



The Ark Family Preservation Center
(In collaboration with Wellsprings Psychological Resources)
63 Springs Station Drive
Franklin Springs, GA 30639

**Guidelines for Interactive Parent Training, Supervised,
and Unsupervised Visitation**
Child Welfare Clients



Temporary facility for The Ark Family Preservation Center

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The Ark Family Preservation Center provides a safe, healthy, and nurturing environment in which children and their parents/family can share time together without the stressful conflicts or dangers that may have been part of their past.

Children can benefit from supervised visits with their noncustodial parents because it a) reduces the child's fear of not seeing that parent again, a) lessens the child's self-blame, c) resolves some of the issues that the child may have had with that parent, and d) continues the important parent/child relationship.

Children's Bill of Rights

1. The right to love and be loved by both of my parents without feeling pressure or disapproval.
2. The right to love as many people as I want (step-parents, relatives, etc.) without guilt or being made to feel disloyal.
3. The right to be parented by both parents, regardless of adults' concerns about money or their feelings.
4. The right to express my feelings about the breakup, such as sadness, fear, anger and to have both parents listen to how I feel.
5. The right to be kept out of the middle of my parents' conflict, including the right not to pick sides, carry messages, or hear complaints about the other parent. The right not to make adult decisions.
6. The right to remain a child, without being responsible for the burden of either of my parents' emotional problems or to be an adult companion, friend, or comforter to my parents.
7. The right to know in advance about important changes that will affect my life; for example, when one of my parents is going to move or get remarried.
9. The right to receive love, care, discipline, and protection from both my parents.
10. The right to the most adequate level of economic support that can be provided by both parents that is as close as possible to what it would have been if my parents stayed together.

Levels of Support

The Ark Family Preservation Center¹ provides an array of services to families needing a visitation center, depending on their desires and legal requirements. These services range from supervised visits with highly interactive therapist involvement to unsupervised but monitored visits. We also offer family visitation for children in foster care or for court-mandated family visits, such as those related to custody disputes, domestic violence, contentious divorce, or other unsafe environments.

(1) Interactive parent training (most intensive)

Interactive parent training is the cornerstone program of The Ark. Parenting is a most challenging endeavor! Children do not come with instruction booklets and, even if they did, each child is so unique that what works well with one child, might be ineffective with another child. However, there are general principles of child-rearing that can guide parents along the way. Using “on-the-job” training and modeling of warm, nurturing ways of responding to children, therapists teach parents how to discipline effectively, communicate clearly with their children, better food preparation habits, the benefits of eating together and cleaning up together. Therapists meet each family where they are and help them enjoy living and playing together. Through these interactions, parents learn the skills needed to form secure attachment bonds with their children, bringing healthy communication and self-management skills into the normal family habits.

These services are available to families whose children have been removed from the home, providing non-custodial parents every opportunity possible to be reunited with their children.

What does an interactive parent training session look like?

The activities of interactive parent training for children and families are diverse, with the intention of replicating some of the normal, everyday activities in which families participate. Activities will be customized to the established culture and lifestyle of each family (when possible), in an attempt to provide an atmosphere to which the family is accustomed.

Some of the family activities which may be utilized during interactive parent training:

- Playing outdoors on playground equipment, riding bikes, playing basketball, badminton, croquet, soccer, etc.
- Playing indoors with appropriate developmental toys for babies, children, and teens. A wide range of toys, board games, arts and crafts, and other equipment and materials are available for use by the family.

¹ The Ark is a nonprofit 501(c)3 organization whose mission is to provide family-centered care for the equipping, empowering, and healing of family relationships. Supervised family visitation is one aspect of its services available to northeast Georgia.

- Preparing, eating, and cleaning up after a meal or snack so the family can practice the skills of planning and preparing meals, eating together at a table, engaging in “family talk” at the table, and cooperating in the clean-up process. At the Ark, the atmosphere of family time together during meals aims to be peaceful and pleasant, with an emphasis on manners and expressing appreciation, values which help build strong family bonds.

(2) Supervised Visitation (less intense and less interactive)

For families who desire only supervision without interactive training, a designated supervisor is present during the entire visit to ensure the safety of the child. The individual assigned to supervise the visit assures the rules and conditions of the visit are adhered to by the family and child (clarifying as needed if/when specific behaviors or activities should not or must not occur). The individual assigned to supervise the visit typically documents or notes specific observations and assesses the parent-child interaction.

