

## A Successful Personal Parenting Time



**For The Alternate Residential Parent:** If you and your child(ren) have been assigned to Supervised Parenting Time, it is up to you as the adult to make it a positive experience. While it isn't the same as unsupervised time, it is valuable time with your child(ren). Also, since detailed notes are taken during this process by a neutral Supervisor, you may be able to use this experience as evidence to show the Court that you show potential to move into unsupervised parenting time. You hold the keys to making the best of the situation.

### **Guidelines To Help You Prepare For Personal Parenting Time**

- If your child(ren) and/or you are being seen by (or have in the past been seen by) a counselor or therapist, you should contact them in advance regarding Supervised Parenting Time. If your legal case has a Guardian ad Litem or if you have legal counsel, you should also contact them in advance regarding Supervised Parenting Time.
- Make sure the child(ren) know in advance when the parenting time is going to happen, rather than springing it on them at the last minute. Gather toys and belongings before the parenting time.
- If being restricted to Supervised Parenting Time is a problem for you, don't ignore your feelings. Talk with a therapist, a friend, a professional from your church, synagogue or mosque, or someone who can be supportive and objective. However, make sure not violate any Court orders regarding the privacy certain information. Consult with your attorney before communicating with others regarding problems you or your child(ren) are experiencing.
- Know what is expected of you during your Parenting Time.
- Plan your transportation so that you can be at your Parenting Time on time.
- Bring, or have readily accessible, pictures or other things that are special to you and your child(ren).
- Plan activities and projects to do together. Have the materials ready. Recall if you and your child planned an activity for the upcoming parenting time, and be prepared to be able to do that activity.
- Find out from your child(ren)'s school and extracurricular directors what they have been doing, so that you can engage your child in discussions, during your parenting time, regarding same.

- Have answers prepared for your child(ren)'s tough questions (such as, Why is this happening? When can I come home? Why can't I live with you? Why don't you love me?). For appropriate responses, consult with your attorney, the child(ren)'s Guardian ad Litem, and the child(ren)'s (and your) counselor or therapist. Make certain not to violate any court ordered restrictions.
- Accept that you and your child(ren)'s other parent may parent differently.
- Get feedback from the Director or Assistant Director regarding past Supervised Parenting Time with A Family Connection.
- If necessary, an orientation can be scheduled prior to the first Personal Supervised Parenting Time, which can be very reassuring to your child(ren). At the orientation, your child(ren) can be told where they'll be dropped off, where they'll visit, and what toys and activities may be there. They'll also get a chance to meet the Director or Assistant Director and the Supervisor.

### **Guidelines To Help You *During* Your Personal Supervised Parenting Time**

- Follow the schedule for your child(ren)'s Supervised Parenting Time. Only cancel for emergencies. If you cancel the visit, be willing to schedule a make-up time.
- Arrive, or be prepared and available, on time.
- Prepare your child(ren) for future scheduled parenting time. Mark parenting time days on a calendar.
- Don't talk about the divorce, or issues of the litigation, the other parent, or court actions with your child(ren) or in their presence or ear shot.
- Do everything you can to keep your child(ren) out of conflict that may exist between you and the other parent, or other relatives.
- Don't criticize or badmouth the other parent or their relatives or the Supervised Parenting Time. No matter what.
- During your parenting time, don't pump your child(ren) for information about what goes on with the other parent. Accept the things that they tell you, on their own time schedule. Be a good listener. Avoid quizzing your child about the other parent's activities and relationships. If you hear things that concern you, contact your attorney and the Guardian ad Litem and the child(ren)'s therapist or counselor.
- Watch your nonverbal language. Sometimes a simple expression on your face can speak volumes to your child(ren) about your lack of support of the parent or the parenting time.
- Ask your child(ren) what they would like to do during your time together and give them choices. Help them plan activities for the next parenting time with you. If they are unsure, take the initiative in engaging child in focused activities, conversation, etc.
- Ask questions about how and what they are doing during the week and listen to their stories. Take an interest in your child(ren)'s activities, hobbies, and interests. Listen to your child(ren), and encourage them to give details, to express their thoughts and feelings about it, and reflecting to them what you are hearing.
- Respond appropriately to your child(ren)'s cues for closeness or distance, physical and emotional needs (avoiding judgment or intimidation).
- Praise and encourage your child(ren) for things they are doing well.
- Utilize appropriate methods of behavior management skills with your child(ren), so that you are able to interact with your child(ren) to redirect his/her negative behavior calmly and without stress or frustration. Also, be able to set appropriate limits and parameters around your child(ren)'s play,

