

THE DIFFERENCES AND DEFINITIONS OF CHILD CONTACT CENTRES

SHROPSHIRE CHILD CONTACT CENTRES

Supported Child Contact

Supported contact takes place in a variety of neutral community venues where there are facilities to enable children to develop and maintain positive relationships with non-resident parents and other family members. Supported Child Contact Centres are suitable for families when no significant risk to the child or those around the child has been identified.

The basic elements of supported contact are as follows:

- Impartiality.
- Staff and volunteers are available for assistance but there is no close observation, monitoring or evaluation of individual contacts/conversations.
- Several families are usually together in one or a number of rooms.
- Encouragement for families to develop mutual trust and consider more satisfactory family venues.
- Apart from attendance dates and times, no detailed report will be made to a referrer, CAFCASS, a party's solicitor or court, unless there is a risk of harm to the child, parent or Centre worker.
- An acknowledgement that it be viewed as a temporary arrangement to be reviewed after an agreed period of time.

Supervised Child Contact

A Supervised Child Contact Centre should be used when it has been determined that a child has suffered or is at risk of suffering harm during contact. Referrals will usually be made by a court, CAFCASS officer, local authority or another Child Contact Centre, but in exceptional circumstances a Child Contact Centre may accept a self-referral. Supervised contact ensures the physical safety and emotional well being of a child. It also assists in building and sustaining positive relationships between a child and members of their non-resident family. This requires supervisors who are skilled and confident enough to intervene immediately and firmly if necessary and can work professionally in a planned way with vulnerable children and highly distressed adults.

Supervised contact requires the following:

- Individual supervision of contact with the supervisor in constant sight and sound of the child, which in turn requires that they have the support of a nearby colleague.
- A high commitment of resources including continuity of supervision and the professional oversight of staff.
- The supervisor and the Centre having access to all relevant court papers and transcripts of any judgments in order to supervise effectively. The party making the referral ensuring that the court gives permission for such disclosure.
- All contact to be closely observed and recorded in a manner appropriate to the purpose of protecting children and working in a planned way with parents.
- A venue that provides privacy and confidentiality to each child and family and is structured to provide maximum safety to all concerned and maximum stimulation for children.
- Contact is time limited with a planned aim to regularly assess and review progress and the possibility of safer future outcomes.

The level of supervision may be reduced in a planned way after a professional assessment has been made. Some families, after being assessed, may move from constant supervision to an intermediate level of supervision, escorted outings, or supported or unrestricted contact, while others will always need the security of full supervision.

Supervised contact is provided by a variety of agencies, both in the voluntary sector and by local authorities. Facilities will therefore vary, and different models will be offered.

Supported or Supervised?

The needs of families can differ widely and there will be some contact situations that require less intensive supervision than indicated in the definition of supervised contact, but more oversight or assistance than would be offered through supported contact. For example this might apply to cases where there is a history of conflict, poor parenting, a low risk of violence, a manageable substance problem or need for re-introduction to parents/siblings. Subject to completion of a referral form, risk assessment and management planning, the family will be referred on to the most suitable venue for the level of service needed.

NACCC member Centres do not discriminate between parents on the basis of gender and recognise that there are many cultural and ethnic differences between families. NACCC encourages Centres to be culturally sensitive and provide staff and volunteers representative of the linguistic needs, racial and cultural backgrounds of most families using their Centres.

Child Contact Centre Working Group (February 2003)

Always make sure your referrer is aware of the difference between Supported and Supervised Contact and that you only accept appropriate referrals for your Child Contact Centre. Do not be afraid to say no!

Handovers

Handovers can take place at the majority of Child Contact Centre and are set up through the normal referral process. Parents do not have to meet, as the handover will be done by Child Contact Centre staff or volunteers. The non-resident parent will then take the child out of the Centre for the duration of the visit, bringing them back to the Centre afterwards. It may be possible for the child to be picked up from one Child Contact Centre in the morning and then taken back to another Child Contact Centre in the afternoon if they are in the same area or at another mutually agreed venue.