

# COVID-19 | RECOMMENDED PROCEDURES FOR FAMILY GROUP CONFERENCES UPDATE FOR LEVEL 4



## Family group conferencing for care and protection and youth justice at Alert Level 4

**Prepared by:** Incident Management Team in consultation with the Professional Practice Group

**Prepared:** 25 March 2020

**\*\*This update replaces the earlier FGC and COVID-19 Advice prepared 19 March 2020\*\***

**THIS IS INTERNAL GUIDANCE FOR ALL FAMILY GROUP CONFERENCE COORDINATORS, SOCIAL WORKERS, SUPERVISORS, PRACTICE LEADERS AND MANAGERS**

*Oranga Tamariki provides essential services to tamariki and their whānau and we need to keep doing this in a way that keeps everyone safe and well and is in line with the Ministry of Health guidelines. That includes holding Family Group Conferences. In order to limit the spread of COVID-19 in the community, we have recommended some additional procedures for C&P and YJ Coordinators to follow.*

*In all of our engagement with tamariki and whānau we need to be first guided by our values and usual social work practice approach. We need to modify the method of engagement to keep people well, but our underlying core practice remains unchanged. Please be mindful that this is health and safety guidance and our practice and policy guidance remains the same.*

*This guidance will be updated as required. If you need more information, discuss with your supervisor or manager or contact [covid19response@ot.govt.nz](mailto:covid19response@ot.govt.nz). Daily updates can be found on [Te Pae](#)*

### **Convening Family Group Conferences**

- Postpone or defer all current Family Group Conferences that are not deemed **critical or urgent**
- During Alert Level 4, social workers **will only** refer to FGC if there are serious care or protection concerns (e.g. Child Protection Protocol; risk of entry to care)
- Triage any new referrals and only hold critical or urgent Family Group Conferences, using alternatives to in person contact

### **Postponing or Deferring an FGC**

If an FGC is not deemed critical or urgent, contact participants via phone or text to discuss the circumstances and the impacts of deferring or rescheduling. Explain that we are currently providing essential services and limiting person to person contact to ensure everybody's safety and wellbeing and therefore the FGC which is required for their tamariki or rangatahi, is being deferred or postponed. Follow this communication up in writing either via letter (couriered) or email where possible. Consider whether the views of participants alter your assessment that the FGC is not critical or urgent. Note and discuss with the referring social worker and supervisor any concerns raised by a participant about the safety or wellbeing of the child or young person.

Consider, where capacity allows and if it will not create additional stress for whānau members, whether you can continue engaging to prepare for when their FGC can be held. This can provide an important means of maintaining engagement with families during the period of isolation.

**Determining whether an FGC is critical or urgent**

**During Alert Level 4, some FGCs will need to be held but no FGCs, family meetings or hui-a-whānau are to be held in person during the period of isolation. Alternative means for securing whānau and victim participation should continue to be sought, this may require you to seek appropriate cultural advice.**

To determine if a critical or urgent FGC is required to be held, we ask that social workers consult with the FGC coordinator and their supervisor and then seek Manager approval. In most cases, we will be able to use other means to agree safe day to day care arrangements for tamariki and rangatahi until an FGC is able to be convened in person.

To assist with making this decision, we recommend that you:

- Contact participants via phone or text to discuss the circumstances and the impacts of deferring or rescheduling.
- Consider the current safety and well-being of tamariki or rangatahi and how this will be maintained.
- Is there a strong and sustainable safety plan in place and what arrangements are in place for this plan to be monitored?
- Are the care arrangements for tamariki and rangatahi (care and protection or youth justice) appropriate and safe for the period of self-isolation or until the FGC can be held?
- Are there adequate supports in place for tamariki and rangatahi? And their caregiver? Information about support for caregivers is available at the Oranga Tamariki [website](#).
- Have tamariki, parents, guardians, usual caregivers and wider whānau (where known) had an opportunity to give their views about the current situation and is there general agreement about what should be happening right now? If not, can their views and input to the plan be facilitated by some other means?
- In the case of YJ FGCs are there any considerations about the risk of reoffending and victim's interests that need to be taken into account?

**Considerations for holding a critical or urgent Care or Protection FGC without face to face engagement**

**The FGC should consider, create and agree to immediate plans that address the critical and urgent safety and wellbeing concerns for tamariki.** Where holding an FGC is deemed critical or urgent, use alternatives to in person contact, these will need to be discussed with participants during the consultation phase and include:

- advising that this FGC will only focus on matters regarding the safety and wellbeing of tamariki during the immediate period of isolation.
- reassuring tamariki, rangatahi and family/whānau that we will reconvene in future to create a more comprehensive plan.
- acknowledgement that ensuring everybody's participation will be challenging but that you will ensure everyone can express their views.
- agreeing how they will attend (e.g. Phone; Facetime; Skype).
- if tamariki have a lawyer for child, agree how they will attend
- encouraging other attendees (e.g. professionals) to provide their views or information by written submission.
- supporting participation by continuing to use tikanga such as opening and closing the FGC with karakia.

## COVID-19 | RECOMMENDED PROCEDURES FOR FAMILY GROUP CONFERENCES UPDATE FOR LEVEL 4



- documenting the plan, including what monitoring will occur during this time, who is responsible for any actions and the process for reconvening or reviewing the FGC.

### **Considerations for holding a critical or urgent Youth Justice FGC without face to face contact**

Where holding an FGC is deemed urgent, use alternatives to person to person contact, these will need to be discussed with participants during the consultation phase. In addition to the considerations above for a care or protection FGC, additional considerations for a Youth Justice FGC include:

- victim's views need to be sought and included in the FGC process
- immediate measures to prevent the risk of reoffending, address victims' views and respond to any matters relating to public interest should be considered
- determine who will be present in person with the young person when attending FGC by phone or skype (may need to be a social worker or youth worker – note social distance will need to be maintained and ideally this person will already be known to the young person)
- confirm how the youth advocate will attend (e.g. Phone; Facetime; Skype)
- consider transportation and support needs for the young person to attend (particularly if young person is currently remanded in custody). Follow the health and safety guidance for this in the latest Working in a Pandemic Environment guidance, which is available on the [What you need to know page](#) on Te Pae (check back for updates to this document).

### **Recording**

- If the FGC is being postponed, ensure that you record in CYRAS a casenote that explains what we are doing and why. Use a heading in the casenote: COVID-19 FGC postponed.
- Where an urgent or critical FGC has been held record the plan and decisions made and ensure that all entitled members receive a copy. Use courier or email to provide copies.
- Enter a review or reconvene date in the CYRAS record to ensure there is visibility of what is required once the isolation period is ended.