

DESIGNING

Supervised Visitation
and Exchange

CENTERS

That Promote Safety



IDVAAC
UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA
Institute on Domestic Violence In
The African American Community



U.S. Department of Justice
**Office on Violence
Against Women**

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DESIGNING

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INTRODUCTION

For families that have experienced domestic violence, the exchange of children present opportunities for the parent that has used violence to continue to inflict physical or psychological harm on their children and former partner. Unfortunately, across the country countless incidents exist of battering continuing during visits and exchanges. To promote adult victim and child safety in situations where there is domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, child abuse, or stalking, Congress authorized the pilot of the Safe Havens: Supervised Visitation and Safe Exchange Grant Program (Supervised Visitation Program) through the reauthorization of the Violence Against Women Act in 2000.

In 2002, the Department of Justice, [Office on Violence Against Women](#) (OVW) implemented the [grant program](#) as prescribed by Congress with the minimum requirements that all applicants for the Supervised Visitation Program must, among other things:

- ◆ Demonstrate that adequate security measures, including adequate facilities, procedures, and personnel capable of preventing violence, are in place for the operation of supervised visitation programs and services or safe visitation exchange; and
- ◆ Prescribe standards by which supervised visitation or safe visitation exchange will occur.

Communities that receive the grant funds are directed to use the program's [Guiding Principles](#) to help develop standards for local programs. The six principles 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. In the Supervised Visitation Program and throughout the Guiding

Principles, the concept of safety is explored in a broad way. It encompasses the traditional mechanisms - such as safety planning, installing and using security measures, 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 safety for 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.

Even with the Guiding Principles, communities requested further guidance about what would be considered “adequate security measures” and how to enhance safety for adult victims and children in respect to center design and use of security mechanism. To meet this need, OVW supported The Institute on Domestic Violence in the African American Community (IDVAAC) in specifically seeking input into what facilitated a safe and respectful center environment. To this end, IDVAAC convened discussion groups of mothers and fathers who used visitation centers due to domestic violence,¹ convened visitation providers, and received insight from technical assistance providers and consultants that have been working with grantees for the past 10 years. It is with that collective feedback, that this tool was created to assist Supervised Visitation Grantees in examination and development of their security measures.

HOW TO USE THIS TOOL

It is again noted that many factors can affect an individual's sense of safety, but this tool is intentionally focused on one part of the equation, and that is issues that directly relate to the centers utilization of security mechanisms and facility design. It is also recognized that each community is unique and clearly no one tool could adequately address the many varied needs of each community. However, this tool proposes standards, minimum requirements, and considerations around key features of center design and security that can impact safety. Grantee communities should use the suggestions as they

plan, develop, and implement services in accordance with the Guiding Principles, especially as they consider physical design, safety and security mechanisms, and policy and procedure development.

Communities are encouraged to work closely with OVW and technical assistance providers as they begin to make decisions about center design, the use of safety and security mechanisms, and drafting corresponding policies.

The tool is organized by recommended standards, minimum requirements and considerations.

Standards

This is what grantees should aim to accomplish. It is understood that how grantees reach the standard may look different from community to community.

Minimum Requirements²

These are mechanisms that grantees should implement for achieving the standards. They are suggested minimums that should be established by grantee communities, to help attain the standard. There may be additional ways grantees can achieve the suggested standards and there may be several minimum requirements under one standard.

Considerations

These are questions and factors that grantees are encouraged to consider when making decisions about a particular safety and security mechanism.



STANDARD

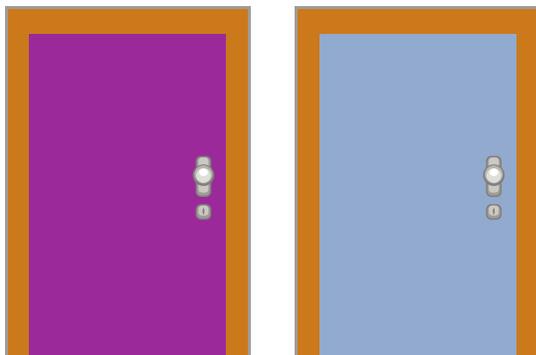
COMPLETE SEPARATION BETWEEN PARENTS

Supervised visitation and exchange centers should design their space and organize their services to ensure there is no visual, auditory, or physical contact between parents while they are on center premises.

One of the most important factors to creating an emotionally and physically safe environment at a supervised visitation and exchange center is to guarantee complete separation of the parents. This means that grantees must prevent parents from having opportunities to see, hear or come into physical contact with one another while on the outside or inside of the center's premises.

