and involving members of the local planning committee in the hiring process. This is particularly important when hiring the coordinator, as the person in this position should have good knowledge and be a respected member of the community.
- ◆ Providing adequate training for all project staff and ensure that coordinators receive intensive training about the implementation of the model before accepting referrals. A valuable strategy to provide training for coordinators and to educate community professionals/members about the model is to invite all those you wish to educate to the training sessions - police, child welfare workers, parole/probation officers, women's groups, community agencies.
- ◆ Providing ongoing, regular supervision, support, and consultation, to project staff, and developing a collaborative project team.
- ◆ Facilitating the work of the overall planning/protocol committee;
- ◆ Organizing a service record-keeping system.
- ◆ Developing or adopting a system for evaluating the project (see last section in this chapter).

Start-up Tasks of Coordinator

- ◆ Setting up the office.
- ◆ Collect data on existing community agencies.
- ◆ In conjunction with project administrator(s), develop recording requirements and systems, forms, filing system.
- ◆ Develop the community panel based on the types of community resources and professionals the coordinator may need to consult with about problems and situations referred families will be addressing at their FGC (i.e., lawyers, mental health professionals, staff from the local women's shelter, drug dependency services, education, child protection, police, social assistance, child psychologists, therapists). A sample mandate and job description for a community panel is located in Appendix B.
- ◆ Educate/train front-line staff of referring agencies and community service agencies to ensure that appropriate and timely referrals are received. Professionals are hesitant to refer to a new resource if they are unsure of the model and what the impact of the intervention will be on their client and their workload.
- ◆ Develop promotional/descriptive materials, e.g., brochures and videos with input from local advisory committees and project administrators.

Research, Evaluation and Follow-up

It is important to include a research evaluation and follow-up component to the project to ensure the model is being implemented in a safe, respectful manner and to measure the impact of family group decision-making on families who are referred to the project.

It is advisable to include the planning committee, local advisory committees, and project staff in developing the research evaluation design. Without their input, it would be difficult to attune the project to local conditions and cultures and to ensure that its procedures, especially concerning such sensitive matters as family violence, fit with the legal and policy context of the province or state.

We also recommend that, where necessary, the evaluation instruments be redesigned on the basis of feedback from conference participants and project

staff.

The need for evaluation bears elaboration. The philosophy and theoretical assumptions that drive the model are probably quite consistent with what is taught to human service workers in North America about the conditions under which people make and maintain changes. The model, however, calls for those same professionals and the organizations in which they practice to also make changes in the way they do things. Such innovation requires study and evaluation. The practice of family group decision-making introduces case-specific measures of accountability between abuser and family, between consumer and professional, between family members and organizations: professionals must make time for families to have a say in decisions, and relatives will stop thinking that professionals can and will keep people in their family safe without their help. Given the levels of collaboration that are essential, the use of this model will predictably raise a lot of feelings. It is best to agree in the beginning on how it will be evaluated and how problems will be dealt with when they come up. Because the model gets so many people involved, the family can get a lot of “publicity,” as it were. Without adequate consultation and ownership of the model at the local level, it can be expected that “the model” will be on trial in the way that models so often are; thus, careful attention needs to be paid to making sure it is being practiced with integrity in regards to its basic principles and design. Professionals sometimes need reminding that troubled families may take some time, or need more than one opportunity to get it right. At the same time, families, when given first hand experience with professionals, find that child welfare workers and police do not go around snatching children and arresting people for no reason. It should be a rare experience that the family does not accept that there is a problem of the kind the authorities have described.



CHAPTER 3

REFERRALS AND ACCEPTANCE INTO THE PROJECT

Objective

To gain the participation of families who are likely to benefit from the project and assist them in making an informed decision on participating.

Process

Referrals to a coordinator come at the end of the investigation and assessment for three main reasons. Participation in the project will not interfere with or be used as part of the investigatory and assessment procedures (all court proceedings do not have to be dispensed with before the FGC can take place). The information secured through the investigation and assessment will give the referring agency and the project coordinator a basis from which to determine the appropriateness of the referral. At the FGC, the participants will not be drawn into a debate about whether a care or protection concern exists; they can instead focus on how to resolve it.

Information from the investigation and assessment is to be forwarded to the coordinator. The amount and content of referral information should be negotiated with referring agencies by the project administrators and the project planning committee as part of the set up of the project. Information should be clear and factual, and when possible should be extracted from existing documents of the referring agency so as not to unnecessarily add to the workload of referring agents.

The project coordinator must receive a written referral signed by the referring agent. This referral authorizes the coordinator to contact family members. After the referral is received and before accepting families into the project, the coordinator must review their situation, suitability for the FGC, and interest in participating. The coordinator is the gatekeeper to the conference process, and may exercise considerable discretion. Discretionary decisions must not be made by a coordinator without the use of consultation with others (project administrators, members of the community panel).

Referrals

Families are accepted into the project when key members of the family have agreed to participate in the FGC. Once a referral is received and the family have been fully informed about the FGC process, a more detailed participation agreement should be presented to family members by the coordinator.

This Agreement to Participate form will ensure informed consent has been given by this family before the coordinator begins the process of preparing them for a FGC and will outline the terms for participation. These terms will include the purpose of the program, the voluntary nature of attendance at the FGC, the measures taken to preserve confidentiality but also the limitations, plus research and evaluation procedures being used, and the risks and benefits of participating. This form should be developed by the planning group and the project administrators to ensure that it is user friendly and that it meets the needs of the project and the families in the community.

This form should be signed by any participating adult member (i.e., 16 years and older) of the immediate family (that is, the family whose situation is being considered).

In the case of a referral of a family with children, this agreement to participate should be signed by at least one parent (with legal custody).

If the referral has come from a source other than the child protection agency and the child is a ward of the director of Child Welfare, his/her delegate must sign the form.

It is preferable, although not strictly necessary, to secure the consent of both parents, whether biological or adoptive.

It is also a good idea, but not legally required, for the coordinator to secure the consent of any young people ages 12-16 years. This should be done only after consultation with the parents to ensure that the coordinator does not undermine what they have already told their children in terms of expectation of participation.

In the case of child protection matters, when a participation agreement has not been able to be attained from biological parents, the family group conference can still be co-ordinated as long as there is enough interest or concern among the family group to warrant a FGC. As long as three or more members of the family or extended family network wish to proceed, and are willing to sign a Participation Agreement, and as long as the coordinator believes the referral is

appropriate, the FGC can proceed.

If some family members choose not to participate, this decision does not preclude others from proceeding with the FGC. Because the family decides to proceed with participation in the project, this decision does not compel anyone in particular to attend the conference. Determination of who participates in the FGC is a matter that the coordinator carefully negotiates with the family (see the next chapter on Preparation for the FGC).

The coordinator must develop a system of administration to keep track of referrals, assessments, reviews, and consent forms. Checklists can be used as guides to key actions. Records must be kept of requests to refer families to the project, the date the referral was made, and the steps taken to deal with them.

Conferences will be convened as quickly as possible. At the longest the conference should take place within 30 working days of the decision. Any referral that has not proceeded to a FGC within five weeks after acceptance must be referred to the community panel and the project administrators for consultation.

Guidelines

Before accepting the referral, the coordinator must ensure that:

- ◆ in the case of a family being referred by the Division of Child Welfare, all pertinent information related to the care and protection concern is received with the referral;
- ◆ the referral has the approval of the referring organization or department and this organization is prepared to resource the plan as well as the costs associated with holding the FGC;
- ◆ Child Welfare and/or the police have concluded their investigation and assessment;
- ◆ in the case where charges have been laid, all information relevant to the investigation is forwarded with the referral;
- ◆ a clear care, protection or safety concern has been identified by the referring agency;
- ◆ investigators or their representatives will be available to give information,

describe the actions and assessments they carried out if a FGC is convened;

- ◆ the family appears likely to benefit from the FGC, and key family members have signed the necessary "Agreement to Participate" form;
- ◆ the project can handle this referral (e.g., given the family's situation or the current number of participating families).

CHAPTER 4

PREPARATION FOR THE FAMILY GROUP CONFERENCE

Objectives

To do the necessary ground work and consultation which is the most crucial factor in ensuring constructive FGC proceedings.

To provide sufficient information to allow potential FGC participants to determine if and how they will participate, and to make the necessary preparations so that they will be able to contribute to the deliberations in a constructive manner.

Overall Process

The coordinator will ensure that the following FGC participants have the opportunity to prepare for the conference:

- ◆ The family members who are to attend must be informed about their role and have adequate opportunity to react to the invitation. The coordinator should stress that the best solutions for the long-term needs of the abused person will be those developed and supported by the family group.
- ◆ The investigators must be prepared to bring good information that has been prepared in advance. They must also be clear about resources available to allow them to approve any costs associated with the family plan, if they deem that plan to be good enough to keep all family members safe.
- ◆ The service providers who attend the session, to describe what they do or what services are available locally, also need to be prepared to take a supportive stance of service to the family.

All aspects of the preparation for the FGC involve consultation with family members, especially with those who are survivors of abuse, anyone at risk of abuse, and young people in the family.

Preparations for the conference include all the steps after acceptance of the referral through to formal notification of time, date, and place once they are set. These steps are outlined in detail in this chapter.

Contacting Family

Initially, the coordinator will contact a key family member (usually the non-offending parent or the person who has signed the Consent for Referral) to arrange a time to meet. At the initial meeting:

- ◆ Give the family complete information about the project; to ensure they fully understand what the process will involve.
- ◆ The "Participation Agreement" is explained and signed by the key family member. (Other family members over the age of 12 are invited to sign this form when the coordinator meets with them to prepare them for the FGC.)
- ◆ The family is presented with a list of community panel members and given an opportunity to express any concern they may have with particular panel members having information about their family. For example, a panel member might be a relative who would be invited to the FGC, or may have had other family dealings that may create conflict. The coordinator may therefore agree to exclude this panel member from consultations.
- ◆ Inform the family of any legal undertakings or agreements made by public authorities pertaining to the family group conference (i.e., the alleged offender's involvement in the project will not be taken as an admission of guilt in any ongoing criminal prosecution.)

Who to Invite to the FGC

- ◆ Consultation with the family is about who is in the family/extended family. It is not about who may or may not attend. The coordinator holds the final say about who will be invited, but this must be done in consultation with the family, especially with the abused persons and a non-abusing family member, and with the community panel.
- ◆ The question of who constitutes family varies for individuals, families, and cultures. Consultation is needed to capture the configuration of a particular family group.
- ◆ All kin should have a right to attend unless they have been formally excluded by the coordinator; in this case, their views (if they want them made known) about how to stop the violence in the family shall be made known through the

coordinator.

- ◆ There is no limit to the number who may attend the family group conference, although there may not be sufficient travel and accommodations monies to underwrite everyone's attendance.
- ◆ The persons who shall ordinarily be considered for attendance or representation at the conference include:
 - the survivors (unless they are excluded for reason of age, maturity, or other specified reason);
 - any member of the survivor's immediate or extended family or friendship network (unless excluded); in the case of a survivor who is child or young person, every person who is a parent, guardian, or care-giver;
 - the coordinator who is convening the conference;
 - a representative of the referring body;
 - a person who is unambiguously aligned with each FGC participant in need of support, including young people under the age of 16, persons at risk of abuse, and alleged offenders;
 - any person identified by the family as having a significant stake in the outcome for the abused person(s);
 - any person required for the purpose of conveying any information or advice required by the conference attendees need to carry out their functions.
 - some young people will have significant, if not primary, attachments to adults who are not their biological family. Such persons should be invited as members of the child's family group. This is governed by:
 - the age when the child or young person first knew the adult;
 - the length of time known; and
 - the intensity of the involvement, e.g., like a parent.
 - The coordinator will consult the child or young person and follow his/her wishes, if he/she is able to make an informed choice.

- Family friends, support people, and members of the families' social support network (e.g., a neighbour, a woman from the local women's shelter) may also be invited. These people are especially important to families who may not have sufficient numbers of relatives to have a conference (e.g., immigrant families, women fleeing from abusive partners).
- In situations where a child or young person has retained a lawyer or if one has been appointed, that lawyer may attend the conference.

The coordinator will give members of the referred family an opportunity to discuss their feelings about each family member whom the coordinator will be contacting and any concerns they have about a particular family member attending the FGC. In some instances family members will request that the coordinator not contact certain other family members. It is important that the coordinator discuss the reasons for concern and negotiate these requests with the family. For instance:

- ◆ Family members may be worried that their relatives will not want to come, or do not care about them. The coordinator can explain that family members are not required to come, but that they will be given information about the project and an opportunity to be invited or express their views about what they believe needs to happen to keep their family members well cared for and safe from further abuse.
- ◆ Sometimes family members may wish to contact their relatives themselves first to introduce the idea before the coordinator calls them. Others will prefer that the coordinator call first so they can avoid any criticism or rejection they may expect from the family.
- ◆ Sometimes the very person the family do not wish to invite is the person with the most information about what has been happening in the family. It is important that the coordinator not buy into the conspiracy of silence that has allowed abuse to take place and continue.
- ◆ There may be serious, legitimate concerns expressed about inviting a family member who has been abusive. The coordinator should explore these concerns fully and decide on a strategy with family for contact with that family member. (The coordinator may first interview the person without using an invitation, and then consult further with the family about whether this person should be involved).
- ◆ The coordinator can exclude a family member from the FGC if after contact

he/she believes that it would be unsafe for this person to attend (see section on exclusions in this chapter).

