

# Church-Assisted Custodial Exchange Protocol

A custodial exchange is a sensitive and critical process, often leading to heightened emotions and potential risks. Here's a suggested protocol that churches can implement to ensure the safety of both the child and the guardian during these exchanges:

- 1. Neutral Location:** Designate a neutral, well-lit, and monitored location within the church premises for exchanges. This might be a common area like a fellowship hall.
- 2. Third-Party Presence:** Always have a neutral third party present, preferably two – one familiar to each parent if possible. These individuals can be church staff or trained volunteers.
- 3. Scheduled Times:** Clearly define and adhere to specific exchange times. This minimizes opportunities for disagreements and confrontations.
- 4. Separate Entrances/Exits:** If possible, have each party use a different entrance/exit to avoid any direct encounters and to keep interactions minimal.
- 5. Documentation:** Keep a logbook to record the date, time, and any notable incidents or observations during each exchange.
- 6. Waiting Area:** Set up a waiting area for the non-custodial parent to ensure they don't arrive early or linger after the exchange. This space should be separate from the exchange location.
- 7. Safety Measures:** Install security cameras in the exchange area. This not only acts as a deterrent for inappropriate behavior but provides evidence if any dispute arises.



- 8. Communication Protocol:** Communication should be limited during the exchange. If any changes to the schedule or other important details need to be communicated, it should be done in writing (email, text) and not in person during the exchange.
  
- 9. Emergency Plan:** Have a clear plan in place for emergencies. This includes having key contacts (like local law enforcement or legal counsel) and an evacuation procedure if needed.
  
- 10. Training:** Regularly train involved staff and volunteers on the protocol, conflict resolution, and how to handle potentially volatile situations.
  
- 11. Stay Neutral:** The church's role is to provide a safe space and not to mediate or intervene in personal disputes unless there's a risk of immediate harm. However, when children are involved, their safety and wellbeing should always be top priority.
  
- 12. Restraining Orders:** Be informed about any existing restraining or protective orders. Ensure they are strictly adhered to.
  
- 13. Feedback System:** Allow both guardians to provide feedback on the process, ensuring the system can be continually improved upon.
  
- 14. Review and Update:** Periodically review the process with all involved parties and make necessary adjustments to ensure maximum safety and efficiency.
  
- 15. Confidentiality:** Ensure that all details regarding the custodial exchange remain confidential. Only the necessary church personnel should be privy to the details.

By implementing such a protocol, churches can provide a crucial service to families in their congregation, ensuring that children's well-being and safety are prioritized during these sensitive times.

