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# Safe Havens

Supervised Visitation and Safe Exchange

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## LESSONS FROM A DECADE OF CHANGE

AUTHOR: JANE SADUSKY



NATIONAL COUNCIL OF  
JUVENILE AND FAMILY COURT JUDGES

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AUTHOR: JANE SADUSKY

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# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

While the need for supervised visitation and exchange for victims of domestic violence and their children had long been recognized, the Safe Havens Supervised Visitation and Safe Exchange Program (Safe Havens Program) provided a key opportunity to expand services available and to do so in a way that accounted for the realities of domestic violence. By focusing on the realities of domestic violence post-separation, this program has led to a significant shift in how those services are offered.

For nearly 15 years, communities have worked diligently to build supervised visitation and safe exchange centers that focus on how to provide a safe and meaningful service to families who had experienced domestic violence. The many individuals, organizations, national training and technical assistance providers, and supervised visitation centers that have done this work have not only provided the services, but also provided an important shift in philosophy and practice in the supervised visitation and exchange field. This document celebrates their work and captures the lessons learned.

We begin by thanking the mothers, children, and fathers who have contributed their insights and guidance since the first years of the Safe Havens Program. From informal, everyday conversations to structured surveys, interviews, and focus groups, they have helped teach visitation programs how to provide services that best secure safety and promote healing in the context of domestic violence, sexual assault, stalking, dating violence, and child abuse.

The Safe Havens retrospective project—Lessons from a Decade of Change—also benefited beyond measure from the reflections and applied experience of the following grantee communities: City of Chicago; Deschutes County, OR; Itasca County, MN; Lafourche Parish, LA; Solano County, CA; State of Michigan; and Nooksack Indian Tribe,

WA. We thank the local visitation programs and everyone who participated in the site visits, interviews, roundtable discussions, and filming.

We also acknowledge the early contributions of the Safe Havens demonstration initiative sites: City of Chicago, IL; City of Kent, WA; Counties of Santa Clara, Santa Cruz, and San Mateo, CA; and the State of Michigan. Their commitment to improving their own practice and helping shape new approaches can be seen in current visitation practices around the country.

This retrospective honors the life and contributions of Ellen Pence (1948-2012). Many of the innovative changes in practice that we see today rest on her bold and thoughtful challenge to visitation service providers and their partners to look at how the work was being done and who benefited—and who was harmed, however unintentionally. “We risk failing children if our interventions are wrapped in claims of ‘neutrality’ that protect us from facing the ugly and complex realities of violence in their lives and those of their mothers,” we hear Ellen remind us.

The following NCJFCJ staff, consultants, and federal partners provided guidance and direction to the retrospective project:

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# Introduction

## A History of Safe Havens

One of the most significant social change movements of the past 40 years has been the effort to end domestic violence. While domestic violence or domestic abuse—terms typically used in legislation and public policy—can include a wide range of behaviors that carry a range of meaning and impact, the most urgent concern has been the ongoing patterns of coercion and dominance that can result in great harm, including persistent physical, sexual, and emotional violence and injury, and even death. “Battering” is the term that antiviolence activists coined to describe the pattern of beliefs, behaviors, and actions that has characterized the abuse suffered by many women throughout their intimate relationships.

The movement to end battering—the battered women’s movement—resulted in the creation of networks of survivor peer support and advocacy, emergency shelters, civil protection orders, legal assistance, changes in criminal and civil law, and expanded awareness and understanding within legal and social service systems and the wider community. Public policy and resources coalesced around

a framework of supports that, where established, were most useful to victims of battering who sought to escape the violence by leaving the relationship. For many women and their children, the new laws and resources opened new paths to safety and well-being.

Few broad efforts to strengthen safety and well-being for people meet their stated intentions in the first attempt, however. Peoples' lives and needs are complex, and "no one size fits all." As with other social justice movements of the past century, the movement to end battering—now more commonly described as ending domestic violence—requires a process of continual appraisal and reappraisal. How does a particular law or policy or practice change, enhance, or diminish safety and well-being—and for whom? What still needs to change?

The Safe Havens Supervised Visitation and Safe Exchange program emerged from this necessary reappraisal and the recognition that leaving a battering relationship does not mean that the battering ends. Not only does the battering not necessarily end, but the time of post-separation, as this period has come to be known, can be a more dangerous and too often lethal time. Where children are involved, attempts to leave the relationship often heighten the use of children as a tactic of coercion and control. The misconception that the solution to battering is for the victim

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## **SUPERVISED VISITATION AND SAFE EXCHANGE**

A parent who does not have custody of his or her child spends time with the child or children under the supervision of someone approved by the court or both parents in a controlled, professional environment in order to protect children from potentially dangerous or harmful situations. Under safe exchange, a noncustodial parent has unsupervised access, but the child or children move back and forth between the parents under supervision. Both supervised visitation and safe exchange limit the contact between the victim and batterer while facilitating safe parenting time.

## **SAFE HAVENS-ORIENTED SUPERVISED VISITATION AND SAFE EXCHANGE**

Supervised visitation and safe exchange that is domestic violence-aware and informed and set within a philosophy and practice of specific Guiding Principles. It holds equal regard for the safety of children and adult victims. It values engagement and respect with all involved, but it is not neutral toward violence and abuse. It rests on a foundation of community collaboration, advocacy, and a shared culture of learning that supports self-reflection and quality improvement.

to leave the relationship has been powerful and enduring across legal and social service systems and public opinion. With the growing recognition and articulation of post-separation violence, survivors and advocates within the movement, supportive members of Congress, and leaders within the U.S. Department of Justice, Office on Violence Against Women (OVW), began to shape a new public policy response.

This new response included the Safe Havens Supervised Visitation and Safe Exchange Grant Program (Safe Havens), established by the Violence Against Women Act of 2000 to increase supervised visitation and exchange services for victims of domestic violence, sexual assault, stalking, dating violence, and child abuse.<sup>1</sup> Supporters of Safe Havens sought to expand services and to ensure that those services would be informed by an understanding of domestic violence and post-separation battering. They sought to protect children and parents who were victims of battering from experiencing further violence, abuse, and threats during child visitation or exchange.

In 2002, Safe Havens launched a demonstration initiative to identify and explore promising practices in supervised visitation and safe exchange in the context of battering

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*“Separation often signifies an end to a relationship; but for many adult victims of domestic violence, separation marks instead an escalation of the batterer’s violence and manipulative tactics. Emotional, psychological, sexual, financial and physical abuse, stalking, and harassment often continue at significant rates post-separation and may become even more severe. Awards of custody and visitation to the batterer ensure continued contact between the adult victim and the batterer, thereby creating an opportunity for the batterer to continue the abuse. Lethal violence occurs more frequently during and after separation than when the adult victim and batterer are still together, and the children can be targets of or witnesses to this violence.”*

**Guiding Principles – Safe Havens:  
Supervised Visitation and Safe Exchange Grant Program**

and other forms of domestic violence.<sup>2</sup> Between 2002 and 2008, the demonstration initiative sites established local collaborations between one or more supervised visitation programs, anti-domestic violence advocacy programs, local units of government, and the courts.<sup>3</sup> Local “consulting committees” included representatives from core collaborating partners—supervised visitation, courts, advocacy, and government—and other agencies and organizations involved in building a community response to domestic violence, such as batterer intervention programs, law enforcement, family law attorneys, and child welfare. The demonstration sites represented a mix of existing and new programs, ultimately involving eleven supervised visitation programs in four states. Each site examined and implemented new policies and practices, developed new partnerships, addressed aspects of cultural accessibility, and grappled with issues of safety and security, documentation, and sustainability.

The demonstration sites, national technical assistance partners, national steering committees, and OVW engaged in thoughtful, spirited discussions of how to design and sustain supervised visitation and safe exchange in the context of battering and other forms of domestic violence.<sup>4</sup> This collective work led to the development of a set of guiding principles, new perspectives on the design and operation of supervised visitation practice and services, and an examination of issues of neutrality and safety in the context of battering and post-separation violence.

Since 2002, hundreds of communities—cities, counties, states, and tribes—have received grants to plan and/or implement supervised visitation and safe exchange programs. Under the Violence Against Women Reauthorization Act of 2013, the Safe Havens Grant Program was absorbed into a newly created discretionary grant program: Grants to Support Families in the Justice System (known as the Justice for Families Program).<sup>5</sup> Safe Havens now rests on more than a decade of experience in establishing a framework for supervised parenting

What seems so simple—exchanging kids—can be so complex. Supervised visitation and safe exchange helps families put it together again—or perhaps for the first time—without anxiety, anger, abuse. Safely.

**– Family court services staff**

To see a family that's been torn apart by a batterer's violence and have to go through the court process have a place to come forward and heal is a benefit for the family and for the community.

**– Supervised visitation program director**

time and access that recognizes that (1) the process of separating from and leaving an abusive partner can increase rather than diminish danger for victims of battering and their children and (2) batterers often use visitation and exchange of children as opportunities for ongoing emotional, physical, and sexual abuse.

*Lessons from a Decade of Change* is a Safe Havens retrospective. It sums up lessons learned, essential discussions, and tips for designing and sustaining supervised visitation and safe exchange in the context of battering. Along with the ground-breaking work of the demonstration initiative, this retrospective draws on the applied experience, wisdom, and candor of seven grantee communities consulted specifically for the project. The “retrospective communities” participated in site visits, roundtable discussions, and interviews. Grantees spanned the diverse, urban setting of Chicago with its seventy-seven distinct community areas, multiple languages, and expansive racial and ethnic diversity to the 2,000-member Nooksack Indian Tribe. No two communities had the same experience, although they shared much in common. Parents, consulting committees and community partners, supervised visitation program staff, judges, court personnel, family law attorneys, advocates from anti-domestic violence organizations, batterer intervention program facilitators, law enforcement officers, and others helped explore what it means to provide a Safe Haven.<sup>6</sup>

Whatever their distinct, local experiences, the communities together emphasized the value and promise of Safe Havens-oriented supervised visitation and safe exchange to (1) promote public safety, (2) provide a knowledgeable ally for safety to child and adult victims of domestic violence, (3) promote a physically and emotionally safe relationship between a child and an abusive parent, and (4) reinforce the message that the community rejects domestic violence.

# How to Use This Guide

Safe Havens grantees in the demonstration initiative years and for several years afterward had the benefit of concentrated, abundant technical assistance. Going forward, communities will have less of such guided support available, but they will be able to draw on the collective experience of the earlier work. This guide and its tools substitute, in part, for that earlier support.

This guide is a collection of discussions, checklists, and tips, organized as follows:

- **Impact and Innovation** includes an overview of the key shifts in thinking and innovations sparked by the Safe Havens philosophy and approach.
- **Putting It All Together: Lessons Learned** presents tips and tools related to designing, operating, and sustaining Safe Havens-oriented supervised visitation and safe exchange.
- **Guiding Principles: Seeking a Unified Voice** includes a brief review of the Guiding Principles and provides examples of how communities have used them to establish and maintain a shared philosophy and voice.



## LEARN MORE...

Appendix 3, *Building Safe Havens: Tools and Resources* includes links to material referenced throughout *Lessons from a Decade of Change*.

## Definitions and terms

This publication, *Lessons from a Decade of Change*, uses definitions and terms found in *Guiding Principles – Safe Havens: Supervised Visitation and Safe Exchange Grant Program*. It therefore uses “battering” and “domestic violence” interchangeably: “Domestic violence, also referred to as battering, refers to physical, psychological, emotional, financial, stalking, or sexual abuse that takes place in the context of an intimate (or prior intimate) relationship and can involve a pattern of purposeful and assaultive behaviors that can be used to maintain control and compliance of the victim” (p. 44). This publication also uses the terms “adult victim of domestic violence” and “victim parent”—and “batterer” and “battering parent.”

## Definitions and terms

This publication sometimes refers to adult victims of battering as women or mothers and to batterers as men or fathers, in keeping with the experience of most Safe Havens-oriented supervised visitation programs. As noted by Bancroft and Silverman: “We find this gender ascription to be accurate for most cases in which a professional is required to evaluate a batterer’s parenting, and it is reflected both in our clinical experience and in most published research... our gendered language does not apply to lesbian and gay male relationships, but recent literature addressing the prevalence, causes, and dynamics of same-sex domestic violence suggests considerable parallel to heterosexual battering...but professionals should be aware of their need for further education about the particular dynamics of domestic violence in these communities...” (*The Batterer as Parent: Addressing the Impact of Domestic Violence on Family Dynamics*, Lundy Bancroft and Jay G. Silverman, Sage Publications, 2002, p. 4).”

- **Essential Discussions** presents four central questions to consider in establishing and sustaining a Safe Havens-oriented supervised visitation and safe exchange program.
- **Looking Forward** highlights the work yet to be done and ongoing challenges in expanding and sustaining Safe Havens-oriented supervised visitation and safe exchange.
- **Learn More: Appendix** provides additional information on strategies and resources related to putting the Safe Havens approach into practice. It includes the following appendices:
  1. Frequently Asked Questions
  2. Strategies for Practice: Lessons from the Demonstration Initiative
  3. Building Safe Havens: Tools and Resources

Readers new to the idea of supervised visitation as it impacts domestic violence might start with the *Impact and Innovation* section, which provides a kind of cue card to the central features of the Safe Havens approach. Readers involved in building a local partnership and exploring further might look first at *Putting It All Together* and *Guiding Principles*. Those who are already engaged in the practice of Safe Havens-oriented supervised visitation might turn to *Essential Discussions* and *Looking Forward* before going elsewhere in the guide. Each section cites additional tools and resources developed under the Safe Havens Grant Program or related to the topics discussed.

# Impact and Innovation

The communities and individuals consulted for the retrospective offered many examples of the kinds of impact and innovation that Safe Havens produced, as a grant program and as an approach to practice. Five themes stand out for their influence on supervised visitation design and practice, whether a community already had a supervised visitation program in place when it became a Safe Havens grantee or whether the program was first established as a result of the grant. The themes are interconnected but highlighting them individually helps illustrate the potential of Safe Havens-oriented supervised visitation.

The five key themes of impact and innovation include:

1. Illuminating and understanding the reality and risks of post-separation battering.
2. Establishing equal regard for the safety of child and adult victims as the cornerstone for intervention.
3. Promoting a broader and deeper understanding of engagement as a core element in building safety.
4. Establishing supervised visitation and safe exchange as an extension of community advocacy and support.
5. Leveraging judicial and community change in the response to domestic violence.

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*There's been a change in thinking. Safety and well-being come first and we want to avoid making it worse.*

**– Judge**

*It's been a cultural shift in our community. People are taking supervised visitation seriously because not only domestic violence advocates are working on it. Safe Havens has been a model for how we can change on a community level.*

**– Advocate**

## Post-separation Battering

*Fear is still real  
for me.*

### **– Mother using supervised visitation**

*Even at the police  
station, women were  
getting harassed.  
Here there's no  
contact at all and  
there's someone  
able to intercept  
inappropriate  
behavior during  
visits, where a family  
member who is  
'supervising' probably  
wouldn't intervene.*

### **– Visitation center staff**

Establishing supervised visitation as an important tool for safety in the context of post-separation battering has been a major contribution of Safe Havens. The experiences of grantee communities have reinforced the importance of recognizing that separating or leaving a relationship will not necessarily end violence and abuse. For some victims of battering, the period after separation will be even more harmful or dangerous.

Post-separation is a critical time for help and services to offset opportunities for contact and violence. Supervised visitation and safe exchange can be vital in building safety in the immediate period of a supervised visit or exchange and during the longer period of the divorce or custody process. Visitation services also provide opportunities for change that can diminish the harm and risk that a batterer might pose over time to a current or future victim.

If there is a court order and expectation of contact, as often is the situation in custody cases, there must be a safe place to ensure that parents do not have to be together and to minimize opportunities for a batterer to engage in such behaviors. As many of those consulted for this retrospective emphasized, most batterers will have access to their children. Judges rarely cut off all contact with or access to children, regardless of the nature of the harm a batterer has caused or the victim's fears of ongoing violence and abuse. Most adult victims of battering also want their children to have a safe and peaceful relationship with the other parent.

Supervised visitation and safe exchange that is informed by an understanding of the context of battering facilitates parent/child contact that is safe. It also offers avenues of help to adult victims and can link batterers with intervention and education about the impact of their violence on children. Safe Havens-oriented supervised visitation provides a framework of critical "breathing

space” for children and victims of battering after separation. The Safe Havens approach provides a “venue for safety” that helps survivors keep safe because their children are safe.

Removing visitation and exchange from such places as fast food restaurants, a friend’s or relative’s home, and police station parking lots reduces opportunities for intimidation, violence, and other harm. Children and adult survivors benefit from a setting where people can recognize and interrupt the behaviors of battering, including subtle forms of coercion and intimidation.

Safe Havens-oriented supervised visitation helps interveners see the ways in which courts and other community systems such as law enforcement or child welfare—and a visitation program itself—might be used as a tactic of post-separation battering. For example, repeatedly returning to court or pushing for joint custody or unsupervised visitation when there may have been little interest in the children during the marriage can be a form of coercion and intimidation. Grantee communities reported that the Safe Havens framework helped expand and strengthen understanding among interveners that the danger and harm do not end when a victim of battering leaves the relationship. The framework expanded awareness that court and community services must remain alert to unintentionally supporting a batterer’s tactics.

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*I remember what it was like before: exchanges in the police parking lot and police not even always there. There were assaults and lots of screaming matches. Having exchanges at the center eliminates contact, reduces exposure for kids. Visits to McDonald’s were the same problem, or some poor grandmother had to supervise.*

**– Attorney in private practice**

*I was so scared I would have signed anything to get away from him. I didn’t ask for supervised visitation, but the court ordered it. I’m scared all the time.*

**– Mother using supervised visitation**

## Equal Regard

*There's been a tangible change and significant impact in what supervised visitation programs are doing. Before Safe Havens, supervised visitation wasn't really accounting for victim safety. It was about neutrality and getting and keeping the courts happy. The focus was on kids disconnected from their mothers and the goal was to get visits to happen, to provide access. Everyone and every situation was lumped into one box. This isn't the reality any longer, in a sweeping way.*

**– Former supervised visitation program director**

As Safe Havens has recognized and made visible the realities of post-separation battering, it has also challenged prevailing assumptions of neutrality that resulted in a separation of children's safety and well-being from that of their most protective parent (usually their mother). To help meet the needs of adult survivors who are trying to separate from and leave abusive relationships, while protecting themselves and their children, means to link the safety of children and mothers rather than disconnect them.



The first Safe Havens Guiding Principle addresses the concept of equal regard: "Visitation centers should consider as their highest priority the safety of child(ren) and adult victims and should treat both with equal regard." Grantee communities repeatedly spoke of the ways in which adopting the Safe Havens framework has infused a deep understanding and recognition of the dynamics of battering and how supervised visitation and safe exchange can respond in ways that help to interrupt and counter the resulting harm. A Safe Havens-orientation means

providing a valuable neutral space for parents to visit with or exchange children without remaining indifferent to the larger context of violence and abuse that brings families through the door. Equal regard in action happens via establishing an environment of respect, communication, and nonviolence that limits the opportunities for harm and promotes opportunities for change.

The significance of the principle of equal regard cannot be overstated. "A commitment to equal regard for the safety of children *and* adult victims of battering opens all center practices to reconsideration: how people are welcomed and introduced to visitation services, what gets documented and recorded, how center records will be used, how the center links adult victims with advocacy, and the visitation center's role in the wider community response."<sup>7</sup>

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*We are not neutral to violence. We respond with respect, but we are not neutral to violence.*

**– Supervised visitation program staff**

*We don't want to treat all cases alike; they're not alike. When battering is occurring, we want to see and understand it. We want a shared understanding among the partners of what causes the victimization and the intervention needed.*

**– Save Havens local project director**

## Engagement as Safety

*Survivors tell us that the visitation center is a safe place that takes the burden off of them. They trust that it's safe because of the staff who run it and their passion for the community.*

### – Legal advocate

*My message to those who have been accused or convicted of domestic violence crimes is that supervised visitation is a safe and practical way to visit your children where you won't be accused or put in a situation of reoffending. And it allows time with your children that you may not otherwise get.*

### – Private practice attorney

Along with considerations for designing physical space, Safe Havens-oriented visitation practice emphasizes engagement and relationship-building as a primary means to reinforce safety for all involved. Safe Havens sets a standard for an atmosphere of respect, resource, and support—reinforced by the Guiding Principles—rather than one of policing and punishment. At the same time, Safe Havens acknowledges the reality and impact of battering. The Safe Havens approach requires that a visitation service examine its entire practice from a standpoint of safety, risk, and relationships.

