



# Supervised visits and changeovers

Where separated parents are experiencing high levels of conflict or there are concerns about violence, the Australian Government has funded Children's Contact Services to enable the safe transfer of children from one parent to another and for supervised visits so that each parent can spend time with their children.

## What is a Children's Contact Service?

Children's Contact Services help children from separated families to establish or maintain a relationship with the parent they do not live with. When families separate and the transfer of children from one parent to another is a problem, a Children's Contact Service provides a neutral venue for safe changeovers.

Where necessary, or as directed by a court order, the Service can supervise the time children spend with a parent or other family members. Sometimes this is because of allegations of violence. Sometimes it is because a child is being reintroduced to a parent or family member when they have spent little or no time together.

## What is a supervised visit?

When a child needs to have a safe, controlled situation in which to spend time with their other parent or a family member, the visit can be supervised by a Children's Contact Service worker.

## What is a supervised changeover?

In separated families there are times when a child needs to be 'handed over' and 'handed back' to the parent or other family member who does not have the day-to-day care of them. In cases where either parent is not comfortable with meeting face-to-face, a Children's Contact Service worker will facilitate or supervise the changeover.

## **Courts and Children's Contact Services**

If you decide to go to court for a decision about your child, the court may order you to participate in supervised changeovers, or for the time that a parent or other family member spends with a child to be supervised at a specific Children's Contact Service.

If you have been ordered by the court to attend a Children's Contact Service, the Service will do its best to help you comply with the order, if you and the other parent of your child meet its criteria, and it has appropriate facilities and resources available. The Children's Contact Service is not bound by the court order.

You may go back to court if the court order expires, if the Children's Contact Service is unable to continue to provide its services, or if the Service recommends a variation of the order in writing to you and the other parent. If you and the other parent agree in writing to new arrangements for spending time with your child, you may need to return to court for consent orders to be made. The court will only make a consent order if it is in the child's best interests to do so.

The Children's Contact Service may recommend that you or the other parent participate in a post separation parenting program. A court can order attendance at other programs at any time during legal action to try to resolve the issues that got in the way of each parent spending time with their child.

A court can order a report from a Children's Contact Service. Reports can provide the court with information about the time spent with the child at the Service and can assist the court to determine whether to allow unsupervised visits.

## **What happens during supervised contact?**

The visits should be a happy time for the child. The Children's Contact Service has a range of toys and activities for children and parents to use. A Children's Contact Service worker will observe the interaction between a child and his or her parent at all times.

## **Who can go to a Children's Contact Service?**

Separated families can be helped by a Children's Contact Service. You can use a Children's Contact Service whether or not you have ever married or lived with your child's other parent.

## **When do I use a Children's Contact Service?**

You can use a Children's Contact Service voluntarily or because you have been ordered by a court to use the Service. The court can order that the handover of children, or the time children spend with a parent or another family member, be supervised.

## **What information will a Children's Contact Service provide me with?**

A Children's Contact Service will explain the safety rules for using the Service and can tell you about other services available to help you.

## **What should I tell my child about supervised contact?**

Talk to your child in plain simple words. Tell them where they will be meeting or spending time with their other parent or family member. Describe it as a safe and friendly place. Take them to the Children's Contact Service for a visit before supervised visits or changeovers start. Make sure the child knows who they are going to see and for how long and who will be picking them up after the visit to take them home.

## **How long is it necessary for the time a parent spends with their child to be supervised?**

Often the relationship between the parent and the child improves so that supervision is no longer needed. Sometimes supervision continues for an extended period. If supervised visits or changeovers have been ordered by the court, these continue until the court decides otherwise.

## **What if you are feeling unsafe?**

Children's Contact Services have arrangements in place to protect the safety of clients and staff. If you have concerns about your safety or the safety of your children, you should let the Service staff know as soon as possible.

## **Will my child be safe?**

If you are concerned about your child's safety during the visits, discuss this with the Children's Contact Service before the first visit.

## **Is what I say at a Children's Contact Service confidential?**

No, anything said or done at a Children's Contact Service can be reported as evidence to any court. Children's Contact Services may provide reports about what the workers have observed during a supervised visit or changeover to you, the court, your solicitor or the independent lawyer appointed to represent your child.

## **Will the supervision be neutral?**

Children's Contact Service workers do not take sides. Their focus is on the child and not on the dispute that parents or other family members may have.

## **What will it cost?**

Children's Contact Services will charge fees for supervised visits and changeovers. Let the Service know if you are on a low income or experiencing financial difficulties as the Service will have arrangements in place to ensure you can access the Service.

## **How do I contact a Children's Contact Service?**

For more information and contact details for these services call the Family Relationship Advice Line on **1800 050 321** between **8am to 8pm Monday to Friday** and **10am to 4pm Saturdays** (except national public holidays).

You can also visit Family Relationships Online at [www.familyrelationships.gov.au](http://www.familyrelationships.gov.au)