

Session 2

2



TEXASCASA
Court Appointed Special Advocates
FOR CHILDREN



OVERVIEW

This is a 3½-hour session. Although times may vary based on the number of participants, we have created a sample timeline based on an evening class beginning at 6:00 p.m. and ending at 9:30 p.m. Please adjust the timeline as needed to fit your training and class size.

This chapter contains activities that allow participants to roll up their sleeves and begin to apply what they are learning to the scenarios in the Bleux case. Prepare a brief recap of the case to refresh everyone’s memory of what they know so far.

One major focus of this session is understanding child development, which can feel a little overwhelming, as it is a vast and varied subject! As a facilitator, it’s helpful to drive home the difference between the many theories and tomes of knowledge about child development and the basic information a CASA volunteer *needs* to know to succeed in their role. The goal is not for volunteers to memorize all the information, but to develop their intuition and be able to “red flag” situations that should be evaluated by a professional or discussed with a supervisor.

As the facilitator, you should acknowledge and build on what participants already know. Connect the content with their personal experience—we were all children once upon a time, and many participants currently have children in their lives.

Check the parking lot before session 2 begins to see if any of the parked issues from session 1 relate to material you will cover in session 2.

SUPPLIES AND CHECKLIST

Supplies:

- Name tents from previous class

Flip charts:

- Your “parking lot”
- Your expectations
- Your group agreements

Handouts:

- Case Assessment Questions handout
- Copies of Session 2 Evaluation

Videos:

- “Interviewing Skills: Meeting with a Parent” video

Slide 1



- Greet participants warmly as they arrive, and invite them to grab their name tents.
- Once participants have found a seat, fade your background music out and welcome your class back for session 2!
- Lead everyone in an opener exercise.

INTRODUCE TRAINING GOALS

Advance to slide 2



- Briefly go over the training topics for this session to help learners feel oriented to the day's agenda, including when they can anticipate a break.

PRE-WORK RECAP

Advance to slide 3



- As always, take a moment to celebrate and thank your class for the time they invested in completing their Pre-Work.
- Emphasize that the work they completed gave them a foundation in children's growth and development, children's needs, the importance of attachment in childhood, how to recognize child abuse and neglect, risk factors for child abuse and neglect and your program's court report.
- Invite any questions learners have in response to their Pre-Work, and capture any questions that will be covered later on the parking lot.

Advance to slide 4

Chapter 2: Chapter Competencies	
Competency Category	Knowledge, Skills and Attributes Development in Chapter 2
Foundations of Knowledge	Understands age-appropriate behavior and development for children
	Understands a child's basic needs
	Understands why the NISL standard is in the best interest of children
	Understands the cycle of attachment
	Understands what constitutes abuse and neglect
Sound Judgment	Understands risk factors for child abuse and neglect
	Understands the benefits and steps to using a strength-based approach
Communication	Knows how to evaluate what is in the child's best interest
	Understands the elements of a court report

- This slide shows which topics from the Competencies Checklist you will be tackling together today.

ACTIVITY 2A: CHILDREN'S NEEDS

6:30 – 6:45

Advance to slides 5 and 6



- Divide the class into four groups. Assign one category of needs per group: **physical**, **emotional**, **developmental** and **cultural**. If you have a smaller class size, this activity can be done together in the large group.
- Each group will brainstorm a list of what Deshawn Bleux might need in their assigned category (for example, What are Deshawn's emotional needs?)
- Give the groups 5 minutes to quickly brainstorm a list together, and then ask for a volunteer from each group to share their ideas with the larger group.
- Once all the groups have shared, ask the larger group: How would these needs be different if Deshawn were 14?

ACTIVITY 2B: MASLOW'S HIERARCHY OF NEEDS

6:45 – 6:55

Advance to slide 7



- Reiterate that Maslow's hierarchy is a widely respected tool for understanding how our needs are interconnected, starting at the bottom with physiological needs, then moving up to safety, belonging, love, esteem, and self-actualization (this means becoming the best person that one can possibly strive to be in the service of both the self and others.)

- Ask the class, How can CASA volunteers help a child move up the pyramid? Are there any needs would you add for Deshawn, considering Maslow’s hierarchy?

