



Henderson County Family Visitation Program Supervised Visitation Parent Handbook

This packet is intended to help parents understand how to use The Family Visitation Program (FVP) most effectively. FVP is a child-focused service. We provide a safe and comfortable place for parents and children to visit and/or exchange in a supervised setting. Staff members at FVP strive to make your visit/exchange experience as clear and comfortable as possible.

The Family Visitation Program believes that every child should have an opportunity to form positive, safe, healthy relationships with their parents, despite any previous conflicts or traumatic experiences. FVP provides supervised visitation and safe exchange services to families with a history of domestic violence, substance abuse, child abuse or neglect, child sexual abuse, mental health concerns, or high-conflict custody disputes. FVP is committed to helping parents establish and maintain positive parenting relationships with their children if possible and create a safe environment for visits between children and parents. There is no contact between parents before, during, or after visits. No contact between parents helps to minimize the effects of conflict between parents.

Services offered:

□ **Supervised Visitation**

Allows parents and children to spend time together in a safe, secure environment. FVP provides age appropriate activities for families to engage in together. Parents and children visit in a private room where a visit monitor is present to observe and take notes, ensure safety, and provide support to the visiting parent. The custodial parent/guardian and non-custodial parent do not have contact with each other at any point before, during, or after the visit.

□ **Safe Exchange**

Allows a child to transition between parents without the parents having contact. Parents who use safe exchange services generally have a shared custody agreement, a court order, or a non-custodial parent has unsupervised visitation with the child. Some parents exchange their child for a few hours, and others may exchange for a weekend or longer.

This project was supported by sub-grant Project ID #:011853 awarded by the North Carolina Governor's Crime Commission. The opinions, findings, conclusions, and recommendations expressed in this publication, program/exhibition are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Department of Justice, Office of Violence Against Women.

Getting Started

After both parents/parties complete the intake process, a visit schedule is arranged by FVP staff. Every effort is made to schedule the initial visit within two weeks of the last completed intake. Parents do not have contact with each other during the intake or service.

FVP has two entrances. Each party will be assigned a separate entrance and parking area.

Custodial Parent/Guardian 1st Avenue East Entrance

- Park in the parking lot of the 1st Avenue East entrance. Do not park elsewhere.
- Come to the door that is facing the parking lot for entrance
- Arrival time for the visit will be at the exact start time of the visit
- Departure time will be immediately after the child is escorted back to the visit area
- **Parents are encouraged to arrange for children to tour the facility prior to the first visit**

Visiting Parent S. Grove Street Entrance

- Park in the front driveway of the Family Justice Center or The Mediation Center. Do not park elsewhere.
- Come to the door on the S. Grove Street entrance
- Arrival time will be 15 minutes prior to the visit
- Departure time is 15 minutes after the visit is complete
- Family, friends, and/or transportation must drop off and wait away from FVP premises until it is time for visiting parents to depart FVP

Program Procedures

Security

To ensure everyone's safety, a police officer may be present in the building at any time.

Our security officers are armed police officers, in plainclothes or uniform. Security officers or staff members may search anyone and their belongings at any time to ensure safety. The officers are friendly to children and parents, and do a lot of little extra things to help out. As an additional safety measure visit rooms, hallways, parking lots, and waiting areas are monitored by video and audio. If security or staff should have any safety concerns, they are authorized to refuse to allow any guest, child, or adult, to visit or to terminate a visit at any time.

Scheduling

We do everything we can to find a visit time that works well for both children and parents.

The Family Visitation Program provides a maximum of one hour of supervised visitation per week. We can only schedule visits when we have available space and staffing. Once we determine a visit time, your visit will occur on the same day of the week, at the same time every time you visit. Parents are expected to stick to their visit schedule - be present and on time. Cancelled visits will not be rescheduled. Instead, the visit schedule will resume at the time of the next scheduled visit. If either parent/party is 15 minutes late, the visit may be cancelled.

Visits are offered during the following hours (based on availability of staff and space):

<u>Wednesdays:</u>	3:00PM – 7:30PM
<u>Thursdays:</u>	2:00PM – 7:30PM
<u>Fridays:</u>	2:00PM – 7:30PM
<u>Saturdays:</u>	10:00AM – 4:00PM

Arrival

To ensure everyone's safety, no one is to be on the premises except at their scheduled visit time unless you have an appointment that has been scheduled. Entry into the building is not permitted until your scheduled time. **You must wait off our premises if you arrive early.** If the visiting parent arrives more than 5 minutes late, the custodial parent/party will be contacted and asked to arrive 15 minutes later than their scheduled arrival time. Visits will still end at the scheduled time. If either parent/party is 15 minutes late, the visit may be cancelled.

