

SUPERVISED VISITATION STEP DOWN PLAN PROCEDURES

The Supervised Visitation Program offered through the Court is designed to provide a safe, structured and relaxed environment for visitation between child(ren) and their parents. Many of the cases that are referred to the visitation program include, among other things, reunification of parent and child, absconding, drug or alcohol abuse and physical abuse.

After visitation begins, participants are re-evaluated by the Court at a mandatory 90-day review hearing. The hearing is designed to monitor the progress of the parties, determine the parameters of visitation and to ensure that cases do not remain in the program indefinitely. The Court's goal is to facilitate the visitation process and to assist the parties in a step down plan from direct supervised visits to unsupervised visits while not compromising the child's safety or emotional well-being.

The Judge or Master will be provided copies of all observation reports and feedback session notes prior to the 90-day review hearing to assist with changing the parameters of the visits, if appropriate. The step down plan is for reunification cases after 3 (three) months in the program. All other cases should not be considered for step down until 6 (six) months in the program has been completed or approximately 12 (twelve) visits.

Once the case has been in the Supervised Visitation Program for the specified period of time, the Court Evaluator will review the file and if appropriate, provide a recommendation for step down to the assigned Judge or Master. A memo of recommendation and all supporting reports will be forwarded prior to the hearing. Once Family Division Services receives a copy of the signed order, the Step Down Plan will begin at the party's next scheduled visit.

The phases of the step down plan are as follows:

- Phase I – Consists of visits as they are currently being conducted.
- Phase II – This phase would allow the parent to have visits (1 ½ hours) without the presence of a monitor in the room. However, the visit will be observed from the outside through an observation window. This will allow the child to see the supervisor and provides a higher level of comfort.
- Phase III – This phase is similar to Phase II however, a video camera is used to record the observation instead of having a supervisor view through a window. This will allow the opportunity to evaluate the child's comfort level while being alone with the parent.

Phase III will begin with weekly visits (1 ½ hours) between the visiting parent and child(ren) instead of the traditional bi-weekly visits. Although the visits are being monitored, Phase III introduces the child to a one on one visit with the parent without presence of a supervisor. This type of change in routine will require a higher level of comfort for the child(ren) and more frequent interaction with visiting parent.

- Phase IV – A **2 ½ hour visit** that permits more freedom by allowing the parent and child to visit outside of the confines of the observation room currently provided. One scenario may be for the parent and child to have lunch together in a mall with the monitor being part of the lunch group. This allows for observation of parenting skills in a different atmosphere and possibly under more challenging circumstances.
- Phase V – This stage also consists of a **2 ½ hour visit** and would allow the parent to take the child away from the facility, without a monitor, for a specified period of time. The

parent will be obligated to return the child at a time designated by Family Trauma Services. A brief feedback session will be conducted with the child, if appropriate, to discuss the child's comfort level and their feelings on the visit. The parent will also participate in a brief feedback session and the staff may conduct a joint session as well.

- Phase VI – The parent can have visits independently at times and dates specified by the Court or agreed to by the parties.

Once it is appropriate to implement the step down plan, a new Court order should be signed designating that the step down plan will commence and a copy of the order forwarded to Family Division Services. After the new order is signed, it will be faxed to Family Trauma Services, Inc. and Phase II should begin at the next scheduled visit.

Each phase will consist of at least 2 (two) visits and the supervisor shall determine when it is appropriate to advance to the next phase. Observation reports will still be provided to the Court but will contain less information and limited observations as the participant's advance from phase to phase.