Safe Havens-oriented supervised visitation offers a holistic approach to safety and supports connections between children and a battering parent in a setting of respect and security. Victims of battering are not forced to deal directly with the person causing the harm or others associated with him, such as visitation at his mother's house. An atmosphere of engagement is helpful to survivors who want their children to have a relationship with their fathers—which includes most survivors—but who want that contact to be safe for their children and for themselves. For many batterers, an atmosphere of respect and engagement can diminish hostility and resentment related to the separation and custody order and help them focus on making the most of their time with their children.

For some community partners in grantee communities—and for some advocates, in particular—Safe Havens challenged the assumption that safety for children meant keeping them from the batterer. Putting the Guiding Principles into practice required reconsidering why survivors may want and need to have ongoing contact with abusive partners as a strategy to better protect themselves and their children.

Building safety via engagement requires ongoing attention at each stage and step of designing and

operating visitation services, as grantee communities consulted for the retrospective project emphasized again and again. While a supervised visitation program's relationship with a batterer can strengthen safety, sometimes it does not. Sometimes the intention can be sabotaged by inadvertently colluding with a batterer, particularly when the victim of battering is the visiting parent. Sometimes a victim of battering walks through the door exhausted by the work of trying to stay safe and trying to escape. She may be frightened, angry, and doubtful that the visitation center will in any way understand what she and her children have been living with. Children are often fearful and conflicted about what has happened in their lives and suspicious about the new routine of supervised visitation. They may not want to be anywhere near their father, or they may be eager to see him and blame their mother for keeping him away.

Engagement as safety also requires full attention to Guiding Principle 2, Valuing Multiculturalism and Diversity, and the practice of "cultural humility" as articulated by the City of Chicago during the Safe Havens demonstration initiative. Safe Havens-oriented supervised visitation is organized to recognize and respond to people's distinct cultures and identities, within a framework of reflection, questioning, and keen awareness of people's everyday experiences and community histories.

Engagement as safety is complicated, but promising. As one visitation center director involved in the initial Safe Havens demonstration initiative put it, "Building relationships with people was the best security measure we've ever taken."<sup>8</sup>

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*Nobody is happy coming to a supervised visitation center, but respect for all helps change that dynamic.*

**– Safe Havens local project director**

*Each safe visit is a success, especially for families with really tough histories of violence and abuse—seeing a child feel safe and a victim feel secure in leaving the child for visitation.*

**– Supervised visitation program administrator**

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*Safe Havens was the missing piece that we needed to complete comprehensive domestic violence services in our community.*

**– Law enforcement agency command staff**

*Our community has come to see supervised visitation and safe exchange as a resource rather than as another punitive service provider ‘in my business.’ We work really hard at doing well by all people who come here.*

**– Supervised visitation program director**

## Community Advocacy and Support

Safe Havens-oriented supervised visitation and safe exchange does not mean that a visitation program acts as an advocate on behalf of an individual. Rather, it means that visitation services are part of the larger framework of community advocacy and support to individuals and families struggling with domestic violence. As an extension of advocacy and support services, supervised visitation offers another tool for making the long and complex process of escaping a violent and coercive relationship safer for children and adult survivors.

Grantee communities emphasized Safe Havens’ role in leveraging attention and support for supervised visitation and safe exchange. Safe Havens has helped put in place a feature of post-separation safety that many advocates working directly with victims of battering saw as missing. Safe Havens promotes supervised visitation as part of a comprehensive domestic violence response that every community should have. Its Guiding Principles emphasize advocacy for children and adult victims (Principle 6) as secured through community collaboration (Principle 5) that seeks to (1) ensure a holistic response to each family member, (2) stop continued abuse, and (3) eliminate the social conditions that cause intimate partner violence.

The supervised visitation program may be the only entity in the community to have regular contact with all family members. It is therefore positioned to link children, mothers, and fathers with meaningful referrals and resources. A “meaningful” referral goes beyond merely providing a phone number or brochure. It includes such actions as asking people what they need, making calls to link a survivor with an advocate or a batterer with an intervention group, and providing space within the center for community-based advocates to meet with victims. Under the Safe Havens approach, visitation centers no longer work in isolation but stand

as core partners in a community response that identifies gaps and develops and expands needed post-separation advocacy and services.

## LESSONS FROM THE FIELD: ITASCA COUNTY, MN

### SAFE HAVENS APPLIED TO OFPS = REDUCED VIOLATIONS

Itasca County began by examining data related to Order for Protection (OFP) violations. Visitation program staff and advocates compared experiences and realized that they often witnessed OFP violations in the courthouse parking lot soon after the order had been issued. “He would be shouting at her, threatening her. When we read case records and looked at OFP violations we saw so much focus on children.” They asked more questions. What if the visitation program had someone at the courthouse when an OFP with supervised visitation was issued and could provide information about how it worked, right then and there? What if people got into supervised visitation as soon as possible and what if the visitation center made that the priority? What if a men’s program educator was available at the courthouse to explain supervised visitation? They tried all of these things. “The tone in the courtroom hallways and parking lot changed dramatically. The number of OFP violations when supervised visitation was ordered went down dramatically: a 70% drop in protection order violations within the first 72 hours of issuance. There are fewer violations when the community sees supervised visitation as a resource and not a policing function. We make it clear up front that when subject to an OFP, fathers will know when and where they will see their children.” The court sends a message that it’s serious about safety and orders related to visitation and exchange. The visitation program responds quickly with information about what such orders mean and how to avoid violations.

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*Prior to Safe Havens, our visitation center didn’t have a foundation that it shared with anyone else. Now we are partners with experts throughout the city. And we have access to the judicial system.*

**– Supervised visitation program staff**

## Courts and Community Change

*As a judge, why would you resist supervised visitation and safe exchange? Either there's going to be no supervised visitation and no contact between a child and a parent, or there's going to be no supervised visitation and contact and danger. We can and should examine where it fits in specific cases, but generally it's the way to go; it makes sense*

**– Judge**

*Better judicial decisions overall have been a huge benefit to domestic violence services in the community.*

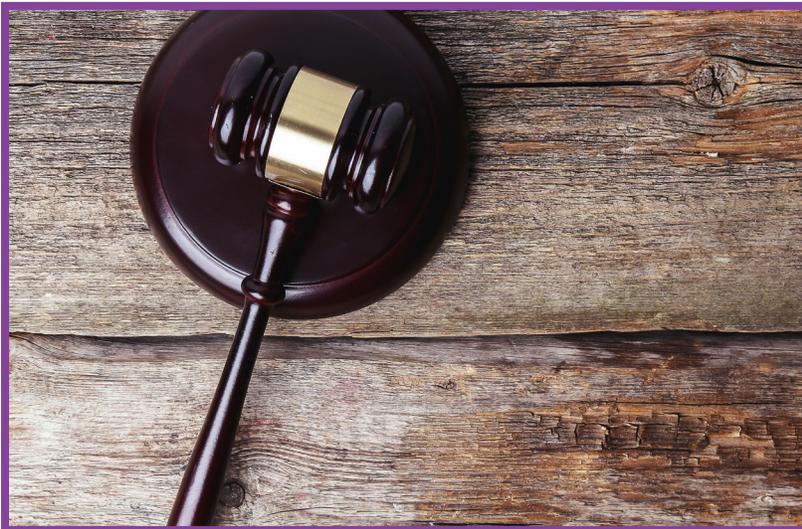
**– Director of community-based advocacy organization**

Grantee communities emphasized the importance of Safe Havens in raising court and community awareness of domestic violence. The Safe Havens framework reinforces that awareness in general and, more specifically, awareness of battering as essential to promoting safety and well-being of children and adult victims—indeed, as essential to promoting the safety and well-being of all family members when battering is involved.

Embedding recognition and understanding of post-separation battering throughout community systems—and throughout the civil legal system, in particular—is a significant change in any community. It is a shift in perspective and practice that can have an impact into the future even if a visitation center as a physical program and entity disappears.

Communities contributing to the retrospective spoke about the impact of Safe Havens as a window onto what judges and related court staff—such as custody evaluators, guardians ad litem, and mediators—know and do not know about battering. Safe Havens not only enhances the court's awareness and understanding of battering and other forms of domestic violence, but it provides guidance for how to strengthen that knowledge. Communities cited the impact of Safe Havens-related training to judges as particularly important. Participation in the judicial institutes (National Judicial Institute on Domestic Violence or NJIDV) helped strengthen decisions from the bench about families, custody, and restraining orders in cases involving domestic violence.<sup>9</sup> The training helped judges to better recognize the distinctiveness of battering and the coercive and manipulative practices, beliefs, and techniques that batterers use. Judicial support for Safe Havens in the community, in turn, strengthened the collaborative and provided influential leadership.

Safe Havens introduces a model of how change can occur on a community level under a set of defined guiding principles and an expectation of collaboration, survivor and community consultation, and an environment of continuous shared learning and quality improvement. Grantees provided examples of different structures for establishing visitation services in local, state, and tribal settings. One benefit of state-organized supervised visitation and safe exchange—or state support and coordination—is the potential to influence more standardized knowledge and practice across courts throughout the state. There is a similar potential on the local level to have a broader influence beyond a single judge or single court when supervised visitation develops in the context of a strong, effective coordinated community response.



*The Safe Havens approach provides a safe environment for all parties in a holistic setting. That's a tremendous value to our community.*

**– County government administrator**

*Communities should invest in Safe Havens-oriented supervised visitation because domestic violence happens everywhere. We know that people are getting hurt when children are exchanged. It's another piece that helps the community say that violence in the home is not okay. It has alleviated the pressure for those who use the services and for others in the community who have to make those decisions. It's impacted the way in which the community views domestic violence and helped heighten awareness of safety when children are exchanged. Now there's a safe place to come where people are thinking about it.*

**– Supervised visitation program director**



# Putting It Together: Lessons Learned

Across the site visits, roundtables, and interviews conducted for the retrospective project, those consulted had many suggestions for how to design, operate, and sustain supervised visitation and safe exchange services that are true to Safe Havens philosophy and practice. Participants emphasized that Safe Havens-oriented supervised visitation is always a work in progress, to one degree or another. There is no finite, finished visitation program. People come and go, whether as users of the service or program staff or members of the collaborative, and that reality alone means that aspects of the work inevitably change. As addressed later in *Looking Forward*, the visitation programs and their communities face a range of issues that require further attention and problem-solving, from ongoing questions of documentation, security, reporting, and neutrality to funding instability and staff turnover and—of great concern—the increasing number of victims of battering who are visiting parents, with children left in the care of a battering parent.

Design and operations are intertwined, and both stages of development impact the long-term sustainability of visitation services. Decisions made at the design phase connect directly to everyday practice and ongoing

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*You don't need to build it from zero. Safe Havens has been a national project and there are lots of resources.*

**– Supervised visitation program director**

*There are models all over the country now; be aware and use them. You don't have to build safe supervised visitation from scratch. We know how to do it, how to make it work—and know the challenges.*

**– Legal advocacy coordinator**

operations while policy and practice will change over time. *Stay flexible* was repeated advice from program staff, consulting partners, advocates, and others involved in any aspect of providing Safe Havens-oriented supervised visitation and safe exchange.

*Relationships are key* was another observation repeated across all communities and by many involved. Thoughtful attention to relationship-building among the collaborating partners helps promote equal standing and voice. Attention to relationships, along with a certain self-reflection by the judges involved, also helps ensure that the court will not be a dominating presence in the collaborative.

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## **SAFE HAVENS ORGANIZERS AND COLLABORATING PARTNERS**

*Organizers* lead the process of establishing and maintaining a Safe Havens-oriented supervised visitation program. Early on, key organizers are likely to be affiliated with community-based advocacy or the courts or government or an already established visitation service. Ideally, the organizers will represent all of these perspectives. Eventually, the *collaborating partners*—representing the visitation program, courts, advocacy, government, and others—assume the role of sustaining Safe Havens philosophy and practice.

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# Design

## > Use the available tools and strategies.

There is “no cookie cutter” or set of bullet points that will produce a fully formed Safe Havens visitation program. Each community is distinct, and the kind of systems change embodied in Safe Havens requires a certain level of initial and ongoing research, preparation, planning, and reflection. Communities new to the Safe Havens approach can learn what has worked for others, however, and have the benefit of more than a decade of experimentation and experience. The Safe Havens Grant Program has produced many learning tools to support domestic violence-informed supervised visitation and safe exchange. These include practice papers, guides, audio and video training recordings, and links to technical assistance that can help address everything from safety, documentation and reporting, facility design, and cultural accessibility to neutrality, confidentiality, and strategies for making the Guiding Principles real. For links, see Appendix 3, Building Safe Havens: Tools and Resources.

## > Take time to convene and plan; avoid rushing to implementation.

From the earliest stages throughout the ongoing life of a Safe Havens supervised visitation program, organizers and collaborating partners must meet and plan. The design process takes time, from getting people to the table, bonding as a collaborative, and consulting with the community to holding thorough policy discussions, hashing out differences of opinion, and dealing with the nuts-and-bolts of space, personnel, and operations. How much time? Grantees cited the value of at least a year or more of planning and design. How the convening happens can vary, but it is essential. For example, in one community the Safe Havens organizers met every two weeks over lunch during the design phase. A common strategy across sites was to divide design tasks between work groups that

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*Some level of CCR (Coordinated Community Response) is likely going on somewhere; start talking.*

### – Supervised visitation program director

*Find the key people in each agency and start the discussion about what your goals are in establishing supervised visitation. You'll probably find that there are similar goals.*

### – Law enforcement agency command staff

*My tips to other judges: If possible, be an initiator in establishing a domestic violence-informed supervised visitation program. Also, the program is likely to be more effective if you have domestic violence advocacy involved from the beginning.*

**– Judge**

*I've had experience in two visitation programs, one with a collaborative and one without. The one without was stagnant. The one with the collaborative asks questions of the practice, asks 'how are we doing?' It seeks the perspectives of its partners.*

**– Supervised visitation program administrator**

would gather information or develop recommendations related to a specific question or policy and then report to the larger collaborative.

**> Seek out and strengthen skills in group facilitation, problem-solving, relationship-building, and training.**

Safe Havens organizers, in particular, need to be skillful in talking with people, building relationships, and managing an effective group process over time. To strengthen needed skills in organizing a community change project such as Safe Havens, consult the *Community Tool Box* or similar guidance on how to create and maintain partnerships, facilitate groups, use problem-identification and problem-solving tools, assess community needs and resources, build leadership, enhance cultural accessibility, and evaluate an initiative.<sup>10</sup>

**> Build a multidisciplinary planning group and collaborative with diverse viewpoints and expertise; include buy-in and leadership from the courts and community-based advocates. Be prepared for a dynamic and often demanding process.**

To build and maintain a strong collaborative that represents different perspectives and voices is inevitably hard work. How hard—and how successful—varies according to a combination of skill, groundwork, local conditions, and perseverance. For example, communities with a history of effective coordinated community response to domestic violence will be in a stronger position to establish and sustain supervised visitation services that are grounded in Safe Havens philosophy and practice. Supervised visitation and safe exchange ultimately succeeds in a context of community response, as reinforced by the Guiding Principles and affirmed by grantees consulted for the retrospective.

*“Create the partnerships first and then design the visitation program”* was a repeated message from grantees. Relationships built through a strong collaborative can help sustain the visitation work when the grant money disappears, as several communities have experienced.

Some grantee communities concluded that the courts should take the lead, others that community-based advocates should lead. Still others encouraged a leadership partnership of equal standing and voice. They acknowledged that the goals of parity and consensus can be particularly challenging when judges are often accorded—and some may expect—deference to their position and the right to control the discussion or work of the group.

**> Seek “champions on the inside” who can persuade their colleagues in the court system of the merits of supervised visitation and safe exchange.**

Grantee communities recommended starting with a judge or judges who are knowledgeable and thoughtful about battering and domestic violence and with private practice attorneys who are known for their competency on behalf of victims of battering, including those providing pro bono representation. Some communities recommended engaging the family law bar in general early on to reinforce the ways in which a Safe Havens-oriented program might benefit their clients. Everyone emphasized the value of the ways in which judges, in particular, can leverage attention throughout the legal system and the community.

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### **Lessons from the Field: Building a Safe Havens Collaborative**

*“A supervised visitation program can’t do it alone.”*

- Cultivate core allies who understand post-separation violence and can inform and sell their colleagues on the merits of Safe Havens.
  - Involve judges and court administration from the beginning.
  - Involve community-based advocates for victims of battering from the beginning.
  - Seek support from judges who are the most thoughtful and knowledgeable about domestic violence.
  - Seek out attorneys who are known for skilled advocacy on behalf of children and adult victims/survivors.
  - Use Memorandums of Understanding to spell out each partner’s role, contribution, and commitment to attend meetings and participate in the work of the collaborative.
  - Invite collaborative partners, attorneys, court personnel, and community allies to walk through the space and services.
  - Stay open to working through different experience and opinions.
  - Emphasize equal partnership and voice among the visitation program, advocacy organization, court, and government.
  - Seek out advice and tools to support effective planning and group facilitation.
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**> Gather basic information about what is happening in the community and the need for supervised visitation and safe exchange.**

*Include those who come into contact with families who are experiencing post-separation battering. Seek the involvement and guidance of courts, domestic violence advocacy programs, batterer intervention programs, mediation services, law enforcement, supervised visitation programs, culturally distinct advocacy and service organizations, guardians ad litem, family law attorneys, and others. A successful, sustainable visitation program benefits from knowing the different perspectives of those who encounter the children, mothers, and fathers living with the reality of post-separation battering. Consulting with such agencies and organizations helps Safe Havens organizers to better understand what the people using them encounter, promote the supervised visitation program, identify potential allies, and explore expectations about the visitation program.*

*Include survivors. Consult with survivors via interviews, group discussions, surveys, or a mix of methods. What do adult victims of battering and their children need post-separation? What are their concerns and fears about visitation and exchange? What might a supervised visitation and safe exchange program offer them? Find out what would be helpful and how safe visitation and exchange could work. Reach out to survivors outside of the existing visitation center or primary domestic violence advocacy organization.*

*Talk with batterers. Use interviews, group discussions, or other methods to ask batterers about their assumptions about or experiences with supervised visitation and safe exchange. What has a supervised visitation and safe exchange program offered them—or what might it offer? How have their children benefited from using supervised visitation and safe exchange? What is their understanding of the program’s requirements and role?*

*Gather baseline numbers.* Seek out basic data about the level of reported domestic violence and the potential scope of cases that might reach the supervised visitation program. Explore what is known or unknown about the number of visitation or exchange orders issued in the past year, the number of civil protective orders involving children, and the number of criminal no-contact orders involving children.

*Assess the existing level of community collaboration and problem solving.* Review the current state of coordination across the criminal and legal systems and the extent to which people are accustomed to working together to identify and solve problems. Do the courts and other intervening systems share a common understanding of battering and its tactics and harm? Does advocacy have a central role and voice in shaping the community response?



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**> Take time early on and as needed throughout the design and operation of the supervised visitation program to ensure that collaborating partners and other decision-makers have a common understanding of domestic violence and of the role of supervised visitation and safe exchange.**

Safe Havens organizers, collaborating partners, and the visitation program all need to understand the nuances of battering behavior and its impact on child and adult victims. As one community noted, “We hired a coordinator that knew nothing about domestic violence. That was a mistake!” Shared knowledge of battering and domestic violence can be strengthened by working closely with the local domestic violence advocacy organization and seeking technical assistance from state or tribal advocacy coalitions and national resource centers. Having people go through experiential exercises such as *Will You Hold My Child?* or *In Her Shoes: Living with Domestic Violence* can be helpful in grounding the collaborative in a common understanding of the dynamics and impacts of battering and the many dilemmas that victims face in trying to escape and keep themselves and their children safe.<sup>11</sup>

**> Understand the role of each collaborating partner and be explicit about what each role means in practice.**

The Safe Havens Grant Program has required grantees to establish a core partnership that includes the (1) state, tribal, or local unit of government, (2) supervised visitation program, (3) court, and (4) domestic violence or sexual assault victim advocacy program. The Guiding Principles emphasize community collaboration as a path to ensuring a holistic response that stops the continued abuse of children and adult victims and helps eliminate the social conditions

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## Lessons from the Field: Drawing a Community Portrait Post-Separation Battering and Supervised Visitation

*"Ask, ask, ask the community!"*

- ✓ *Talk with courts, advocates, batterer intervention programs, and others who come in contact with families.*
    - Who are you seeing and serving?
    - How does leaving a relationship impact domestic violence?
    - How often do courts order supervised visitation or exchange?
    - What does the order look like?
    - Who supervises visits? Exchanges?
    - Where do exchange occur and under what conditions?
    - What is the interest in and capacity for establishing domestic violence-informed supervised visitation and safe exchange?
    - What kind of collaboration or coordinated community response is already in place?
    - Is there a shared understanding of the definition and impact of battering and other forms of domestic violence?
  
