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COMMUNITY SUPERVISED VISITATION CENTERS

A Guide to Opening Your Own Center



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WELCOME

This Visitation Center Manual was created to explain why Visitation Centers are an important part of the community, what is needed to establish a Visitation Center, and who to contact when questions arise. We hope that this is a useful tool in helping you to make a successful contribution to Georgia's families and communities.

A. What Is The Mission Of A Visitation Center?

A Community Visitation Center should provide a safe, comfortable, and accessible environment in which supervised visitation opportunities for children and families (involved with juvenile court) can take place.

B. Why Should You Help?

- Every year several thousand children enter the juvenile court system as a result of abuse or neglect.
- Many of these children are separated from their parents and placed in foster care or group homes.
- Before parents can be permanently reunited with their children, they are often required to undergo supervised visitations.
 - In the past, these visitations have taken place at the often busy, crowded, or inconvenient offices of the Department of Family and Children Services (DFACS).
 - In response to a federal review of Georgia's child welfare system, DFACS is strongly encouraged to provide alternative and less-restrictive locations for family visitations.
 - This has created a special and immediate need for community centers and organizations to open their doors.
- Supervised parent-child visitations are critical to the process of bringing parents and their children back together. These visits not only provide feedback to the court on the progress of a family, but more importantly, they allow the participants to maintain their familial bond.

C. What Are The Benefits Of Supervised Visitation?

1. Visits maintain the parent-child bond.
 - When a child is removed from their home, it is a difficult and often scary experience for the child and family.
 - Frequent visits provide a means by which parent and child can continue their relationship.
 - Frequent visits reassure the parent that their child has not just disappeared; they reassure the parent that the child is being given shelter and care.
 - If a child does not see his/her parent(s) for a long time, it becomes more difficult for that child to re-adjust to living together as a family again.
2. Visits provide parents with motivation and hope.
 - Research provides evidence that parents who do not visit with their children lose motivation to put their lives back on track.
 - Parents who have lost physical custody of their children have many expectations placed upon them. It is often hard to accomplish all that is required (visit with their children, obtain housing, begin substance abuse





treatment, find a job, attend parenting classes, etc.). Without community support, the process can be discouraging.

- The opportunity for parents to spend time with their children is not only required, but instills the hope and motivation necessary to ensure the permanent return of their children.
3. Visits provide critical information to DFACS and the courts about the parent-child relationship.
- Reports from the supervised visitation are read by the court and become part of the family's permanent case plan.
 - The reports help speed up the court process by providing additional information that can aid the judge in making quick, prudent decisions about the child's future.
 - Because the reports are written by impartial volunteers, the observations are likely to be a realistic reflection of the parent-child relationship.
 - For a list of the kinds of reports kept by a Visitation Center, see below – [Record-Keeping: What Kind Of Records Should Be Kept?](#)

D. What's Wrong With The Old System Of Supervised Visitation?

- Infrequent Visits – On average, a child in foster care only visits with a parent once a month for two hours, which equals about one full day per year.
- Inconvenient Scheduling – When visits are offered primarily during business hours, conflicts arise. This is the time when parents are working or trying to find employment and when children are in school.
- Inconvenient Location – Visits are generally held at the offices of the Department of Family and Children Services, which can be a great distance from the workplace or home of the Visiting Family. Having more Community Visitation Centers available in the county can help alleviate this problem.
- Uninviting Location – Current visit locations are sometimes viewed as sterile and uninviting, and often do not provide activities and private rooms for visiting families.
- Inhibiting Atmosphere – When a DFACS Case Manager observes a visit, his/her presence may be considered intrusive or distressful. This could cause a Visiting Parent to be apprehensive about the visit, and thereby inhibit the interaction between the Visiting Parent and children.
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I. GETTING STARTED

A. *Terms Used In This Manual:*

1. Visiting Parent

- A Visiting Parent is one who has temporarily lost physical custody of his or her children and has been required to undergo supervised visitations with his or her children.
- Because DFACS refers families to the Community Visitation Centers, Visiting Parents who utilize the Center will in most cases be close to resuming full physical custody of their children.
- Visiting Parents are often called the “non-custodial” parents in DFACS documents.
- Community Visitation Centers sometimes refer to their Visiting Parents as “guests” or “clients” as a measure of respect in order to demonstrate a friendly, courteous, and comfortable atmosphere.

2. Custodian

- For the purpose of this manual, “Custodian” refers to the person who is responsible for bringing the children to and from the supervised visitation.
- A Custodian can be a Foster Parent, DFACS case manager, or relative of the children.

3. DFACS

- abbreviation for the Department of Family and Children Services
- DFACS is responsible for creating and overseeing the case plan developed for each family

B. *What Do You Need In Order To Open A Visitation Center?*

You will need a physical space, established leadership, a staff of volunteers, and scheduled hours of operation.

1. What Kind of Physical Space?

- Greeting Area – some centers may have separate entrances for Custodians and Visiting Parents
- Visitation Rooms – private rooms for visitation – should contain comfortable seating and “play” areas; some centers use one large room for several concurrent visitations, but private rooms may be preferred
- Waiting Areas – there should be separate waiting areas for Custodians and Visiting Parents
- Amenities – a playground or outdoor visiting area is recommended; age-appropriate toys and games for use during the visitation
- Other – centers should be handicapped accessible (including restrooms);
 - though not required, centers should attempt to comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) guidelines
 - you can access the ADA Homepage at <http://www.ada.gov/> for information on requirements and recommendations
- for more detailed information, see below - [FACILITIES](#)





2. What Kind of Leadership?
 - Program Coordinator /Supervisor – the person in charge of overseeing the operation and maintenance of the Visitation Center;
 - the Coordinator may designate other volunteers to be in charge of different areas of the Visitation Center
 - the Coordinator maintains all necessary records and serves as the link between the Visitation Center, the Department of Family and Children Services (DFACS), and the local juvenile court

