

Parent Handbook

Center for Family Connections

Mission Statement

The mission of Center for Family Connections is to provide a respectful environment and access to resources that foster healthy, safe parenting opportunities.



— CENTER FOR —
FAMILY CONNECTIONS

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WELCOME TO CENTER FOR FAMILY CONNECTIONS

The mission of Center for Family Connections is to provide a respectful environment and access to resources that foster healthy, safe parenting opportunities.

Our primary concern is your safety. We believe children have a right to a safe and healthy relationship with their parents. To provide such an environment, guidelines for participation need to exist. Please review the guidelines carefully because we want your experience here to be the best possible for you and your children.

Services offered at Center for Family Connections

Supervised Visitation

Center for Family Connections offers Supervised Visitation services to non-custodial parents and their children. During a supervised visit, a Visitation Monitor will provide direct supervision during the entire visit. Visits are scheduled for up to 2-hours (based on staff discretion) and will take place in a family room that is comfortable and entertaining for parents and children.

Safe Exchange

Center for Family Connections offers Supervised Exchange services to facilitate the safe transition of children from one parent to the other. During a *supervised exchange*, Exchange Monitors will facilitate the safe exchange of children and certain items between parents. The exchange typically takes about 35 minutes to complete so please be patient as staff works with you to facilitate the exchange.

Children in Divorce and Separation Workshop

Four-hour mandatory co-parenting workshop for divorcing or separating parents.

CIDS is designed to help parents help their children while living separately, who are currently in the process of divorce/separation, are considering it, are already divorced or never married. This training will help assist your children in minimizing or eliminating trauma and adjusting to changes that occur during and after divorce or separation.

Resources

Center for Family Connections will provide resource information to parents, as needed, including but not limited to domestic violence hotline and information, a resource library with information about local services and how to access those services.

Information

Confidentiality

Each party must agree to respect the privacy of others. Center for Family Connections will do everything in their power to safeguard clients' rights to privacy and the confidentiality of any information disclosed, in the course of their relationship with the Center.

Staff will not release any personal information including addresses, living arrangements, transportation type, telephone numbers, email addresses and other types of electronic media or children's school information unless court ordered or voluntarily released. If you would like for anyone outside the center to receive information about the visits, a Release of Information form must be signed.

Exceptions to confidentiality are- in response to a court order; in reports of suspected child abuse and neglect to the appropriate authority as required by law; and in reporting danger or threats of harm to self or others as required by law.

Emergency Contacts

Custodial parents are required to provide Center for Family Connections with emergency contact information during the intake process. Emergency contacts should include anyone that the parent may send in their place to pick-up or drop-off their children, in case of an emergency. These individuals may be contacted if staff is unable to contact the parent directly in cases involving services and you are acknowledging that persons listed are allowed to pick up your child(ren) from the premises.

The Custodial Parent is primarily responsible for picking up or dropping off the children for visits however, in the event of an emergency, the person listed as the emergency contact may be drop off or pick up by seeking permission from staff, in advance. Children will only be released to the designated party and they should be prepared to show identification to staff.

If the parent needs to add anyone to the Emergency Contact list, they must fill out an Alternate Transportation Form.

**It is the responsibility of the parent to explain the policies and procedures to the designated emergency contact. Any rule violation by a third-party will reflect on that parent.*

The Visiting Parent will also need to provide an emergency contact in the event of an emergency that may take place while the parent is visiting at the Center.

Visitation Monitor's Role: Visitation Monitors will stay present in the visitation room to maintain a safe environment during visitation. Visitation Monitors will not provide childcare or actively participate in the visit, unless it is necessary. Parents are responsible for the care of their children and their belongings. Parents are also responsible for the children's behavior. Visitation Monitor will provide re-direction and

feedback to parents during and after visit times (read section What to Expect During a Visit)