  - ✓ *Talk with survivors.*
    - What do you need for you and your children to stay safe?
    - What do you know about supervised visitation and exchange orders or services?
    - What are your concerns and fears about it?
    - How might a supervised visitation and safe exchange program help you?
-

that produce intimate partner violence. In addition to the core partners, key stakeholders contribute to the community response and the success of the supervised visitation program. Key stakeholders include batterer intervention programs, attorneys in the private bar and legal aid organizations, child advocacy and mental health providers, law enforcement and probation agencies, faith-based organizations, health care providers, and culturally-specific community organizations.

The communities consulted for the retrospective emphasized the importance of defining roles and expectations early on and being clear about what an effective partnership should look like in practice. They have experienced a range of challenges in establishing collaborations where the core partners have an equal voice and standing, courts accept the visitation program's autonomy, advocates are recognized for their key role and expertise, and supervised visitation develops in the context of the overall response to domestic violence. In some places, it may take intentional and ongoing conversation—and hard work together—to avoid or overcome the barriers, which can include domination by the court, disrespect for or marginalization of advocates, loss of community-based advocacy services, a history of difficult partnerships, and interpersonal dynamics between individuals. When faced with such problems, grantees advise meeting and consulting with other Safe Havens visitation programs and seeking technical assistance from national resources.

*Government partners* (tribal, state, or local) not only provide fiscal administration but reinforce the Safe Havens goals and messages and provide leadership, access to key governmental departments, and in-kind and sometimes facility support. Government partners have a central role in securing sustainable funding to support supervised visitation services into the future.

*Judges and court administration* are the primary referral source and help integrate supervised visitation and safe exchange into the civil legal system. They educate and train

their colleagues in language that is understood and faces less resistance than it might when coming from visitation or advocacy programs. Judges can often leverage the attention of decision-makers in the community. Court administration has a central role in getting information to the parties involved, influencing the courtroom environment, and managing the court's calendar and availability.

*Community-based victim advocacy* helps ensure that the supervised visitation program stays victim-sensitive and attentive to the needs of survivors and children. Advocacy organizations are positioned to spot trends in how the visitation program and the legal system are responding. They are skilled at recognizing risk and danger and can help the visitation program and the legal system identify when to increase safety measures. Advocacy provides a touchstone for the realities of battering and why the community—and supervised visitation and safe exchange—cannot be neutral to the violence and coercion. Advocates can explain supervised visitation and safe exchange to an individual survivor and answer questions about how to access it or include it in a civil order for protection, when possible. Advocates can review policies and procedures from the perspective of victims of battering and bring that perspective into cross-training with the supervised visitation program and other collaborative partners. When advocacy is lost, as happened in one grantee community, it is a critical loss: there is no longer a clear, direct line for victims of battering to access supervised visitation or any other domestic violence-related services. Safe Havens-oriented supervised visitation and safe exchange requires advocacy.

**> Begin with conversations about what an ideal model of supervised visitation and safe exchange would look like for the community.**

The Guiding Principles are a helpful framework for exploring what supervised visitation and safe exchange means and how it can address local needs and conditions. Safe Havens organizers can use the principles and related standards and practices as a kind of readiness or

assessment tool. For example, a collaborative could analyze each principle in turn over a series of discussions. Or the standards and practice elements could be used as the basis for a survey of all core partners and key stakeholders to provide a picture of what is expected or already in place. Safe Havens Online has a variety of other tools that can be useful in planning and shaping conversations about supervised visitation and safe exchange, including frequently asked questions about the core partnership, a foundational webinar on collaboration building and community assessment, and a video training on balancing safety and access. For links, see Appendix 3, Building Safe Havens: Tools and Resources.

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### Lessons from the Field: Partners & Stakeholders

*“There’s no one entity involved.”*

- ✓ *Core collaborating partners*
  - Supervised visitation program
  - Community-based victim advocacy
  - Courts
  - Government
- ✓ *Key stakeholders*
  - Batterer intervention programs
  - Private family law attorneys
  - Child advocacy & mental health providers
  - Culturally-specific community organizations
  - Health care providers
  - Faith-based organizations

### > Consider the benefits and cautions of where the supervised visitation and safe exchange program will be located.

The Safe Havens programs in most of the grantee communities consulted for the retrospective were affiliated with community-based anti-domestic violence advocacy organizations. Some were affiliated with other nonprofit organizations or government agencies, including one established in a law enforcement agency. There are benefits and cautions in each approach. Fundamentally, however, the administration and location must be grounded in knowledge of battering and domestic violence, respect for people’s histories with and trust in different agencies and community systems, and an atmosphere that is welcoming and safe.

*Community-based advocacy organizations* offer the benefit of their knowledge of battering; quicker access to advocates, information, peer support, and other services for victim parents; and links with community resources that can benefit children, mothers, and fathers. The space is often centrally located and accessible by available public transportation. A primary caution, however, is to

address the tensions and dilemmas related to associating visitation services with or physically locating them within an organization known for its advocacy on behalf of victims of domestic violence. Many people coming through the doors will not believe that they need any services related to domestic violence. In particular, men who are using supervised visitation and exchange because they have battered their children's mother can be particularly resistant to services affiliated with an advocacy organization. They resent that someone is "watching me," though the reality is that the court has determined that someone needs to be watching. That reality requires transparency about visitation services as an aspect of the community's response to domestic violence while also conveying respect, clear expectations, and fairness.

Another primary caution is the need for clear identification of roles: supervised visitation and advocacy are not the same. An advocacy *organization* that operates a supervised visitation program must maintain clearly defined confidentiality boundaries and communicate those distinctions and boundaries to people using the program. In addition, the organization cannot assume that advocacy staff can necessarily shift to positions as visitation program staff. Few individuals can do so seamlessly, and such a reassignment requires careful attention and selection. Without preparation and guidance, many advocates will find it difficult to engage with men who batter and to shift to the perspective of working with all members of a family.

*Government-based agencies* can offer the benefit of a lower facility cost; reassurance of heightened security for some victims of battering when located in a police agency or other government space; and less stigma in being seen as an arm of victim advocacy. A primary caution, however, is that a law enforcement or child welfare facility is likely to be mistrusted by many people, particularly by



people from communities that have experienced a high level of scrutiny by law enforcement and child welfare. Location in a policing agency or the possibility of an immigration status check or arrest on a warrant for unpaid fines or a missed court appearance can be particularly threatening to parents who are or have been involved in the criminal legal system or whose residency status is undocumented. In a government agency setting, it can be more challenging for the visitation program to avoid a punishment- or policing-oriented atmosphere that conflicts with the Safe Havens goals and principles. If it is a multiple-use facility, such as a child center, visitation

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### **Lessons from the Field: Finding & Designing Space**

*“The center is safe, it’s beautiful, and it feels like home.”*

*“My kids like it.”*

- Do you want or need a building?
- Can the work be accomplished in other ways or through other locations?
- Will safe exchange be a primary focus?
- Is there a comfortable transition space for children waiting for safe exchange?
- What meaning does the space have to the community, either positive or negative?
- Will people use the space? Is there any past history or association that would keep them away?
- Is the location easy to reach?
- Will children want to spend time in the space?
- Is it or can it be made welcoming and comfortable for parents and children of different ages?
- Does the site include space where non-visiting parents can wait comfortably and safely or are there places nearby?
- Will visits occur in a private space? Open, shared space? A combination depending upon circumstances?
- Will the location and space work for flexible evening and weekend hours of operation?

families may feel that their needs are an afterthought or lesser priority.

No single location or space is likely to provide all of the ideal features that support supervised visitation services. A building is usually costly to secure and maintain and in some communities that reality has been a major influence on the visitation program's physical location. Space offered in a county-run child care facility at low or no rent, for example, is likely to be accepted, regardless of whether the location is the best choice for accessibility or the government agency is untrusted by many in the community. Supervised visitation services cannot be dropped into an advocacy organization—or any other organization or agency—without considering the many implications for everything from where people park and enter the building to changing tables in restrooms and determining who will use which restroom. Whatever the location, it is essential to establish an environment that is culturally respectful, welcoming, flexible, family-centered, and safety-oriented.

**> Plan for safe exchange and transition services early on in the design process.**

Safe exchange remains underdeveloped and underutilized. It is more likely to become well-established when Safe Havens organizers and collaborating partners include safe exchange from the beginning. One grantee community described the problem of launching supervised visitation but realizing that exchanges were still occurring in parking lots, including the visitation center parking lot after hours. Visitation center staff spoke about how challenging it was to manage supervised exchanges in comparison to supervised visits. They often shared the concerns and fears of victim parents about what might actually be happening for children. Exchanges create anxiety and require extra safety planning.

Survivors and advocates consulted during the retrospective project repeatedly emphasized the importance of safe exchange and planned transitions from supervised visitation. As one mother noted, "What scares me is

not being able to have my kids at the center anymore.” Another reinforced that “When you exchange in a public place, like Costco’s parking lot, he can still find a way to hurt me.” Transitions between and out of supervised visitation and exchange involve issues of timing and risk, along with responding to the court’s expectations and pressures to end supervision more quickly than may be in the best interest of safety.

### > Design for safety.

The highest priority of supervised visitation and safe exchange is the safety of children and adult victims. The Guiding Principles set the foundation. Safe Havens publications such as *Designing Supervised Visitation and Exchange Centers that Promote Safety and Building Safety, Repairing Harm* and other tools provide the how-to directions. *Creating Opportunities for Safety and Change in Supervised Visitation Programs: A Policy Framework for Engaging Men Who Use Violence* maps out how to develop and test policies that reinforce safety. For links, see Appendix 3, Building Safe Havens: Tools and Resources.

Safety is the protection of child and adult victims of domestic violence from continued physical, sexual, and emotional harm, coercion, and threats over the span of time. It is not a static, one-time action or process. The Safe Havens framework of engagement as safety (see *Impact and Innovation*) has been a significant innovation in shaping visitation services that account for battering. To understand safety needs as dynamic and changing over time means to examine every aspect of how visitation services are organized, from physical space and initial contact with family members to what happens during visits and exchanges, documentation, and transitions from visitation to exchange or the end of services.

Grantees emphasized the importance of thoughtful conversations about safety among visitation staff and collaborating partners. Necessary conversations include engagement and relationship-building as aspects of safety, physical security, and the impact of fear, including

fear of batterers and fear of missing something in a center's interactions with people.

Many grantees reported starting out with a highly visible law enforcement orientation (including metal detectors, wands, uniformed and sometimes armed security) and shifting to an emphasis on engagement and relationships within a framework of basic security features, including staggered arrival/departure times, separate entrances, multiple staff present, two-way radios, panic buttons, risk assessments on the front end of services, and ongoing check-ins with each family member. Several centers spoke to the importance of creating an atmosphere of safety that did not rely on metal detectors and armed guards and that did not feel like an extension of the court or convey an atmosphere of policing or punishment. Part of the approach is to emphasize basic rules for everyone: arrive on time, no violence or abuse, and be respectful.

The design for safety begins with the kind of initial contact that occurs when families first encounter the visitation program. It begins with something as simple—and essential—as the court providing a basic information sheet about what to expect to families being referred to supervised visitation and safe exchange. In one jurisdiction, the visitation center staff is present in the courthouse to provide immediate information about the process if visitation or exchange is ordered as part of a civil protection order. Orientation—as shaped by Safe Havens and distinct from completing forms that meet the business needs of basic contact and other information—sets the tone for the visitation center's relationship with each person using its services. A separate orientation with each family member is an opportunity to (1) build a foundation for safety, (2) build a respectful and fair relationship, and (3) recognize and meet people's unique needs related to life circumstances and cultural identities. This approach to orientation helps determine who needs protection from whom and what kinds of protection will best support equal regard for the safety of adult and child victims. Orientation is a time to explore confidentiality,

levels of anxiety and fear, patterns of abuse, changes in behavior post-separation, and indicators of danger.

**> Incorporate cultural respect and accessibility into supervised visitation and exchange services from the beginning.**

The Guiding Principles require that Safe Havens-oriented visitation services respond to the background, circumstances, and cultures of the communities and families served. During the demonstration initiative,

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### **Lessons from the Field: Safety Basics**

*“It’s tricky not to have a million rules, but it’s okay as long as you’re clear about the purpose of keeping people safe.”*

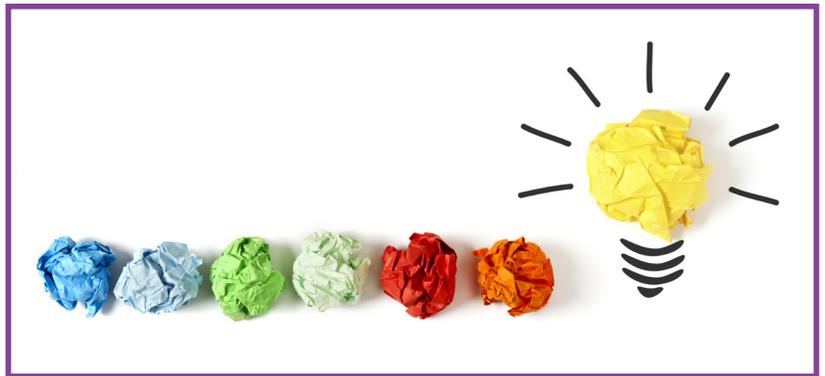
- Orientation with each family member
- Well-trained staff who are knowledgeable about domestic violence, sexual assault, stalking, dating violence, and child abuse
- Risk assessment on front end of services and ongoing
- Frequent check-ins with each family member
- Quick and clear communication to court when there is a safety concern
- Emphasis on center as a resource rather than policing function
- Knowledge of the family and the dynamics of battering specific to that family
- Awareness of how rules impact different people in different ways
- Separate records for each family member
- Staggered arrival/departure times
- Separate entrances
- Multiple staff present
- Two-way radios
- Panic buttons
- Parking lot and entrance cameras
- Advocacy referrals for victims of battering who are visiting parents

Chicago explored how to do this, in part by conducting a Safety and Accountability Audit of the ways in which it was accounting for people's distinct cultures and identities.<sup>12</sup> "The center's design, appearance, and staffing must be deliberate and conscious of the implied

and explicit messages about who is welcome and how they are valued." This meant that *everything* must be designed to convey respect, from the visitation center's location, quality of the furnishings, and selection of magazines and art work to the receptionist's greeting and staff interactions with children, mothers, and fathers. For centers working in communities with histories of oppression and mistrust of policing institutions, respect also meant the absence of uniformed guards and metal detectors.

Cultural respect and accessibility requires the representation and involvement of the communities served, with a "seat and voice at the table." Safe Havens organizers and collaborating partners need to know who is in the community and who the center is likely to serve. This happens in part by building relationships with culturally specific organizations, searching out expertise within the community, and hearing directly from victims of battering. In Tribal communities—and in other culturally distinct communities—elders and other leaders should be involved as soon as possible in the design and planning process, as well as throughout the program's operation.

Other essential aspects of cultural respect and accessibility include language access (for in-person contact and all parent-oriented information, forms, and documents), bicultural and bilingual staff, a diverse staff that is representative of the communities served, hours that are convenient for families, involvement of extended family members, and a kitchen or other facility to support visiting parents and children sharing a meal together. The grantee



communities emphasized the value of working out ways for extended family to be involved in supervised visitation. They noted that most custodial parents will accept involvement by other family members, but they want to be consulted, know that their safety concerns will prevail, and have limits set on the frequency (i.e., a grandmother should not be visiting every week along with her son—the visiting parent needs time to interact directly with the children). Extended family visitation requires guidelines such as checking first with the custodial parent, following any court order restrictions, restricting other family involvement if there are sexual abuse allegations, and defining how often it can occur.

**> Create an environment and expectation of shared voice, commitment, and learning among collaborating partners.**

The value of shared voice has a practical benefit: the collaborative works best if each member is fully invested. An environment of continuing, shared learning is “the glue that keeps the collaborative together,” as one community put it and others echoed. Explicit expectations set early on in conversations and in written agreements help set the tone. Purposeful meetings (i.e., respectful tone, reasonable agenda and expectations, regular schedule) and tasks keep people coming back. Many visitation program administrators emphasized the value of bringing collaborating partners—and key stakeholders—to the supervised visitation center early on and thereafter for tours and meet-and-greet events. “They need to see it and walk through it. They may be making all kinds of assumptions about what it looks like, how it feels, and what happens,” as one director described. In that community, the visitation program contacted every family law attorney who had a client involved in visitation or exchange services, whether as a visiting or non-visiting parent. It used one-on-one conversations to explain the program and then invited the attorneys to tour the center.

> Balance informal and formal planning activities and time together as an organizing team and/or collaborative—and give the collaborative something to do.

Designing and maintaining a Safe Havens supervised visitation program is “long-haul work,” as those involved emphasized. It helps for everyone involved to periodically get away from their day-to-day environments and engage in more informal settings and activities, such as a day at a retreat center with a mix of unstructured time and other activities. A structured planning period ahead of launching a supervised visitation program is also essential, however. In particular, there needs to be a structured way for people to discuss key issues early on, such as the Safe Havens philosophy and Guiding Principles and the roles of the collaborative and each partner. It can be helpful to use an outside facilitator for such discussions: that is, someone who is in a better position to challenge all players and ensure that different perspectives are heard.

Grantee communities offered many examples of the kinds of activities that collaborative partners could be involved in, sometimes together and often working in smaller groups or teams: research a policy or practice question and report back to the full collaborative, tour other Safe Havens visitation programs, draft policies, conduct or observe community surveys or interviews, map the response to domestic violence cases, read and analyze redacted cases

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## Lessons from the Field: Valuing Multiculturalism & Diversity

*“Practice cultural humility.”*

- Understand peoples’ experiences with the courts, police, welfare, medical, and other institutions (as individuals and as communities).
  - Define a clear identity as a visitation program that is separate from the court.
  - Examine every aspect of the program’s design and the implied and explicit messages about who is welcome and how they are valued.
  - Structure adequate time and flexibility into all interactions with children and parents.
  - Invite diverse community organizations to walk through and critique the program’s space and procedures.
  - Form and maintain advocacy partnerships to craft policy and practice.
  - Build a diverse staff that reflects people’s cultures, languages, and identities.
  - Ensure language access in all interactions and communication.
  - Support families’ food, music, and religious traditions.
  - Provide opportunities for extended family to be safely involved.
  - Prepare staff to work with battering parents.
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involving domestic violence to study how decisions get made in cases involving battering, participate in a Safety and Accountability Audit, tour the visitation center, participate in an experiential exercise such as *Will You Hold My Child?* or *In Her Shoes: Living with Domestic Violence*,<sup>13</sup> contribute to cross-system training, or hold a community summit or launch event to promote Safe Havens. Activities such as experiential exercises or case studies can be ways for the collaborative to tackle tough issues together in an atmosphere of shared learning. Case examples from Safe Havens publications, other communities, or national resource organizations help avoid conflicts of ex parte communication related to local cases and often include discussion guides.

# Operations

Again, program design and operations are closely intertwined. The initial design sets the foundation for a Safe Havens-oriented visitation program to open its doors with basic policies and practices in place. Once the doors are open, the design gets revised and adapted as the center begins its actual day-to-day work and faces each family's distinct circumstances and needs. This section highlights aspects of ongoing operation that grantee communities cited repeatedly when reflecting on daily practice.