MINIMUM REQUIREMENT

Separate Entrances



There should be two, separate entrances for parents to use to access the center. Entrances should be physically located so that people entering or leaving the building through one door, cannot see or hear people coming or leaving, through the other door.

MINIMUM REQUIREMENT: Separate Entrances

Considerations

- ▶ What mode of transportation do families use to come to the center and which direction do people travel to approach the facility?
 - ▶ Are there at least two distinct ways for parents to approach the center?
 - ▶ Are the entrances positioned so that people cannot see or hear each other if they unexpectedly arrived or left at the same time?
 - ▶ If the center located within a building that has other businesses or services, are there separate entrances into the outside building and to the center space itself? Are there procedures in place that keep parents separated as they enter the building to access the center space?
 - ▶ Does each entrance lead into a separate independent area in order to prevent parents from sharing the same waiting areas, hallways, etc.?
 - ▶ Are both entrances suitable and center policies flexible to allow for door/entrance assignment based upon the specific safety needs of individual adult victims and child(ren)?
-


MINIMUM REQUIREMENT
***Staggered
Arrivals and
Departures***

In order to facilitate complete separation while using the center and minimize opportunities for the adult victim to be stalked, parents should arrive and leave the center at different times, **with no less than 15 minutes** between these intervals.

The procedure where one parent comes to the center at a set amount of time ahead of the other parent and one parent leaves the center at a set amount of time after the other parent has departed from the premise, is called staggered arrival and departure. This procedure provides the time and space for parents to approach and leave the premises without compromising the standard of complete separation. It also provides that time and space for center staff to respond to any issues that may arise with a child or parent or to have the time to check-in with parents and children about how things are going to ensure that there are no new safety issues, that any questions are answered, and generally that relationships between staff and clients are being fostered.

Fifteen (15) minutes is the **minimum** time that centers should be using between staggered arrivals and departures of the parents. However, the amount of time may increase based on the safety needs of the adult victim and child. Mitigating factors that could impact the length of time needed are:

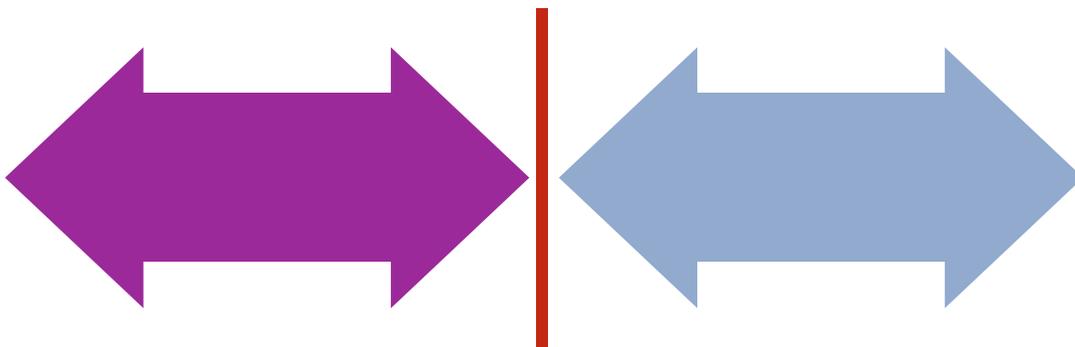
- ◆ Location of the center. How far do people have to drive to reach the center? How isolated/remote is the center? If within a building with other programs, how long does it take to navigate the building in order to reach the center?
- ◆ Consider local traffic patterns. Will parents be arriving or departing during times of heavy traffic, such as rush hour? Is there only one road leading to/from center that both parents have to travel on?
- ◆ Mode of transportation used by parents. For example, does the adult victim take public transportation, walk, drive, or use a taxi? What mode of transportation does the other parent use and what is the likelihood their paths may cross?

It is important to note that in order to gain access to the adult victim, a batterer may attempt to circumvent or control arrival and departure procedures and accompanying time frames. Center staff should be skilled at recognizing this type of tactic and be ready and comfortable to take ownership of all decisions made about arrival and departures.

MINIMUM REQUIREMENT: Staggered Arrivals and Departures

Considerations

- ▶ Has the center set up a system to minimize the chances of children being at the center without the presence of at least one parent? *The center should try to work to always have a parent on the premises.*
- ▶ Are staggered arrivals and departures required under all circumstances? For example, even when the adult victim is waiting on the premises while services are taking place.
- ▶ Has the policy about who comes first and the amount of time used for staggered arrivals and departures been left flexible so that the center staff can adjust these parameters based upon the safety needs and comfort level of the adult victim and child(ren) use and what is the likelihood their paths may cross?