*In our casework, we want to advocate for the wellbeing of the **whole child**. This is one reason why it’s so important that we work to engage family members and help maintain a network of supportive relationships for our children, because those feelings of safety, love and belonging are things that children absolutely need.*

Advance to slide 8



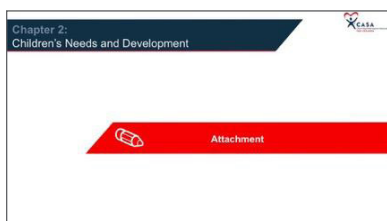
- Emphasize that keeping Deci’s research in mind can also help us see parents through a lens of deeper empathy. His work reminds us that people **need** access to the resources and skills necessary to meet the demands of daily life with competence and ability. People **need** to feel that they have autonomy and are empowered to make choices in their lives. People **need** to experience “relatedness” and connection to others in order to thrive.

*For some folks, it can be difficult to empathize with parents who have neglected or abused their kids. However, it’s not our place to stand in judgment of the parents that we work with. Our role is to focus on advocating for the needs of the children to be met, and we know that children **need** to be raised by their parents whenever safely possible. Doing this work effectively means choosing to practice compassion with parents who have made mistakes. In session 3, we’ll learn more about the Adverse Childhood Experiences or ACE Score, which can help us strengthen our empathy for parents who are struggling to safely parent their children.*

ACTIVITY 2C: ATTACHMENT

6:55 – 7:05

Advance to slides 9 and 10



- Ask for a volunteer to briefly summarize how the attachment cycle works, which they learned in their Pre-Work. Point out that many of the children we serve show signs of disrupted attachment.



Share one or two examples of specific children who never had a healthy attachment to their caretaker or have had that attachment broken. Hearing about children in the volunteers' community makes this issue feel more real for the participants.

- After each story, refer to the attachment cycle visual aid and ask the group where in the cycle the attachment was broken.
 - ◆ If you can't think of an example from your community, describe a 3-year-old who will go to anyone, sit on anyone's lap and show no emotion when the primary caretaker leaves. This child was bounced between numerous caretakers as a very young child because her mom was incarcerated. She has no strong primary attachment figure.
 - ◆ Another example could be a 7-year-old child who hoards food in foster care. As an infant being raised by parents who suffered from heroin addiction, this child was sometimes left to cry for hours without food, and at other times was provided with food whenever she expressed that she was hungry.

ACTIVITY 2D: THE MINIMUM SUFFICIENT LEVEL OF CARE

7:05 – 7:30

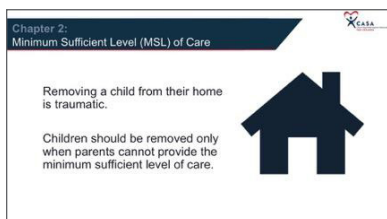
Minimum sufficient level of care is a key foundation for our advocacy work. Facilitators should dedicate sufficient class time to ensuring trainees truly understand what can be challenging ideas to accept.

Advance to slide 11



- Remember to check in with your class as the discussion unfolds. Ask what you can clarify to help make them feel more comfortable with the concepts.
- Transition to introducing the minimum sufficient level of care (MSL).

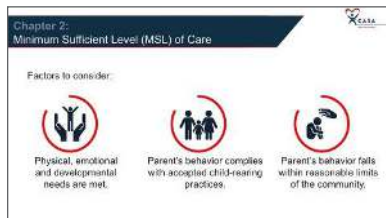
Advance to slide 12



- Stress that removing a child from the home because of abuse and/or neglect is a drastic remedy. Because removal is so traumatic for the child, the law requires that agencies work to keep the child in the home whenever it's possible to do so and still keep the child safe. But how do we know what a "safe home" looks like?

- Ask the class to pause and consider what a safe home looks like to them. Have them take a moment and conjure an image of a safe home in their mind. Once they've had a minute to visualize this, ask what the likelihood is that any two images look exactly the same. Point out that since we all have different life experiences, worldviews and personal standards, our perceptions of what constitutes a safe home vary.
- The Minimum Sufficient Level of Care is a baseline that's determined by a number of factors. Essentially, this baseline describes what must be in place for the child to remain in the home, and it's the same standard that's also used to determine whether or not parents have made sufficient progress so that a child can be safely returned to the family home. In every case, children should be removed only when parents cannot meet that child's MSL.

