

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR SUPERVISED PARENTING TIME

How Much, How Often?

When there is occasion for the Courts to recommend children see a non-residential parent in a formal supervised setting, there are numerous factors to be taken into consideration when deciding how often the child should see the visiting parent. Important points to consider include:

- The child's age;
- The child's developmental level;
- The child's temperament;
- How much time has gone by since the child has had parenting time with the absent parent; and
- The strength of the bond with the non-custodial parent.

If possible, the child's schedule should be thought out. A child will be more likely to react negatively to visits if they must miss certain activities in their routines, such as naps, play groups, after school programs, sports activities, or other regiments.

Often these factors are not considered, but decisions are based upon how much time the visiting parent wants with the child or the bringing parent is willing to give.

Birth to Twelve Months

Children in the age range of birth to approximately twelve months do not have the stamina older children have. They nap more frequently. Their attention spans are not long. Rather than assign a child of this age to a two hour visitation period once a week, the visitation should be limited to approximately an hour, and it should be repeated several times per week.

An infant would fare well seeing the absent parent for shorter, more frequent visits as opposed to longer, less frequent periods of time. For instance, a schedule might be a one hour visit on Monday, Thursday, and Saturday or Sunday. More frequent contact allows a child to develop a positive bond with the non-residential parent.

Twelve Months to Two Years

From twelve months up to two years, the parenting time/visitation periods should remain frequent and consistent, and depending upon the child's temperament, may increase in length.

At this age, when the child is taken from the bringing parent by the visitation staff, a tantrum may ensue. It is important for the bringing parent not to interpret this as the child not wanting to see the visiting parent, but more as a developmental reaction. The visitation should be allowed to occur, unless after a reasonable period of time, the child remains hysterical and inconsolable.

Two to Three Years

From ages two to approximately three years, the amount of time spent in supervised settings may be increased to two hours, but should continue to be several times per week.

Three to Five Years

Visitation for a child in this age group may be increased in amount of time spent with the parent, and if necessary, decreased in frequency. Visitation periods of two hours twice a week are reasonable.

Five to Ten Years

For children in this age bracket a regular routine is important. Children this age tolerate two to three hour visits two times a week.

Ten to Fifteen Years

At this period the frequency of visitation may decrease. Recommended visitation is at least once per week with duration of two to three hours or longer if possible. The older the child becomes, the less likely they want to engage in visitation with their non-custodial parent in a supervised setting. However, parents should not let children dictate whether or not they have parenting time with the non-custodial parent.

Sixteen to Eighteen Years

Rarely do we see children ordered to have supervised parenting time in this age range. Yet, this may be necessary if there are safety concerns for the child. Young persons in this age are very tied into their school, social activities, and friends. They often have little time for the parent with whom they are residing, not to mention taking time to visit with a parent who does not live with them. Negotiating parenting time is best. Success is more likely if another family member such as an aunt or grandparent (NOT the other parent) can supervise the parenting time.

Conclusion

A good rule of thumb is that greater frequency in smaller increments is better in very young children. As children age, the frequency may decrease and the time per visit increase. As children approach adolescence, the developmental and social needs of the child must be more closely scrutinized.

It is helpful for the judge to order a set amount of parenting time (i.e. two, 2-hour visits a week), allowing the parents and supervising agency the opportunity to work around the child's schedule, the parent's schedule and the provider's schedule.

It is important to note, in a normal environment, three or four hours are a short time to spend with your child. However, in a closed, supervised environment, we have found visits longer than two hours are not successful. The parties are in a space the size of a typical family room. After two hours children and parents usually become restless and bored during the third hour. Often a child's attention span will not last that long. What then happens is the children will become resistant to visit. The parent/child relationship and the visits start to deteriorate. I have been doing this for almost 20 years. Rarely have I seen visits longer than two hours be successful. For this reason, with a few exceptions, KIDS Services will not schedule visits longer than two hours. Additionally, we encourage weekly contact as opposed to every other week.