

**Intervention of Children exposed to  
Domestic Violence: Supporting the Child  
Support Service for Family as a whole-  
Visitation Centre**

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# Support Service for Family as a whole- Visitation Centre

- *Risk of unsupervised Visitation Arrangement*
  - 88% of the women surveyed by Favreau (1999) responded to have been emotionally or psychologically abused during child custody exchanges, and 55% had been abused physically;
  - Half of the women surveyed did not feel safe exchanging their children with their spouse

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- When there has been a history of significant spousal abuse, unsupervised access places children at risk of further emotional and physical harm from the perpetrator (Schaffer and Bala 2003)
- Access provides the perpetrator with opportunities to question the child about the mother, and to attempt to continue to exert control over her life (Schaffer and Bala 2003)
- Supervised visitation and exchange programs are required

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## ● The Function and Objectives of Child Visitation Centre

- Supervised visitation and exchange programs are utilized with estranged families in which contact between the former spouses could be highly abusive or dangerous to either party or to the children
- To provide a **safe and non-threatening child-focused, neutral** environment for non-custodial parties or other family members, to visit with or exchange their children

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- Who needs Supervised Access Service?

Tuckman(2005) recommends that supervised access is warranted when one or more of the following factors are present in a divorce situation:

- serious mental illness accompanied by behaviour damaging to the children
- vindictive behaviour towards the children or custodial parent
- attests for violence against people

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- abuse of children, including sexual abuse
- active alcohol and substance abuse
- persistent violations of custody orders
- threats or past acts of abduction
- ongoing parental conflict caused by a non-custodial parent after a long period of time; and
- an alienated child who is strongly allied with the custodial parent, and
- who views the non-custodial parent as dangerous and damaging

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- Child Visitation Centre in Canada
  - Around 100 visitation centres across Canada
  - Different source of funding, e.g. Provincial Government Departments, corporate donation, fee charging
  - Ontario and Quebec have developed Provincial standards with mandated features

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- Characteristics of the Child Visitation Program in Canada
  - on-site or off-site (some provides overnight visit with a minimum of one staff at all times)
  - hours of operation
  - location of physical Premises: residential facilities in the community is regarded to be the most satisfied place to most operators
  - interior physical setting: a large room is particularly conducive to the group supervision context; kitchen facilities; outdoor play area;
  - television and audio visual equipment is not recommended



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- Safety Features and Policies to ensure safety  
*Guiding Principles*
  - safety comes first
  - child's best interest dominates any decision made
  - visitation centre does not provide assessment for family court
  - staff of visitation centre act as impartial observers but do not tolerate abusive behaviour
  - Visitation centre retains the right to discontinue if adequate safety cannot be reasonably ensured

# Support Service for Family as a whole-Visitation Centre

## Safety Features and Rules

- two separate exits: one for custodial and one for non-custodial parents
- separate waiting room
- staggered drop-off times
- a panic button that can activate emergency services
- “working alone” policies ensuring that supervisors are never alone; video surveillance camera; alarms and walkie-talkie, etc.

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- prohibited activities include: alcohol or drug prior to or during visit; smoking; abusive behaviour; discussion of negative, inappropriate comments of access issues of other party in presence of the child; whispered conversation
- monitored washroom visits by the child with non-custodial party
- signing of contract

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- Effectiveness of the Program

- some recent studies have explored the psychological and social outcome of families who have attended these programs
- Pearson, Davis and Thoennes (2005) evaluated supervised visitation and exchange programs offered in 30 of California's 58 counties
- 90% of the parents reported that the program provided a safe environment for themselves and their children

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- supervised visitation users reported a significant increase in the number of days of contact with their children; those with no contact dropped from 36% to 25%
- fewer non-custodial parents characterized their relationship with the other parent as “hostile and angry”
- The Pearson et al. 2005 study (on 173 program users) also reported that child support payments improved following participation in the supervised visitation centres, with 38% of the users increasing their child support

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- Advice to New Program
  - not cost effective if offered as stand alone programs
  - best run in conjunction with another community partner such as Children's Services
  - not as an adjunct to a women's shelter
  - should not be in a formalized organizational environment but should stimulate a normal, comfortable family situation
  - wrap around service with flexible time

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- *Does Hong Kong need Supervised Visitation Centres?*
- *Child visitation centre – A child's program*

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- Part of the content is adapted from:  
Supervised Visitation and Exchange Centres for Domestic  
Violence: An Environmental Scan by
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