Advance to slide 13



- Walk the class through the factors of the MSL. Ask volunteers to throw out examples of **basic needs**, emphasizing that you are looking for only the most essential needs a child may have for survival and not something that is “nice to have.” Ensure volunteers surface these needs:
 - **Physical needs** (food, clothing, shelter, medical care, safety and protection)
 - **Emotional needs** (attachment between parent and child, freedom from emotional abuse and connections to supportive adults)
 - **Developmental needs** (educational needs and special help for children with disabilities)
 - Share an illustration of behavior that falls within and outside of social standards. For example, in terms of discipline, does the parent use disciplinary tactics that are widely practiced norms in our society such as time out? Or do they use approaches to discipline that would be widely viewed as cruel and unusual, like regularly refusing the child food?
 - Share examples of behavior that falls within the community norms. Some ideas:
 - The age at which a child is deemed old enough to care for other children is largely determined by cultural and community norms.
 - Even something as simple as sending a 9-year-old child to the store might fall within or outside community standards, depending on neighborhood safety, the distance and traffic patterns, the weather, the child's clothing, the time of day or night, the ability of the child and the necessity of the purchase.
- Pause for a perception check: Ask the class, “Based on these parameters, would the minimum sufficient level of care be the same for two siblings in the same home? If not,

why not?” Point out that the MSL for each child is based on that particular child’s specific needs, which can vary greatly based on age, ability, medical needs, etc.

- Have your class work in small groups at their table for five minutes to brainstorm answers to the questions:
 - How do you think the MSL standard benefits children?
 - How do you think the MSL standard benefits parents?
 - How does the MSL help us practice sensitivity to the cultural and community norms of the families we are working with?
- After five minutes, have volunteers quickly share back their ideas to the larger group. Then read the following statement aloud to the class and ask participants to respond: “Some people believe that the best place for children to grow up is in their own homes, with their own families—even if a foster family can provide material things that the children will never have if they are returned home.” Allow two or three minutes for group discussion.

Takeaway:

It can be difficult to accept that there may often be a pretty big gap between the Minimum Sufficient Level of Care required for a parent to be able to raise their child, and what would be the ideal level of care for that child. Of course we want every child to have the healthiest, most comfortable, empowering and joyful life full of opportunities. However, we need to always keep in mind that if a child is physically, emotionally and developmentally safe with a parent, being in their parents’ care is in the child’s best interest.

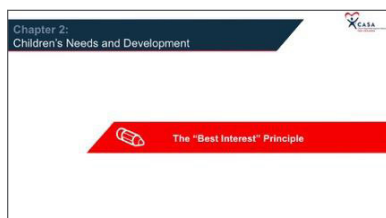
BREAK

7:30 – 7:45

ACTIVITY 2E: THE BEST INTEREST PRINCIPLE

7:45 – 7:50

Advance to slide 14



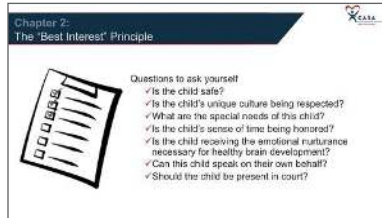
Begin this discussion by asking the class, “Who decides what’s best for the children in your life?”

Advance to slide 15



- Ask for a volunteer to read aloud the first two paragraphs under "The Best Interest Principle: What the National CASA Association Says." Invite the class to comment on what stood out to them in that paragraph.

Advance to slides 16 and 17

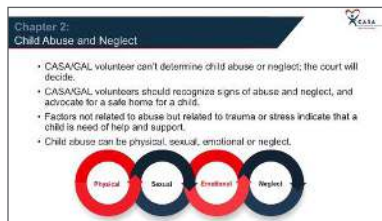


- Briefly go through the Best Interest Checklist.

ACTIVITY 2F: RISK FACTORS FOR CHILD ABUSE AND NEGLECT

7:50 – 8:05

Advance to slides 18 and 19



- Ask if participants have any questions about the definitions of abuse and neglect from their Pre-Work. Emphasize that CASA does not investigate allegations of abuse or neglect; however, it's necessary to be able to recognize abuse and neglect in order to advocate for a safe home for a child. Let volunteers know they should always discuss any concerns with their supervisor.

Advance to slide 20



- Convey to participants that at some point all families encounter change, stress and perhaps even crisis—the family moves, a parent is laid off, childcare arrangements fall through, a new stepfamily comes into being, the car

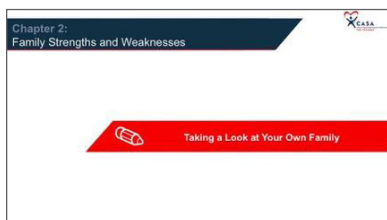
breaks down, a child becomes ill, the rent goes up, and on it goes. The families that participants will encounter in their work as CASA volunteers are, by definition, under stress and are likely to be in crisis—if for no other reason than the state is now involved in determining whether their child remains in their care and custody. Some families cope well and adapt effectively to stress and crisis; others do not and become overwhelmed. Families that are not able to cope well are often isolated from resources, face a variety of challenges and are stressed by numerous problems that compound one another. These families may develop patterns that lead to, and then perpetuate, abuse and neglect.

