



GIVING VOICE TO THE VOICELESS: HOW TO STAY CHILD-CENTERED WHEN MAKING INTERVENTIONS IN SUPERVISED VISITATION

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**The New York Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to
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SUPERVISED VISITATION NETWORK:

SVNWORLDWIDE.ORG

- an international membership organization of professionals who provide supervised visitation and access services to families.
- *Founded in 1991* to provide opportunities for networking, sharing of information, and training for agencies and individuals who are interested in assuring that children can have safe, conflict-free access to parents with whom they do not reside.
- *Providing resources* for members and families in need of supervised visitation services.



SUPERVISED VISITATION NETWORK

- Established Minimum Standards of Practice and a Code of Ethics that members pledge to follow.
- Provides training opportunities including our Annual Conference, the SVN Training Manual, Regional Trainings, Telephone Trainings, a grant supported training on the issues of Domestic Violence funded by The Office of Violence against Women.
- Is NOT a governing agency, local laws or governmental funding programs, when they exist, govern programs directly.



HISTORY OF SV

Supervised Visitation Programs exist almost everywhere, but the evolution of practice varies somewhat in different regions, states, or provinces. Typically programs begin with either a Child Welfare Focus, or they work primarily on separating families in Family Law, or marital dissolution cases.



TYPES OF PROVIDERS

Non Profit SV Programs

Larger Nonprofits with SV as an added service

DV Agencies

Court Based Programs

Non-profit counseling programs

For-profit/ private counseling programs

Individual for-profit providers



OVERVIEW

- Supervised Visitation awareness
- Community supported programs evolve from tragic results
- Trends in SV, especially in Child Welfare, is for more supportive, coached, or Therapeutic visits
- The NYSPCC as an example of a Therapeutic Visitation program with a keen awareness of the unique aspects of supervised visitation.



Overview

- **Holding a systemic frame**
- **Building collaborative relationships with parents**
- **Interventions in the visit room and during pre/post coaching**
 - Modeling
 - Coaching
 - Helping parents play with children
 - Attunement
 - Staying child centered
- **Interventions with the custodial parent**
 - How to support child with visits
 - Reducing divided loyalties
- **Interventions with the child**
 - Visit refusal
 - Decision dialogue
 - Healing conversations
 - Therapeutic games and the arts



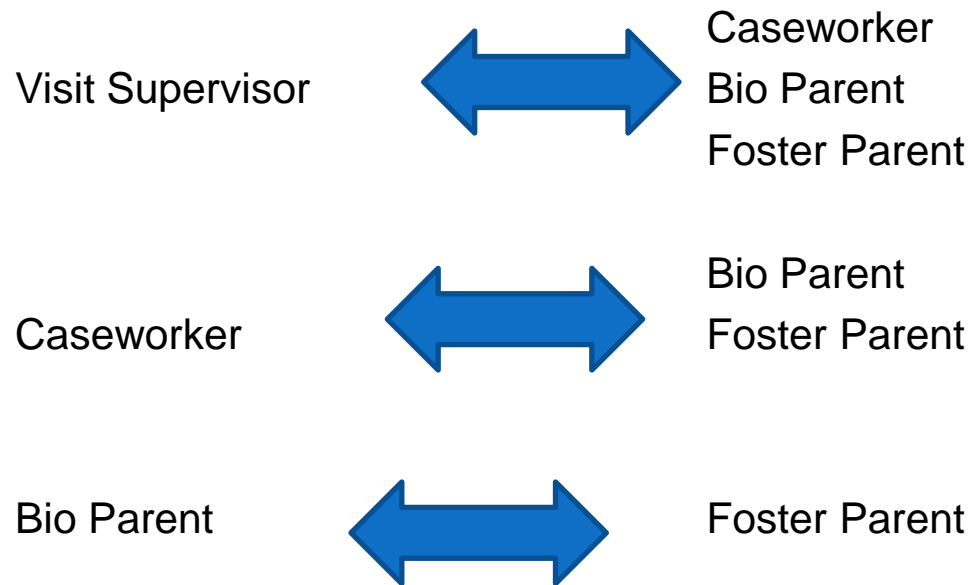
HOLDING A SYSTEMIC FRAME

- Supporting consistent contact between children and biological family early in the placement process is critical in the healing process
- Bridging connection/communication between biological and foster parents decrease the child's divided loyalties



WORKING SYSTEMICALLY (CONT'D)

- Facilitate communication in every direction:



HOW TO CREATE A COLLABORATIVE RELATIONSHIP

- Authentic curiosity
- Listen for stories of pride and unique outcomes.
- Listen for underlying values and beliefs about what is meaningful
- Find out what and who is important to the client.



HOW TO CREATE A COLLABORATIVE RELATIONSHIP

- Listen to understand a client's point of view.
 - Understanding doesn't mean you agree, accept, or condone the client's behavior or point of view.
- Talk about potential areas of conflict or disagreement before they occur
- Ask the client: How do you like to receive feedback? How should we handle the situation if you and I disagree?



Visit Supervisor/Parent Work

Goals of Visit Supervisor/Parent work:

- 1) To encourage parents to think about their child's experience from their child's perspective
- 2) To help parents develop their understanding of their children's feelings and developmental needs
- 3) To highlight moments of connection during visits and to expand these moments



Interventions in the Visit Room

- What can I do right now to encourage a positive interaction between this parent and child?
- If I intervene now, will that interrupt the parent-child flow or enhance it?



