

YOUTH JUSTICE

Family Group Conferences





If you're reading this you've probably broken the law – and because you're under 18 you're now part of the youth justice system.

That might sound really bad, but it's actually an opportunity for you to change your life for the better and stop offending.

Read on to find out more about youth justice and family group conferences.

Please feel free to contact us if you have any questions.

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WHAT IS THE YOUTH JUSTICE SYSTEM?

The youth justice system aims to help young people like you stop committing offences and stay out of trouble.

You'll be contacted by a youth justice coordinator, whose job is to set up a family group conference to help you face up to what you've done and take the next steps towards a better life – a life without all the problems that come with having a criminal record.

It starts with you making a choice. Do you want to stay where you are, or choose a future where you can be safe, and stand tall and strong?

“There were two paths I could take, the right one or the wrong one. Taking the right path got me to where I am today, and now I know I can be anything I want to be.”

Young person

WHERE DOES THE FAMILY GROUP CONFERENCE COME IN?

If you have committed an offence, the Police or the Youth Court might ask you to take part in a family group conference (often called a FGC).

The FGC is a formal meeting where you, your whānau, the victim (if there is one), your youth justice coordinator, the Police and other people involved with your case talk about what happened. Together, you make a plan to help you:

- face up to what you did wrong and take responsibility
- start to put things right with the victim
- learn how to make good choices and get back on track with your life (like taking part in activities, sports, a training course or work experience).

Your youth justice coordinator will organise the FGC and help you and your whānau to get the most out of it. This will include asking for your ideas on:

- when and where the FGC should be held
- whether you'd like to include any special customs in the FGC
- whether someone in your whānau can help the coordinator organise the FGC.

WHO ELSE CAN GO TO THE FGC?

The FGC might also include:

- people supporting the victim
- your lawyer (known as a 'youth advocate')
- others who can provide important information about you, such as your teacher, doctor, social worker, transition worker or youth worker.

WHAT HAPPENS AT THE FGC?

Your FGC will be unique, because you and your whānau will have a say in how it's run. But this is generally what happens:

1. Getting the facts straight

Everyone hears what the Police say happened:

- If you agree with what the Police say, everyone talks about how you can make things right.
- If you disagree with what the Police say, the FGC ends and the Police or the Youth Court decide what to do next.

2. Time to talk

Everyone talks about:

- what you did wrong
- how it made other people, like the victim and your whānau feel. This is when the victim gets a chance to talk about how the crime affected them and what they think should happen
- what you can do to try to make things right.

Note: If you are aged 10-13, the FGC must consider some other parts of your behaviour and circumstances. The youth justice coordinator will explain these to you and your whānau.

3. Making a plan

- you and your whānau get a chance to talk privately and develop a plan
- you also come up with ideas for putting things right for the victim, in a way that's fair to them and helps you to learn from your mistakes
- you take your ideas back to the FGC, and as a group you finalise and agree on the plan
- it is important to have someone, maybe from your whānau who agrees to support you and help you to complete your plan.

Most FGCs take one or two hours, but some may take longer.

"The FGC made us look at ourselves as a family, and we realised we just needed some help. Our family is stronger for it."

Mother

BEFORE THE FGC – SOME TIPS FOR GETTING THE MOST OUT OF IT

You might find it hard to talk about things at the FGC, but it's important that you have your say. Before the FGC, you might like to think about how you'd like your future to look:

- do you need help at school, in getting a job or learning new skills?
- what kind of job would you like?
- what new skills do you need to learn?
- what do you want for your whānau?
- what kind of friends do you want in your life?

TURNING YOUR PLAN IN ACTION

You must stick to your plan. If you don't, you might have to go back for another FGC or to the Youth Court. That's why it's a good idea to have someone in your whānau or from Oranga Tamariki to keep an eye on your progress.

Oranga Tamariki will also review the plan and check your progress – and your coordinator or social worker will be there to help if you get behind, or go off track. You can also contact them anytime if you have any questions or concerns.

“Everyone makes mistakes. You have to learn from them and be a better person.”

Young person