

Family Drug and Alcohol Court



Information for families

BIRMINGHAM AND SOLIHULL

FDAC



The problem-solving court

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What is the Family Drug and Alcohol Court?

The Family Drug and Alcohol Court (FDAC) is an alternative court model for care proceedings. It helps families where substance misuse is a problem and this puts the children at risk.

The FDAC court is different from other courts. It is all about trying to solve the problems that have led the local authority to bring you to court.

To do this, the same Judge reviews your child's case every fortnight. At these regular, informal hearings you get a chance to speak to the judge directly. There is a team of workers who are independent from the local authority who support the Judge and help you and your family with specialist treatment.

Parents who join FDAC are given what we call 'a trial for change'. This is work with the team and with other services that gives you the best possible chance to overcome your problems. At the same time FDAC tests whether you can make enough change quickly enough for what your child or children need.

We find that most parents welcome this chance to prove themselves. It also gets parents and professionals working together in a way that means everyone is clear about what must be done, when and why.

What does research say about having a FDAC?

FDAC gets much better results than when parents go to court in normal care proceedings.

This is what a research study at Lancaster and Brunel Universities found:

- **More parents addressed their problems by the end of the proceedings.**
- **More children are able to live with their parents at the end of FDAC proceedings.**
- **FDAC families were 50% more likely to have their children returned at the end of proceedings.**
- **The changes parents make are more likely to be long-term.**
- **When children go home, there is less neglect or abuse by parents who have been in FDAC.**
- **Parents have a better experience in the FDAC court process and felt they have been given the best chance possible to make the changes necessary.**



The research said that parents were overwhelmingly positive about the FDAC team. The team motivated and engaged parents. They listened to them and did not 'judge' them badly.

They were honest with them and were both 'strict' and 'kind'. The team gave parents practical and emotional support, and they made sure that everyone was helping parents stick with their plan of work.

We believe that the best result is that families overcome their difficulties and are able to raise their children at home.

Sadly, sometimes that is not possible, and then we must try to help children find a different home to grow up in. We also help parents keep going, trying to overcome their difficulties.

We hope this will help them stay involved with their children if possible and have a good chance of caring for future children.

Why have you been invited to join FDAC?

A case might be suitable because:

(1) Parental substance misuse is the local authority's main worry, or one of their main worries.

Or

(2) Parents are showing real signs that they want to make changes to their life.

Do parents get a choice about joining FDAC?

Yes, it is up to you. You can join FDAC right away. Or you can say you want your case to go into normal care proceedings. Or you can take a bit of time to decide what to do. Your solicitor will give you advice about all of this.

At the first court hearing the judge will ask if you want to do the first FDAC assessment. If you say yes, you join FDAC there and then and meet the FDAC team.

What happens next?

Between the first and second court hearing you will do an assessment day at the FDAC office and you have a meeting with us that we call the Intervention Planning Meeting.

This is where the FDAC team will work with you to agree a plan of work.

We call this the Intervention Plan.

The assessment and the Intervention Plan are written up as a report, and you can discuss this report with your solicitor and any other person.

When the Plan is agreed the judge will say this is what everyone is going to follow. This usually happens at the second court hearing, about 4 weeks after the case starts in court.

The judge then expects everyone to do their best to follow the Plan. To show that you are committed to your bits of the Plan, the judge will ask you to sign an agreement to be open and honest with the team and the court.

After the second hearing, the 'trial for change' begins.

As part of this, you will have a court hearing without your lawyer each fortnight for up to 30 minutes.

These are to encourage you in your treatment, to see how things are going, and to check that the Intervention Plan is still right for you. This is also the time to solve any problems along the way and to make decisions about a life-long plan for your child, and to do so as quickly as is possible.

What happens if you say no to FDAC?

If you say no to FDAC or don't agree the FDAC plan you can withdraw from this and you will go into normal care proceedings with the local authority.

