

Tips for Gathering Feedback from Children and Youth Using Supervised Visitation Services

Children and youth can provide valuable feedback about how we can improve our supervised visitation center practice. In addition, asking for their thoughts can be a part of empowering them to think about their needs as survivors of family violence and participants in your services.

Before you begin any process of gathering feedback from children and youth, it's crucial to remember that relationships matter. The stronger your relationship is with the young people you serve, the more likely they are to open up about your services. Asking for feedback should never come at the expense of your relationship. It is important to keep in mind that often, children and youth share information over time, so think of this as an ongoing process.

To prepare children and youth we suggest you say something like this to the young person you are seeking feedback from (please adjust to account for the developmental and cognitive needs of each child and youth): “We want to make sure we are doing the best job we can at the center so we are asking many of the kids that come here to help us. Your ideas are important to us, and we want to hear from you about how we can make things better. But you get to decide what you share with us, and we can stop talking about it anytime. Also, there are no wrong answers.”

Gathering Feedback:

We have found that using an activity that facilitates directed conversation is often the most effective approach to getting feedback and input from children and youth. Here are a few examples of what you could do:

(1) Ask them to create a drawing that describes something in particular. For example: “Can you draw a picture of what it was like when we first showed you around the center?” or “Can you draw a picture of how you felt the first

time you came here?” Or, “Can you draw a picture of how it felt to get used to coming here?” Or, “Can you draw a picture about what you think kids need to feel ok about being here?”

(2) Ask them to finish a sentence verbally or in writing for you. For example: “When I first came to the center, I felt....” Or, “One way to make it easier for new kids at the center would be to....” Or, “If I could tell a new kid one thing about visiting at this center, I would say....” Or, “Something that would have helped me more when I was getting used to coming here would be....” Or, “One way this place could be better for kids would be....”

(3) Ask them about what they want and need from the staff at your center (again by completing sentences). “When I am here, I want the adults to....” Or, “Grown-ups at the center can help me by....” Or, “If I could tell adults what to do, I would say....”

Special Note: It is essential to be clear with both the kids and their parents about why you are asking the questions you are asking, what you will do with the information you gather, how you will protect their identity, the extent and limitations of confidentiality, and the voluntary nature of talking with you. Ensure that every kid knows that they can stop talking to you at any time, and they don’t have to share anything they don’t wish to share or answer.

Only engage in these activities and questions with children and youth during times when they are emotionally regulated and relatively calm, and only once you have established some rapport and relationship with them. For example, following a difficult visit is probably not a good time to engage them in these questions.

You should also be aware that privacy is important - check-in with children and youth (as is developmentally appropriate) about who is in the room with them when they answer these questions, as well as ensuring you are checking in with their parents. Additionally, make sure you have a plan to communicate to their caregiver if they display any distress or emotional dysregulation after the activity, so their caregiver is aware and prepared to support them.

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