Parent's Role: The visiting parent is responsible for bringing diapers, wipes, and other pertinent items for the child during the visit. The visiting parent is also, responsible for providing snack foods or drinks for the child during the visit. These items should be brought to the visit in a clear 1 gallon sized freezer bag. Diaper bags are not allowed. The custodial parent will provide baby formulas, or any specialty foods needed by an infant or child. The custodial parent will provide information about types of foods, baby foods and formulas, food allergies that are pertinent to the visit, if any (this information will be obtained at orientation and provided to the Visiting Parent by staff prior to the first visit)

Center for Family Connections Hours of Operation:

Visitation Hours:

Weekdays:

Wednesday, Thursday & Friday-visits begin at **3 PM** and the last visit will end at **8 PM**

Weekends:

Saturday- visits begin at **10 AM** and last visit will end at **5 PM**

Sunday- visits begin at **3 PM** and last visit will end at **7 PM**

Center for Family Connections business hours are:

9 AM-5 PM, Monday thru Friday

Please note that orientations and non-visit needs are by appointment only. We do not accept walk-ins in order to respect the privacy of other families in visitation or in orientation.

**Families will be scheduled according to their scheduling needs and based on the Center's availability.*

***Center for Family Connections reserves the right to make changes in scheduling, as needed.*

Holiday Schedules:

Center for Family Connections will be closed on the following holidays:

New Year's Day	Martin Luther King, Jr. Day	Easter Sunday
Memorial Day	Independence Day	Labor Day
Thanksgiving (2 days)	Christmas (2 days)	

**Efforts will be made to accommodate all pre and post-holiday requests for visits.*

Cancellations

Due to illness: If you need to cancel a visit, please contact staff as soon as possible. Do not bring your child to a visit if they are too sick to visit or are showing signs of becoming sick (for example, running a fever or throwing up). Repeated incidents of sudden illness or injury may have to be verified by a licensed health care professional.

If a child or adult has head lice or another communicable disease, the condition has to be treated before the next visit. A letter from your pediatrician, primary care physician or the health department may be required stating the participant is free of the condition.

Due to weather- In the event of bad weather during the week or on the weekend, the Center will make the determination on whether to open or close based on decision by management utilizing local weather and road information. Staff will make contact with all parties concerning cancellations by telephone and by sending a message out on the SecureCases messaging system.

Smoking Policy- Family Connections is a smoke-free/tobacco-free facility. No smoking or use of tobacco products will be allowed on the premises, inside or within 30 feet outside the facility.

****Any parent on-site will not be allowed to leave the building to smoke during the visit.***

Alcohol/Drugs Policy- Alcohol and drugs are not allowed on the premises. Participants will not use or possess illegal substances or alcohol before or during supervised visitations. Center staff reserves the right to cancel visits or services if there is a suspicion that a participant is impaired by or in possession of illegal substances or alcohol.

If the parent who is dropping off or picking up the child(ren) is thought to be impaired by drugs or alcohol and is driving, calls will be made to that parent's emergency contact to pick up child(ren). Children will not be allowed to leave with a parent who is impaired by alcohol or drugs.

****Center for Family Connections staff reserves the right to call Child Protective Services in the event they are unable to reach a parent or an emergency contact.***

Weapons Policy- Center for Family Connections is a weapons free zone with no firearms, concealed weapons, knives mace or other types of sprays allowed on the premises. Bringing weapons onto the premises may result in immediate termination of services.

Guns brought onto the premises including the parking areas, will be subject to all pertinent laws and police procedures as determined by the Chattanooga Police Department.

Chattanooga Police will be called to take control of the weapon if brought onto the premises.

Pets/Animals Policy- no pets/insects/fish/reptiles will be allowed at the visits. Service animals with documentation will be allowed.

ADA Accessibility Policy- If you are in need of any forms of handicap accessibility features for example; handicap ramp, larger print material, hearing problems, etc...please let staff know during orientation so we can work with you to have the best experience possible.

Grievance Procedure- Anyone applying for service, including children, have the right to complain if dissatisfied with decisions concerning them, or if services provided them are considered unsatisfactory.

**Ask staff for a copy of the Client Grievance/Complaint Handbook for more information.*

Parent Guidelines

Parent guidelines may be modified if there are case specific allegations pertinent to safety made during orientation or after visits have started. Parents will be given further instructions at that time.

