

guardianhouse
POLICY HANDBOOK
SUPERVISED VISITATION

This handbook has been prepared for you so that you know our policies and what to expect as you begin services with us. These policies have been developed with the aim of creating a safe and healthy environment, and will be reviewed with you at intake. Please initial each page, indicating that you have read, understand, and had an opportunity to ask questions about the content. A copy of this handbook will be provided to you at intake.

**Guardian House is a neutral location.
Staff do not favor either parent.**

WHAT HAPPENS ON A SUPERVISED VISIT?

A supervisor will be present at *all* times during the interaction between the parent and child(ren). The supervisor documents observed interactions and conversations during the visit; however they do not record opinions or make recommendations. The supervisor is responsible to intervene and re-direct the non-custodial parent if policies are not being followed.

The role of the supervisor is also to help facilitate, as needed, interaction and connections between the parent and child. Additionally, the supervisor can assist with parenting questions, like how to discipline with time-outs and how to change a diaper. Parents are encouraged to take our free Parenting Education class, and can put to practice what they are learning during visitation.

Although relatives may visit, the visitations are primarily aimed at maintaining, improving or establishing the parent/child relationship. There are many types of activities that can happen during a visit: families can cook or bake in our kitchen or play on our playground; play board games and video games, create arts and crafts, read books together, or engage in imaginative play with toys. We have things at Guardian House to do, but parents may also bring age appropriate activities.

We understand that being supervised during visitation may feel uncomfortable at first, but parents and children typically adjust quickly to the situation.

WHEN CAN VISITS START?

Services may begin once the enrollment process and Child Orientation are complete. The enrollment process is not complete until both parties have completed their intake interviews, provided all required documentation and paid their intake fee.

Enrollment Process

1. Both parties must contact Guardian House and schedule an intake interview to enroll in our services. Center staff will NOT contact the other party to schedule an intake interview.
2. Each party is responsible for their own intake fee regardless of who is ordered to pay for supervision fees, unless the court order specifically states otherwise.
3. All paperwork, required documentation and fees from both parties must be submitted before the enrollment process is considered complete.
 - a. A court order, signed by the judge, is required before services may begin.
4. After the enrollment process is complete and before visitation begins, a Child Orientation will be conducted with each child participating in supervised visitation services.
5. After the Child Orientation is complete, both parties will be contacted by phone to let them know that the non-custodial party may now begin requesting visits.
6. In the event that services do not begin, the intake paperwork will only remain on file for **six months**. After that, the intake interview and intake fee will have to be completed again to have an active intake, or to start services.
 - a. We suggest that you maintain your copy of these policies and receipt for payment of the intake fee as your proof of completing the intake interview. We will not provide verification that you have completed your intake.
7. In the event that services started but have not been used for at least one year, both parties will have to re-enroll in services, including completing their intake, providing all required documentation and paying the intake fee.
8. Any change of address or phone number, home or office, emergency contact or individuals who can pick up or drop off must be reported immediately to CFR. Parents may be asked to update their contact information every three months but are responsible for keeping contact information current.
9. It is the responsibility of the clients to keep Guardian House informed of court dates and modifications in visitation made by the court. A copy of the modification orders must be provided to Guardian House as soon as possible after orders are finalized/approved.
10. If you wish to have concerns, events or comments documented for your file, you may put these in writing and we will make sure it goes in your file. Staff will not document anything they did not witness firsthand.

Scheduling Visitation

1. All initial visits will occur on the premises of Guardian House, unless otherwise ordered by the court.
 - a. Only the non-custodial parent may be present during the initial visit.
 - b. The initial visit is limited to one hour to allow time for the child(ren) to adjust to the new environment and situation.