Communities should strive to use a facility that has two, separate and discreet parking lots where parents cannot see each other's cars. If this cannot be accomplished, then at a minimum the center should: have distinct parking areas or designated spaces **AND** actively monitor the parking lot when in use.

Parking areas offer a lot of opportunity for batterers to see the adult victim, obtain vehicle information, or see who is transporting the children. This information can assist in continuing coercive control. Therefore, it is highly recommended that separate parking areas be used without visual access to one another. It is understood that this may not be possible in some communities. In that circumstance, grantees are encouraged to establish a center that has designated spaces or distinct parking areas and rigorously monitor these areas during services.

It is highly recommended that given any configuration of parking areas (even meeting minimum requirements), that mechanisms are in place to monitor parking areas, although closer monitoring is essential if lots are not separated. Monitoring may be accomplished through a combination of the following:

- ◆ The use of security cameras that has a person designated to watch them during operational hours.
- ◆ Staff members or security officers available to escort the adult victim and children from their transportation, to and from the premises.
- ◆ Procedures in place to offer the adult victim the option of remaining away from the center until he/she is notified that the other parent is at the center.
- ◆ Expanded or additional length of time for staggered arrivals and departures.



MINIMUM REQUIREMENT: Separate and Discreet Parking Areas

Considerations

- ▶ Are center policies flexible to allow for assignment of parking areas/spaces based upon safety needs of each adult victim and not blanket rules such as custodial status?
- ▶ Are parking areas in close proximity to every entrance?
- ▶ Are there designated handicap parking spaces available in each parking area?
- ▶ Are there barriers that can be placed between parking areas/spots to help create separate and distinct spaces?
- ▶ Are parking areas well-lit?
- ▶ Are parents informed in advance about which parking area/spot there are to park in to avoid any compromise of the standard of complete separation?



MINIMUM REQUIREMENT*Adequate
Number of
Bathrooms*

The center should have a sufficient number of bathrooms for families to use, so the standard of complete separation is upheld.

Considerations

- ▶ Grantees should consider the situation where both parents may be using bathrooms at the same time on center premises. In that situation, how will the center be able to maintain complete separation without compromising service delivery and safety?
 - ▶ How will individuals in waiting areas access the bathrooms without entering the visitation area and vice versa?
 - ▶ Are all bathrooms being offered to families in compliance with the American Disabilities Act?
 - ▶ Are bathrooms gender-neutral and child-friendly to allow for the greatest flexibility of use?
 - ▶ Are bathrooms located in an isolated area or in an area outside of the control of the center (i.e. if a shared space)? If so will center staff have the ability to monitor the approach to and departure from the bathroom?
-

The center should have a sufficient number of waiting areas to allow both parents to be on the premises simultaneously while maintaining the standard of physical, auditory, and visual separation.

When determining how waiting areas will be assigned, centers should be cognizant that the custodial status of a parent is not indicative of whether that parent is the victim in the relationship. Therefore, to reduce the chance of adult victims and batterers sharing the same space, waiting areas should not be designated based solely on custodial status. As with all safety considerations, adult victims should be consulted about which waiting area feels more secure to them when assigning them.

**MINIMUM REQUIREMENT**

*Adequate
Number of
Waiting Areas*

Considerations

- ▶ When in use, does the center have someone who is proactively monitoring the waiting area?

If security cameras and monitors are being used to monitor the area, are people trained on how to use the equipment? Is the person monitoring dedicated to that role and not distracted with other duties?

- ▶ Is the center designed so that staff is able to lead parents and children in and out of waiting areas, without compromising complete separation? For example, do waiting areas open directly into visitation and exchange areas or other common areas? If so, are visual and sound barriers in place to prevent people seeing or hearing each other?
-

Considerations (Waiting Areas continued)

- ▶ Do waiting areas share walls with reception, visitation rooms, bathrooms or other areas that are used by parents and children? If so, are sound and visual barriers in place to maintain complete separation?
 - ▶ If centers have the capacity to allow custodial parents to wait onsite during services, can complete separation be maintained throughout service delivery, including the departure of both parents?
 - ▶ Are waiting areas comfortable and offer resources to help facilitate long-term safety of adult victims and children?
-



COMPLETE SEPARATION

OTHER ELEMENTS THAT CAN IMPACT STANDARDS

Grantees should consider the use and placement of the following design elements so that they do not compromise the standard of complete separation.

Windows

Windows frequently allow visual contact between parents. There are reports of batterers looking in windows from the outside of the center as well as moving blinds and other window coverings to gain visual access of the adult victim from inside of the center. Most centers have windows, but the center should safeguard that windows cannot be used to compromise complete separation.

