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## FORENSIC COUNSELING SERVICES

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### Information about supervised visitation locations

As our web page and forms note,

“We coordinate professionally trained staff supervising visits in the community, often at a parent’s home or other child-friendly location.”

Many parents enjoy visiting with children in their homes, as they are able to prepare snacks and meals, play games, and generally “hang out” as parents and children often do in family settings. For multiple different, case-specific, reasons parents and courts may choose to have visits outside of parents’ homes. Generally by the time we become involved families have already selected a visitation location, but we also occasionally get questions about what specific locations we utilize for supervised visits. This document is intended to help address those questions.

Our basic requirements for visit locations are that they must have an indoor area where people are invited to congregate, and restroom facilities available. This allows us wide latitude in working with parents in different areas of the metroplex to find locations that fit their family’s needs.

Examples of community locations that are acceptable are:

- Malls, which invite people to loiter and enjoy the various businesses, amenities, and other attractions. There are generally multiple food options if parents and children wish to have a meal together, and some have specialty attractions such as movie theaters, black-light miniature golf, or bounce houses, to name a few.
- Outdoor shopping plazas, such as the Shops at Legacy or Upton Village at Cedar Hill, which have various outdoor areas for when weather is appropriate, and often a different variety of options on property than their indoor cousins.
- Recreational centers, such as those operated by city parks and recreation departments. These are often better used during pleasant weather, and we suggest planning a backup site in case of inclement weather, as most children find visiting in lobbies while hiding from the elements less than appealing.

- Museums, science centers, and cultural exhibits. The metroplex has an amazing number of wonderful fun and educational attractions. Often the content of these attractions changes, and thus return visits cover new ground, rather than becoming repetitious, although the cost of these locations often makes them a special event for families rather than a routine meeting location.
- Entertainment-themed pizza and arcade centers. There are several options for these types of locations, and while they expect some food and beverage purchases in exchange for use of their facilities, they are generally accommodating to families who linger after a purchase. Similar to museums, etc. some families use these types of locations as a special event, while others routinely use them as their meeting location.
- Restaurants. From fast food to casual sit down dining, restaurants remain a popular location for short lunch-time and dinner-time visits. Having a meal with children is a common parenting experience, and many families enjoy the chance to have a relaxed meal together and chat about how they are doing. For longer visits we suggest locations where restaurants are available, rather than making them the sole location for the visit.
- Commercial amusement attractions. These can vary greatly based on where in the metroplex one resides, but there are jump parks, zoos, bounce houses, aquariums, go-cart tracks, and other interesting enterprises available. Because location of visits is determined by agreement of the parties or court order we stay out of discussions regarding which facilities are appropriate for children of what age; parents can always agree what is in their children's best interests, or have the court make such a decision.

**Special note:** Due to supervisor's inability to jump/ride/etc. on attractions while still providing appropriate supervision visiting parties and the supervisor will need to remain together and observe while children participate in activities. This makes large roller-coaster parks unappealing for most families, but there are many smaller attractions where parents often participate by loading children in to rides and then cheering them on.

*Please note for locations where there are admission charges or other fees per person the parents will also have to provide for the supervisor's admission fees.*

Examples of community locations that are generally not acceptable:

- Water parks. There are myriad problems with visits at water parks that simply make them untenable for supervised visitation. Apartment pools and splash pads, or swimming pools in backyards of parents' houses are fine, but similar to the issues with commercial amusement attractions our supervisors and parents are not able to swim during those visits. Hanging out at the edge of the pool with feet in the water while the children play is fine, but we are unable to hear communication well from the sidelines when parents are in pools with their children.

- Parks without restrooms and indoor facilities. There are many beautiful parks in the area, however the inability of children to use restrooms or seek shelter from unexpected weather puts these off limits during visits.
- Wal-Mart. While we have only had one request for Wal-Mart as a visit location, that request caused us to refine our thinking on visit locations. Unlike in malls, there is no intent for shoppers to loiter at Wal-Mart, outside of the café areas. They are also simply not designed in the way malls and other shopping areas are for comfort; they are utilitarian by nature rather than recreational.
- Private boating expeditions. For much the same reasons we do not ride in parents' cars (both on the liability side, and the ability to appropriately direct the visits), travel in parents' watercraft is also not engaged in during visits. Some boating attractions may be appropriate, such as the dinner cruise on Lake Granbury, however those are qualitatively different experiences.

Facilities we have available:

As noted in our literature, our interview office is a business office that is not suitable for supervised visitation. Due to repeated requests for a more secured, non-public location we have made arrangements for access to a facility in the City of Denton which is suitable in size for supervised visits, and is furnished with a couch, coffee table, rug, television, and DVD player. Assuming parents want to do more than just watch a movie with their children, parents would need to bring toys and other items to play with in order to make the experience satisfactory. We recommend the Denton space only for short visits (two hours or less in duration).

While the list of specific locations we have used for supervised visits would be extensive, we hope these broader examples have provided some insight into choosing visit locations. We look forward to working with you should our services be needed.