2. Guardian House reserves the right to limit subsequent visits to an hour in length, increasing the length over time, if the child(ren) need additional time to adjust. This determination will be made by Guardian House.
3. NON-CUSTODIAL: It is the responsibility of the non-custodial parent to contact Center staff to request a visit.
 - a. The non-custodial parent must call Guardian House no earlier than **Sunday at 6:00 pm**, and no later than **Tuesday by 6:00 pm** if they wish to have a visit that weekend.
 - b. Request for off-site visits and visiting relatives must be made at this time.
 - i. **Approval for visiting relatives** is required prior to every visit. Guardian House reserves the right to limit relatives until at least after the fourth visit, and may refuse relatives on subsequent visits. There is a limit of two relatives on a visit.
 - ii. Visiting relatives are also required to follow these policies. If a visiting relative breaks any of these policies they may be asked to leave the visit and may be denied on future visits.
 - iii. Review the section “Off-Site Visitation” on page 7 as it pertains to scheduling.
 - c. The non-custodial parent must call at least five business days in advance for a weekday visit. The custodial parent must confirm at least two days in advance of the requested visitation day.
 - d. If staff does not answer the phone, a message should be left on **extension 104, by pressing 1**. Please leave your name and the name of the oldest child, as well as any request you have for your visit, such as day, time, and visiting relative or off-site requests.
 - e. Requests for visitation will not be processed if there is a balance on the account.
4. CUSTODIAL: Staff will begin attempting to contact the custodial party to confirm the visit once a request has been received by the non-custodial party. The custodial party must confirm the visit no later than **Thursday by noon** for weekend visits and **two business days prior** to a weekday visit.
 - a. If staff does not answer the phone, a message should be left on **extension 104, by pressing 1**. Please leave your name and the name of the oldest child, as well as whether you are confirming the visit or not.
 - b. If you are not confirming the visit, we will ask the reason the visit is not being confirmed so that we may document that as well as inform the other party. Please provide a doctor’s note in the event of an illness.
 - c. If staff does not receive a call back from the custodial party Thursday by noon for weekend visits or two business days prior to a weekday visit, the visit will not be processed.

- d. The custodial parent is not apprised by Guardian House of visiting relatives or off-site visits.
5. **NON-CUSTODIAL:** Once the visit is confirmed by the custodial parent, staff will call the non-custodial parent to receive verbal confirmation of the visit. **A visit will not be scheduled until verbal confirmation is received from both the custodial and non-custodial parents.**
 - a. If the non-custodial parent does not receive a call back from staff about the visit, it means the visit was not scheduled.
6. All phone conversations and phone call attempts are documented.
7. While every attempt is made to arrange visits based on both parents' available time, Guardian House reserves the right to change visitation times based on staff and room availability.
8. Guardian House reserves the right to limit the length of a visit if the child(ren) appears overly stressed or traumatized. In many situations an adjustment period is necessary, with the length of the visit increasing as the child becomes more comfortable.

Cancellations

1. Cancellations must be made at least 48 hours in advance.
 - a. **Notice of less than 48 hours will result in a \$65.00 cancellation fee, which must be paid before future visits can be scheduled.**
 - b. After three cancellations, your case will be reviewed by Guardian House before additional visits will be scheduled.
 - c. Cancellations with less than 48 hours arising from an **emergency situation** may be exempt from a cancellation fee. Documentation must be provided to Guardian House and will be reviewed on a case-by-case basis.

VISITATION

Arrival and Departure

1. Parents need to call if they are going to be late. Failure to call can result in the cancellation of a scheduled visit.
2. Guardian House reserves the right to determine and/or change the arrival and departure procedure on a case-by-case basis.
3. If the visit ends early, the custodial party will be called to pick up the child(ren) and given the reason why the visit ended.
4. **STANDARD ARRIVAL PROCEDURE:**

- a. CUSTODIAL: Bring the child(ren) to Guardian House 15 minutes before the scheduled visit.
 - b. NON-CUSTODIAL: Arrive at the designated time of the visit and leave at the time the visit is scheduled to end.
 - c. CUSTODIAL: Pick up the child(ren) 15 minutes after the visit ends.
5. ALTERNATE ARRIVAL PROCEDURE:
- a. NON-CUSTODIAL: Arrive 15 minutes prior to the time the visit begins and wait inside Guardian House for the visit to begin.
 - b. CUSTODIAL: Drop off the child(ren) at the scheduled start of the visit and pick up the child(ren) when the visit ends.
 - c. NON-CUSTODIAL: Remain at Guardian House for 15 minutes following the end of the visit.
6. Parents are required to sign-in and sign-out before and after visitation.
- a. You must accompany your child(ren) inside Guardian House and sign in.
 - b. Guardian House does not limit whom a parent may designate to pick up children unless that individual is inappropriate, abusive, or specifically prohibited by the court order.
7. No early or late arrival – you must arrive precisely at your scheduled time.