- Briefly highlight key information from the risk factors for child abuse and neglect information that volunteers read as part of their Pre-Work. Divide participants into small groups and assign each group one category of risk factors (child-related, parent-related, social-situational, family and triggering situations). Ask that each group list the factors in their category that they noticed in the Bleux case.
- Allow five minutes for small group discussion, then ask groups to come back together and share their ideas. Stress that in many families, more than one condition contributes to the reason child protective services files a petition for the court’s intervention. As groups report back, be ready to offer some examples if participants do not come up with their own.
- Next, in the large group, lead participants in brainstorming the types of services, supports and interventions that should be implemented to alleviate the issues in the Bleux family. This is a great opportunity to circle back to the MSL and emphasize the importance of advocating for services that are directly related to any concerns about the parents’ abilities to meet the MSL for their children. Emphasize, “We don’t want to advocate for more services simply for the sake of quantity; we want to advocate for more appropriate services and supports for the sake of a quality intervention and lasting positive change.”

ACTIVITY 2G: FAMILY STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES

8:05 – 8:15

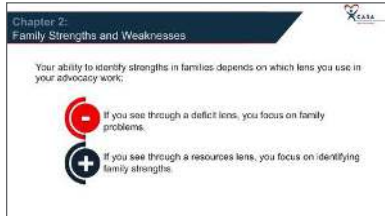
Advance to slide 21




- Have participants take a moment to think about their families (either their family of origin or their current/ chosen family), trying to focus first on an event that illustrates the strengths in their family and then on an event that exemplifies the weaknesses, struggles or deficits. Ask them to quickly write down one strength and one struggle, and give them

a moment to share their responses with a partner. After pairs have finished sharing, ask for a couple of volunteers willing to share in the large group. Be aware that some participants may have been raised in an environment of abuse and neglect themselves, and note that they only need to share what they are comfortable with.

Advance to slide 22

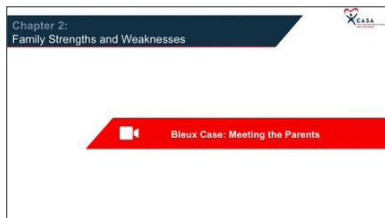


 Ask participants, “What might be some benefits of using a strengths-based approach in your work as CASA volunteers?” Allow a few minutes for discussion.

ACTIVITY 2H: A STRENGTHS-BASED APPROACH TO SPEAKING WITH PARENTS

8:15 – 8:40

Advance to slide 23



- Play the video “Interviewing Skills: Meeting with a Parent.” Guide participants to think about the Bleux family’s strengths as they watch. Note a few items for participants before playing the video:
 - Ask participants to watch the video looking for tone, body language and other techniques that can be used in all interviews—with parents, foster parents, relatives, teachers and so on.
 - If your program does not provide an opportunity for CASA volunteers to visit with or talk to parents, underscore that the techniques depicted in the video are transferable to all interviews.
 - The video mentions that the mother has been engaged in anger management due to concerns about domestic disputes. Explain that although anger management is often the default intervention ordered for intimate partner conflicts, research shows that individual therapy focused on learning healthy relationship dynamics is a more effective intervention. This will be covered in greater depth in session six.
- Following the video, in the large group, discuss the following questions:
 - What strengths did you observe in the mother?
 - If you don’t know whether or not a particular strength exists in this family, how might you gather information to find out? (For ideas on how to formulate

questions, direct participants to the “Asking Strengths-Based Questions” section on page 110 of their manual.)

- How would looking only at strengths or only at deficits affect your recommendations for this family?
- Transition into a discussion about family engagement, highlighting that the volunteer in the video did not seek out any information about family connections for the child. Encourage volunteers to think back on the information covered in their Pre-Work about the importance of bringing relatives to the table:

One of the strengths mentioned by the mother is that she has support from her sisters as well as from Miles’ family. Considering what you learned in your Pre-Work about engaging family members, what would you have asked this mother to find out more about these supportive relatives? What would the benefits of your family engagement efforts be for the Bleux family?

