



Supervised Visitation and the Role of Human Service Departments

Supervised child visitation may be indicated in cases involving custody; shared parenting; grandparent custody or visitation; divorce; legal separation; post-decree matters; emergency custody situations; abuse/neglect/dependency cases; concerns about parental abduction; and, reintroduction of a parent after a long absence.

Child visitation may be restricted or denied if a court finds that allowing regular visitation would endanger a child's physical or emotional health. In numerous situations, courts may order child visitation by stipulating how often visits are to occur, with whom, and whether the visits are to be supervised by a human service employee or some other responsible adult. If there are protection and safety concerns the visits are supervised. Such supervised visits also provide an opportunity for workers to observe and document parent-child interactions.

Types and Goals of Supervised Visitation

In many states there are three basic types of supervised visitation providers: volunteers, paid professionals, or paid therapeutic providers. The latter two categories may include department of human service employees or their contractors. Their role is to protect the integrity of the visit and to provide a positive atmosphere where a parent and child can interact in a safe, structured environment.

California stresses that the goal of "standards of practice is to assure the



safety and welfare of the child, adults, and providers of supervised visitation. Once safety is assured, the best interest of the child is the paramount consideration at all stages and particularly in deciding the manner in which supervision is provided."¹

To emphasize the professional nature of supervised visitation, California also notes that supervised visitation providers should receive training on the following subjects:

- ♦ The role of a professional and therapeutic provider;
- ♦ Child abuse reporting laws;
- ♦ Record-keeping procedures;
- ♦ Screening, monitoring, and termination of visitation;
- ♦ Developmental needs of children;
- ♦ Legal responsibilities and obligations of a provider;
- ♦ Cultural sensitivity;
- ♦ Conflicts of interest;
- ♦ Confidentiality; and

- ♦ Issues relating to substance abuse, child abuse, sexual abuse, and domestic violence.²

A national organization, the Supervised Visitation Network, affirms in its training manual that the "overarching purpose of supervised visitation is to minimize risk and optimize safety for the children and adults involved in the supervised visitation. The primary role of the provider is to optimize safety and minimize risk to the child." It underscores that a visit may even be abruptly stopped: "At a minimum, supervised visitation providers are compelled to intervene whenever a parent's behavior compromises child and/or staff safety, or the parent is a danger to him or herself. Examples include the following parental behaviors:

- ♦ Attending a visit under the influence of a substance;

- ♦ Exhibiting behavior abusive to the child, or staff; or
- ♦ Threatening the psychological and/or physical health, safety, or welfare of a child.

At such times, the provider should have the authority to stop the visit.”

Future Concerns

Looking forward, Joe Nullet, executive director of the Supervised Visitation Network, identifies two significant concerns: (1) “While we know how important supervised visitation is in keeping families safe during difficult cases involving domestic violence and child abuse, and our Association has established national standards of practice that have been in place for 20 years, the field is still widely

misunderstood and many communities simply do not support supervised visitation services financially or philosophically; and (2) A small handful of states, California and Florida for example, have legislation that addresses requirements to supervised visitation providers, but neither state actually oversees the providers directly with an enforcement agency.”

Conclusion

When a child is in state custody, departments of human services know that regular visitation helps preserve a child’s attachment to his or her parents, siblings, and other family members. Such visits may also ease a child’s anxiety about being placed in substitute care. In particular, supervised visitation can be an important tool for

minimizing the risk of further harm to a child or other victims of violence while a child is trying to reestablish or maintain his or her family ties. ■

Reference Notes

1. California Rules of Court (2013). Standard 5.20 (a). Uniform standards of practice for providers of supervised visitation. Scope of service, http://www.courts.ca.gov/cms/rules/index.cfm?title=standards&linkid=standard5_20
2. California Rules of Court (2013). Standard 5.20 (d). Uniform standards of practice for providers of supervised visitation. Training for providers, http://www.courts.ca.gov/cms/rules/index.cfm?title=standards&linkid=standard5_20

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staff spotlight

Name: Joshua Garner

Title: Communications and Social Media Manager

Time at APHSA: I started in January.

Life Before APHSA: Before being hired at the association, I worked primarily as a news reporter and editor at outlets, including The Washington Post Company, AOL/Patch, Landmark Communications, and *The Washington Business Journal*. About four years ago, I decided to take my news skills into the digital landscape when I became

a content editor and social media manager.

Priorities at APHSA: As Communications Manager, my priorities are to ensure the association’s flagship publications, *This Week in Washington* and *Policy and Practice*, maintain their editorial schedules. Additionally, I am tasked with monitoring and growing the association’s social media feeds and managing content on the web site, www.aphsa.org.

What Can I Do For Our Members: I think it is important for members to know what work we’re doing at APHSA. The greatest

contribution I can give is to make sure that members know how we are leading change within human services and how it can be applied at the ground level.

Best Way To Reach Me: You can reach me via e-mail at jgarner@aphsa.org

When Not Working: I’m always working. But when I am not working at APHSA, I am usually writing or working on other projects. I do enjoy pursuing my fitness goals and hopping on Xbox Live when time permits.

Motto To Live By: “If you want something, you have to work for it!”