

VOICES

of
Mothers and Fathers



Recommendations about Safety and Security Measures
for Supervised Visitation and Exchange Centers Serving
Families Who Have Experienced Domestic Violence

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NOVEMBER 2013

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The authors would like to thank everyone who contributed to the creation of this document. We are particularly grateful to the mothers and fathers who participated in the discussion groups and bravely shared their experiences to help improve supervised visitation and exchange services for families experiencing domestic violence, sexual assault, child abuse, or stalking. We would also like to thank the supervised visitation and exchange centers that volunteered to open their programs to feedback, assisted in recruiting parents, and graciously offered space in which to hold the discussion groups. Finally, without the support of the Institute on Domestic Violence in the African American Community and the Department of Justice, Office on Violence Against Women, this project would not have been possible.



This project is supported by grant #2009-TA-AX-K075 awarded by the Office on Violence Against Women, Office of Justice Programs, U.S. Department of Justice. Points of view in this document are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official position or policies of the Office of Justice Programs, U. S. Department of Justice.

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OVERVIEW

It is well documented that when there is a history of domestic violence the violence often does not end because the parties have separated or ended their relationship. Instead, the tactics used to exert control over a victim shift; this is especially true when the adult victim and batterer have children in common.¹ When there is a history of domestic violence, visitation or parenting time² can be an opportunity for the perpetrator of violence to continue to inflict physical or psychological harm on their children and former partner.³

To promote adult victim and child safety in situations where there is domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, child abuse or stalking, the Violence Against Women Act authorized the creation and implementation of the Safe Havens: Supervised Visitation and Safe Exchange Grant Program (Supervised Visitation Program). The Department of Justice, [Office on Violence Against Women](#), began administering the Supervised Visitation Program in 2002. The [grant program](#) was designed to help communities develop and expand supervised visitation and exchange services

that reflect a clear understanding of the above referenced issues for families experiencing those situations.

Communities that receive the grant funds are directed to use the program's [Guiding Principles](#).⁴ The six principles⁵ provide a philosophical framework for grantees to approach their work and to assist them in thinking about how to achieve safe, respectful, and meaningful services for adult victims and their children. Supervised visitation and exchange centers (centers) are unique compared to most traditional domestic violence services. In fact, centers are the one service where all family members are seen and are directed to be in the same location at approximately the same time. Therefore, a different lens must be applied when seeking to achieve short- and long-term safety for adult victims and children.

In the Supervised Visitation Program, and throughout the [Guiding Principles](#), the concept of safety is explored in a broad way. It encompasses traditional safety procedures – such as safety planning, installing and using security mechanisms, and providing culturally relevant services – but also asks centers to spend time in

building relationships with all family members in order to create individualized and respectful services, and to develop flexible policies and practices that account for the safety of the adult victim and child, regardless of the victim's custodial status. It also acknowledges that supervised visitation centers should not operate in isolation and requires communities and systems to work in partnership to build a holistic continuum of responses for families experiencing domestic violence, stalking, child abuse, and sexual assault.

As the Supervised Visitation Program grantee communities began to incorporate the Guiding Principles into their work, they faced challenges and encountered differing opinions about how to balance providing a safe environment with creating a welcoming, friendly and respectful environment, and doing both within a sustainable budget. Many of these conversations and challenges surrounded the hardware or security mechanisms used by centers, such as the use of metal detectors, law enforcement, wands, and panic buttons. Concerns were raised by grantees about a gamut of issues. Some expressed worry about cost. Others feared that safety procedures were intrusive, counterproductive, or culturally offensive. On the other end of the spectrum, others raised concerns that some centers were not using

any safety and security mechanisms. Or if measures were in place, that staff were not trained properly on how to use such mechanisms thereby increasing the risk to families and staff. Additionally, grantees struggled with configuring the center space to account for safety. Communities were required to minimize the opportunities for parents to have any contact with one another and plan a space that permits flexibility in service design, is manageable for staff, and serves its core purposes.



