

## VICTIM INVOLVEMENT:

### It Does Make a Difference

You have been the victim of an offense committed by a young person. The Family Group Conference process is an alternative to the usual court process for handling this kind of offense. Many victims have found the traditional prosecution of offenses in court to be frustrating and insensitive to their needs. The intention of this approach is to be more personal and sensitive to your needs. It is important for the young person to be held accountable and responsible for the offense committed against you and important they understand the impact of their actions on you and your family. It is also important that restitution be made to you.

The Family Group Conference (FGC) process, with a Coordinator facilitating, will give you the opportunity to tell your story to the offending young person and to be heard. Your involvement through sharing your experience can lead to healing, and hope for a positive outcome for you. This process addresses your needs as the one who has been victimized.

This brochure has been prepared by a Sonoma County Restorative Team, and designed by:



a Sonoma County, California based non-profit organization. For more information, contact us.

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# Family Group Conferencing for Youth Justice

## Information for Victims

## How can the Family Group Conference Coordinator help you, the Victim?

The Family Group Conference Coordinator will:

- ✓ Explain how the Juvenile Justice system works, including the FGC process
- ✓ Make you aware of your rights as a victim
- ✓ Show you how your interests will be taken into account throughout the FGC process
- ✓ Communicate your role and the opportunities for you to talk at the FGC
- ✓ Review how members of the FGC will explore ways in which the young person can be held accountable, take responsibility for their behavior, and as much as possible repay the victim and put things right.

## What is a Family Group Conference?

It is a meeting of the victim(s) and any support person you choose, the young person who has offended, and members of the young person's family, attended by law enforcement and facilitated by the Coordinator.

Counselors, attorneys or other support representatives may also attend if needed. The goal is to develop a plan to hold the young person accountable and to set things right with the victim.

### Who arranges the conference?

The Coordinator arranges the conference and will contact you to discuss a convenient date, time and place for the FGC.

The Coordinator will make sure that everyone attending the conference has the information and support they need to fully participate.

## Why is it important for you to attend the Family Group Conference?

Many victims have found that taking part in a FGC is a helpful and healing process.

It is understood that you may

- ✓ Be feeling angry and unsafe
- ✓ Not want to relive what happened
- ✓ Be unsure about the FGC process
- ✓ Be anxious about seeing the young person and their family

**In Family Group Conferencing, victims are given an opportunity to participate in the justice process.**

Experience has shown that the victim's contribution at the conference is important in confronting the young person with the personal cost of their crime on others.

- ✓ You will have the opportunity to have your say about how the young person should be dealt with.
- ✓ The young person needs to hear just how much you and others have been affected financially, physically and emotionally by what has happened.
- ✓ You are the person most likely to have an impact on the young person's behavior.
- ✓ You are the best person to express how the offense has affected your life.
- ✓ You have a vital role in helping to develop and approve the plan, particularly as it relates to your interests.

## What about support for you at the conference?

- ✓ If you would like to have support at the conference, you may bring family members or friends. Victim advocates are available for this purpose also.
- ✓ If you are unable or unwilling to attend, the Coordinator will discuss with you the option of sending a representative in your place. Your representative will have the same rights as you at the conference.
- ✓ If you are not able to make it to the conference and you do not send a representative, you are encouraged to express your views verbally or in writing to the Coordinator who will make sure your views are presented in the conference.

## How long will the conference take?

Family Group Conferences are usually two to four hours long.

## What about restitution or reparation (getting back what has been taken)?

The goal is fair and just compensation to you for your losses. You should not agree to any plan that does not feel fair and just to you.

Once the agreed upon plan has been completed you will be notified.

**Your involvement does make a difference.**