The center should carefully consider the placement of exterior windows in order to prevent visual access to areas such as the parking lots, visit rooms, exchange areas, waiting areas, and entrances. Interior windows (e.g. windows that go from visitation rooms to common areas or waiting areas to common areas) should also be analyzed. Staff may need visual access into visitation areas, but interior windows should not compromise the standard of complete separation.

Communities should avoid having exterior or interior windows that would allow for anyone other than staff to view parents as they wait, visit, or pick up/drop off the child(ren). If windows are placed in locations that have the potential to threaten complete separation, the center should find ways to inhibit visual access such as:

- ◆ Applying semi-permanent high-quality window tinting that still allows for natural light while preventing visibility to the outside.



- ◆ Placing shutters on the outside of the window that can be closed during operating hours.
- ◆ Placing large items that cannot be easily moved (such as bookcases, shelving, etc.) in front of the window to block visual access to the outside.

If other mechanisms such as mini-blinds or curtains are used, then the center should have adequate staff to actively and continually monitor the batterer so that these window coverings are not tampered with placing the adult victim and children at risk.

Sufficient Space for Private Conversations or Deescalation

It is not uncommon that when working with families where center staff will encounter situations that necessitate private conversations with parents. For example, staff may need to: consult with another monitor or supervisor about a case; check-in with a father, mother, or child about how services are going; or talk to a parent about behaviors that are causing center staff concern. There should be adequate space to ensure that these conversations can take place where staff and clients remain safe and confidentiality is maintained. The logistics of how to access these spaces is also critical to consider.

In order to prevent others within the center from hearing sensitive conversations or parents from hearing one another, and thus compromising complete separation, centers may want to consider:

- ◆ Using sound or white noise machines.
- ◆ Using sound proofing paint or sound proofing foam.
- ◆ Ensuring walls are of sufficient thickness and properly insulated.
- ◆ How sounds travels through the ceiling, as some drop down ceilings are poorly insulated and allow for sound to travel easily.

When utilizing any material or machine that can block or limit noise, centers should also take into consideration how that impacts their ability to hear conversations they are monitoring.

STANDARD

EFFECTIVE, SAFE, AND TIMELY COMMUNICATION

The center should have mechanisms in place that allow for safe communication between the center and law enforcement AND internally among staff when families are on the premises.

To support the safety of everyone working and using the center,, center staff should have the ability to communicate quickly, safety, and effectively – both internally and externally.

In emergency situations it is essential that center staff be equipped with a way to alert local law enforcement of the need for assistance. The mechanism must provide the staff the ability to do so quickly and safely. It is also imperative that law enforcement takes the contact seriously and is able to respond to the alert in a timely manner). Finally, staff should understand both how to contact law enforcement and under what circumstances law enforcement is to be contacted.

MINIMUM REQUIREMENT

*Responsive
and Effective
Communication
with Law
Enforcement*

MINIMUM REQUIREMENT: Responsive and Effective Communication with Law Enforcement

Considerations

- ▶ Has law enforcement been trained about the center's role and responsibilities so that they know what services are happening on the premises and the layout of the facility/premises?
- ▶ Has a protocol been developed to ensure all emergency calls/contacts placed by the center are given high priority?

Is law enforcement able to guarantee a quick response time?

If law enforcement is not on site or the location is more isolated, can they drive-by on a regular basis during times when services, including orientations, are taking place?

What information is essential to provide law enforcement when an emergency arises? Has staff been trained on how to convey this information in a concise manner?

- ▶ Are there clear policies and procedures that guide the use of mechanisms such as panic buttons? For example:

Under what circumstances should a panic button be activated?

How should center staff or those working in other agencies in the building respond to the emergency?

Are there situations that may require assistance from additional staff but do not rise to the level of involving local law enforcement and what role should the panic button play in these scenarios?

Who does the panic button alert (e.g. police, alarm company, 911-dispatcher)? Have these individuals been trained on what the center does?

How will law enforcement be dispatched once the panic button is activated?

MINIMUM REQUIREMENT*Quick
Response or
Onsite Officers*

Grantees should work with local law enforcement and their community collaborative to make certain all emergency calls placed by the center will be given high priority and that a quick response time is feasible.

If due to geographical and resource limitations this cannot be accomplished then it is strongly recommended that a center have onsite security personnel, with a preference for law enforcement. There are many factors that may weigh into the decision of whether to use security officers or trained law enforcement. There is a preference for law enforcement as they have more training and expertise in dealing with crisis situations. Other decisions include whether security personnel will be in uniform or plain-clothed and carry a weapon.