FVP may cancel visits, end visits in process, or refuse services at any time.

Staff may discontinue services or end visits in process for excessive cancellations, non-compliance with FVP policies and procedures, if it is determined that the needs of the family cannot be met by the training and qualifications of staff, or due to other circumstances such as staff/volunteer illness or weather. If services are discontinued, both parties will be notified in writing within 14 days from the date of discontinuation.

Cancellations and No Shows

We strive for visits to be consistent for children visiting at FVP. It can be difficult for a child to miss a visit with their parent. If you need to cancel a visit for any reason, we ask that you provide *at least* 24 hours' notice by calling 828-697-7055 x106.

Suspension/Discontinuation of Service

Supervised visitation is best when children know they will consistently see their parent every time the visit is scheduled. **If either party cancels three times within 90 days, the next two visits will be suspended.**

After a two week suspension, if there are three additional cancellations or two no-shows within 90 days following reinstatement, visits will be discontinued.

No family is guaranteed that they will be able visit on the same day or at the same time after a suspension. An updated intake appointment will be required if you would like to resume services more than six months from the date of your last visit.

Two no shows, by either party, may result in discontinuation of services.

We understand that circumstances may change. **If scheduling conflicts occur due to work, school, extra-curricular activities, or vacation plans, please contact the Client Services Coordinator immediately to discuss possible alternatives. Good communication will help avoid suspension or discontinuation.**

Share your Concerns

We want you and your child to feel safe and comfortable at FVP, and we understand that a number of concerns could arise from visitation. Please share any concerns when your child is not present. At times, we may need to get back to you outside of visit hours. Please feel free to call the Client Services Coordinator at 828-697-7055 x106 with any questions or concerns.

Grievance Procedure

If you have a concern, please contact the Client Services Coordinator at 697-7055 x106. If your concern has not been resolved, you may contact the Program Director, at 251-6089 x419. If the issue remains unresolved, you may submit a grievance in writing to the Mediation Center Executive Director. The Executive Director will

review the grievance and respond in writing within 14 days. Decisions made by the Executive Director are final.

Observation Notes

Observation notes are factual, neutral, and objective records of services, parent/child interactions, and interventions by staff. The Family Visitation Program does not provide evaluations of families or make recommendations about future arrangements for parent-child access.

Observation notes are taken by trained professionals, para-professionals, or volunteers. Observers are instructed to record what happens during parent-child contacts and do not document opinions or judgments.

The parent/child interactions have occurred in a structured and protected setting. No prediction is intended about how contacts between the same parent and child might occur in a less protected setting and/or without supervision. Care should be exercised by the users of FVP's observation notes when making such predictions.

Observations notes will only be released by subpoena or order of the court.

Requesting Supervised Visitation Documentation

Copies of observation notes will only be provided by subpoena. If you or your attorney subpoenas the observation notes associated with your visits, you must allow seven (7) days for these documents to be provided.

About Supportive Supervision

Visit Monitors meet with non-custodial parents for 15 minutes before and 15 minutes after each visit to discuss strategies and set goals for a successful visit. Visit monitors work collaboratively with the parent to review the highlights and challenges of the visit and allow the parent to identify areas of focus for improvement. Visit Monitors have been trained in the evidenced-based Triple P parenting model.

Parents are encouraged to talk with their visit monitor during the first visit about goal setting and how they would like to receive feedback. Visit Monitors will also support parents to set limits for their child's behavior while at FVP. If a child is acting in an unsafe manner and parents do not step in to set appropriate limits, FVP staff or volunteers will set appropriate limits.

Please Remember:

1. **If you show signs of being under the influence of drugs or alcohol**, you may not have a visit that day.
2. **Weapons are not allowed inside FVP**, including but not limited to: guns, knives, pocket knives, razor blades and any object determined by staff or security to be potentially dangerous. We know some people carry pocket knives. If you carry a pocket knife, we ask that you leave it in your vehicle. If you forget to leave it in your vehicle, please give it to a staff member or the police officer, who will hold it for you and return it to you when you leave the building.
3. **Straighten up visit rooms before you leave** and wash any dishes that were used, so that the area is ready for the next family. We encourage parents to include their child when cleaning up the rooms.
4. **Do not text, make, or receive phone calls during your visit.**
5. **Engage in age-appropriate activities with your child.** DVDs, videos, games and toys must be age appropriate. Wrestling and rough play are not allowed. Realistic toy weapons are not allowed.