If you have any questions, you can talk to your solicitor or the FDAC team

Who will I see at court and from the FDAC team?

At court

The same Judge, or one of a small team of Judges is in charge of what happens on your case.

The FDAC Judges are trained to help families stay motivated and get better at taking charge of their lives and solving problems.

Sometimes solicitors will be present and other times they won't such as at the non-lawyer reviews every fortnight.

CAFCASS

As per traditional care proceedings a Guardian will also be appointed at the first hearing who will act in the interests of the child/ren

The FDAC team

The FDAC Specialist Team are independent and the team includes people with different skills, which is why it is called a 'multi-disciplinary team'.

It has a Team Manager, child protection Social Workers, a Substance Misuse worker, a Domestic Abuse worker, a Mental Health Worker, Family Support Workers and Parent Mentors.

There is also an Adult Psychiatrist and some Therapists attached to the team.

Parent Mentor

The mentors are volunteers that have overcome drug or alcohol problems in their life and some have also been involved in care proceedings.

They are there to provide you with support, encouragement and reassurance.



What sort of treatments and support will be written into my Intervention Plan?

It will be a mix of interventions.

Some will be from services in your local area. Others will be the work that the FDAC team will do with you.

They will depend on what your family needs, but they will probably involve these 4 things:

1. Abstinence

Parents get support and advice on being abstinent from street drugs and alcohol and on abstaining from domestic abuse and criminal activity.

This might include community drug and alcohol programmes that provide individual and group education and advice about what triggers this behaviour and how to prevent it happening again.

2. Understanding & repair

Parents get support, advice and treatment to help them understand the problems that might be causing substance misuse, domestic abuse and mental health problems.

Nearly all the parents who use FDAC need help to find safer ways of dealing with how trauma has affected them.

Many children need help to make sense of the disruption to their life that is caused by their parents' difficulties that end up in care proceedings.

Some parents and children need treatment for mental health problems such as anxiety, depression or post-traumatic stress disorder.

3. Strengthening relationships

Parents are helped to be more sensitive and responsive with their children and to strengthen their relationships with other adults, such as their partner, the child's other parent, and the wider family.

This might involve families being offered a programme called Video Interaction Guidance.

4. Child-centred lifestyle

A lifestyle where the child is at the centre. Families are helped to develop a lifestyle that enables parents to give high priority to the needs of their children.

This might include help to find education and training that enables parents to care for their children and be engaged in other activities.



How long does FDAC take?

The FDAC work has to fit with two different sorts of timescales.

One timescale is about what is right for each child based on their age and needs and the other is about what the court process requires.

The very best result from your time in FDAC is that you overcome your problems in time to meet your children's needs.

The question is how long your children can afford to wait for the situation to improve.

The answer is that we can't afford to wait so long that your children miss out on the second best result.

This might be getting settled with a member of your wider family, living with foster carers or being adopted.

The court also has timescales.

A limit of 26 weeks has been set for finishing care proceedings.

This is what is expected for those FDAC cases where children will not be returning home to their parents.

If families are making good progress in FDAC the court will usually allow proceedings to go on beyond 26 weeks.

What will be expected of me if I join FDAC?

We believe that no parent wants to cause their child to suffer and that every family in difficulty wants things to get better.

But parents often don't know how to sort things out themselves and they are afraid that if they ask for help, they will be judged badly and punished.

We find that things work best when everyone is open and honest. This means families and professionals alike.

We know that we must earn a parent's trust and respect.

We find it helps if everyone knows exactly what to expect and what they must do. So, we tell parents and professionals what they can expect from us and what we expect from them.

We have seen families in FDAC achieve amazing things. Mainly this is because they have discovered how to reach out for help and how to work as part of a team.

We want to take your wish for something better and tell you: "You are not alone now, you can do it, and we will help you do it".

At the same time the Judge will be saying: "You have to do it, whatever you do there will be consequences".



Further information

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