## > Develop a standardized referral process and court order.

Safe Havens-oriented supervised visitation is part of the domestic violence response. As such, it has a specific focus and courts and other referral sources must be kept aware of that focus. While there may be other circumstances that warrant supervised visitation to protect children from potentially dangerous or harmful situations, a Safe Havens-oriented program cannot take anyone a court wants to send for whatever reason, such as concerns about harm related to a parent's alcohol or drug use or neglect or incapacity. A Safe Havens program is organized to provide safe visitation and exchange in the context of domestic violence, primarily, and in circumstances of sexual assault, stalking, and child abuse. In holding that focus it helps to have a standardized referral process and court order that is consistent across all courts and other referral sources—standardized, but with flexibility to tailor the order to specific circumstances and risk.

## > Stay flexible and organize day-to-day operations around peoples' needs; talk with people.

Each family is different and has different needs. Within the framework of the Guiding Principles, policy, and procedure—and the language of visitation and exchange orders—there remains a need for flexibility according to peoples' circumstances. It is essential for a supervised visitation program to talk with people in order to find out

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*We strive to be more survivor-friendly and family-friendly rather than being seen as an extension of the court. We started by changing the intake process.*

### – Supervised visitation program director

*We started by writing everything down because that's what we inherited from the previous program. Then staff said no, we can't do that. We're actually missing things that we would otherwise capture—things that are related to safety—when we're trying to write everything down.*

### – Supervised visitation center director

*Check in with the people you serve. If you're not understanding the context of their lives and what it means to use supervised visitation, you're doing a disservice and may also be creating safety problems.*

**– Supervised visitation program director**

what they need to feel safer and how visitation services can contribute to healing and repairing harm. “Think creatively” was common advice when grantee communities talked about staying flexible and striving to meet people’s needs. For example, think about transportation to the center as a safety and security measure, suggested one visitation program director. How and whether people can get to the program is an issue that warrants attention from the visitation center rather than being left to individuals to figure out. Attention to people’s needs begins with initial contact and orientation and continues across visits, exchanges, and transitions—continues during a family’s entire involvement with the program, however many weeks, months, or years that might be. It requires talking with people who are using the visitation program’s services on a regular basis, as well as with those who might benefit from the service.

Examples of flexibility in meeting people’s needs include: ensuring that visitation services and spaces are culturally respectful and responsive, providing parent guides that are clearly written and accessible in people’s languages, providing information about visitation services in audio and video formats as well as print, maximizing evening and weekend hours of operation, providing bus passes or gas vouchers, bringing visitation services to remote areas rather than making people travel long distances (perhaps using a room in a church or a clinic in an outlying community), making connections with advocacy for victim parents, making referrals to batterer intervention, and connecting an unemployed visiting father with employment and housing assistance.

**> Keep safety always in focus; talk with people.**

Safety is not static. To find out what is working and not working for people using visitation and exchange services requires regularly checking in with them. It requires checking in with children, mothers, and fathers using the services. It requires checking in with child and adult victims—and with those who have caused the harm. Grantee communities repeatedly emphasized the value of consulting with current and potential consumers of visitation services

to help increase safety by identifying what may not be safe for victims of battering and where and how batterers might try to use access to children to continue battering. Grantees suggested a mix of both formal (surveys, interviews, focus groups) and informal (brief check-ins at the time of a visit or exchange, drop in at survivor support groups and batterer intervention groups, with prior arrangement) methods of checking in and other ways of informing the practice of supervised visitation.



Grantees also emphasized that the quality of the relationship established from the beginning with each adult and child sets the foundation for safety. Many visitation programs cited their experiences in moving away from a fill-in-the-form kind of “intake” to a practice of orientation that focused on establishing a relationship, sharing information, understanding safety needs, and ensuring that each parent understood the service.

**> Prepare visitation program staff to recognize and respond to the possibility of inadvertently reinforcing tactics of post-separation battering.**

Inadvertently reinforcing a batterer’s behavior—or “collusion” with that behavior—can sometimes look like engagement or start with that intention. It is critical that visitation program staff understand the dynamics and tactics of battering and the ways in which they might unintentionally support battering behaviors and goals. For example: staying silent when a battering parent talks about the victim parent as “crazy,” feeds the child foods that she has restricted, or disparages her capability as a parent. Collusion also occurs when a victim’s safety concerns and fears are minimized.

Visitation staff recognize the hazard of collusion. As one worker described it, “Fathers use intimidation tactics, trying to break us down.” Staff welcome guidance on what the tactics look like and how to deal with them. One visitation program has sought to help its staff avoid colluding with batterers by training staff in the skills that batterer intervention program facilitators use. It does so not with the expectation that a visitation center function as a batterer intervention program, but to better prepare staff to recognize and respond to behaviors and use reflective questioning rather than debate in their interactions. Many visitation program staff and advocates consulted for the retrospective project emphasized the need for stronger education about the dynamics and tactics of battering to *all* collaborating partners and key stakeholders.

**> Foster and support a skilled, collaborative visitation program staff.**

Keeping staff connected with one another helps keep the focus on safety. Grantee programs recommended regular staff meetings (i.e., monthly or more frequently) that include case reviews and strategizing and fostering an atmosphere of mutual problem-solving. Frequent contact—both formal and informal—is particularly important when many part-time staff or volunteers or interns are providing visitation services. Staff need to be well-prepared to make independent decisions as required during visitation and exchange, but with the support of back-up and consultation. Accessibility to one another when questions or difficult situations arise strengthens safety-oriented decisions and helps reduce burnout.

**> Maximize retention of skilled visitation program staff.**

Grantee communities emphasized the importance of avoiding high staff turnover. As several visitation programs emphasized, the “baptism by fire approach” does not help. They recommended several strategies to retain staff, including: providing a supportive, collaborative team environment; acknowledging and preparing for the challenge and emotional impact of working with batterers; and developing the knowledge and skill to

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## Lessons from the Field: What Is Helpful? Battered Mothers' Experiences with Safe Visitation & Exchange

*"Understand: he is still dangerous."*

*"They're not afraid to let me know when I should be on the alert."*

*"They're hands-on when they need to be and hands-off when they need to be."*

[Participants in focus groups conducted in grantee communities.]

- Understand what's happening when he's threatening, stalking you.
- Be flexible.
- Be respectful, friendly, and welcoming.
- Provide reassurance: show how the center will prevent abduction.
- Understand what it means for a battered mother to leave her children for visitation or exchange.
- Be clear about what to expect; give a tour; provide a written guide.
- Be attentive to privacy.
- Include staggered arrival/departure, different parking lots/entrances, two-way radios, locked doors.
- Communicate openly and frequently.
- Respond quickly to calls and questions.
- Speak up for children and validate their perspectives and feelings.
- Keep mothers informed about any alarming behavior and about how the children are doing.
- Connect mothers with other women who are also dealing with a battering partner and visitation or exchange.
- Connect mothers with other services and ongoing support and advocacy.
- Create a space that is safe, beautiful, and "feels like home."
- Understand domestic violence.
- Speak a mother's primary language and provide all written materials in that language.
- Help mothers navigate scheduling and requests to the court to change time, date, location.
- Avoid surprises; operate visitation and exchange services as described on website, in literature, and by staff.

recognize battering tactics and de-escalate and intervene effectively. As one visitation monitor emphasized, “Without these skills we feel drained and confused about what we are supposed to do in our jobs.” Other suggestions for retaining skilled visitation program staff include comprehensive initial and ongoing training, exposure to the Guiding Principles, practice in conducting and intervening in supervised visits and exchanges, preparation and practice in de-escalating aggressive or distressed behavior, a mix of full- and part-time opportunities, a diverse staff (including culture, education, race, ethnicity, language, age, gender identity, and sexual orientation), time and space for team-building, peer-to-peer learning, and adequate compensation.

**> Standardize and simplify documentation and reporting to focus on safety.**

The retrospective communities repeatedly noted how they tended to begin their visitation programs with a highly detailed, fly-on-the-wall kind of approach to documentation that recorded almost every minute of a supervised visit. Centers often assumed that was what judges wanted and later discovered that most favored far more basic information about whether or not a party was participating in supervised visitation and exchange as ordered and whether there had been any violations of rule or policy that signaled a safety concern. The attempt

to write everything down also meant that visitation staff could miss what might be most important to safety, particularly subtle behaviors.

Documentation and reporting to the court are aspects of supervised visitation and exchange that have been the subject of much debate throughout the history of the Safe Havens Grant Program and in each



grantee community. As a result, guidance to assist in negotiating these issues is available via the standards and practices associated with the Guiding Principles and the Safe Havens archives of policy development publications and training.

**> Establish and practice a culture of shared learning and exploration within the visitation program and the collaborative.**

Visitation program staff and collaborative partners—and other community-based organizations and those using visitation services—need to be able to bring forward what they see and to know that they will be heard. A culture of shared learning and exploration also requires agreement and guidance on how to challenge one another respectfully and productively. One visitation program director described a core aspect of their community’s process as “very intentional around consensus decision-making and inclusion. It’s led by the judge, and nonprofit community organizations are always in on meetings convened by the legal system.”

Ongoing training that is practical and practice-oriented is a key element in a learning environment. Scenario-based training can help assess how policies play out in practice, reinforce team-based problem solving, and encourage curiosity and creative thinking about how to best address families’ diverse needs. Visitation program staff and collaborating partners benefit from such training. An organization and its partners can use analysis of case

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**Lessons from the Field: Qualities, Knowledge, & Skills Working in Safe Havens-Oriented Visitation Services**

*“You need self-reflection. You need to talk together as staff and examine your own biases. Never assume. And go to the communities you serve and ask them what they need and how it’s working.”*

- Foster helpful qualities: self-reflective, nonjudgmental, respectful, calming, flexible, collaborative, curious, sense of humor.
  - Practice “cultural humility.”
  - Understand the potential threat someone poses and still see their humanity.
  - Embrace complex situations and make decisions.
  - Recognize and avoid victim-blaming assumptions and reactions.
  - Know the nature and patterns of domestic violence, sexual assault, stalking, dating violence, and child abuse—and impacts for child and adult victims.
  - Know the nature and dynamics of battering and its distinction from other forms of domestic violence.
  - Know the markers of child development.
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examples adapted and redacted from another jurisdiction or from state or national resource centers as a means to talk about how to approach and resolve the issues raised. Within the supervised visitation program, case reviews are a way for staff to problem-solve together and to examine and refresh practice. Grantee communities that emphasized creating a learning environment for their Safe Havens work expected that anyone who attended a related training would share that information with the collaborative. They also reported structuring shared training events around webinars and audioconferences.

**> As a supervised visitation program and as a community collaborative, share problems and concerns about what is happening within the center and in the response of courts and community agencies.**

What is working and not working well for people using a supervised visitation program—and in the larger community response—can change frequently. Watch what is happening in the community and collect and share data about who is using visitation and exchange services and what is happening in response to domestic violence. Be alert for trends, such as an increase in victims of battering appearing as noncustodial, visiting parents or a sudden sharp decline in protective orders that include visitation or exchange. Provide feedback to the courts on how their orders impact families. As one Safe Havens local project director advised, “Watch things; be observant of what happens, and if it’s a trend, address the problem systemically.” Stay flexible and open to revisiting the visitation program’s policy and practice.

Staying proactive helps avoid small problems becoming huge problems. It helps staff and partners check assumptions about how they understand the visitation program’s role. For example, one community brought together the collaborative partners to map out and diagram where and how they were linked and involved with families. When the visitation center explored its link to the court, it discovered that judges expected the visits to be safe *and* they expected that things would be better

when the family left: that is, that the person causing the harm would change. The center had not realized that the courts had expectations for supervised visitation to be this kind of change agent, nor was the center's role to intervene with batterers in that way. As a result of the mapping exercise and discussion, the courts began to make greater use of orders to the batterer intervention program, as well as orders for supervised visitation or safe exchange.

## Sustaining the Work

*Sustainability is multifaceted. It includes looking for diversified funding, creating a demand for the service and making the visitation program indispensable, and raising awareness of its value among leaders, decision-makers, and the wider community.*

### **– Government partner**

*We need to convince courts and municipalities that supervised visitation and safe exchange are child-protecting, life-saving.*

### **– Government partner**

Ongoing funding to support supervised visitation and safe exchange is the central issue of sustainability, but not the only issue of importance. Sustainability also concerns keeping the practice of Safe Havens-oriented visitation and exchange dynamic, true to the Guiding Principles, and faithful to meeting people's needs.

### **> Diversify the funding and build a base of support early in the design process.**

Every grantee community has struggled with securing and keeping funding to continue supervised visitation services that were initially established under the Safe Havens Grant Program. Many communities lost visitation and exchange services entirely at one or more points in time or had to severely reduce the scope before securing new grants. Many sites noted that it is difficult to interest funders in visitation services. One element may be the prevailing lack of understanding about domestic violence in general and the needs related to post-separation battering in particular: leaving the relationship is still assumed to solve the problem. Another element in funders' disinterest might be a calculation that supervised visitation provides a benefit to relatively few people. Prospective funders may need to be far better informed about the issue and the role of safe visitation *and* exchange in a community response.

Grantee communities provided the following examples of potential sources of funding: local government, United Way, private foundations, law firms, divorce fee surcharge, and state lottery funds. Ultimately, sustainable funding rests on multiple sources; no single entity is likely to fully support a supervised visitation program. Grant funds such as the OWW Justice for Families Program can be used to leverage community attention and other support.

**> Position the supervised visitation program as a community resource: stay visible, keep referral sources informed, and share success stories in a purposeful, public way.**

Barring any deep shift in the availability of federal resources, when any VAWA-related or other federal grants are gone, the community itself will have to support supervised visitation services. The visitation program must have a visible presence and education campaign if the community is to be kept aware of the value of safe visitation and exchange.

Visitation and advocacy partners, in particular, have a key role in educating the court and other interveners about post-separation battering and the role of supervised visitation and safe exchange. Any discussion of domestic violence should include discussion of supervised visitation and safe exchange. Decision-makers and governments—such as the tribal council, county board, city council, or legislature—need to be kept informed. Some communities regularly invite collaborative partners, elected officials, and referral sources to attend events such as an open house, an annual potluck, or a walk-through and mock visit or exchange.

Keeping primary referral sources (e.g., courts, family law attorneys, legal services attorneys) up to date requires constant exposure and education about what supervised visitation and safe exchange is, who it is for, and its value to the community. Bringing training to judges, advocates, lawyers, and others can be a useful tool for visibility. Such training does not need to be long or complicated. It can be a presentation over a brown bag lunch or invitation to join a webinar discussion.

**> Create and foster a “culture of collaboration” that carries a shared community vision about domestic violence.**

Beyond a core collaborative—the “regulars who come together”—it can be difficult to maintain a common vision and goals. Fostering a shared understanding requires continual attention to introducing and reinforcing the

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*There’s a challenge in constantly educating people, in getting the word out. Supervised visitation is such a foreign concept to people.*

**– Supervised visitation program director**

*I’m proud that our small community has so much available. We started from a grassroots approach and attitude of ‘let’s try it, let’s see if it works. If not, we’ll change it.’*

**– Private bar attorney**

overall goals of Safe Havens-oriented supervised visitation and each partner's role. Partners are more likely to stay invested when they have a seat at the table and an equal voice. When collaborating partners can contextualize the kinds of violence that those coming to the supervised visitation program experience and their needs for safety, there is a foundation for a shared community vision. Every meeting can be an intentional learning opportunity.

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### **Putting It Together: Design and Implementation – Summing Up**

- ✓ *Use the available tools and strategies.*
- ✓ *Take time to convene and plan; avoid rushing to implementation.*
- ✓ *Strengthen skills in group facilitation, problem-solving, relationship-building, and training.*
- ✓ *Build a collaborative with diverse viewpoints and expertise; include buy-in and leadership from the courts and community-based advocates.*
- ✓ *Ensure that collaborating partners and other decision-makers have a common understanding of domestic violence and of the role of supervised visitation and safe exchange.*
- ✓ *Begin with conversations about what an ideal model of supervised visitation and safe exchange would look like for the community.*
- ✓ *Consider the benefits and cautions of where the program will be located.*
- ✓ *Plan for safe exchange and transition services early on in the design process.*
- ✓ *Design for safety.*
- ✓ *Incorporate cultural respect and accessibility from the beginning.*
- ✓ *Create an environment and expectation of shared voice, commitment, and learning among collaborating partners.*
- ✓ *Balance informal and formal planning activities and time together as an organizing team and/or collaborative—and give the collaborative something to do.*

- ✓ *Develop a standardized referral process and court order.*
  - ✓ *Stay flexible and organize day-to-day operations around peoples' needs; talk with people.*
  - ✓ *Keep safety always in focus; talk with people.*
  - ✓ *Prepare visitation program staff to recognize and respond to the possibility of inadvertently reinforcing tactics of post-separation battering.*
  - ✓ *Foster and support a skilled, collaborative visitation program staff.*
  - ✓ *Maximize retention of skilled program staff.*
  - ✓ *Standardize and simplify documentation and reporting to focus on safety.*
  - ✓ *Establish and practice a culture of shared learning and exploration.*
  - ✓ *Share problems and concerns about what is happening within the program and in the response of courts and community agencies.*
  - ✓ *Diversify the funding and build a base of support early in the design process.*
  - ✓ *Position the supervised visitation program as a community resource.*
  - ✓ *Create and foster a "culture of collaboration" that carries a shared community vision about domestic violence.*
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# Guiding Principles: Seeking a Unified Voice

## History

The Guiding Principles define the philosophy and practice of Safe Havens-oriented supervised visitation and safe exchange in the setting of a community response to domestic violence. The Guiding Principles help guide program development and administration, serve as a reference point for drafting policies and protocols, and assist collaborating partners in developing a shared understanding and voice.

The Supervised Visitation Program National Steering Committee developed the principles and related practices between 2003 and 2006 after consultation with a diverse group of stakeholders. The grant solicitation required that Safe Havens programs adhere to standards, and the Guiding Principles were developed to define those standards. The principles emerged from dynamic, spirited discussions involving grantee communities, supervised visitation and exchange services, advocacy organizations, the judiciary and legal community, child welfare and domestic violence services, batterer intervention services, culturally specific organizations, mental health professionals, federal agencies, and the academic community. Participants examined many issues related to supervised visitation and safe exchange,

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*We seek to teach the Guiding Principles statewide as a foundation, so that all programs have a strong, common grounding and common philosophy. The Guiding Principles are a centering reference.*

### **– Government partner**

*We wanted to go beyond getting a child from one parent to another. We sought to institutionalize a response that was oriented to post-separation violence.*

### **– Safe Havens local project director**

*The Guiding Principles are the bedrock of the work. If we're getting pushback, we ask the partner—even the center—how does what you're proposing fit? The principles are the basic text of our work; they help frame the work.*

**– Government partner**

*The Guiding Principles are in everything that we do. They're a mirror to look at what we're doing: does it fit with the Guiding Principles?*

**– Supervised visitation program director**

always within the context of the personal and systemic obstacles facing child and adult victims of battering.

## Overview

Six guiding principles outline the Safe Havens overarching philosophy and perspective. Each principle has accompanying expectations or standards and a set of related concrete practices. The principles, standards, and practices together provide a roadmap to best practice in providing safe visitation and exchange services within an overall community response to domestic violence. *Guiding Principles – Safe Havens: Supervised Visitation and Safe Exchange Grant Program* provides more detail on how to put the principles into practice.<sup>14</sup> For related links, see Appendix 3, Building Safe Havens: Tool and Resources.

### **1. Equal Regard for the Safety of Children and Adult Victims**

Consider the safety of children and adult victims as the highest priority and treat both with equal regard.

### **2. Valuing Multiculturalism and Diversity**

Be responsive to the background, circumstances, and cultures of the community and the families the visitation center serves.

### **3. Incorporating an Understanding of Domestic Violence into Center Services**

Demonstrate a comprehensive understanding of the nature, dynamics, and impact of domestic violence and incorporate that understanding into supervised visitation services.

### **4. Respectful and Fair Interaction**

Treat every individual using supervised visitation services with respect and fairness, while taking into account the abuse that has occurred within the family.

## 5. Community Collaboration

Seek to operate within a community collaborative which has as its goal to centralize the safety of children and adult victims and to hold batterers accountable. The community collaborative will strive to (1) ensure a holistic response to each family member's needs; (2) stop continued abuse of children and adult victims; and (3) eliminate the social conditions that cause intimate partner violence.