(3) Unsupervised (Monitored) Visitation

For families who have been mandated to have unsupervised visitation but need a safe environment, the family visitation occurs without a supervisor being present at all times. However, a monitor is available and checks in with the family from time to time.

Initiation Procedures (prior to visitation)

Note: The DFCS case manager will provide the supervising therapist/facilitator with the necessary information which outline the terms and details of the supervised visitation. The DFCS case manager will be the contact person for arranging the initiation procedures and is responsible for contacting the parties involved (attorneys, noncustodial parents, foster parents, etc.)

1. Supervising therapist/facilitator will receive all the necessary legal information outlining the terms and details of supervised visitation.
2. Facilitator will meet with custodial parent for orientation to the visitation process. He/she will address these guidelines, discuss questions and/or concerns, and complete paperwork for the case.
3. Facilitator will meet with noncustodial parent for orientation to the visitation process. **Bring a picture ID with you for identification purposes.** He/she will address these guidelines, discuss questions and/or concerns, and complete paperwork for the case.
4. For age-appropriate children, children will have an orientation with a tour, to ask questions, to get comfortable, and relieve any anxiety they may have about the supervised visitation.
5. If the facilitator has questions related to the visitation process and procedures, the facilitator will contact the DFCS caseworker for clarification.
6. At initiation, all parties will provide local emergency contacts.

Preparing the Child(ren) for Visits

Custodial Parent

1. Custodial parent should help the child(ren) understand that he/she has done nothing wrong and that it is not his/her fault the family is involved in supervised visitation services.
2. Maintain a positive outlook about the visitation.
3. Prepare the child(ren) for visits by using age-appropriate language to explain the procedure and the reasons for the supervised visits.
4. Be consistent with bringing the child(ren) to their scheduled visits. Consistency will provide the child(ren) time to form and maintain a relationship with the noncustodial parent.

Noncustodial Parent

1. Maintain a positive outlook about the visitation. Use the time with your child(ren) to build a healthy relationship and to help the child(ren) to feel comfortable during the visit.
2. Be consistent with attending scheduled visitation with your child(ren). Showing up to the visits will show your child(ren) that you care and love them. This is a good opportunity to build and maintain a relationship with your child(ren).
3. Focus on the present not the past. Relax and have fun while you are with your child(ren). Involve everyone in choosing activities.
4. The Ark Facilitator will be available to help during the visit so you feel supported in the interactions with your child(ren).

Visitation Procedure

1. Facilitator will be present at all times during visitation.
2. All contact between child and the non-custodial parent shall take place within facilitator's hearing and sight at all times.
3. The custodial parent will arrive at the designated time (10 minutes prior to the visit), enter the front door of The Ark Family Preservation Center ("The Ark"), **sign in at the window**, and wait in a designated area.
4. The visiting noncustodial parent will arrive at the designated time, enter the front doors of Wellsprings, **sign in at the window**, and wait for the facilitator in a designated area.
5. After the visitation, the noncustodial parent will return to the waiting room and have the post-visitiation feedback session with The Ark facilitator. *(The above procedure is part of the staggered time security measures that have been designed to keep parents and children safe. These procedures are strictly enforced. Any violations of these procedures may be reported to the Court.)*
6. Should the child(ren) need the custodial parent during a visit or exchange, The Ark staff will escort them to the parent or contact them by telephone.
7. The length of the visitation is determined by the court or DFCS.
8. Visiting parents are not permitted in the agency or on the grounds once the supervised visit has been completed and the parent has been dismissed by The

- Ark facilitator. Custodial and visiting parent will adhere to facilitator's guidance at exchange and during scheduled visitation.
9. Non-compliance with guidelines or challenging the authority of the facilitator may lead to termination of services at the discretion of the facilitator.
 10. If parties arrive prior to their designated time, they are to wait inside their vehicle until the appointed time.
 11. Supervised visits will take place at The Ark or Wellsprings Psychological Resources, to be determined by the facilitator. Outdoor activities are at the discretion of The Ark facilitator.
 12. Unless arrangements are made for another language, parents and child(ren) must speak English during visitation and must speak loud enough for facilitator to hear.
 13. Parents will adhere to facilitator's guidance at exchange point and during visitation.
 14. As long as there is no problem with other family members or friends who want to visit the child during the first 15 minutes, they MAY be authorized by the court to participate in visitation and must adhere to the same guidelines as the noncustodial parent. A list of other individuals who have been authorized by the court shall be presented in writing.
 15. Law enforcement will be notified if the noncustodial parent attempts to leave the facility with the child(ren) or if either party becomes unruly.

