

# VISITATION Times



**FLORIDA STATE  
UNIVERSITY**



Family Visitation Times

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*Dear Directors:* In this issue of the *Family Visitation Times*, we bring you updates, new research, training, and ideas to improve your services. All programs are different: be sure to call me if you have questions about how this information can be relevant to your particular program.

Last year was a difficult year for Florida's supervised visitation programs. Many suffered severe funding cuts, several lost major grants that had enabled them to assist underserved populations, and many subsequently were forced to scale back services. At least five programs closed their doors forever. Despite these glum events, the service of supervised visitation in Florida continues, as committed directors and their staff struggle through difficult times. It is an inspiration to watch determined staff and volunteers labor together to ensure that parents can spend meaningful time with their children in safe and friendly environments. In many ways, the families who thrive at visitation programs prove to us all that Florida's programs are still extremely successful at doing their jobs.

I am particularly inspired when directors call and ask questions about unusual cases. Some directors are new; they feel tentative about making decisions and want advice before they proceed. Many of these professionals, however, have been monitoring visits for years, and they still want to touch base and make sure they are doing their best when faced with novel circumstances. Of course, Florida's families are worthy of such meticulous attention, but it is always heartening to be part of those case review discussions. As someone who has been part of the wonderful supervised visitation community since 1995, I am honored to stand with such devoted service providers.

Please continue to take advantage of our resources. Our monthly phone calls are opportunities to learn and exchange ideas. Our E Presses offer up-to-date news. And our staff are enthusiastic about the technical assistance we offer. Above all, know that we recognize all that you do for families of Florida.

— Karen Oehme, *Director*

### A Director Asks:

#### *What is the difference between a sexual offender and a predator?*

According to [Florida Statutes](#), a sexual offender is a person convicted of (or who has pled no contest or guilty to) a sex offense involving a minor and who is released on or after October 1, 1997 from the sanction (e.g., fine, incarceration, probation, etc.) imposed as a result of the offense. Offenses include, but aren't limited to, child pornography, sexual performance by a child under 18 and procuring a person under 18 for purposes of prostitution. Consult the Florida statutes for a complete listing of offenses.

A predator designation requires that a person be convicted of a first-degree felony sex crime, or two second-degree felony sex crimes (with offenses, convictions or release from court sanctions occurring within 10 years) and which occurred after October 1, 1993. In addition, the court must issue a written order finding for predator status.

Florida law requires sexual offenders and sexual predators to register their address with the Florida Department of Law Enforcement or the local sheriff's office. Details on [registration requirements](#) are available at FDLE's web site; a [searchable database of predators and offenders](#) residing in Florida is also available at the FDLE site.

## Supervised Visitation Program Guide for Developing Social Media Policy

*Social media is an undeniable force in our new, global, and connected society. For those in the social services, social media both presents incredible opportunities and poses great risks. Supervised visitation programs are encouraged to develop a social media policy in order to maintain client confidence and confidentiality, guard the program’s reputation, protect staff/volunteers, and maintain high standards of ethical practice. Such a policy should be updated at least annually, because of the speed at which the technology is changing.*

### I. WHAT IS SOCIAL MEDIA?

#### A. Definition

- Social media is any online mode of communication used by individuals for the purpose of social interaction and networking. Social media differs from email: while both are forms of electronic communication, social media has the potential to reach a wide-range of unknown recipients in contrast to directed email communication. On the other hand, email can be forwarded to unknown recipients almost instantaneously.
- Potential abuse/misuse is only likely to increase as new workers enter the field who have grown accustomed to regularly using social media.
- Some statistics on the impact of social media:
  1. Information leaks and/or confidentiality breaches through multiple form of social media are on the rise:
    - a. 43% of companies investigated electronic information loss in the last year
    - b. 18% of companies investigated information loss or breaches of confidentiality through blogs and video postings in the past year

#### B. Examples of social media include:

- Facebook, MySpace, LinkedIn, Foursquare, Wikipedia, YouTube, Twitter, Yelp, Flickr, Second Life, Yahoo groups, Wordpress, Blogspot, etc.

### II. WHY SHOULD SUPERVISED VISITATION PROGRAMS DEVELOP A SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY?

#### A. Protection

- Protecting clients’ personal information
  1. Scenario: *Thomas just started a blog, which he writes late at night. He has a username and feels almost anonymous, except to his family and close friends. He thinks that finally*

*he has a safe place to vent about all the families he sees at the supervised visitation program, how he feels about his coworkers and how his job affects him on a daily basis. He gets lost in the relief of sharing all of his pent up feelings and frustrations. Over time, he starts using first names, giving details, revealing his inner thoughts and intentions. Then, one day, a client stumbles upon his blog.*

2. Consider how a client might feel seeing his/her confidential information on the internet. Consider how the judge would feel about Thomas’s actions. This scenario illustrates how one individual can threaten the integrity of the entire program.

3. The internet can sometimes feel like a safe haven for venting and sharing about one’s experiences, but when supervised visitation staff/volunteers share (“chat,” “post,” “blog” or “tweet”) about their day on the internet, they are violating clients’ rights to confidentiality, putting themselves at risk of disciplinary action, endangering the integrity of the program, possibly exposing the program to a libel suit, and perhaps influencing the litigation.

4. Importantly, social media information is already influencing outcomes in family law cases as some attorneys utilize the information posted on such sites in divorce and custody cases.

- Staff/volunteer safety
  5. Scenario: *Sharon is an employee at a supervised visitation program. The program does not have an official page on, nor is it aware of Sharon’s use of Facebook. Nevertheless, Sharon proudly advertises the name of her agency as her employer on her profile page and is constantly updating her status with things like “Wow, today was a hard day. Seeing so many screwed up families is really tough. This one little boy and girl I saw today have a real loser for a dad. Poor kids.” The “loser” happens to be a friend of a friend on Facebook, unbeknownst to Sharon, and was snooping around on her site. He is infuriated by this post, which he assumes refers to him, and decides to do something about it. He notices Sharon often has her daily routine on Facebook, including when and*

where she takes her kids to school...