Special issues

Some persons present dilemmas about their status at the conference. For example, a parent who has had little or no involvement in the child's life; a current care-giver; new partners of family members, and their extended family. Each situation has to be judged on its own merits. Some ideas which may be helpful in regards to child survivors:

- ◆ Give parents the opportunity. They may wish to contribute to their child's future. However, where little or no contact has been maintained, preparatory work is essential.
- ◆ Contact relatives (grandparents, aunts, uncles, etc.) of a parent who has had little or no contact with their children/relatives. In situations involving children of single mothers, the father's family members often wanted contact with their relatives but had no way of establishing it.
- ◆ Include short-term/emergency care-givers but have them attend as nonvoting, information/advice givers, since they are more like social workers than family members.
- ◆ Include as relatives care-givers who have a significant psychological attachment to a child or young person since they will have had longer-term involvement in the child's past and future.

Exclusions

- ◆ A parent, guardian, usual care-giver or member of the family group may be excluded from the conference if the coordinator believes that their attendance would not be in the best interests of the survivors or would be undesirable for any other reason.
- ◆ Good preparation reduces the need for the coordinator to use intrusive powers such as exclusions and minimizes the risk of over-involvement in the process.
- ◆ The coordinator may exclude a child or young person for the same reason, or because the child's age or level of maturity indicates an inability to understand

the proceedings.

- ◆ When a person is excluded, the coordinator must take all reasonable steps to obtain the person's view about the issues to be discussed and must present these views at the conference.
- ◆ The power to exclude should be used sparingly, and done in consultation with the community panel. The reasons for excluding must be recorded in writing.
- ◆ The power to exclude can be exercised at any time including during the conference. Exclusion is justified when:
 - there is a serious threat to harm or kill, and/or when significant, substantiated risk is posed to others;
 - a person exhibits serious mental disturbance that will interrupt the conference, or the person will be significantly distressed; and
 - situations in which full participation may cause significant stress to the abused person in question.
- ◆ A coordinator is expected to use creative strategies to avoid having to exercise the power of exclusion. The excluded person is still a member of the family group. Plan how these persons will be advised of the outcome, and how they can be assisted to resume their place (or at least a carefully defined place) in the family group, especially in relation to the survivor who is a child or young person.

Strategies to avoid exclusions

- ◆ Talk to the disturbed family member. They may not be as confused or upset as others say.
- ◆ Use preparation time to avoid the need to exclude.
 - a) while the coordinator cannot make partial exclusions, let the family know that anyone can take time out if things are too stressful. Reiterate anger and upset is to be expected and that it is okay. The conference has the right to set its own procedures to deal with this.
 - b) a family member or other person trusted by a young survivor can be assigned beforehand to take the child or young person for a break if

s/he is upset, or to allow free discussion among adults.

- c) deal with threats through family discussion or direct confrontation. Seek advice from stable senior members in the family. Arrange for police to stand by.
- d) take steps to deal with potential disruptions. What is behind the anger? Can old hostilities, guilt, grief and pain be dealt with before the conference?

Other Issues About Family Membership at the Conference

Parents, guardians, or other persons of key significance to the child or young person should participate even if they are in prison or in an institution. Try to have them attend by the institution's agreement or on a temporary leave of absence. A co-operative and reasonable approach is essential. The institution may not be able to release the persons in question, but their views should be obtained. If people cannot attend, find the most effective means for their views to be presented at the conference, for example:

- ◆ personal visit by the coordinator to secure the individual's views and then present them on the person's behalf;
- ◆ securing a statement through the social worker or classification officer (or any other person) who knows the person well and has his/her trust (this worker can be an information/advice giver only);
- ◆ telephone conference call during the family group conference. However, consider the incarcerated person's privacy and ability to participate. Some things are difficult to discuss through this medium. Consider the level of personal support available where the issues will raise pain, guilt and distress.
- ◆ Video or audio tape by the person to be shown or played at the FGC. This tape is owned by and will be returned to the person and after the FGC. The coordinator or worker bringing the tape to the FGC would sign a statement that s/he would undertake to return the tape to the person by a certain date and that the tape would only be played at the FGC. Such a tape should be considered hearsay and not used as court evidence against the individual.

Preparing All Family and Extended Family for the FGC

- ◆ The key strength of family decision-making is the involvement of all those who know and are committed to the survivor.
- ◆ Pre-conference consultation is the opportunity to lay the groundwork for a constructive conference. When members are well prepared, they cope better with painful issues and disputes and are able to make sound and safe plans. This includes helping each person anticipate how they might feel if certain issues are brought up at the FGC and how they might make others feel with what they have to say.
- ◆ The more extensive the consultation within the family group, the more family information and family options will be available to the conference.
- ◆ Make personal contact with family members, extending as widely as possible within the family group.
- ◆ Family members should be informed of the FGC process, and the reason they are being invited. They are important in the lives of their relatives who have been referred to the project and they have a right to express their views about what they believe needs to happen in order to keep all family members safe, and be involved in making decisions and plans to address the abuse that has been happening in the family.
- ◆ Be clear about why the referral was made; what the care, protection, and safety concerns have been outlined by the referring agency and need, to be addressed by the family group.
- ◆ With the exception of some investigating authorities and service providers who are invited only for the purpose of conveying information or advice required by the conference, all attenders including the referring agent will be party to the decisions, recommendations, and plans of the conference.
- ◆ Discuss the role of family members at the conference and suggest that they be prepared to set their own limits and consider how they can contribute to helping their family before the FGC. It is important that family members do not take on tasks that they can not really manage or have not carefully considered (e.g., agreeing to care for a child or agreeing to monitor an abuser).
- ◆ The coordinator may have to convince family members that what they have to say is important and that even if they are not able to do anything concrete to help their family members in need, their views and ideas about what kinds of

help/resources they believe their family needs will be of value.

- ◆ Emphasize the importance of family knowledge for sound, safe planning.
- ◆ Particular effort should be made to work through issues when estranged members of the family group will be attending.
- ◆ Let family members know that the focus of the meeting is on the future care and safety of all family members. The FGC is not about settling past family disputes, airing family secrets, laying blame, or hurling accusations. Help the family decide which issues they need to deal with or put aside in order to participate constructively in the FGC.
- ◆ Financial assistance to enable attendance at the conference can be made available by the referring agency to a family member when:
 - it is essential that the family member be present; and
 - the attendance of that family member can only be assured by providing some or all of the costs of attending.
- ◆ Check with the family, especially senior members, on how this conference should begin and end, how discussion should be conducted and difficulties addressed (e.g., prayer, usual family norms). Explore with this family its usual approach problem solving and how this might best fit with the FGC process.
- ◆ If family members are unable to or do not wish to attend, their views can be presented at the FGC by:
 - written statement
 - by the coordinator verbally on behalf of the family member
 - audiotape
 - videotape

The Views of a Child or Young Person

Consideration should be given to the wishes of the child, young person or other abused family members as far as the wishes can reasonably be determined. In the case of a minor, those wishes should be given weight, depending on age, maturity, and culture. As noted earlier, written consent of a child over 12 should be obtained as part of the referral.

It is the role of the coordinator to ensure that the child or young person's views are obtained and clearly presented at the conference. The coordinator must ensure that any child or young person attending a family group conference feels adequately supported.

The following tasks must be attended to whether or not the child or young person is at the conference:

Identifying a Support Person for the Child or Young Person

- ◆ Any other young person under 16 who plans to attend a FGC must nominate a support person to attend the conference with them.
- ◆ The selection of the person is subject to veto by the coordinator. There must be no doubt in the coordinator's mind that the support person is aligned with the abused person and that the chosen support person is capable of fulfilling this role (e.g., a trusted adult or relative rather than a school friend). (See role of support person, Appendix C).
- ◆ The coordinator must not be the support person for the abused person.
- ◆ The social worker or other person representing the referring agency is not appropriate. That person should be free to concentrate on the care and protection issue.
- ◆ Adolescents can sometimes assume an inappropriate degree of power at the FGC, and from their role as a member in the decision-making (e.g., they may believe that they have the final say in all decisions and therefore make the process of reaching decisions more difficult). This is not grounds for excluding them. This problem may be eliminated by careful preparation.

Finding a way to obtain the child or young person's wishes both before and during the conference

- ◆ In the case of a child under the age of 12 or any young person who will not be

attending the FGC, the coordinator would meet with the child to determine the best way to ensure his/her views will be presented at the FGC.

- written statement, letter, poem, or picture from the child
 - audio or video tape of child expressing their views
 - having a trusted adult or relative (support person) present the child's wishes
 - having reminders of the child present at the FGC (e.g., a photograph, an empty chair)
- ◆ When young people between the ages of 12 and 16 plan to attend the FGC it is important that the coordinator prepare them completely for what to expect and how to make sure their voices and their views are heard. This would involve meeting with the young person and their chosen support person to discuss the best strategy for presenting their concerns/wishes.
 - ◆ One useful idea is to have the young person write down what they would like to be able to say at the FGC. The support person or the coordinator can help with this, and either of them can then read these views at the FGC. This is often very powerful because presenting views in this way lends credibility to the words of the young person in the eyes of adult family members. It also forces the young person to think about their feelings and concerns in advance, and they generally take this task very seriously.
 - ◆ Do not give in to a young person's claim that they do not need a support person or that they do not need to prepare what they want to say at the conference. Keep encouraging until they see the importance of these preparations.
 - ◆ There may be some issues the young person would like to see addressed, but they do not feel they can safely raise these issues: "If I say that, he will kill me when we get home." The coordinator can help figure out a way to have these issues addressed safely (e.g., have the support person or a neutral family member raise these issues, have a guest speaker at the conference give information indirectly about the problem).
 - ◆ Several meetings may be needed to be sure that the child or young person's wishes are understood clearly by both the coordinator and the support person.
 - ◆ Plan for someone to be available to the children and young people after the FGC to deal with any left-over emotions or concerns. This may simply be a sleep over at grandma's or a special treat with an aunt, but it may require

formal de-briefing over the days or weeks following the FGC by someone who has close contact with the child or young person.

- ◆ It is essential that the views of children and young people be obtained in ways that do not make them think that the final decisions rest with them alone - except in a situation whereby they are clearly requesting protection from members of the family group and are willing for their views to be made known to Child Protection and/or police.

Other Considerations

- ◆ In the instance of survivors who are children or young people, particular effort should be made to ensure the attendance of parents, guardians, and usual care- givers.
- ◆ Where a conference will bring together parent and child, who have been separated for whatever reason, careful preparation is essential unless the situation is well resolved by all parties.

Views of Abused Adults in the Family or Those at Risk of Abuse

- ◆ Unless a plan keeps all family members safe, it does not keep anyone safe. If a Mother is being abused by her partner, her ability to protect and care for her children is diminished.
- ◆ It is crucial for the coordinator to develop strategies to ensure the views of adult survivors of abuse in the family are heard, especially if they are still at risk for further abuse.
- ◆ Give them as much information as possible about services/help available to them;
- ◆ All persons attending the conference who are known to have been abused by the perpetrator in question must have a support person attend the conference with them;
- ◆ Have them write down their views to be read by either the woman! abused adult or her support person at the FGC. If they are likely to be under criticism at the FGC, this strategy can help silence the critics since the woman can tell the family what life has been like for her and what help she would like. This

can also increase the level of support for the abused woman among members of the family group.

- ◆ Identify members of the family who know about the abuse that has been happening (e.g., someone who has witnessed the abuse or walked in just after an incident occurred). Prepare them to raise these concerns so that woman, young people, or other vulnerable family members do not have to bring information forward that may put them at risk of further abuse.
- ◆ Be creative in ensuring that all issues that need to be addressed are presented in a manner that does not jeopardize the future safety of any family member.

Preparing Abusers/Alleged Offenders

- ◆ Ensure the abuser is fully aware of the FGC process.
- ◆ Prepare the abuser for the details of the abuse that will be presented at the conference by the investigating authorities.
- ◆ Suggest that the abuser choose a support person to attend the FGC with him/her. The selection of this person is subject to veto by the coordinator. This person should be someone who the abuser has respect for and who will be able to help ensure the abuser's behaviour is in check at the FGC. This may be a comfort to the abuser who may be worried about losing control.
- ◆ Male abusers may resist having a "support" person but may be open to having someone who "can help you cool off if things get tense" or can "take you for a smoke break if you do get angry".
- ◆ Suggest that the abuser prepare a statement to read at the FGC (if they are wanting to take responsibility for their actions or find it hard to communicate their feelings verbally).
- ◆ Remind the abuser that the focus of the FGC is to develop a plan for the future care and safety of family members, not to lay blame, determine guilt or innocence, or hurl accusations.
- ◆ Provide information about treatment/services available in the community.

Support Persons

All children under the age of sixteen who will be attending the family group conference must choose a support person to attend with them.