To better understand the effects of various security mechanisms and their impact on an individual's perception of safety and overall program satisfaction, it seemed imperative to hear directly from consumers about their experiences using supervised visitation and exchange centers. This report is a summary of the information gathered.⁶

DISCUSSION GROUPS

As a way to learn how parents perceive and experience safety and security measures utilized by supervised visitation and exchange centers, discussion groups were held in which mothers and fathers shared their needs, concerns and recommendations related to center security.⁷ Centers helped recruit parents⁸ by posting information about the discussion groups and reaching out to parents who they thought may be interested in participating. Individuals self-selected whether to participate and were asked to contact discussion group facilitators⁹ directly for further screening and explanation of the discussion group's purpose and goals. The criteria for participation was that:

- Domestic violence was an issue in their family; and
- The individual has used or is using a supervised visitation and exchange center for any length of time.

The announcement explained that the discussion groups would be an opportunity for families who have a history of domestic violence to share their experiences and relay their suggestions on how to improve safety and security while using supervised visitation and exchange services. Discussion groups were divided by gender and not by custodial status or type of center service utilized. Therefore, mothers and fathers participated in separate discussion groups and within a group there could potentially be someone who visited their child, brought their child to visit the other parent, or used the center as a place to safely exchange the child.

Discussion groups were held at seven centers across five states.¹⁰ The goal was not to analyze how a particular center was operating but rather to hear from mothers and fathers from centers located in a variety of settings to determine if there was consensus as to what security measures and mechanisms and other factors contributed to their feeling of being safe. In order to have a more comprehensive sampling, the

Some of the questions asked include:

- ? How did you learn about the center and come to use supervised visitation or exchange services?
- ? When you first came to the center, was there anything about the security measures/mechanisms utilized that surprised you?
- ? How do you feel about the use of: metal detectors, wands, security officers, police officers (in uniform vs. plain clothed and carrying weapons/guns), security cameras, separate entrances, separate parking areas, separate visit rooms/shared visit rooms, staggered arrival and departures, lighting, windows, weapon policies, bathrooms, emergency doors, kitchens, etc.)?
- ? Were the security measures described in the center's policies or at your orientation carried out consistently?
- ? Did you ever feel the center was too strict when it came to security?
- ? What about the location of the center made you feel safe? Unsafe? Comfortable?
- ? What about the actual space, configuration, or structure of the center helped to make your children feel safe? Unsafe?
- ? Have you or your children ever felt unsafe while using the center?
- ? What rules did the center have that contributed to your sense of safety and security?
- ? Did you ever see or hear the other parent while you were on center premises?
- ? Have you or your belongings ever been searched? If yes, what impact did it have on you?
- ? Did you try other ways of visiting/exchanging children? If so, did you feel more or less safe when using those options and why?
- ? What would you like the center to do to help you feel safe/comfortable/respected?
- ? How can centers better take into account the violence your family experienced when they think about designing their services to help provide safety?



THEMES

Participants indicated they chose to be involved in the discussion groups as a way to support the development of centers across the country and also as a way to meet and hear from other parents in their similar situation. Both mothers and fathers were thankful for the existence of center services and seemed to have a good understanding of the demands placed on centers due to limited resources. Themes began to emerge as parents expressed what helped them to feel safe, respected, and supported. While the reasons for wanting, or not wanting, certain security mechanisms varied, universal agreement was voiced on many areas of concern for parents and are highlighted below.

Although it has been two years since we separated, when I hear his voice I have nightmares that night.

—A Mother

Centers Should Ensure that Parents Have No Contact with Each Other

Mothers and fathers agreed that centers should ensure **complete separation between parents** while parents are on the premises and services are occurring. Parents explained that there should not be any opportunities for them to see or hear one another, whether on the inside or outside of the center premises. Parents indicated that when they did see each other, it demonstrated that the center was unable to maintain their policies, which made them lose confidence in the center's ability to keep them safe.

Mothers felt most strongly about this issue stating that maintaining complete separation should be one of the center's highest priorities. Many mothers indicated that having any type of contact, even seeing his car or hearing his voice, caused them stress and trauma and greatly affected their perception of both physical and emotional

It takes me two days to prepare for the visit and two days after the visit to get myself together again. Seeing him while I'm there just makes it worse.