## 6. Advocacy for Children and Adult Victims

Work with the community collaborative to ensure that children and adult victims have meaningful access to services and actively link individuals to those services.

## Application

Participants in the retrospective project's site visits, roundtable discussions, and individual interviews offered many suggestions on how to use the Guiding Principles to help design and maintain a supervised visitation and safe exchange program. They emphasized the value of the Guiding Principles in setting a standard for policy and practice while also acknowledging the challenges in making them real. No one strategy, tool, or approach is sufficient. Making the principles real is at the heart of Safe Havens-oriented supervised visitation, and the following tips reflect the strategies that grantee communities have used and continue to use.

- Use the published Guiding Principles as a planning guide to inform all aspects of policy and practice design.
- Develop a short "two-pager" or brochure that



summarizes the Guiding Principles. Pass it out at every meeting, training, and event. Use the overview as a set of talking points for every presentation.

- Structure training around the Guiding Principles and related standards and practices.
- Use the Guiding Principles as a reference point for examining the visitation center's work. Establish an ongoing review of visitation center practices using the related standards and practices for each principle as benchmarks.
- Post one Guiding Principle each week in the visitation center in locations where parents and staff can see it. Invite everyone to write down examples of how the principle had been put into practice—or was missing from practice—and then analyze as a staff team to identify any gaps.
- Infuse the language and content of the Guiding Principles into policy, common forms, training, documentation, and problem-solving.
- Bring core partners and stakeholders together early on in the design process to talk about how best to implement supervised visitation and safe exchange. Use the Guiding Principles as a framework from which to explore and discuss safety and accountability from different points of view.
- Treat all partners with relevance and equal standing. No partner—and, particularly, no advocacy partner—should be left on the periphery with less voice and presence at the table. This is of particular importance to the court and legal system partners who may be accustomed to working together without inviting community agencies to participate.
- Develop an orientation for new visitation program staff that incorporates the Guiding Principles and shows how they are integrated into policy and practice. Provide an annotated copy of policy and procedure manuals that highlights all applications of the principles.

- Engage and build a relationship with each person coming to the center, from the point of initial referral and contact onward. Include mothers, children, and fathers. Structure the orientation and introduction to the supervised visitation program in ways that reinforce the Guiding Principles, particularly those of respectful, fair interaction and responsiveness to people’s cultures and identities. Above all, avoid a one-size-fits-all approach.
- Ensure a strong voice and presence for community-based advocates. When the Guiding Principles were expressed most widely and deeply in grantee communities—were most evident in practice—was when advocates on behalf of victims of battering had a central role in the collaborative and in shaping the supervised visitation program.
- Examine how the supervised visitation program welcomes families and explains its purpose and role. In several grantee communities, this process led to moving away from an intake process dominated by filling out forms. Instead, they adopted an orientation approach that includes meeting each family member separately, talking with children if they are developmentally able, and conducting a more intentional risk assessment specific to battering and to each family’s circumstances.
- Connect supervised visitation services to the larger legal system and the many things that have to work together for supervised visitation and safe exchange to function to its fullest potential as an element in post-separation safety. Encourage collaborating partners—and civil legal system partners, in particular—to use supervised visitation as a resource in the response to battering.
- Ensure that “cultural humility” is visible and purposeful in all aspects of a program’s design and operation. *Cultural humility* is an active, lifelong commitment to building culturally respectful and accessible organizations and services through a process of community consultation and partnership, full engagement with the people served, examination of the cultural values and assumptions

embedded in community systems (such as supervised visitation), and changes to values, assumptions, and practices that impede cultural respect and accessibility.<sup>15</sup>

- Convey the message that supervised visitation and safe exchange is a resource and support rather than a policing or punishment or part of the court system. At the same time, be aware of and pay attention to the reality of post-separation battering and its persistence, which is why there is a need for supervised visitation and safe exchange.
- Treat battering parents respectfully and fairly, without denying the harm that they have caused.
- Pay attention to assumptions that visitation program staff might have about what visiting parents should be doing. Parents may want to do everyday kinds of activities with their children and not follow a script for a certain kind of playtime or interaction.



The communities consulted for the retrospective project acknowledged that putting the Guiding Principles into action can be challenging. While the Guiding Principles express the intention, the practice of implementing them can be complicated.

Confusion arises when supervised visitation and safe exchange drifts away from a clear focus on and communication of the Guiding

Principles. Among the conversations with visitation center staff, for example, the significance of equal regard and of incorporating an understanding of domestic violence into center services sometimes disappeared in an emphasis on neutrality, access, and attachment. Some center staff described their role as “here for kids, not for parents,” in contradiction to the Guiding Principles. This perspective was more likely when advocacy had a more marginal role in the collaborative partnership.

Collaborative partners, visitation center staff, judges and court staff, advocates, and others involved were sometimes unfamiliar with or did not remember the Guiding Principles. Making and keeping the principles visible as a common philosophy and unified voice requires persistence. Applying the Guiding Principles across different situations requires practice. It requires a “culture of learning,” as one program director put it. Visitation program staff and collaborating partners need opportunities to come together and practice applying the principles to problems and case studies in a setting that allows reflection and without the immediate pressure of making decisions in response to a specific family’s situation or a crisis.



# Essential Discussions

## Four Questions

One of the contributions of the Safe Havens demonstration initiative was its identification of four “essential discussions” for a supervised visitation program that seeks to account for battering and pay equal regard to safety. Many questions go into designing and maintaining a visitation program (see *Putting It Together: Lessons Learned*), but these four help reinforce the Guiding Principles and examine assumptions about role, culture, safety, and access. Communities interviewed for the retrospective repeatedly spoke of their experience in relation to these questions and themes. These are discussions to hold early on in designing a program and to return to throughout its operation as a framework for evaluation.

- 1. What is the *role* of supervised visitation and safe exchange in a community response to domestic violence?**
- 2. How can supervised visitation and safe exchange best account for people’s distinct *cultures and identities*?**
- 3. How can supervised visitation and safe exchange produce and support *safety* for everyone involved?**
- 4. How do families who might benefit from supervised visitation and safe exchange learn about it and access it?**

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*We had assumptions about how visiting parents interact with visitation center staff and we didn’t fully see and understand risk in the context of batterers with children. We weren’t responding to the nature of risk and potential risk. There’s a pretty significant amount of violence we’re embracing by doing this work and the structures need to account for it.*

**– Supervised visitation program administrator**

*Understanding the three types of domestic violence—battering, resistive, and non-battering—gave the consulting committee a practical framework to talk about how the supervised visitation program should respond. We took redacted cases from another community and worked through them. It doesn't mean that we always agreed on what to do, but we had shared vocabulary and way to analyze what we were seeing.*

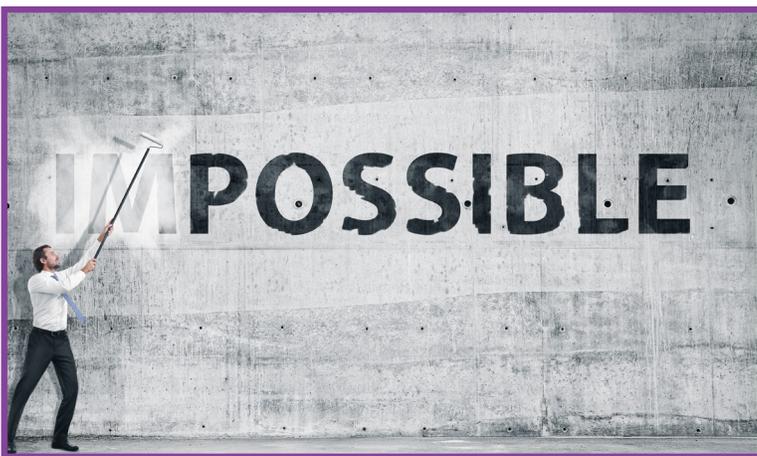
**– Safe Havens project director**

“The questions and resulting discoveries are intertwined. It is impossible to talk about the role of supervised visitation without talking about safety, and vice versa; or, to talk about role and safety without accounting for people’s unique needs, cultures, and identities. Whether and how a victim of battering discovers supervised visitation or exchange, evaluates its potential for improving her and her children’s safety, and has access to it requires all of the above, as well as collaboration across visitation programs, advocates, courts, and other community interveners.”<sup>16</sup>

## How to Have the Discussion

The Safe Havens demonstration initiative sites used the methods of the Praxis Safety and Accountability Audit, a form of Institutional Analysis, to explore the questions they posed. While a community may choose to use Institutional Analysis or similar tools as part of its planning, design, or evaluation of a Safe Havens-oriented visitation program, it is not necessary in order to use the essential questions as a departure point for discussion. Communities now have the benefit of the demonstration sites’ experience. Each community published an account of its work and recommendations for practice. For links to each report, see Appendix 3, Building Safe Havens: Tool and Resources.

The venue and format for the discussions will vary according to local conditions. Possible approaches include: holding a facilitated, collaborative retreat; working through each question in turn as part of a planning group’s regular meetings; or developing a checklist from each demonstration initiative report to use as part of an annual assessment of the visitation program’s design and services.



Visitation centers and collaborative partners are also encouraged, based upon the recommendations of those consulted for the retrospective, to deepen the discussions by keeping these essential questions in mind as they regularly talk with people (including survivors and families using visitation and exchange services), observe court processes related to supervised visitation and exchange, and review orders, forms, and case records.



# Looking Forward

After more than a decade of change under the Safe Havens Supervised Visitation and Safe Exchange Grant Program, much has been learned about how to design and implement safe visitation and exchange as part of a strong community response to battering and other forms of domestic violence, sexual assault, stalking, dating violence, and child abuse. Communities now have tools and strategies that had not been developed or explored prior to Safe Havens. The contributions of grantee communities consulted for the retrospective help convey the impact, innovation, and key lessons of Safe Havens. The task of establishing Safe Havens-oriented supervised visitation as a wider reaching and more lasting practice is unfinished, however. Looking forward, ongoing challenges and questions remain that will require the qualities that have characterized Safe Havens in its first decade: energy, thoughtfulness, creativity, and an environment of shared learning and collaboration.

**> Widespread lack of understanding of the dynamics and impacts of battering persists, particularly in making decisions related to post-separation safety and equal regard for child and adult victims.**

The “domestic relations and family court world is not kind to victims of domestic violence,” as one private practice attorney put it. A similar analysis was offered by other collaborating partners in many communities: namely, that a lack of understanding of battering and its dynamics still

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*The need for supervised visitation and safe exchange is, unfortunately, undiminished.*

## **– Government partner**

*Supervised visitation is a small part of a larger system and we need to look at the issues that lead people into the system. Judges, attorneys, mediators, custody evaluators: all need to make domestic violence visible and see supervised visitation and safe exchange as a resource.*

## **– Safe Havens local program coordinator**

*The unreliability of funding is a real problem. Think of it from the victims' perspective. For a while they had a great option that was safe and then when funding goes they are back in an unsafe place because most judges won't cut off contact.*

**– Supervised visitation program director**

*I know that at any moment the tables could be turned on me and I could be accused of abuse. That's one of his tools.*

**– A mother and survivor**

prevails and the civil legal arena continues to hold many myths, among them that most claims of abuse are lies or distortions intended to create an advantage in the case.<sup>17</sup>

A deep societal reluctance to acknowledge the distinct nature and impact of battering remains and has a strong influence on courts and communities. “Parental conflict” is often the prevailing point of view, with distrust that the violence and coercion that battered women, in particular, attempt to bring forward truly exists or a conviction that the severity is exaggerated. As one visitation center discussion emphasized, domestic violence was still accepted in the community, still considered a personal matter, and victim-blaming remained a common response.

Some judges still do not recognize the importance of including orders related to children, especially in civil orders for protection. Many sources consulted for the retrospective noted that courts continue to struggle with seeing the impact of post-separation battering. Courts often use a narrow lens of parental access and miss seeing and understanding the battering—and thus miss the implications for safety and well-being for children and adult victims. The harm to adult victims gets detached from harm to their children, as if what a mother experiences has little to do with her children’s well-being and sense of safety and security.

When courts do not see and understand post-separation battering, they either do not order supervised visitation or safe exchange when it would be most helpful or they refer cases where the abuser is very dangerous and any contact raises safety alarms. The court might order supervision for a short period of time and without any follow-up or criteria for behavior change. Advocates and visitation center staff cited the ongoing challenge of how to raise concerns with judges about whether a case is even safe enough for supervised visitation. Courts sometimes rely on supervised visitation or safe exchange in cases where any ongoing contact may be contrary to equal regard for adult and child safety. Equal regard, however, requires examining the common assumption of parental access to children as the desired outcome alongside due consideration of the harm and risk involved.

Most courts and supervised visitation services remain outside of the Safe Havens framework and its clear, articulated attention to battering. Going forward, a central question is how to get all supervised visitation programs and the courts that use them to apply the principle of equal regard for safety. How does the Safe Havens-oriented approach become the standard in circumstances involving domestic violence, sexual assault, stalking, dating violence, and child abuse, regardless of the community someone happens to live in or the courtroom someone happens to enter?

**> Many supervised visitation programs are seeing an increase in noncustodial, visiting mothers who are victims of battering.**

Communities consulted for the retrospective spoke about seeing an increasing number of noncustodial mothers who are victims of battering being referred to supervised visitation. While much concern was expressed, there were few examples of concrete community action in response to increasing numbers of victims of battering ending up as noncustodial, visiting parents in supervised visitation programs. The phenomenon has gone largely unexamined, with little systematic investigation by researchers or by Safe Havens grantees at what is happening and how and why. It may be that the widespread lack of understanding of the dynamics of battering, as identified by many of those consulted for the retrospective, has much to do with victims of battering coming through the doors of visitation programs as noncustodial parents. Visitation programs consulted for the retrospective emphasized that the distinctive nature of Safe Havens and its Guiding Principles supported them in paying attention to victims of battering in ways that are helpful and protective, regardless of whether they are a custodial or noncustodial parent.

**> Safe exchange services are much needed but remain underdeveloped and often unavailable.**

Supervised visitation programs and their collaborating partners identified the lack of adequate safe exchange as a gap, both in helping families transition to unsupervised visitation and in strengthening post-separation safety planning overall. They observed that most victims of battering still face negotiating the exchange on their own, even when a visitation program exists and is able to assist some families. Few, if any, visitation programs have the capacity and resources to provide supervised exchange for every family that might benefit from it. Other factors that may contribute to the gap include limited hours or location of existing services; courts that are unprepared to evaluate the need for safe exchange; and the reality that a supervised exchange via a family member or friend can be the closest and quickest option, even though not the first option that a victim of battering might select. Visitation programs and collaborating partners face the continuing challenge of figuring out how best to guide decisions about safe exchange, including how to use safe exchange in the transition from supervised to unsupervised visitation, when supervised exchange is a safe first option, and when supervision or exchange involving family members or other individuals could be the safest and most helpful option.

**> The realities of post-separation battering mean that some children and families may need supervised visitation and safe exchange services for a very long time—as well as other post-separation supports and resources.**

For some adult victims of battering and their children, the post-separation battering persists far beyond a few months or a couple of years; it may persist through and even beyond the children's age of majority. One center offered the example of a child who had been visiting his father for 14 years, wondering how a visitation program and its collaborating partners could even plan for such a need. As a collaborative partner in one community put it "We underestimated how big the hole was and how vulnerable people were when McDonald's was the de facto supervised visitation site."



Overall, grantee communities felt that the need for domestic violence-related services post-separation has been greatly underestimated. That underestimate includes the need for safe visitation and exchange services. It also includes many supports that can make it possible for those harmed to recover and heal and for those who have caused the harm to change their behavior and make reparations, such as legal assistance, batterer intervention programs, housing, stable employment, and access to trauma-informed health care.

**> Funding is unstable and inadequate to the need for supervised visitation and safe exchange services.**

Many Safe Havens communities have experienced unstable funding and grant money—including OVV Safe Havens funds—disappearing one year and then returning two or more years later. They offered multiple examples of centers and services established and then lost or severely diminished. “There have been times when our program had no funding, and it seriously damaged our reputation among referring entities in the legal system,” as one visitation program director noted. Some programs have had to curtail or suspend visitation and exchange services and institute fees for parents. Such situations may make it even more difficult to establish sustainable funding. One advocate observed: “It’s a real problem when a community has something good and starts to rely on it, and then it’s

pulled. It sounds to many people like a shell game.”

This instability has contributed to high turnover within visitation programs and collaborating partners. It has meant starting over and over again in applying the theory of the Guiding Principles to the day-to-day practice of supervised visitation and safe exchange. Turnover drains “institutional memory” as those who have been immersed in the philosophy and practice of Safe Havens-informed supervised visitation and safe exchange leave.

Collaborating partners often voiced discouragement at the problem of stable funding for supervised visitation and exchange services. “No one wants to fund it” was a common refrain, along with the opinion that funders who could provide support do not understand supervised visitation and are not necessarily eager to learn. The prevailing conclusion was that most communities are unable to sustain a supervised visitation program on their own. What is the role, then, of ongoing federal support? Other support? How can supervised visitation and safe exchange be sustained as part of the community response to domestic violence? How can such services be sustained while also meeting other needs related to advocacy and post-separation support?

**> Cultural respect and access are underdeveloped and are too often an afterthought in designing supervised visitation and safe exchange services.**

It is not enough to “value multiculturalism and diversity,” as the Guiding Principle reads. Action is required. Many supervised visitation programs acknowledged limitations in language access and bicultural, bilingual staff. Some noted that the appearance of the visitation program as an arm of the court—or its location in a government facility—was a source of mistrust and fear for some families. Some collaborating partners did not see the question of culturally accessible services as needing much attention. As one court official put it, “The common feature is domestic violence, which crosses all boundaries, so I haven’t seen this as an issue. Another observed that “It doesn’t really come in. It’s just about kids and families.” Many grantee communities

consulted for the retrospective expressed the importance of valuing multiculturalism and diversity and expressed “hopes for the future,” but were uncertain on how to transform such intentions into action.

**> A strong, effective coordinated community response, grounded in a common understanding of the context of battering and other forms of domestic violence, provides the best foundation for safe visitation and exchange.**

*Coordinated community response* is the organization of community systems to ensure that those intervening in domestic violence, sexual assault, stalking, dating violence, and child abuse (1) centralize safety and well-being for victims/survivors, (2) hold perpetrators accountable while offering opportunities to change, and (3) seek systemic change that contributes to ending violence and abuse.<sup>18</sup>

The experiences of the demonstration initiative sites and other Safe Havens grantees have shown that a strong coordinated community response, grounded in a shared understanding of domestic violence, provides the best foundation for supervised visitation and safe exchange. Supervised visitation alone is not enough: “Families need a whole coordinated response,” as one contributor noted. Supervised visitation and safe exchange that is promoted only by advocates or dictated by the courts is unlikely to meet families’ needs if it is isolated from a comprehensive community response.

“Community collaboration” is a Guiding Principle and the Safe Havens Grant Program has required that grantees establish community working groups. All applicants are required to enter into a formal collaborative working relationship with state, tribal, or local courts, a local unit of government, and a nonprofit, nongovernmental domestic violence or sexual assault victim services organization. Such arrangements are not in and of themselves a coordinated community response, however.

Many of the sources consulted for the retrospective spoke to how difficult it can be to establish and maintain any level of collaboration, particularly one that is a truly functioning

coordinated community response. Sometimes the challenge is working with a structure that is largely coordinated and collaborative in name only, established primarily for the purposes of securing grant funds. Sometimes the challenge is a history of failed collaboration or history of conflict and disagreement. Carrying Safe Havens-oriented supervised visitation into the future requires strengthening coordinated community response.

The issues summarized here are not the only questions to be addressed in the unfinished work of establishing Safe Havens as a philosophy and practice. In addition, going forward also means that communities will continue to revisit and often struggle with how to operationalize the Guiding Principles and how to address questions of confidentiality, neutrality, documentation, and the relationship between visitation services and the court. They will continue the exploration and conversations related to roles, safety, security, and engagement.

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## Lessons from the Field: Resource Recap

*"You don't need to build it from zero."*

Primary sources for links to technical assistance providers, FAQs, publications, audio and video recordings, and training tools:

- ✓ National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges: **Safe Havens Online**
- ✓ Praxis International: **Supervised Visitation & Safe Exchange Archive**
- ✓ Battered Women's Justice Project: **National Child Custody Project**

**Community Tool Box:** free online tools for organizing and coordinating community change

See Appendix 3, Building Safe Havens: Tool and Resources.