Any other adult family members who have been a victim of abuse or are at risk of abuse will be strongly urged to choose a support person to go with them to the family group conference. If their abuser is to be present at the FGC, the abused persons must each have a support person.

The alleged offender will be encouraged to have a support person at the conference.

The coordinator will meet with the support person as part of the preparation process for the family group conference to ensure they are clear about their role at the conference and that they are willing and able to be the support person.

A meeting with the support person and the person they will be supporting is also helpful so that the coordinator can be sure that a positive rapport exists between the two individuals and that they are both clear about any issues/strategies they need to discuss with each other prior to the FGC.

A written copy of the "Role of Support Person" (Appendix B) is given to the support person.

The coordinator has the right to veto the choice of support person if there is a concern that he/she is not totally on side with the person who has chosen him/her or is not able to fill the role required (e.g., in the extreme, if the conference participants "gang up" on the person and claim that the abuse did not occur, the support person would be responsible for either taking the person from the room or for alerting the coordinator that the family does not believe that the reason for referral was a legitimate care and/or protection concern).

Role of Support Person

The support persons will provide emotional support to the person which they accompany to the family group conference. They will ensure that they are aware when tensions are running high and check with the person which they are supporting to see if s/he would like a break, and ask for the time needed.

If the person they are supporting is upset and needs to leave the room, the

support persons would leave with him/her and let the others at the meeting know how long they need to break, whether the person plans to return, etc.

Another role might be to raise issues that the individual whom they are supporting is not able to raise for fear of abusive repercussions but that he/she believe need to be raised.

Support persons are not responsible for facilitating the meeting during the Family deliberation time or for presenting the defence of the 'person whom they are supporting. While the support persons are not in the role of advocate, they are able to add their own perspectives and views.

Preparing Investigating Authorities

The coordinator decides who needs to attend to give information. The family must be fully informed about:

- the investigation and what was found;
- the referring agency's assessment and reasons for it;
- the body of expert knowledge which informs that assessment; and
- the sorts of actions which could meet the needs identified in the assessment.

Family should be made aware before the conference of all information relative to any assessments and investigations to be presented.

Check what information the referrer holds and who has been involved.

Contact other agencies and groups directly to decide the relevance of their information and how it might best be presented. Never assume that second-hand information is correct. Double check.

Ensure that each person who is to present information is well-prepared.

- ◆ The key is that they communicate respectfully with the family group.
- ◆ Ask that they prepare their presentation to the family in advance and offer to go over this with them as part of the preparation process.
- ◆ Suggest that they bring important documents/reports with them to refer to or to enable them to correctly answer questions of family members.

- ◆ Ensure that investigating authorities are prepared to read out the relevant wording from the Child Welfare Act or the Criminal Code to emphasize the seriousness of the matter. (Where the FGC is reconvened by request or for a planned review, the original grounds may need to be reviewed).
- ◆ The representative of the investigating and referring agencies carries a particular responsibility to be satisfied that the plan meets care, protection and safety requirements.
- ◆ Encourage them to take a non-prejudicial stance of giving clear, detailed, factual information (rather than manipulating the family to view the situation in a certain way or making value-laden assumptions).
- ◆ At the same time, the investigators must not withhold information, expectations or opinions that are crucial to the family's deliberations. If there are specific concerns that have to be incorporated into the family's plan, the family needs to be clear about them. For example, they need to state their intentions to apprehend a child if something does not happen, or their expectations that an alleged abuser can only have supervised access to a child or young person.
- ◆ Suggest that they use language that is "user friendly" and free of jargon.
- ◆ Ask that they arrive at least 15 minutes early for the FGC as a sign of respect for the family.
- ◆ Ensure that any equipment they need for their presentation (flip chart, etc.) is available on the day of the FGC.

Information About the Abuse and Resources Available to Families

The coordinator is to make sure that relevant information and advice is made available to the family conference to ensure the conference can carry out its functions.

Effective gathering of relevant information and advice is equally as important as effective gathering of the family group.

The coordinator will prepare a resource package for the family containing brochures and information about agencies and services available in the

community that the family group can include in their plan at the FGC if they wish. In the course of preparing for a family group conference family members, through discussions with the coordinator, may identify the need for information regarding specific services available or issues affecting this family. When topics or issues are identified, the option of having an information provider present is discussed and negotiated with the family. Family members, with the support and input of the coordinator, identify those areas where they wish to have more information to help them in their planning process.

The coordinator, in consultation with the family, decides who needs to attend the conference to give advice and to describe resources and services available. Such persons would be considered guest speakers and would not be party to other information about the family or to the decision-making portion of the FGC. Having guest speakers may also be a way of dealing with illiteracy of conference participants who would not benefit from written brochures/information.

Ensure that the conference has access to all the information it needs. For example, the conference may need to have access to knowledge and expertise in the areas of:

- drug and alcohol abuse: responses to treatment, recovery chances, etc.;
- sexual abuse: dynamics; typical reactions of victims, abusers, family members; counselling and treatment options; usual responses to treatment, etc.;
- failure-to-thrive: what does this mean; how can you tell; what happens;
- transition in care: what typically happens when a child moves to live with new care-givers; what's it like for the new (and former) care-givers; what helps; etc.;
- male violence: why does it happen; can anything be done;
- legal opinions: what is in the law that applies to the problem; what other options are there.

Keep the presentations relative to the cultural, gender, social and economic context in which the conference is occurring.

- use language the family understands;
- use examples and anecdotes that help to humanize the issue;
- avoid sexist, racist, and homophobic statements;

If information on certain programs is commonly requested or needed, video tapes may be an alternative means of presenting the material.

The conference may need to adjourn or make a limited plan with a short review while resource options are explored.

The better informed the conference, the more likely that a plan will be realistic and sustainable.

Role of Information Providers/Guest Speakers

Information providers are invited to share their expertise in a given area during the first stage of the family group conference so that the family can hear the information and have it fresh in their minds during their planning stage. The purpose of giving families this information is to ensure that they have all the information they need to make good decisions about the kind of help, support and resources they want for their family. Information providers may be asked to remain on hand after their presentations to answer any questions that might arise.

Information providers are a resource to the family but are not active participants in the family's planning. It is the role of the coordinator to ensure that family members receive the support necessary to deal with any issues that might arise as a result of information presented, and to provide an opportunity to debrief any concerns that might be triggered by this information.

The coordinator needs to prepare information providers for their role at the FGC. This would include giving them a hand out that clearly states their role (see Appendix B).

Consultation with the Community Panel

- ◆ The mandate of the community panel and the job description for panel members can be found in Appendix B.
- ◆ The coordinator should discuss with the community panel and the project directors or Project Management Team any dilemmas and decisions about:
 - who is family;
 - anyone who is to be excluded and why;
 - appropriate means of contacting this family group;
 - information about agencies/services available in the community that the family should be made aware of;
 - adequacy of information/advice givers, and the information that is to be

- given to the conference;
- safety issues to consider in preparing and holding the FGC.
- ◆ The coordinator must consult with the community panel at least once during the preparation for the FGC.
- ◆ This consultation should happen at least one week in advance of the conference to ensure that the coordinator has ample time to implement recommendations of the Panel.
- ◆ A minimum of three panel members should be present for each consultation.
- ◆ The coordinator will outline the details of the referral and the preparations s/he has made for the FGC using non-identifying information.
- ◆ A genogram (family tree) is often helpful to allow the panel to get a sense of the size and composition of the family, and to serve as a guide as the coordinator is presenting information about the family.

Setting up the Conference

In consultation with the family, the coordinator determines the date, time and place, the persons invited to attend, and the procedure of the family group conference. The family's wishes are followed, provided these are practical and consistent with the philosophy of the project. Within the project's philosophy and the fiscal limitations of the budget, the family group conference can, with the approval of the coordinator, set its own procedures.

Date and Time

It is important to ensure that the day and time of the conference meets the needs of family members. In many cases, family group conferences take place on weekends. The date and time has to also be negotiated with information providers and investigative authorities to ensure they will be available to attend the conference. It is also crucial to give all attendees sufficient notification of the date and time of the FGC to ensure they can arrange their schedules to attend.

Accommodation and Travel

The coordinator is responsible for making sure that persons who are invited are informed about the time, date and venue of the conference. Family members make an informed choice whether or not to attend, and will usually make their own arrangements for travel and accommodation.

Where assistance is sought, or financial constraint appears to be a significant barrier, assistance will be offered by the referring agency. Limits to this assistance will be negotiated in advance with referring agencies during the set up phase of the project. Each case will be decided on its merits after full consultation and assessment. Factors to consider are:

- ◆ importance of this person to the child, young person, or abused family member;
- ◆ importance to the family group process, because this person is:
 - a parent, guardian, or usual care-giver;
 - senior member, or other influential family member;
 - holder of important family information;
 - potential care provider; or
 - key support person.

The coordinator is responsible for ensuring travel and accommodation arrangements are in place for family members to enable them to attend the FGC.

This may include making sure all FGC participants have transportation to and from the conference.

If airline reservations are required, it is important that these details be attended to as early as possible in the preparation process to ensure the FGC does not have to be delayed while awaiting the arrival of family members.

Child Care

Make sure that FGC participants with young children have child care available for the day of the conference so they are free to participate fully in the deliberations. If family members require financial assistance for child care, this will be provided by the referring agency and arranged by the coordinator.

Venue

Features of a good venue are:

- large enough for the expected numbers of participants to be seated comfortably, usually in a circle;
- access to toilets;
- available for as long as necessary;
- space for time-out, for confidential discussions, and for a comfortable split during private family time;
- tea/coffee making facilities;
- reasonable access to transport, telephone, and meals or kitchen;
- sufficiently close to necessary back-up services or protection (e.g., project coordinator, police);
- should be a neutral venue where all family members feel comfortable.
- accessible for disabled or infirm participants.

Family homes generally do not make good venues as one side of the family, or particular family members may not feel comfortable, welcome, or safe. Also, in many traditional families, the woman of the house would feel compelled to care for the comfort needs of the family if the conference were to take place in her home.

Food/Supplies

Food is an important consideration in preparing for the FGC. Families have different preferences for types of food and this should be checked out by the coordinator when arranging meals/snacks. The coordinator consults with the family as to what they would like to eat on the day of the conference if the conference is likely to extend through a normal meal time (generally lunch). The coordinator makes arrangements and preparations for this meal. S/he also ensures that tea, coffee and other refreshments as well as supplies such as cups, plates eating utensils, coffee pot, kettle are available.

Translation

If translators will be needed due to a language barrier or to accommodate hearing impaired participants, ensure this is arranged.

- translator needs to be someone with whom the family will feel comfortable;
- weigh benefits and problems of using translators who are family members;
- translators need to be prepared for the purpose and process of the FGC and for their role at the conference.

Seating

The family group conference is a formal meeting but is designed to promote discussion and resolution between all participants. Rows of chairs and a head table are not appropriate. Seating should be circular and inclusive. There must be ample seating with no tables or other objects between the participants.

Materials

A white or chalk board or flip chart may be useful but should not intrude. Be sure that paper (and flip chart paper) and writing utensils (including markers) are available for family members.

A videotape machine or cassette tape player may need to be made available to families (e.g., a family member may send a recorded message to the conference).

Written Notice

Let people know in good time (preferably within the week but no more than two weeks) once the time, date and place are settled. Address invitations to all potential participants. Specifically include partners, siblings, and the survivors (child, young person, or adult) to ensure they understand that they are invited. Use plain envelopes when sending out notices so as not to identify the nature of the contents to neighbours, etc. This is especially important in rural areas with shared post offices/boxes. Make sure that professionals who will be presenting information are also notified in writing of the time and place.