Listed below are some points of consideration for communities to assist in decision-making. However, whether a center decides to hire security or police officers, the center should ensure that the individuals working at the center are trained on the dynamics of domestic violence, understand the center's mission, policies and procedures, and most importantly, understand their role within the context of service delivery. Centers must clearly outline the role and responsibilities of any security personnel and guarantee that the individual is solely dedicated to that role.



MINIMUM REQUIREMENT: Quick Response or Onsite Officers

Considerations

- ▶ What are the community perceptions about security officers vs. law enforcement? For example, is there a stigma attached to one or another, the training and professionalism involved, and professional duties, such as law enforcement's arrest policies. Is there a history of strife between any community and security officers or law enforcement?
 - ▶ Will individual officers be selected by the agencies or the center? It is strongly suggested centers only use security personnel that they can hand-select versus using a department or organization that dictates what officer will be scheduled at the center.
 - ▶ Will the center have the ability to schedule security personnel in order to maintain highly skilled and experienced individuals in that role? Will the same individuals be placed at the center or will the scheduled security personnel be rotated based on availability?
 - ▶ Does the center want someone with the ability to arrest or detain onsite?
-

Internal staff communication during service provision also helps facilitate safety. There should be mechanisms in place that provide staff the ability to effectively and quickly communicate with one another when orientations, visits, and exchanges are occurring.



MINIMUM REQUIREMENT

*Responsive
and Effective
Internal
Communication*

Grantees may want to make sure that center staff has multiple ways for internal communication depending upon the circumstances. The mechanisms should allow staff to consult with each other and seek assistance as needed without necessarily alerting parents or families to a problem. Some modes of communication include:

- ◆ Two-way radios with the use of headsets and/or verbal codes only known to staff. This option can ensure that the content of the conversations is not understood and kept private when others are present in the center.
- ◆ Phones, both landlines and cell can be located in the visitation or exchange areas or carried by staff and can be used to seek assistance from others during service provision.
- ◆ Intercom systems located within the center that can allow back up staff to hear what is taking place in the visitation and exchange areas while services are occurring without physically being present in those spaces. This option also allows staff that is facilitating the visit or exchange to call for assistance if needed.
- ◆ Panic buttons/buzzers (that are not connected to outside law enforcement/alarm) can be used to alert additional staff of emergency situations that do not rise to the level of needing to contact outside law enforcement.





All of these internal and external communication options necessitate sufficient staffing. That means that staff should not be placed in a position where they are called away from their responsibilities to respond to a communication, potentially compromising safety. Thus, there should never be a time when only one staff member is alone at the center while services are occurring, including orientations. Additionally, there should always be at least one staff member who is not otherwise engaged in the active provision of services, available to assist those that are

serving in the monitoring or security roles.

When scheduling any time with clients, the center should carefully consider the number of staff members that are needed to:

- ◆ Answer the phone while visits and exchanges are occurring.
- ◆ Monitor the entrances and exits.
- ◆ Monitor the waiting areas.
- ◆ Facilitate services such as supervised visitation, supervised exchanges, and orientations.
- ◆ Address concerns that may arise with individual family members.
- ◆ Provide assistance to other staff.
- ◆ Provide back up during emergency situations.

Another aspect of safety and security and internal communication is the ability for staff to hear each other and also to be able to hear the families they are monitoring.³ Sound quality within the center must be examined and grantees should assess for potential challenges, such as:

- ◆ Multiple families and/or multiple children playing, laughing, crying, and yelling,
- ◆ Echoing.
- ◆ Air conditioning units, mechanical rooms, or other appliances that make a lot of noise.
- ◆ Outdoor noises, like air traffic, emergency vehicles, or railways.

STANDARD

ADEQUATE SECURITY MECHANISMS

Grantees should use a combination of security measures, strategies, and mechanisms that fosters safety for adult victims and children, and ensure center staff are properly trained on all mechanisms, including the policies and procedures surrounding their use.

Security mechanisms serve an important role in creating a safe environment in which supervised visitation and exchange services can occur. Mechanisms is an umbrella term that includes any type of hardware that may assist in creating a safer space such as lighting, cameras, automatic locks, metal detectors, etc. It also includes trained individuals who are hired to serve in security roles such as security officers or off-duty law enforcement. Although the thoughtful use and placement of various security mechanisms is critical to providing a safe environment in which supervised visitation and exchange can occur, communities should not over-rely on any one mechanism.

Individual communities have various levels of available resources. There are different sets of norms around security mechanisms. The configuration of center space varies greatly. The cultural implications of certain mechanisms and how they will be perceived or experienced by historically marginalized populations must also be considered. Grantees are encouraged to consider all these issues when selecting which mechanisms will be the most effective and how they will be used.