Late Fees and Cancellations

1. If you have not arrived within 5 minutes of your scheduled arrival, you will be charged a **\$10.00 late fee**.
2. Visitation will be canceled by Guardian House if either party has not called or entered the building within 15 minutes of the scheduled visitation time. You will also be charged a **\$65.00 cancellation fee, unless an emergency situation can be documented**.
 - a. The visitation may still be cancelled and a fee charged even if a phone call is made by, or to, the late parent.
3. The custodial party is responsible for cancelling the visit in the event that the child has a fever or contagious illness; a doctor's note or school nurse's note must be provided.
4. Early arrival fees
 - a. Clients are not to arrive early to visitation. A **\$10.00 early fee** will be charged if you arrive up to 5 minutes before your scheduled time.
 - b. If you arrive more than 10 minutes early, you may be charged a **\$10.00 early fee** and will be asked to leave the premises until your scheduled arrival time.
5. Clients and visitors must leave Guardian House's premises and surrounding area promptly before and after your scheduled time of service. You may not be on the premises, or within 4 blocks of Guardian House (i.e. parked on the street or nearby parking lot, waiting outside).

- a. No one is allowed to wait in a vehicle or in the parking lot.
6. The custodial party or their designee must remain accessible by phone for thirty minutes after the drop off time in the event of cancellation of the visit.

Make-up Visits

1. Either party may request or offer make-up dates for missed visitation dates after starting services at Guardian House. Guardian House is not responsible for tracking missed visitation dates.

Rules of Conduct

1. No child will be released to a parent or designee who appears to be under the influence of drugs, alcohol, or appears to be emotionally unstable.
2. The visit will be terminated if the non-custodial parent appears to be under the influence of drugs, alcohol, or appears to be emotionally unstable.
3. No abusive language will be tolerated on Guardian House's premises. Do not argue with staff. If you have a concern from the weekend, address it with office staff during weekday business hours.
4. Guardian House will not be utilized as a site to exchange pets or other items. Pets are not allowed on the premises.
5. The non-custodial parent or visitors may not leave the front or side entrances of the building during visitation, i.e. to go to their car.
6. Guardian House will take any stated or implied statement regarding "child snatching" or physical threats seriously. All incidents will be documented, and the appropriate officials notified.
7. Guardian House staff will not administer medication to a child. All medications related to a child are to be given directly to Guardian House's staff at the time of arrival. Explicit directions for medication must be included. These directions will be given to the co-parent, who is then responsible for administering the medication.
8. Guardian House is not an investigative service and does not physically inspect children. Only obvious injuries or child-initiated reports may be noted and/or documented.
9. Guardian House will summon **law enforcement** if a client becomes verbally or physically abusive or threatens an employee or other individuals present.
10. Clients are restricted from summoning law enforcement, making police reports, or having papers served to another party on Center property.
11. Parents are expected to take care of and be responsible for their children during the visits, including setting limits and providing appropriate discipline when needed without the use of physical discipline.

- a. The non-custodial parent is responsible for bringing any items required for the child(ren) during the visitation, such as diapers, change of clothes, or snacks/meals.
 - b. Parents are responsible for cleaning up after visitation, and are encouraged to have child(ren) assist in an age appropriate manner. Please allow adequate time to clean up.
12. Guardian House staff will not pass verbal communication between parties, therefore all communications with the co-parent need to be in writing on a Parent Note.
- a. Contents must be in regard to the child(ren)'s needs. The Parent Note will not be passed if the contents are harassing in nature, personal or regarding child support.
 - b. All Parent Notes need to be written **before** coming to Guardian House. Parents are responsible for their own copy.
 - c. A charge of \$1 per copy will be assessed for any copies that are requested.

