



The Mediation Center
Finding common ground.

Family Visitation Program Supervised Visitation Parent Handbook

This packet is intended to help you fully 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, healthy relationships with their parents, despite any previous conflicts. FVP provides supervised visitation and safe exchange services to families with a history of domestic violence, substance abuse, child abuse or neglect, mental health concerns, or high-conflict custody disputes. FVP is committed to helping parents establish and maintain positive parenting relationships with their children and 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.



United Way
Funded Program

This project was supported by sub-grant Project ID #:010345 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.

N. French Broad Avenue Entrance

- Park on the street or to the south of the building. Do not park elsewhere.
- Come to the N. French Broad Avenue 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**

Carter Street Entrance

- Park near the door at the Carter Street entrance. Do not park elsewhere.
- Come to the Carter 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. 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.

Scheduling

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

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 and time. 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 for 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 of availability of staff and space):

Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays: 2:00PM - 7:30PM

Fridays: 2:00PM - 5:30PM

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. Entry into the building is not permitted until your scheduled time. **You must wait off our premises if you arrive early.**

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

Staff may discontinue services or end visits in process for non-payment, 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.

Payment of Fees

Both parties are required to sign a Fee Agreement prior to receiving services. Unless otherwise court-ordered, fees for visitation are paid by the visiting parent. If the court order states that two parties are to share/split a fee, each party will pay whichever is less: \$45 (half of the full cost of the visit) or the sliding-scale fee based on the individual clients' household income.

Once either party owes past-due fees amounting to \$45 or more, future visits will be cancelled until all fees are paid in full. Once fees are overdue, fees must be paid at least 24 hours in advance of the next scheduled visit to avoid visit cancellation. Failure to pay past-due fees may result in suspension or discontinuation of service.

Fees for FVP services are as follows:

<i>Intakes:</i>	\$25
<i>Intake cancel with less than 24-hours' notice:</i>	\$25- also charged for a no-show intake appointment
<i>Visits:</i>	\$90- income-based fee reduction available
<i>No Show visit:</i>	\$45- no contact with FVP to cancel prior to the visit
<i>Cancellation with less than 24-hours' notice:</i>	\$30- fee may be waived in the event of an illness or emergency
<i>Observation Notes:</i>	\$20- if viewed more frequently than every 60 days (see below)
<i>Guest Fee:</i>	\$10- per approved adult guest, per visit
<i>Document Release Fee:</i>	\$30- for the first 5 visit notes, \$2 for each additional note
<i>Testimony Fee:</i>	\$40- per hour, including wait time.

Fee Reduction Application

The Family Visitation Program offers a sliding scale based on income. Clients may apply for a fee reduction based on their household income. Families whose income does not appear on the sliding scale do not qualify for a fee reduction. Fee reductions will only be considered once all required income verification documentation has been received. Paying clients will be asked to provide updated income verification documentation every 6-12 months.

Visiting for more than one hour per week

The Family Visitation Program offers one hour, per family, per week of supervised visitation at a reduced fee for those who qualify based on their income. If you would like to visit for more than one hour per week, and it is permitted by your court-order or referral, we can offer additional hours at \$90 per hour. The initial one-hour visit will still be provided at a reduced fee if you qualify.

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 828-251-6089 x420.

If a visit is not cancelled at least 24 hours in advance, the cancelling party will be charged a \$30 fee, no-show visits will be charged a \$45 fee. If proof of illness or documentation of an emergency is provided, the fee may be waived. Any fees incurred are due at time of the next scheduled visit.

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.** If after a two week suspension services cannot be reinstated due to non-payment of past due fees, services will be discontinued.

After a two week suspension, if there are three additional cancellations or 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 time after a suspension. An updated intake appointment may be required if you would like to resume services more than six months from the date of your last visit.

Two no shows without any contact with FVP prior to the visit, 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 828-251-6089 x420 with any questions or concerns.

Grievance Procedure

If you have a concern, you may contact the Client Services Coordinator at 251-6089 x420 or 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 may be 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.

Reviewing Observation Notes

To review observation notes from visits, schedule an appointment in advance. You must come to FVP and review the notes in the presence of a staff member. You may review them once every 60 days free of charge. If you wish to view observation notes more frequently, a \$20 fee will be charged, payable at the appointment. You may not remove observation notes from the office, or write down information about the contents of the observation notes.

Requesting Supervised Visitation Documentation

Copies of observation notes will only be provided by subpoena, by the request of the Department of Social Services, or when requested by a therapist. 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. There is a \$30 document release fee. If more than five visit notes are requested, there is an additional fee of \$2 per visit note.

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 or improvement. A list of goal suggestions, customized to your child's age, is included in the intake packet.

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, 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.
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 in the 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 parties. 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. **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 and gifts will be allowed at the discretion of FVP Staff.

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.

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.

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 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), pay a \$10 guest fee per visit, and sign the Guest Agreement.

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.

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. A positive outlook and a smile can go a long way toward helping a child to feel more relaxed. To help make your child more 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 else 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.

Medication

FVP staff and volunteers cannot administer any medication to children except for minor first aid. Any medication (prescription or non-prescription) given to a child at FVP is the responsibility of parents. If the child needs medication during a visit, the parents must provide written instructions for the medication, dosage, and times to be given.

Inclement Weather

The Family Visitation Program follows AB-Tech's decisions for weather-related closing and delays. You can determine if AB-Tech is closed or delayed by visiting www.abtech.edu or calling the campus. If AB-Tech closes only for evening classes, the Family Visitation Program will close at 5pm. If AB-Tech 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 Buncombe County, and the community college in your county is closed due to inclement weather and you need to cancel your visit, your cancellation will be excused and you will not be charged a fee.

In the Event of a Fire Alarm

FVP staff will assist everyone in exiting the building. Visiting parents will exit through the Carter Street Entrance. FVP staff will escort children through the N. French Broad exit. N. French Broad Avenue parents will exit through the front door and cross the street to safety. 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 custodial parents are able to pick up children at your 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 handicap. 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.