



Henderson County Family Visitation Program Supervised Visitation/Exchange Parent Handbook

This packet aims to help parents understand how to use The Family Visitation Program (FVP) most effectively. FVP provides child-focused supervised visitation and safe exchange services. Staff members at FVP strive to make visits and exchanges comfortable and predictable while always maintaining safety.

The Family Visitation Program believes every child should have a chance to form positive, safe, and 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 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 negative effects conflict may have on children.

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 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 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 two parties having contact. Parents who use safe exchange services often have a shared custody agreement, a court order, or the 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 complete the intake process, a visit schedule is arranged with FVP staff. Every effort is made to schedule the initial visit within two weeks of the last completed intake.

Parents do not have contact during the intake process or through services. FVP has two entrances, and each party will be assigned a separate entrance and parking area.

Custodial Parents

- Park behind the building, in the parking lot of the 1st Avenue East entrance. **Do not park elsewhere.**
- Always enter through the entrance facing the parking lot.
- The arrival time for the visit will be the exact start time of the visit.
- Departure time will be immediately after the child is escorted back to the waiting area. Parents are expected to leave the area promptly.

Non-Custodial, Visiting Parent

- Park in the front driveway, on S. Grove St. **Do not park elsewhere.**
- Always enter through the S. Grove St. entrance.
- Arrival time will be 15 minutes BEFORE the visit.
- Departure time will be 15 minutes AFTER the visit is complete and the child has left.
- Transportation of the visiting parent by family, friends, etc., must leave promptly after dropping off. If they intend to wait, they must do so off FVP property or N. French Broad Ave custodial parent parking.
- Also, no one may accompany the visiting parent and wait in the car in FVP parking, including children and partners. If anyone must accompany the visiting parent, they must wait off the premises.

Program Procedures

Security

To ensure everyone's safety,

Staff members may search an individual's person and/or their belongings at any time to ensure safety. Additionally, all visiting rooms, hallways, parking lots, and waiting areas are monitored by video and audio. If staff should have any safety concerns, they are authorized to refuse services to any parent, guest, or child. From time to time, FVP may contract with off-duty law enforcement officers or other qualified individuals to provide security

Scheduling

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

FVP scheduling is limited to when there is available time and staffing. Once a time is determined, your services will occur on the same day and time. Parents are expected to stick to their schedule; be present and be on time.

Cancelled services cannot be rescheduled. If there is a cancellation, the visit schedule will resume for the next scheduled visit.

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

Monday – Wednesday: 2:00 PM – 8:00 PM

Arrival

To ensure safety, no clients are allowed on the premises outside of their scheduled time unless they have an appointment. Entry into the building is not permitted until your scheduled time. **If you arrive early, you must wait off the premises.**

If the visiting parent arrives more than 5 minutes late, the custodial parent will be contacted and asked to arrive 15 minutes later than their scheduled arrival time, and the visit will end at the scheduled time. If either parent is 15 or more minutes late, the visit will be cancelled.

FVP may cancel services, end services in process, or refuse services at any time. Services may be ended for any policy violation or safety concern, including excessive cancellations, non-compliance with FVP policies, inappropriate discussion, or inappropriate behavior, e.g., falling asleep. Staff may also cancel services if it is determined that the family's needs cannot be met by the training and qualifications of staff. Additionally, staff may cancel or end services in process due to staff illness or inclement weather.

One hour-long visit a week

If there is a court order in place, FVP will do its best to follow the outlined visit specifications. The program can offer each family up to one hour of supervised visitation per week. This limit is due to limited physical space and staff capacity, paired with the high demand for services.

Parent Cancellations and No-Shows

We strive for visits to be consistent for children visiting at FVP. 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 x 101.

A parent is considered a "no-show" for their visit if they do not come to a scheduled visit and there was no prior notice to staff. In the event of a same-day emergency documentation, the cancellation may be excused. Final decisions are up to staff discretion.

Suspension/Discontinuation of Services

Supervised visitation and safe exchange services are best when they are consistent. Furthermore, FVP is often at full capacity, with a list of families waiting to access FVP's services. For those reasons, **if either parent cancels three times within 90 days (about 3 months) for any reason, the next two visits will be suspended.** After suspension, if there are additional cancellations or no-shows within 90 days (about 3 months) following reinstatement, visits may be discontinued. **Additionally, if any parent has two back-to-back no-shows, services may be discontinued.** The canceling or no-show parents must meet with staff within two weeks to create a plan to ensure that they will not miss additional visits. If a plan is not created, visits will be discontinued. In the event of a same-day emergency, the cancellation may be excused, and the final decision is up to staff discretion.

Child Refusal

Apart from infants, children are expected to engage in visit or exchange services voluntarily. If a child is reluctant to participate in services, staff will encourage participation by offering alternatives, such as inviting the child to briefly say "hello" or asking the child if they would like to write a letter or draw a picture for the non-custodial parent. For supervised visits, staff may offer a shortened visit, and for exchanges, staff may offer a visit if space allows. However, if the child continues to refuse to visit or exchange, that day's visit or exchange will be canceled due to child refusal. If the child continues to refuse to visit with the non-custodial parent for **three consecutive** scheduled visits or exchanges, FVP staff may discontinue services.