Centers need to work with partners when selecting security measures. Law enforcement, domestic violence advocates, and batterer intervention specialists should be consulted and their expertise used to guide the placement, types, and use of the various mechanisms.

Additionally, all security mechanisms should routinely be inspected to guarantee they are in proper working order and policies and procedures developed that guide the consistent and safe use the devices.

The following are recommended minimum requirements and considerations as applied to certain measures.



The center should have ample lighting to illuminate parking areas, the perimeter of the building the center is housed in, areas where there is an opportunity to hide, and any other areas that may become dark during evening hours.

Supervised visitation centers that elect to use security cameras as part of their security measures, must have people who are trained to use the cameras and are dedicated to viewing the monitors (through computer screens, televisions, etc.) during hours when services are taking place.

Security cameras, if strategically placed, can help providesafety for the adult victim and child(ren). Areas most commonly seen as needing security cameras include parking areas, entrances and exits, and any other locations within the center that may be isolated such as a waiting area and hallways. Centers should consider the number of cameras needed, their placement, and develop a plan for monitoring EVERY camera.



When developing policies and procedures around use of security cameras, grantees should discuss whether the security cameras to record while in use. If they are, then they must consider:

- ◆ What will be recorded?
- ◆ How long will the recordings/tapes be retained?
How will maintaining recordings for extended periods of time impact safety?
- ◆ How will the recordings be disposed of?
- ◆ How will the center respond to requests for recorded information?
- ◆ What will the center tell families about how the cameras are used?

Security cameras vary in quality and technological options. When discussing what type of cameras to purchase and where to place them, grantees may want to factor in:

- ◆ Is it important that the camera be capable of zooming?
- ◆ Is it necessary that the camera have the ability to pick up detail such as the type of car in the parking area or the facial features of the person at the entrance versus simply being able to see that a car is in the parking area and a person is at the entrance?
- ◆ Should the cameras be motion-activated?
- ◆ Will it be necessary to have audio monitoring?
- ◆ What weather may the cameras be exposed to?
- ◆ Are there lighting issues where the cameras will be placed that will impact visibility?

Metal detectors and wands are devices that some centers use as part of their toolbox of security mechanisms. It is recommended that centers electing to utilize a metal detector or wand also have security personnel⁴ onsite who are trained on how to use the devices.

Grantees should be cognizant of the fact that if metal detectors are used this also necessitates the use of a wand device and possibly pat downs if the metal detector or wand are activated (see additional discussion below on pat downs). Therefore, law





enforcement should be consulted when creating policies and procedures that address how metal detectors or wands will be used, who will be subjected to screening, and what will be done if an objectionable item is found. Grantees must also consider how the center will accommodate and screen those with disabilities, metal pins, plates, or other medically implanted metal devices.

Finally, placement of metal detectors is important. Centers should ensure that screening can occur at each entrance and that it take place as privately as possible.

If a center decides to engage in pat downs, then they should only be conducted only by trained security personnel.

Pat downs can be very sensitive and grantees are encouraged to think carefully about how and if they will be accomplished. In fact, they may retraumatize individuals who have experienced violence. Therefore, they should not be used as the first line of screening but only if and after a safety concern has been clearly identified.

Furthermore, pat downs should be conducted by the person of the same gender as the individual being screened, a second person should be present to observe the pat down, and people should be given the opportunity to be screened in a private, but safe, area.



Door and locks often go hand-in-hand. Centers should use doors as a barrier to areas to reach the standard of complete separation of parents and also to protect the confidentiality of information. For example, centers should think about placing



doors to help create barriers to staff offices, waiting areas, entrances, exits, visit rooms, exchange areas, and rooms used for the storage of confidential information. Locks should be placed on all doors that give access into the center and those acting as barriers to common areas from visitation and exchange areas. Locks should be always be used on doors that lead from outside of the center space to the inside of the center. All locks on internal doors should be used at minimum when visits, exchanges, and orientations are occurring.