Parent Orientation – Orientation is a time to meet with staff and to get to know the setting prior to the start visit. Both parents are required to complete an orientation before services can begin. The visiting parent must complete the process first. Each parent will complete orientation individually and at separate times.

Child Orientation- Children will meet with staff for an orientation to become familiar with the environment. It will also give the child an opportunity to meet the Visitation Monitor and understand their role during the visit. Child orientations will take place during the custodial parent's orientation or if not possible, due to school schedule, the orientation will take place during the first 15 minutes of the first visit.

Scheduling

Center of Family Connections will offer scheduling including evenings and weekends to accommodate work and school schedules of both parties. The schedule will be set once the Center identifies a day and time that works for both parties. Staff will communicate with both parties to schedule the visits.

Changes to schedule- Once a schedule is set, it will remain the same unless the circumstances change and the schedule does not work for one or both parties. If the schedule needs to be changed, the request will need to be made in writing and staff will work with both parties to facilitate the change. If the new time is not available, the family will be put on a Waiting List and visits will stop until the new time is available.

Safety and Security

For the safety of all participants at Center for Family Connections, the following policies must be followed:

Arrival and Departure: the times of your arrival and departure to and from visits will be discussed and set-up during intake. **IT IS VERY IMPORTANT YOU FOLLOW THE TIMES SET UP AT ORIENTATION.** If you are having a difficult time meeting the schedule, discuss with staff to determine if other arrangements can be made.

Late Arrival- if you are running late for the visit, IT IS VERY IMPORTANT YOU CALL STAFF and let them know what time you will be arriving at the Center. Staff will then let you know whether you should still come to the visit or if the visit has been cancelled (see below for visit cancellation information). Late arrivals will be documented in the monitoring report. If a pattern of running late develops, staff will document and discuss with the parent.

**It is the discretion of the Center to determine whether a visit will be cancelled due to lateness.*

If the *custodial parent* is running late to pick up their child from the visit, it is very important that staff is called to let them know what time you will be arriving at the center. If the parent has not arrived or made contact with staff within **15 minutes of the end of the visit**, then one of the Emergency Contacts will be called to arrange pick-up of the child(ren).

**If the Emergency Contacts cannot be reached and staff is unable to reach the custodial parent, staff will call the proper authorities which may include Law Enforcement or the Department of Children Services to come pick up the child(ren).*

***If another person besides the custodial parent brings the child to the visit, they will not be allowed to stay on site during the visit.*

Cancelled Visits: If either party has not arrived 45 minutes after the start of a 2-hour scheduled visit or 15 minutes after the start of a 1-hour scheduled visit, it may be cancelled. This will be documented as a no show in the Monitoring Report

If there is a pattern of missed visits, visits will be suspended until the parent cancelling the visits meets with the Center's Program Manager to discuss why visits are being missed.

Entrances and Parking Lot- Parents will be assigned separate entrances and parking areas during orientation to avoid contact with one another. Parents are expected to maintain these directions for the duration of the visits, unless changed by staff.

- Parent arriving through the rear entrance door (to visit child/ren) will park in the area closest to Office Depot as shown during orientation and **must exit the**

building that way. Parents are not allowed to drive through parking lot or exit any other exit.

- Parent arriving through the main entrance (to bring child/ren) will park in the designated spots shown during orientation. Parent **must exit** the parking area immediately.
- **No parent is allowed to circle the parking lot and/or look into other parent's car.** All Parents are required to leave out their designated exit. For anyone who violates this policy their visit or exchange will be suspended on the first offense. Any other violations on this policy will be at staff discretion but could be another suspension but not limited to termination.
- **No one is allowed to stay in their cars in the parking lot.** You will be directed to leave the area and return at the designated time or to enter the building to wait until the supervised visit is completed.

Security Devices- the following security devices will be utilized for safety during visits.

- Metal detector/wand
- Security guard will be present during all visits and orientations.

What to Expect During a Visit-

Visitation Monitors will be in the room and with the family throughout the course of the entire visit. Children will not be left alone with the visiting parent during this time. It is important that children be there to enjoy spending time with the parent and to not be burdened with questions about adult situations.