3. How Many Staff Members (Volunteers)?
 - Volunteers – community or congregation members who are able to serve as:
 - Greeters
 - Observers
 - Escorts or “Floaters”
 - see below: [Volunteers - How many volunteers will be needed?](#)

4. What Kind of Schedule Will the Center Have to Keep?
 - The Center will have to set regular hours of operation, which can be anything from 2-3 hours a week (preferably during the evening), to a full weekend.
 - Schedules should be flexible and reflect the needs of the Visiting Parents – namely, evening hours and weekend hours are necessary.
 - Visitations usually last around an hour with a 5-15 minute grace period.
 - see below: [Facilities – What Are The Recommended Hours Of Operation](#)

5. How Much Money Do You Need to Start a Visitation Center?
 - By utilizing a volunteer staff and existing facilities, a Community Visitation Center should be able to operate under its existing budget, without the need for any additional funds.
 - Note: Use of facilities and resources at the Community Visitation Center should be provided at no-cost.
 - There may be some minor operational costs involved, such as purchase of supplies or paperwork costs, which are explained in greater detail later in this manual.
 - see below: [Administration - What Kind Of Budget Is Necessary To Operate A Visitation Center?](#)

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II. FACILITIES

A. *Are There Any Site Prerequisites?*

- It is important that all of the visitation facilities provide a welcome and friendly environment in a secure building.
- The site should be accessible (when possible this includes accessibility to public transportation), safe, and a pleasant place for children.
- Time spent at the site should enhance family relationships through the facilitation of parent/child interaction.
- The site's existing facilities should be able to provide all of the activities and services intended to be performed by the Visitation Center.

B. *What Are The Recommended Hours Of Operation?*

One of the primary goals of the Community Visitation Center is to offer families visitation hours that are outside of the typical 9-5 workday. With that goal in mind, it is recommended that community sites offer supervised visitation hours at least one evening a week and the majority of the day on Saturdays and/or Sundays.

In the case of emergencies, questions, or unexpected situations, the Program Coordinator is encouraged to have a pager that is monitored during all of the hosting facility's regular operating hours. Questions and inquiries often arise while the facility is open for its primary purpose, when Visitation Center staff members are not present. A fact sheet about the Visitation Center should also be available at the hosting center during the regular operating hours.

C. *What Areas Should Be Considered About the Center's Physical Site?*

1. Parking and Transportation

Considerations should be made regarding how people might arrive at the Visitation Center, including:

- availability of public transportation access in areas where there is a public transit system
- availability of parking

Maps should be available and mailed upon request and should include both written and pictorial directions.

- see below: [Transportation](#)

2. Entry Ways

First impressions leave a lingering impact on the viewer; it is important that the message that is communicated upon entering the building is synonymous with the mission of the Visitation Center:

- Entrances should comply with the American's with Disabilities Act.
 - you can access the ADA Homepage at <http://www.ada.gov/> for information on requirements and recommendations
- Visitors should be able to immediately recognize the person or people in charge.
 - A front desk or table should be set up for sign-in and sign-out and for meeting with the volunteer supervising the visit.





- Volunteers should wear matching colors, shirts, or hats to help them stand out.
- If possible, there should be two separate waiting rooms, one for Custodians and one for the Visiting Parents. The rooms should be physically separate so that Visiting Parents and Custodians are not likely to see one another. Other areas that should be separated, where possible:
 - entryways
 - parking lots
 - bathrooms

3. Waiting Areas

- There should be places for people to sit in the waiting areas, with activities or distractions for people using the area. Suggestions include:
 - age appropriate games and toys for children
 - pictures on the walls
 - magazines (targeted towards parents and children)
- Considerations should be made for individual differences. For example:
 - physical or mental disabilities
 - illiterate individuals
 - those who do not speak English or speak English as a second language
- If it is possible, the waiting rooms should maintain a calm and soothing atmosphere. Some suggestions include:
 - painting walls in calm greens and blues
 - having plants in the room
 - having fish tanks or water fountains
 - removing individuals who are misbehaving or intoxicated

4. Visitation Areas

Visitation Centers vary on whether families visit in private or semi-private areas. Because the visits must be supervised, some centers feel that being in a large room with sectioned-off areas is more comfortable for the families, while others believe that having private rooms allows the families to have more constructive time together. The decision for your set-up will depend largely on the facility itself, and also on the recommendations from your DFACS office.

Regardless of the set-up, the following recommendations for the visitation areas should be accommodated wherever possible:

- private rooms for families with special circumstances
- tables and age appropriate play equipment for the children.
- activities that the Visiting Parent and children can do together
- it will be also be helpful to have available for emergencies:
 - snacks
 - diapers
 - First Aid

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III. ADMINISTRATION

A. Who Administers A Community Visitation Center?

There are many people involved in the visitation process. It begins at the Local Juvenile Court, where a family is first determined to be in need of services. The process typically flows in the following manner:

- Juvenile Court
 - determines visitation needs and requirements
 - While DFACS is ordinarily responsible for referring families to a Community Visitation Center, in some case the juvenile court will refer a particular family to a particular center.
- Department of Family and Children Services (DFACS)
 - determines which families could be best served by the Community Visitation Center
 - maintains close contact with the Visitation Center in order to collect records of visitations and offers periodic volunteer training review sessions to keep the training up to date
 - may coordinate transportation to the Center for the children & Visiting Parents
 - In instances of large counties with multiple Community Visitation Centers, DFACS may create a position for a County Coordinator, who acts as a liaison between the individual Community Center's Program Coordinator and DFACS.
- Program Coordinator
 - leads the Community Visitation Center Program
 - manages Volunteers for the visits
 - maintains records of visitations
 - serves as liaison between Visitation Center and DFACS (or County Coordinator)
 - Whether the Program Coordinator is a paid or volunteer position will be up to the individual Center, keeping in mind that any compensation will have to come from the Center's budget.
 - Many Program Coordinators have assumed the role as part of their existing job. For example, a Program Director at a community center or an associate minister in a faith-based organization may take on the additional title as part of his or her community involvement.
- Volunteers
 - administer and supervise visits
 - complete family visitation reports