—A Mother

safety, regardless of how long they had been using the center or were separated from their former partner. Many parents talked about seeing the other parent in the parking lot or behind a door left open during an exchange, or about being watched through a window from inside the center.

Most fathers indicated that they did not have a strong reaction to seeing the other parent but it was easier when no contact occurred. None of the fathers stated that seeing or hearing the other parent caused fear or anxiety. However, some fathers reported being able to hear their former partner's voice due to shared or thin walls or open doors and were concerned that the other parent could hear their conversations with their children.

Even though seeing and hearing the other parent was a source of anxiety and fear for mothers in the discussion groups, all

participants reported that this type of contact was a common occurrence. Parents agreed that they preferred to have separate waiting areas, separate entrances into the building, and separate and designated parking areas where they could not view each other's vehicles. They suggested that more time be given for staggered arrival and departure to accommodate the parking situations and that centers come up with flexible options to drop off children. For example, some mothers suggested having the ability to drop off and pick up children curbside if parking was an issue. Additionally, many parents stated that in order to promote complete separation at all times, it was important for centers to carefully consider the placement of the bathrooms, waiting areas, and visit rooms. It was agreed that individuals should be able to access necessary areas without interrupting other services or compromising the separation between parents.

Security Mechanisms Are Necessary and Should Be Used Consistently

All discussion group participants believed that supervised visitation and exchange centers should utilize a variety of security mechanisms to help create a safe environment.¹³ Participants shared some

consistent sentiments. First and foremost, parents want their children to be safe, but said it was equally as important that their children like being at the center. Second, parents want centers to use security measures. Third, if a center is going to have security measures they should be in working condition and utilized. Fourth, center security measures should be used consistently and in a manner whereby all families are subjected to whatever is in place. Fifth, participants thought the safety and well-being of the center staff to be considered when implementing various safeguards.



Parents expressed different reasons for wanting security mechanisms. Mothers articulated that they wanted centers to use security mechanisms as a way to protect them and their children from further abuse. Whereas most fathers discussed security from the standpoint of their children's protection from others using the center.

Security Cameras

All discussion group participants stated that having cameras on center premises was a good idea. They believed and wanted cameras on the premises to be recording so that the footage could be accessed later if needed. Fathers felt that the cameras were unobtrusive and could help prove they were a good parent. Mothers expressed that they wanted cameras everywhere – at entrances, in waiting areas, visitation rooms, and parking areas – and they wanted the cameras monitored by staff or security personnel. Mothers also felt that having cameras in the parking lot was of utmost importance as many reported multiple incidents occurring in the parking area. Some mothers stated they would often find notes or letters left on their windshield when returning to their car after a visit or exchange, while others reported having damage done to their cars. Like the mothers, fathers also said the parking areas left parties exposed and often contact could be made if someone so desired.

Security Personnel

Discussion group participants agreed that employing security personnel (off-duty law enforcement or individuals hired through a security company) was an essential component in providing a safe environment. In addition to maintaining complete separation and using security cameras, employing security personnel ranked as a top mechanism for helping create a safe environment. Both mothers and fathers reported they felt most comfortable with security personnel who knew their family by name and routine. Thus, having the same officer during a particular family's visit or exchange was preferred.

The mothers who used centers with security personnel stated their presence made them feel safer. Furthermore, most



I like that he knows my name and just talks to me like a normal person (in reference to the police officer who works as security at the center).

—A Father

mothers said they would not feel safe at a center that did not have security personnel during times that visitation and exchange services were taking place. For those who used centers where security personnel were not employed, they agreed that their presence would enhance their feeling of safety. Additionally, mothers stated a preference for using off-duty law enforcement. Many of the mothers liked the idea that there was someone who gave an appearance of authority onsite and carried a badge and a gun. They recommended that officers be available to escort them to and from the center. Therefore, they wanted the security personnel to be highly visible with a distinct role. They also thought security personnel should understand battering behavior, domestic violence, and its impact on children.

