

Tips for Parents

Visitation and/or custody exchange, under any circumstances, can be a challenge for both parents. You have your own needs and emotions, and have an established routine for yourself and your family. Having to participate in a Safe Exchange Program can feel like one more responsibility. And because of the angry and hurt feelings, it may seem impossible to think positively about it. This is understandable. Remember that both of you care about your children, and that in most cases, children benefit from having two parents in their lives.

Here are a few suggestions that might be helpful to you:

- Read and understand your court order regarding custody and visitation
- Explain to your child how and where the exchanges will take place
- Have your child at the location on time
- Respect the relationship your child has with the other parent
- Reassure your child that you want him or her to have a good relationship with the other parent
- Avoid quizzing your child about the other parent's activities and relationships
- Remember that your child is not a messenger to the other parent
- Provide your child's belongings including clothes and medication, also favorite personal objects, such as blankets, stuffed animals
- Make sure the belongings your child brought to your home are returned to their other home
- Be objective and non-critical of the other parent when your child reports something you find objectionable.

How do we change the visitation schedule?

If you need to change the visitation/custody schedule from the court order, a Safe Exchange Program cannot do that for you. To assist you in filing the proper paperwork, contact your attorney or go to the Family Law Information Center at:

Lamoreaux Justice Center
341 The City Drive, 7th Floor
Orange, CA

Often parents cannot agree on how to modify the Court's order. If you are both willing, you can meet with a Court Mediator, at no cost, to assist you in reaching an agreement. That agreement can then be filed in court and become an order. Call Family Court Services at (714) 935-6550 to schedule an appointment.



Superior Court of California County of Orange Family Court Services

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Safe Exchange Programs



For the peaceful exchange
of children for custody
or visitation



Superior Court of California
County of Orange

What is a Safe Exchange Program? —

Safe Exchange Programs assist parents in the transfer of their children from one to the other for visitation and/or custody. This service is provided by several community agencies for a fee.

How does it work? —

A Safe Exchange Program coordinates this exchange of children without the parents having to meet.

Although Safe Exchange Programs may vary, parents generally arrive and leave at different times or by different doors so they will not have contact with each other. A staff member will take the children from one parent to the other. This occurs in a neutral and safe setting.

Some parents choose to use a Safe Exchange Program. In other cases, it is ordered by the Court.

Why would the Court order parents to participate in a Safe Exchange Program? —

The Court's role is to protect the best interests of children whose parents have custody or visitation matters within the family courts. Generally it is in the best interest of children to have contact with both parents. Children have a great need to love and feel loved and nurtured by both parents.

Far too often, although both parents love their children, even the sight of the other parent sparks hurt, anger, and conflict. When the children are transferred, these meetings are emotionally charged, sometimes even abusive. It is very stressful for a child to be exposed to the anger and conflict between their parents – and the child may even feel responsible when it happens at an exchange.

In some relationships there is a history of domestic violence and a protective order is in place. To exchange a child without assistance would be violating this order and jeopardizing the safety of the other parent and the child.

So the Court may order participation in a Safe Exchange Program so the child is exchanged without the risk of observing a confrontation between the parents and being placed in the middle of the parents' conflict.



Benefits of using a Safe Exchange Program —

Safe Exchange Programs protect children from being exposed to their parents' conflicts. A child can look forward to an exchange without worrying about what is going to happen.

In addition, a Safe Exchange Program can be helpful to parents as they go through difficult and/or transitional times. Some significant benefits to parents are:

- One parent does not have to communicate or have contact with the other parent.
- The exchange is facilitated by a neutral person, who documents and keeps records of the exchange.
- The number of physical, emotional and legal problems that stem from domestic discord during custody exchanges are prevented.

How do I get started? —

Regardless of whether the Court has ordered the use of a Safe Exchange Program, or you have decided to use one, the insert in this brochure has current information on community agencies that offer this Program.

Once you contact an agency, and before the first exchange takes place, a staff member must meet with each of you, at separate times, to discuss the exchange with you. The topics include:

- Court order regarding visitation
- Terms of the exchange
- Safety procedures
- Documentation of the exchange
- Special considerations
- Fees

You will then be asked to sign an agreement. Prepare for this interview as you would for a business interview. Make a list of questions you have about Safe Exchange and make sure you understand what services will be provided and what is expected of you. This will help you feel more comfortable about the exchange and make it easier for your child.

Fees —

The fee to participate in a Safe Exchange Program is determined by each agency. In most situations, both parents will share in the cost unless otherwise ordered by the Court. If there is a protective order, however, the restrained parent will generally pay the fee.