B. What Are The Different Volunteer Duties?

There should be several volunteers present during visitation hours. Each volunteer should be clear about his or her assigned role and the respective duties involved in that role. Some suggestions for the volunteer breakdown include:

- Captain or Lead Volunteer –
 - make room assignments





- have extra copies of observation forms
- make reminder calls to team volunteers
- turn in reports to Program Coordinator

- Greeter –
 - greet and sign-in Visiting Parents, Children, and Custodians
 - collect consent and identification forms from Visiting Parents and Custodians (to be turned in to Captain at end of session)
 - direct guests to either wait in waiting area or follow Escort to visitation room
 - hand out evaluations after the visitation session has ended

- Escort / Floater –
 - escort families to waiting room, restroom, or visitation room
 - be on hand to escort children to restroom during visitation
 - return children to main area after visitation has ended

- Observer -
 - prepare visitation rooms (set out toys, snacks, etc.)
 - record observations from visits
 - turn completed observation forms into the Team Captain

C. Who Keeps Track Of The Records And Paperwork?

The Program Coordinator is ultimately responsible for collecting the visitation records and passing them along to DFACS. If the Program Coordinator is not present during a visitation session, the Lead Volunteer should ensure that the paperwork is collected and delivered to the Program Coordinator.

- see below: [Record-Keeping](#)

D. How Much Money Is Necessary To Operate A Visitation Center?

The Visitation Center should be able to operate on its existing budget.

- Minor additional costs for the purchase of amenities or supplies may include:
 - copying costs, paper, walkie-talkies, first aid-kits, toys, snacks, diapers, etc.
- If funding is likely to be a problem, you may consider seeking a private grant or donation to get the center started.
 - Possible fundraisers may include car washes, bake sales, letter writing campaigns, special collection at worship service, etc.
 - One possible resource for funding is the Safe and Stable Families Grant. You should assess and share your needs with your local DFACS office in determining what may be the best source of necessary funds.

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IV. VOLUNTEERS

Volunteers should be recruited from the surrounding area (i.e. members of the hosting faith community congregation or residents of the surrounding community).

A. *How Many Volunteers Will Be Needed?*

The specific number of volunteers will depend on the number of visiting families a center can accommodate. To estimate the total number of people your center will need, use the following suggestion:

- Program Coordinator – may or may not be a volunteer (see [Administration – Who Administers a Community Visitation Center?](#))
- 1 Lead Volunteer to be in charge of supervising the overall operation of the visitation sessions (an assistant to the Program Coordinator)
- 2-3 volunteers to sit at the entrance area and sign-in stations
- 1 volunteer per family to remain in the visitation room as the Observer
- 2-3 “floating” volunteers (Escorts) to help out with various other activities including escorting children to the visitation rooms and bathrooms, and dealing with any emergencies

B. *What Is The Role Of A Volunteer?*

Volunteers are essential to the success of a Community Visitation Center. They should promote the safe and welcoming atmosphere that the Center was designed to provide. Volunteers should maintain a friendly attitude, keeping judgments and opinions to themselves.

Specific activities that the volunteers should expect to perform include:

- signing-in the Visiting Parents, children, and Custodians as they arrive
- observing the visitation
- facilitating child/parent interactions, if necessary
- recording observation comments after the visitation has ended

- The Volunteer training sessions (led by DFACS) will teach the volunteers when and how to:
 - encourage age-appropriate activities
 - recognize and discourage inappropriate conduct
 - intervene with the visitation or terminate if it becomes necessary

- see below: [Volunteer Training](#)

C. *What Are The Qualifications To Volunteer?*

- Volunteers ought to be adults capable of acting with authority when needed.
 - Each Center should set a minimum age for their volunteers.
- Confidentiality agreement
 - The center should create a confidentiality agreement. All volunteers should be informed about the importance of keeping information confidential and should be required to sign an agreement acknowledging the confidentiality of the sessions.
- Affidavit of moral character





- The center may want to require the volunteers to submit an affidavit of moral character. The center may create a questionnaire to be completed by friends or employers of the volunteers.

D. What Should A Volunteer Know About Cultural Competency?

The topics of cultural awareness and cultural competence should be thoroughly developed in the Volunteer Training sessions. The sessions, led by DFACS, will include discussions on the following areas:

- relating to other cultures, ethnicities, social economic status
- maintaining a supportive, positive, non-judgmental attitude
- understanding child development issues such as attachment and bonding
- appreciating diversity
- see below: [Volunteer Training – Cultural Competency](#)

E. What Is Acceptable Behavior For A Volunteer?

1. Keep information confidential.
 - The Volunteer is an extension of the court; therefore, the Volunteer should not discuss issues of the visits with people outside the Center. If the Volunteer is feeling overwhelmed or frustrated and needs to process those feelings, then a discussion should be had with the Program coordinator or other Volunteers.
 - It is wholly inappropriate to discuss the visitation sessions with friends, neighbors, or anyone else not involved with the Visitation Center.

2. Observe visits, only facilitate when necessary.
 - The volunteer should observe and record positive and negative interactions.
 - The volunteer should remain non-judgmental and avoid excessive interactions.
 - The volunteer should keep in mind that the parent and child are there to visit each with other, not with the volunteer.