Procedures for cancellations or rescheduled visitation

- 1. Noncustodial parents MUST call the office or text the facilitator 24 hours in advance of the day before the scheduled visit to confirm the appointment. If call or text is not received 24 hours in advance, the visit will be cancelled.**
2. Cancellation or re-scheduling of visitation requires 24 hours advance notification and both parents must confirm mutually agreed upon reschedules and cancellations.
3. If visitation is cancelled with less than 24 hours notice, facilitator will be paid by the cancelling party as if visitation had occurred.
4. If custodial parent fails to arrive with child(ren) without sufficient notice of cancellation, custodial parent shall pay for missed visitation. Facilitator will be paid for the visitation.
5. Failure of visiting parent to arrive within 15 minutes of designated time of arrival without notification by phone will result in cancellation of the visit, and the facilitator shall be paid for the visitation by the party that did not show.
- 6. If noncustodial parents confirm the visit but **do not show up**, for any future visitations they will have to **confirm the visit 24 hours in advance as well as the day of the visit.****
7. Two no-shows or late cancellations may result in termination of the visits.

Rules of Conduct

1. The visiting parent is expected to give the child(ren) their full attention. Cell phones must be turned off during visitation; **no cell phone usage is allowed.**
2. Kindness and consideration when speaking to the child(ren) are expected. Derogatory comments about the other parent or family members in front of the child(ren) will not be tolerated. The visit may be terminated should this occur.
3. Use of tobacco products (including vapes) is prohibited anywhere on the property.

Termination of a visit

1. The child(ren) have the right to end their visit at any point during the visit. No pressure will be placed upon the child(ren) if they choose to end the visit early. If the child(ren) are unable to verbalize their wishes and become visibly upset by crying, fussing, etc, the visit may be ended by The Ark facilitator.
2. If the parent is suspected of being under the influence of alcohol or non-prescription drugs or if the individual fails a 5-panel instant drug test, if required. At any time, without a court order, if the facilitator has any suspicion of any adult being under the influence of alcohol or drugs (slurred speech, is unstable, has alcohol on their breath, has bloodshot eyes, is belligerent, or if there are any mental health issues that make it unsafe for the child to visit), the visit will be cancelled.
3. The following behaviors may result in termination of the visitation:
 - Inappropriate demands for affection or physical contact
 - Foul language, shouting, threats of violence or abuse, cursing
 - Attempts to move child(ren) out of sight or hearing of the facilitator; no whispering
 - Taking photographs of the child(ren) is permitted unless specifically forbidden by the case manager or the court.
 - Speaking negatively about the other parent or family in front of the child(ren) or asking questions about the other parent's whereabouts or activities
 - Passing of correspondence or messages to the other parent through the child(ren)
 - Making promises about future living arrangements or enticement of "gifts" that the parent has for the child(ren)
 - No talk of court cases or court documents
 - Weapons or any articles that could be used as a weapon at the visitation site
 - Any other behavior deemed inappropriate by the facilitator

Additional Guidelines

1. The noncustodial parent may bring a snack to share with the child(ren). The residential parent is responsible for bringing formula/milk for infants and young toddlers.
2. The noncustodial parent is also required to provide items needed for child support: diapers, food, snacks, bottle, juice, crackers, etc.
3. For families dealing with sexual abuse allegations, the noncustodial parent will not be permitted to change diapers or help with toileting needs.
4. Unless there are safety concerns, gifts will be allowed for special occasions (holidays and birthdays). Gifts must be age-appropriate and approved by The Ark staff prior to the visit.
5. If child(ren) are taking medication, the medication should be given prior to the visitation.
6. The Ark staff members are mandated reporters. By law, the staff must report suspected child neglect or abuse to the Department of Children and Family Services.
7. Any concerns by either party involved should be addressed to the Director of The Ark by scheduling an appointment (706-680-0801 OR 706-246-0733).

Record of Visits

Reports are completed for each visit and reviewed with the noncustodial parent at the next visit. The highlights of these reports are compiled and sent to the agencies representing the parties upon request. To ensure this information is received in a timely manner, please provide staff with a lead time of 10 business days prior to court date.

Suspension or Termination of Services

Clients who are unable or unwilling to abide by program guidelines will be redirected or reminded by staff and may receive a reprimand in writing. Non-compliance with rules or challenging the authority of staff may lead to termination of The Ark Family Preservation Center services. When The Ark terminates services, we may inform each parent in writing of the reason for termination of services or provide written notice to the court and/or referring source stating the reason for the termination, at which time we will close the case file.