activities, and interaction with you and others. If this process is frustrating to you, inquire about this with your or your child(ren)'s therapist or counselor. If there is no therapist or counselor, inquire about this with your attorney and the child's Guardian ad Litem, and/or seek out a provider to assist with this frustration.

- Talk positively about the other parent if the child(ren) brings them up.
- Tell your child(ren) that you love and miss them. However, try to avoid over-emotional reactions of sadness in the child(ren)'s presence.
- Keep your child(ren) out of the middle when dealing with conflicts you have with the other parent or another adult or relative.
- Avoid talking negatively about your child(ren)'s appearance, or the rules or routines of their home-life with the other parent or relative.
- Be careful to avoid lecturing, repeating, ordering, preaching, criticizing, and shaming.
- Offer a non-judgmental attitude, which demonstrates respect.
- Avoid pressure, sarcasm, ridicule, put-downs, and labeling.
- Focus on the here and now moments with your child(ren) during your parenting time.
- Never raise your concerns with your child(ren) during the visit.
- Avoid discussing the litigation or terms of the parenting time with your child(ren).
- Avoid making your child(ren) a messenger to the other party.
- Say brief and positive good-byes to your child(ren) when the parenting time is over.
- Follow to the letter the rules set forth by your Court orders, the requirements from A Family Connection, and instruction from the Supervisor.

#### **When a Child is Resistant**

- If your child(ren) and/or you are being seen by (or have in the past been seen by) a counselor or therapist, you should contact them if you believe there is or may be resistance from your child(ren) to participate with Supervised Parenting Time. If your legal case has a Guardian ad Litem or if you have legal counsel, you should also contact them if you believe there is or may be resistance from your child(ren) to participate with Supervised Parenting Time.
- If permitted by the Court, answer your child(ren)'s questions by trying to be positive and encouraging. For example, you might say, "Ms. ... (the Supervisor) will be here the whole time. I think you should give it a try." If questions or concerns persist, contact the child(ren)'s Guardian ad Litem, and therapist or counselor.
- You should talk with the Director or Assistant Director about your child(ren)'s concerns and work with them to come up with a plan that supports your child(ren). Find out A Family Connection's policy when children don't want to visit and how the Supervisor is trained to approach these situations.
- Know that you are limited in being able to control other influences on your child(ren), while you are exercising Supervised Parenting Time. However, you can control your own consistent behaviors, and show your child(ren) from their positive consistent and reliable experiences with you, that parenting time with you should be met with positive anticipation.
- Keep in mind that A Family Connection's staff are not the reason for why there may be conflict in your family. Just like you, they are looking out for your child(ren) and following court orders.

### **Ideas For What To Do During Your Parenting Time**

- Build with Legos or blocks
- Play a card game
- Watch a movie together
- Find out what your child(ren) want to do (listen to them)
- Play a video game together
- Read a book together (one person will read out loud while the other listens)
- Prepare and eat a meal together
- Play board games
- Play with play dough
- Talk about current events (relevant to the child's developmental level)
- Teach each other something
- Share about major events in your lives (even from your childhood)
- Talk about each other's hobbies, and try something new
- Talk about why you love each other
- Complete a project together
- Talk about being responsible for own behavior
- Talk about what your child(ren) want to do when they grow up
- Read the newspaper together
- Draw a picture of your family or simply draw pictures or color
- Share your values with each other
- Find something to celebrate each family member for
- Tell each other what you need and want
- Build a family tree
- Make a scrapbook of each family member
- Talk about friends
- Talk about extracurricular activities that the child(ren) enjoy
- Speak with A Family Connection's Director or Assistant Director about expanding your parenting time to take place in other venues and/or at events