3. Facilitate, but do not intervene without reason.
 - *The volunteer should not attempt to counsel or advise the parent or child.*
 - If the Visiting Parent is breaking the rules (i.e. whispering to child, bad-mouthing Custodian, etc.), the volunteer should gently remind the parent of the rules.
 - If the parent is engaging in inappropriate conduct or activities that are not age-appropriate for the child, the volunteer can suggest or encourage other activities that are more appropriate.
 - The volunteer may have to terminate the visit if the parent continues to break the rules.

4. Maintain boundaries.
 - The volunteer is present to facilitate a visitation, not to “rescue” the children.
 - *Volunteers should not engage in activities with the children outside the Visitation Center, such as offering to take children shopping or out to eat after the visit.* The role of the volunteer is strictly limited to observing the visit.





5. Keep a positive attitude.
 - The volunteer will likely observe parents who lack parenting skills, who may be recovering from substance abuse, and who may have mistreated their children; however, the Visiting Parents are trying to improve their lives to get their children back home.
 - Keeping this in mind, the Volunteer should avoid judgmental attitudes.

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V. VOLUNTEER TRAINING

A. *What Kind Of Training Is Needed?*

Volunteer Training Sessions should be held prior to opening the Center and should be supplemented by continuing education sessions.

The Program Coordinator or Supervisor will work with the local DFACS representatives to establish the training routine for the Center's Volunteers. There are a variety of topics that should be covered in a training program, including:

1. The Purpose Of Supervised Visitation
 - The training session should discuss the particular needs of families in your community and how the Visitation Center can address and help alleviate those needs.
 - other areas that should be discussed include:
 - the juvenile court system
 - the role of DFACS
 - why families are in need of supervised visitation
2. The Different Roles Of The Volunteers
 - Depending on your individual setup, your Center's "Chain of Command" may include positions such as the Lead Volunteer, along with Observers, Greeters, Escorts, Floaters, or any others you find necessary.
 - The volunteers should be taught the differences between *observation*, *interaction*, *facilitation*, and *intervention*.
 - Other areas that should be addressed include:
 - appropriate volunteer behavior
 - inappropriate volunteer behavior
3. The Procedure Of A Visitation
 - The volunteers will learn about what goes on in a visitation session, including:
 - what happens before, during, and after a visitation
 - what rules the Visiting Parents, Custodians, children, and Volunteers are required to follow
 - what emergency procedures are in place for the Center
 - *Emergency protocols should be established for your individual Center.*
 - *DFACS should train the Volunteers about how to handle specific situations.*
4. Cultural Competency
 - This is a very important part of the training process; each session should address potential cultural biases.
 - Training in cultural competency should be on-going throughout the center's existence (not limited to the initial volunteer training).





- Issues that should be continually addressed include:
 - differing insights into what constitutes a “family”
 - the definition of “diversity”
 - the definition of “cultural competency” and how it applies to a Community Supervised Visitation Center
 - differing cultural approaches to parenting

B. Where Can You Get Training Materials And Guidance?

Your local DFACS office, and in some cases the local juvenile court, will assist you with volunteer training. DFACS has a vested interest in leading a training curriculum that will ensure the success of the Community Visitation Center. By collaborating, Visitation Centers and DFACS can establish a training program that is both interesting and informative for the Volunteers.

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VI. WALK THROUGH A VISITATION

Visitation procedures should be written down and handed out to the Volunteers during their training sessions. Visiting Parents and Custodians should also have a copy of these procedures in advance of the visitation. The details of a visitation session at your particular Center will be worked out in coordination with your DFACS representative, but will likely follow this basic framework:

- Visiting Parents are typically expected arrive first, around 10-15 minutes prior to the scheduled meeting time; after signing in, the Visiting Parent may be escorted to the visitation room to wait for his or her children to arrive.
- Children and their Custodian arrive and check in at the scheduled time; the children are escorted to the visitation room, where Visiting Parent is waiting.
 - Custodian may either leave the Center and return in an hour, or remain in the Custodian's waiting room during the visitation.
 - NOTE: *the Custodian should not leave the facility until the Visiting Parent has arrived*; the Visiting Parent should already be checked-in when the children arrive with their Custodian, but in the event that the Visiting Parent does not show within 15 minutes of the scheduled time, the children should be taken home by the Custodian.
- Children and Visiting Parents will visit for about an hour. The volunteer Observer will remain in the room for the entire time.
 - If a child needs to use the restroom, another volunteer will escort the child to the facilities. Visiting Parents are not allowed to take children to the restroom.
- The Volunteer will let visiting families know when the hour is almost over (about 15 minutes before, and then again at 5 minutes before time is up).
- At the end of the hour, the Visiting Parents will leave the visitation room, proceed to the check-in area, and sign out.
 - A Visiting Parent may be asked to fill out an evaluation form, if time permits.
- The children will then be escorted back up to the greeting area, where the Custodian should be waiting to take the children home.
- Once the parties have left, the volunteer who observed the visitation should fill out a visitation observation form, including all observations (not opinions) about what happened in the visitation.
- The records from the visitation will then be collected by the Program Coordinator, who will then transfer them to DFACS to be placed in the individual case plans of the families.

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VII. INSURANCE

A. *How Much Insurance Coverage Must A Visitation Center Carry?*

- Because there are no statutory materials covering supervised Visitation Centers in the State of Georgia, there are no provisions addressing insurance coverage, *however*:
 - A Center should not operate without carrying general and liability insurance for the premises.
- The existing policy on the premises will likely suffice for coverage, but *contact your insurance provider for details* on whether further coverage is needed.

