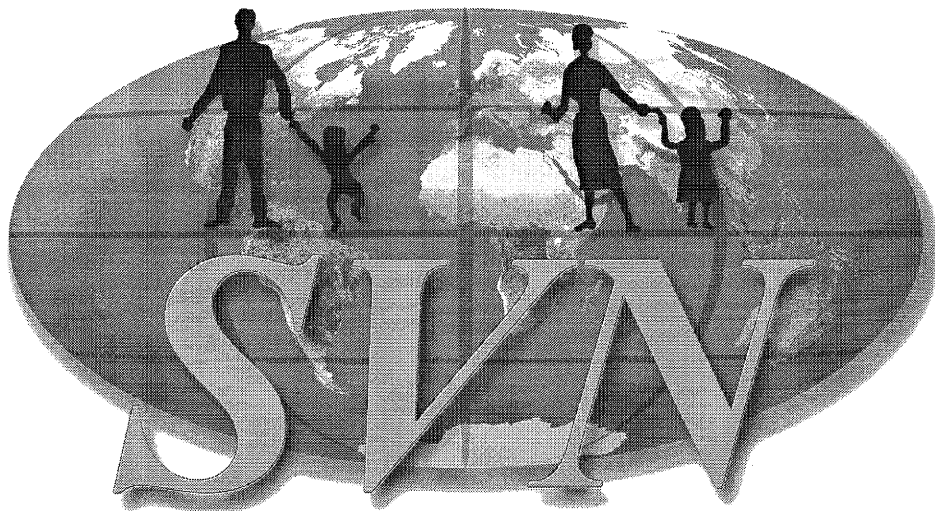


# Supervised Visitation HANDBOOK FOR PARENTS

**A Guide to the Selection and Use  
Of Supervised Visitation and Exchange Services**

**A Publication of  
The Supervised Visitation Network  
[www.svnetwork.net](http://www.svnetwork.net)**



# **Introduction**

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The **Supervised Visitation Network (SVN)** is a non-profit membership organization consisting of individuals and agencies, mostly in the United States and Canada, who have a common interest in assuring that children have the opportunity for safe, conflict-free access to parents with whom they do not reside.

The Network performs the following functions:

- Publishes and disseminates guidelines for Supervised Visitation and Exchange Services
  - Provides training and support for Supervised Visitation and Exchange providers
  - Serves as a clearinghouse for information and research regarding supervised visitation and exchange services
  - Assists parents in obtaining services in their LOCAL area
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SVN does not regulate or monitor service providers. Names of service providers who belong to the Network are made available as a courtesy to those seeking services. Each service provider is a separate entity with its own governing board and/or operating policies and procedures. The Network is not responsible for the quality of services provided. Before selecting a service provider you should check their qualifications and credentials.

**This Handbook is designed to help parents understand how to select a provider and to get the most out of their service. It also has suggestions for what to do if you have a problem with the way your service is provided.**

## **Why Supervised Visits or Exchanges?**

Both Supervised Visits and Supervised Exchanges are designed to assure that **a child** can have safe contact with an absent parent without having to be put in the middle of the parents' conflicts or other problems. It is the child's need that is paramount in making any decisions regarding supervision of the visit or the exchange.

However, there are also some significant benefits to parents. It is our hope that no one will look upon supervised visitation or exchange as a negative or stigmatized service. It is a tool that can help families as they go through difficult and/or transitional times. Some of the benefits for the various family members are as follows:

### **For the Children:**

SUPERVISED VISITS AND EXCHANGES allow the children to maintain a relationship with both of their parents. They can anticipate the visits without the stress of worrying about what is going to happen, and enjoy their time in a safe, comfortable environment without being put in the middle of their parents' conflict and/or other problems.

### **For the Parents or Guardians with whom the child resides:**

The children's primary guardian can feel comfortable allowing their children to have contact with their non-residential parent. They can feel confident about the child's safety without having to communicate or have contact with a person with whom they are in conflict or by whom they might be frightened or intimidated.

### **For the Non-Residential Parent or relative:**

They can be sure that their contact with the children does not have to be interrupted regardless of any personal or interpersonal problems they may be having or conflicts with the children's caretaker(s). If allegations have been made against them, they can visit without fear of any new accusations because there is someone present who can verify what happened during their time together.

## Selecting a Provider

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### Should I use a friend or relative or a professional service?

Often there is nothing to prohibit you from using a “non-professional” relative, friend, or acquaintance. Many court orders will allow that as an option providing both parents can agree on whom to use. This option most frequently does not work out for the following reasons:

- It is often difficult to find someone on whom you both agree.
- It puts a strain on relationships. Many well-meaning friends and relatives will agree to provide the service but will quickly tire of the regular commitment and/or being in the middle of your conflicts.
- It is difficult for friends and relatives to refrain from taking sides. Once neutrality is lost, then the credibility of the “supervisor” will come into question and much of the feeling of security and safety will be gone.
- And, finally, it may actually detract from the quality of the parent/child time together. It is often tempting to spend time interacting with the acquaintance rather than focusing on the child. Children may then come to resent the visits because they feel that they are secondary and not primary in the interaction.