The following are allowed during visitation:

1. Picture taking and videotaping (up to 2 minutes) are allowed only for preserving family memories.
2. Food and drinks are allowed during the visit, either provided by the custodial or non-custodial party.
3. Outside games, toys and videos may be brought to Guardian House.
 - a. Bags will be inspected by staff prior to going onto the visit.
 - b. Guardian House staff reserve the right to approve all items being brought on the supervised visit.
 - c. Guardian House is not responsible for valuable items brought on the premises.
4. Gifts are allowed to be given during visitation.
 - a. Items brought for the child will be displayed for staff prior to the visitation. Gifts must be unwrapped or in a gift bag to allow for inspection.
 - b. Electronic items and money for the child (not child support) must be passed through a Parent Note and given to the custodial party.
5. Phone calls during the visit for the child must be on speaker. Video conferencing is not allowed.
 - a. All phone calls must follow Guardian House's policies on what can/cannot be discussed.
 - b. No other cell phone use or texting during visitation is allowed.

The following are **prohibited** during visitation, both on-site and off-site:

If any of these prohibited behaviors occur, the visit supervisor will interrupt to warn the parent, and can terminate the visit for failure to comply.

1. Inappropriate demands for physical contact, foul language, shouting, threats of violence or physical discipline. Spanking, or threats of spanking, are not allowed.
2. Attempts to move child(ren) out of sight or hearing of staff. The Supervisor must be able to **SEE** the child and **HEAR** what is being said at ALL times. Whispering is not allowed.
3. Passing of correspondence or messages to the other parent through child(ren) or staff.
4. Discussing “adult issues”, including mentioning the case, court, or court documents with the child(ren).
5. Making promises about the future, such as living arrangements, time sharing or visitation modifications.
 - a. **Visit discussions should focus on the present to avoid pressure and/or disappointment.**
6. Speaking negatively about the other parent, his or her family or designee in front of the child(ren).
7. Asking questions about the other parent’s whereabouts or activities.
8. Interrogating your child about bruises, bumps, scratches, etc.
9. Permanent alterations of child(ren) during visitation without prior written consent of the custodial party. Alterations include but are not limited to haircuts, tattoos, body or ear piercing.
10. Smoking/vaping/dipping in the presence of the child(ren) or supervisor, or on Center property.
11. Bring guns, knives or anything that can be used as a weapon or looks like a weapon into Guardian House.
12. Contact or confrontation between parents before or after visitation.

Off-Site Visitation

1. **Guardian House reserves the right to restrict off-site visits.**
2. Guardian House offers off-site visitation to qualifying families. In order for a family to qualify for off-site visits, Guardian House must determine that it is safe and responsible to allow visitation to occur outside of the facility at a location which facilitates parent/child interaction.
3. **At least four** on-site visits must have occurred before off-site visits will be considered, unless ordered by the court.
4. **Off-site privileges will be revoked if any of these rules are not followed, or safety becomes a concern, which is at the sole discretion of Guardian House.**

5. Updated insurance and driver’s license information must be on file with Guardian House, and the vehicle must be in **good working condition**.
6. At the time of your request, you must provide the location of the off-site visit; which can be a walking or driving visit.
 - a. **Walking Visits** allow families to visit local parks, restaurants and museums around Guardian House.
 - b. **Driving Visits** allow families to visit public locations outside Guardian House. For all driving visits the child rides with the supervisor and non-custodial parent. The supervisor must ride in the front seat. The supervisor accompanies the family throughout the excursion and the same level of supervision and documentation is maintained as an onsite visit.
6. **Activities that pose a safety risk will not be permitted.**
7. During off-site visitation, the non-custodial party is responsible for any transportation and expenses required to keep the supervisor with the family, this includes meals, park admissions, etc.
8. The supervisor **may terminate a visit and call a taxi**, at the parent’s expense, if the parent drives or behaves in a reckless manner, becomes belligerent, uncooperative, or intentionally makes it difficult for staff to observe the visit.
9. **The driver may not use a cell phone while driving, and must obey all traffic laws.**
10. During off-site visitation, **car seats and seat belts are required** according to state laws.

