

Court Expectations for Non-Professional Supervised Parenting Time

Case Name _____

Case # _____

Why Am I Being Asked to Supervise Parenting Time?

Sometimes a judge will decide that in order for a child to have contact with a parent, it is better for all concerned that a third person be present. This arrangement is called **supervised parenting time**, and the person who does this very important work is called **the supervisor**. That person is **you**.

Supervised parenting time is ordered by the courts or agreed upon by a family. It is used to keep the child safe and support the parent/child relationship at the same time.

In this handout, we will cover important guidelines for you and answer questions we think you might have regarding your responsibilities as a supervisor.

What Am I Being Asked to Do?

You have been asked to do a very important job – to supervise visits between a parent and a child. You have been asked because supervised parenting time has been ordered by the court or agreed upon by the parents. The court recognizes that you are playing a very important role and has made these guidelines available to help you understand your role and how you can best help the child and the family. By accepting this responsibility, it is clear that you care about the child and family involved and are willing to perform the tasks of a supervisor. Please read the following guide carefully before deciding to supervise visits. If, after reading it, you agree to act as a parenting time supervisor, it will give you information that you **MUST** know in order to properly do the job.

LEVELS OF SUPERVISION

As a supervisor, you may be asked to monitor the child and parent contact in different ways. Please read the court order to understand the level of supervision required in your case. Some common levels of supervision include:

Level 1: Sight and Sound Supervision: This requires that a supervisor be present at all times with the child. The supervisor must maintain the child within both hearing and sight.

Level 2: Monitored Parenting Time: This requires that the supervisor remain at the location of the visit at all times with the child nearby. The child and parent may be out of the supervisor's range of sight and hearing for periods of time.

Level 3: Monitored Visits: This requires that the supervisor check in on the child and parent periodically during a visit at a set location. Monitored visits are used when there continue to be safety concerns, but the safety concerns are controlled by the environment and by periodic observation by the parenting time supervisor.

Level 4: Monitored Exchanges: This requires that the supervisor be present only when the child is being exchanged.

What Are My Responsibilities?

Unless the court specifically orders otherwise, these are the expectations and responsibilities of a supervisor.

- **Please read the court order to fully understand your role and duties.**
- **Do everything you can do to make sure that the child has a safe visit.**
- **Remain Neutral.** The judge understands that you may have feelings and emotions about the child, parents, and circumstances in the case. Even if this is true, while you are supervising the visits, it is very important that you avoid taking sides with either of the parents, and that you keep your opinions about any aspect of the case to yourself.
- **If Level 1 Supervision is ordered, make sure that you can see and hear all contact and conversations between the child and parent.** This also means you must understand the language they are using. As you cannot leave the location of the visit, it would be helpful for you to make arrangements regarding such distractions as answering the phone or the door, preparing food, using the bathroom, or attending to other matters that would take your attention away from the visit.
- **Do not allow derogatory comments about either parent, their family, caretaker, child, or child's brothers and sisters.** Sometimes it is difficult to set rules for a friend or family member, especially when those involved may be hurt or upset. During the time you are supervising the visits with the child, however, the court expects you to provide an environment for the child that is free from anger and unkind remarks. This is the time for the parent to build a positive relationship and create a pleasant experience for the child involved.
- **Do not allow discussions of the court case or possible outcomes.** The visits are about the relationship between the parent and the child. It can be very stressful for a child to hear about the court case. The court expects that a child will be free from such discussions.
- **Unless the court has ordered otherwise, do not allow yourself or the child to be used to gather information about either parent or transmit information, money, personal possessions or papers.** Again, the court recognizes that when families and friends are those involved in parenting time it can be more difficult for you to establish firm rules. Know that you have the Court's support in keeping the interaction between the child and the parent focused on the visit and their relationship.
- **Do not allow any physical discipline of the child. No spanking, hitting, shaking slapping, or grabbing the child is allowed.**
- **Do not allow verbal, emotional, physical or sexual abuse.**
 - **Physical abuse** can also include such things as pinching, pulling the child, tickling too hard, and playing too rough. Spanking and hitting is not allowed.
 - **Emotional and verbal abuse** includes such behavior as yelling and screaming; calling the child names such as "sissy," "stupid," or "dumb," blaming or accusing the child; making fun of the child; threatening the child with physical abuse, harm to his or her loved ones or animal; or

threatening, frightening situations for the child like abandonment or loss of a home and/or friends.

- **Sexual abuse** includes inappropriate touching of the child's body, inappropriate or suggestive language and attempts to have the child touch sexual or intimate parts of the adult.

- **Do not allow unpermitted people to attend the visit.**

- **Do not allow visits to occur when the parent appears to be impaired because of use of a substance such as alcohol, illegal drugs, marijuana, or prescription medications.** This is grounds for ending a visit. Your judgement is sufficient for making this decision.