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# Appendices

# APPENDIX 1

# FAQs about Safe Havens

## Frequently Asked Questions Safe Havens-Oriented Supervised Visitation and Safe Exchange

**Find video versions of the FAQs at  
<https://safehavensonline.org>.**

Contributors include:

- Melissa Scaia – Executive Director, Advocates for Family Peace, Grand Rapids, MN
- Jennifer Rose – Consultant, San Francisco, CA
- Carla Bean – Chief District Attorney, Dallas, TX
- Ona Foster – Supervised Visitation Initiative, Vera Institute of Justice, Washington, DC
- Hon. Jerry Bowles – Judge (ret.), Jefferson Family Court, KY
- Hon. Victor Reyes – Judge (ret.), Pueblo County, CO
- Hon. Ramona Gonzalez – Circuit Court Judge, La Crosse County, WI

# SAFE HAVENS

## **What is supervised visitation?**

A parent who does not have custody of his or her child spends time with the child or children under the supervision of someone approved by the court or both parents in a controlled professional environment in order to protect children from potential dangerous or harmful situations. Both supervised visitation and safe exchange limit the contact between the victim and batterer while facilitating safe parenting time.

## **What is supervised exchange?**

A service that allows for the monitored exchange of children when a court has determined that the mother and the father should not have contact with each other. Typically, one parent drops off the child at the designated visitation center or other location and then the other parent picks up the child, with the transfer occurring through a third party—such as a visitation program staff person—and without the parents having any contact.

## **What models of supervised visitation and safe exchange are currently in use?**

The most common model is the one-on-one on-site supervised visit or exchange involving the child, noncustodial parent, and a monitor. Other approaches include group supervision and supervision at offsite locations, such as a park or recreation center. Courts may also direct relatives to provide the supervision. The primary consideration in selecting a model should be safety specific to the needs of the child/children and victim parent. Another consideration is the visitation program's capacity to meet families' needs. Some programs may be limited to one or two one-on-one visits at a time; others may use group visits because they can meet a greater need in the community.

## What is Safe Havens Supervised Visitation and Safe Exchange?

Safe Havens provides supervised visitation and safe exchange when there has been domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, or stalking. Its primary focus is domestic violence, also referred to as *battering*: physical, psychological, emotional, financial, stalking, or sexual abuse that takes place in the context of an intimate (or prior intimate) relationship that can involve a pattern of purposeful and assaultive behaviors used to maintain control and compliance of the victim. Safe Havens-oriented supervised visitation and safe exchange is domestic violence-aware and informed and set within a philosophy and practice of specific Guiding Principles (see related FAQs). It holds equal regard for the safety of children and adult victims. It values engagement and respect with all involved, but it is not neutral toward violence and abuse. It rests on a foundation of community collaboration, advocacy, and a shared culture of learning that supports self-reflection and quality improvement.

## Why does a community need a supervised visitation program?

Domestic violence, sexual assault, stalking, and dating violence remain widespread. Supervised visitation or exchange is a critical safety component when a victim who is also a parent tries to get free of such violence. “Post-separation” is a dangerous time for adult victims and their children. A supervised visitation program provides a safe place where children can still have access to their other parent in a setting that is monitored, secure, informed about domestic violence, and connected to community services. Absent such a supervised visitation program, most visitation and exchanges typically occur in parking lots of restaurants or discount stores and are overseen by family or friends who often are unprepared to understand the dynamics of battering and identify the risks involved.

## **Where does the money come from to operate a Safe Havens-oriented supervised visitation program?**

Most programs are funded through a combination of public funds (grants and local, state, or tribal government appropriations) and awards from private nonprofit foundations, such as a charitable fund or United Way-type entity. Between 2008 and 2013, the majority of funding came through the Safe Havens Grant Program in the Department of Justice Office on Violence Against Women (DOJ-OVW). Since the 2013 Violence Against Women Act, grants continue to be available through the Justice for Families Grant Program.

## **How long does it take to get a Safe Havens-oriented supervised visitation program up and running?**

It depends on the community and what is already in place. Many communities start from scratch while others adapt an existing supervised visitation and safe exchange program. Under either situation, a key consideration is to establish policies that reflect the Safe Havens orientation. Such policies centralize safety for adult victims and their children and incorporate the Safe Havens Guiding Principles. To get a center up and running also requires a physical space that meets the needs of both child and adult survivors. It can take a year or longer to assemble a community collaboration, establish policies and practices that meet the safety needs of adult victims and their children, and secure a location. It may take longer if the Safe Havens approach is substantially different than a prevailing child welfare or access model of supervised visitation.

# GUIDING PRINCIPLES

## What are the Guiding Principles?

The Supervised Visitation Program National Steering Committee developed the Guiding Principles in order to frame the philosophy and practice of Safe Havens-oriented supervised visitation and safe exchange in the setting of a community response to domestic violence. The Guiding Principles help shape program development and administration, serve as a reference point for drafting policies and protocols, and assist collaborating partners in developing a shared understanding and voice. They help shift practices to ensure the safety of adult victims and their children within a framework of attention to diversity and identity, respect and fairness, community collaboration, and advocacy on behalf of victims of battering and their children.

## What is equal regard?

Equal regard is the consideration of the safety of the child and the adult victim parent together in cases of domestic violence, sexual assault, stalking, and dating violence. Equal regard balances safety and parental access, with safety for both the child and the adult victim as the goal.

## How do supervised visitation programs incorporate meaningful program aspects that respect people's diverse cultures and identities?

Supervised visitation programs—as organizations and as individuals within those organizations—must engage in a process of continuous assessment, self-reflection, and adjustment to recognize and correct biases in practice. Such biases may reflect assumptions about race, ethnicity, religion, class, sexual orientation, gender, disability, and/or other aspects of culture and identity. Practical steps—always within the context of safety—might include activities such as allowing families to bring in their own food or music to the visitation program, providing time and space to practice their religious traditions, providing interpreters or bicultural and bilingual staff, including extended family members in visits, and providing transportation and flexible hours.

# CORE PARTNERS

## SUPERVISED VISITATION PROGRAM

### **What are the advantages and disadvantages of allowing extended family at a visit?**

With due consideration for the safety of the child and adult victim, involving extended family can help set and reinforce an environment of respect, engagement, fairness, and cultural respect. Involving extended family requires extra attention on the part of the visitation program, however, because other family members may not understand the significance of a court order or deny the harm that has occurred that led to the order. They may push the parameters of what should and should not be talked about during visitation or encourage the noncustodial parent to do things that conflict with visitation program policies.

### **How can a supervised visitation and safe exchange program sustain its work?**

Beyond any specific DOJ-OWW grant funding that may be available, long term sustainability requires a relationship between the visitation program and its partner(s). Partners can help create opportunities for locally-based public funding. Other avenues to financial support include community outreach, fundraising events, United Way membership, and foundation and other grants.

### **Where can a supervised visitation and safe exchange program find more information about domestic violence services and resources for the families it works with?**

The first place to start is the domestic violence collaborating partner (or partners). The domestic violence advocacy organization will know what is available through its own program and through other sources of help related to the common needs that victims of battering face, such as safe housing, economic stability, transportation, health care, and peer support. Other partners and key stakeholders can provide links to resources related to

batterer intervention, civil or legal aid, and the impact of living with violence and abuse.

### **Who decides where families will go for supervised visitation or exchanges?**

Ideally, the order for visitation or exchange should be a collaborative decision made by a well-informed court in consultation with the visitation program. The decision should be based on a thorough determination of safety needs of the child/children and adult victim and knowledge of the services available in the community.

### **How can supervised visitation and exchange programs provide meaningful access to resources and advocacy?**

The relationships that a supervised visitation program builds with other core partners and key stakeholders are essential. Meaningful access is not a matter of handing out a business card or telling someone that a service exists. Meaningful access requires that visitation program staff know the community, know what helping agencies can provide, and know individuals within those agencies—positioning themselves to be able to call and say, “I’m working with this person, they’ve given me permission to talk with you. Can you talk with them now?” Meaningful access is not a generic, one-size-fits-all response. It requires talking with those who come to the visitation program, learning about their specific needs, and connecting them with programs that might best meet those needs. To be successful, meaningful access requires a policy and protocol framework to clarify how information can be shared and cross-training to help build relationships and shared knowledge of common post-separation needs and safety considerations.

### **What types of documentation should be sent to the courts?**

While there is no single answer to this question—and each community collaborative needs to ask and answer it—the key consideration is to document and convey to the court information that is related to the safety of child and adult victims: i.e., documentation related to the reason for the

order and referral to supervised visitation or safe exchange. For example, a court is going to want to know if a “critical incident” has happened. The local collaborative will define what a critical incident means, but it is likely to include such things as when a parent interferes with the safety of the other parent or the child or a child refuses to come or is highly distressed by the visitation or exchange. Courts will also generally want to know that people are complying with basic requirements of the order and the visitation program, such as attendance, type of visitation or exchange, people involved, and follow-through with any specific conditions.

### **What are the training requirements for a supervised visitation provider?**

There is no single, mandated training curriculum for visitation program staff, but key areas have been identified through the experiences of Safe Havens grantees. Content should include large topic areas, such as the Guiding Principles; dynamics of domestic violence, sexual assault, stalking, and dating violence; and the role of supervised visitation and safe exchange in post-separation safety. Training also needs to be highly hands-on and experiential in ways that provide opportunities to practice engaging with children, mothers, and fathers; monitoring visits and exchanges; and intervening when warranted. Role plays and case studies are effective ways to introduce and practice skills—for both new and experienced staff—and to do so outside of a real-time, real-life crisis situation. Using a multidisciplinary training team (including advocacy partners and the batterer intervention program) is key to delivering training that provides as much of an authentic feel as possible. Training should also include exposure to the larger context in which people are referred to supervised visitation and safe exchange. For example, observing in court—such as a protection order court or similar court where restraining orders are issued—is a way to hear the testimonies and issues related to the referrals that the court makes. Mentoring of new staff is also important and provides a way for them to practice their role and solve problems with support and feedback.

### **What is the relationship between the supervised visitation program and the court?**

The supervised visitation program is a collaborative partner of the court, but it is not the eyes and ears of the court. The visitation program cannot be seen as or become an extension of any custody dispute between parents. The court is the primary referral source for families to access safe, domestic violence-informed supervised visitation or safe exchange that seeks to reduce risk and prevent further harm. The visitation program provides an environment where parents and children can have safe contact without the risk of violence or harm, but it is not a place to work out the custody dispute that is before the court.

### **When is it appropriate for a supervised visitation provider to make a parenting or custody recommendation to the court?**

It is never appropriate for a supervised visitation program to make recommendations related to child custody. The program's purpose is to provide a safe environment for supervised visitation and exchange. Custody cases typically involve multiple, complex issues that are beyond the scope of a supervised visitation program to evaluate, nor are monitors typically qualified to make custody recommendations to the court. Some courts may nonetheless expect a visitation program to do so, particularly if the court relies on its experience with visitation in dependency and neglect or child abuse cases where social workers monitor visits and then come back and make recommendations to the court. In such cases, the visitation program will need to be clear about its role and may need to seek technical support (such as via the NCJFCJ) to help work through the issue with its court and other collaborative partners.

### **How long does it take for a family to start receiving services once they have made initial contact with the supervised visitation program?**

Many factors can influence when visitation or exchange services begin, including the existence and size of any waiting list, staffing and physical space capacity, the

frequency and type of visitation ordered by the court, and how the program has set up processes for initial contact and orientation. For example, if supervised visitation program staff are present at the order for protection court and make the first contacts at that time, services may start earlier than if they wait for parents to contact them. If there's an urgent need for supervised visitation or safe exchange to begin as quickly as possible—based on risks identified by the court, the initial contact with the victim parent, the specific terms of the order of protection, or other information—the program may accommodate the start date accordingly. Once a visitation or exchange order has been made, a prompt start date can help reinforce safety by discouraging claims by the battering parent that the victim parent is denying access to the children.

### **What are the arrival and departure procedures for custodial and noncustodial parents?**

Staggered arrival and departure times are an essential component of domestic violence-informed supervised visitation and safe exchange. This does not necessarily mean that the custodial parent always arrives first and the noncustodial parent at a later time—or vice versa. Rather, paying equal regard to the safety of children and adult victims and accounting for the dynamics of battering require consideration of which parent needs protection. The parent needing protection is not always the one with custody of the children; sometimes it's the parent who's the noncustodial, visiting parent. Determining who arrives when requires talking with the victim parent to determine what form of staggered arrival and departure will feel most safe, rather than applying a blanket rule of this parent comes first and that parent comes second.

### **What evaluation criteria do visitation programs use to gauge effectiveness or efficiency?**

The best way to gauge how a supervised visitation and safe exchange program is working is to talk with the people who use and benefit from its services. Above all, consulting the women, men, and children who come to the

program is one of the best ways to learn what's working and not working. This can happen through focus group discussions, anonymous surveys, and exit interviews with those who are transitioning from or otherwise leaving the visitation program. Similar consultation with core partners—particularly advocacy organizations and the courts—is also an important source of information about whether and how the program is meeting its intention and goals in providing Safe Havens-oriented supervised visitation and safe exchange. Programs funded through a DOJ-OVW grant are required to submit semi-annual reports on the effectiveness and efficiency of the services they are providing. Private foundations and other funders typically have similar conditions for program evaluation.

### **What are some considerations for site selection?**

Selecting a location and space for supervised visitation and safe exchange services requires consideration of many factors, including: physical layout, separate parking lots and entrances, accessibility to public transportation (if available), emergency response time, security systems, and adaptability to creating a welcoming environment and meeting the needs of the children and parents who will be using the space.

### **How long is each supervised visit?**

While a typical visit lasts from one to two hours once or twice a week, the length and frequency ultimately depend on the visitation program, the community, and a family's needs. Ideally, however, a court will not issue orders that restrict a visitation program's flexibility to balance a family's needs with the program's capacity to meet them. Ideally, the court and the visitation program are in communication about what is possible. Factors that influence scheduling include such things as the number of families ordered to the program, details of the court order, space available, distance families need to travel, and ages of the children.

## **Can supervised visitation and safe exchange programs refuse cases, end visits, or terminate services?**

Visitation programs can and should refuse visits and exchange services when they conclude that they cannot safely provide them. Supervised visitation programs are not an arm of the court; they have autonomy to make decisions based on their capacity to provide safety for families.

## **DOMESTIC VIOLENCE ADVOCATES**

### **Who decides where families will go for supervised visitation or exchanges?**

While it is ultimately up to the court to determine where the parties will be referred, Safe Havens-oriented supervised visitation and safe exchange is grounded in a collaborative approach and expectation that the court will consider the expertise of domestic violence advocates and the visitation program in establishing protocols for crafting orders. Referrals outside of court orders may come through advocacy programs, law enforcement, or other community interveners.<sup>16</sup>

### **How can advocates participate in creating safety for adult victims of domestic violence and their children who are using supervised visitation or safe exchange services?**

A collaborative relationship with the supervised visitation program supports well-informed advocacy. Developing this relationship goes beyond each organization knowing that the other exists. It requires that advocates go to the visitation program, see and tour the space, become familiar with the policies and procedures, and be able to describe to victims of battering what to expect and how the visitation program might contribute to their safety. Similarly, it requires that the visitation program becomes familiar with how to access advocacy and what advocates can provide to adult victims and their children. In a fully developed collaborative relationship, advocates have a voice in developing and creating visitation program policies and procedures that best enhance safety in the context of battering. Cross-training

can help reinforce a collaborative relationship, as can joint discussion of case scenarios where advocates can share their expertise about the issues that victims of battering and their children face.

### **How does a parent get an order for supervised visitation and/or safe exchange?**

Courts may issue orders for supervised visitation or exchange in any case that involves allegations of domestic violence. Orders typically come through custody or divorce proceedings but are also used with orders for protection and in conjunction with criminal court actions, such as a condition of pretrial release or sentencing. Some parents voluntarily use supervised visitation or exchange services through mediated agreements or other agreements that they've reached outside of the court process.

## **JUDGES**

### **What types of family problems or conflicts make a judicial referral to a supervised visitation program appropriate?**

When some level of domestic violence has occurred in the family, the court is going to want to do a risk or lethality assessment to determine if it is safe for there to be any type of contact and then to determine the likely impact of that contact on the child or children. A referral to supervised visitation or exchange provides a setting that is oriented toward safety for both the victim parent and the children and tries to avoid additional trauma to the children. It can be a hard decision for judges to make. If there is a previously reported history of domestic violence—particularly if the parties have been before the court over issues of battering—then a supervised visitation or exchange referral is appropriate and more straightforward. If there is no previously reported history and information about past domestic violence first comes forward during a divorce or custody action or there is a high level of conflict between parents, the decision is more difficult but the

families involved may very much need the protection of supervised visitation or safe exchange.

### **How long should an order for supervised visitation or safe exchange last?**

There is no standard period for supervised visitation or exchange orders. Once issued, they should be frequently reviewed and re-evaluated by the court to determine if the level of supervision is necessary. The type and length of supervision should be determined on a case-by-case basis. Every case has a different set of facts and there are different dynamics within the relationship. A court may determine that certain conditions must be met in order for a person to move from one supervised visitation setting and schedule to a different level and frequency of supervision.

### **What does a typical order and transition plan include?**

Courts often struggle with how and when to transition a person from an initial supervised visitation order to another level of supervision—typically a lower degree of supervision, although it could be higher—or to discontinue supervised exchange altogether. When domestic violence has been involved, the post-separation period is dynamic and always changing. People change over time in ways that can strengthen safety or increase risk. Consequently, such decisions must be made on a case-by-case basis. When considering a transition plan and schedule, judicial reviews are essential in order for the court to be able to make decisions that avoid putting an at-risk parent or child in any type of difficulty related to their safety. An order may require that certain conditions be met before a person can graduate from supervised visitation to unsupervised visitation, such



as completing a batterer's intervention program, substance abuse treatment, or other program or type of treatment that is specific to the case. Courts may want to look at not only whether the person attended the batterers intervention program, but how they did in the program. Did they actually participate? Did they actually get something out of it? The court cannot rely solely on what is reported about the visits but must look outside of that setting. Has the person stopped battering their partner? Left the at-risk person alone? Stopped stalking? Has the person who is subject to the order made legitimate changes in their life, so the court may feel more comfortable in a less secure setting? What are the implications for the safety of the child/children and at-risk parent?

### **Why should a judge order that visits and exchanges be supervised by a visitation program rather than a relative?**

When battering is involved, a victim's family member who is asked to supervise visits or exchanges may also be put at risk. Because of the level of harassment, abuse, and risk that their family members experience, some victims may decide to go back to managing the exchange of children with their abusers themselves. Because there's such a high level of denial among perpetrators, it can be difficult for their family members to appreciate the level of risk that the abusive parent creates for the child and for the adult victim. Consequently, family members of a battering parent may not take orders of supervision seriously. An objective, trained, domestic violence-informed supervision program and staff help avoid such conflicts of interest. They are prepared to provide for a safe and protective environment for the children and the abused parent.

### **How can a court start the process of establishing a Safe Havens-oriented supervised visitation program?**

A court cannot go it alone; it is essential to have buy-in from the community. A court can play a key role in generating that buy-in, in part by getting the community excited about the supervised visitation program and the impact it will have on issues of domestic violence. The court's leadership

is fundamental in designing and implementing a needs assessment to determine the likely demand for and scope of supervised visitation and exchange services. Judges are recognized and well-positioned to bring together the collaborative partners and key stakeholders—from domestic violence advocacy and social service organizations to courts, law enforcement, family law and defense attorneys, and others who have a stake in keeping victims of domestic violence and their children safe. Judges can help ensure that everyone is on the same page in understanding the role, goals, and principles of Safe Havens-oriented supervised visitation. Once the needs assessment and collaborative partners are in place, judges—as the primary referral source—can provide a supportive hand and critical eye to designing, operating, and sustaining the supervised visitation program.