6. Possible repercussions of Sharon's actions:
  - a. Threats to her/her family
  - b. Physical violence or stalking
  - c. Legal repercussions against both her and the program for which she works
  - d. Loss of employment
7. Social media policy is essential for protecting staff/volunteers from putting themselves at risk by provoking clients and divulging too much personal information.
- Protecting the program
8. Misrepresentation
  - a. Staff who use social media and discuss work are representing their agency, often poorly and unprofessionally. This can lead to misunderstandings and even legal repercussions.
  9. Losing respect and credibility
    - a. Unprofessional behavior by staff/volunteers on social media sites can give the agency a bad reputation and endanger credibility.
    - b. The funders of the program might decide not to renew the program's contract if they believe that standards of confidentiality and professionalism are not maintained.
    - c. Scenario: *Julie is a recent college graduate. She loves working in the child welfare field and enjoys getting to know families who come into the program. Two of the teenage girls who visit their father at the visitation program find Julie on MySpace. They ask to be friends. Julie she thinks this will be a good way to get to know them better and develop a good relationship with them. She fails to remember all the pictures on her MySpace from her crazy college days- at the beach on Spring Break and at various frat parties. She also is very open about her night life, and one of the girls has asked her about "clubbing" at the visitation program. Now Julie is being treated differently by the family. They have mentioned Julie's postings to the program director.*
    - d. As illustrated above, mixing personal and professional lives can invalidate staff/volunteers' credibility and undermine the agency's reputation.
10. Lawsuits and other forms of legal retribution
  - a. Agencies could be held accountable for staff/volunteers' behavior on social media sites, even legally, especially if clients' confidentiality is violated. The program can be held in contempt of court for confidentiality violations.
  - b. The vast majority of cases are referred to supervised

visitation through the child protection and/or court system. This means that the cases sent to the program are part of ongoing litigation. Case-specific postings on social media sites might become part of the parents' complaints against each other and/or the program.

c. It is difficult to predict how a lawsuit might come out in this area because of the mix of personal and professional. Social media are particularly challenging for an employer to manage as users will utilize the service for both personal and professional reasons. Users may believe that their postings on social media are wholly personal, but that may not be the case. Law is in its infancy in this area, but the blending of personal and private use in social media outlets means that employers should be proactive in adopting a social media policy and employees should be particularly careful in their use of such sites. **It is important to note that courts have required parties to produce the content of social media sites when they have determined that the information could be relevant to the issue in dispute.**

## B. Professionalism

- Program staff/volunteers are not only bound to the law, but to professional ethics. These include-
  1. Treating clients with dignity and respect.
  2. Honoring clients' rights to confidentiality.
  3. Maintaining appropriate boundaries with clients.
- Representing oneself online (in the public sphere) should be done with the same level of professionalism displayed in any public arena.
  4. If you would not walk around the office in a bikini, tell everyone around the office exactly what you think of them, or air your dirty laundry publicly – you should **not** do it online!
  5. Even if you believe your use of social media to be entirely personal, when you identify your employer on your Facebook page or other social media outlet, you blend your personal and professional worlds. Do not consider all your social media use to be purely personal – it may have professional repercussions and long-term implications for you and/or your employer.

## III. WHO DECIDES WHAT EACH PROGRAM'S SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY SHOULD BE?

- Each organization must follow its own protocols for developing new policies.
- If the program is under the umbrella of a larger agency, the program director should identify what the corporate policies are regarding social media.

- If no corporate policy can be found within the larger organization, the program director should find out whose approval is needed to create a new policy at the local level.
- If the program director is the head of the 501(C)(3) agency, it is his or her responsibility to evaluate alternatives and make choices regarding the program's social media policy with the Board of Directors.

#### **IV. WHAT ARE THE POSSIBLE COMPONENTS OF A SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY?**

##### **A. Affirmation of social media's potential for good**

- Affirmation is important, as the agency does not want to seem disconnected and out-of-touch with technological advancement or opposed to change.
- Social media should be affirmed as an exciting new part of our world and an opportunity to better serve the community and connect with other professionals, if care is used.

##### **B. Advising staff/volunteers of general web safety precautions, such as:**

- Take advantage of opportunities social networking sites offer to protect personal privacy and information.
- Remember that the information posted online, even when privacy settings are utilized, is potentially available to anyone with access to the internet. It is public information (comparable to writing your personal information on a billboard on I-75).
- Take precautions to assure that potentially dangerous information is not displayed on your social media sites (i.e., personal activities, schedule and whereabouts, address, telephone number). The list might also include email, children's names or activities, etc.).

##### **C. Addressing basic ethical considerations, such as:**

- Staff/volunteers are expected to abide by social media site's policies and terms of service.
- Staff/volunteers are expected to comply with the law, as with copyrights and plagiarism.
- Staff/volunteers are expected to behave professionally and ethically (i.e. not making defamatory comments, racial slurs, using offensive language etc).

##### **D. Issues specific to supervised visitation staff/volunteers, such as:**

- Staff/volunteers should be advised whether or not they are permitted to use the agency's name and/or their job title on social media sites.

- Staff/volunteers should be reminded of their commitment to confidentiality and instructed that they are prohibited from disclosing clients' names, personal information and/or discussing client situations on social media sites, just as they would be in any other social context.
- Staff/volunteers should be instructed that in order to avoid conflict of interest situations, they should refrain from interacting with clients and/or anyone related to clients on social media sites (this includes being friends on Facebook, sharing blog posts, etc.).
- Staff/volunteers should be advised to refrain from discussing their work with people on social media sites, especially with friends with whom there could be a potential conflict of interest.
- Staff/volunteers should be encouraged not to "vent" about work on social media sites, but to find other, more private and professional ways of processing their work experiences, such as with a trusted colleague or the program director.
- Staff/volunteers should be required to make clear that any views they express are their own, rather than those of their employer.

##### **E. Clarifying information if programs allow employees to use the agency name/job title in social media:**

If agencies decide to allow staff/volunteers to post their information on a social networking site, agency decision makers and policy makers need to decide what information is acceptable and unacceptable for those staff/volunteers to broadcast.