B. *What Have Other Visitation Centers Done Regarding Insurance?*

- one community church kept the existing policy on its premises as it was originally written
- one Center operating under a grant was required by the granting organization to take out a specific liability policy covering the operation of the center
- others have increased the amount covered in their general/liability plans

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VIII. LEGAL

A. *Are There Legal Requirements For Opening A Visitation Center?*

- As of Fall 2002, the State of Georgia did not have any laws or regulations on its books regarding any legal requirements for a supervised Visitation Center.
- As of Fall 2002, the Georgia Department of Human Resources (DHR) and Department of Family and Children Services (DFACS) also do not have specific policy regulations regarding Visitation Centers.

B. *Has There Been Any Legislation On This Topic In The Past?*

- While there has not been legislation specifically addressing the need for more Visitation Centers, in March of 2000, the Georgia Senate passed SR 786, which urged judges to “encourage non-custodial parents to actively participate in their child’s life by expanding visitation and setting minimum standards for visitation and to bring Georgia in line with the national average of visitation for non-custodial parents.”
 - SR 786 can be found online at:
<http://www.ganet.org/services/leg/ShowBill.cgi?year=1999&filename=1999/SR786>
- The Georgia House version of the SR 786 (HR 1426) was identical in language to the senate version, but did not move beyond the first read on March 22, 2000. As of Fall 2002, the resolution had not been re-offered for consideration.
 - HR1426 can be found online at:
<http://www.ganet.org/services/leg/ShowBill.cgi?year=1999&filename=1999/HR1426>

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IX. SECURITY

A. *What Kind Of Security Is Needed At The Visitation Center?*

Organizations that are opening a Visitation Center often have concerns about the need to hire security during the hours of operation. For several reasons, hiring private security is usually unnecessary:

- Families who are referred by DFACS to the Community Visitation Centers are typically those who are very close to having their children permanently returned to their homes. Visiting Parents using the community centers have demonstrated to DFACS their dedication to completing the requirements of the case plan, are considered by DFACS to be low-risk, and are therefore unlikely to jeopardize the upcoming reunion through dangerous, inappropriate, or violent behavior.
 - Be aware that there is often tension between the Visiting Parents and the Custodians. For this reason, having separate entrances and waiting areas for the Visiting Parents and the Custodians is strongly encouraged.
- Because the observation reports of the volunteers become part of the family's case file and are taken seriously by the juvenile court, the parties are unlikely to engage in behavior that could reflect poorly on their chances of regaining custody of their children.
- If the Visitation Center has legitimate concerns about safety, some kind of agreement with the local police department may be investigated. For example, one Center in Georgia put the local police department on notice of the scheduled visitation times and requested that the police increase their visibility or patrolling in the area during those times.
- Other centers simply place an extra volunteer or two at the entrance-ways to monitor the comings and goings of all participants in the visitation program.

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X. TRANSPORTATION

The Center is not required to provide transportation, but it should be supportive in facilitating the ease of transit for the family members. If transportation is included in the case plan, then the Case Manager should also be involved with assisting the Visiting Parent and children with transportation issues.

A. How Can A Visitation Center Assist Motor Vehicle Drivers?

- Maps should be available for distribution and to assist callers:
 - Maps should include written directions to the Visitation Center.
 - If possible, maps should be available in other languages common in the local community.
- Information about taxi services should also be available.
 - For more information contact the Bureau of Taxicabs (404) 658-7600 (phone), (404) 658-7615 (fax).

B. What Should A Center Know About Public Transportation?

For Georgia counties that offer public transit:

- A nearby public transportation stop should be an important aspect of location.
- A public transportation stop that accesses multiple lines is optimal.
- A copy of all lines and regularly connecting lines should be available at the center.
- A memo should be available, written in English and in other local languages, detailing accessible public transportation lines. This memo should also be mailed or faxed upon request.

C. Where Can You Get Information About Public Transportation?

- Internet – link to Public Transportation in Georgia:
<http://www.georgia.gov/gta/cda/nav/front/0,1036,5-8,00.html>
- MARTA (metropolitan Atlanta Rapid Transit Authority):
 - TTY: (404) 848-5665 (for the hearing impaired)
 - ROUTE INFO: (404) 848-4711
 - CUSTOMER SERVICE: (404) 848-4800
- Cobb County Transit (CCT): (770) 427-4444

D. What About Pedestrian Or Bicycle Traffic?

- Bike locking stations should be available for bicycle riders.
- The building and entryways should be clearly visible and marked for pedestrian traffic.
- Signs should be posted outside directing foot traffic to the Visiting Parent and Custodian entrances of the building.
- Entries and exits should be maintained to avoid accident/injury.





E. What About Transportation For Individuals With Disabilities?

- Sometimes transportation services are available for individuals with disabilities.
- These services often have restrictions on accessibility and hours of operation. There may be some need to be flexible when scheduling visits for individuals with disabilities.
- Options in Georgia for the disabled:
 - MARTA Paratransit: (404) 848-5826 or (404) 848-5389
 - CCT Cobb Connection: (770) 427-2222 or (770) 424-5729 (fax)
 - Monday-Friday 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.
 - Saturday Noon to 4 p.m. (serves parts of Cobb County)

F. What If A Visitation Center Can Provide Transportation?

Any sites considering providing transportation will need to consider the following matters:

- liability issues and insurance coverage
- the need to obtain a Commercial Driver's License – required for:
 - multiple vehicles weighing a total of 26,001 pounds or more
 - single vehicle with a gross vehicle weight of 26,001 pounds or more
 - single vehicle designed to transport more than 15 persons (including the driver)
- scheduling issues

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XI. EMERGENCIES

Each program should develop a protocol for emergency situations. These should be in writing, and all volunteers should know the protocol for emergency situations. A written copy of the emergency plan should be available on-site at the Visitation Center.

