

worker and the family approve the final plan. An optional follow-up meeting can be arranged.

### **Who Benefits?**

- ♥ Children, who will live in safer living environments with support from their families and their community.
- ♥ Families, who may become more unified, involved, and better informed in order to resolve issues and concerns.

### **Why does Family Conferencing Work?**

- ♥ Provides for the **CARE AND PROTECTION** of children.
- ♥ Develops and **ACTION** plan.
- ♥ Gives all participants **INFORMATION** about the departmental and court processes.
- ♥ Outlines **OPTIONS** for services.
- ♥ Develops a plan **TAILORED** to the needs of the family.
- ♥ Identifies appropriate **RESOURCES**.
- ♥ Respects and values the **CULTURE** of family.

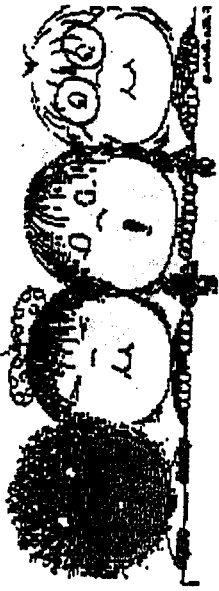
- ♥ Holds participants **ACCOUNTABLE** for plan follow through.
- ♥ Increases plan **COMPLIANCE**.
- ♥ Allows **SHARED DECISION MAKING** and shared responsibilities between the family and the social worker.
- ♥ **REDUCES CONFLICTS** between the family and the Department of Human Services.
- ♥ Increases the family's ability to become **SELF-DETERMINED**.

*"...The Conference allowed for expression of our feelings and kept us focused on the main issue-the child."*

For more information on the Family Conference Program, call:

(330) 722-9283  
(330) 225-7755  
(330) 336-5200

Medina County Department of Human Services  
980 North Court Street  
P.O. Box 1239  
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## *The Family Conference*

*...Providing families the opportunity to be involved in decisions for protecting and caring for their children.*





**T**he Family Conference is a tool for solving family problems that is based on a simple, traditional belief: that the combination of family strengths and community support can keep children safe and well cared for. A Family Conference is a gathering of family members, friends, community specialists, and other interested people who join together to improve the care and protection of a specific child or children.

Currently, in most Family and Children Services Agencies- the court and social services-are the main decision-makers when a child's safety is endangered. Through the Family Conference, people who know and care about the child - the family, extended family, and community - can work together to find a solution.

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*"It showed the kids that no matter how bad things were, we were here for them because we loved them."*

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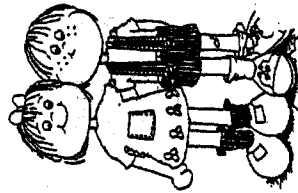
### **Who's Involved?**

Family and children service cases are referred to the Family Conference Program by the social workers. A pre-conference meeting is held between the social worker and the conference facilitator to discuss the process, answer questions, determine participants, and discuss any cultural or special needs. The conference facilitator or another staff member will also contact the family to discuss the family's needs prior to the conference.

The conference itself usually lasts 2 to 4 hours. The time can be divided into three phases:

- ♥ **Information Gathering** - After introductions are made the facilitator and all participants discuss information about the family's situation, the family's strengths and concerns, the court process and resources available within the community.

- ♥ **Family Time (optional)** - Without social workers present, the family discusses the information presented and tries to decide what decisions are in the best interests of the child(ren). The facilitator is available if any participant feels uncomfortable being alone with family members.




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*"Instead of using the court system to resolve this problem, this program provided an opportunity for the families to resolve their problem cooperatively..."*

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- ♥ **Decision-Making** - The facilitator, invited professionals, and others rejoin the family. The family presents it's plan. If the plan is not realistic or viable, the group works on it together until consensus is reached.



### **Who's Involved?**

Parents, children (depending on their emotional development and stability), relatives, extended family, social workers, teachers, counselors, clergy, or anyone who is committed to the child's well being.

### **What Happens Afterwards?**

The social worker will prepare and distribute a written report to all conference participants. **In court cases, the family's plan will be presented to the Court for the Court's approval.** In non-court cases, the social