- A list of acceptable and unacceptable examples may be helpful for staff to understand the boundaries of permissible online activity.
- The consequences of mixing personal and professional lives should be described.
- Conflict of Interest should be discussed.
  1. Inadvertently creating a conflict of interest is a huge risk when using social media
    - a. Scenario: *Jim is talking wall-to-wall on Facebook with a friend going through a messy divorce. In the course of comforting her, he confides that he works for a supervised visitation program and he can help her through the process if the judge refers her family to the program.*
    - b. In the above scenario, Jim may be perceived by his friend's ex-spouse as offering a special, biased relationship to a potential client.
    - c. This kind of situation can easily happen when personal



and professional lives become too mixed on social media sites.

2. Employees/volunteers should be discouraged from accepting or initiating friend requests with clients (former or active).

3. Employees/volunteers should be required to disclose the fact that they have “friended” former or current clients or their families on social media sites.

- Other risk factors:
  - a. Potential endangerment of their safety and/or their families’ safety
  - b. Heightened caution and restriction regarding the content of their social media site
  - c. Heightened risk of employment loss and other work-related consequences

## **V. WHEN SHOULD A SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY BE UPDATED?**

As technology changes, social media policies should be updated to reflect those changes.

## **VI. WHAT ARE THE CONSEQUENCES OF FAILING TO ADHERE TO THE PROGRAM’S SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY?**

- Specific consequences actions for violation of the policy should be clearly communicated to staff/volunteers. These consequences should be clearly articulated to staff/volunteers and executed consistently.
- Consider having staff/volunteers sign a social media policy when hired.
- Add your policy and reminders about social media policy to the program’s Code of Ethics.

## **VII. WHO IS RESPONSIBLE FOR HANDLING QUESTIONS, CONCERNS AND CASE-BY-CASE ETHICAL DILEMMAS?**

- It is important to designate someone to whom staff/volunteers can be referred if they need additional information.
- The name of this designated person and their contact information should be included in the social media policy.

### **SAMPLE TEMPLATE**

#### **Sunshine Visitation Program’s Social Media Policy**

An Introductory Statement should spell out the benefits and risks of social media.

## **I. General web safety precautions:**

This is a list of general safety precautions that you want your staff/volunteers to understand.

## **II. Ethical considerations:**

This is a list of ethical considerations concerning social media, program policies, and general ethical conduct.

## **III. Issues specific to supervised visitation staff/volunteers:**

This is a list of issues that deal specifically with the mission and goals of supervised visitation.

## **IV. Acceptable vs. unacceptable use:**

This section determines whether staff/volunteers are able to identify their agency name and job title in a social media site. It describes what kinds of information can be communicated on social media by staff/volunteers. It also lists prohibited communication.

## **V. Consequences of failing to adhere to the programs’ social media policy:**

The consequences of failing to adhere to the program policy, and the authority and discretion of the program director to take action when staff/volunteers commit breaches of the policy, should be outlined. The program contact for questions relating to the social media policy should be identified.

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# PLANNING CALENDAR FOR DIRECTORS

Every year our nation celebrates numerous “official” months, weeks, and days dedicated to specific causes, interests, or hobbies to raise awareness, to educate, or to just have fun. Some of these days seem silly while others are much more somber and serious. Many of them provide unique opportunities to train and motivate staff; improve interactions with clients/ consumers; increase involvement with your community; and aid in making the working environment better.

When you are looking for inspiration, consider this calendar.

## January

- Birth Defects Month
- National Mentor Month
- Nat'l Personal Self- Defense Awareness Month
- Nat'l Volunteer Blood Donor Month
- Shape Up U.S. Month

## February

- Nat'l African American History Month
- Nat'l Parent Leadership Month
- Nat'l Time Management Month
- Relationship Wellness Month
- World Day for Social Justice (2/20)

## March

- American Red Cross Month
- Employee Spirit Month
- Nat'l March into Literacy Month
- Nat'l Women's History Month
- Nat'l Social Work Month
- Spiritual Wellness Month

## April

- Celebrate Diversity Month
- Child Abuse Prevention Month
- Global Child Nutrition Month
- Nat'l African American Women's Fitness Month
- Nat'l Sexual Assault Awareness Month
- Physical Wellness Month
- Stress Awareness Month

## May

- Heal the Children Month
- Nat'l Foster Care Month
- Nat'l Mental Health Month
- Prepare Tomorrow's Parents Month
- Teen Self-Esteem Month
- Nat'l Family Month

## June

- Children's Awareness Month
- Professional Wellness Month
- Student Safety Month
- Something Nice Day (6/1)
- Abused Women & Children's Awareness Day (6/12)

## July

- Nat'l Black Family Month
- Nat'l Make a Difference to Children Month
- Social Wellness Month

## August

- Black Business Month
- Nat'l Truancy Prevention Month
- Nat'l Humanitarian Day (8/19)

## September

- College Savings Month
- Nat'l Child Awareness Month
- Self Improvement Month

## October

- Domestic Violence Awareness Month
- Eat Better, Eat Together Month
- Emotional Intelligence Month
- Financial Planning Month

## November

- Nat'l Inspirational Role Models Month
- Nat'l Adoption Month
- World Kindness Week (11/8-14)
- Nat'l Hunger & Homelessness Awareness Week (11/ 13-19)

## December

- World Aids Month
- Nat'l Drunk Driving Prevention Month
- Spiritual Literacy Month



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# PROGRAM UPDATES

## Focusing on the Mission

Family Resources, Inc  
Bradenton  
Brenda Green, Coordinator

Since 1997 Family Resources has provided a safe, supervised setting for children to meet with non-custodial parents for on-site visits or to be exchanged for off-site visits.

The majority of visits and exchanges are presently held in the afternoons or evenings with some visits being held in the late morning. An off-duty police officer is hired on-site for every visit. A master's level counselor is present in the visitation room to not only closely monitor each visit but also to facilitate and intervene if needed. Custodial and non-custodial parties are provided with separate entrances and staggered arrival and departure times in order to insure that there is no contact between them. Generally, visits are held in one hour increments for twenty-four sessions. Arrangements can be made for longer visits or additional sessions as requested. All program referrals come either through the Safe Children Coalition or the court system.