If services are discontinued, both parties will be notified in writing within 14 days (about 2 weeks) from the date of discontinuation.

If services are discontinued, there is no guarantee that a family will be able to resume visits on the same day and/or time if they begin services again at a later date. An updated intake appointment may be required if more than six months have passed since the date of the last visit.

As scheduling conflicts occur due to work, school, extracurricular activities, or vacation plans, please contact the Client Services Coordinator as soon as possible. Good communication can help avoid missed visits, suspension, or discontinuation.

Grievance Procedure

If you have a concern, please first contact the Client Services Coordinator at (828) 251-6089 x418. If your concern remains unresolved, the Client Services Coordinator may direct you to the Program Director. If the issue persists, the Program Director will direct you on how to submit a grievance in writing to The Mediation Center's Executive Director. The Executive Director will review the grievance and respond in writing within 14 days (about 2 weeks). Decisions made by the Executive Director are final.

Observation Notes

Observation notes are factual, neutral, and objective records of services and interventions by staff. The function of FVP services is not to provide evaluations or make recommendations about future arrangements for parent-child access, including custody. Observation notes are made by trained professionals and paraprofessionals. Observers are instructed to record what happens during parent-child contacts without documenting opinions or judgments.

Parent-child interactions in services with FVP take place in a structured and protected setting. We do not provide predictions about how parent-child interactions might occur in a less protected setting or without supervision. Great care and consideration should be exercised by those who request and access FVP observation notes. Observations notes are only released by subpoena or order of the court.

About Supportive Supervision

Non-custodial parents have 15 minutes before and after each visit. Parents may use this time to create a plan for the visit, discuss the visit's successes, and/or what could make for future successful visits. Visit monitors will also support parents to set limits for their child's behavior while at FVP. If a child is acting unsafely and parents do not step in, FVP staff or volunteers will set appropriate limits.

Things to Remember:

- 1. If you show signs of being under the influence of drugs or alcohol,** your services will be canceled that day.
- 2. Weapons are not allowed inside FVP,** including but not limited to guns, knives, pocketknives, razor blades, and any object determined by staff to be potentially dangerous. Additionally, realistic toy weapons are not allowed.
- 3. Straighten up the 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.
- 6. Wrestling and rough play are not allowed.** Please also read the section on Appropriate Physical Interactions.
- 7. Physical punishment or the threat of physical punishment is not allowed.** This includes slapping a child's hand, spanking, squeezing a child's arm, etc.

Items Brought into FVP

Staff will search the contents of all gifts, bags, and food brought into FVP for the visit. 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 and cards must be viewed, approved, and possibly photocopied before being shown to the child. Any notes or cards not approved before the visit cannot be shown or passed to the child 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, then gifts, cell phones, and other technology 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 visits. This helps protect the child from any potential harm and the visiting parents from further allegations.

Photos and Videos

Parents may take still photos of their child during a visit. Please do not take photos of staff or volunteers. All photos, including those brought to the visit and those taken during the visit, **must be shown to staff, and approved by staff before being shown to the child.** Any photographs not approved cannot be shown to the child(ren). Video and/or audio recording is not allowed. Additionally, home video or audio may not be watched or listened to 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 medically necessary information and/or information directly related to the child's needs during the visit between parents. A form is provided for this purpose, titled "Child Related Communication Form." FVP staff will review the form for appropriateness and make a copy before passing it to the other parent. Examples of appropriate use are communication of new or changed medication, allergies, recent illness that may affect visit activities, etc.

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).

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. The "Child-Related Communication Form" is to be used for this purpose.

Toileting/Bathroom/Diapering

FVP staff do not assist children with toileting or diapering but may provide support to parents on appropriate procedures.

If a child can use the bathroom without assistance, the child can leave the visit alone and return after using the restroom, or the visit monitor can accompany them to the bathroom and wait in the hallway. If the visit monitor accompanies the child and there is more than one child in the visit, a second member of staff will be required to monitor the visit.

Children younger than five who are reported by the custodial parent to need diapering or toileting assistance may be assisted by the visiting parent. For sanitary reasons, all such activities must take place in the bathroom; parents are

prohibited from diapering children in other parts of the facility. While a visiting parent assists the child with toileting or diapering, the door to the bathroom must remain open and the visit monitor must closely observe the interaction while maintaining the privacy and dignity of the child. Custodial parents must provide diapering supplies for use during the visit.

If the custodial parent reports that a child 5 years or older needs diapering or toileting assistance, and the child does not have an obvious disability, which makes this necessary, FVP will require medical or court documentation.

If the case involves alleged or substantiated child sexual abuse, the Visiting Parent may not diaper, assist with toileting, or accompany the child to the bathroom. In these cases, the Custodial Parent must remain at FVP during the visit to assist with diapering or toileting unless the child can use the bathroom independently.