Child Car Seat Laws

Child Passenger Safety Best Practice Recommendations		
Phase 1	Rear-Facing Seats	Infants: Birth - 35 pounds. Rear-facing infant or rear-facing convertible safety seat as long as possible, up to the rear-facing height or weight limit of the seat. Properly install rear-facing in the back seat.
Phase 2	Forward-facing Seats	When children outgrow the rear-facing safety seat, they should ride in a forward-facing safety seat as long as possible, up to the upper height or weight limit (40 - 80 pounds) of the harnesses. Usually 4+ years old. Properly installed forward-facing in the back seat. NEVER turn forward-facing before 1 year old AND 20-22 pounds.
Phase 3	Booster Seats	After age 4 and 40+ pounds, children can ride in a booster seat with the adult lap and shoulder belt until the adult safety belt will fit them properly (usually when the child is 4'9" tall). MUST have a lap/shoulder belt to use a booster seat.
Phase 4	Adult Safety Belt	Once children outgrow their booster seat (usually at 4'9", 100 pounds) they can use the adult safety belt if it fits them properly. Lap portion low over the hips/tops of thighs and shoulder belt crosses

the center of the shoulder and center of the chest.

When a child reaches their 8th birthday-no matter their height, it is legal for the child to use only the adult safety belt in the passenger vehicle.

Children 12 years old and under, must be properly restrained in the *back seat*.

Children are better protected the longer they can stay in each phase. Keep children in each seat up to the **maximum** age/weight/height limits before moving to the next phase.

SUSPENSION OR TERMINATION OF SERVICES

1. Regardless of what is stated in a court order, Guardian House has the right to suspend and/or terminate client services for any of the following reasons listed below:
 - a. Missing three consecutive visits without providing 48-hour notice.
 - b. A consistent pattern of late or early arrival by either parent.
 - c. Hostile, belligerent, or abusive behavior, use of foul language, or threatening behavior toward any staff member, the other parent, the child(ren) or other clients.
 - d. Any parent breaking one of more rules set out by the Center, or otherwise threatening the stability of the environment and safety of the staff and clients.
 - e. Failure to pay for services rendered.
 - f. The case is placing undue demands on Guardian House's resources.
 - g. The involved parties agree that they can manage visits/exchanges without assistance, providing that this does not violate their court order.
1. Parents who have been suspended may be reinstated after the terms of their suspension have been met (case specific). Failure to meet the terms of suspension may result in termination. Terminated cases will not be reinstated, unless directed by the courts.
2. If it becomes necessary to suspend and/or terminate a client, Guardian House will notify both clients and their attorneys.

RELEASE OF RECORDS

1. Copies of files will be released to the client's attorney upon receipt of subpoena and payment for copies.
2. Records may be released to a therapist, or other professional, if they are listed in the court order, the appropriate Release of Information forms are signed and any fees have been paid.
3. Guardian House requires **three (3) days** notice to prepare copies of records from client files.

- a. There is a \$25 administrative fee for copies in addition to 25 cents per page.
 - b. A rush fee of \$50 will be assessed for records requested with less than three (3) days notice.
 - c. An additional fee of \$25 will be assessed for records that are requested with less than 24 hours notice.
4. Upon subpoena, the Custodian of Records at Guardian House will testify or make depositions regarding observations made during visits.
- a. **A fee of \$50 per hour, minimum of four hours, will be billed to the attorney serving the subpoena.**
 - b. Payment must be made at least **two (2) days prior** to the appearance of the Custodian of Records.

FINANCIAL POLICIES

1. The client must provide Guardian House with the two page order as required by Bexar County in order to be placed on the sliding fee scale.
 - a. Clients are required to provide their last two paycheck stubs, most recent tax return or documentation of assistance as verification of income in order to assess a fee per exchange based on our sliding scale fees.
 - b. For individuals on the sliding fee scale, Guardian House may request income documentation at any time to maintain updated information.
2. Fees for supervised visits are due at the time visits are scheduled or on the day of the visit.
3. Visit requests will not be processed if there is a balance on either party's account.
4. **A fee of \$25 will be charged for checks returned for any reason.** In that event, the original amount and associated bank fees will be charged to the client. Guardian House will no longer accept checks from that individual.