Successful visits are those where children have satisfying, safe, productive and regular visits with non-custodial parents without being put in the middle of the parents' conflicts or other problems. Successful visits help those non-custodial parents realize the importance of continued contact with their children and helps them commit to positive behavior in order to regain custody or rebuild relationships with their children. Supervised visitation puts focus on the actual relationship and interaction between parents and children in a neutral, professionally staffed environment. The program goal is to assist parents with dependency case plans and to facilitate reunification where appropriate. Successful visitations and exchanges can result in better outcomes for children and their families and can enable case closings without re-entry or re-occurrence. This process can reduce the length of stay for children in out-of-home placements. Outcome measures for this program include:

1. Provide 100% of services in a safe, supervised setting.
2. Provide services to at least fifteen (15) non-custodial parents or guardians to visit and/or exchange children for off site visits
3. Assist at least fifteen (15) Safe Children Coalition families in moving towards unsupervised visits or exchanges
4. Provide services to at least fifteen (15) dependency/Safe Children Coalition children and families that will assist and lead to reunification of children with their families.

## SV Pilot Program Seeks to Help Needy Families

Children's Justice Center  
Tampa  
Patricia Waterman, Director

The Administrative Office of the Courts (AOC) and the Florida State University – School of Social Work, Clearinghouse on Supervised Visitation have entered into a contract whereas the AOC's, Children's Justice Center, as one of two sub-grantee statewide, will provide a case manager whose mission is to enhance services to families using the Supervised Visitation Program. This project is a pilot and is referred to as the Special Improvement Project (SIP)

Basically, this three year project provides effective intervention for families accessing court ordered supervised visitation and connects volunteer participants with services based on individual needs. There is strong focus on access to Child Support Enforcement, employment resources, fatherhood programs and other community based services. The goal is to reinforce safe protective factors and provide stability for children. The staff's energies focused initial efforts on collaborating with local job placement agencies and creating a bank of resources including access to organizations offering job searching strategies. The Department of Revenue provided training on how to help project clients understand and access child support through the Department of Revenue. The case manager has identified families using the Supervised Visitation Program that match the criteria for possible participation with the project and will continue to identify clients throughout the terms of the project. All programs and services provided are the result of strong community partnerships between local agencies which have been established in order to provide the best possible resources available to families in Hillsborough County. Florida State University's Clearinghouse will be conducting qualitative outcome research on the project, to determine whether supervised visitation programs can indeed enhance the financial outcomes of low income families.

## Finding Ways to Serve Families

Valued Visits  
Fort Pierce  
Jenene McFadden, Program Manager

Valued Visits has been in existence for 11 years and in those years we have helped assist families with thousands of visits that would have not otherwise occurred. We provide a secure and nurturing environment so that children can have a safe visit with their parent. The visitations are court ordered and there is a deputy on site. This January Valued Visits signed a new agreement with the court.

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This past October, Valued Visits lost its funding from Safe Havens and changed its days and hours of operation. Valued Visits operates in three counties: Martin, St. Lucie and Indian River. Services are provided to clients in Okeechobee, however they visit in St. Lucie County. Martin County went from three days of visits to two, Indian River County now operates on one day instead of two and St. Lucie County has two days of visitation from four days. The clients were the ones hit hardest and the saying “you don’t know what you’ve got till it’s gone” is true. With the loss of funding, there was a full time position and two part time positions eliminated. The positive side of this situations is that we have MSW and BSW interns to monitor visits, so those volunteers are not only getting their required hours but giving us quality work and working with families that really appreciate their assistance.

Our most recent fundraiser, Holiday Magic was held in November and we met our goal. Our next fundraiser will be our Stomp Out Child Abuse Walk/Run on April 30th. These fundraisers held every year assist us in our financial ability to provide services to our clients in addition to the grants and donations we receive from community organizations and businesses. Our Indian River office will be relocating due to a grant written by our Assistant Executive Director, Dr. Doug Borrie. As the recipient of this grant, we have been able to purchase a building that will house the offices and visitation room that will assist our clients. This will eliminate the monthly expense of rent, which serves as a major part of the funding we receive.

With the changes that have taken place within the past couple of months, Valued Visits has been able to keep the family unit a priority because of the help of the community and people who care and know that services like supervised visitation are needed. Valued Visits foundation is strong, just like the families we serve.

### **New Faces in New Places**

Children’s Home Society  
Pensacola  
Emily Dehnhoff

The Children’s Home Society of Pensacola, Family Visitation Center has welcomed Emily Dehnhoff. They have recently moved into a new building and are hoping to redecorate things with this fresh start. Other new additions at the CHS, FVC include using a college intern to provide a first-hand approach to the services such as assisting with visits and participating in home visits. As of now, the services continue to be offering visitation for Family Law and Family First Network Clients; child exchanges are no longer being offered.

### **Building on Strengths**

Southeastern Community Mental Health Center  
Miami  
Jenine Camejo

Southeastern Community Mental Health Center offers numerous services to its clients including (therapeutic) supervised visitation, counseling sessions, family care training, support groups, and intensive outpatient services. Many of the services available provide professional and cutting edge counseling techniques. Southeastern CMHC focuses on using clients’ strengths as the basis for healing. Each client is actively involved in the development and implementation of their uniquely designed “goal oriented” treatment plan.

### **Life Management’s New Staff**

Life Management Center Family Visitation Program  
Panama City  
Shaun Phelps

The Life Management Center Family Visitation Program was founded in February 2007, sponsored by Big Bend Community-Based Care. The program services families involved in the dependency court system in Bay, Jackson, Holmes, Washington, Calhoun, and Gulf counties. Wanda Ranger, the program’s original director, created the program with a strong emphasis on a clinical, family-centered practice. She developed a parent coaching program to help families learn and practice new skills within a therapeutic environment. Wanda also believed in ongoing communication between all parties involved in a family’s life. These factors helped ensure families had a safe, comfortable, and beneficial place to visit.

In December 2010, Shaun Phelps took over the Visitation Center from Wanda Ranger. Shaun has a background in both mental health and dependency case management. The program continues to maintain the family-centered focus that is a history of the program, and to also integrate trauma informed care. As a result, the visitation program has been able to increase its focus on parent coaching, helping visitation families gain new skills and feel more empowered.

The visitation program has recently updated its documentation process by using electronic forms instead of paper. This environment-friendly approach has helped increase and speed communication between all parties involved. Currently, we are researching ways to use video conferencing and internet technologies to remove barriers for families separated by large distances.



