

Additional Handout for Parents of Preschoolers:

## Interpersonal Skills for Your Preschooler

**Sharing and Playtime:** It is important for preschoolers to learn to share, to improve their socializing skills. Sharing skills can be developed when children play with toys. During playtime, encourage children to work toward a goal of completing a puzzle or building a tower of blocks. This will make sharing more fun and enjoyable.

**Verbal Communication:** One of the best ways for preschoolers to communicate is through their words. They are able to express themselves by directly telling you what they want and need. To encourage the use and development of verbal communication, ask your child questions and have conversations with your child about preschool, playtime, and so on.

**Nonverbal Communication:** Teaching children to understand nonverbal cues, including facial expressions and hand gestures, is also beneficial for their communication skills. If a child is unable to understand someone's words, they can rely on nonverbal cues to understand the message and tone of the speaker.



**Listening Skills:** Teaching children to listen to others and understand what they are saying is a skill that will be necessary throughout their lives. There are several activities that can improve your preschooler's listening skills, like Simon Says and Red Light, Green Light.

**Assertiveness:** It is important to encourage children to express their feelings because, otherwise, no one will understand what they want. One way to develop assertiveness is by finding situations where your child can make the decisions based on what they are feeling. For example, pick one night a week and allow them to choose what to eat for dinner.

# New Training Manual for Florida’s Supervised Visitation Programs

## CHAPTER

### Part I. FLORIDA’S FRAMEWORK FOR SUPERVISED VISITATION

#### Introduction

This Chapter explains Florida’s current standards, best practices, and statutory mandates for supervised visitation programs. It includes commonly asked questions for new programs. In order to understand Florida’s framework for supervised visitation, there are three documents which must be considered:

<b>Florida Statute 753</b>	<b>Florida Supreme Court’s Minimum Standards</b>	<b>2008 Report to the Florida Legislature: Best Practices for Programs</b>
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The state of Florida has one of the most structured and transparent systems for the service of supervised visitation in the U.S. However, the state’s goal of formalizing a certification process and stabilizing programs financially has not yet been realized. Even without a certification and funding structure, though, there are still many training resources for programs funded by the Department of Children and Families.

In 2016, programs still use skeletal set of Florida Supreme Court Standards (called the “Interim Minimum Standards” in FL Statute 753) written in the late 1990’s. In addition, the Clearinghouse encourages programs to follow a more updated set of Recommended Standards, commonly referred to as “best practices,” from the 2008 Report to the Florida Legislature. Both are discussed below.

*Note: Programs must work closely with the courts, but this chapter does not include information on that topic. Instead please see the chapter entitled “Working with the Court.”*

## What will I learn in this chapter?

Upon completion of this chapter, a visit monitor will be able to:

- Understand the elements of Florida Statute 753
- List the purposes of supervised visitation mandated by the Supreme Court's Minimum Standards for Supervised Visitation Programs
- Understand the scope and limitations of the best practices in the 2008 Report to the Florida Legislature
- List the elements of a Client's Agreement with the Program
- Describe the requirements of an Agreement for accepting child sexual abuse referrals
- Identify the Clearinghouse's set of training materials and tools on the web



**The Mission of Florida's Supervised Visitation Programs is to use well-trained staff to provide safe and respectful Supervised Visitation and Monitored Exchange services and to coordinate these services within each community. Programs accomplish this mission by adhering to four principles: safety, training, dignity and diversity, and community.**

**(From the Report to the Florida Legislature, See Appendix)**

## Snapshots and Facts

- There are currently approximately 100 programs offering supervised visitation in Florida
- Most judicial circuits in Florida are home to at least one supervised visitation program
- Over the last decade, six programs in Florida have received federal funding from the US Office on Violence Against Women to provide supervised visitation in domestic violence cases.
- Approximately 28 programs receive federal Access and Visitation funding annually from the U.S. Office on Child Support Enforcement through the Florida Department of Children and Families
- There are three important documents that guide supervised visitation services in Florida: Florida Statute 753, The 1999 Florida Supreme Court's Minimum Standards for Supervised Visitation Program Agreements; and the 2008 Report to the Florida Legislature. All can be found on the Clearinghouse website [familyvio.csw.fsu.edu](http://familyvio.csw.fsu.edu).
- Programs are developed to take a variety of cases. These may include dependency cases, divorce and post-divorce related cases, paternity cases, and criminal cases





## Definitions

The following definitions were created by the Supervised Visitation Standards Committee and appear in the Report to the Florida Legislature.