GENERAL PROVISIONS

1. This is a service related organization. As such, we reserve the right to refuse service to those who do not abide by our policies. Any alterations or additions to the policies will be provided promptly. Failure to comply with the stated policies and/or contract will constitute termination of services.
2. This Agreement may be terminated by any party by giving notice in writing to the other parties; however, such a termination by a conservator may be contrary to a Court Order and legal advice should be sought prior to such action.

3. Visitation times are specific, and the conservators agree that they will be prompt in their observance. No person other than those named shall attempt to take possession of any child(ren) on behalf of any conservator, unless authorized by the conservator in writing prior to the possession.
4. Should the conservator required to take possession fail to do so within three (3) hours, Guardian House shall, at its option, notify the Department of Protective and Regulatory Services and/or deliver the child(ren) to a children's shelter within Bexar County.
5. Conservators agree to release, hold harmless and indemnify Guardian House for any claims arising from the performance of this Agreement. Should performance of Guardian House be interrupted by any occurrence which is beyond the control of Guardian House, Guardian House shall be excused from performance of its obligations and undertakings so long as such condition continues in existence.

Your fee for supervised visitation is \$_____ per hour for visits up to two hours in duration. For visits that are longer than two hours, the first two hours are \$_____ per hour, and \$65 for hour thereafter.

None of the interactions, conversation, or activities at Guardian House are confidential. You will be given a copy of these policies at intake to maintain for your records. You will be charged applicable copying fees for any additional copies. It is recommended, and your responsibility, that you provide a copy of these policies to your attorney.

By signing below, I am indicating that I have read, understand, and will comply with the policies of Guardian House.

Printed Name

Client Signature

Date

Staff Signature

Date



Child Passenger Responsibility Form

It is your responsibility to ensure your child(ren) is/are properly secured when transporting to and from Guardian House. By signing this document, you agree that you will provide proper passenger safety to the child(ren) that adheres to the Texas Department of Public Safety guidelines. Please note, Guardian House holds the right to conduct random car seat, booster chair, etc. inspections without notification to you. Refer to chart for further clarification.

Child Passenger Recommendations		
2016 Child Passenger Safety National Best Practice Recommendations		
Phase 1	Rear-Facing Seats	Infants: Birth – 35+ pounds and 2+ years old. Rear-facing infant or rear-facing convertible safety seat as long as possible, up to the rear-facing height or weight limit of the seat. Properly install according to instructions in owner's manual, rear-facing in the back seat.
Phase 2	Forward-facing Seats	When children outgrow the rear-facing safety seat (minimum 2+ years), they should ride in a forward-facing safety seat as long as possible, up to the upper height or weight limit (40 – 80+ pounds) of the harnesses. Usually 4+ years old. Properly installed forward-facing in the back seat. NEVER turn forward-facing before child meets all: AGE/HEIGHT/WEIGHT requirements set by safety seat manufacturer for forward-facing.
Phase 3	Booster Seats	After age 4 and 40+ pounds and behavior maturity*, children can ride in a booster seat with the adult lap and shoulder belt until the adult safety belt will fit them properly (usually when the child is 10 – 12 years old). MUST have a lap/shoulder belt to use a booster seat. *Behavior maturity required according to booster seat owner's manual
Phase 4	Adult Safety Belt	Once children outgrow their booster seat (usually at 10 – 12 years old) they can use the adult lap/shoulder safety belt if it fits them properly. Lap portion low over the hips/tops of thighs and shoulder belt crosses the center of the shoulder and center of the chest.

Children are better protected the longer they can stay in each phase. Keep children in each seat up to the **maximum** age/weight/height limits before moving to the next phase. **ALL** children younger than age 13 years should ride properly restrained in the back seat. [Retrieved: 7/25/2018]

Parent's Name (Print)

Case Name

Parent's Signature

Date

Staff Initials

Date