

Ask-An-Expert

This segment will allow Supervised Visitation Program grantees an opportunity to interact with other grantees on problem-solving exercises and ask subject matter experts questions about topics relevant to the Supervised Visitation Program grantees and their collaborative partners.

 Safe Havens:
Supervised Visitation and Safe Exchange Grant Program

Ask an Expert

When Children Refuse to Visit
November 18th, 2013
Jennifer Rose

The goals of this Ask –an-Expert Segment:

- Explore reasons why children, youth, and teens refuse and/or are reluctant to visit.
- Discuss strategies for supporting children, youth, and teens who refuse to visit.
- Examine practices for working with families and the community when children refuse to visit.
- Clarify the role of visitation centers and child refusals.

Emily and Felicia

Emily and Felicia have been using your center for the past month. Emily is always really excited to visit with her dad and Felicia is reluctant. In a check in, Felicia tells you this is really stupid and a waste of time. She only comes because she wants to protect Emily. When they show up for their visit, Felicia tells you she is not going and if she is not going neither is Emily.

We should: (Poll)

- A. Talk the girls into going on the visit.
- A. Allow Felicia to skip the visit but have Emily visit her dad.
- A. Offer alternatives.

Why do children and youth refuse visits?

- They are afraid.
- They have other things they would like to do.(eg. birthday parties, going to the movies, hanging with friends)
- They just don't feel like it.
- They feel conflicted loyalties
- Others?

Pressure:

- Parents waiting to see their child(ren).
- Court orders.
- Avoid conflict.
- Desire to have a "good" visit.
- Its our role.
- Time.

Strategies that support children, youth, and teens

- Facilitate orientations with children, youth and teens.
- Create on-going and regular check- in's with children, youth, and teens.
- Provide options for young people that are supportive and non-coercive.
- Work with mothers and fathers to support their children and their children's decisions.

Sandra, a 6-year-old girl, asks, pulls, pushes, and begs to have her mom come into the visit with her father. She says she will not go unless her mom can come too. She starts to cry and grabs onto her mom.

What should we do to support Sandra? (Poll)

- A. Take her aside and talk with her about why she doesn't want to visit.
- B. Tell her that her dad is very excited to see her and he has brought something special.
- C. Talk with Sandra and her mom separately and ask for mom's help.
- D. Just let Sandra leave and try again next time.

Additional strategies to help centers account for children's unique needs

- Set up services with flexibility so the process can be child led.
- Work with both parents to support their child(ren).
- Think outside the box.
- Let go of the idea of a "good" visit

Juan is 14 years old and is refusing to go into the visitation room to visit his mom. He has been visiting for the past 4 months without any issues and often tells you that he really misses his mom and wishes he could have more visits.

What do you think is going on for Juan?(Poll)

- A. He suddenly decided he hates his mom.
- A. He had a party he wants to attend.
- B. He just doesn't feel like being at the center today.
- A. Dad is manipulating him and talking badly about his mom.

Working with your community

- Co-create your child refusal policy with your community partners.
- Facilitate open conversations with your courts and partners about your role as a visitation provider.
- Advocate for children's autonomy and ability to make decisions.
- Work with law enforcement around your policies and practices pertaining to child refusals.

Clarifying our Role

1. As visitation center staff it is not our role to "investigate" or "diagnose" the issue but it is our role to support each child coming to the center.
2. Our role as a visitation program is NOT to make visits happen. Our role is to support safety.

What are your biggest challenges with children, youth, and teens who refuse to visit?

What are our opportunities for empowering and supporting children, youth, and teens?

DISCUSSION

Thank you for the work you do everyday!

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Thank You For Attending

Thank you for attending today's segment. For more information, or to inquire about training or technical assistance, please visit safehavenonline.org or contact Michele Robinson, Program Manager with the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges at mrobinson@ncfci.org or (775) 784-6427.



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