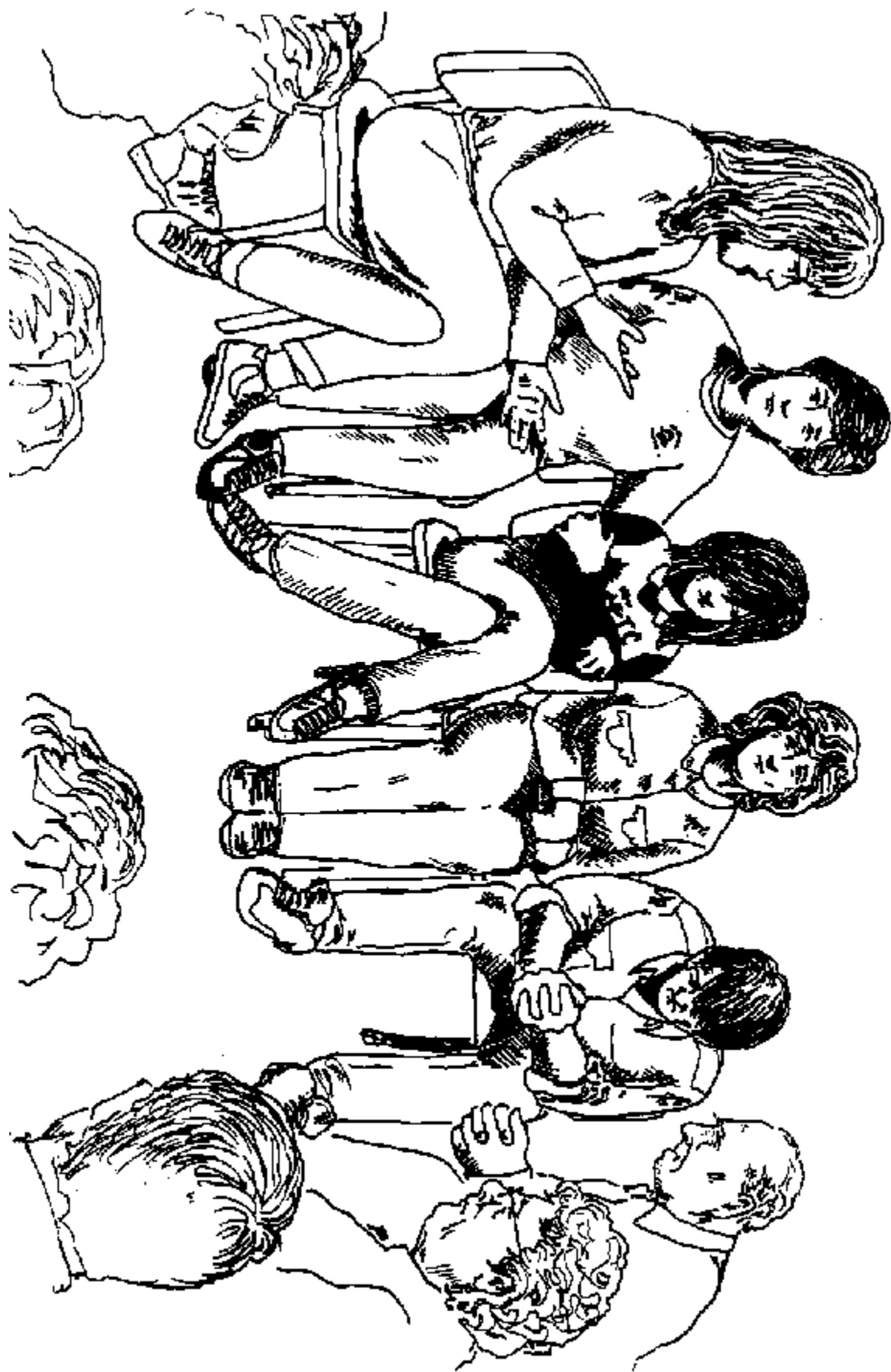
Checklist

It is helpful for a coordinator to have a checklist to ensure that all preparations have been completed for the FGC (see Appendix D).

Last Minute Preparations

The coordinator often has to reassure family members and deal with last minute fears and anxieties about the conference in the last few days before the FGC. These fears often come in the form of people calling to cancel their attendance. A call around to family members who in the coordinator's view are most likely to be anxious may help avoid this panic. Generally, though, the 2-3 days preceding the FGC are hectic for the coordinator.

NOTE: When a coordinator seriously believes that proceeding to conference would be unhelpful for the abused person, s/he has the right to veto and can halt the process at any time.



CHAPTER 5

HOLDING THE CONFERENCE

Objectives

The FGC is (a) to consider the care and protection matters regarding the child or young person and/or safety needs of adult survivors and (b) to make decisions, recommendations, and plans to address any of these needs.

Overall Process

The FGC may regulate its own procedures within the overall philosophy and guidelines for the project.

- ◆ A family group conference begins when the invited members come together at the time, date, and venue of which they have been formally notified.
- ◆ The family participants are party to the decisions, recommendations, and plans formulated at the conference.
- ◆ The conference must include at least one support person who keeps as a priority the specific care and protection concern of the abused individual. The support person may vote in any situation where a vote is taken, and is party to the decisions, recommendations, and plans formulated by the FGC. All young people under the age of 16 are expected to have a support person attend the FGC with them. Any adults at risk of abuse, or an abuser, may also have a support person present.
- ◆ The coordinator must not be the bearer of the care and protection concern, nor is s/he the advocate for the abused person during the conference itself. The coordinator is the facilitator and convenor of the process. The coordinator is, however, a fully entitled member of the conference and is party to the decisions, recommendations, and plans formulated by the FGC.
- ◆ A FGC ends when either:
 - a set of decisions, recommendations, and plans for carrying out the decisions and monitoring the results are agreed; or
 - the coordinator formally declares that no agreement is possible.

- ◆ All adjournments and sub-group meetings between the first meeting and the decisions, recommendations and plans being formulated (or non-agreement declared), are part of the same FGC.
- ◆ If a coordinator reconvenes a FGC or a review conference, it is a new FGC, even if the decision of this conference is to reaffirm decisions, recommendations and plans made previously. In the case of a demonstration project where the coordinator is no longer available at the end of the project, it is the responsibility of the staff of the referring agency to ensure plans are reviewed according to the guidelines agreed upon at the FGC.
- ◆ The decisions, recommendations and plans made at the FGC stand regardless of subsequent actions of the participants. If participants declare later that they did not agree, the FGC can be reconvened by the coordinator so that they can advise the conference of the reasons for their non-agreement. In the meantime, the plan previously made stands. This includes conferences where invited members did not attend but later expressed disagreement with the outcome.
- ◆ The coordinator must explain to all FGC participants (e.g., family members, information providers, translators, etc.) the expectations and limitations surrounding confidentiality of the family and protection of the abused person(s).
 - no publication (written or verbally) is to be made of the proceedings of the conference, except in the case of an observer's research notes when the family has consented to participate in research on family group conferencing;
 - written report of the decisions, plans and recommendations goes to all participants at the conference (that is the family group members, the investigating authorities, the referring agency, but only those information providers who are included in the plan and require a copy of it);
 - the community panel is expected to maintain confidentiality with respect to all knowledge they have about individuals and families except in situations where they would, as specified in the Child Welfare Act, be required to report child abuse which they had reason to believe had not already been reported.

Guidelines for the FGC

The following phases of the conference are addressed separately. The three phases after formal welcome, acknowledgements and introductions have been made are:

- Phase 1: Information and advice giving to ensure the family has all the correct, detailed information they need to enable them to develop a good plan;
- Phase 2: Private family deliberations; and
- Phase 3: Negotiating a Plan (if there is agreement) and recording agreed decisions.

Introductions

- ◆ Begin according to any protocols agreed with this family (e.g., prayer, acknowledgment of elders or family guests);
- ◆ Welcome, appreciations and acknowledgments; (i.e., strengths of the family, participants from out of town);
- ◆ Make sure that everyone present introduces themselves clearly to everyone else, and identifies their connection with this matter (remember, some of the participants may not have met before or seen each other for some time for a variety of reasons);
- ◆ Go over housekeeping items - breaks, washrooms, lunch, etc.;
- ◆ Establish basic ground rules for the FGC:
 - no violence or abusive language;
 - do not interrupt when others are speaking, it is important that the views of all participants are heard;
- ◆ Discuss issues of confidentiality and protection, and special issues such as translation;
- ◆ Review the purpose and process of the conference;

- ◆ Acknowledge the inevitability of some painful issues and some ways they can be dealt with (separate meeting rooms, adjournments, take a walk, etc.);
- ◆ Any research/evaluation components of the FGC process (e.g., observation of the FGC, evaluation forms);

Phase 1: Information and Advice Giving

Objective:

To ensure that relevant information and advice is made available to the family group conference so that participants can carry out their functions in considering and resolving care and protection issues of the abused persons.

Guidelines:

- ◆ Clearly state the grounds for the referral.
- ◆ Invite the referring agency representative(s) to present their information and basis for their concern. They must be ready to say to the family that they believe the abused person is in need of care or protection and why they believe this.
- ◆ Ensure that investigating authorities read out the relevant wording from the Child Welfare Act or the Criminal Code to emphasize the seriousness of the matter. (Where the FGC is reconvened by request or for a planned review, the original grounds may need to be gone over again).
- ◆ The family may require a brief break after hearing the presentations of the investigating authorities.
- ◆ Invite others to present and discuss their information (both information and advice givers and family). If a guest speaker has been invited, s/he would be asked to present to the family at this time. Give everyone a chance to comment. Encourage family to ask questions and/or state what they know.
- ◆ The views of absent or excluded family members are presented at this time.
- ◆ Family members who have prepared personal statements to present at the FGC are invited to share them.

- ◆ When there seems to be no more questions, the conference is moving toward the Private Family Deliberations Phase. Check with participants.
- ◆ Judge whether the questions being asked or the manner of the conference indicates agreement that there is a care or protection issue to be addressed. If this is not clear, identify it as an issue to be addressed by the family group during their private deliberations.
- ◆ Have family members choose someone to record decisions during the private family time.
- ◆ Have elements to be included in the plan (that family members and investigating authorities have already raised during the preparation for the FGC) listed by headings on flip chart or in some written form. It helps to have a visual guide to help families get started and stay focused during their decision-making time. Be sensitive to the possibility of family members being illiterate or vision impaired. Read out loud items on flip charts.

Presentation of Information:

- ◆ Some people take in information best by reading, others by listening; written, oral, and taped presentations can be used.
- ◆ Complicated matters may need to be presented in written form. Be aware that some people attending the conference may not read and may not understand English or may have difficulty expressing emotional matters in other than their first language.
- ◆ Be aware that material distributed in the conference in writing may be impossible to get back. Make sure that written material is distributed only with the permission of the author unless those materials are already public (e.g., descriptions of service available). While the family needs to know what has been written about them, and should have a right to this information, there is a need for care with information and how it is used. Inform the family of undertakings made to return materials to their authors (e.g., tapes by inmates who cannot attend the FGC).

Phase 2: Private Family Deliberations

Objective:

To give the family group the opportunity and privacy to work out its own plan for stopping the abuse.

Process:

- ◆ No non-family member, with the exception of a translator, is entitled to be present during the private family deliberations held among members of the family group unless those members request any such person to be present with the following exceptions:
 - If the coordinator believes it would be unsafe for family members to be in the room alone, the coordinator may stay. This should only be done in exceptional circumstances and as soon as the coordinator can safely leave, s/he should do so. The coordinator is expected to leave.
 - If any abused person's chosen support person is a non-family member, s/he will stay in the room.
- ◆ The definition of who is family is determined by the family and may include people such as a close friend or religious leader.

Guidelines:

- ◆ Private family time is key to this model. The coordinator is expected to leave with all other non-family members.
- ◆ It is not acceptable to offer to stay. If asked to stay, the coordinator and other participants should gently but firmly decline and leave.
- ◆ Make it clear that anyone the family wishes will rejoin them at their request. Any subsequent request to join the family must be followed but must be at the family's initiative.
- ◆ Non-family members and care-givers who have been brought by family members should be encouraged to allow family to have sometime alone.
- ◆ Ideally, referring agent(s) and/or public authorities will wait with the coordinator in an alternate space during the family deliberations so they can be available to family for questions and to negotiate approval of the plan in the last phase of the FGC.
- ◆ The private time with the family begins when it is clear that the family group

members feel they have all the information they need. Check with each member individually. They need to know:

- that time alone at any stage is their right;
 - that all workers and non-family members except as otherwise stated are expected to leave and will not return unless asked;
 - that family members can have time-out and return;
 - that it is a time for family to discuss in private all the issues raised and to brainstorm ideas to address these;
 - that they have the right to agree or disagree that a care and protection problem exists;
 - that the coordinator is available and that other participants can be made available;
 - that the coordinator will help turn the ideas into a specific plan if necessary.
- ◆ Check that family is clear about any tasks, and the members have everything that they need.
 - ◆ Express confidence in the ability of this family to come up with ideas that will fit this problem well.
 - ◆ While the family is alone, the coordinator can use the opportunity for feedback and debriefing of referring agency and information and advice givers. The time at conferences can help the professionals become acquainted and better able to work together after the conference.
 - ◆ Avoid interruptions: the family will call everyone back when they are ready. The coordinator will tactfully check in with the family periodically to ensure the participants are focused and see if they need clarification/additional information.

Phase 3: Negotiating a Plan

Objective:

To turn the family group's ideas and wishes into a specific plan.

Overall Process:

After the family has formulated their plan, they call back in the coordinator to review it with them and, where necessary, to pull it together into a clear and do-

able plan of action. Activities at this phase include the following:

1. Agreement that a care and protection issue exists;
2. Developing the plan;
3. Ensuring clear elements of the plan and a system of monitoring and follow-up;
4. Securing agreement of the family group and the public authorities to the plan; and
5. Coordinator veto, if necessary.

1. Agreement that a care and protection issue exists:

- ◆ If agreement was not evident in the first phase, the coordinator must check that the conference agrees that a care and protection issue exists. A formal statement is not required.
- ◆ Where agreed plans cannot be formulated, the coordinator must identify whether the disagreement is about the existence of a care and protection concern, or about the means to address it. This must be recorded by the coordinator.
- ◆ When the matter of agreement seems in doubt, check with each person individually.
- ◆ Accepting the need for care and protection does not necessarily mean that any particular person acted or failed to act in any particular way; i.e., it is not an admission of culpability in the legal sense since the FGC is not a legal proceeding to find guilt. It is about whether or not the survivor of the abuse has a need. Who might or might not be responsible may affect the decisions and plans made.