Fathers also felt that security personnel were necessary. They did not express a preference for law enforcement over security officers but felt both helped increase staff safety and safety of their children, particularly from other visiting parents. Fathers wanted to ensure that security personnel understood their role and did not interfere with visits. Additionally, many fathers felt it was imperative for security personnel to be friendly, respectful, and nonjudgmental. If law enforcement was used, both mothers and fathers preferred that the officers be in plain clothes, which in their opinion, was most conducive to creating a more welcoming and child-friendly environment

Metal Detectors and Wands

Most of the fathers who participated in the discussion groups had experienced the use of wands or metal detectors by a center. While some did not like these mechanisms, they all said they understood the need for them. When screening occurred in open areas, fathers preferred that their children not have to see them being screened by wands or metal detectors because they felt it sent a negative message to their children, especially if they were taken aside or singled out. They did agree, however, that requiring every person who entered the

center to go through the same screening process would normalize the process so that if their children were present when the screening occurred they would not, as one man stated, “think I am some kind of dangerous criminal.”

Walking through metal detectors is somewhat degrading but doable. In the end, I really don't care. Ultimately whatever keeps my son safe is what I will do.

—A Father

In contrast, most of the mothers who participated in the discussion groups had not experienced walking through a metal detector or having a wand used on them. However, like the fathers, they were not opposed to such screening as long as everyone entering the center was required to go through the same process. They also felt a more universal screening process would have less of a negative effect on their children.¹⁴

Centers Should Ensure that Families Are Monitored While on Premises

This was a point of consensus for all mothers. Fathers were not opposed to the idea, but did not bring it up on their own as something that should be in place to enhance safety. Mothers firmly believed that the centers should be designed so that participants can be and are monitored at all times as they enter, leave, and move within the center's premises.



All the mothers reported feeling safest when staff or security personnel watched them arrive, enter, and depart the center and reported feeling uncomfortable with the idea that the other parent could enter the center premises and potentially wander around the building undetected. Some

participants reported having to walk down multiple hallways to get to the area where visits and exchanges occurred and expressed feeling anxious as they wondered if their former partner was lurking around each corner. Others said that visiting parents were required to use an elevator to gain access to the area where visits and exchanges occurred, but there was no monitoring of the elevator so an incident could happen inside the elevator or a parent could get off on another floor and find their way to where the adult victim was waiting.

Additional Input

Mothers and fathers also raised other issues while discussing their experiences with security measures. Although not directly related to security mechanisms and hardware, most of the discussion group participants felt that the issues highlighted below impacted their perception of overall safety and program satisfaction.

Center Location

Most discussion group participants stated it was important that supervised visitation and exchange centers be located in an area they viewed as safe. This encompassed the safety of the neighborhood, having places close to the

center where they felt safe and could wait (if there are no options to wait onsite), and that the center not be in an isolated area (e.g. only thing in operation in a strip-mall or large office building, at the end of a one-way/or dead-end street, or with nothing around it).

Child-Friendly Environment

All participants wanted their children to feel comfortable at the center and wanted all aspects of the center to be child-friendly and clean. They suggested that the center have a home-like environment equipped with activities for children of all ages including large visit rooms, childproof areas, and an outdoor space if feasible. Both mothers and fathers expressed being most concerned that the center was safe for their children and felt that this could be best accomplished by using security mechanisms.

Staffing Patterns

Mothers and fathers were concerned that centers frequently seemed to be understaffed during operating hours (e.g. only having one or two monitors). They talked about the safety risks posed to both staff and families due to the inability of staff to cover the various aspects of daily

I feel like I'm saying the same thing over and over and no one is doing anything about it (pertaining to different center staff monitoring the family).

—A Mother

operations or address a situation or crisis if it arose. Many discussion group participants talked about times when they were left unattended, when policies were not upheld, or when there was contact between parents as a result of staff shortage. While participants were cognizant of the tight budgets that centers operate under and were hesitant to make recommendations that could further financially burden centers, concern about the appropriate number and expertise of staff was repeatedly conveyed. All discussion group participants agreed that a center could not safely provide services without, at the very least, ensuring that there was staff available to offer support and provide back up if needed, who were not otherwise engaged in an exchange or supervised visit.

