

Family Group Conferencing and Juvenile Justice

by Sophia Tutorial



WHAT'S COVERED

In this lesson, we'll discuss a specific type of conflict resolution that occurs within the juvenile justice system. The specific areas of focus include:

1. History of Family Group Conferencing
2. Steps and Effects of Family Group Conferencing

1. History of Family Group Conferencing

When minors get in trouble with the law, their cases are typically handled by the **juvenile justice system**.

Within that system, there is a conflict resolution program called **Family Group Conferencing (FGC)** that seeks to hold the minors accountable for their actions, but also to promote their best interests and prevent them from repeating this kind of criminal activity.

Family Group Conferencing originated in New Zealand from the traditions and values of the Maori people who live there.

When conflict based on the actions of a minor would occur within their community, the Maori people would bring the whole community together to discuss the issue because it affected everyone.

In this meeting, they would seek to understand why the issue occurred and work together with the juvenile to prevent it from happening again. This approach was so successful that it has spread around the world.

Family Group Conferencing is a collaborative approach because not only does it involve the juvenile justice system, but it allows the juvenile justice system to work collaboratively with the family, the community, and any other social services agencies that would be appropriate.



TERMS TO KNOW

Juvenile Justice System

In the U.S., the segment of the justice or legal system assigned to deal with criminal behavior by minors.

Family Group Conferencing (FGC)

A conflict resolution process which addresses criminal behavior by minors in a collaborative way, engaging

2. Steps and Effects of Family Group Conferencing

As a process, Family Group Conferencing has five stages. To illustrate the how the steps of FGC work, imagine that a teenager named Jacob has gotten into trouble for spray-painting graffiti on the garages of some of his neighbors' houses.

Stage One: Recommending the Process

The FGC program starts with somebody recommending that it be used. This recommendation could come from the court or from the family.

In this case, let's say Jacob was apprehended for vandalism; in court, the judge recommends Family Group Conferencing. However, if family members noticed Jacob engaging in some criminal activity, they could ask for this process to be initiated as well.

Stage Two: Identifying Issues and Explaining the Process

Once the process has been recommended, the juvenile justice system sits down with Jacob and his family to identify the issues involved, as well as explain how this whole process is going to work.

At this stage, the juvenile justice system may identify that Jacob hasn't gotten into trouble with the law before; he's a first time offender. However, his family shares that he has been having some behavioral issues at school.

Stage Three: Setting Goals

Once these issues have been identified, the juvenile justice system, the family, and any other professionals involved work together to set some goals around the changes they would like to see from Jacob.

These would probably involve making amends with the homeowners whose garages got spray-painted with graffiti. The goals may also relate to academics since Jacob is having problems in school. Essentially, the goals pertain to whatever issues were identified in the previous stage.

Stage Four: Developing a Plan

In this stage, the family meets privately with Jacob to look at the goals that have been set, and the issues that they're dealing with, in order to come up with a plan for moving forward.

The plan might involve apologies to the homeowners or some sort of restitution, such as repainting the garages. There may also be a portion of the plan that discusses getting Jacob some help with his academics or involving him in some other constructive activity.

Stage Five: Evaluating and Implementing the Plan

Once Jacob and his family have created the plan, they will meet again with the professionals to evaluate the plan in order to ensure that it meets all the legal requirements.

The professionals can also provide some help with implementing the plan once it has been approved and adopted by the juvenile justice system and the other parties involved with helping Jacob.

In terms of the program's results, studies have shown that Family Group Conferencing has had a lot of success in preventing juveniles from becoming repeat offenders.

Families of juvenile offenders have also talked about having increased satisfaction with this program. They feel that their needs have been met, and they've gotten the necessary help for working with the juvenile.



SUMMARY

In this lesson, you learned about the **history of Family Group Conferencing** as a collaborative approach to juvenile justice. FGC originated in New Zealand from the culture and traditions of the Maori people there.

You now understand that Family Group Conferencing has become part of the juvenile justice system in the United States, and there are **five stages of the FGC process**: recommending the process, identifying issues and explaining the process, setting goals, developing a plan, and evaluating and implementing the plan. Additionally, studies have shown the positive **effects of FGC**; the process has prevented many juveniles from becoming repeat offenders, and the families of these juveniles often leave satisfied that they have gotten the help they needed. Good luck!

Source: Adapted from Sophia tutorial by Marlene Johnson.



TERMS TO KNOW

Family Group Conferencing (FGC)

A conflict resolution process which addresses criminal behavior by minors in a collaborative way, engaging the juvenile justice system, parents, community, and social services.

Juvenile Justice System

In the U.S., the segment of the justice or legal system assigned to deal with criminal behavior by minors.