2. Developing the plan:

- ◆ At this stage, the coordinator works to guide the making of the plan, ensuring a good fit between the problem and the plan.

- ◆ Where the conference considers that the survivor is in need of care or protection, one function of the conference is to make such decisions, recommendations and plans as it thinks desirable to address the problem, in keeping with the philosophy and principles of the project and "bottom line" expectations previously identified by the referring agent.
- ◆ The family group member who was designated as note taker usually reads out the family's plan. Often there will be discussion and negotiation after each item in the plan is presented.
- ◆ This negotiation usually takes place initially with the coordinator, and once all details are included, the plan is presented to the investigating authorities/referring agent for approval.
- ◆ The plan and recommendations must include a method of monitoring the carrying out of the plan, for reviewing the plan, and for monitoring the safety of the survivor.
- ◆ It is the responsibility of the coordinator to ensure that the monitoring plan and plans for review are carried out even though the tasks may be delegated to others. While it is desirable for the plan to include the coordinator as overseeing the monitoring, the plan should not build in the coordinator as the person to carry out elements of the plan (e.g., providing counselling).
- ◆ In the case of a time limited demonstration project it may not be possible for the coordinator to be involved with monitoring and reviewing plans on an ongoing basis. The referring agent/case worker would then be the appropriate person to take on this responsibility. Family members may take on roles to share this responsibility (i.e., agreeing to informally monitor how the plan is working regularly, or helping to set up review meetings).
- ◆ It is the responsibility of the coordinator to ensure that a written record is made of the decisions, recommendations, plans and review mechanisms of the conference.
- ◆ In the case of children or young people, the plan must state where the survivor is to live, with whom, and for how long.
- ◆ The plan must be detailed and specific, stating precisely the tasks to be done, responsibilities to be undertaken, by whom and when. For example, Young person X will visit with Auntie and Uncle Y every Saturday for 4 hours. Uncle Y agreed to provide transportation to and from these visits. If a visit has to be

changed or cancelled Auntie Y will call Mom by Friday to rearrange the visit."

- ◆ The wording of the plan should be agreed upon at the conference and not subsequently altered without the agreement of all who attend. Suggest that the family use contingency plans to avoid the likelihood of the plan having to be altered.
- ◆ Changes to the plan can only be made at a review meeting or a reconvened family group conference or, on minor issues, by a system of consensus where every participant is given a chance to endorse a change in writing or by phone (in cases where travel is involved to bring the participants together).

Guidelines:

- ◆ Guide the conference to formulate a plan which is comprehensive and which adequately addresses the survivor's need for care and protection. The plan needs to be specific and workable. It must specify how it will be put into practice and how this will be reviewed.
- ◆ Decide together on the overall goal(s) and on the elements needed for care and safety. Build in services and resources to achieve these.
- ◆ Build around the family's ideas.
- ◆ The conference may need to adjourn while options are explored.
- ◆ Invite everyone to question the plan until it is satisfactory and clear to everyone.
- ◆ Have a checklist to be sure that nothing is forgotten and refer back to the concerns listed on the flip chart/board.

3. Elements of the plan and system of monitoring and follow-up:

- ◆ Look ahead; what is the plan to achieve overall?
- ◆ A good plan fits the age of the survivor and the circumstances requiring intervention.
- ◆ The elements of the plan must fit together logically. The care and protection arrangements must link sensibly with the plans for support, monitoring, and

review. The plan is about care, protection, safety, and well-being of all family members and must focus on these issues.

Safety elements

- ◆ Monitoring the situation of all family members at risk of abuse (this includes children, women, and other adult family members)
 - Are these people safe now? What active checks need to be made? How?
- ◆ Safety net
 - Who will notice if the survivor(s) is okay? How are these people to be linked together? Who will be contacted if the plan is not working. (The higher the risk, the tighter the net).

"I will drop by on Friday evenings and if X has been drinking you will come to my house with me".

- ◆ Future Safety
 - What needs to change before those family members who have been abused or are at risk of abuse can be safe in the future? What can be done to facilitate that change?
- ◆ Services and Resources
 - What services/resources are available locally or need to be developed?

Protection Elements for Adult Survivors of Abuse

- ◆ Information about peace bonds, shelters, etc., will be available; and families will be informed about the agencies and help that are available to them if they feel unsafe at home.
- ◆ The family group conference will not be used in place of laying criminal charges against the person who is being abusive and/or violent.
- ◆ Information about the issues facing survivors of abuse can be outlined at the start of the family group conference by a person from the community who works with survivors of abuse. This will make sure that all family members have correct information and a better understanding of the issues facing those

who have been abused when making decisions and plans.

- ◆ Plans will need to include clear direction for survivors of abuse about exactly what they will do if further abuse occurs or if they are feeling unsafe (e.g., who they can call, who will be available to respond to a crisis situation).

Care and protection elements for children or young people

- ◆ How will the child/young person's need for care be met in this plan?
- ◆ Where will the child/young person live and with whom?
 - Is this a change?
- ◆ Legal Responsibilities
 - Who has legal guardianship? custody? access?
- ◆ Assessing the care-giver
 - Is the child or young person safe now? What can be done, and by whom, to be sure?
- ◆ Access
 - Is someone a real threat to the child or young person? How shall the contact between them be managed or avoided?
- ◆ Sustaining the Care-giver
 - What will make this placement work?
 - What/who needs to be supported and strengthened; and
 - What needs to change?
- ◆ Keeping Family Links
 - Which family or families is this child/young person a part of?
 - How can they keep in touch?
- ◆ Future Care
 - What needs to change to give the child/young person secure care in the

future? For example, what is needed to stabilize this care giving arrangement; to re-establish usual care-givers; to build a new family; to maintain cultural identity?

◆ Services and Resources

- What services/resources are available locally or need to be developed?

Contingency plans

Contingency plans make the plan more flexible. They avoid the need to reconvene! or to change plans without full involvement of the family group. Think of likely snags, and encourage the family to do the same, and plan for them.

"What if this child goes to live with this family member and the placement does not work? What will happen next?"

"What if my abusive husband shows up at my door in the middle of the night?"

Monitoring

Provisions must be made in the plan for monitoring the overall plan. Family members can have a say about whom they would prefer to have doing the monitoring. Generally the monitoring is done by a combination of family members and public authorities. The plan should detail by whom, how, and how often monitoring will take place. For example, a Grandma may agree to call all key family members once a week to see if everyone is doing what they agreed to in the plan and then contact the Social Worker to report on how the plan is progressing.

Review

How often/where will review meetings be held?

Who will attend these meetings?

What will be taken as evidence that the plan is working? Not working?

It is a good idea to schedule the first review meeting at the FGC and record the date, place and time in the plan.

Recording

The plan should be written-up in rough draft by the coordinator in front of everyone and changed and corrected as it develops. In many instances the notes of the family group recorder can be used as the basis of the plan.

4. Securing agreement of the family group and the public authorities to the plan

- ◆ If the plan is to work, it needs the real commitment of family and public authorities.
- ◆ Check the strength of agreement, allowing uncertainty, doubt and disagreement to emerge.
- ◆ If agreement seems uncertain, seek each person's verbal agreement, or ask each person to sign the agreement.
- ◆ Allow time to negotiate and debate points of difficulty. Bring in resource people for further information or advice.
- ◆ If agreement cannot be reached, decide whether to adjourn or to declare no agreement possible.
- ◆ Take all necessary steps to ensure that plans are realistic and are likely to be accepted by the referring persons and organizations:
- ◆ Seek the approval of the plan by investigating authorities before the FGC ends.
- ◆ This approval can occur;
 - If the referring agent is still available to the family group conference during the negotiating of the plan;
 - If the referring agent has clear authority to approve plans;
 - If authorities agree with the plan from a care, protection and safety perspective;
 - If the cost associated with the plan is within the limits of financial resourcing available for plans of family group conferences.
- ◆ If uncertainties exist, referring agents can phone their supervisors or

appropriate service agencies to seek necessary information, authorization or clarification.

5. Coordinator veto

- ◆ The coordinator may disagree with the decisions, recommendations and plans. It is expected that this will occur rarely. The chances of this occurring can be minimized through:
 - careful screening of referrals;
 - good preparation for the conference;
 - careful questioning as the elements of the plan are developed; and, if necessary, recalling information and advice givers to challenge elements of the plan.

- ◆ It is expected that the coordinator would only veto a plan when:
 - there is no representative of the referring agency or the representative is unable or unwilling to veto the plan themselves (in a case where it is necessary);
 - the plan would leave the survivor in a situation in which there is significant risk of harm; or
 - the plan would breach the philosophy of the project in avoidable ways, (e.g., the child/young person will be cared for by strangers when options within the family are available or have not been explored).
 - It may be better to develop a tentative plan, with a short review period and careful contingency plans.



CHAPTER 6

AFTER THE CONFERENCE

Objectives

To ensure that the family group's plan receives formal approval by the investigating authorities. If approved, to ensure appropriate monitoring and review measures are in place to oversee implementation of the plan, and to ensure those people responsible for implementation and monitoring of the plan are clear about their roles and responsibilities. Where the plan is not approved or implemented, to reconvene the FGC or to work out an alternative means to allow the family group to have input into decision-making.

Notification of Plan

- ◆ The coordinator must make sure that a written record of the decisions, recommendations and plans, including the mechanisms for monitoring and review, is made.
- ◆ This written record must be given or sent within 5 working days to:
 - the survivor (child or adult);
 - in the case of child survivors, every person who is a parent or guardian of the child or young person, or who has the care of that child or young person;
 - legal counsel or other barrister or lawyer representing the survivor;
 - all family members and support people in attendance at the FGC unless otherwise directed by the conference;
 - any other person who will be affected by the plan;
 - any referring person(s) or public authorities responsible for ensuring the safety of family members;
 - the project directors/principal investigators;
 - any other person or body as directed by the family group conference.
- ◆ The community panel should be kept informed of the FGC plans and issues around their implementation.
- ◆ In the case of child survivors, the coordinator will include in the plan a list of all persons who attended which identifies their relationship with the child/young person.

- ◆ When sending out the plan, it is also helpful if the coordinator includes a list of addresses and phone numbers of all those in attendance at the FGC, particularly those who are involved in the plan in any capacity.

Approval/Resourcing of Plan

Whenever possible, the coordinator and referring agencies should give an immediate response to the family regarding whether or not their plan is acceptable. At the end of the conference or immediately after the conference, the coordinator presents the plan for formal approval by the investigating authorities (e.g., Child Welfare, Parole, police). Approval of the plan or rejection of the plan should be received in writing. In the latter instance, the reasons for rejection should be clearly outlined by the investigating authorities. When portions of the plan cannot be approved immediately because they exceed the agreed upon maximum expenditures for approval by the front-line worker, requests for resources in excess of these limits will be submitted in writing to the referring agency. Protocols for response time to these requests, and for guidelines for approval and resourcing plans should be negotiated during the set up of the project/family group conferencing service.

Review of Plan

- ◆ An essential element of a plan developed at an FGC is the set of procedures for how the plan will be reviewed. The date, time, venue and specific means of carrying out the review, will be decided at the FGC and will be included in the written plan which is sent out to all who attend the conference.
- ◆ The role and involvement of the coordinator in reviewing plans will differ depending on whether family group conferencing is being done as a pilot project or if it is part of the regular service delivery system in a community.
 - If family group conferences are being done as a pilot, a coordinator may not be available to initiate/facilitate the review process given the short-term nature of projects. In this case, responsibility for ensuring plans are reviewed as documented in the plan of the FGC would lie with the referring agency.
 - If family group conferencing is part of the community's service delivery system, the coordinator may be assigned a clear role in reviews (i.e., the

coordinator will initiate reviews of plans of FGCs at six-month intervals).

- ◆ Preferably the review will involve a follow-up meeting to review the content of the plan and a consideration of how appropriate and effective the plan was. It should also involve a review of what tasks were set, who agreed to carry out those tasks, how and when they were meant to be carried out. It is important that attention be given to those tasks that were carried out and not only to focus on reviewing things that went wrong. In the latter case, attention should be paid, without seeking to blame anyone, to answering the following questions:
 - Was it the right plan?
 - Is the plan still relevant?
 - If so, why didn't it work the first time?
 - What needs to happen so that it will work now?
 - Who needs to be involved to ensure it works this time?
 - If it was the wrong plan, what needs to be done?
 - By whom? How? By when?
- ◆ When meeting in person at a review conference is not possible for some or all members, the review may be made by telephone consultation, written comment or other creative means.
- ◆ It is important that everyone at the initial FGC have an opportunity to participate in the review, unless a sub-group of the family has been appointed to this role as part of the family's plan at the FGC.
- ◆ At the FGC a family member may take on the role of ensuring that reviews take place according to the guidelines of the plan. This person is accountable to the referring worker and the family members.
- ◆ Authorities responsible for on-going case management and for resourcing the plan of the FGC would also attend.
- ◆ The decision that no further review is required can only be made when everyone agrees that the survivor is no longer in need of care or protection.
- ◆ Regardless of the FGC decision, the coordinator may, on his or her own initiative, or at the initiative of the referring person(s) or any other participant at the FGC, initiate a review at any time.
- ◆ In the case of child survivors where the plan involves a change of care-givers,

there should be at least one review to ensure that the transition has occurred satisfactorily and the change is meeting the child/young person's needs.