# APPLYING ART THERAPY TECHNIQUES:

A family-centered way to strengthen the parent-child bond at supervised visitation.

By Emily Parker

Sometimes supervised visitation staff want to employ creative techniques at visits. They want to try different things to help strengthen the parent-child bond. Here are some research-based ways to use art therapy techniques. Remember, even a simple achievement of having a child and parent create a work of art together can be very meaningful. It sounds simple, and it is. But there is strong research to support the ideas of art therapy. First, we begin with a reminder of family-centered principles.

## Family Centered Principles:

- Everyone desires respect
- Everyone wants to be heard
- Everyone has strengths
- Each family has capacity to change and grow when provided with proper supportive interventions

## How can art therapy techniques support the relationship of the child with the visiting parent?

- Expressive therapies enrich the process of change because they focus on the expression of emotion. Expressing oneself is an important step in the healing process and expressive therapies provide a way to safely do that within the framework of the therapeutic relationship (Dachinger & Ulman, 1975, p.7).
- There is fascination of the meaning of art made in therapy, but the overall purpose is for the person making the art to come up with an interpretation of their own; the purpose is to help the client become their own change agent (Malchiodi, 2007, p. 8).

## Target Populations of Art Therapy

**Children:** Young children are one of the main beneficiaries of art therapy. Because children's vocabulary is not fully developed or developed much at all, describing their feelings and experiences can be very difficult. Children tend to find art as a natural way to communicate and are generally comfortable communicating through it. "The use of art with this population is not only helpful, it may be a preferred treatment method since it clearly does not rely on language skills, which may not be developed, and it allows children a pleasurable and constructive



way to communicate, externalize, and process their undisclosed pain, fears, worries, and triumphs (Malchiodi, 1997, p. ix)."

**PTSD:** Post Traumatic Stress Disorder is prevalent among domestic violence victims; some studies indicate that 35% of domestic violence victims were found to have PTSD. Art therapy is effective in treating the symptoms of this disorder. The records show that children provided with the opportunity to express difficult feelings through art after they were exposed to chronic violence were found to be less likely to suffer from Post Traumatic Stress Disorder symptoms (Berberian, 2003, p.33).

## When is it appropriate to use art therapy technique?

- Art therapy is appropriate for people with addictions, individuals with serious or terminal illnesses, war veterans, people with disabilities, prisoners, families experiencing difficulties, and individuals experiencing a wide spectrum of emotional disorders (Malchiodi, 2007, p.3). Art therapy helps with the following:

Develop self esteem	Develop close friendships
Modify behavioral conduct	Improve group cohesion
Reduce anger	Reduce self injurious behavior
Improve relationships	Reduce depression
Reduce trauma symptoms	Improve decision making
Enhance participation	Recognize strengths
Develop empathy	Develop genuineness

(Hartz & Thick, 2005, Chemtiob, Lyshak-Stelzer, Singer, St. John, 2007).

- Art is another option for people who are resistant to communication through talk, even though they are able to speak (Rubin, 1999).

## How is it empowering?

- Transforming abstract thoughts into concrete images: Stepakoff (2009) presented the concept of externalization and how it can lead to catharsis because there is a "human need to symbolize or represent, via external form, emotions, and images that have been purely internal." Painting is very useful for the clients in distancing themselves from their inner conflicts so that they can develop mastery over them (Huntoon, M., 1949)

- The art making process: The act of creating itself gives the client the therapeutic opportunity to channel aggressive energy into the creation of a project, thus producing positive feelings of accomplishment (Malchiodi, 1997, p.viii).
- Completing a piece of art: The goal is to provide an opportunity for the patient to discover him or herself through artistic expression and to discover their own meaning for their creations (Malchiodi, C. A., 2007). Developing a sense of self-worth is key to fostering the sense of control necessary for the client in overcoming trauma and developing internal resources for life after the therapy comes to an end (Malchiodi, 1997, p.43).
- Communication: Creating images expands communication and offers insight outside the scope of the reasoning mind (McNiff, 1992, p.3). There is also the belief that art enlarges, sharpens, expands, and deepens awareness because you become in touch with all levels of consciousness and with the external stimulus (Rubin, 1978, p.268).

*How is art therapy flexible to meet challenges that different families face?*

Art therapy works with the family-centered principle of dignity and diversity. Where communication is key- art provides another language by which to communicate. Persons of limited English proficiency, those who have low literacy skills, or are not literate, and individuals who are differently-abled are given more opportunity when art is presented as a means for expression.

### *Three "C" Tips for facilitating Art Therapy in Supervised Visitation*

1. Comfort: Create an environment that will help the children feel safe. Modifying light and allowing for music can help children relax or give them inspiration.
2. Choices: Remind the children of their choices. They can create or not, share or not, etc.
3. Communication: Actively listen. Do not preach. Use humor, understatement and irony.

(Hodas, 1991, Rubin, 1999)

## **Art Therapy + Supervised Visitation**

*Materials Needed:* crayons, paper, paint, markers, chalk, paper towels (for cleanup), water, brushes, smocks (optional)

*Warming Up:* There are many variations of the scribble technique that help people warm up their creative juices and open up to the idea of expressing their feelings through imagery. One example is the scribble. One could give the child a crayon, marker, or paint-soaked string and suggest they drag

it around the paper to create a scribble. From there the child could highlight an image from the scribble and elaborate on it, creating a finished product.

*Graphic Secretary:* Have the child and parent take turns being a graphic secretary. This means that one will tell the other what to draw, naming specifics about what and how to create.

*Suggestions for Directives:* Draw your mood in the moment; Dreams or fantasies; Three wishes; Your First Memory; You feel...; You are...; You have...; You do...; Self portrait; Draw your family (Rubin, 1999, p. 220).

Art can be used to develop trust, empathy and support between the child and parent. Techniques can be altered to address different needs. In the beginning, focus may be on helping the child and parent become comfortable creating and sharing that experience. Parents can be shepherded to be encouraging, open, and patient during the art processes and children can be given the opportunity to express their feeling in the moment, thoughts they have about recent events, or interpersonal messages they wish to convey.