This whole thing is hard for me and sometimes I just need to vent.

—A Father

Another aspect of staffing patterns that was raised was consistency in the staff that worked with a family. As with security personnel being familiar with individual families, parents also preferred center staff who were familiar with their family. Many of the mothers felt strongly that poor communication among staff negatively impacted the level of safety that the center could provide. Using multiple staff members to facilitate their family’s visit or exchange was seen as the leading cause for this poor communication. Mothers relayed numerous stories of discussing potential safety concerns with one staff person only to have to repeat those same concerns to a different staff member who was to facilitate the next visit or exchange. Mothers were not confident that information essential to providing for their families’ safety was consistently shared with all staff. Many mothers shared experiences that highlighted ways in which insufficient communication and inconsistent staffing compromised adult and child safety and well-being.

Staff Expertise

Discussion group participants talked about staff expertise and the importance of staff building relationships with them. Both mothers and fathers indicated that when staff took the time to talk with and listen to them their overall experience at the center was much more positive. All discussion group participants felt it was essential that centers employ staff that not only understand the issues they face, but are nonjudgmental, supportive, respectful, and take the time to learn about each family’s unique needs. Staff referring them to community resources, supporting their role as a parent, and listening to them was across-the-board appreciated.



Mothers indicated that in conjunction with safety and security mechanisms, the relationship they had with center staff was one of the most important factors to influence their perception of safety for both themselves and their children. However, there seemed to be a great deal of variability, even within the same center, regarding the level of engagement between center staff and program participants. When asked what staff did to help them feel supported, mothers reported that staff took time with them and created services based on their individual needs. For example, one mother described how fearful she was that her former partner would try and approach her in the parking lot. Center staff had listened to her concerns and created a special arrival procedure that allowed her to stay miles away from the center until she was contacted and informed that the other parent was secured in the visit room.

Unfortunately, many of the mothers felt unsupported and reported that there was little opportunity to talk with staff and when they did talk it was typically about logistics, such as the time or place of the next visit or exchange. Many mothers reported that even when there was time to discuss their safety concerns, staff seemed dismissive. Most felt that center staff did not take their safety concerns seriously and that staff needed more training pertaining to domestic violence and its effects on the family, especially long-term.

I don't understand why I need to be punished for someone else doing something stupid (referring to the rules of the center).

—A Father

Many fathers also indicated they felt unsupported and judged. They said that it seemed staff already had preconceived and negative notions about them and their case. They reported feeling as if the staff were there only for mothers and always took the mother's side. Many fathers complained that visits or exchanges were cancelled for various reasons and stated that it did not seem to be a priority for staff to ensure they were rescheduled. This lack of follow-through by staff led to the fathers feeling disrespected and as if they had little value in the lives of their children. Visiting fathers said they better understood the situation when staff took time to explain why interventions occurred or visits did not happen. However, they also felt that sometimes staff was too quick to intervene and overreacted to what was typical child behavior or parent/child interaction. Fathers appreciated it when staff was encouraging and supported them as parents.

Support groups

Mothers and fathers wanted to participate in the discussion groups not only to help their respective visitation centers but also to meet other parents who are using the center. Both mothers and fathers expressed feeling isolated and unanimously liked the idea of having support groups for parents using center services.

Many mothers expressed a need for support groups that focused on the unique issues that arise post-separation. Mothers who had experience with traditional domestic violence support groups stated that although they were helpful in providing information and the support needed to end the relationship, advocates and other helping professionals were not as understanding or sensitive to the ongoing issues they experienced years later. Several mothers indicated it would have been easier to stay in the relationship and face abuse, than the ongoing abuse of the system, disregard of helping professionals, and realization now that life will remain difficult.

In addition to support groups, both mothers and fathers indicated that they wanted center staff to refer or link them to community resources that could assist them in meeting a variety of their needs.



Policies and Procedures

Discussion group participants understood the need for policies and procedures but wanted centers to implement policies that take into account the reality of their lives rather than those based on “worst case scenarios.” They wanted centers to carefully select and consistently uphold policies that support safety while at the same time not being so rigid as to not account for differences in each family.