- ◆ In cases where wardship is involved and/or where another court has been involved, all decisions, plans and reviews are subject to review by the relevant bodies.

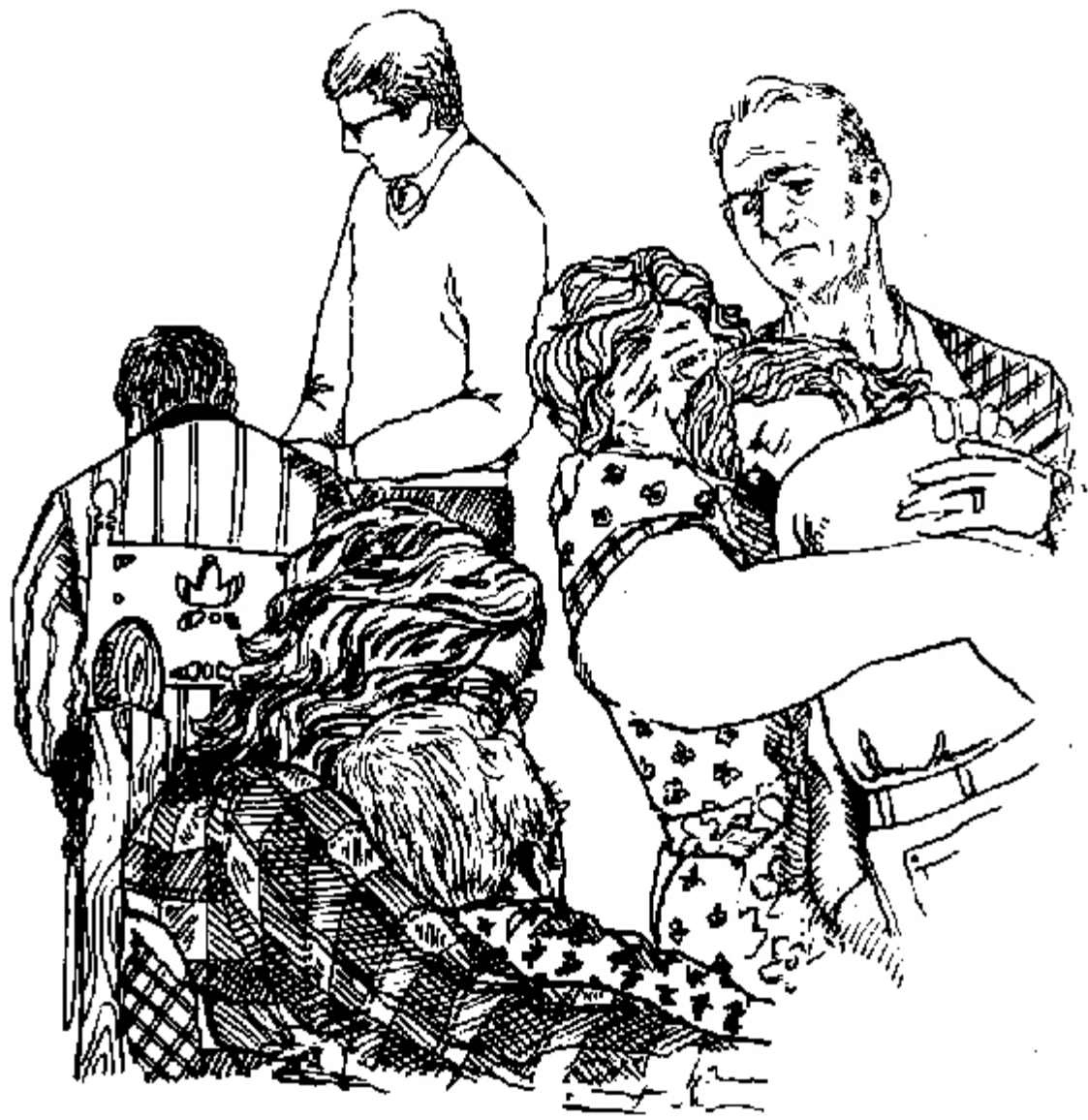
Suitable Time Frames for Reviews

- ◆ Match the review time to the situation. Consider:
 - court dates;
 - age of child survivor;
 - stability of arrangements; and
 - degree of risk.

Closure of Case

- ◆ A decision to close a case should be made with a focus on survivors of abuse and their well being.
- ◆ This is a critical judgment. In the case of a coordinator recommending closure, or no further follow-up, competent advice should be sought from the project administration and the community panel.
- ◆ In some instances, the referring worker may want to abandon including the family and their input at the first sign of problems. Coordinators will continue to give the message that the family should continue to be consulted unless there are clear reasons presented which would endanger the victims/survivors if this was done.
- ◆ Referring agencies will sometimes need to be reminded that families, like professionals, need to be allowed to learn from their mistakes and should not be expected to come up with a plan that will forever solve all the problems in the family as the result of a single meeting. Despite this, some workers will seek information that the "model does not work" and will want to go back to making decisions without including the family. Others will continue to search for ways to include the family in making whatever decisions have to be made.
- ◆ Situations suitable for case closure are characterized by:
 - long periods without significant incident;

- care arrangements are stable;
 - family is self-sustaining, well linked to the extended family group and other supports;
 - legal aspects of care arrangements are satisfactorily resolved (i.e., guardianship, custody, access, are all established and functional);
 - child or young person knows how/where to seek help if problems arise in the future and it is likely s/he will do this; and
 - needed services are in place and people are participating in them.
- ◆ A few cases may not be suitable for closure for some years. These cases typically involve:
- ◆ small, or otherwise vulnerable children or young persons or dependent adults;
 - ◆ significantly poor care giving or risk of abuse which does not warrant a change of care-giver but which could escalate dangerously without steady support for the family and regular monitoring of the child or young person's wellbeing; or
 - ◆ periodic checks needed to make sure that adequate support is in place.



CHAPTER 7

SAMPLE FAMILY GROUP PLAN

Introduction to the Family

The following sample family plan is a composite of a number of referrals received by the Family Group Decision-Making Project. All names and details of the plan have been altered for reasons of confidentiality.

This family consists of a Father (John), a Mother (Mary), and two daughters ages 14 (Donna) and 13 (Kim). The family was referred to the Family Group Decision-Making Project by Child Protection. The teacher of the 14 year old reported that this young person had been physically assaulted by her father. The police and Child Protection assessed the situation. Charges were not laid as the family did not wish to lay a charge and family members were not willing to testify against their father. Child Protection advised that a serious care and protection concern existed. The father agreed to leave the home rather than have the children placed in foster care. A referral was made to the Family Group Decision-Making Project to ensure that long-term plans would be developed to keep all family members safe.

The father in this family was an alcoholic and had a criminal record comprised mainly of assault offenses.

The family had split up and reunited several times in the past. The mom in the family had a good relationship with her daughters and clearly had their respect. The mother and both daughters were all victims of the father's physical, verbal, and emotional abuse and incidents of violence were frequent. In spite of his abusive behaviour this man expressed remorse for his actions and was willing to seek help to stop the abuse. Both children were afraid of their father when he was drinking, ashamed to bring friends home, and worried about their family's future.

The family was fairly isolated from extended family members geographically but was willing to involve them in the FGC. On the day of the conference, in addition to all immediate family members, 2 of the mother's sisters, a brother-in-law, one of the mother's brothers, a cousin, one of the father's brothers, and a neighbour/family friend attended.

Family Plan

Violence in the Home

John has not been residing in the home since the incident which led to this family group conference. The family agreed that this situation will continue until he has received treatment for his alcoholism and his violent behaviour, It was further decided that before John can return home, a review meeting will be held with the family and the Child Protection Worker to determine if this would be safe for all family members. John will continue to stay with his brother until he is able to find a suitable place of his own.

John will be permitted to visit with his family. All family members agreed, however, that if John arrives at the home of Mary and the children under the influence of alcohol, the following steps will be taken:

- 1) The locks on the house will be changed and the door will be kept locked at all times. John will not be permitted in when drunk.
- 2) If John continues to try to enter the house, or becomes violent in any way, his brother Jim will be called to help. If this is unsuccessful or if Jim cannot be reached, the police will be called.
- 3) If such an incident occurs, the result will be a period of time (to be decided upon by Family and Child Protection as part of the monitoring process) where there will be less contact between John and the children.
- 4) The other family members present suggested that Mary and the children call them for support if an incident of this nature occurs again. They further offered to have Mary and/or the children come stay with them overnight if they are feeling unsafe.
- 5) The family also agreed that if further violence occurs, John will be the one removed from the home rather than the children. John agreed with this plan.

Alcohol Abuse

John agreed to begin attending A.A. He agreed to call and find out where the nearest meetings to him are held and to arrange transportation to and from meetings. Child Protection agreed to assist John with transportation costs to enable him to attend meetings when he has no other alternative. John agreed to have this in place and attend his first meeting within one week of the FGC.

Counselling

Mary requested that she be referred for counselling to deal with the abuse she has suffered. John agreed to attend an anger management group. The Child Protection worker agreed to arrange these referrals and pay any associated costs.

Both daughters will begin regular counselling with the school guidance counsellor.

The family may wish to attend family counselling once John is alcohol free and family members have had a chance to heal separately. Family counselling will be discussed further at the first meeting to review this plan.

Appropriate Guidelines/Limits for Young People in the Family

All family members expressed concern that John is over protective of and unreasonable in his expectations of his daughters. He agreed to follow the guidelines outlined below which were agreed upon by family members with regard to rules for the girls.

- 1) Curfew for Donna and Kim will be 11:30 pm on weekends. John agreed not to go looking for the girls prior to this time and will allow them freedom to be with their friends. If the young people stay out past their curfew they will be grounded the following weekend.
- 2) Donna and Kim will each be allowed two phone calls per night at 15 minutes per call. John will not interfere with these calls or dictate to whom the children can speak to on the phone.
- 3) Donna will be allowed to date providing at least one parent has met the young man. She will abide by her curfew when on a date. Donna agreed not to lie about her whereabouts or whom she is with. Kim will be allowed to date once she reaches the age of fourteen.

- 4) Mary indicated that she would like their children to be able to bring their friends to the house so that she can get to know them. Family members all agreed that this would be more possible if the children do not have to worry about whether John is drunk or what he may say or do while they are in the house. It was acknowledged that it would be difficult for John to stop some of his inappropriate parenting without support. He agreed that when he becomes upset or concerned about something he has heard about one of the children, he will call his brother-in-law George to first discuss the problem and figure out the best way to handle it before confronting Mary or the children with anger.

Family Outings

The family indicated that they would like to begin having family outings at least twice monthly to relax and have fun together without alcohol. Suggestions for outings included movies, hockey games, and visiting relatives. A maximum of \$100.00 per month will be made available to the family by child protection to make these outings possible as the family is now living on Social Assistance.

Monitoring

The family agreed that their neighbour and close friend Martha will monitor the plan and report to the Child Protection worker every two weeks as to how things are going.

Review

The plan will be reviewed every two months. Review meetings will be arranged by the Child Protection Worker and all those in attendance at the FGC will be invited. Mary's sister Emma agreed to act as a contact person for the Child Protection Worker and inform all family members of upcoming review meetings. The first review meeting will be at the home of Martha Lake on the first Friday in March.

** A list of those in attendance at the FGC with addresses and phone numbers would be attached to the plan.

OTHER PUBLICATIONS

Burford, G., & Pennell, J. (1995). Family group decision making: New roles for 'old' partners in resolving family violence: Implementation report summary. St. John's, Newfoundland, Canada: Family Group Decision Making Project, School of Social Work, Memorial University of Newfoundland.

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Pennell, J., & Burford, G. (1994). Widening the circle: The family group decision-making project. Journal of Child & Youth Care, 9(1), 1-12.

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APPENDIX A
MISSION AND PHILOSOPHY STATEMENTS

Mission

The aim of the Family Group Decision-Making Project is to establish a means by which a family can join with its kin and friends to develop a plan for stopping violence between its members that fits their culture and situation. The project seeks to protect survivors of abuse from harm, uphold their rights, and promote their welfare while holding abusers accountable for their actions. It considers matters pertaining to children and young people's care and protection and to adult survivors' safety and works to strengthen the family's capacity to take care of its members. Support and protection from the community and authorities are to be organized in such a manner that makes it possible for the family group to decide upon and carry out its plan.