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# The Effects of the Recession on Child Welfare

Phyllis E. W. Stolt

This think-piece article introduces emerging research that examines some of the newly identified risk factors for child maltreatment. The research involves the effects of economic recession on maltreatment and how events associated with economic contraction have changed how researchers view the risks of long-term poverty. The Effects of the Recession on Child Welfare, a memo from Theresa Huizar (2011) at the National Children's Alliance, notes some insights into the rates of child maltreatment in recent years from three reports released in 2010. These reports reveal striking challenges for the providers of child welfare services. The research presented demonstrates that the impacts of a sudden change in economic well-being may be a primary cause of child abuse and neglect. Recessions affect families without regard to their prior economic status, resulting in job loss and the possible consequences thereof: housing instability, food instability, and emotional strain. These families are often hindered in their ability to provide for their children both physically and psychologically (Huizar, 2010). *New evidence demonstrates that exposure to these stressors and not simply socioeconomic status may be the appropriate predictor of contact with child services.*

Another issue discussed in the Huizar memo is that of the accuracy of current maltreatment statistics and the perception that maltreatment rates are trending downward. The implications of this memo, if Huizar's interpretations are accurate, could be that child maltreatment rates are starkly higher than current reports maintain as a result of budget shortfalls decreasing the ability of agencies to respond to maltreatment in the communities they serve. And, if recession substantially increases the risk—and there is any level of causality in the relationship – the true numbers could rise even further. Huizar backs up this conclusion by returning to the reports that maltreatment rates have fallen. But if the interpretation of these reports as presented is accurate, that may be too rosy a picture to be maintained. The American Bankers Association claims that unemployment will fall to 9.4 percent in 2011 (Kowalski, 2011), but that still leaves many families in sustained instability. The future could hold years of high unemployment rates and state budget shortfalls; together these may present a grave threat of unreported, unchecked maltreatment to children in families which, without the recent recession, may not have been at risk.

**The future could hold years of high unemployment rates and state budget shortfalls and together these may present a grave threat of unreported, unchecked maltreatment to children**

**...the impacts of a sudden change in economic well-being may be a primary cause of child abuse and neglect.**

## Direct Impacts of the Recession

The recession lasted from December 2007 to June 2009 (CBS, 2010), but unemployment increases lasted considerably longer. The first sustained increase in jobs began in February 2010. Before then, the economy hemorrhaged over 6 million jobs (ADP, 2010). The greater impact of job loss during the recession fell on industries dominated by men (three-quarters of all jobs lost) but it should be noted that single mothers experienced a 68 percent increase in unemployment during the recession. The recession also resulted in an increase of 15 percent in the number of poor people in the United States between 2000 and 2008, with an increase of 25 percent found in the suburbs where poverty services are

less prevalent, all prior to the start of the recession (Adrian and Coontz, 2010).

In 2008, nearly 20 percent of children under 18 were living in poor households (Isaacs, 2009). The recession itself brought a serious strain on housing stability, with one in seven mortgages delinquent by the end of 2009 and 3.6 million homes expected to be foreclosed on by 2012, even if federal measures slow the rate. At the end of 2009, 18.5 percent of households responding to the Gallup Household Wellbeing Poll claimed to have had trouble buying enough food during the year. Other polls cited by Adrian and Coontz describe 20 percent of low-income New York City residents experiencing utility shutoff, 78 percent of food banks cutting back on the food distributed to each client with 55 percent turning clients away, and a poll finding that more than half of unemployed adults resorting to borrowing money from friends or relatives with as many having to reduce utilization of health care .

Children living with food insecurity increased from 16 percent in 2007 to 21 percent in 2008, the largest increase in a single year since the USDA began collecting this data in 1995 (Sell, Zlotnik, Noonan, and Rubin, 2010). Also, during the year from August 2008 to August 2009, monthly caseloads for Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) increased from 29.5 to 36.5 million participants, and SNAP recipients increased by 7.0 million or 24 percent (Isaacs, 2009). In 2007, over 40 percent of families with children struggled to pay for housing or were living in substandard housing. The next year, the families of 12.7 million children were spending over 50 percent of their income toward housing. For reference, the US Department of Housing and Urban Development considers housing that costs more than 30 percent of income to be unaffordable. Additionally, though the number of homeless



persons spending time in a homeless shelter between 2007 and 2009 decreased, the number of families spending time in shelters increased by 30 percent from 2007 to 2009, and the number of days spent by these families in shelters increased by 20 percent (Sell et al., 2010).

### Economic Contraction and Stress

Low-income families are frequently cited to bear an increased risk of contact with the child welfare system (Adrian and Coontz, 2010; Cancian, Slack, and Yang, 2010; Sell et al., 2010). This increased risk is important given that these families experience a delay in recovering from economic downturn. Sell et al. indicate that the median income for non-elderly middle and lower income households following the 2001 recession had not yet returned to pre-recession levels in 2007, when the new recession began.

Consequently, the impact of economic stress on relationships in lower-income families, and any possibly resulting risk to children, may also be prolonged.

The median income for nonelderly middle and lower income households following the 2001 recession had not yet returned to prerecession levels in 2007, when the new recession began.

Job loss has been shown to cause a 44 percent increase in mortality of men (who have been hit hardest in this recession) within four years and 15 to 20 percent over 20 years. U.S. suicide hotlines had an increase in call from 39,000 in January 2009 to 57,000 in July 2009, with nearly one-third attributing their calls to economic stressors. High unemployment and the resulting fears of loss of pay also increase the rates of depression, sleep disturbance, and stress among those who are able to retain employment (Adrian and Coontz, 2010). Increased duration of unemployment is predictive of increased levels of depression, substance abuse, and suicide (Adrian and Coontz, 2010; Goldman-Mellor, Saxton, and Catalano, 2010; Howe, Levy, and Caplan, 2004; Mossakowski, 2008; Mossakowski, 2009). Unemployment also increases the risk of domestic violence, and the National Domestic Violence Hotline notes an increase of nearly 50 percent in calls in 2009 over the previous year. While women have been impacted less by unemployment in this recession, single women in particular have experienced a 68 percent increase in unemployment (as noted above), and are at a higher risk of housing instability, since women were often targeted for the subprime lending which initiated the recession. Many single-mother families are now at risk of eviction from rental homes because of foreclosures on their landlords. Moreover, by the end of 2009 one in seven children was living

**The median income for non-elderly middle and lower income households following the 2001 recession had not yet returned to prerecession levels in 2007, when the new recession began.**

with a recently unemployed parent (Adrian and Coontz, 2010).

