



Family networking approach across Children's Social Care

Quick guide

What are we doing?

A Family Networking Approach (FNA) is a fundamental part of Signs of Safety practice and promotes the following practice principles:

- Every child/parent has a family and/or network and they can be found if we try;
- That family and/or network will be involved in the planning and decision making for their child;
- A meaningful connection to their family or network helps a child develop and maintain a sense of belonging;
- The single factor most strongly connected with positive outcomes for children is a meaningful lifelong connection to their family and/or network;
- Ensure that families have a copy of the plan in an accessible format.

This approach ensures we identify and engage with everyone who is significant to a child – immediate and extended family, friends, neighbours, etc. It is an expectation that all workers across Children's Social Care embed the Family Networking Approach into their practice, making it “business as usual”.

Meetings for a child or young person must meaningfully include members of their family and natural network.

Why take a family networking approach?

Ensuring children's plans are led by the family and network is fundamental to 'working with' rather than 'doing to' or 'doing for' and ensures we are working within the core principles of the Children Act (1989). It also encapsulates the ethos of Norfolk's Vital Signs for Children.

Working in this way ensures families (including children) are part of planning and decision-making for their child and empowers them to build resilience and find their own solutions to problems. Co-production between the family and professional networks helps increase safety and wellbeing for the child or young person. Ownership of the plan by members of the family network increases the opportunity for sustainable change.

How do we embed the approach in practice?

Whether part of the assessment or ongoing intervention, ensure that:

- A network conversation takes place at your first contact with families (NC@FC).
- There is a meeting arranged with the entire identified network, including paid workers, as an early and critical part of your assessment/intervention.
- Genograms, ecomaps and mobility mapping are continually updated with the child/young person and parents as a piece of direct work across the whole of Children's Social Care.

- The information sharing consent form (DP1) and/or Suzie Essex family safety circles tool are used to explore what information can be shared with wider family, friends, neighbours, etc.
- All relevant members of the family network are invited to key meetings such as Family Support and Child in Need (CiN) Planning meetings, Core Groups, Child Protection Conferences, and any other meetings where planning and decisions happen. The only exception to this would be where it is assessed that to do so would put the child/family or other person at risk – if this is the case a clear management rationale must be recorded on Liquidlogic.
- Where additional Family Network Meetings are needed outside of statutory meetings the [Family meeting template](#) should be used and attached to a case note that references the Family Network Meeting. Where this occurs the family plan should be incorporated into the planning at the next statutory meeting (one-plan model).
- If risk increases or the plan needs to change a review should be held either as part of the formal meeting schedule or as a Family Network Meeting – **NB** in either case the ‘one-plan’ model should be followed.
- As part of the process consider how you can align ending professional involvement with a plan that the family network can take forward i.e., identify a family lead/chair early on in the process.

Remember:

- Appreciative Inquiry (AI) will help draw out and build on existing strengths and safety.
- For children who are Looked After, connections to their family network promote a sense of belonging, a potential source of ongoing support and an opportunity to maintain lifelong links.

Frequently asked questions

What happens if it is not possible for all the network to come together?

Technology should be used to enable family networks to work together with professionals to create safe and supportive plans for children and young people. At times it may be necessary to have separate meetings for parts of a child’s network. If it is not possible to have meetings together initially, workers should record the reasons for this, and what they will do in the future to try and bring people together to plan for the children.

What happens if parents or children do not want to involve their network?

This will need to be discussed on a case-by-case basis, to consider how parents or young people can be encouraged to access the support around them. If there are people around the child that the parents/young person does not want us to talk to, we will need to work with them to build trust and reassurance, so that we can work directly with those who play an active part in the child’s life.

What do I do if no one in the family network is safe enough to involve in the plans for a child?

This also needs to be discussed on a case-by-case basis, but very often, if we are tenacious, curious and risk-sensible, we will be able to help the child/young person identify people who have provided stability and safety. Also, ensure risks are regularly reassessed.

What should I do if the family do not wish to engage?

The earlier you involve and work collaboratively with the family, the better chance of achieving good outcomes for the child. Building a trusting relationship is a key factor in achieving engagement. Where families are reluctant or refuse to meet with professionals due to a lack of trust, poor relationships or previous experiences, consideration should be given to seeking a consultation with the FGC and Family Networking Advisory Service – FNA@norfolk.gov.uk.

I’m not confident holding meetings with large family networks/facilitating meetings online; how do I get support?

There are various ways to get support. Speak to your manager in the first instance to see if there is support available within your team. Training on chairing meetings is on offer to all workers. The Family Group Conference and Family Networking Advisory Service can provide coaching opportunities to workers around facilitating Family Network Meetings.