All of the mothers and fathers that were visiting their children at centers stated that some of the center’s policies and procedures “made no sense.” The most commonly cited examples included policies regarding guests, gifts, food, and cameras. The visiting parents felt that if there were no safety concerns attached to those items for a particular family then those items should not be restricted. Parents indicated that for centers that provided snacks as a way to address safety through food, the options provided were limited and did not account for cultural differences. Parents recommended that centers have more diversity and options in snacks or allow food to be brought in.

All of the mothers voiced concerns regarding the seemingly inconsistent manner in which their respective centers upheld the policies and procedures that

were presented to them during their initial meetings with program staff. Often, mothers were assured that certain policies and procedures existed in order to keep them and their children safe. However, a common and serious example reported by many mothers was the lack of consistency in upholding the staggered arrival and departure procedures. Mothers reported that it was not uncommon to be pulling out of the parking lot or waiting at a nearby stop sign and seeing the other parent leaving the center.

When the center is closed
on Saturdays it places me
and my child at risk because
the exchange needs to be
done and I have to go
elsewhere to do it.

—A Mother

Mothers also relayed that when centers are closed on weekends or holidays it becomes extremely dangerous for them as their visits or exchanges still need to occur. They strongly urged centers to find a way to be open when exchanges and visits are ordered.

Screening of Belongings

Discussion group participants had varying opinions regarding policies implemented by some centers requiring the visiting parent to give staff all of their personal belongings. Some of the custodial mothers appreciated that the center required the visiting father to turn in his keys, identification, and any other personnel belongings he may have brought into the center. They felt that this policy would help to prevent any unwanted items being brought into the visit and could potentially prevent an abduction. However, visiting mothers and fathers unanimously objected to the practice stating it was a violation of their privacy.

Documentation

Although documentation practices are not usually considered related to security measures, many discussion group participants shared information that demonstrated a clear link between safety and record-keeping practices. Fathers were more likely than mothers to understand center documentation practices. They were able to articulate what the center kept in files, the type of information contained within monitor's notes, and how to access that information. Mothers on the other hand, often conveyed

assumptions regarding what was kept in the files and seemed surprised to learn that those assumptions may not be accurate. Very few mothers stated that they had ever asked for the center's records and many did not know how to make the request.



All of the parents expressed that they wanted centers to document services in a detailed and thorough manner. However, fathers and mothers often had different motivations for wanting detailed documentation. Fathers felt that thorough documentation could help prove to the court that they were good fathers and that their ex-partner's characterizations of them were not accurate.

Mothers wanted detailed documentation to ensure that anything impacting their safety or the safety of their children was being recorded. Mothers felt that if something occurred that raised a safety concern not only should it be written down but also center staff should notify them with specific information pertaining to the incident. They said this latter part often did not happen. Even when notified of a

concern, mothers cited several examples where center staff would not explain the basis of the safety concern. Mothers described what seemed to them to be an atmosphere of “secrecy” at the center. Additionally, both mothers and fathers stated the level of documentation decreased when exchanges were occurring, which actually is when parents tended to have the most issues with each other.

CONCLUSION

Consumers can help guide supervised visitation and exchange centers and communities because they are best situated to comment on their own experiences. Discussion group participants were thankful that supervised visitation and exchange services exist and wanted to ensure that their input did not compromise funding or support to visitation centers in any way. However, the participants’ feedback and comments suggest that there is much that can be done to improve not only the level of safety provided to program participants but also their overall experience with supervised visitation and exchange services.

Most importantly, parents wanted centers to be designed to keep parents completely separated by sight and sound. The mothers and fathers equally expressed concern that the center was safe for their children and felt that this could be best accomplished by providing a high level of security. Contrary to current thinking in the field, using multiple security mechanisms, including security personnel was not, for these parents, counterproductive to the creation of a welcoming and respectful environment. The use of security personnel, cameras, wands, and metal detectors were not seen as intrusive per se, but rather it was the way these mechanisms

were used that most influenced their effect. While thoughtful use of various security mechanisms is important, mothers and fathers were in agreement that their relationship with program staff equally affected their perception of safety and program satisfaction. Participants felt it was essential that centers employ staff that not only understand the issues faced by their families, but also are nonjudgmental, supportive, respectful, and take the time to

understand each family's unique needs. Parents stressed the importance of being treated as individuals with unique needs and resented the application of a "one size fits all" philosophy.