### **What is the relationship between the court and the supervised visitation program?**

The court and the supervised visitation program are collaborative partners: i.e., they work together. The court makes referrals to the visitation program through the cases that come before it—family law, child custody, restraining orders/orders for protection—and the visitation program provides services to meet the safety concerns that the court has identified. The court is not merely providing bodies to the visitation program, however. One of the Guiding Principles of Safe Havens-oriented supervised visitation and safe exchange is community collaboration that strives to ensure a holistic response, stop continued abuse of children and adult victims, and eliminate the social conditions that cause domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, or stalking. Collaboration is active, not passive. The Safe Havens orientation requires the court to be involved in a deeper level than many courts are used to being involved. The American Bar Association’s Model Code of Judicial Conduct (Canon 3.1, commentary) talks about how courts should be engaged in nonprofits that involve areas of the law which the court has an interest in. There is an ethical basis, then, for the courts to be involved with the supervised visitation program

at a deeper level than just a referral source.

**In what types of situations is it appropriate for a supervised visitation provider to make a parenting or custody recommendation to the court?**

It's not the function or role of a supervised visitation program or its staff to make parenting or custody recommendations. Their role is to determine the appropriateness of the visiting parent's contact with the children and to intervene based on the children's safety. There is an inherent risk in asking someone to make recommendations outside of their qualifications. Moreover, nothing observed in the artificial environment of a visitation center is an adequate basis for making conclusions about behavior in the longer term. A battering parent is likely to act differently in the vacuum of a safe exchange or supervised visit than in everyday settings. Batterers can be an extremely manipulative population. Visitation program staff who may not appreciate or understand or have access to the total context of a batterer's use of violence and coercion in the relationship that led to that supervised order can be particularly influenced by such manipulation.

## APPENDIX 2

# Strategies for Practice

### Strategies for Practice – Lessons from the Demonstration Initiative

#### Safe Havens-Oriented Supervised Visitation and Safe Exchange

*“Above all, supervised visitation services that account for battering need not fit a single model, but will reflect the distinctiveness and diversity of each community, under a framework of guiding principles.”<sup>19</sup>*

The following strategies reinforce and expand upon those identified by the communities consulted for the Safe Havens retrospective and included throughout *Lessons from a Decade of Change*.

- Link survivors with post-separation advocacy.
- Build intentional relationships.
- Welcome and introduce people through orientation.
- Take a critical look at documentation
- Take a critical look at safety and security.
- Support children’s safety in the context of domestic violence.

## LINKING SURVIVORS WITH POST-SEPARATION ADVOCACY

- ✓ Have an advocate available at the visitation program at regularly scheduled times.
- ✓ Provide brochures or other material in parent waiting areas that explain the community-based advocacy available to victims of battering.
- ✓ Develop and/or provide a video that addresses post-separation safety and related advocacy questions and resources.
- ✓ Assist parents who are victims of battering in identifying when it would be helpful to ask for an advocate.
- ✓ Ensure that all staff and community partners can identify and support meaningful resources and referrals. Avoid working in isolation.
- ✓ Participate in a community response to identify the gaps in post-separation support services for survivors of domestic violence and develop and expand these services (e.g., legal services, housing assistance, employment, job training assistance, individual and group support).

## BUILDING INTENTIONAL RELATIONSHIPS

### **Working with batterers**

- ✓ Prepare staff to understand and recognize battering beliefs and behaviors; acknowledge their fears and provide time to practice talking and interacting with batterers.
- ✓ Send staff to the training that domestic violence program staff and volunteers complete.
- ✓ Invite the batterer intervention program to conduct a training series on the tactics of battering.
- ✓ Make the physical space and program environment a welcome place to go each week (i.e., distinct from other aspects of a court order, such as drug testing, batterer intervention program, and alcohol or drug treatment).
- ✓ Be clear and upfront about the visitation program and its purpose. Acknowledge that referrals are made to the visitation program because of a domestic violence

allegation or finding; provide a sample of the observation forms that are used and an explanation of how they will be used.

- ✓ Determine individual circumstances and supervision needs around danger and safety rather than taking a one-size-fits-all approach or assuming that all battering parents are the same.
- ✓ Ensure that the voices of the adult victim and children inform the approach and decisions when working with a battering parent who is coming to the visitation program.
- ✓ Begin relationships with clear expectations and boundaries.
- ✓ Help prepare battering parents for services. For example, talk about how it will feel to come to the center, how their children might greet them, what will happen when they are there, activities to do with their children, and questions their children might have and how to answer them.
- ✓ Develop a strong and consistent community response to battering. Acknowledge and agree that it may not be safe for all batterers to use a visitation program or to have access to their children.
- ✓ Provide opportunities for change and healing, but make certain that the safety of victims and children is the first priority.

### **Building safety-orientated relationships with adult victims of battering**

- ✓ Fit visitation services to individual circumstances and account for and revise according to changing safety needs over time.
- ✓ Ask about needs and expectations. Use questions such as:
  - o Here's what the program can do. How does that work for you?
  - o What do you need for you and your children to feel safe here?
  - o What's changed since you filed the divorce papers?
  - o What do we need to do differently for your safety now that you've moved out of the shelter?

- ✓ Develop or provide a guide for adult victims of battering about what to know about supervised visitation and exchange and how to request or object to it.<sup>20</sup>
- ✓ Provide a check-in time with each parent either at the end of a visit or at a more convenient time. For example, a brief phone call the next day might be more helpful to a mother who has had to get young, tired children into car seats or get everyone home via bus at the end of a work day and then make it to the visitation center on time.
- ✓ Link victims of battering with community-based advocates.
- ✓ Encourage victim parents to think about and communicate to their advocates or attorneys any concerns about transitions to less supervised access.
- ✓ Support safety planning that accounts for culture and identity (including the possibility that cultural beliefs, practices, and expectations might be used as tactics of abuse).

### **Building relationships with court partners**

- ✓ Invite judges and court personnel to tour the center.
- ✓ Develop relationships with the professionals that judicial decision-makers rely upon in making custody and visitation decisions, such as family court services and custody evaluators.
- ✓ Develop court referral forms for supervised visitation and exchange that are specific to domestic violence.
- ✓ Host local training for judges and court personnel with nationally recognized practitioners and researchers on the impact of battering on child and adult victims.
- ✓ Hold discussions with court partners about difficult kinds of decisions, such as cases where (1) use of the supervised visitation seems too dangerous for children, a parent, or staff; (2) children are reluctant or refuse to visit; or (3) the visitation program has concerns about someone's safety in the transition to less protective access, such as a jump from supervised visitation to unrestricted access. Use scenarios or hypothetical examples to avoid possible problems with ex parte communication in actual cases. (See Appendix 3, Tools and Resources, for links to

- possible sources of case examples.)
- ✓ Examine the referral process and the kinds of information courts should gather regarding danger and safety (e.g., police reports, sentencing recommendations, order for protection affidavits, and child welfare records). Determine what information should be shared with the visitation program and how it should be conveyed.
  - ✓ Invite court and judicial officers to train visitation program staff about how the court works, the types and function of court orders, and the kinds of decisions courts make related to the work of a visitation program.
  - ✓ Connect judges and court personnel with national forums and conferences on supervised visitation and domestic violence.
  - ✓ Avoid interacting with the courts and judicial officers solely via court and visitation program documents; develop face-to-face relationships.
  - ✓ Anticipate, plan, and be informed when new court and judicial officers are elected or rotate in to a new assignment; orient them to the supervised visitation program.
  - ✓ Provide courts with updated visitation program information, such as the referral process, hours of operation, security features, reasons for using visitation services, and staff training.

### **Accounting for diverse cultures and identities**

**Caution:** The goal is to build safety in ways that also acknowledge and support people's distinct cultures and identities. Safety of adult victims and their children must remain at the forefront, however. Read each of the following strategies as if it concluded with the following cautionary phrase: *in the context of safety for adult victims and children.*

- ✓ Invite diverse community organizations to walk through and critique the visitation program's space and procedures.
- ✓ Use staff meetings, ad hoc work groups, community members, and parents to help examine every aspect of the program's design and the implied and explicit

messages about who is welcome and how they are valued.

- ✓ Structure time and flexibility into all interactions with children and parents.
- ✓ Build processes to understand and acknowledge families' experiences with the courts and legal system, police, welfare, health care, and other intervening institutions, both individually and historically.
- ✓ Account for battering and the safety of adult and child victims without demonizing the abusive parent.
- ✓ Prepare staff to accommodate and switch between English and someone's preferred language.
- ✓ Recruit bilingual and bicultural staff and volunteers.
- ✓ Plan for and meet needs for language interpretation.
  - Screen and obtain personal recommendations for interpreters.
  - Be clear about the program's expectations and an interpreter's role in the visitation setting.
  - Use the least-invasive microphone and headset system.
- ✓ Provide opportunities for extended family to be involved and recognize that who is included in "family" has different meanings to people.
- ✓ Support food and music traditions.
- ✓ Minimize note taking during visits.
- ✓ Engage in collaborative self-assessment to determine: (1) the impact of the systems that supervised visitation represents on different communities; (2) the role each system or organization core partner has played in the oppression, exclusion, or isolation of specific communities; and (3) how culturally responsive the core partners and visitation program have been.
- ✓ Ask different communities to assess: (1) how the community views the Safe Havens/supervised visitation collaborative; (2) if the visitation program is a trusted resource in the community; and (3) whether the program is seen as part of the community or seen as an outsider or as not inclusive.

## Engaging community partners and the wider community

- ✓ Integrate supervised visitation and safe exchange into the larger community systems work and existing collaborations.
- ✓ Encourage deeper discussion and attention to issues of post-separation advocacy and keep such discussions prominent in the collaborative's work.
- ✓ Bring a redacted case file from another jurisdiction to a group of interveners from different fields and read it together. Examine where and how the visitation program and overall intervention help or hurt the victim of battering and her children. Examine where and how it helped or failed to help the batterer to acknowledge and begin to repair the harm. (See Appendix 3, Tools and Resources, for links to possible sources of case examples.)
- ✓ Participate in community activities and projects, such as projects addressing racial disparities or support for immigrant communities and resource or neighborhood fairs. Contribute to formal and informal networks and spend time in the "life" of the community.
- ✓ Engage diverse community members in providing training and staff development.

## WELCOMING AND INTRODUCING PEOPLE: ORIENTATION

Moving from the largely static, program-oriented perspective of "intake" to the more dynamic, person-centered process of orientation requires developing the base of knowledge and skills that prepare a visitation program and its workers to:

- ✓ Pay equal regard for the safety of child and adult victims.
- ✓ Recognize and account for batterers' use of post-separation tactics of power and control.
- ✓ Acknowledge and value families' unique identities and needs.
- ✓ Carry respectful and fair interactions throughout all aspects of a program's relationships with family members.
- ✓ Participate in community collaborations to address

domestic violence.

- ✓ Link child and adult victims with advocacy.

Find additional strategies in *New Perspectives on Supervised Visitation and Safe Exchange: Orientation* (<http://praxisinternational.org/library/supervised-visitation/>).

## TAKING A CRITICAL LOOK AT DOCUMENTATION

- ✓ Conduct a guided reading of several case files and ask these questions of each document and related process:
  - o Who needs protection and what kind of protection?
  - o What is the purpose of this form or document and how is it used?
  - o Why is this question asked?
  - o Who benefits from this information?
  - o How can this information be used to harm those in need of protection?
  - o Where does this form or report go from here and how is it used?
  - o How is the information collected here related to the protection and safety of child and adult victims of battering?
- ✓ Conduct a complete review of the legal parameters of confidential communication and documentation in the local jurisdiction.
- ✓ Develop a clear, legally sound policy around record-keeping practices and the limits of confidentiality.
- ✓ Develop a release of information process and document that allows the person granting the release to determine: (1) an expiration date and explanation of how to terminate the release before that date and how to extend it beyond that date; (2) a clear indication of to whom information can be released; (3) what information can be released; and (4) how information can be released, such as phone, fax, personal delivery, mail, or email.
- ✓ Develop a procedure to address the long-term security of information, including what records will be maintained at the conclusion of services and for how long, and what will be destroyed.

- ✓ Address safety and other considerations around data storage (in both paper and electronic formats).
- ✓ Review and address how families are informed of the visitation program's record-keeping practices and limitations of the protections in place.
- ✓ Convene a panel of survivors and advocates to review the forms, brochures, and other documents that family members complete and that explain visitation services.
  - Pay particular attention to how these documents are understood or misunderstood.
  - Explore ways in which presentation or completion of information about the visitation program and its services addresses people's distinct cultures and identities.
  - Discuss what the program should know about a survivor's experience and the best ways to gather that information.

## TAKING A CRITICAL LOOK AT SAFETY AND SECURITY

- ✓ Account for the fluid, changing safety needs of victims of battering and their children.
- ✓ Talk with adult victims about their needs; establish ways to have ongoing conversations about safety and security.
- ✓ Know the community and the people who use the program; understand the impact and meaning of each security feature for different communities.
- ✓ Consider the least intrusive methods of supporting safety for each family.
- ✓ Expand the understanding of security to include (1) factors that help each abused parent and child feel safe, (2) whether the program can realistically take the precautions needed, (3) court orders that restrict one parent's interaction with another, and (4) cultural, social, or environmental factors that increase or decrease safety.
- ✓ Build respectful relationships in ways that promote communication, identify ongoing safety needs, and reduce batterer hostility and aggression.
- ✓ Reach an agreement with the court that court papers

- (e.g., personal protection order, warrants) will not be served on a parent who is using the visitation center.
- ✓ Recommend periodic reviews or other hearings to monitor risk and compliance with court orders, as warranted to support safety.
  - ✓ Discourage the practice of log books or journals where parents write notes to one another.
  - ✓ Maintain separate files for each parent and child.

## SUPPORTING CHILDREN'S SAFETY IN THE CONTEXT OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

- ✓ Understand and maintain an ongoing discussion about the ways in which children's safety and well-being are linked to the safety and well-being of the adult victim parent.
- ✓ Recognize that children may want and need to maintain a relationship with the battering parent, regardless of the violence and abuse that has occurred.
- ✓ Develop a relationship, establish trust, and have ongoing conversations with each child using the program.
- ✓ Listen to children and allow them to be heard without judgment.
- ✓ Remain focused on how children define their own needs; avoid assumptions.
- ✓ Learn what would best contribute to a child's sense of physical and emotional safety.
- ✓ Help children establish safe and respectful ongoing relationships with each parent and sibling.
- ✓ Establish meaningful links with advocacy and support within the community.
- ✓ Create structure, limits, and predictability around visitation services.
- ✓ Provide frequent training to staff on child development, including cross-cultural aspects and specific considerations in the context of domestic violence.
- ✓ Engage the courts and law enforcement agencies to create child-friendly policies and protocols regarding children who refuse to visit.

# APPENDIX 3

# Tools and Resources

## Building Safe Havens - Tools and Resources

Communities now setting out to establish Safe Havens-oriented supervised visitation and safe exchange have far more available to them than those that took their first steps in 2002. Many individuals, organizations, national training and technical assistance providers, and supervised visitation centers have engaged in a process of collective thinking and experimentation that has helped articulate philosophy and define practice. Appendix 3 gathers the most relevant and useful references in one list. It identifies key sources of guidance and highlights a range of specific tools and where to find them. While new tools will emerge, those included here represent the state of the art as of the 2016 publication of *Lessons from a Decade of Change*.

## TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE COLLECTIONS AND SUPPORT

The following sources provide essential publications and training tools relevant to Safe Havens-oriented supervised visitation and safe exchange:

- **Battered Women’s Justice Project – National Custody Project**

<http://www.bwjp.org/our-work/projects/national-child-custody-project.html>

The National Custody Project seeks to increase safety for battered parents and their children while promoting fairness in all custody-related processes. It provides training and technical assistance to courts, legal and dispute resolution professionals, advocates and others working to resolve child custody.

- **Center for Court Innovation**

<http://www.courtinnovation.org/>

The Center for Court Innovation (The Center) offers free technical assistance, supported by the U.S. Department of Justice's Office on Violence Against Women (OVW), to jurisdictions across the United States interested in creating or expanding existing family, civil, criminal, and integrated domestic violence court projects.

The Center is the OVW designated comprehensive TA provider to Justice for Families grantees providing support to courts, supervised visitation centers, civil legal service providers and other legal system stakeholders. The Center has created materials on supervised visitation such as *Enhancing Collaboration Between Domestic Violence Courts and Supervised Visitation Services* and *Supervised Visitation: What Courts Should Know When Working with Supervised Visitation Programs* to provide support and guidance to courts and communities.

- **Futures Without Violence – National Institute on Fatherhood and Domestic Violence**

<https://www.futureswithoutviolence.org/engaging-men/national-institute-on-fatherhood-domestic/>

The National Institute on Fatherhood and Domestic Violence provides training and technical assistance to professionals who work with abusive fathers in different fields, including domestic violence advocates, supervised visitation centers, batterer intervention and fatherhood programs, judges, law enforcement officers, and child protection workers. The Institute has published a policy

framework for supervised visitation programs to use in creating opportunities for safety and change with men who use violence in their intimate relationships.



Futures Without Violence has published several practice guides related to supervised visitation, including those under its former name, the Family Violence Prevention Fund.

- **Inspire Action for Social Change**

<http://www.inspireactionforsocialchange.org>

Established by former directors of supervised visitation programs that were part of the Safe Havens Demonstration Initiative, the organization is a source for interactive training on documentation and on everyday practices and challenges in providing safe visitation and exchange services. The site includes links to a variety of Safe Havens-oriented publications.

- **National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges – Safe Havens Online**

<https://safehavensonline.org/>

Safe Havens Online is the primary, one-stop source of tools to support communities in establishing Safe Havens-oriented supervised visitation and safe exchange. The site includes an overview of the origins and history of Safe Havens, presentation and discussion of the Guiding Principles, a library of publications, educational training videos, virtual tours of visitation centers, and planning tools.

- **Praxis International – Supervised Visitation and Safe Exchange Archive**

<http://praxisinternational.org/library/supervised-visitacion/>

Between 2002 and 2010, Praxis provided technical

assistance to the Safe Havens Supervised Visitation and Safe Exchange Demonstration Initiative and other Safe Havens grantees. Resources developed during this period continue to support visitation programs and their community partners. The library includes publications related to program design and operation and many archived audio and video training presentations.

- **Vera Institute of Justice**

<https://www.vera.org/projects/supervised-visitation-initiative>

The Supervised Visitation Initiative (SVI) works with supervised visitation programs funded by the U.S. Department of Justice's Office on Violence Against Women to enhance their capacity to effectively and safely serve families who have experienced domestic violence. The initiative provides these programs with training, tailored consultation, and access to information on best practices from programs across the country.

## FOUNDATION: USEFUL READINGS

The Safe Havens grant program (now incorporated into the Justice for Families Program) has supported the writing of a wide range of practice guides and discussion papers related to supervised visitation and safe exchange in the context of battering and other forms of domestic violence. The following publications help build knowledge and skills related to the design and operation of Safe Havens-oriented services. They help explore Safe Havens' areas of greatest impact and innovation, including: the nature of post-separation battering; equal regard for the safety of adult and child victims of battering; engagement as a core element of building safety; supervised visitation and safe exchange as an extension of community advocacy and support; and judicial and community change in response to domestic violence.

## Principles and Frameworks

- ✓ *Guiding Principles – Safe Havens: Supervised Visitation and Safe Exchange Grant Program*  
National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges for the Office on Violence Against Women, 2007

Provides a discussion of the meaning and intent of each principle plus an accompanying set of standards and practices which include general expectations for meeting the principle plus concrete ways to accomplish it.

[https://safehavensonline.org/media/com\\_library/resources/24-guiding-principles-svp.pdf](https://safehavensonline.org/media/com_library/resources/24-guiding-principles-svp.pdf)

- ✓ *Building Safety and Repairing Harm: Lessons Learned from the Office on Violence Against Women Safe Havens Supervised Visitation and Safe Exchange Grant Program – Demonstration Initiative*  
Jane Sadusky for Praxis International, 2008

Presents the lessons and strategies that emerged from the experiences of the four demonstration initiative sites that included nine supervised visitation programs in four states: City of Chicago; City of Kent, WA; Counties of Santa Clara, Santa Cruz, and San Mateo, CA; and the State of Michigan.

<https://safehavensonline.org/resources/library.html>

- ✓ *Engage to Protect: Foundations for Supervised Visitation – Discussion Papers*

Published by Praxis International in 2009, this series of practice papers examines key aspects of framing Safe Havens-oriented supervised visitation and safe exchange.