### How do I find a provider?

If you have a court order for visitation, chances are the local courts will have a list of providers in your area. Your attorney may be able to advise you about services. Our Directory of Service Providers on our web site ([svnetwork.net](http://svnetwork.net)) is listed by state and city. If we do not have one listed in your community, then you might call the service that is closest to you and ask them. They may know of one closer to you.

### How do I make sure the service will meet my needs?

Be sure to check the court order to see if it specifies the kind of supervision required. Then check with the provider to see that all conditions can be met. Due to the limited resources available in most communities for such services, you will probably have to be flexible. Some services are open for limited times, particularly in smaller communities. You may not always be able to visit at a time and place most convenient for you.

## The Initial Interview

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When you contact the service, remember that although this is new to you, they are experienced and comfortable. The service providers will guide you through the process and do everything they can to assure that your child’s needs are met. Supervised access providers are there to provide a safe, child-focused setting for your child’s contact that has been ordered by the court or agreed upon by you and the other parent. They are there to help and to do everything they can to make the experience as safe and positive for everyone as possible.

You want to look for the following during the interview:

- Does the interviewer treat you with respect and courtesy?
- Does the service have a clear set of written guidelines?
- Is there a service agreement for each parent/guardian to sign?
- Is there a form for you to sign authorizing release of information and to whom the information is to be released?
- Are fees for service and reports clearly set out?
- Does the provider have a clear understanding of why services were ordered in your case and demonstrate the capacity to meet specific needs?
- Is the in-take interview informative and helpful?
- Does the level of supervision provided meet the needs of your court order and/or your situation?
- Are appropriate security measures in place? Do they have a policy to keep personal identity information (e.g. addresses and telephone numbers) confidential?
- Are there procedures that keep the custodial and visiting parties from encountering each other?
- If it is on-site visits, are you allowed to visit the site ahead of time and can you bring the children to the site in advance to familiarize them with the center and staff?
- If it is off-site, are there detailed guidelines for what is and is not allowed at a visit? Are there sufficient safety precautions?
- Do they have a Board of Directors or Advisory Committee that oversees the program?
- Are they members in good standing of their professional association?
- Does the provider have a clearly defined grievance procedure?

## **Special issues in cases with Domestic Violence and/or child abuse**

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If there have been issues of domestic violence or child abuse in your case, it is important to alert the Service Provider to your concerns. You may want to ensure that the service provider is trained to be aware of and sensitive to domestic violence and child abuse in the context of supervised visitation.

## **Scheduling Visits**

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The Service you select should have clear written procedures about how visits are scheduled and canceled as well as the times and days the services are available. If your court order specifies times and days different from what is available, the Service is not obligated to change its operations accordingly. Some Services will help you work out a different arrangement; others may require that you go back to court and get the order changed. **In any case, it is important that you follow the procedures of the service provider if you are to obtain their services.**

Once the visits are scheduled, you should honor them in a consistent manner. It may be inconvenient at times, but they are important to the children and frequent cancellations by either party are damaging not only to the relationship but to the child's self esteem.

## **Having Successful Visits**

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The Service Provider can provide parents and guardians with information and help in assuring that the children have safe, comfortable, and satisfying visits. Following the rules and guidelines of the service is the first key to this. Custodial parent/guardians should be positive and encourage the children to enjoy their visit. After the visit, they should be willing to listen if the children want to talk about the visit, but should **never** pump the child for information. The visiting party should come prepared to have a good time within the limits set by the service provider. Children are looking for demonstrations of love and acceptance; the other factors are not as important to them.

## **Grievance Procedures**

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If you have a problem or grievance against a service provider, follow the provider's grievance procedures. If not satisfied, contact your local court or whoever referred you for supervised visitation. Some local areas and states may have governing bodies that regulate supervised visitation. Inquire from your provider or your courts about the existence of one in your area. Remember that you always have the right to request a change to another provider if there is one available.

## **How can SVN be of help?**

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Our on-line Service Directory includes only current members of the Supervised Visitation Network. Although we do not have a review process, these members have voluntarily agreed to follow the SVN Standards and Guidelines inasmuch as their individual situations allow. A copy of these Guidelines can be found on our web site at [www.svnetwork.net](http://www.svnetwork.net). Our web site also contains other useful information for parents. If you have any questions regarding our policies, you can contact our office either by phone at 904-389-7800, or by e-mail at [info@svnetwork.net](mailto:info@svnetwork.net).

**Remember, this is about the children—and their needs. It may require some sacrifices on the part of the adults involved. Do not let minor inconveniences interfere with children's needs and rights to have time and attention from all of the people they care about. You will probably not have any difficulty, if you can truly think about it from the child's point of view instead of your own.**

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