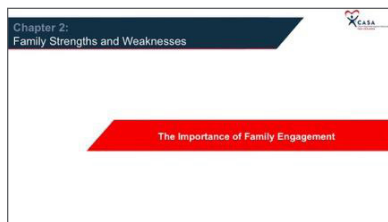
Answers could include:

- ◆ Gaining further insight about the child’s needs and strengths.
- ◆ Gaining further insight about the parents’ needs and strengths.
- ◆ Exploring the possibility of advocating for the child to have visits with appropriate relatives.
- ◆ Exploring the possibility of the child being placed with appropriate family members rather than in foster care.
- ◆ Exploring the possibility of an appropriate family member becoming approved to supervise parent/child visits in order to create a more natural visitation environment.
- ◆ Gathering information about other family members to contact.
- ◆ Building out a family tree.

ACTIVITY 2I: MYTHS AND FACTS ABOUT FAMILY MEMBERS

8:40 – 8:50

Advance to slide 24



Ask the class, “What are some false assumptions or ‘myths’ about the family members of children in the child welfare system?” Some ideas include:

- The family members would have come forward already if they really cared about the child.

- Everyone in the family probably has criminal history or has been involved with CPS.
- The family members are probably too poor to take good care of the child.
- There are no other family members.
- The caseworker is the person responsible for finding and engaging family members.

The goal is to break down these false assumptions that get in the way of pursuing family finding and robust family engagement efforts. Help participants understand that they can't get a clear idea about how safe and appropriate family members are until they find out more about them, and they should pursue every avenue to find safe adults in a child's family network. If your program has other tools for connecting with family members, share those here.

- Invite any questions participants may have about family engagement work.

ACTIVITY 2J: ASKING THE RIGHT QUESTIONS AND PLANNING YOUR NEXT STEPS

8:50 – 9:05

Advance to slides 25 and 26



- Give a brief recap of the Bleux case.
- Divide participants into small groups, and distribute copies of the Case Assessment Questions. Using the handout, groups should identify additional questions they would like to seek answers to, as well as possible sources for the information (caseworker, foster parent, birth parent, child, therapist, relative, etc.).
- In the large group, have volunteers plot out their next steps for working the Bleux case (for example, requesting records [which ones?], scheduling interviews, submitting reports, consulting with the program's case supervisor and appearing in court).

Advance to slide 27



- Participants should have copies of your program's court report template, which you distributed in the previous session. Have trainees look at this template as you give a brief overview of each section of the report and its purpose. Explain how participants will access the report forms or templates, and how and when they will submit their written reports to the program.

Advance to slide 28



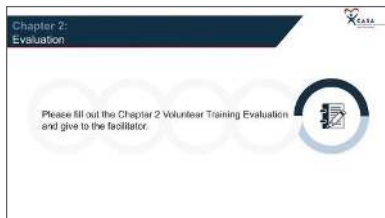
- Give participants an overview of your program's guidance for writing effective court reports, highlighting the most important tips and things that case supervisors check for when reviewing reports. Then, ask participants to answer the following questions using the sample report for the Bleux case:
 - Was the report organized, grammatically correct, factual, objective, concise and conclusive about what's in the child's best interest?
 - Are there unanswered questions?
 - Are the report's recommendations supported by facts and/or concerns?
 - Do the recommendations flow logically from other information stated in the report?
 - Are there other pieces of information that should have been included?
 - If you were the CASA volunteer on this case, are there other people that you would have liked to interview, or documents that you would have liked to review to support your recommendations?
 - Based on the report, do you feel that the judge would be able to make a decision in the best interest of the child?

Advance to slides 29 and 30



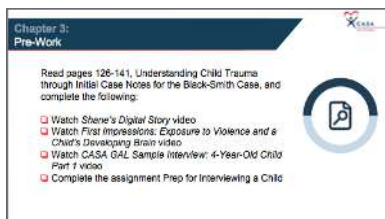
- In summary, quickly review the objectives from the beginning of the session to check in about volunteers' comfort level with the content. Invite any remaining questions.
- If applicable, share information with volunteers about ways they can learn more about the topics covered in this chapter.

Advance to slide 31



- Pass out evaluations and emphasize the importance of participant feedback.

Advance to slide 32



- Go over assigned Pre-Work for session 3, and ensure everyone has a clear understanding about what to tackle before the next session.