While there were many common themes shared by the discussion group participants, the needs of each family varied. Therefore, it is necessary to understand that safety is dynamic and best defined by those in need of protection.



ENDNOTES

1. Jaffe, P.G., “Children of Domestic Violence: Special Challenges in Custody and Visitation Dispute Resolution.” In J. Carter, C. Heisler, & M. Runner (Eds.), *Domestic Violence and Children: Resolving Custody and Visitation Disputes, A National Judicial Curriculum* (San Francisco: Family Violence Prevention Fund), pp. 22-30.
2. There are different terms used around the country for time parents spend with their children. Most frequently it is referred to as visitation or parenting time. For the purposes of this document, it will be called visitation.
3. Bancroft, L., & Silverman, J.G. (2002). *The Batterer as Parent: Addressing the Impact of Domestic Violence on Family Dynamics*, Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
4. Published in 2005, The Guiding Principles were developed by the assistance of a National Advisory Committee, grantees, and national technical assistance providers. During a three-year period, professionals representing a wide array of fields, discussed how supervised visitation centers could and should enhance their practices when serving families experiencing domestic violence.
5. The six principles are [I] equal regard for the safety of child(ren) and adult victims of domestic violence, [II] valuing multiculturalism and diversity, [III] incorporating an understanding of domestic violence into center services, [IV] respectful and fair interaction, [V] community collaboration, and [VI] advocacy for child(ren) and adult victims.
6. The information gathering focused on facility design and physical mechanisms utilized to support the safety of staff and individuals using program services while onsite and did not focus other policies and practices that could impact safety during supervised visits or exchanges. Parents raised some related issues and where relevant to this discussion, are included in this report.
7. This was not a formal research endeavor. Instead, the discussion groups were a way to receive some input from parents about real-life experiences. A roundtable with center employees from around the country also took place to hear their perspectives about the same issues. Information from both was used to inform the development of a tool to help guide grantees in considering safety and security mechanisms.
8. Individuals did not have to be current or past clients of the visitation center hosting the discussion group. However, they had to have used a supervised visitation or exchange center in the past and had to have experienced domestic violence, sexual assault, stalking or child abuse.
9. Facilitators were two individuals who have been working with the Supervised Visitation Program in different ways since its inception and had no personal connection to any of the individuals who participated. Individuals received a \$25 gift certificate for their participation. Centers were not told who participated in the discussion groups so as not to unintentionally compromise the confidentiality, safety, or current/future services the participants may receive.
10. The centers were located in Colorado, Florida, Indiana, Michigan, and Ohio.
11. Given the small sample centers were selected to have the following diversity as to: location (some were in urban areas and others rural); demographics of the geographic area the center served; security mechanisms employed at the center (e.g. five of the seven programs used security personnel or law enforcement, one had a metal detector, many used wands); type and scope of services (different levels of monitoring visits (group visits or one-on-one monitor/family or group rooms/private room, or some only offered supervised visits some both visits and exchanges; and facility design (e.g. some were located in a free standing building, such as a house, some were in more commercial structures and others were housed in umbrella organizations where other services in addition to supervised visitation and exchange were being provided).
12. Ten people identified as African American, one as Asian, one as Indian, and four as Latino.
13. Five of the seven visitation centers that hosted the discussion groups used a variety of security mechanisms, including metal detectors or wands, law enforcement/security personnel, and security cameras. Some participants had used more than one center and had various experiences to pull from, including places with no security.
14. It should be noted that a few women felt strongly that as the victim, they should not be required to walk through a metal detector or have a wand used on them. They reported if they were asked by their center to do so they would feel “offended” and it could affect their relationship with program staff.

VOICES

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