A. What Constitutes An Emergency?

- Violent, dangerous or inappropriate behavior of a child, including:
 - a child who cannot be comforted or calmed down after a reasonable period of time
 - a child who is kicking, hitting, biting, or screaming
- Violent or inappropriate behavior of an adult (Custodians or Visiting Parents), including:
 - failure to comply with visitation rules after repeated requests
 - a Visiting Parent or Custodian who appears to be intoxicated
 - a Custodian who confronts a Visiting Parent or vice versa
- Attempted abduction of a child, including:
 - a Visiting Parent trying to coax child to the parking lot
- Fire
 - evacuation procedures and escape routes should already be created for the facility
 - volunteers should be familiar with these plans
- Medical emergency
 - for any medical situation that cannot be treated with a first aid kit, call 911

B. What To Do In A Case Of Emergency?

- A protocol for emergency procedures should be in place and understood by all volunteers.
- Some suggested elements of an emergency protocol include:
 - volunteer access to walkie-talkies, pagers, cell-phones, phone tree lists, etc.
 - written evacuation procedures that include maps of escape routes
 - an agreement with local law enforcement (increased patrolling, quick response, etc.)
- First-aid kits should be on-site at the Visitation Center.
 - Each Center should create a protocol for addressing Basic First Aid and CPR training. Volunteers should follow this protocol when administering any aid.

Protocols should be established for your individual Center.

DFACS will train the Volunteers about how to handle specific situations.

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XII. RECORD-KEEPING

A. Why Is It Necessary To Keep Records Of Visitation?

- Maintaining certain records will ensure consistent and predictable operation of your Visitation Center
- Observation reports are collected by DFACS and placed in each family's case plan.
- Visitation Centers operating under a grant may have specific paperwork required by the granting organization.

B. What Kinds Of Records Should Be Kept?

- The types of forms required may differ between counties, but for any Visitation Center the following are suggested:
 - REFERRAL FORM (Court/Visiting Parent) – this form comes from the local DFACS office (and sometimes directly from the juvenile court) referring a particular family to the Visitation Center
 - IDENTIFICATION FORM (Visiting Parent) – records Visiting Parent's identification and contact information, as well as his or her specific visitation schedule
 - RELEASE FORM (Visiting Parent) – Visiting Parent's agreement to obey Visitation Center's rules and to follow the established procedures; depending on the structure of the county, parents may be required to fill out and sign this form in the presence of the local juvenile court prior to the visitation
 - RULES FORM (Visiting Parent / Custodian) – specific and detailed list of rules for visitation; should cover topics such as arrival and departure times, punctuality, attitude, language, food or gifts for the children, physical contact, cleanliness, intoxication, and any other rules that are relevant to the particular facility
 - the rules sheet should also list the specific consequences for violating any of the rules
 - TRANSPORTATION FORM (Visitation Center / Visiting Parent) – explains pick-up/drop-off schedules for counties that are able to provide transportation to needy families
 - not all counties will be able to provide transportation services
 - transportation is not required to maintain a community Visitation Center
 - IDENTIFICATION FORM (Custodian) – records identification and contact information of whoever is responsible for bringing the child to and from the visitation
 - OBSERVATION REPORT (Volunteer) – describes interaction between Visiting Parent and children during the visit; should be filled out *after* the visitation has ended; can be styled as a checklist or in a narrative format
 - NOTE: During the training sessions, Volunteers should be given explicit instructions on what to include in the observation report. Because volunteers are not trained case managers or social workers, they should include only their observations, not opinions or analyses.
 - INTAKE FORM (Volunteer) – separate sign-in sheets for Visiting Parent and the Custodian; should indicate time of arrival, time of departure, whether Custodian remained at center, etc.
 - DUTIES FORM (Volunteer) – detailed list of volunteer responsibilities; checklist of pre- and post- visitation duties





- All forms should include the contact information for the Visitation Center and the name of the Program Coordinator.

C. What Happens To The Records After The Visitation?

The Program Coordinator will collect the Observation Reports and turn them in to DFACS. These reports become part of the family's permanent case file, which is compiled by DFACS and reviewed by the court.

Sign-in and other intake forms should be kept on file at the Visitation Center with copies going to DFACS or the court, if requested.

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XIII. SELF-EVALUATIONS

A. What Is The Purpose Of A Self-Evaluation?

Periodic self-evaluations ensure the Visitation Center is meeting its objectives and serving the families and children in the community. They provide the opportunity to look back on what has been done, and to look forward for ways to improve the program. Not only does the information gathered serve the immediate purpose of checking up on the Center's progress, it may also be useful in writing grant proposals.

Evaluation methods may include:

- collecting evaluation surveys from the Visiting Parents, Custodians, DFACS, and any other people who use the Center as a resource
- using a pre/post test as part of the volunteer training session
- generating output reports that track the number of visits completed each year, the number of families served each year, etc.

B. Why Use Pre/Post Test For The Volunteer Training Session?

Using a Pre/Post test as part of the volunteer training session is important because:

- it measures what participants have actually learned
- it highlights needed improvements in the training session
- it highlights the needed areas of additional training for individual volunteers

C. How Do You Administer Pre/Post Tests?

Before the training, volunteers should be given a pre-test to assess their baseline knowledge of what will be covered in the training sessions. After the training, the same test should be administered to the same group of volunteers to test the changes in knowledge. The scores on the post-test should be higher than the pre-test. If the scores do not improve or if the post-test scores are not high, the Visitation Center may want to consider revising the training session. If only a few volunteers have difficulties with the post-test, then the Program Coordinator may want to consider spending extra training time with these volunteers.

The pre/post tests should include the key points from the training session. It should be no longer than one-page and can be a short answer or multiple-choice quiz.