1. *Recognizing and Understanding Battering*  
Ellen Pence and Jane Sadusky

[https://safehavensonline.org/media/com\\_library/resources/18-engage-to-protect-recognizing-battering.pdf](https://safehavensonline.org/media/com_library/resources/18-engage-to-protect-recognizing-battering.pdf)

2. *Engaging with Battered Women*  
Maren Hansen-Kramer, Julie Tilley, Beth McNamara,

and Jane Sadusky

[https://safehavensonline.org/media/com\\_library/resources/19-engage-to-protect-engaging-battered-women.pdf](https://safehavensonline.org/media/com_library/resources/19-engage-to-protect-engaging-battered-women.pdf)

3. *Engaging with Men Who Batter*

Maren Hansen-Kramer, Julie Tilley, Beth McNamara, and Jane Sadusky

[https://safehavensonline.org/media/com\\_library/resources/20-engage-to-protect-engaging-men-who-batter.pdf](https://safehavensonline.org/media/com_library/resources/20-engage-to-protect-engaging-men-who-batter.pdf)

4. *Informing the Practice of Supervised Visitation*

Melanie Shepard, Jane Sadusky, and Beth McNamara

[https://safehavensonline.org/media/com\\_library/resources/21-engage-to-protect-informing-practice-of-supervised-visitation.pdf](https://safehavensonline.org/media/com_library/resources/21-engage-to-protect-informing-practice-of-supervised-visitation.pdf)

5. *Crafting Policies that Account for Battering*

Ellen Pence and Jane Sadusky

[https://safehavensonline.org/media/com\\_library/resources/22-engage-to-protect-crafting-policies.pdf](https://safehavensonline.org/media/com_library/resources/22-engage-to-protect-crafting-policies.pdf)

✓ *On Safety's Side – Protecting Those Vulnerable to Violence: Challenges to Notions of Neutrality in Supervised Visitation Centers*

Martha McMahon and Ellen Pence for Praxis International, 2008

Explores the principle of equal regard for protecting adult and child victims and reexamines the idea that a supervised visitation center has an obligation to the court to be neutral in the “conflict between parents using a center.”

[https://safehavensonline.org/media/com\\_library/resources/26-on-safetys-side.pdf](https://safehavensonline.org/media/com_library/resources/26-on-safetys-side.pdf)

## Attention to Diverse Lives and Needs

- ✓ *Concepts in Creating Culturally Responsive Services for Supervised Visitation Centers*  
Oliver J. Williams for the Institute on Domestic Violence in the African American Community, 2007  
  
Assists supervised visitation programs and their community partners to examine how they can strengthen their services to support culturally diverse populations.  
  
[https://safehavensonline.org/media/com\\_library/resources/16-concepts-in-creating-culturally-responsive-services.pdf](https://safehavensonline.org/media/com_library/resources/16-concepts-in-creating-culturally-responsive-services.pdf)
- ✓ *Ozha Wahbegannis: Exploring Supervised Visitation and Exchange Services in Native American Communities*  
Lauren J. Litton and Oliver J. Williams for the Institute on Domestic Violence in the African American Community, in partnership with Mending the Sacred Hoop  
  
Highlights recommendations from discussion groups held with Native American professionals and consumers about how supervised visitation and safe exchange services can be crafted and implemented by tribal communities in ways that offer safety, respect, healing, health, and serenity.  
  
[https://safehavensonline.org/media/com\\_library/resources/27-ozha-wahbeganniss.pdf](https://safehavensonline.org/media/com_library/resources/27-ozha-wahbeganniss.pdf)
- ✓ *“You can’t be held accountable if you don’t count” – The Impact of the National Institute on Fatherhood, Domestic Violence, and Visitation (NIFDV) on the Capacity of Supervised Visitation Centers to Engage Men and Enhance Family Safety*  
Lisa Goodman, Margret Bell, and Jennifer Rose for Futures Without Violence, 2013  
  
Presents the results of surveys and conversations with Safe Havens grantee communities to identify lessons learned, obstacles to implementation, and steps to deepening visitation programs’ work, particularly in engaging with men who batter.

[https://safehavensonline.org/media/com\\_library/resources/34-nifdv-lessons-learned-2013.pdf](https://safehavensonline.org/media/com_library/resources/34-nifdv-lessons-learned-2013.pdf)

- ✓ *VOICES of Mothers and Fathers: Recommendations about Safety and Security Measures for Supervised Visitation and Exchange Centers Serving Families Who Have Experienced Domestic Violence*

Lauren Litton and Tiffany Martinez for the Institute on Domestic Violence in the African American Community, 2013

Reports the themes and recommendations from a series of discussion groups held in seven visitation centers across five states with mothers and fathers using visitation services provided by Safe Havens grantees.

[https://safehavensonline.org/media/com\\_library/resources/39-voicesofmothersandfathers13.pdf](https://safehavensonline.org/media/com_library/resources/39-voicesofmothersandfathers13.pdf)

## Policy and Practice

- ✓ *Designing Supervised Visitation and Exchange Centers that Promote Safety*

Lauren J. Litton and Tiffany Martinez for the Institute on Domestic Violence in the African American Community, 2013

Proposes standards, minimum requirements, and considerations around key features of facility design and security mechanisms in supervised visitation and safe exchange.

[https://safehavensonline.org/media/com\\_library/resources/38-designingcentersfinal1214.pdf](https://safehavensonline.org/media/com_library/resources/38-designingcentersfinal1214.pdf)

- ✓ *Creating Opportunities for Safety and Change in Supervised Visitation Programs: A Policy Framework for Engaging Men Who Use Violence*

Jennifer Rose and Beth McNamara for Futures Without Violence, 2015

Includes a range of tools to assist in policy development, including community readiness and asset mapping, policy examination chart, and case study application.

<https://s3.amazonaws.com/fwvcorp/wp-content/uploads/20160121112522/Policy-Framework-for-Engaging-Men-in-SV-final-2015.pdf>

- ✓ *New Perspectives on Supervised Visitation and Exchange: Orientation*  
Jane Sadusky for Praxis International, 2008

Presents an overview of a key shift in practice influenced by the experience of the Safe Havens Demonstration Initiative: the change from agency-centered intake to person-centered orientation as a framework for welcoming mothers, fathers, and children to supervised visitation and safe exchange when domestic violence is involved.

[https://safehavensonline.org/media/com\\_library/resources/25-new-perspectives-orientation.pdf](https://safehavensonline.org/media/com_library/resources/25-new-perspectives-orientation.pdf)

- ✓ *Safe Passage: Supervised Safe Exchange for Battered Women and Their Children*  
Jane Sadusky for Praxis International, 2010

Reviews key issues in supervised safe exchange, presents strategies to address those issues, and suggests policy and procedure changes that will help visitation programs deliver this critical service with as much skill and safety as possible.

[https://safehavensonline.org/media/com\\_library/resources/28-safe-passage-think-piece.pdf](https://safehavensonline.org/media/com_library/resources/28-safe-passage-think-piece.pdf)

- ✓ *Fathering After Violence: Working with Abusive Fathers in Supervised Visitation*  
Juan Carlos Areán for Futures Without Violence (formerly Family Violence Prevention Fund), 2007

Provides tools related to community and program readiness, cultural context, communication, and a continuum of practice in engaging with abusive men and visiting fathers who have been violent with their intimate partners.

[https://safehavensonline.org/media/com\\_library/resources/23-fathering-after-violence.pdf](https://safehavensonline.org/media/com_library/resources/23-fathering-after-violence.pdf)

- ✓ *Supervised Visitation Programs: Information for Mothers Who Have Experienced Abuse*  
Jill Davies for Futures Without Violence (formerly Family Violence Prevention Fund), 2007

An example of the kind of resource that a supervised visitation program might offer, the guide includes basic information about how visitation programs work and how mothers can prepare themselves and their children for the experience.

[https://safehavenonline.org/media/com\\_library/resources/39-voicesofmothersandfathers13.pdf](https://safehavenonline.org/media/com_library/resources/39-voicesofmothersandfathers13.pdf)

- ✓ *Beyond Observation: Considerations for Advancing Domestic Violence Practice in Supervised Visitation*  
Jay Campbell, Derrick Gordon, and Ona Foster for Futures Without Violence (formerly Family Violence Prevention Fund), 2008

Presents considerations for expanded practice along a continuum of supervised visitation and exchange services and different approaches, particularly those that are described as “supportive” or “therapeutic.”

[https://safehavenonline.org/media/com\\_library/resources/5-beyond-observation.pdf](https://safehavenonline.org/media/com_library/resources/5-beyond-observation.pdf)

- ✓ *Responding to Stalking: A Guide for Supervised Visitation and Safe Exchange Programs*  
Stalking Resource Center of the National Center for Victims of Crime, 2008

Addresses the intersection of stalking, domestic violence, and supervised visitation and safe exchange, including safety considerations and ways in which visitation programs can prepare themselves to respond.

[https://safehavenonline.org/media/com\\_library/resources/40-safe-haven-guide---stalking--1-.pdf](https://safehavenonline.org/media/com_library/resources/40-safe-haven-guide---stalking--1-.pdf)

## Demonstration Initiative Safety and Accountability Audits

Under the Safe Havens Program Demonstration Initiative, each grantee site selected and examined a question central to the overall design and function of Safe Havens-oriented supervised visitation and safe exchange (the “essential discussions” referenced in *Lessons from a Decade of Change*). The process included focus groups with parents using visitation and exchange services, interview and consultation with community partners, case reviews, and other activities. Each site published a report of its discoveries and recommendations related to the question it posed.

1. State of Michigan: What is the role of supervised visitation and safe exchange in a community response to domestic violence?  
[https://safehavensonline.org/media/com\\_library/resources/32-safety-audit-report-michigan.pdf](https://safehavensonline.org/media/com_library/resources/32-safety-audit-report-michigan.pdf)
2. City of Chicago: How can supervised visitation and safe exchange best account for people’s distinct cultures and identities?  
[https://safehavensonline.org/media/com\\_library/resources/30-safety-audit-report-chicago.pdf](https://safehavensonline.org/media/com_library/resources/30-safety-audit-report-chicago.pdf)
3. Counties of Santa Clara, Santa Cruz, and San Mateo, CA: How can supervised visitation and safe exchange produce and support safety for everyone involved?  
[https://safehavensonline.org/media/com\\_library/resources/29-safety-audit-report-south-bay-area.pdf](https://safehavensonline.org/media/com_library/resources/29-safety-audit-report-south-bay-area.pdf)
4. City of Kent, WA: How do families who might benefit from supervised visitation and safe exchange learn about it and access it?  
[https://safehavensonline.org/media/com\\_library/resources/31-safety-audit-report-kent.pdf](https://safehavensonline.org/media/com_library/resources/31-safety-audit-report-kent.pdf)

## FOUNDATION: USEFUL AUDIO AND VIDEO

The following audio trainings, webinars, and video presentations are particularly useful in establishing the Safe Havens-oriented philosophical framework and designing and implementing related programs and services. See the technical assistance collections referenced earlier for a wide range of archived material. Presentations can be found by title at the listed web address.

### Audio

- Strengthening Staff Skills: Engaging with Men, Women and Children in Supervised Visitation Centers

A three-part series covering (1) de-escalation and conflict management, (2) listening and engaging in dialogue, and (3) decision-making in a supervised visitation center.

<http://praxisinternational.org/library/supervised-visitation/>

- Crafting Visitation Center Policies

A three-part series addressing (1) tips for successful policy development, (2) architecture of a good policy, and (3) fatal flaws and remedies in writing policy, including attention to avoiding harmful, unintended consequences.

<https://safehavensonline.org/training-tools/audio-trainings.html>

- Documentation

How and what to record and report and to whom—i.e., documentation—is a key policy and practice issue for supervised visitation programs. The following audio trainings provide guidance:

- Documentation, Record Keeping, and Confidentiality
- Documentation Dilemmas

<https://safehavensonline.org/training-tools/audio-trainings.html>

## Webinars

- Foundational

A series of webinars covering the nuts-and-bolts of launching Safe Havens-oriented supervised visitation and safe exchange:

- Center Design and Site Selection
- Collaboration Building and Community Assessment
- Creating Mission and Vision Statements
- Crafting Policies and Procedures

<https://safehavensonline.org/training-tools/webinars.html>

- Enhancing Safety through Practice

The following webinars address the many dimensions of supporting safety in the context of battering and family members' distinct needs:

- Engaging Fathers in the Supervised Visitation Setting
- Supporting Families with Deaf Individuals in Supervised Visitation
- Working with Individuals with Limited English Proficiency
- Working with Interpreters: Practice Considerations for Visitation Centers

<https://safehavensonline.org/training-tools/webinars.html>

## Video

Since it was first established, the Safe Havens grant program has supported wide-ranging and collaborative training. Many conference plenaries and training presentations have been archived and remain accessible as valuable training tools. In addition to the examples included below, see the technical assistance collections referenced earlier for additional material.

The following video presentations address core issues related to safety and collaboration in providing supervised visitation and safe exchange.

<https://safehavensonline.org/training-tools/video-trainings.html>

- Balancing Safety and Access
- Fathering After Violence: Working with Abusive Fathers in Supervised Visitation
- Forging a Collaboration between Courts and Supervised Visitation Centers

- Working with the Visiting Parent Who is the Victim of Domestic Violence

The following presentations from a regional Safe Havens grantees' conference are particularly useful for prompting discussion about cultural accessibility and respect in supervised visitation services, as well as key areas of policy and practice.

<https://safehavensonline.org/training-tools/regional-conferences-workshops-plenaries.html>

- Using Supervised Visitation Centers: Perspectives from Women of Color
- When Women Use Violence in Intimate Relationships
- Intervening for Safety
- Balancing Safety and Accessibility
- Recognizing and Responding to Stalking
- Welcoming LGBTQ Parents and their Children into Supervised Visitation
- Crafting and Revising Policies and Procedures
- Fostering Resilience in Children in Immigrant Families
- Managing Information Safety and Fairly in Supervised Visitation
- Voices of Mothers and Fathers: Recommendations about Safety and Security Measures

# ENDNOTES

- 1 “Domestic violence” is a reference used throughout this guide because the primary focus of supervised visitation programs and services established under Safe Havens has been adult and child victims of domestic violence. It is used as shorthand for the entire scope of Safe Havens, however, and “adult and child victims” should be read to include victims of domestic violence, sexual assault, stalking, dating violence, and child abuse.
- 2 The demonstration initiative communities included the City of Chicago, Illinois; the City of Kent, Washington; Santa Clara, San Mateo, and Santa Clara Counties, California; and the State of Michigan.
- 3 “Supervised visitation program” will be used throughout to represent supervised visitation and safe exchange programs generally, with distinction as necessary to address the differences in context and structure.
- 4 Along with the Office on Violence Against Women, technical assistance (TA) partners for the Safe Havens demonstration initiative included the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges, Praxis International, and the Supervised Visitation Program National Steering Committee.

As Safe Havens developed, additional TA partners included the Vera Institute for Justice, Futures Without Violence, Inspire Action for Social Change, ALSO (Alliance of Local Service Organizations), Supervised Visitation Network, and IDVAAC (Institute on Domestic Violence in the African American Community). See Appendix 3, Building Safe Havens: Tools and Resources.

- 5 <https://www.justice.gov/ovw/grant-programs#gsfj>
- 6 See video profiles of communities consulted for the retrospective project at Safe Havens Online, <https://safehavensonline.org/>.
- 7 See “Equal Regard” in *Building Safety, Repairing Harm* at [https://safehavensonline.org/media/com\\_library/resources/37-building-safety.pdf](https://safehavensonline.org/media/com_library/resources/37-building-safety.pdf).
- 8 See “Intentional Relationships,” in *Building Safety, Repairing Harm* at [https://safehavensonline.org/media/com\\_library/resources/37-building-safety.pdf](https://safehavensonline.org/media/com_library/resources/37-building-safety.pdf).
- 9 Established in 1999, the National Judicial Institute on Domestic Violence (NJIDV) is a partnership of Futures Without Violence, the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges, and the Office on Violence Against Women. It provides training and technical assistance on developing and enhancing judicial skills in managing domestic violence, sexual assault, and stalking cases. See <https://njidv.org/>.
- 10 Access the Community Tool Box at <http://ctb.ku.edu/en>.
- 11 Developed by Praxis International, *Will You Hold My Child?* is a scripted dramatic production on intervening in domestic violence cases involving children: <http://praxisinternational.org/product/will-you-hold-my-child/>. The Washington State Coalition Against Domestic Violence developed *In Her Shoes: Living with Domestic Violence* as a simulation to use with a wide range of interveners and community

members: <http://wscadv.myshopify.com/products/in-her-shoes-living-with-domestic-violence>.

- 12 Developed by Praxis International, the Safety and Accountability Audit (or Safety Audit) is a problem-solving tool used by interdisciplinary groups and community-based advocacy organizations to further their common goals of enhancing safety and ensuring accountability when intervening in cases involving battering and other forms of domestic violence. The Safety Audit discovers how systems organize and coordinate practitioners, directly and indirectly, to approach and act on cases in specific ways. It is primarily concerned with uncovering and analyzing gaps between what people need when they become involved in complex institutions and what the institution actually provides. Safety Audit tools include interviews and conversations with people about their experiences, mapping the steps and intersecting actions involved in case processing, interviewing and observing workers, and analysis of policies, forms, case records, and other documents related to how an agency or system intervenes. As part of the Safe Havens Demonstration Initiative, Chicago and the other sites each conducted a Safety Audit related to supervised visitation and safe exchange (see *Essential Discussions*, later in this guide). For information about the Safety Audit method, see <http://praxisinternational.org/institutional-analysiscommunity-assessment-2/what-is-a-safety-audit/>.
- 13 See descriptions and links to these experiential training tools at footnote 11.
- 14 <https://safehavensonline.org/guiding-principles.html>
- 15 See the discussion in the report of the Safety and Accountability Audit conducted by the City of Chicago Safe Havens Demonstration Initiative at

[https://safehavenonline.org/media/com\\_library/resources/30-safety-audit-report-chicago.pdf](https://safehavenonline.org/media/com_library/resources/30-safety-audit-report-chicago.pdf).

- 16 See “Essential Discussions” in *Building Safety, Repairing Harm* at [https://safehavenonline.org/media/com\\_library/resources/37-building-safety.pdf](https://safehavenonline.org/media/com_library/resources/37-building-safety.pdf).
- 17 For example, a review of recent studies examining custody evaluators’ beliefs about domestic abuse concluded that if “evaluators’ beliefs are associated with outcomes – and if, as we observe, many of the most commonly held beliefs are negative beliefs about battered mothers – then it is no wonder that outcomes are so often disconnected from the real life experiences of battered mothers and their children.” See Gabrielle Davis, *Custody Evaluators’ Beliefs About Domestic Abuse*, Battered Women’s Justice Project, December 2011, at [http://www.bwjp.org/assets/documents/pdfs/custody\\_evaluators\\_beliefs\\_about\\_domestic\\_abuse.pdf](http://www.bwjp.org/assets/documents/pdfs/custody_evaluators_beliefs_about_domestic_abuse.pdf).
- 18 In 1980, the Domestic Abuse Intervention Project in Duluth, MN, began the groundbreaking work to define coordinated community response in the setting of the criminal legal system response to battering. See <http://www.theduluthmodel.org/about/index.html>. Many communities have since expanded upon and adapted similar approaches to interagency and survivor-oriented collaboration in the many systems that respond to domestic violence, sexual assault, stalking, dating violence, and child abuse. This collective work has shaped the concept of coordinated community response, which has been a central feature of the Violence Against Women Act. See <https://www.justice.gov/opa/blog/celebrating-17-years-violence-against-women-act>.

- 19 Adapted from *Building Safety, Repairing Harm: Lessons and Discoveries from the Office on Violence Against Women's Safe Havens Supervised Visitation and Safe Exchange Grant Program – Demonstration Initiative*. Praxis International, 2008. Used with permission. Access the original publication at [www.praxisinternational.org](http://www.praxisinternational.org).
- 20 One example is *Supervised Visitation Programs: Information for Mothers Who Have Experienced Abuse*, Jill Davies, Family Violence Prevention Fund, 2007. The pamphlet is available at [www.endabuse.org](http://www.endabuse.org).





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