

# **RECOMMENDATIONS FOR SUPERVISED PARENTING TIME**

## **Birth to Two Years**

Children in the age range of birth to approximately six months do not have the stamina that older children have. They nap more frequently. Their attention spans are not long, and their verbal skills are nonexistent. Rather than assign a child of this age and their parent to a three to four hour visitation period once a week, the visitation should be limited to approximately an hour, and it should be repeated several times per week. For instance, an infant would fare well seeing the absent parent one hour at a visit, on visits alternating between Monday, Wednesday, Friday and Saturday or Sunday. In most cases, this allows the child to develop a bond with the non-residential parent, while at the same time not subjecting the child and the parent to long drawn-out periods when both have become tired and bored. This will not help the child to develop a positive bond with the visiting parent. Flexibility is key. If the child and parent must maintain a visitation schedule over the period of several years, the duration of each visit can be increased as the child matures, depending upon how well the child's temperament tolerates the visit. If the child is easy-going, it is feasible to increase the visitation period to what the child will tolerate. If the child becomes easily bored or tired, increases in the visitation period should be carefully considered. An overtired, bored child is much less likely to look forward to visits than a child whose needs have been closely considered. The child's age and developmental level often go hand in hand, but occasionally children with special needs must be more carefully considered. If a very young child has not seen the non-custodial parent in several months, the visitation period should be gradually increased, remain consistent as to the days and times, and if at any time during the initial visits, the child appears alarmed or frightened, termination of the visit should be considered. Visitation is to allow and facilitate a child developing or maintaining a positive relationship with their non-residential parent; it should not become a punishment for the child. If prior to the ordered supervised visits, the child has had a close relationship with the non-custodial parent, it may be much easier to gradually increase the time the child spends visiting.

From about six to twelve months, the child is beginning to hold objects, develop routines, and attempt to imitate language. At this age, the child may be learning to sit up, roll over, stand with support, self-feed finger foods and drink from a cup. The child continues to nap, but with less frequency. The parenting time/visitation periods should remain frequent and consistent, and depending upon the child's temperament, may increase in length.

From twelve to eighteen months up to two years, the child has usually learned to walk, is becoming more verbal, has begun to understand the word "no," and is beginning to verbally express wants and needs. Children this age will often play near the parent but not with the parent, something the visiting parent needs to understand so that they do not feel frustration when the child turns from them to a toy. With some children this age, stranger anxiety or separation anxiety occurs, so if the parent has not seen the child for several months, there may be a period of crying and discomfort when the child is first placed with the visiting parent. In fact, when the child is taken from the bringing parent by the visitation staff, a tantrum may ensue. It is important for the bringing parent not to interpret this as the child not wanting to see the visiting parent, but more as a normal

## **RECOMMENDATIONS FOR SUPERVISED PARENTING TIME**

reaction. The visitation should be allowed to occur, unless after a reasonable period of time, the child remains hysterical and inconsolable.

Other less important factors should also be considered. For instance, if possible, the child's schedule should be thought out. A child will be less likely to react positively to visits if they must miss certain activities that are in their routines, such as regular therapy visits or exercise regimens such as swimming with mom. Try to schedule around the child's naps. Engaging in feeding routines can help in strengthening the bond between the child and non-custodial parent. It can help normalize the otherwise nonstandard environment of the visitation center. Therefore, it is good to encourage the visiting parent to bring meals or snacks, unless there are health or safety reasons why this is not appropriate.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS FOR SUPERVISED PARENTING TIME**

### **Two to Three Years**

From ages two to approximately three years, the amount of time spent in supervised settings may be increased to two to three hours, but should continue to be several times per week. During this period, the child's verbal skills are rapidly increasing and the child is often more social and interactive. A child this age is capable of taking instruction, such as "put the doll on the chair." There are elementary games and activities that the parents can participate in together, such as counting games, learning colors, learning body parts, learning songs. Attention should continue to the child's routine, and care should be taken not to interrupt that routine. Visitation should not be scheduled during a child's regular naptime, unless the visiting parent wishes to spend the time watching the child sleep or in dealing with a cranky toddler. However, it should be noted that there have been instances where the custodial parent has attempted control the non-custodial parent's access to the child using naptimes as an excuse. Children this age often enjoy interacting with other children, so again a visiting parent should not take it personally if the child wants to wander into other family groups.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS FOR SUPERVISED PARENTING TIME**