The impact of these stressors is clear. But recession is not the only time these affect families. The Unheard Third, a survey conducted among low-income populations in New York City cites similar concerns among this population as those experienced by others during the recession. Yet even before the recession, the psychological strains noted above affected these low-income respondents. In 2005, 68 percent of low-income respondents saw their economic prospects as worse or unimproved over their parents compared to 26 percent of the moderate to high income respondents. Similarly, 51 percent of respondents at or below the poverty line reported having no health insurance coverage; 45 percent had fallen behind on housing payments (24 percent in 2006,

26 percent in 2007) with 65 percent paying half or more of their income in rent in 2005; 39 percent had experienced a utility shutoff (22 percent in 2006, 22 percent in 2007); and 34 percent had hours, wages, or tips reduced and 28 percent had lost a job (23 and 21 percent in 2006, 23 and 19 percent in 2007) (Community Service Society, n.d.). This survey is the only one of its kind in the nation, but low-income individuals and families in New York City may not be substantially different from their peers in other states. The straightforward conclusion is that, even in times of relative economic calm, low-income families face financial hardships similar to those found in recessions, especially in the categories of job and wage security. Might it not be this increased financial instability which increases risk of maltreatment for these families?

### Intimate Relationships

Marital and intimate partner relationships have also been affected by the recession. Stress in one partner can create negative stress reactions in another, and these stresses can be mutually reinforcing. An increase of stress can increase negative interactions between partners, increasing the strain on the relationship thereby further increasing stress (Adrian and Coontz, 2010; Conger et al., 1990; Howe, Levy, Caplan, 2004). Literature specifically cites that maternal stress and harsh parenting is increased during relationship transitions (Beck, Cooper, and McLanahan, 2010). Divorce has been decreasing in recent years, and evidence suggests a sharper decrease in 2009. However, the impact of the recession seems to be one of delaying divorce because of the inability to afford counsel or divesting assets, not of improving relationships. Delaying dissolution of marriage may increase the negative effects on children during



recession by prolonging their exposure to high levels of conflict and by the impact of the conflict on parenting itself (Adrian and Coontz, 2010).

This delay in divorce would be particularly damaging in separations occurring because of domestic violence. A survey funded by Mary Kay cosmetic company in 2009 shows an increase in victims seeking support in 75 percent of 600 surveyed domestic violence shelters in the United States beginning in September 2008. “Financial issues,” “stress,” and “job loss” were reported by 73, 61, and 49 percent of victims when asked for contributing factors to the abuse. “Loss of home or vehicle” also played prominently in some regions (Mary Kay Inc., 2009). Domestic violence rates also increased during the Great Depression, despite a similar fall in divorce rates (Adrian and Coontz, 2010).

### Stress and Child Maltreatment

The impact of the stressors associated with recession – job loss, housing instability and substandard housing, reduced access to goods and services, and increased risk of substance abuse and mental health issues – is an elevated risk of negative interactions between parents and their children (Sell et al., 2010). The stress and mental health concerns resulting from economic difficulty can have a significant impact on children’s wellbeing, with an increased risk of academic failure, poverty into adulthood, compromised health as adults, and impaired short-term memory via chronic stress. While healthful interactions with parents can mitigate these negative impacts, parents experiencing increased stress report feeling less effective in interactions with their children; show less affection toward them; and also respond inconsistently to misbehavior, responding harshly due to decreased patience and then allowing misbehavior due to guilt over harsh interactions or the inability to provide for needs and wants (Adrian and Coontz, 2010; Mistry, Vandewater, Huston, McLoyd, 2002).

Existing literature, including a longitudinal study from the Great Depression, demonstrates a connection between changing economic conditions and shifts in parenting styles. The literature shows no direct correlation between job loss and maltreatment. Instead, the cumulative stress on caregivers resulting from economic difficulties leads to punitive and inconsistent parenting (Sell et al., 2010; Elder, 1974). Berger (2004) found that income was associated with maltreatment risk and with five factors reviewed: medical care, dental care, cognitive stimulation, emotional support, and spanking. Berger concluded, as did Cancian et al., that higher incomes would provide a protective effect for children at risk of maltreatment (Berger, 2004; Cancian et al., 2010). Another study suggested that maternal depression is causally associated with increased psychological aggression with children, but did not find the same relationship with physical abuse or neglect. However, the study did find that such aggression was associated with

an increase in child behavioral problems, and the study also noted that employment resulted in a decline aggression, as does the presence of an intimate partner in the home. Thus, unemployment ought to have the reverse effect, increasing aggression in the parental relationship (Conron, Beardslee, Koenen, Buka, and Gortmaker, 2009).

Cancian et al., moreover, find such an effect, and suggest that there is consistent evidence that suggests a causal effect between a change in income and child maltreatment. They note that, in high-risk populations, utility shut-off, housing instability, food insecurity, and economic stress increase the risk of involvement with child services. They also note literature support for a correlation between child maltreatment and community or state level poverty rates, unemployment rates, welfare receipt rates and benefit levels, and demonstrate the relationship between a change in income level and child well-being suggested above. The Cancian et al. report references studies that show income loss and a corresponding increase in contact with child welfare services, and details a randomized trial with Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) recipients in a city of around 600,000. In the experimental group, mothers were permitted to keep child support payments in addition to their TANF benefits. In this experiment, the inverse of the relationship was demonstrated – that even a small increase in income has a substantial impact on the risk of contact with child services with about a ten percent drop in the rate of maltreatment reports warranting additional investigation (Cancian et al. 2010).

### Maltreatment Already Increasing?

But in this recession, and often in the lives of low-income families, increased income is not the most likely event, and if the hypothesis that change in income impacts maltreatment rates, a drop in income would be expected to result in an increase in maltreatment. Unfortunately, that prediction seems to be coming true, and there is already some evidence that abuse rates could be increasing due to the recession. Sell et al. (2010) discuss a study indicating that a one percent increase in unemployment rates consistently predicted an at least .05 percent increase in confirmed child maltreatment reports during the following year using National Child Abuse and Neglect Data System (NCANDS) state-level data between 1990 and 2008 (Sell, Zlotnik, Noonan, and Rubin, 2010; Zagorsky, Schlesinger, and Sege, 2010). Zagorsky et al. made a point to mention that the NCANDS data is an estimate, and that true rates of maltreatment may far exceed these numbers. They cite a random phone survey in South Carolina which produced results suggesting that official reports had underestimated child sexual abuse by a factor of 15 and physical abuse by a factor of 40 (2010).