**Monitors may occasionally "redirect" the conversation meaning that they will ask the parent not to discuss a particular topic in front of the child, to ask the child certain questions or to change a behavior.*

For instance, parents may not and will be redirected if they:

- ❖ Ask child about the other parent
- ❖ ask child financial or legal questions (child support or court)
- ❖ asking the child where they live or go to school
- ❖ ask child for phone numbers
- ❖ ask whether the other parent is dating, remarried
- ❖ yell or scream at the child
- ❖ make promises about the future such as, "when you come live with me" or "when we get back together"

Also, parent may not:

- ❖ Whisper to child (staff must be able to hear all conversations)

- ❖ Pass notes to the child including legal documents, personal letters, cards, or child support.
- ❖ Use a cell phone during the visit- please plan to leave your phone in your vehicle or staff will hold it until your departure
- ❖ Physically discipline a child

Bathroom breaks for children- If a child is not old enough to go to the bathroom alone, then the parent may escort the child to the bathroom. The Visitation Monitor must stand at the door that is slightly opened in order to see and hear inside the bathroom.

If the child is old enough to go to the bathroom alone then staff may allow them to go alone. Staff will open the door to the bathroom area and wait for the child to finish and bring them back to the room. Security will be called to stay with the Visiting Parent during the time staff is out of the room.

Medication- If medication has to be given to a child during the visitation time including scheduled medication or emergency medication i.e. asthma inhaler; must be left by the custodial parent. Correct dosages must be made available and will be administered by the visiting parent if the child needs assistance. *Staff will not administer medication to children.*

Artwork or other items made by children during visit -Center staff will make the determination whether artwork can go home with child(ren) at the end of the visit.

End of Visit- Parents and children will be expected to return the visitation room to the way they found it during the last 10 minutes of the visit. This includes throwing away any trash, straightening up tables and chairs, putting away games, etc. Due to required wait times, parents will pass the time by cleaning the room after the visit has ended. We expect the rooms to be left clean and in order prior to leaving the Center. This includes throwing away any trash, straightening up tables and chairs, putting away games, and vacuuming, etc...

Special Requests-The Visiting Parent must request the use of any special equipment including TV's, DVD player, VCR, or Wii/games when they arrive for the visit.

Gifts and Celebrations- Visiting Parent may bring gifts to the child(ren) using the following guidelines:

- Parent must arrive 10 minutes earlier than the assigned time with gifts and staff/security will inspect the gift.
- Gift bags only
- No cash, gift cards, phone cards, checks, or any other types of monetary gifts may be given.
- If the gift is electronic – including but not limited to iPods, iPads, computers, phones, game consoles, CD's, software, and other devices – it must be brought to the Center new, unopened, and in its original packaging.

- Gifts from the visiting parent must have prior approval of the Center. It will be at the discretion of the Center staff whether the gift will be permitted. If a gift is not permitted, no reason will be given.

**The Center retains the right to accept or deny gift-giving practices based on the unique circumstances of each family's case.*

Photography may be allowed based on the families unique history and circumstances. If allowed, contact the center in advance of bringing a camera. Cell phones camera's maybe used with staff taking pictures but must be left with staff or taken out of the room once pictures have been taken. Disposable and Polaroid cameras will also be allowed for use.

Photographs, video recording and other recording devices

- ❖ Photographs cannot be brought in by the visiting parent to give to the custodial parent or vice versa.
- ❖ Photographs brought in to give to the child must be approved.
- ❖ Photographs brought in by child for the visiting parent will be previewed by staff.
- ❖ Neither custodial nor non-custodial parent may take any photograph or make any audio or video recording on-site.
- ❖ Photography will only be allowed at special events i.e. birthdays and only with approval from center staff.
- ❖ No voice recording will be allowed.
- ❖ Pictures may not be taken of staff members, security or other families who may be visiting at the Center.