### **Three to Five Years**

Visitation for a child in this age group may be increased in amount of time spent with the parent, and if necessary, decreased in frequency. Visitation periods of two hours twice a week are reasonable. A child this age can understand more abstract concepts, but it is still recommended that when a parent explains when the next visit will occur, they tell the child in a more concrete way. Rather than “I will see you in a few days”, tell the child “I will see you when you have been to school two more days.” Children this age have begun to learn their last names and know the name of their street. Children this age often model after their same sex parent, so if the visiting parent is a father and the child is a female, the father should not be upset if the child wants to do things like mommy. Likewise, if the child returns from the visit imitating daddy, when the child is a boy, the bringing mother should not be upset. Of course, parents need to be vigilant for inappropriate behaviors by either sex child.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS FOR SUPERVISED PARENTING TIME**

### **Five to Nine Years**

Children in this age bracket are attending school, learning many new things, and developing close same sex friendships. These children know what foods they like to eat. They are beginning to play games, such as simple card or board games. They are more aware of their sexual orientation, such as “I am a girl.” They are beginning to understand the difference between right and wrong, but they have a difficult time understanding that sometimes good people do not always do good things, and that just because someone is bad (criminal), they can also do good things. For children in this age group, there are no shaded areas of morality. During visitation, reading books, playing games, doing homework, and doing art projects are good activities. Having meals together, if the visitation situation permits, also helps with the parent-child bonding.

For visitation, a regular routine is important. Children this age tolerate two to three hour visits in the same frequency as children in the three to five age group. However, it is important to realize that if there is a Boy Scout camp-out scheduled for the weekend, and the child must miss it to visit with the non-custodial parent, the child will not react favorably to that parent. Parents who are visiting their children in supervised settings must be more tolerant of times when the child may not want to have visitation because they are involved in other activities.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS FOR SUPERVISED PARENTING TIME**

### **Ten to Fifteen Years**

The older the child becomes, the less likely they are to want to engage in visitation with their non-custodial parent in a supervised setting. It is embarrassing. It interferes with time on the telephone, school activities, time with friends. Parents become less important in a child's mind at this age. However, parents should not let children dictate whether or not they have parenting time with the non-custodial parent. Changes in the schedule should be allowed to occur as long as parenting time continues. Parents should attempt to schedule around times when children have, or are likely to have, activities scheduled. A child will be much more likely to want regular time with the non-residential parent if it does not occur on Friday night when a party, dance or a sleepover may occur. Children need parents to understand that the closer a child comes to adolescence, the more likely that child will be to seek autonomy. The child's primary job is to discover their own identity. Also, as they approach adolescence, there is often great concern about their changing bodies. Parents should be careful to safeguard a child's sense of self, and not tease about facial hair, changing voices or developing breasts.

It is at this period that the frequency of visitation may decrease. This has nothing to do with the suitability of the visiting parent or the child's love for that parent. It has everything to do with the child's need to become a separate individual. Recommended visitation is at least once per week with duration of three to four hours or longer if possible. For visitation, be prepared to listen to the week's activities, or be prepared for very little verbal interaction. There may be frequent arguments, simply to disagree. Social interaction with the parent depends on the child's comfort level, temperament, and closeness of the bond with the non-custodial parent. Children in this age are beginning to become more rebellious, and therefore parenting time may have to be flexible. Punishment, such as groundings for refusal to visit with the non-custodial parent, may cause more problems than it solves.

# **RECOMMENDATIONS FOR SUPERVISED PARENTING TIME**

## **Sixteen to Eighteen Years**

Rarely do we see children ordered to have supervised parenting time in this age range. Young persons in this age are very tied into their school and social activities and friends. They often have little time for the parent with whom they are residing, not to mention taking time to visit with a parent who does not live with them. Parents should not allow themselves to be angered by this, because it represents normal development. Children in this age group are often more rebellious, and they may flatly refuse to visit if made to go when they have other activities planned. Negotiating parenting time is best. Yet, this may not be practical if the parents have been ordered to use a standard visitation program or a therapist. Negotiated parenting time works best if another family member such as an aunt or grandparent can supervise the parenting time. Frequent telephone contact is recommended when the children have activities that preclude frequent visitations.

During this time, young people are planning for the future, looking into careers and college. They are more goal-oriented. They are often more concerned with the happenings of the world: politics, famines, and environmental concerns. During visits, they may want to engage in deep discussions in order to determine where you stand in regard to their developing beliefs and values. They may be experimenting with their sexuality, and parents who act as if this is a taboo subject risk the child not communicating both on this subject and in other areas of real concern. There is a lot of peer pressure, and parents should be prepared to talk about other subjects that are not always comfortable, such as smoking, drinking, and use of illicit drugs. There may be times when the child will subject their parent to an uncomfortable discussion just to see how far they can push them to talk about difficult topics.

**Sunni Ball, MA, DAPA  
Domestic Relations Program Manager  
CASA of the Pikes Peak Region**