MINIMUM REQUIREMENT: Doors

Considerations

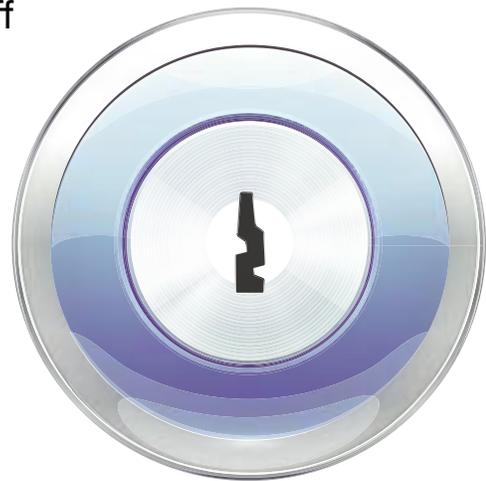
- ▶ Are the doors sturdy? Consider the use of solid core doors which will provide for increased safety and sound proofing.
- ▶ Is there an ability to view who is on the other side of the door? Depending upon the location of the door, a center may want to use reverse peep holes, security cameras, or mirrored glass.
- ▶ Are there doors in areas where visits and exchanges are occurring that allow for access to areas of the building outside of the center's control? Or open to the exterior of the building permitting someone to exit the center? Optimally, doors leading to the outside should not be placed in areas that are used as a visit room or waiting area for perpetrators. If this cannot be avoided, those doors should be connected to the center's alarm system so that the alarm is triggered if the door is opened. Additionally, there should be sufficient staff to monitor that door during service delivery.
- ▶ Are doors in compliance with the American Disabilities Act? During their use, especially with doors that automatically open, how will the center secure the area?



MINIMUM REQUIREMENT: Corresponding Locks

Considerations

- ▶ What type of locking device will the center use and what makes the most sense given the type of door and where it provides access to? Centers may want to use automatic locks, traditional key locks, strike or remotely controlled locking options.
- ▶ How will a loss of power impact the safety and security of the doors and overall center?
- ▶ How will staff unlock and move through doors in a way that preserves the standard of complete separation and facilitates their own safety?
- ▶ How will keys be maintained by staff and what happens if a key is lost?
- ▶ Locks should vary depending on placement ensuring that there is not one universal key
- ▶ How will bathroom doors be locked? Will staff be able to access the bathroom if locked from the inside?



STANDARD

FACILITY SELECTION

Grantees should select a space for the center that facilitates safety for families experiencing domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, child abuse, or stalking. Many things can influence the creation of a safe environment for supervised visitation and exchange services. This section outlines other key components that interplay with the more traditional safety and security measures and design factors already discussed.

Safe Location

The center should be placed in a location that promotes safety for adult victims and children. In selecting a location, grantees should determine if the location is:

- ◆ **Accessible.** If public transportation is used in a community, is the center located close to train or bus stops? If driving is the primary way people will access it, is it isolated or around other activity? Are there places nearby for people to go for parents that choose to wait offsite while services are occurring, such as restaurants, coffee shops, libraries, or grocery stores,
- ◆ **Safe.** Centers should be located in a community which is perceived as being safe by the families participating in services. It is recommended that grantees find ways to get input from adult victims of domestic violence about where different communities would feel safe traveling to for services. Centers should also avoid locations that are isolated and have limited approach options such as having only one road leading in or out of the center.

Free Standing vs. Shared Space

Communities have to decide whether to place the center in a free-standing building or inside a location where other businesses or services exist. There are challenges and benefits to both. If the center occupies its own space, the inside and outside can be configured to the grantee's specifications, the space can be more closely controlled and safety and security mechanisms can be permanently fixed. Some challenges in a standalone space are finding one that will meet the standard of complete separation and minimum requirements under it; it can be a more expensive option; and it can leave center staff isolated.

If thinking about using a shared space, grantees may find more options in their communities to select from. A shared space can also be more affordable (e.g. shared utilities, business equipment, and security) and less overhead) and reduce isolation of center staff. However, the space can be much more difficult to control and configure in a way that promotes safety and security for adult victims and children. If grantees are considering placing the center within a location with other services, it is recommended that they do not co-locate the supervised visitation and exchange center with a domestic violence shelter, family justice center, or in a space that is primarily used for children, such as a school, head start, or child care.

Other considerations for shared space:

- ◆ Are other programs that operate within the building compatible with the center? For example do the programs have similar safety and security and/or activity needs?
- ◆ What populations are being served by each program and are there any possible conflicts of interest?
- ◆ How will adult victims be notified about other types of services that occur on site?



- ◆ How will staff learn about all of the services and programs in which both parents participate? This will assist staff in coordination services in such a way as to ensure inadvertent contact between the parents does not occur.
- ◆ Are there policies that clearly state that in order to provide a safe environment, parents need to notify staff if they plan on arriving at the location without a scheduled appointment at the center?

Multi-Level vs. One-Level

Grantees have selected various types of structures to use for center operation some of which either requires that services occur on more than one level or afford the opportunity for services to occur on more than one level/floor. Grantees choosing to utilize multi-level structures must guarantee that all areas of the building that are accessible (ADA compliant). All areas should also be equipped with security mechanisms that promote complete separation. This includes when parents are in stairwells, elevators or various parts of the building. Additional staff and/or security mechanisms may be needed in order to adequately monitor the families utilizing the center.