**Supervised visitation** is contact between a parent and a child overseen by a trained third party in a controlled environment which enhances the safety of all vulnerable parties. The contact between the parent and the child is structured so that program personnel may actively encourage the parent-child relationship by providing age-appropriate activities, helping parents develop or enhance parenting skills when necessary, modeling appropriate interactions with the child and discouraging inappropriate parental conduct. Although Supervised Visitation program staff facilitate and support the parent and the child relationship, facilitation and support should not be construed to mean therapeutic intervention rising to the level of therapist-client relationship.



A **supervised visitation program** is an entity that has as its core function the provision of supervised visitation and/or monitored exchange services, and which has entered into an agreement with the Chief Judge of the circuit in which the Program is located to provide services pursuant to the program agreement and court order. A Program is located to provide services pursuant to the program agreement and court order. A Program may operate under the auspices of the court, or be a not-for-profit corporation or association, or be a component of a larger not-for-profit corporation or association. Some private for-profit programs also exist in Florida.

## Types of Supervised Visitation

- Group supervision: supervision of parent/child contact in which more than one family is supervised by one or more visit supervisors simultaneously; also referred to as “multiple-family” supervision
- Individual/”one to one” supervised visitation: one visitation monitor for one family
- Therapeutic Supervision: the provision of therapeutic evaluation or therapeutic intervention to help improve the parent-child interactions; may only be provided by order of the court and only by licensed mental health professionals who are also specifically trained to provide supervised visitation



- Facilitation or supportive/educational visitation: the means by which program personnel actively encourages the parent-child relationship, and should not be construed to mean therapeutic intervention rising to the level of a therapist-client relationship.

### The Purposes of Supervised Visitation

According to the Minimum Standards, the purposes of supervised visits are

- (1) To assure the safety and welfare of the child, adults, and program staff during supervised contact.
- (2) To enable an ongoing relationship between the noncustodial parent and child by impartially observing their contact in a safe and structured environment and to facilitate appropriate child/parent interaction during supervised contact.
- (3) Where appropriate, to provide written information to the court regarding the supervised contacts.
- (4) Programs may also provide other services, including parenting education, mediation, assistance with parenting plans, and others, listed at:  
<http://familyvio.csw.fsu.edu/clearinghouse/fl-programs/>

## Florida Law

The Florida law that deals directly with supervised visitation program function is Florida Statute 753. This statute outlines definitions and terms of supervised visitation services, describes the functions of the Clearinghouse on Supervised Visitation within Florida State University's College of Social Work (in the Institute for Family Violence Studies), and creates the requirement for supervised visitation programs to have Agreements with the Court. It also provides additional rules for programs that accept cases involving child sexual abuse.

753.03 required the Clearinghouse to develop a new set of standards that will ensure the safety of children and families for supervised visitation programs. These were created and published in 2008, but they have not been approved by the legislature or "fully implemented." They are only considered Best Practices, and are located at <http://familyvio.csw.fsu.edu/clearinghouse/standards-best-practices/>

753.04 mandates that until the standards for supervised visitation and supervised exchange programs are completed and a certification and monitoring process is fully



implemented, supervised visitation programs must comply with the Minimum Standards for Supervised Visitation Programs Agreement adopted by the Supreme Court in 1999. These Standards require a supervised visitation program to form an agreement with the circuit court(s) within the geographic jurisdiction of the program which will confirm the willingness of the program to comply with the Supreme Court's standards.

Under 753.04, programs cannot receive federal funding through the Department of Children and Families under 42 U.S.C. s. 669b, unless the program provides documentation to the state agency administering the grant that verifies an agreement between the program and the circuit court.



### **753.05: Referrals involving child sexual abuse**

This section of the statute mandates that in order to accept referrals involving child sexual abuse, a visitation program must have an agreement with court and current affidavit of compliance on file. Additionally, the chief judge of the circuit in which the program is located must affirm that the program has agreed to comply with the minimum standards.

- The program must also have a written an agreement with the court and with the department that contains policies specifically related to child sexual abuse that include provisions for the following:
  - Staff who supervises visits must have specific training on child sexual abuse by the Clearinghouse and that training must be documented in personnel files
  - The program must have protocols on how to obtain background material on the family prior to starting services
  - The program can only accept referrals for which the staff already has background material, training, and security in place to safely monitor visits.
  - The program cannot accept referrals when staff lacks the education, training, background material, and the security necessary to ensure safety of the child.
  - The program must cease visits if the child appears to be traumatized by the visits or when the visitor engages in inappropriate behavior or violates the program rules.

#### **USE YOUR RESOURCES**

**A copy of the Department of Children and Families' agreement for supervised visitation programs in sexual abuses appears as an appendix to this chapter.**

#### **REMEMBER**

Agreements with the Court are described in the chapter entitled "Working with the Court."