6. **Physical punishment or the threat of physical punishment is not allowed at FVP.** This includes slapping a child's hand, spanking, squeezing a child's arm, etc.

Items Brought Into FVP

Staff will search all gifts and food brought into FVP by either party. If you want to wrap a gift, please bring materials to FVP to wrap the gift after it has been viewed by an FVP staff member. Notes, cards, and photographs must be viewed, approved and may be photocopied before being shown to the child. **Any photographs, notes, or cards not approved before the visit cannot be shown or passed during the visit. FVP is not responsible for the distribution of property or exchanging items not directly related to the child's needs.**

If the case involves alleged or substantiated child sexual abuse, cell phones, other technology and gifts will not be allowed. FVP will not allow letters, cards or photographs to be exchanged during these visits. Parents and children should not bring anything with them to these visits. This helps to protect the child from any potential harm as well as protects visiting parents from further allegations.

Photos and Videos

Parents may take still photos of their child during a visit. Do not take photos of staff or volunteers. Both photos brought to the visit and taken during the visit **must be shown to staff or volunteers before being shown to the child.** Video recording is prohibited. You may not show home video or audio while at FVP.

If the case involves alleged or substantiated child sexual abuse photos will not be allowed.

Child-Related Communication

FVP staff will only pass child-related communication between parents. A form is provided for this communication. FVP staff will review the form for appropriateness and make a copy before passing it to the other parent. FVP staff and volunteers will not communicate verbal messages between parents. Communications not related to the child should be directed to parents' legal representatives (attorneys).

Toileting/Bathroom/Diapering

If the child is old enough to use the bathroom without assistance, a staff member can accompany the child and wait in the hallway while the child is in the bathroom. Parents may diaper or assist a small child in the bathroom under staff supervision except in special circumstances. Custodial parents are expected to bring diapers and wipes to the visit. Staff and volunteers may diaper or assist the child in the bathroom in special circumstances.

If the case involves alleged or substantiated child sexual abuse, FVP staff or custodial parent, not the visiting parent, will assist the child in toileting/bathroom and diapering matters.

Guests

Occasionally, guests who are family members of the child may be allowed to attend a visit. No guests are allowed for the first three visits. After three visits, if you would like to bring a guest, you must provide a letter or court order from an attorney, judge, member of the clergy, social worker, therapist, or other approved professional stating that the guest is appropriate. **The custodial party will be informed of the potential guest.** No registered sex offenders are allowed as guest at the Family Visitation Program. Guests will be not permitted if the court order disallows them or if there are safety concerns which indicate the guest visiting is unsafe for the child. **FVP staff has final discretion about whether a family member will be allowed to visit.**

FVP must be informed of the visiting parent's desire to bring a guest at least 48 hours in advance of the visit. Guests may not be brought to more than one out of every four visits. All adult guests must present a government issued photo ID (a copy will be made and kept on file).

If the case involves alleged or substantiated child sexual abuse, guests will not be permitted unless specifically stated in the court order or referral.

Appropriate Discussion

We encourage conversations between parents and children that are present-focused, positive, and age appropriate. Visiting parents should avoid making promises or talking about a time when visits might be unsupervised. Talking about court proceedings or other adult topics is not appropriate. Visiting parents may not quiz or probe the child for information. This includes information about the other parent. Neither parent should make negative comments about the other parents while at FVP. Profanity, interrogation, threats or threatening behavior of any kind are not permitted. Parents should speak so that the visit monitor can hear (eg, no whispering), and all conversations must be in English unless a monitor is available who understands the language spoken. For non-English speaking families, parents may request a bi-lingual visit monitor.

Appropriate Physical Interactions

We encourage body autonomy and respecting the child's choice to engage or not engage in physical contact such as hugs, kisses and physical play. FVP encourages child-initiated physical contact and child-directed play. Visit monitors will be present to help guide visiting parents to allow their child to have a say about their physical boundaries and personal space.

