

Youth Justice Group Conferencing

What is a group conference?

A group conference is a court ordered program that is available before sentencing to young people found guilty of an offence.

Group conferencing brings together important people in your life and where possible, the victim, to discuss and understand the harm caused by your offence.

The law states that if you participate in a group conference and agree to an outcome plan, the court is required to give you a reduced sentence.

Confidentiality

What is said in a group conference is confidential. No one is allowed to share any information from the conference unless the court says they can, or everyone at the conference agrees.

Aims

The *Children Youth and Families Act 2005* states the purpose of a group conference is to have a meeting between the young person and other persons that has the following aims:

- increase your understanding of the impact that your offending has had on the victim and the community
- reduce your likelihood of re-offending
- negotiate an outcome plan that you agree to, that says what you will do to try to fix the harm caused and what you will do to make sure that you don't offend again.

Other aims include to:

- stop you from getting a more serious sentence and having further involvement with the criminal justice system
- improve how victims feel about the court process by meeting you and letting you know how your behaviour affected them

- help to repair and maintain the connections important to you, particularly with your family and loved ones.

Benefits

The benefits of a group conference include to:

- give you an opportunity to address the harm caused by your offence
- encourage you to be responsible and accountable for your offence
- provide victims and others with the opportunity to say how the offence affected them
- give those most affected by your offence, including you, the chance to contribute to an outcome plan.

Who participates in a group conference?

The Children, Youth and Families Act states that the following people must attend:

- the young person (you)
- your lawyer
- the police
- the group conferencing convenor.

The following people may also attend:

- the victim and/or their support persons or representatives
- members of your family and/or people important to you, that you would like to have there
- workers from services you are involved with that you would like to have there
- any others who have been affected by the offending, who the convenor allows to attend.

Victims in a group conference

Victims are given a choice to participate in a group conference. If the victim chooses to participate they can have support people with them.

The victim will be able to speak in the conference and talk about how the offence impacted them.

What happens before a group conference?

Your group conferencing convenor will meet with you to prepare you for the conference, explain what will happen at the conference and answer any questions that you have.

The convenor will also meet with the victim and make sure they understand that the aim of the conference is for you to repair the harm caused by the offence.

If you have a Youth Justice case manager they will also attend the conference if you would like them to.

What happens at a group conference?

The convenor will make sure that everyone can tell their story and how the offence has affected them.

Everyone is then invited to provide ideas about how you could repair the harm caused by the offence, and stop you from breaking the law again.

Together with others at the conference, you will develop an outcome plan based on the ideas and suggestions discussed during the conference. The outcome plan must be fair.

Examples of activities that could be included in the plan are apologising to the victim or others, or participating in an activity to stop you from breaking the law again.

A conference usually runs for two hours.

What happens after a group conference?

The group conferencing convenor will prepare a report for the court that includes information about:

- your participation in the group conference
- the results of the group conference including the outcome plan
- any other matters that the court asked to be addressed in the group conference.

You return to court for sentencing on the date set by the court.

You complete the actions in the outcome plan with the help of your support people.

For further information about Youth Justice Group Conferencing contact your Youth Justice Case Manager, the Youth Justice worker at court or your lawyer.