

All bags are checked when entering and leaving, to ensure that nothing unsafe enters the room and that nothing inappropriate is given to the child.

During the visit, a staff member stays with the child as an observer. The child is never left unattended with the visiting parent.

Staff members are trained to keep the atmosphere of the visit positive and child focussed. They will intervene to keep the conversation and interactions positive, using gentle techniques at first. But they will increase their interventions in the interests of the child, up to the point of stopping the visit, if they deem it necessary.

THE FOCUS OF THE PROGRAM IS TO CREATE A POSITIVE EXPERIENCE FOR THE CHILD.



THE SUPERVISED ACCESS & EXCHANGE PROGRAM

provides a safe, neutral, child-centred place for a child to visit with a parent or for a parent to drop off or pick up a child for a court-ordered visit without having contact with the other parent.

This program is supported by the Department of Justice.



Supervised Access & Exchange Program

A SAFE, NEUTRAL, & CHILD-CENTRED PROGRAM



What is it?

The Supervised Access and Exchange Program provides a safe, neutral, child-centred place for a child to visit with a parent, or for a parent to drop off or pick up a child for a visit without having contact with the other parent.

A judge may order visits to take place under this program while parenting issues are being addressed through the court system. This program is a transitional and interim tool to facilitate access. A typical order might set out 12 visits, each for an hour and a half, or 18 one-hour visits, depending on the age of child. Supervised access and exchange may be ordered for a variety of reasons, including when

- there are safety concerns resulting from domestic violence or other abusive behavior, substance abuse, or mental health issues
- the child has not had regular access with the visiting parent, for whatever reason, and a period of facilitated and supervised reintroduction is needed
- there is a history of high conflict between the parties that is affecting the child
- there is a risk of abduction

The Department of Justice contracts with local service providers for this service. All visits take place at the site of the service provider.

No fees are charged to either parent. Parents must provide their own transportation to and from the site.

What the program can do

The program enables safe, neutral, child-centred visits with a visiting parent or other family member by

- focussing on creating a positive experience for the child
- treating both parties with equal respect and without judgement
- eliminating direct contact between parents
- ensuring the safety of all involved
- encouraging both parents to put the needs of the child first
- remaining neutral and intervening only when necessary to ensure safety



What the program cannot do

The program facilitates access but cannot enforce access. Operational requirements or safety concerns may make visits impossible to organize or maintain. The service provider has the discretion to refuse service.

FOR EXAMPLE

Service delivery may not be possible if

- an order specifies a time for visits that the facility cannot accommodate and a workable alternative time cannot be found

- one of the parents does not make themselves available for meetings or visits or does not respond to requests for information
- one of the parents is under an order restricting their access to other children and other children may be present in the facility of the service provider
- one of the parents does not comply with program rules that have been fully explained during an intake process

Program staff cannot provide opinions or make recommendations in court. Detailed, fact-based, observational notes are taken at each visit. These notes are filed with the court and given to both parties. The notes avoid making judgements, offering opinions, or making recommendations. For example, the observer would not say “the child was sad,” but rather would report the observable facts: “The child has tears streaming down her face.” If asked to appear in court, staff members read directly from their notes.

Service providers do not take sides, do not offer legal advice, and do not explain court processes.

What the program looks like

Program staff meet with both parents separately to explain the program and complete intake paperwork. A staff member will also meet with the child to explain what will happen during the visits and give them a tour of the facility.

Drop off and pick up times are arranged so that the parents do not come into contact with one another at the facility.