

Supervising Child-Parent Visits with a Parent Who Used Domestic Violence: *Your Role as the Family or Friend Supervising*



Aligning systems and practices to prevent domestic violence and support survivors and their children.

What is a supervised visit? Why is it ordered?

Supervised visitation (referred to as 'parenting time' hereafter) is when the court requires a supervisor to be present during parenting time to ensure the child's safety. A judge's decision for ordered supervision is driven by what is in the child's best interest only. Judges do consider logistics like parent schedules and finding neutral supervisors.

Separation and Custody in the Context of Domestic Violence

Children are often put in the middle of parental divorce and separation. Domestic violence affects every individual in the family. Here are some signs of domestic violence:

Parents who used violence

- May try to control or scare the other parent or child by changing the schedule, sending messages to the other parent through the child, or bringing objects that remind them of bad memories.

Parents who experienced violence

- May be in denial about the risk from or take the blame for the violence.
- May act very protective of themselves and their child(ren).

Children

- Children's safety and well-being are dependent on the safety of their parents. In families with domestic violence, many children are exposed to or experience violence or neglect.
- Children may have behavioral or emotional concerns and may fear the parent who used violence.

Expectations of the Parent Who Used Domestic Violence

- To be physically and emotionally safe.
- To interact, play, and communicate with the child in a safe manner.
- To discuss age-appropriate topics with age-appropriate language.
- To avoid talking about other parent(s) or court/legal cases.
- To provide child's basic needs during parenting time (e.g. activities, snacks, lunch).

Supervising as a Friend or Family Member: The Basics

1. You agree to follow the court orders.
2. You have not been convicted of child abuse or other crimes against a person.
3. You have no record of requiring supervision in your own parenting time or custody arrangements with your own child.

General Duties

- Keep the child safe, protected, and comfortable.
 - Safety: Make sure the child(ren) and adults are in a safe environment and feel emotionally safe.
 - Health: Learn about each child's medical and mental health needs.
 - Comfort: If a child is very upset, consider ending the visit.
- Read and follow the court order.
 - Some, but not all, cases have protective orders as well.
- Stay neutral.
 - You may have feelings about the case. While you are supervising, remain neutral. Avoid discussing the case
- Report Abuse.
 - You must report abuse or problem behavior. Make sure the parents know this.

Before the First Scheduled Parenting Time

1. Have a copy of the protective order, if applicable.
2. Make a safety plan.
 - a. Review the plan with the parent who experienced domestic violence.
3. Discuss expectations.
 - a. Explain that the rules are intended to promote positive relationships and safety.
 - b. Talk with the parent about their expectations for the parenting time and your ability to meet those expectations; prepare them for the child(ren)'s potential reaction.
4. Know what information is confidential and do not share it with the parent.
 - a. If information must be released, remove identifying information, such as addresses, phone numbers, e-mail addresses, name(s) of employer, and name of school from paperwork as necessary.
5. Schedule the parenting time so there is NO CONTACT between the parents.
 - a. Offer staggered arrival and departure times.
 - b. Allow the custodial parent to wait nearby based on the safety needs, age, and disabilities of the child(ren).
6. Try to help the parent and child find fun things to do.
 - a. Ask parents about the types of activities they would like to do.

During Parenting Time

1. See and hear what's going on at all times.
2. Do not let others stop by. (Unless the court has approved them to be present).
3. No negative comments about the child, the other parent, or other family members.
4. No talking about the court case.
 - a. Children are kept out of adult talk about the court case; redirect when needed. The child(ren) may be looking for answers from the parent. Have a plan for what to say if the child(ren) ask direct questions.
5. Use your judgment and right to end or cancel parenting time.
 - a. If the parent is under the influence of alcohol or illegal drugs, find a safe way to end the interaction, and make sure the child will not see or hear an argument.
 - b. End parenting time or do not allow it to occur if parents behave in unsafe ways.
6. Respect the child(ren)'s wishes.
 - a. Do not force the child(ren) to participate in the parenting time; explore gently their reason(s) for not wanting to and offer them other ideas, like saying hello, having it be shorter, and drawing a picture or writing a letter for the parent.
7. Check in with the child(ren), letting them express concerns or ask questions.
8. The parent should be the active participant; lessen your presence during the parenting time while observing.

After the Parenting Time

1. Document the parenting time.
 - a. All observations are important. You may be asked to share your observations with the judge. Keep a record of parenting time, including positive moments and problem behaviors.

Special Rules for Sexual Abuse Cases

There are very strict rules for sexual abuse cases. The supervised parenting time must not be in the same place where the sexual abuse was said to have happened. Unless the court made a different order, you must not allow the parent to:

1. **Give gifts, money, or cards.**
2. **Photograph, audio, or video record the child.**
3. **Communicate by whispering, passing notes, hand signals, or body signals.**
4. **Have physical contact with the child (even if the child initiates the contact).**
 - a. Do not allow the parent to:
 - i. comb or stroke the child's hair,
 - ii. hold hands, wrestle, tickle, horseplay with the child,
 - iii. change the child's diapers or accompany the child to the bathroom.