Modeling

- The learning happens by observing the visit supervisor's behaviors
- Parents can learn by imitating the visit supervisor's behaviors
 - Getting on the floor to play with a toddler or school age child
 - When giving a directive, making eye contact with the child
 - Using age appropriate language



Coaching

- Coaching helps build skills
- Coaching is easiest in the context of a strong relationship between parent and visit supervisor
- Directing the parent to intervene/respond in a particular way

Examples:

- I'm noticing that Johnny is having a hard time building that tower; I bet he could really use your help.
- I bet Johnny would really like it if you were to sit next to him on the floor and play with him.
- I am hearing that Johnny really needs you to listen right now. Will you please do that?



Helping Parents Play With Children

Goals:

- To help parents play with their children in developmentally appropriate ways
- To increase a parent's awareness of how children learn and communicate through play
- To support parents with strengthening the bond with their children by tuning into their children during play
- Support parents with using metaphor to help children resolve emotional conflicts—Children tell us a lot through their play!!



Helping Parents Tune into Their Child

Watching a child and commenting on:

- what he or she may be feeling;
- thinking;
- doing, both verbally and non-verbally;
- what he or she is communicating with his/her body

helps a child feel noticed, seen, and known.



Tuning in Comments

- Wow! You built those blocks so tall!
- You jump really high!

Tuning into non-verbals:

- You seem sad. What is it that you're thinking about?
- You climbed those monkey bars even though it was pretty scary for you! Great job trying!
- I notice that your shoulders are slumped. I am wondering what's happening?



Questions to Ask Parents During Pre/Post Coaching

- What do you think your child enjoyed most about today's visit?
 - How could you tell?
 - What did the child do or say to indicate that might have been what he/she enjoyed most?
- When do you think your child was most connected to you during the visit?
 - How could you tell?
 - What did the child do or say to indicate that he/she was most connected to you?
 - How do you think your child felt during those moments?



Questions (Continued)

- At one point do you think your child was having a hard time during the visit?
 - How could you tell?
 - What did your child do or say to indicate that he/she was having a hard time?
 - How do you think your child was feeling during that time?
- When did you feel most connected to your child during today's visit?
 - What was it about that time that felt good?
 - How did that feel to you?



Interventions with the Custodial Parent

- Helping custodial parents to manage ambivalence about visitation/their child's relationship with the other parent
- Understanding divided loyalties
- Non-verbal messages given to children



Divided Loyalties

- Children can experience the bind of feeling like they are betraying one parent by connecting or bonding to the other.
 - Non-verbal messages can reinforce this bind.
- Loyalty binds can create confusion and inner-turmoil for children.
- If a child feels that connecting with the non-custodial parent will hurt or disappoint the custodial parent, he or she may hold back.



Reducing Divided Loyalties

- Provide psychoeducation to custodial parents:
 - The impact of divided loyalties
 - What is best for children is for them to love and be loved by all of their parents and caretakers
 - If children internalize a negative experience of their parent, this becomes part of their identity
- Support custodial parents with managing their own feelings of ambivalence related to visits/contact with non-custodial parent
 - Help parents connect with the loving/redeemable parts of the visiting parent
 - Help them recall what attracted them to the person in the first place



Reducing Divided Loyalties (Cont'd)

- Coach custodial parents to support, both verbally and non-verbally the child's visit/contact with non-custodial parent:
 - Coach parents to ask child in an open ended way how the visit was
 - Have child share favorite parts of the visit with the custodial parent
 - Have child share artwork or other things created during the visit
 - Handouts: Helping Children with Visitation
Things to Keep in Mind When Visiting Your Child
What to Expect After the Supervised Visit



Interventions with the Child

- Meet with the child prior to visits.
- Explore the child's hopes, fears, or worries about the visits.
- Provide the child with a tour of the visit rooms, so nothing is a surprise on their first day.
- Child is empowered to know they can take breaks at any point during the visit.
- Create a safety signal with the child.
- Create structure and predictability within the context of visits,
 - i.e. begin and end the visits the same way each week



When a Child Refuses to Visit

- Never force a child to visit
- Review “safety signal”
- Remind child they won’t be alone
- Explore the child’s fears and worries
- Explore what the child would need to feel safe in the room
 - Provide child with choices (increases their personal agency)
 - Offer less restrictive options, i.e. writing a note or a phone call



When a Child Refuses to Visit (con't)

- If a child is refusing to visit, explore the hypothetical, i.e.
 - What would it be like **IF** the child went into the visit room?
 - What would the child need in order to feel safe to visit?



THE DECISION DIALOGUE

- A technique that creates an opportunity for the child to express his or her thoughts, feelings, worries, or fears that have often NOT been previously expressed.
- The decision dialogue gives a child a voice; it optimizes the child's personal agency.



THE DECISION DIALOGUE (CONT'D)

- Explore the child's thoughts or feelings about visitation
- Through a dialogue with the child, decisions are made about how to use the information
- The child decides what, when, where, how, and with whom the information is shared



THE DECISION DIALOGUE (CONT'D)

When a child does not want the information shared:

- Explore the child's reasons
 - What do you think your dad/mom would do/say/think/feel?"
 - "What do you worry would happen if you told?"
- This exploration provides information about the relational constraints that exist in the relationship
 - What are the fears or worries that stop people from sharing certain parts of themselves?



THE DECISION DIALOGUE (CONT'D)

- The information around what constrains the child can then be used to strengthen the relationship with the parent
- Ask what the child would need in order to feel safe with the information being shared
 - “What do you need from dad/me/mom to feel like it would be okay to share?”



HEALING CONVERSATIONS

Healing conversations are:

- initiated by the child
- relate to ruptures in the parent/child relationship
- work toward resolution of the ruptures.

Often the child will:

- ask questions
- ask for more information about events
- need the parent to take responsibility or ownership



Therapeutic Games and the Arts as Intervention

- The Talking, Feeling, Doing Game
- The Ungame
- Family Happenings
- Affect Modulation Exercises
- Creative Arts in the Visit Room



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