Another study cited looks at abusive head trauma (AHT) rates at four geographically distinct children’s hospitals in metropolitan

areas of 2-3.5 million inhabitants from 2004 through mid 2009 – across the beginning of the recession. Berger et al. show a near doubling (from 4.8 to 9.3) in the mean rate of monthly cases of unequivocal AHT in three of four hospitals. The locations of these hospitals had similar increases in unemployment rates during the recession of about fifteen percent (Berger et al., 2010). This evidence strongly suggests that there has been an increase in child maltreatment because of the recession. But it also calls into question the reliance on data produced by state systems in which resources may not meet need (Sell et al., 2010). When funding is limited and practitioner caseloads are heavy, how can appropriate responses and reporting be expected?

### Implications for Policy Makers

Policy and funding changes needed:

- Prioritize child welfare services
- Preparedness funding for economic downturn
- Parenting/stress services offered to those seeking income assistance
- Include transition counseling in discontinuation process for income assistance
- Promote professional training to recognize risks associated with short-term economic hardship (Cancian et al., 2010; Fein and Lee, 2003; Sell et al., 2010; Paxson and Waldfogel, 2002; Shook, 1999).

As suggested previously, there is evidence that the reduction in rates of child abuse over the last two decades may be a result of tightened state budgets and thus limited child service workers rather than a real decline in maltreatment (Sell, Zlotnik, Noonan, and Rubin, 2010). Adrian and Coontz fall short of reemphasizing the need to increase budget preparedness in advance of periods of economic contraction necessary to counteract the pressures of economic stress on rates of child maltreatment (2010). However, Cancian et al. note the importance of child maltreatment prevention programs paying heed to poverty and economic hardship in clients (2010). How states prepare for economic contraction, and whether the child welfare system remains a priority in these times, can be an essential factor in the wellbeing of children (Sell et al., 2010).

Berger could not establish a causal relationship, but suggested that policies regarding income assistance, employment, and child welfare be reconsidered in a cooperative light rather than continuing to regulate these areas as unrelated (2004). Paxson and Waldfogel also find decreases in income assistance to be linked with increased foster care placements (2002). Fein and Lee find that a state welfare program including reforms increasing aid but restricting and even discontinuing assistance based on parenting and personal responsibility provisions did lead to a decrease in abuse; however, this program also resulted in a slight increase in neglect, particularly in the months

immediately preceding case closure due to parenting sanctions when the caregivers have already experienced benefit reductions (2003). This would support the sum of the evidence presented here, that increased caregiver stress, particularly in the face of economic hardship, is likely the culprit for child maltreatment. Shook also notes that discontinuation of welfare payments, due to reforms intended to limit the duration of these payments, especially when caregivers are unable to secure employment, is linked to an increase in child welfare contact (1999).

In short, it is clear that policies regarding assistance and eligibility and of course funding for child welfare agencies must take into account the fact that change in income such as job loss can dramatically increase the risk to children and that these events may occur suddenly across a wide segment of the population, placing a pressing burden on social infrastructure. Periods of economic contraction often occur without warning, so it is vital that the planning for child welfare programs include advanced preparation for such events.

The other issue policy makers must address is the problematic state of the child maltreatment data. Sell et al. and Zagorsky et al. both cite data that are inconsistent with reports to child services and with other surveys. Zagorsky et al. mentions a random phone survey in which estimates the rate of child physical abuse at 40 times higher than official reports. The data sources mentioned in the literature reviewed above, NCANDS (Zagorsky et al., 2010), NIS-4 (Sell et al., 2010), and Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS, Huizar, 2010) all result from agency contact. As state budgets continue to contract, despite consistent methodology, these data become less reliable. So, even if these data appropriately represent a true reduction in the rate of maltreatment, the additional evidence suggests that there is still an enormous population of children unserved. That can be disheartening to practitioners, but it is vital information for those pursuing funding.

### Implications for Practitioners

This research can provide some clear goals for practitioners. First among these is a new set of risk factors to watch for in clients.

Risk factors for child maltreatment

- Caregiver stress
- Caregiver depression
- Caregiver history of maltreatment
- Limited social supports
- Stressful life events: relationship transitions and job loss
- Change in income (Sell et al., 2010; Cancian et al., 2010)

Additionally, new programs may be needed to provide stress

mitigation and parenting resources to persons who have recently lost a source of income. As shown in the Cancian et al. study, this change in income does not need to be large to place a substantial burden on family well-being (2010).

### Implication for Supervised Visitation Staff

- Programs should be ready to make referrals to community resources
- Programs should discuss changes with families periodically. For example, after every few visits, staff should ask both parents whether there have been any significant changes in their lives or the child's
- Staff should understand what agencies in the community may be able to help families with economically-related problems

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# SUPERVISED VISITATION PROGRAMS

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## FIRST JUDICIAL CIRCUIT – PROGRAM IN PROGRESS

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**Activity Suggestion for Visits: The Self-Esteem Game**

“The Self Esteem Game” is great for families who need to build confidence, work on reading, learn coping skills, and learn more about the other players. It helps in promoting sharing of feelings, teaching how to overcome challenges

How this game could be beneficial during supervised visitations: The game was created by a clinical psychologist Michael R. Sheehan Ph.D. “...to assist parents, teachers, and therapists in teaching the principals of healthy self-esteem.”

How it works:

- This board game is laid out as a road to “Self Esteem City” where players role dice to move forward to the goal, along the way saying affirmations, handling problems, dancing, and sharing about their feelings and strengths!
- Up to four players of almost any age can play and gain esteem throughout the game while answering questions on the cards that ask about positive traits.
- Intended for age 8 and up, but children just need basic reading skills to play



- Order online at <http://www.selfhelpwarehouse.com>
- Costs \$19 plus the cost of shipping