- see below: [Appendix \[A\] – Sample PRE/POST Test for Volunteers](#)

D. Why Survey Visiting Parents, DFACS, Or Custodians?

The evaluation survey is an important tool to get feedback from the people who use the services provided by the Center. The results from the survey will let the Visitation Center know:

- what areas are successful
- what areas need improvement

For example, feedback from the Visiting Parents may offer suggestions for more convenient hours. Responses from the Custodians might lead to a more efficient traffic flow. To be most effective, the surveys should be administered to the Custodians, DFACS personnel, and Visiting Parents within the first few months of starting up, and then at least once a year after that.





- see below: [Appendix \[B\] – Sample Evaluation for Visiting Parents](#)

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XIV. RESOURCES

A. *The Barton Child Law And Policy Clinic*

The clinic helps Georgia serve neglected and abused children by providing multi-disciplinary, child-focused research, training, and support for practitioners and policymakers charged with protecting Georgia's children. The Clinic's website is an excellent online resource for child welfare information and child welfare links.

Phone: (404) 727 - 6664
Emory University School of Law
Address: 1301 Clifton Road
Atlanta, GA 30322
E-mail: childlaw@law.emory.edu
Internet: <http://www.childwelfare.net/>

B. *Child Welfare Institute (CWI)*

The Institute provides information, ideas, and guidance in the field of child welfare training and organizational development consultation.

Phone: (770) 935 - 8484
Address: 3950 Shackleford Road, Suite 175
Duluth, GA 30096
E-mail: Messages can be sent from the following web address:
<http://gocwi.org/contactus/contactus.htm>
Internet: <http://gocwi.org/>

C. *Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA)*

CASA workers are court appointed, trained volunteers from the community who investigate individual cases and speak up for the best interests of the child in a deprivation proceeding.

Phone: (800) 251 - 4012 (toll-free)
(404) 874 - 2888 (Atlanta)
Address: 1776 Peachtree Road NW Suite 219 South Tower
Atlanta, GA 30309
E-mail: gacasa@gacasa.org
Internet: <http://www.gacasa.org/>

D. *Department Of Family And Children Services (DFACS)*

DFACS is responsible for welfare and employment support, protecting children, foster care, and other services to strengthen families. The DFACS case manager is generally responsible for coordinating visitations and assisting with transportation.





- Phone:** A listing of DFACS addresses and phone numbers for Georgia counties can be found at:
Address: <http://www2.state.ga.us/departments/dhr/dfcs/dfcsdir2.html>
E-mail: There is an inquiry form found online at:
<http://www2.state.ga.us/departments/dhr/asub.html>
Internet: <http://www2.state.ga.us/Departments/dhr/dfcs/index.html>

E. Georgia Department of Human Resources: Promoting Safe and Stable Families Program

The PSSF Program offers Georgia, through the Department of Human Resources, Division of Family and Children Services, the opportunity to implement and institutionalize the goals, strategies and detailed work plans set forth in the Safe Futures plan. An important element of Georgia's plan for Safe Futures is the development of a strengths based, prevention-driven community response to vulnerable children and families. The goal of this response is to develop family centered, individualized courses of action for families, neighborhoods and community networks of services and supports, to support CPS and Placement Practice

- Phone:** (404) 657 – 3306
2 Peachtree Street, N.W.
Address: Suite 18-202
Atlanta, GA 30303
E-mail: adsmith@dhr.state.ga.us
Internet: <http://www.caresolutions.com/pssf.html>

F. Interfaith Children's Movement Of Metropolitan Atlanta (ICMMA)

The ICMMA is an interfaith advocacy movement that works to improve the well-being of children in metropolitan Atlanta.

- Phone:** (404) 727 - 2072
Address: 1301 Clifton Road
Atlanta, GA 30322
E-mail: info@icmma.org
Internet: <http://icmma.org/>

G. Office Of the Child Advocate

The Office of the Child Advocate was established by statute for the purpose of assisting, protecting, and restoring the security of children whose well-being is threatened. The office provides independent oversight of persons, organizations, and agencies responsible for providing services to or caring for children who are victims of child abuse and neglect, or whose domestic situation requires intervention by the state.

- Phone:** (800) 254 - 2064 (toll-free)





(478) 757 - 2661 (Macon)

Address: 3330 Northside Drive, Suite 100
Macon, GA 31210

E-mail: Messages can be sent from the following web address:
<http://www.gachildadvocate.org/contact.html>

Internet: <http://www.gachildadvocate.org/>

H. Office Of Regulatory Services (ORS)

A division of the Department of Human Resources, ORS is responsible for inspecting, monitoring, licensing, registering, and certifying a variety of childcare and health care programs. ORS works to ensure that facilities and programs operate at acceptable levels, as mandated by state statutes and by rules and regulations adopted by the Board of Human Resources.

Phone: (404) 657 - 5700

Address: Two Peachtree Street, N.W.
Atlanta, Georgia 30303-3142

E-mail: mapalli@dhr.state.ga.us

Internet: <http://www2.state.ga.us/Departments/DHR/ORS/>

If you have any other resource suggestions, or would like to add your agency to the resources list, please email the Barton Clinic at childlaw@law.emory.edu.

