
Child In Need of Aid

Mediation and Family Group Conferencing Program

Who is a child in need of aid?

A person under 18 years of age is a “child in need of aid” if the court finds that the child needs the help of the State of Alaska because the child is not receiving the proper care or is in a bad situation.

What is mediation or a family group conference?

In a mediation and in a family group conference a neutral and impartial person, the facilitator, helps the people involved in the case reach voluntary and mutually acceptable agreements.

Mediations and conferences may involve a number of individuals including parents, extended family, and others important to the children and family who meet together with a facilitator to come up with a plan or resolve a dispute.

What happens in mediation or a family group conference?

The facilitator tries to create an atmosphere that is comfortable for everyone and is careful to make sure that all parties understand the process.

Everyone has an opportunity to speak and be heard. Everyone’s ideas and points of view are important. The facilitator tries to make sure that everyone has the information needed to make whatever decisions or plans need to be made.

In a family group conference, family and others with important connections to the family meet privately to discuss the issues and come up with a plan.

When agreements are reached, the facilitator helps to put them into writing.

What does the facilitator do?

The facilitator helps the people involved talk about their concerns and find solutions to them. The facilitator does not decide who is right or wrong and is not a decision-maker. The people involved make the decisions together.

Is this confidential?

What is discussed in mediation or a family group conference is private. Before the meeting begins, the facilitator explains confidentiality and some of its limits, and everyone signs an agreement about that. The mediator does not testify in court or tell the judge about what was discussed.

What does this cost?

When the court makes an order referring parties to mediation or a family group conference, the court pays the facilitator.

What kinds of concerns may be discussed in mediation or a family group conference?

Here are some examples:

- Safety plan so child may remain in home, or return home
- Where children are placed
- Contact and visitation arrangements
- Case plan development and progress
- How to address children's school or health needs
- Concerns related to the Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA)
- Plan for ongoing contact between children and parents when adoption or guardianship is the plan

How do I ask for mediation or a family group conference?

Any legal party in the case may ask the judge for a referral. If you have an attorney, discuss your interest in this with your attorney. Your attorney may make the request for you.

What happens if all the issues are not resolved in mediation or family group conference?

There is still the option of going through a court hearing or trial. If you reach some agreements, but not on everything, you can focus in court just on the areas still in disagreement.

For more information about this publication, please call the
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