- **It is most important** for you, the supervisor, to pay close attention to the child's responses during the visit. Something in the child's experience may cause them to be particularly scared or sensitive to a person, place, animal, media, online content etc. If the child begins to seem afraid or upset, even if you don't know what has caused it, change the situation so the visit can again be comfortable for everyone.

- **As the supervisor, you may establish reasonable rules of your own.** For example, if the visits occur in your home, you may require the parent and child to stay within a certain area of the house or yard. If riding in the car, or playing in the park, you may want to establish certain rules so that the child and parent will know what you expect (eg. no smoking in the vehicle).

Special Rules for Cases Involving Allegations of Sexual Abuse

The following rules apply to all supervisors of parenting time in cases where there are allegations of sexual abuse, unless the court has made other orders. These cases are very painful for everyone involved. The court recognizes this fact. The court also understands that enforcement of the following rules may be even more difficult among friends and family members. Until the issues in the case are resolved by the court, however, the following restrictions apply:

- Allow no exchanges of gifts, money or cards;
- Allow no photographing, audio-recording, or video-recording of the child;
- Allow no physical contact with the child such as lap-sitting, hair combing, stroking, hand holding, wrestling, tickling, horse playing, changing diapers, or accompanying the child to the bathroom;
- Allow no whispering, passing of notes, hand signals or body signals;
- Allow no parenting time in the location where the alleged sexual abuse occurred.

Special Rules for Cases In Which There Are Allegations of Domestic Violence/Abuse

The following rules apply to all supervisors of parenting time in cases where there are allegations of domestic violence, unless the court has made other orders.

- Know and follow the rules of the safe parenting time exchange, such as by making sure that the parents are not at the exchange location at the same time.
- Understand the rules of any protection orders in place between the parties, as these orders apply to parenting time and contact between the parties and child.

- Do not allow the visiting parent to ask questions of the child regarding the other parent, particularly questions that may reveal the other parent's address or location. Be alert for questions that may reveal other confidential or sensitive information, such as questions about a child's new school, the other parent's relationships, where the child goes for medical care, etc. These questions could reveal confidential information about the other parent's residence, activities, etc., and put the other parent at risk.
- Do not allow whispering, the passing of notes, hand signals or body signals.
- Do not allow the visiting parent to use the child to transmit information to the other parent.

Can I Interrupt or End a Visit If Necessary?

Yes, if the rules of the visit have been broken, the child has become very distressed, or your safety, the safety of the parent or the safety of the child is at risk, you must take action.

Depending on the situation, you may temporarily interrupt the visit, talk to the parent about the problem, and let the visit continue if the parent is cooperative; or you may end the visit for that day. If you decide to interrupt or end the visit, you must do three things:

- Tell **both** parents why you decided to interrupt or end the visit.
- Take notes about the visit, including time, date, location and reasons for the interruption or termination of the visit in case you are asked about it later. You could be required to take these notes to court, so make sure you accurately record what happened.
- If there are specific requirements to do so in your case, you may need to notify a judge.

Do I Have Additional Obligations? Yes, you have these additional obligations:

1. Anything that you see, hear, read or are told is not confidential. Any communication including conversations, letters, cards, etc. are not confidential. Although it does not happen often, you may be asked about the visits by a judge.
2. Inform the parents prior to the first visit that the court expects you to report any suspected child abuse. If you suspect any child abuse you can report it to the:
Child Abuse Hotline at 1-855-503-SAFE (7233)

You do not have to witness child abuse to report it. Reporting may be appropriate if you notice unexplained marks or bruises on the child, if a child tells you that they are being hit or have been hit and there is or has been bruising, or that someone has touched them inappropriately. If you are not sure whether you should report something or not, call the above number and a social worker will assist you. If you do make a report, your identity as the caller is protected by law.

3. End the visit if you decide it is necessary to comply with the guidelines.
4. If for any reason you are unable or unwilling to continue to act as a supervisor, notify the Judge in writing.

TIPS FOR A SUCCESSFUL VISIT

- Explain the rules for the visits to both parents before you supervise any visits.
- If the parents are clear about what you expect from them, chances are the visits will go more smoothly.
- If it becomes necessary for you to interrupt or end a visit, take the parent aside and quietly and calmly explain why you interrupted the visit. Don't get into an argument or discussion with them about the problem, just state the problem and tell them what they need to change if they want the visit to continue.
- Keep notes about each visit. If you interrupt or end a visit, write down what specific behavior, action, words or conversation you saw that caused you to interrupt or end the visit. Try to be objective and report to the parents what you saw and heard rather than what you feel or think about the situation.
- If the visit seems strained between the parent and child, especially if they have not seen each other for some time, suggest fun activities that the parent and child might do or ask the child some questions about their interests, friends, sports or other activities to encourage them to answer with more than a yes or no.

Thank you for providing a valuable service to this family.