Statement of Philosophy²

The Family Group Decision-Making model is based on five premises:

- 1) All persons ought to be secure and supported, and permitted to live their lives free of abuse and coercion.**
- 2) Family members who abuse other family members ought to be held accountable for their actions by their family, the community, and the authorities.**
- 3) All persons ought to receive the services necessary for protecting them from abuse and for promoting their well-being.**
- 4) All family members ought to take part in decisions that concern their lives.**
- 5) With support many families can make and carry out sound plans for resolving abuse between their members.**

Family violence is wrong. It will not stop on its own, and it will continue until family members act to stop the violence. This can occur when the members are

²This statement of philosophy was developed through discussion among community groups, government officials, and the university project directors. For greater elaboration on the statement of philosophy, see Pennell and Burford (1994).

no longer afraid, trapped, and isolated and when all family members are supported in having a say over their lives. The small family groups in which abuse is typically perpetrated are rarely able to accomplish these goals as long as the abuse is contained within their small group. They require support from a variety of others including their extended families, the community, and government authorities to keep all their members safe while at the same time joining together to make and carry out decisions to end the family violence.

The key assumption here is that most family members have something important to contribute to decision-making and that 'having a say' in decisions which affect one's life is directly related to the outcomes. Moreover, it is assumed that families are the most complete source of information about themselves on which decisions can be made. In short, no one is more expert on the subject of violence in a family than the members themselves, and enduring change necessitates 1) getting the knowledge of what is happening in the family "out in the open" for discussion; and, 2) inviting the family to become partners in stopping the violence and recovering from the pain of past abuse.

This model supports the aims of Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child which states that:

- (1) Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child.
- (2) For this purpose, the child shall in particular be provided the opportunity to be heard in any judicial and administrative proceedings affecting the child, either directly, or through a representative or an appropriate body, in a manner consistent with the procedural rules of national law.

Related Principles

First, **child victimization can only be stopped when the abuse of all family members is identified and addressed.** Children and young people cannot be protected from abuse, refrain from committing acts of violence, and gain a sense of security unless all family members--including adults are also safeguarded. Those who are abusing must be held accountable for their violations of any family members. Families cannot make decisions together when child or adult members continue to assault or live in fear of retaliation. Participation of victims must be voluntary and un-coerced. The Family Group Decision-Making Model

aims to reduce power imbalances in the family while at the same time providing the necessary guidance and support to members of different ages and competencies.

Second, **measures to stop family violence are most effective when they develop out of the strengths of the community and the culture in which the family lives.** Family violence can only be resolved by building supportive networks and resources and by educating and encouraging communities to plan and advocate for necessary services. Communities can support family group decision-making if their commitments and means allow them to do so. It is not assumed that community supports are simply available for tapping. It recognizes that family violence is widely prevalent because many community values and practices have sustained such abuse. Communities, however, are not stuck in one way of dealing with family violence: their members hold a range of views on family violence and can challenge each other to develop alternative ways for preventing it. These alternatives, including family group decision-making, must simultaneously emerge out of the community's culture while building the community's capacity to prevent family violence. In effect, a program of community policing develops in which members consent to safeguard each other with the support and protection of the police and other authorities. The model is predicated on the belief that the creation of a partnership between the extended family, key community leaders and advisors, child welfare, the police, the crown prosecutor and other justice officials as indicated [probation and parole] is worthwhile and can be instrumental in stopping abuse, curbing inter-generational transmission of violence and reducing the impact of violence on the community including the court system.

Third, **the sanction, support, and monetary resources of government authorities and professionals can expedite families' making and carrying out decisions to stop family violence.** While family group decision-making is thwarted if outsiders take charge, the process may require external intervention. Families often cannot create on their own the conditions that make it safe to address family violence. Legal authorities can make families aware that violence is illegal and that perpetrators will be held accountable for committing such acts. Police and other legally mandated authorities can provide protection to family members from violence during the family group decision-making process. At the same time this model acknowledges that guaranteed safety of family members cannot be demanded of families by authorities who know that absolute guarantees cannot be assured by government intervention. The best that can be hoped for is to offer both supports and protection along with the invitation of a partnership with the family to monitor the risk for members. Professionals can help families acknowledge the violence and enable them to reach out to their

extended families and community for help. The government can provide the travel funds for families' coming together to make decisions, the resources for implementing the families' decisions when that is necessary, and the follow-up for ensuring that plans are carried out.³

And fourth, **each participant has a distinct role to play in resolving the family violence, and to be effective each participant must work with the others to develop a cooperative strategy for ending the violence.** The family members assume a major role in developing a plan to stop the violence; such a contribution is likely to increase the effectiveness of the plan and the family members' willingness to carry it out. The intent is to increase the involvement of families in the care and protection of their members after problems have already developed. In so doing, the model aims to heighten parental accountability and responsibility for the abuse of children and young people while at the same time giving all victim/survivors in the family or their caretakers/guardians a role in negotiations over decisions about outcomes. The community is responsible for raising public awareness of violence, fostering planning to stop the violence, and building the networks for preventing further abuse. The community agencies are to provide a system of mutually supportive professional services which are both sensitive to the community's cultures and which are vigilant to the ways in which professional and organizational power frequently are used to exclude families from valid participation in decision-making. In general, the role of government is to facilitate families' taking an active role in stopping the violence, both materially and through a stance of empowerment. Families are to be given the best professional advice and support in order that they have all the necessary information on which to make a decision. Child welfare is to protect children by investigating reports of abuse and neglect and by remedying or alleviating child maltreatment; their mandate is to uphold the best interest of the child. The justice system is accountable for investigating alleged offenses, enforcing the law, and protecting the community. Each participant maintains its area of responsibility; none relegate their power to the other participants; and all participants work together to assist the family to realize their plan for stopping the violence in their family.

³Child Welfare is only involved in families where there is a child under 16 years of age.

APPENDIX B
ROLES OF PROJECT STAFF AND COMMITTEES

JOB DESCRIPTION -- COORDINATOR

MANDATE

Within the philosophy of the project's model, the project coordinator receives referrals of families to the project, sets up and facilitates the carrying out of the family group conferences and ensures that follow-up plans are carried out. The coordinator administers the project at the local site and is a member of the overall project management team.

RESPONSIBILITIES

- 1) To organize and coordinate Family Group Decision Conferences in the site where they are employed.
- 2) To develop and maintain a system of record keeping for files of all families referred to the project.
- 3) To make the final decision about the acceptance of a referral to the project.
- 4) To negotiate effective working relationships with local agencies and organizations involved in working to stop violence in the community.
- 5) To work with the members of the Local Advisory Committee and the community panel in stimulating the development of local services to respond to family needs related to stopping violence.
- 6) To ensure that the concern about the safety of family members are articulated by all the participants at the family group conference and that these concerns are effectively heard and examined especially by the family members. The coordinator works to ensure that this occurs in a way that maintains the strength and integrity of the family group.
- 7) To take a relatively neutral stance in the conferences. However, the coordinator is not neutral to the principle of taking all possible steps to ensure the care and protection of children and young persons or any other person being abused when there is a legal mandate to protect.
- 8) To contact the person(s) being referred and work closely with the

victim/nonabusing parent or guardian in articulating the concerns about violence in the family, determining who is family, deciding on appropriate means of contacting the members of the family group, determining who will be information/advice givers at the conference, determine who, if anyone, will be excluded (and how their views will be made known at the conference when this is indicated) and where and when the conference will take place.

- 9) To issue invitations and communicate all relevant details about the conference (e.g., time and place) to the family members.
- 10) To ensure that the victim selects a support person to attend the conference with them.
- 11) To consult with members of the community panel as necessary.
- 12) To ensure that all relevant steps in setting up the conference, carrying it out and follow-up actually occur.
- 13) To record and report the details of the family's plan back to the family and to the referring authorities as is necessary to ensure provision of service and clear follow-up.
- 14) To reconvene the family group as may be necessary or required.
- 15) To facilitate and participate in the project evaluation.
- 16) To participate in the on-going development of all job descriptions, committee terms of reference and protocols used in the project.

STRUCTURE

The coordinator takes direction from the two project directors/principal investigators yet is expected to work closely with members of their Local Advisory Committee. As the central person at the project site, the coordinator is a member of the overall management for the whole project.

QUALIFICATIONS

The coordinator must have a demonstrated history of interest in and knowledge about issues pertaining to violence in families and communities. Additionally, the prospective coordinator must demonstrate evidence of leadership and organizational ability including the capacity to work with people in diverse positions and to facilitate communication across different groups. The coordinator must hold the fundamental belief that within most families is the competence to act to stop the violence in their own family. The coordinator must demonstrate knowledge of and experience in the community, awareness of the families' concerns and perspectives, understanding of regional dialects or languages, ability to write and speak in English (or whatever the official language used in that area), respect for confidentiality, and ability to work cooperatively as a member of the project team.

JOB DESCRIPTION: RESEARCHER

MANDATE

Within the philosophy of the project's model, to collect data for the evaluation of the project and assist with data analysis.

RESPONSIBILITIES

1. To engage in initial training and regular consultation with the principal investigators and other site researchers.
2. To consult with the community groups, the project coordinator, and others about the evaluation procedures to ensure that they are culturally sensitive.
3. To check that all the appropriate consent forms have been or are signed by any participants prior to undertaking any of the evaluation steps.
4. To consult with the project coordinator on scheduling of interviews and observations, and to review family files in preparation for collecting data.
5. To observe family group conferences (FGC) and use recording forms to document who participates in the sessions, to what extent, and in what ways. During the debriefing sessions after the family group conferences, to record the views of the family members about the FGC.
6. To follow-up the families in six and 12-month intervals after the FGC by (a) requesting and reviewing reports or files from the referring agency and other involved organizations/professionals and (b) interviewing family members about the actions taken after the FGC, the effect of these actions, and the current situations of the survivors or other family members presumed to be at risk. Also to follow-up the families who elected not to participate in the project or left the project without completing the FGC contract.
7. To assess files of a comparison group (families similar to ones participating in the project) and record data.

8. To discuss their insights/analyses with the principal investigators and provide them with all stipulated data.

STRUCTURE

To take direction from the principal investigators, to develop evaluation procedures with the other members of the Evaluation Committee, to work cooperatively with the project coordinator, and to consult with involved community groups.

QUALIFICATIONS

Knowledge of and experience in the community, awareness of the families' concerns and perspectives, understanding of regional dialects or languages, ability to write and speak in English (or the official language), respect for confidentiality, ability to work cooperatively as a member of the project team.

ADMINISTRATIVE STAFF SPECIALIST II

MANDATE

Within the philosophy of the project's model, this position coordinates administrative support activities for the entire project and facilitates communication among project personnel and provincial committees.

RESPONSIBILITIES

- ◆ to act as primary administrative contact for all project personnel and committee members
- ◆ to serve as a member of the Management Team, Protocol Committee, and Fund Raising Subcommittee; arrange meetings and any necessary teleconference arrangements; ensure that members have necessary information/materials in advance of meetings; record and distribute minutes
- ◆ to search out additional funding sources and coordinate proposal submissions
- ◆ to arrange scheduling of project site visits and travel to project sites
- ◆ to assist in preparation and distribution of project reports and other materials, including to make necessary translation arrangements, edit some written materials, overseeing editing and copying of video tapes
- ◆ to serve as liaison with university departments including the Comptroller's Office, Human Resources, and Office of Research
- ◆ to maintain records of all revenues and expenditures
- ◆ to prepare financial statements on a monthly, year-to-date and comparative basis
- ◆ to prepare quarterly reports for the granting bodies
- ◆ to ensure accurate and timely payment of all accounts payable
- ◆ to prepare payroll and maintain financial records for all employees

- ◆ to maintain personnel records for all project staff
- ◆ to maintain inventory of office supplies and equipment (liaison with Department of Social Services on supplies), ensure upkeep on video camera equipment, and, where necessary, assist with office space securement and arrangements
- ◆ to receive and direct incoming mail, to reply to certain types of correspondence (e.g., inquiries for project descriptions)

STRUCTURE

The position takes direction from the project directors/principal investigators, participates in decision-making of provincial committees/subcommittees, and coordinates work of campus-based project research assistants.

QUALIFICATIONS

To be sensitive to issues of family violence and cultural differences in responding to this issue. To have clear organizational and communication skills. Good understanding of the English language and writing competency. Experience in administrative work; graduation from high school supplemented by completion of University level courses in business administration, public administration, or organizational management; or any equivalent combination of experience and training which provides the following knowledge, abilities, and skills:

- ◆ Knowledge of the principles and practices of office management and supervision
- ◆ Knowledge of budget preparation, personnel, purchasing, and accounting procedures
- ◆ Ability to coordinate the work of the project personnel and committee members
- ◆ Ability to develop, layout, and implement clerical procedures according to general instructions and guidelines
- ◆ Ability to work independently on a variety of administrative tasks and identify

new ones

- ◆ Ability to assist in editing and laying out reports and other written materials (including competency in using WordPerfect)
- ◆ Ability to prepare operating and statistical tabulations and reports (including competency in using computer spread sheet package)
- ◆ Ability to establish and maintain effective working relationships with all project personnel, committee members, funding bodies, and community representatives.

PROTOCOL COMMITTEE

MANDATE

Within the philosophy of the project's model, the Protocol Committee will develop organizational policies with respect to the operation of the project.