Staff do not supervise Custodial Parents who are diapering or assisting their child with toileting.

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. Any potential guest not outlined in the court order must have a letter of support from an approved professional, such as an attorney, judge, member of the clergy, social worker, therapist, or etc. The custodial party will be informed of the potential guest.

Registered sex offenders are not allowed as a guest at FVP. Individuals identified in a custody court order or protective order will not be allowed as a guest. Approved adult guests may attend no more than every fourth visit. Child guests may attend visits more regularly based on FVP staff discretion. FVP staff has final discretion about whether a family member will be allowed to visit.

FVP requires, at minimum 48 hours (about 2 days) of advance notice for all guests. 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, interrogate, or probe the child for information. Parents may not make negative comments about the other parent. Additionally, profanity, threats, or threatening behavior of any kind are not permitted.

Parents must speak so that the visit monitor can hear them (e.g., no whispering). If the visit monitor must ask the parent to speak up, speak louder, or to speak more clearly, it is expected that the parent will make a genuine effort to do this and that the parent will keep this in mind for all future visits. 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 bilingual visit monitor.

If the case involves alleged or substantiated child sexual abuse, discussions involving the history of abuse or allegations are not allowed at FVP. Additionally, discussions around the child's appearance, dating, or

sexuality are not allowed. These rules potentially prevent re-victimization as well as misinterpretations of contact.

Appropriate Physical Interactions

We encourage bodily autonomy and respect for each 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 in encouraging their child to communicate their physical boundaries and personal space.

If the case involves alleged or substantiated child sexual abuse, there is to be no physical contact between the visiting parent and child. Physical contact includes but is not limited to the following: tickling, lap sitting, rough-housing, prolonged hugging, or kissing, kissing on the lips, kissing below the chin, stroking, handholding, hair combing or brushing, and/or changing diapers or clothes. If the court order is not clear, FVP has final discretion when determining if this rule is applicable to your visit.

Staff Intervention

Staff are trained to intervene during visits if there is a concern. This might include a safety issue, adult conversation, a question that is difficult for the child to answer, etc. Not all interventions are negative. Parents are encouraged to talk to their visit monitor about how they would prefer interventions to occur during visits.

Preparing Your Child to Visit at FVP

For some children, it may take time for them to adjust to visiting their parents at FVP. Please prepare your child by communicating with them who they will be visiting and the general process of visiting with FVP. Please reassure your child that visits will occur in a safe environment and that an FVP staff person will be present throughout the visit. It is okay to remind the child that they may leave the visit at any time.

To help children to feel more comfortable, FVP provides a child orientation and tour of the facility. The orientation and tour must occur prior to the first visit. If your child is under 18 months (about 1 and a half years), they may be exempt from the tour at the discretion of FVP staff.

Mandatory Reporting

FVP staff must 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.

Warrants for Arrest

Warrants for arrest should not be served at FVP. If one parent creates a scenario where a warrant is served to the other parent, their visits may be suspended. Seeing the arrest of any parent 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 the parent of the possibility of a warrant prior to their visit so that the parent may take care of the warrant or cancel the visit if there is risk of arrest while at FVP.

Inclement Weather

FVP follows Blue Ridge Community College's weather-related closings and delays. If Blue Ridge **closes only** for evening classes, FVP will close at 5pm. If Blue Ridge **opens only** for evening classes, the Family Visitation Program will open for all visits and exchanges that begin after 5pm.

In the Event of a Fire, Carbon Monoxide Alarm, or Other Building Hazards

FVP staff will assist everyone in exiting the building. Visiting parents will exit through the S. Grove Street entrance. FVP staff will escort children through the 1st St. parking lot entrance. If they are present in the building, custodial parents will exit through the 1st St. parking lot entrance. If either of the two entrances are blocked, all staff, children, and parents will exit out of the nearest door to safety. While accounting for safety, it is expected that parents will remain a reasonable distance from one another, and to not attempt contact or communication. If the custodial parent is not present, staff will call them and will remain with the child(ren) until the custodial parents are able to pick them up. Staff will contact emergency services, and all staff and parents should follow their directions regarding access to the building and to vehicles near the building.

The Mediation Center's Confidentiality Policy

Confidentiality is of primary importance to the effective function of The Mediation Center's Family Visitation Program (FVP). All contact (written, telephone, and/or face-to-face) with clients of FVP are kept confidential. FVP staff and volunteers will not have contact or communication with clients outside of the program. FVP staff and volunteers always maintain confidentiality even after services to the program have been terminated.

The only exceptions to confidentiality include:

- When a client has expressly consented to the disclosure of information, such as through a written release of information.
- When necessary to comply with court orders and properly issued subpoenas.
- In the case of suspected child abuse, elder abuse, and/or the abuse of a person with a disability and/or homicidal or suicidal threats.
- When it is 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 based on race, ethnicity, religion, sex or gender identity, sexual orientation, nation of origin, age, or ability. 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 accommodation, have questions about physical access, or require alternative communication of program information, please contact The Mediation Center at (828) 251-6089 x215 before your visit.