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XV. VISITATION CENTERS IN GEORGIA

A. CARROLL COUNTY: Carroll County Visitation Center

Contact: Kathy Lowry
Phone: (770) 836 – 2783
(770) 830 – 5037 (fax)
Address: 1075 Newnan Road
Carrollton, GA 30116-6435
Email: kathy.lowry@carrollcountyschools.com

B. CHATHAM COUNTY: Family Unity Services

Contact: Linda C. Richardson
Phone: (912) 651 – 2121
Address: P.O. Box 2566
Savannah, GA 31498-1301

C. COBB COUNTY: First Baptist Church of Marietta

Contact: Glenn Borders
Phone: (770) 423 – 0481
Address: 148 Church Street NE
Marietta, GA 30060

D. DOUGLAS COUNTY: Starting Over (Douglasville, GA)

Contact: Diane Campbell
Phone: (770) 949 – 9949
Address: 5400 Stuart Mill Road
Douglasville, GA 30135

E. FLOYD COUNTY: Exchange Club Family Resource Center

Contact: Tina Bartleson
Phone: (706) 290 – 0764
(706) 290 – 9617 (fax)
Address: P.O. Box 1308
Rome, GA 30162-1308
Email: frc@wavegate.com





F. FULTON COUNTY: Big Bethel AME Church

Contact: Bonnie Copeland
Phone: (404) 237 – 5835 (Bonnie)
(404) 827 – 9707 (Big Bethel AME Church)
Address: 206 Auburn Avenue
Atlanta, GA 30303

G. FULTON COUNTY: Kingdom of God Evangelistic Outreach Ministry

Contact: Bonnie Copeland
Phone: (404) 237 – 5835 (Bonnie)
(404) 766 – 4163 (Kingdom of God Ministry)
Address: 4590 Welcome All Road
College Park, GA 30349

H. FULTON COUNTY: St. Johns Episcopal Church

Contact: Bonnie Copeland
Phone: (404) 237 – 5835 (Bonnie)
(404) 761 – 8402 (St. Johns Episcopal Church)
Address: 3480 Main Street
College Park, GA 30337

I. MITCHELL COUNTY: Mitchell County DFCS

Contact: Vivian Williams
Phone: (229) 522 – 3500
(229) 522 – 3561 (fax)
Address: 90 West Oakland Ave.
Camilla, GA 31730-1254
Email: mcdfcs@surfsouth.com

J. MURRAY COUNTY: Murray County DFCS Visitation Center

Contact: Ross Collins or
Elaine Butler
Phone: (706) 695 – 7315
(706) 695 – 7541 (fax)
Address: P.O. Box 1014
Chatsworth, GA 30705
Email: drosscollins@yahoo.com

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Unit Chief, Foster Care
Georgia Division of Family and Children Services

Supervised Visitation Network. (2000). Standards and Guidelines.

Visited September 9, 2002 at <http://www.svnetwork.net/StandardsAndGuidelines.html>

Faith-Based Visitation Centers, A Partnership Between the Fulton County Juvenile Court and the Faith Community in Collaboration with the Department of Family and Children Services (2002) (created by Georgia State University Masters of Social Work Candidates; Zegalia, S., Freemon, Y., Cochrane, J., Kendall, J., and Huff, C.)

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XVIII. APPENDICES

APPENDIX [A]: Sample PRE/POST Test for Volunteers

NOTE: ANSWERS ARE INDICATED IN BOLD

1. In terms of observing the visit, observation means:
 - a) You act as a counselor while you are supervising the visit
 - b) You only report the good interactions
 - c) You report the reality, including good and bad parenting interactions**
 - d) You should use therapeutic interventions to make the visit run smoother

2. What kind of volunteer behavior is appropriate?
 - a) talking to your friends about the visits to get advice
 - b) offering to take the child to the mall and McDonald's after the visit
 - c) teaching the Visiting Parent how to use art therapy with the children
 - d) observe visits, only facilitate when necessary**

3. What is considered an emergency?
 - a) Visiting Parent becomes violent
 - b) attempted abduction of a children
 - c) violent or dangerous behavior of a children
 - d) all of the above**

4. What should you do in case of an emergency?
(include questions about center's emergency protocol)

5. What does it mean to facilitate?
 - a) encourage age-appropriate activities
 - b) discourage inappropriate conduct
 - c) terminate visit when necessary
 - d) all of the above**

6. It is important to be culturally sensitive because:
 - a) you make the Visiting Parent comfortable by keeping a non-judgmental attitude**
 - b) you can teach the Visiting Parent better parenting skills
 - c) you can understand how families become dysfunctional
 - d) all of the above

7. What is diversity?
 - a) willingness to relate to other cultures, ethnicities, and other socio-economic status
 - b) respect and appreciation for differences
 - c) realizing your way of doing things is not the only or the best way
 - d) all of the above**

8. What are the rules for Visiting Parents?
 - a) the Visiting Parent should bring toys and games for the kid to play with
 - b) the Visiting Parent should show up 15 minutes early**





- c) the Visiting Parent should not verbally discipline the children's behavior
- d) all of the above

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APPENDIX [B]: Sample Evaluation for Visiting Parents

This survey is given as a way for us to receive feedback on whether our services helped you in spending time with your children. Please feel free to add comments and suggestions about how we can improve this process.

1. Was the Visitation Center easy to find?
 - a) Yes
 - b) No
 - c) Explain:

2. Do you have a reliable way to get to and from the Visitation Center?
 - a) Yes
 - b) No
 - c) Explain:

3. Were the Visitation Center volunteers easy to recognize?
 - a) Yes
 - b) No
 - c) Explain:

4. Was a volunteer available to answer your questions throughout your visit?
 - a) Yes
 - b) No
 - c) Explain:

5. Were the hours of operation convenient?
 - a) Yes
 - b) No
 - c) Explain:

6. Did you feel safe during your visit?
 - a) Yes
 - b) No
 - c) Explain:

7. Did the Visitation Center provide a supportive environment for you to meet with your children?
 - a) Yes
 - b) No
 - c) Explain:

8. Would you want to return to this Visitation Center on future visits?
 - a) Yes
 - b) No
 - c) Explain:

Thank You for taking the time to fill out this survey. Your comments are appreciated.

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