

## SUPERVISED ACCESS SERVICES

<b>Counselling Services of Belleville &amp; District</b> 12 Moira St. Belleville, ON <b>Supervised Access Services          for Hastings and Prince Edward Counties</b> 150 Dundas St. East Belleville, ON K8N 1C7	<b>Phone: 613-966-7413</b>  <b>Phone: 613-968-7362</b> <b>Fax: 613-966-4542</b>
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### **Hours of Operation:**

**Office Hours are Monday to Friday 8:30 – 4:30**

**Visits/Exchanges-Belleville site: Tuesdays: special arrangements 9:30-7:30,  
 Wednesdays/Thursdays 9:30-7:30, Fridays/Sundays 9:30-5:30, Saturdays  
 9:30-3:30**

### **Introduction**

The Supervised Access Services (SAS) of Counselling Services of Belleville and District is funded by the Ministry of the Attorney General and mandated to provide separated or divorced families a safe and non-threatening, child-focused, neutral environment for visits and exchanges between children and non-custodial parties or other persons such as grandparents where there is a concern for the safety of the child and/or the custodial party.

Supervised Access Services does not provide service to families who are involved in CAS protection cases where the children are in care; under supervision order or there is an on-going investigation.

The Children’s Law Reform Act under Section 34, provides the legislative framework for the program and in most instances, families are ordered by the court to attend at the Supervised Access Service, however, the program also accepts referrals from lawyers for the parties, the Office of the Children’s Lawyer, and self-referrals in those instances when both parties consent to the service being provided.

All visits and exchanges are prearranged by Supervised Access Services. There is a fee of \$10:00 per supervised visit and/or full exchange service. The fee is waived if a client is unable to pay. SAS will provide reports to the parties and/or their counsel outlining the factual observations about the participant’s use of the service, for a fee.

More specifically, the program:

- strives to provide a safe and non-threatening, child-focused, neutral environment for visits and exchanges between children and non-residential parents/family members

- strives to provide an environment that is non-stigmatizing - where families feel welcome regardless of their religious, ethnic or socio-economic background or reason for referral
- strives to ensure the safety of all persons involved in the program, including staff and volunteers
- provides trained staff and volunteers who are sensitive to the needs of parents and children
- provides constant supervision during visits and exchanges, and direct monitoring of all interactions between participants and children and intervening when the safety, health or welfare of the child or other participants is at risk, and
- provides the courts and/or lawyers with factual observations about a participant's use of the service.

## Overview of Specific Procedures and Services

As a member of Supervised Visitation Network the SAS have minimum standards and guidelines to follow.

### 1. INTAKE INTERVIEWS

Upon referral to the program, both parties are required to contact the Coordinator to set up an intake interview prior to any exchanges or visitations. Parents will be given specific instructions about documentation required for the intake process: for example, the custodial party is asked to bring health card numbers for all children who will be visiting at the service. In those instances when the Coordinator is aware one of the parties has been a victim of partner abuse, additional detailed information will be solicited with priority attention to safety and risk assessment. Similarly, if partner abuse is disclosed during the intake interview, the Coordinator will collect additional relevant information.

The terms of the exchanges and/or visits are determined along with acceptance into the program during the intake process. Custodial parents will be asked to confirm any specific conditions or limitations needing to be applied to visits/exchanges with the visiting parent, including but not limited to permission for the child/ren to receive gifts, permission for photographs to be taken during visits, and permission for other family members or friends to participate in scheduled visits.

To facilitate the comfort of the child/ren, all participants including the child/ren are encouraged to attend an orientation at the designated visit site prior to the first visit or exchange.

### 2. EXCHANGES AND VISITS

**Supervised Exchanges:** In separated families where there is a great deal of conflict between the parents, a neutral place to exchange the children for visits makes access easier

and reduces the tension for the child. In the **drop-off/pick-up service**, the only supervision provided is that of the exchange of the child. Parents arrive at staggered times and do not have contact with one another at the time of the exchange; therefore do not have to be concerned with personal safety issues. The service records the parents' arrival times and ensures that the visiting parent is not under the influence of drugs or alcohol.

**Supervised Visits:** The SAS provides a safe, comfortable, child-focused environment for on-site supervised visits with non-custodial parents/family members. Trained staff or volunteers provide constant supervision throughout the entire visit. Visiting parents/family members are required to comply with a variety of program guidelines during visits, such as refraining from discussing the custodial parent and/or any legal procedures involving the family, refraining from whispering and refraining from the use of physical discipline. Visits may be cancelled if staff suspects either party is under the influence of drugs or alcohol.

Visits may be terminated by staff in the event that either party does not comply with these program guidelines.

The following procedures and requirements apply to both exchanges and visits:

- parents are required to provide their own transportation to and from the designated site
- arrival and departure times for each parent are staggered up to 15 minutes
- all contacts with parties, including telephone, interviews, and during visits/exchanges is documented and kept with their file

These procedures ensure that parents/family members do not have any direct contact with one another during exchanges or visits.

Visits or exchanges may be scheduled weekly, bi-weekly, monthly, or whenever needed in accordance with the "spirit of the court order" and in consideration of the availability of staff and volunteer. It should be noted that the service cannot enforce agreements or orders, and can only strive to facilitate the access arrangements. Consequently, the need to alter days or times may be unavoidable in order to accommodate a family's use of the service.

SAS staff makes every reasonable effort to respect and protect children while fulfilling the requirements of any exchange/visitation order. For example, staff do not force visits on children who refuse to meet with a parent and parents may not force physical contact of any kind on their child/ren during exchanges or visits. In accordance with the law, Hastings Children's Aid Society is contacted whenever staff or volunteers suspect child abuse.

All exchanges and visits are monitored and documented through observation notes.

Supervised Access Services closes during the Christmas season and on Statutory Holidays. Attempts will be made to assist families to make alternate arrangements during the closure.

## **Accessibility**

The SAS Dundas Street location is not accessible to wheelchair users. However, visits and exchanges can be arranged at the Moira St. office of CSBD for those individuals requiring a wheelchair accessible environment. SAS has a TTY and will arrange for interpreter services when necessary.

## **Accountability**

Complaints or concerns regarding the quality or nature of services received or not received through Supervised Access Services of Counselling Services of Belleville and District should be brought to the attention of the staff of SAS. If the client, after speaking with the staff member, is still not satisfied, they will be directed to the SAS Supervisor. If after discussion with the Supervisor the problem is not resolved, the client will be directed to the Clinical Manager and/or the Executive Director. Clients may make a written request for a meeting with the Executive Director. In the event the client requires assistance to put their complaint in writing, the agency will assist to find a neutral third party to provide such. Upon receipt of this information, the matter of concern will be reviewed with all respective persons. A written report of this review will be prepared and shared with the individual, the respective staff member, and the Executive Director of CSBD within five (5) working days. If the client or collateral agency is not satisfied with the decision reached and/or the discussion held with the Executive Director, and should they wish to pursue the matter further, they shall be referred to the Program Coordinator of the Supervised Access Program, Family Justice Services Division, Ministry of the Attorney General.

CSBD aims to build collaborative relationships with clients and collaterals. CSBD has membership on the QCCAV and the Domestic Violence Court Advisory Committee.