## Important Roles under the Supreme Court's Minimum Standards

**The chief judge** in each judicial circuit has responsibility for:

- a. the oversight of a program operating under the auspices of the court; and
- b. entering into a program agreement with independent programs that are in compliance with minimum standards for providers of supervised contact services. (See the Chapter on **Working with the Court**.)

**The role of the referring judge** is to determine when supervised contact is appropriate and to ensure that referrals for supervised contact are comprehensive and specific as to the conditions under which the supervised contact is to occur, including the party responsible for the payment of fees for the supervised contact



services. The judge shall also ensure that referrals are appropriate for the level of service available in a program.

**The role of a program** is to provide a safe, independent site at which supervised contact between the noncustodial parent and child may occur; to ensure that program staff have adequate training to

observe the contact; and where appropriate, provide written information about such contact to the court.

**The role of a program director/coordinator** is to ensure the overall quality of services provided and he/she will also be able to assume roles associated with that of visitation supervisor.

**The role of the visitation supervisor is to:**

- c. maintain independence from parties;
- d. ensure that contact between parties proceeds pursuant the visitation agreement and court order;

- e. relay relevant information relating to the child's welfare between the custodial and noncustodial parent at the commencement and conclusion of supervised contact (e.g. special needs, medication, diet, etc.);
- f. intervene, where necessary or appropriate, to ensure the welfare of the child or parent;
- g. if necessary, facilitate child/parent interaction during the supervised contact;
- h. terminate the visit if the child's safety or that of other parties or staff cannot be maintained;
- i. provide constructive feedback, correction, or redirection;
- j. document the visits consistent with the program agreement.

## **Program Policies and Procedures**

Under the Minimum Standards, Programs must have comprehensive written operating policies and procedures, which shall include, at a minimum:

- types of services and manner in which they are provided;
- case acceptance and discharge policies;
- procedures for communication with the court, including how the program and the court will avoid impermissible ex parte communication;
- procedures for providing reports to the court;
- the visitation agreement;
- payment of fees;
- hours of operation that are accessible to use;
- restrictions for transportation of children;
- security measures and emergency protocol and/or procedures;
- grievance procedures;
- policies and procedures regarding release of information;
- employment policies and policies governing the acceptance and discharge of volunteers, including: non-discrimination policies regarding the employee or volunteer's race, religion, gender, sexual orientation, national origin, age, disability, marital status; and policies that comply with the laws and regulations governing fair employment practices.

The Best Practices require additional operating policies on the following:

- Risk and danger assessments for all referral types;
- Intake, documenting observed behavior;

- Record retention;
- Sexual abuse allegations;
- Photography;
- Gift-giving.

## Visitation Agreements Between Programs and Adult Clients

Adult Clients of Supervised Visitation Programs should enter into Visitation Agreements with the program to ensure compliance with program policies and procedures.

A Visitation Agreement is a written agreement between the program and each custodian and visitor including, but not limited to, specific rules, responsibilities, and requirements of the program and the consequences of failing to abide by the same. The visitation agreement shall also advise the clients that no confidential privilege exists as the program's records, except as provided by the law or order of the court. (Best Practices: Report to the Florida Legislature)

### Elements of a Visitation Agreement with Adult Clients

In all cases, visiting parents and the custodian in non-dependency cases must sign an Agreement that states they will comply with the requirements of the Program.

A Program's Standard Agreement must contain at least the following, but may contain additional information as well.

1. General Program usage information, such as:

- The primary purpose of the visit center
- Hours of operation of the Program and holidays
- A "hold harmless" clause
- Prohibitions on firearms and weapons of any kind.
- Building access information (arrival and departure time)
- Names of all participants authorized to visit
- Specific security protocols and conditions of the Parties; including separation of the parties
- Supervision model/level



- Information regarding records access
- Fee and fine information
- Process of forms, reports, and court correspondence
- Scheduling and cancelling visits, including the Program's discretion to cancel any visit.

2. Participants must have an understanding and agreement with the Program rules: this understanding and agreement must be documented in a provision within the Agreement.

3. Additional rules must be included in the Agreement as well as commonly relevant issues including at least:

*For the visitor:*

- Policies regarding suspicion of drug or alcohol use prior to or during visit
- Policies regarding sexual abuse allegation cases
- Policies related to physical space where visit occurs
- Policies regarding smoking, pets, cell phones, and cameras
- Policies on gifts
- A section for special conditions



*For both the visitor and custodian:*

- Policies designed to keep visual, auditory, and physical separation of the parents
- Policies regarding food
- Policies regarding corporal punishment
- Policies about speaking foreign languages
- Policies about any topics or remarks that should not be discussed in the presence of the child
- A section for special conditions
- Signature and date of visitor, custodian, and program representative

These are not exhaustive lists. They provide a starting point for local programs to craft agreements that reflect local priorities.