If the case involves alleged or substantiated child sexual abuse, in addition to child-initiated physical contact, the following physical contact should be avoided: tickling, lap sitting, rough-housing, prolonged hugging or kissing, kissing on the lips, kissing below the chin, stroking, handholding, hair combing or brushing, changing diapers or clothes. Discussions involving the history of abuse or allegations should be avoided at FVP. Additionally, discussions around the child's appearance, dating or sexuality should be avoided. These rules potentially prevent re-victimization as well as misinterpretations of contact. It is recommended that any physical contact is determined and agreed upon by both the child and the alleged perpetrator's therapist.

FVP has final discretion when determining if this rule is applicable to your visit.

Staff Intervention

Staff and volunteers are trained to intervene in visits if there is a concern. This might include a safety issue, adult conversation, a question that is difficult for the child to answer, or something else. Not all interventions are negative. Parents are encouraged to talk to their visit monitor about how they would like any intervention to occur.

Preparing Your Child to Visit at FVP

It takes time for children to adjust to the FVP environment and the visitation process. Please prepare your child and help them understand the visit process. Please assure your child that visits will occur in a safe environment and that the child will be with a staff person at all times. It is okay to remind the child that they may leave the visit at any time. To help children to feel comfortable, we encourage parents to bring their child for a tour and to play at FVP before the first visit. Our staff is sensitive to your child's needs and will assist in making the transition as smooth as possible. Let us know how we can help.

Mandatory Reporting

FVP staff are required to report any reasonable suspicion of child maltreatment to the appropriate authorities. This includes physical, sexual or emotional abuse and/or neglect. FVP staff does not investigate or determine if child abuse or neglect has occurred. If any new allegations of abuse and/or neglect are reported during the visit, FVP may suspend services until a determination of safety is made.

Warrants for Arrest

Warrants for arrest should not be served at FVP. If one parent makes a situation so that a warrant is served, visits may be suspended. Seeing the arrest of any parent while at FVP may be traumatic to children, and parents may be weary to return to FVP. If advance notice is given, FVP staff may choose to notify a client of a warrant prior to their visit so that the client may take care of the warrant or cancel the visit if there is risk of arrest while visiting with their child.

Medication

FVP staff and volunteers cannot administer any medication to children except for minor first aid. Any medication (prescription or non-prescription) is the responsibility of the parents and should not occur while using FVP's services.

Inclement Weather

The Family Visitation Program follows Blue Ridge Community College's (BRCC) decisions for weather-related closing and delays. You can determine if BRCC is closed or delayed by visiting <http://www.blueridge.edu/> or calling the campus. If BRCC closes only for evening classes, the Family Visitation Program will close at 5pm. If BRCC opens only for evening classes, the Family Visitation Program will open for all visits and exchanges that begin after 5pm. If you do not live in Henderson County, and the community college in your county is closed due to inclement weather and you need to cancel your exchange, your exchange will be excused. If your visit occurs on Saturday; If BRCC is closed for classes on Friday, the Family Visitation Program will be closed for Saturday visits. Please call 251-6089 ext. 106 and listen to message to confirm closings.

In the Event of a Fire Alarm

FVP staff will assist everyone in exiting the building. Visiting parents will exit through their assigned entrance and cross the street to safety. FVP staff will escort children through the custodial parent's assigned exit. Custodial parents will exit through their assigned entrance. In the event that either of the two entrances is blocked, all staff, children, and clients will exit out of the nearest door to safety. Staff will remain with children until the custodial parent is able to pick up children at their designated entrance.

The Mediation Center's Confidentiality Policy

It is the policy of The Mediation Center to keep client information confidential.

Exceptions to this general rule of confidentiality include the following:

- When the client has expressly consented to the disclosure of information, such as through a written release of information.
- When FVP receives a subpoena or court order requiring the disclosure of confidential information.
- In extraordinary circumstances, such as revealing confidential information to law enforcement authorities when necessary to protect the health, well-being, or safety of any client, employee, or other party.

The Mediation Center's Non-Discrimination Statement

It is the policy of The Mediation Center to maintain an environment free of discrimination and to prohibit discrimination and harassment against any person on the basis of race, color, religion, sex, sexual orientation, national origin, age, or disability. Harassment of The Mediation Center's Family Visitation Program participants or staff will not be tolerated.

The Mediation Center encourages individuals with disabilities to participate in its programs. If you require special accommodations, have questions about physical access, or require alternative communication of program information, please contact The Mediation Center at 828-251-6089 x419 before your visit.