

Family Group Decision Making

A service available in Westmoreland, Indiana and Armstrong Counties

While being a parent can be the most rewarding occupation one has, it can also be challenging at times. Worrying about our children is natural. As parents we play the scenarios over and over in our heads. We are ready for anything that parenthood can throw at us. At least that is what we like to believe. Sometimes though, things can happen, which we are not prepared for. We may even feel alone and helpless.

You do not have to feel this way. Family Group Decision Making (FGDM) is a program that can assist your family in these times.

What are the reasons a family may choose to use FGDM?

The family is at-risk of being separated
The child's behavior has become concerning
The parents have difficulty in meeting the needs of their child, due to various factors.

What is FGDM?

FGDM is a voluntary program. It is a collaborative meeting with family and friends, where decisions are made to keep your child safe. At the meeting, the family members and supportive people in their life come together and develop a plan to help the family in a difficult time. An independent coordinator assists the family in recognizing their strengths and their own ability to navigate through life's most difficult times. FGDM is about strengthening the family.

What FGDM is not...

FGDM is not a way for the government to get involved in your private life. It is not a group of professionals sitting with the family instructing them on what they need to do. The program is not mandatory and can be stopped at any point of the service, without penalties.

How does a family get involved?

Currently at JusticeWorks YouthCare, it is a requirement that the family be involved with WCCB or JPO (in Westmoreland County) or CYS (in Indiana or Armstrong Counties).

What is the cost of the program?

\$0. Yes, it is true that your family can receive the assistance of a FGDM coordinator absolutely free.

FGDM processes are carefully managed and crafted to ensure fidelity to the FGDM values and to ensure that those values drive practice. The following five criteria are critical to supporting exemplary practice in FGDM:

1. An independent (i.e., non-case carrying) coordinator is responsible for convening the family group meeting with agency personnel.

When a critical decision about a child is required, dialogue occurs between the family group and the responsible child protection agency personnel. Providing an independent coordinator who is charged with creating an environment in which transparent, honest and respectful dialogue occurs between agency personnel and family groups signifies an agency's commitment to empowering and non-oppressive practice.

2. The child protection agency personnel recognize the family group as their key decision-making partner, and time and resources are available to convene this group. Providing the time

and resources to seek out family group members and prepare them for their role in the decision-making process signifies an agency's acceptance of the importance of family groups in formulating safety and care plans.

3. Family groups have the opportunity to meet on their own, without the statutory authorities and other non-family members present, to work through the information they have been given and to formulate their responses and plans. Providing family groups with time to meet on their own enables them to apply their knowledge and expertise in a familiar setting and to do so in ways that are consistent with their ethnic and cultural decision-making practices. Acknowledging the importance of this time and taking active steps to encourage family groups to plan in this way signifies an agency's acceptance of its own limitations, as well as its commitment to ensuring that the best possible decisions and plans are made.

4. When agency concerns are adequately addressed, preference is given to a family group's plan over any other possible plan. In accepting the family group's lead, an agency signifies its confidence in, and its commitment to, partnering and supporting family groups in caring for and protecting their children, and to building the family groups' capacity to do so.