Termination of Visits

Visits may be terminated, either temporarily or permanently, if any of the following occur:

- ❖ When a parent chooses not to correct their behavior after staff intervention
- ❖ When a child refuses to visit or is extremely upset
 - Staff is trained to work with the child to gently encourage him or her to continue or begin a visit. If staff is unable to reassure the child the visit will be cancelled for the day. It should be noted that *no child will be forced to visit.*
- ❖ Physical discipline of a child
- ❖ Chronic no-shows
- ❖ Safety concerns or other case issues that cannot be safely or effectively managed by center staff
- ❖ Parent's failure to comply with the conditions or rules for participation after following the 3 levels of termination guideline, as described below:

- Suspend service and meet with offending parent
- Let court know through monitoring form
- Immediate termination of visit(s)

Termination of Visits by a Parent

If a parent wishes to terminate services, a letter that is signed and dated requesting to terminate visits will be required.

Liability- Center for Family Connections will not be held liable for the loss of property, injury, or abduction of the child(ren) by either party or persons acting on their behalf.

Emergency Disaster Procedures- In the event of any of the following emergency disaster situations, staff will provide clear instructions to follow.

In the event of a *bomb threat or fire*, staff will contact the proper authorities and everyone inside the building will be instructed to evacuate. Staff will ensure, if both parents are on site, they leave the building out of separate entrances as to not come into contact with one another. The visiting child will be placed with the custodial parent at this time, if on site. Staff will monitor both exit areas.

In the event of a *natural disaster involving bad weather*, staff will contact the proper authorities and move everyone in the building to a safe location. The visiting parent will move to the long hallway outside the visiting rooms. If the custodial parent is on site, the child will be placed with that parent and moved to the residential parent hallway. Staff will monitor both areas.

***If during an emergency, the child must be with either parent. The parent visiting must stay on site with the child until the custodial parent arrives to pick up the child. The parent who arrived to the visit first should wait until staff informs them it is okay to leave. The child(ren) will only be released to the custodial parent.*

Tips for a Successful Parent/Child Visit

Tips for the Visiting Parent

- ❖ Follow the schedule set up for your visits.
- ❖ Cancel only in the event of an emergency. Routine is very important for children.
- ❖ Arrive on time.
- ❖ Focus on your children. Enjoy this time together. Allow your children to enjoy this time with you.
- ❖ Try and avoid distractions and give your children all your attention.

- ❖ Be prepared. Plan on talking to and playing with your children. Choose games, books and other activities your child will enjoy.
- ❖ Have a plan in mind for how to spend the time, but make sure you are open to what your children may want to do.
- ❖ Talk to your children about what you are doing and give them general details about your life.
- ❖ Ask them questions about their activities however, **it is important not to ask them personal information about the other parent or identifying information such as where they are in school if they have recently moved or where they live.* Follow your child's lead and if they do not answer your questions, do not grill them. Move on to another topic.
- ❖ Keep the conversation positive!
- ❖ Avoid talking about adult issues i.e. court, child support, custody, divorce, etc... These topics can cast a negative light on the visit and will not be permitted.
- ❖ Relax and enjoy your visit. Children will sense your relaxation and it will carry over.

Tips for the Custodial Parent

- ❖ Follow the schedule set for your children's visits with the other parent.
- ❖ Only cancel for emergencies.
- ❖ Arrive on time.
- ❖ Prepare your children for the visit. Mark the visitation days on a calendar.
- ❖ Use what you know about your children's personality to help them transition to the visit. *For example, allow enough time to get ready so that they aren't frantically rushing out the door. Provide down time after the visit rather than immediately going to another activity.*
- ❖ Be positive. While this may be difficult for you, it will likely benefit your children if you can try to remain positive about the visits.
- ❖ Avoid talking about the divorce, the other parent, and Court.
- ❖ If having your children spend time with the other parent is a problem for you, don't ignore your feelings. Talk with a therapist, a friend, your pastor, or someone who can provide support and be objective. It is never appropriate to share those feelings with your children. Maintain good boundaries and keep adult issues between adults.
- ❖ When the visit is over, listen to your child. Let your children set the pace of not only what they tell you about the visit, but when they are ready to talk to you about the visit.