RESPONSIBILITIES

- ◆ to formulate, review, and, where necessary, revise project protocols
- ◆ to ensure that project protocols are appropriate for each of the project sites
- ◆ to ensure coordination of project protocols with those of other involved institutions or agencies
- ◆ to ensure coordination on a provincial level among organizations and government departments represented

TASKS

- ◆ to attend quarterly teleconference meetings
- ◆ to serve on subcommittees of the committee
- ◆ to maintain liaison with each of the organizations and government departments represented
- ◆ to seek input from each project site on protocols
- ◆ to participate in evaluating the implementation of the project
- ◆ if new to the project, to participate in an orientation program on the philosophy, mandate, and procedures of the FGD model

STRUCTURE

Representation

The committee will be composed of representatives from each project sites, government, community groups, and university (principal investigators and administrative assistant). The following government bodies will be represented through senior officials: Department of Social Services (Child Welfare), Public Prosecution, Royal Newfoundland Constabulary, Royal Canadian Mounted Police, Adult Corrections (including Victim Services), and Correctional Service of

Canada. Each project site will appoint its own representative/s.

Decision-Making

Within the philosophy of the project's model, decisions will be reached by consensus after consultation with each of represented bodies.

Channels of Communication

Representatives will ensure that their organizational body (provincially and in project sites) is consulted on and kept informed of pertinent protocol decisions. The principal investigators and administrative assistant will facilitate liaison between this committee and the other standing committees (Management Team, Development & Evaluation Committee, Fund Raising Subcommittee).

COMMUNITY PANEL

MANDATE

The community panel will act as a support and advisory group to the coordinator of the FGD project with regard to her work with families referred to the project.

RESPONSIBILITIES

- ◆ to act as consultants to the coordinator during the referral selection process.
- ◆ to meet with the coordinator during the preparation phase of a FGC to ensure the coordinator is ready to proceed with the family to a FGC.
- ◆ to review the plans and outcomes of the FGC's and provide feedback to the coordinator in this regard.
- ◆ to keep information concerning families referred to the project confidential

TASKS

- ◆ to attend monthly meetings
- ◆ to attend sub-committee meetings as required
- ◆ to be available to the coordinator for consultation as required
- ◆ to provide input to the Local Advisory Committee, the Provincial Protocol Committee, and the project administrators with regard to evaluating the implementation of the pilot project at each project site to sign an oath of confidentiality

STRUCTURE

Representation

The committee will be comprised of community members who have expertise and/or experience in working on issues of violence and abuse. Each project site will appoint its own representatives to its community panel.

Channels of Communication

The coordinator will be responsible for ensuring the community panel receives information on the project from the project administrators, the Local Advisory committee, and the Provincial Protocol Committee. Copies of minutes of community panel meetings will be forwarded to the project administrators.

**COMMUNITY PANEL VOLUNTEER
JOB DESCRIPTION
DRAFT JULY 16 1993**

Purpose of the Panel

The community panel acts as a sounding board for the coordinator. The panel is intended to serve as a support of the coordinator in balancing the risks of further abuse to family members with the goal of empowering the family to take constructive action to halt the abuse within their family. The panel is made up of persons who represent both professional and/or the lay interests of the community.

- 1) The community panel members are available at the request of the coordinator for periodic consultations on issues pertaining to the use of family group decision-making with a particular family. The work of the panel is not meant to be a substitute for supervision. The panel advises the coordinator and provides opportunity for consultation at the request of the coordinator.
- 2) Panel members are there to advise and offer a sounding board to the coordinator so as to reduce the risk for victims of abuse in the family in question but at the same time to ensure that the family is given the opportunity to work out a solution to their problem without unnecessary interference from outsiders.
- 3) The names of panel members are given to family members prior to the signing of consent to release information about the family to the panel members. A panel member may be excluded at the request of the family.
- 4) The panel members work to anticipate what resources might be needed for a particular family and to advise the coordinator accordingly.
- 5) Panel members will be asked to exclude themselves in situations where their involvement actually, potentially or would appear to represent a conflict of interest. This includes any member who is closely related to the family in question and who may be called to the family group conference itself.
- 6) Members will be invited to serve on the panel for the duration of the project. The size of the panel will be large enough to ensure that

consultation is available to the coordinator even if a member is excluded by a family or if a member declares themselves to be in a conflict of interest with a particular family.

- 7) Members are required to sign a oath or declaration of confidentiality prior to serving on the panel.

LOCAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE

MANDATE

A Local Advisory Committee will act as a management and resource group to the project in each site.

RESPONSIBILITIES

- ◆ to oversee and monitor the implementation of the project in a local site
- ◆ to provide input and feedback to project coordinators with regard to the overall operation of the project locally
- ◆ to provide input to the coordinator, the project administrators, and the Provincial Protocol Committee with regard to evaluating the implementation of the pilot project at each project site
- ◆ to work with the project administrators and the Provincial Protocol Committee toward the long-term sustainability of the project in a local site
- ◆ to monitor the project locally to ensure that the objectives and mandate of the project are being met

TASKS

- ◆ to attend monthly meetings
- ◆ to attend sub-committee meetings as required
- ◆ to provide a representative to the Provincial Protocol Committee
- ◆ to be available to the coordinator for consultation as required
- ◆ to address issues as they arise locally with regard to the project

STRUCTURE

Representation

This committee will include representatives from government and community agencies and from interested community groups. Each project site will appoint its own representatives to the Local Advisory Committee.

Channels of Communication

The coordinator will be responsible for ensuring the Local Advisory Committee receives information on the project from the project administrators, the community panel, and the Provincial Protocol Committee. Copies of minutes of Local Advisory Committee meetings will be forwarded to the project administrators.

Decision-Making

Within the philosophy of the Family Group Decision-Making Model, decisions will be reached by consensus after consultation with the coordinator and the project administrators.

ROLE OF SUPPORT PERSON

Every child under the age of sixteen who will be attending the family group conference will be asked to choose a support person to attend with them. Any other adult family member who has been a victim of abuse or is at risk of abuse will be given an opportunity to choose a support person to go with them to the family group conference. It will also be possible for an alleged offender to have a support person at the conference. The coordinator will meet with the support person as part of the preparation process for the family group conference to ensure they are clear about their role at the conference and that they are willing and able to be the support person. The coordinator has the right to veto the choice of support person if the coordinator feels he/she is not totally on side with the person who has chosen him/her or is not able to fill the role required.

Support persons will provide emotional support to the person they accompany to the family group conference. They will ensure that they are aware when tensions are running high and check with the person whom they are supporting to see if the person would like a break, and ask for the time needed. If the person whom they are supporting is upset and needs to leave the room, the support person would leave with him/her and let the others at the meeting know how long they need to break, whether the person plans to return, etc. Another role might be to raise issues that the person whom they are supporting is not able to raise for fear of abusive repercussions but that he/she believes need to be raised.

The support person is not responsible for facilitating the meeting during the private family deliberation time or for presenting the defence of the person whom they are supporting. While the support person is not in the role of advocate he/she is an entitled member of the meeting and, therefore, is able to add his/her perspectives and views.

ROLE OF INFORMATION PROVIDERS

The aim of the family group conference (FGC) is to provide a process by which a family can meet with its relatives and friends to make a plan to stop the abuse or ill-treatment between its members. The FGC offers a means by which family and friends can make a constructive contribution to resolving abuse rather than leaving the decision-making in the hands of the legal authorities and service providers.

In the course of preparing for a family group conference family members, often through discussions with the coordinator, may identify the need for information regarding specific services available or issues affecting this family. When topics or issues are identified, the option of having an information provider present is discussed and negotiated with the family. Family members, with the support and input of the coordinator, identify those areas where they wish to have more information to help them in their planning process.

Information providers are invited to share their expertise in a given area during the first stage of the family group conference so that the family can hear the information and have it fresh in their minds during their planning stage. The purpose of giving families this information is to ensure that they have all the information they need to make good decisions about the kind of help, support and resources they want for their family. Information providers may be asked to remain on hand after their presentations to answer any questions that might arise.

Information providers are a resource to the family but are not active participants in the family's planning. It is the role of the coordinator to ensure that family members receive the support necessary to deal with any issues that might arise as a result of information presented, and to provide an opportunity to debrief any concerns that might be triggered by this information.

FAMILY GROUP DECISION-MAKING PROJECT LIAISON

The purpose of this liaison role is to ensure plans, that are developed by families in family group conferences and are approved through Child Protection, are monitored, reviewed and implemented.

The liaison person will receive a copy of the plan of each family that has had a family group conference.

S/he will note when reviews of plans are due and check with workers to ensure reviews are happening.

S/he would also have knowledge of the project goals, philosophy and procedures so that Child Protection Workers could consult with her/him regarding the process or the on-going effective implementation of the plans.

When referrals have been initiated/funded by Parole but where there is an overlap with Child Protection, the liaison person will ensure that coordination between agencies occurs and plans are effectively implemented, monitored, and reviewed.

The Department of Social Services has made a commitment to continue to fund plans of family group conferences beyond the end of the demonstration project. The role of liaison worker will be particularly important once the demonstration project concludes to ensure that families and extended families continue to have a say in the decisions that are made affecting their lives and that plans continue to be implemented for as long as the family and the Child Protection Worker deem them appropriate.

APPENDIX C

**MEASURES TO ENSURE THE SAFETY OF FAMILY MEMBERS
PARTICIPATING IN THE
FAMILY GROUP DECISION-MAKING PROJECT**

MEASURES TO ENSURE THE SAFETY OF FAMILY MEMBERS PARTICIPATING IN THE FAMILY GROUP DECISION-MAKING PROJECT

The family group conference process helps keep members of the family safe by breaking the silence about abuse: by making sure as many relatives and supportive friends of the family as possible know what is happening. By giving the Family enough information about services that are available to them and allowing them to make decisions about how to stop the abuse that is happening, so that family members will be better protected.

A basic idea of the Family Group Decision-Making Model is that people are responsible for their behaviour and family members who abuse other family members ought to be held responsible for their actions by their family, the community and the authorities. The following are measures this project will use to make sure family members are kept safe.

1. All persons under the age of sixteen who have been a victim of abuse will be required to have a support person go with them to the family group conference. Also, any other persons in the family who have been a victim of abuse or are at risk of abuse will be given an opportunity to choose a support person to go with them to the family group conference. The coordinator will check to make sure that this person is able to fulfil the role of support person.
2. As part of preparing for the family group conference, the coordinator will meet with any non-violent parents to determine if they will feel scared to speak up in the meeting for fear that their partner will hurt them in some way after the meeting. The coordinator will help the persons plan a way to make sure their views are heard without being put at risk (i.e., have someone else raise difficult issues).
3. In preparing for the family group conference, coordinators will make themselves aware of which people in the family carry the most authority in the family to see if they are willing to take responsibility for keeping violent family members in check during the family group conference. This person(s) would also be identified in the plan of the family group conference to take on this role after the meeting. These people, along with the support people will also be asked to let the coordinator know when tension is too high during the family group conference and ask for a break.
4. As part of preparing for the family group conference, the coordinator will make sure family members know the agencies and help that is available to

them if they feel unsafe at home.

5. Information about the issues facing survivors of abuse will be outlined at the start of the family group conference by a person from the community who works with survivors of abuse. This will make sure that all family members have correct information when making decisions and plans.
6. The offender may have a stake in the outcome of the conference that may help to keep victims safe.
 - a) When charges have not yet been laid, but Child Protection has concerns.
 - b) When charges have been laid but the case has not yet gone to court. The outcome of the family group conference may be presented at sentencing.
 - c) When the person is on Parole or Probation.
7. If it is not possible to make sure Family members are kept safe at the family group conference if the offender is there, the offender can be excluded from the meeting.
8. If the coordinator feels that holding a family group conference will put family members at risk of further abuse, s/he can choose not to hold the conference and report this decision to the authorities who referred the family to the project.
9. It will be possible for an accused offender to have a support person at the conference.
10. The people who have been involved in checking out the problem of violence in a family will be asked to approve the plans the family decides on and make sure good safety and follow-up measures are included in the plan. The community panel will also make sure that the coordinator has paid enough attention to safety issues in preparing for the family group conference and will give their ideas about the plan after the conference.
11. Follow-up and review of the plan of the family group conference will include regular checks by the Children's Protection Service, the police or any agency that has been involved in checking out the concerns about abuse that is happening in the family.

12. The researcher for the project will also serve as part of the checking-up process as s/he will visit the family from time to time after the conference.
13. The safety measures that are already available to families (i.e., peace bonds, shelters) will still be available and families would be given information about these choices.
14. The family group conference will not be used in place of laying criminal charges against the person who is being abusive and/or violent.

All of these safety measures are intended to make sure that as many family and friends as possible are able to work together to make plans to keep all family members safe.

APPENDIX D
PREPARATIONS FOR FAMILY GROUP CONFERENCE
CHECKLIST

PREPARATION CHECKLIST

Consultation with referred family

Consent forms signed

Consultation with victim(s) and support person(s)

Preparation of all family participants

Consultation with community panel

All family members' views received

Child Protection Worker prepared

Venue secured

Travel arrangements for family members

Tea/coffee/meal arranged

Child care arrangements made

Translation arranged

Written notice of family group conference sent out

Resource package given to family

Evaluation/Research forms completed

Copy of plan sent out by five working days after
Family Group Conference