Monitoring the Perimeter

Centers should ensure that whatever location they select, the perimeter of the center can be easily monitored and free of obstacles that may inhibit effective monitoring. Centers should consider the placement and size of objects such as bushes and trees that may unintentionally be used by the batterer to hide while watching or waiting for the adult victim. Obstacles such as large overgrown bushes that prevent clear viewing of the parking areas or trees or shrubs that inhibit the view of individuals as they approach or exit the building should be trimmed or removed.

OTHER ISSUES RELATED TO CENTER DESIGN AND SECURITY

Breathalyzers/Rapid Drug Screening

Providing alcohol and drug screening is not the role of a supervised visitation and exchange provider and therefore this activity is not supported by the grant. OVW has indicated that it would find any program that supports these activities to be working in opposition to the grant program's Guiding Principles. However, trained staff should have the discretion to end a visit early or cancel a visit or exchange if there appears to be a safety risk. Proof of a parent's impairment is not necessary.

Emergency Situations

Centers must have center policies and procedures that cover:

- ◆ Natural disasters
- ◆ Power outages
- ◆ Inclement weather
- ◆ Volatile clients
- ◆ Abduction
- ◆ Violence
- ◆ Hostage situations
- ◆ Stalking
- ◆ Parents that appear be impaired due to the use of substances
- ◆ Sex offenders/sexual abuse
- ◆ Child/parent injured (medical emergency)

The policies and procedures should address the centers role in:

- ◆ Addressing the situation with the clients.
- ◆ Communication with emergency responders.
- ◆ Communication with others within the center.
- ◆ Following up after the emergency has passed, including:
 - Debriefing the event with staff.
 - Revising safety plans with individual family members.
 - Reviewing the response to the incident and revising policies and procedures if necessary.

Personal Belongings of Visitors

For centers requiring clients or visitors to give center staff their personal belongings prior to entering the space or participating in supervised visitation and exchange services, consideration must be given to the implications and liability involved. For example, what happens if the items are lost or damages or clients claim that they are? How will centers accurately assess what is in the belongings without compromising people's privacy? Where will personal belongings be stored? If centers are committed to having clients not have personal belongings on them, centers are encouraged to think about asking clients to leave their personal belongings in their own vehicles before entering the center or offering lockers where clients can secure their own belongings.

Outdoor Visitation and Exchange Areas

Centers that choose to offer an outdoor area in which to provide supervised visitation services should ensure that the outdoor area is as secure as the supervised visitation/exchange areas located indoors. If offered, the outdoor space should be secure enough for most families to safely use. Centers should consider the challenges involved in monitoring families that are engaged in playing on play equipment. Therefore, cases that require intensive monitoring such as those that involve child sexual abuse, may not be appropriate candidates for the use of the outdoor areas

Grantees should strive to ensure the outdoor area is:

- ◆ Not isolated from the rest of the center.
- ◆ Not visible to those within the building or those located outside of the building.
- ◆ Fully equipped with the same level of safety mechanisms that are utilized throughout the center.

MINIMUM REQUIREMENT

Outdoor Spaces should Offer Same Level of Security as Indoor Spaces



CONCLUSION

Supervised visitation and exchange centers play a critical role in providing safety for adult and child victims of domestic violence, sexual assault, stalking, dating violence and child abuse. However, as illustrated in this tool, extensive planning, training, and community collaboration is needed in order to create a center that effectively addresses the emotional and physical safety needs of adult victims and children. It is hoped that this tool will help guide communities in the development and revision of center safety and security measures that account for the varied and unique safety needs of those affected by domestic violence.



ENDNOTES

1. There is a companion document, *Voices of Mothers and Fathers: Recommendations about Safety and Security Measures for Supervised Visitation and Exchange Centers Serving Families Who Have Experienced Domestic Violence*, which outlines the themes garnered from the discussion groups held with mothers and fathers. It is recommended that grantees read that document to help provide context for this tool.
2. It is recognized that a community's ability to achieve the minimum requirements set forth in this tool may be impacted by a variety of factors such as geographical location and available resources. Each community should strive to demonstrate that the safety of adult victims and children will be upheld in every area of service provision.
3. This in no way negates the recommendation that sound barriers exist to prevent parents from hearing one another. Instead, staff must be aware of barriers in place that can make it difficult for them to monitor the situation and duly adjust how they monitor to accommodate for those issues.
4. In this document, security personnel are representatives from law enforcement such as police officers or sheriff deputies or security officers hired through reputable companies.

