



# Safe Visitation for Community Agencies

## Information Sheet

The need for safe visitation was identified during the 2004 Alberta Roundtable on Family Violence and Bullying, a public consultation process that focused on finding solutions to prevent family violence and bullying.<sup>1</sup>

The safety of children and families continues to be a top priority of the Government of Alberta.

### Get Help

**If you or someone you know is in immediate danger, phone 911.**

For help in your community or for more information, phone the 24-hour Family Violence Info Line at **310-1818**, toll-free in Alberta, or visit **[www.familyviolence.gov.ab.ca](http://www.familyviolence.gov.ab.ca)**.

Alberta Children's Services is proud to lead Alberta's Prevention of Family Violence and Bullying Initiative.

## Provincial Safe Visitation Initiative

### For children involved in a high-risk family violence situation

#### What is safe visitation?

The Alberta Government's Safe Visitation Initiative helps protect children and families in situations where there is a high-risk of family violence between parents. Safe visitation provides an opportunity for children to visit with non-custodial parents in a safe and secure environment. Safe visitation services are provided by trained staff to help ensure children have a positive experience visiting with their parent.

#### Why is safe visitation needed?

Research shows the importance of children maintaining safe and positive contact with both parents. However, in families where family violence has occurred and the parents are separated, child visits with a non-custodial parent can be stressful.

#### Who is eligible for safe visitation services?

Families may be eligible for safe visitation services if...

- There have been incidents of violence between parents and the parents are separated.
- There is a high risk of continuing or escalating family violence between parents and the children are at risk of further harm or exposure.
- The custodial parent would like a child to have safe contact with the non-custodial parent, a child wishes to visit the non-custodial parent, or a court has ordered that a child must have the opportunity to visit the non-custodial parent.
- The family circumstances have been assessed by a Child and Family Services Authority (CFSA) or Delegated First Nations Agency (DFNA) caseworker who has determined that the safe visitation program will meet the intervention needs of the family.

#### How does the safe visitation service work?

Anyone can identify that a family may be eligible for safe visitation services. The family is referred to the local CFSA (see contact information on the reverse of this sheet).

When a family is referred, a caseworker will provide a comprehensive assessment of the family situation, including risk factors for ongoing exposure to family violence and abuse.

For families for whom safe visitation services are not appropriate, the caseworker will help the family connect with other sources of help in the community.



For families whom safe visitation services are appropriate:

- The caseworker will connect the family to safe visitation services.
- Trained staff from the community agency will meet with the parents separately.
- The staff will help develop safety measures so that the parents do not have contact with one another, allowing them to focus on the best interests of the child.
- The visit will take place outside of the parental homes in the community.
- The staff will observe the contact between the parent and child and provide support to enable the child to have a positive experience.
- Before and after the visit, the agency staff can assist family members in accessing specialized services, such as counselling and parenting support.

### **Where is safe visitation available?**

Safe visitation is being piloted in five sites:

- Calgary – YWCA Sheriff King
- Edmonton – YWCA Edmonton
- Grande Prairie – PACE
- Lethbridge – YWCA Lethbridge and District
- Red Deer – Central Alberta Women’s Outreach Society (CAWOS)

The five pilot sites were chosen in communities that have a domestic violence court as part of a coordinated response to the needs of families experiencing family violence. Experience from the pilot sites will assist in determining the need for safe visitation services in other areas of the province.

### **Is there a cost? Do families need a court order?**

There is no cost for families to access services from a safe visitation pilot site, and a court order is not necessary for a referral.

### *Find out more*

#### **Contact the Child and Family Services Authority in one of the following locations:**

Calgary: (403) 297-2995

Edmonton: (780) 644-8386

Grande Prairie: (780) 538-5102

Lethbridge: (403) 381-5500

Red Deer: (403) 340-5400

Safe visitation services are an initiative by the Alberta government to support families impacted by family violence. The services have been designed based on information from other safe visitation programs and services from across North America.