

Session 1

1



TEXASCASA
Court Appointed Special Advocates
FOR CHILDREN



OVERVIEW

This is a 3½ hour session. Although times may vary widely 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.

In this session, participants learn about the roles and responsibilities of CASA volunteers and the principles that guide their work. Your goal as a facilitator is to establish the tone for the training and to create a positive learning environment. This includes:

- **Inclusivity:** Participants feel it matters that they are present.
- **Motivation:** Participants express their reasons for choosing to join the training.
- **Safety:** Participants feel they can ask questions, share opinions and explore values.
- **Inspiration:** Participants feel inspired about their contribution to child welfare.
- **Welcoming Burning Questions:** Participants ask pressing questions that free them to be attentive and involved.
- **Group Agreements:** Participants understand the norms and expectations for the training, and establish trust in the community.

This is a “big picture” session, setting the historical and current context of child protection and describing the CASA volunteer’s place in the overall system. This session provides an opportunity for participants to feel inspired, knowing they can make a difference in the lives of children.

As a facilitator, you should address the commitment required in being a CASA volunteer. Balance inspiration with realistic expectations. Make sure trainees know what they will be asked to accomplish. Encourage participants to think critically about the CASA role and its limits and parameters.

CASA volunteers need to understand the influence of their own values and race, class, gender, religious and other cultural experiences on their perspective. Watch for difficulty accepting or tolerating other perspectives, and follow up one-on-one about any red flags.

SUPPLIES AND CHECKLIST

Supplies:

- Name tags and supplies for name tents
- Sticky notes
- Snacks
- A/V equipment: computer, projector, screen, speakers
- PowerPoint presentation

Flip charts:

- A blank page titled “parking lot”
- A blank page titled “expectations”
- A prepared page listing group agreements, with room for more to be added

Handouts:

- Copies of the Volunteer Dilemmas worksheet
- Copies of your program’s policies and procedures, emphasizing the dos and don’ts for volunteers (see sample at the back of this guide)
- Copies of your program’s Volunteer Advocate Job Description (see sample at the back of this guide)
- Copies of your program’s Court Report Template and Court Report Instructions (see sample at the back of this guide)
- Copies of the Bleux Case Court Report styled in your program’s court report format. Learners will need to review this as part of their Pre-Work for session 2
- Copies of Session 1 Evaluation

Videos:

- “Emily’s Dragon”

Slide 1



- Greet participants warmly as they arrive and invite them to make name tents or name tags.
- Once participants have found a seat, fade your background music out and welcome your class! Introduce yourself and any co-facilitators.
- Ask participants to introduce themselves with their name and one detail (a light one, such as what they had for breakfast, the names of pets, a hobby they love).
- Do an opener exercise.

INTRODUCE GROUP AGREEMENTS

Bring everyone’s attention to the flip chart where you have listed the group agreements. Ask participants if they want to add anything to the list.

We have shared agreements so we establish values for our community and how we’ll interact, and to keep everybody engaged and safe. Can I get one person to read out each agreement? [Discuss each ground rule after all are read out.] Are there any ground rules that anyone would like to add to this list?

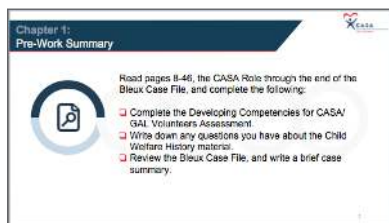
INTRODUCE TRAINING GOALS

Advance to slide 2



- Shift attention to the PowerPoint slide with training topics for this session. Briefly touch on what you will be covering to help learners feel oriented to the day’s agenda, including when they can anticipate a break.

Advance to slide 3



- Take a moment to celebrate and thank your class for the time they invested in completing their Pre-Work. Acknowledge how many hats they wear outside of this training and that you understand their time is precious. You can encourage them to high five the people on either side of them to start to build a class culture of celebration.

- Invite any questions learners have after completing their Pre-Work. This is a great opportunity to try out the parking lot, as their questions may relate to things that will be covered in the future. Acknowledge each question, and write questions for later in the parking lot.

Advance to slide 4



- Encourage learners to think about their Competencies Checklist throughout the entirety of training. Explain that there are a lot of skills that go into being a competent advocate, and you are here to support them in building these skills. Note the slide, which shows the topics from the checklist you'll be tackling together today.

ACTIVITY 1A: CELEBRATE EXCITEMENT AND RECOGNIZE CONCERNS

Advance to slide 5



- Ask volunteers to pause and think about what they are most excited and concerned about as they begin their CASA journey. Invite them to take a sticky note and write one sentence summarizing their apprehension and one summing up their excitement.

- Next, ask them to crumple up their sticky note and toss it into the air. Have each person pick up a crumpled note and ask for volunteers to read the paper they picked up. There may be overlap or connections between what people chose to write. The goal is to acknowledge and normalize apprehensions, and celebrate excitement.
- Alternative activity: Ask volunteers to share who they see as a hero and why, and to describe one characteristic of this hero they hope to bring into their work as a CASA.

ACTIVITY 1B: “EMILY’S DRAGON” AND THE IMPACT OF CASA VOLUNTEERS

6:40 – 7:00

Advance to slide 6 to show that we are moving into talking about the volunteer role; then advance to slide 7



- Play the video “Emily’s Dragon,” an 8-minute film from the point of view of a child who has been removed from her home and placed in foster care.
- Invite a large group discussion about responses learners had to the video. Ask what stood out to them as they watched the story, and what ways they saw the CASA volunteer helping the child.

Advance to slide 8



- Ask volunteers to read aloud the slides displaying the National CASA mission statement and your local program’s mission.

Advance to slide 9



- Emphasize the key aspects of the CASA volunteer movement: helping children find safety, permanence and the opportunity to thrive. As CASA volunteers, they will be part of a movement to make life better for children in the child protective services (CPS) system.
- Review evidence of effectiveness:
 - Children with CASA volunteers get more help while in the system, have more services ordered for them, are more likely to have a consistent, responsible adult presence and are less likely to be bounced from home to home.
 - A child with a CASA/GAL volunteer is more likely to have a plan for permanency, especially children of color.
 - Volunteers spend significantly more time with the child than a paid guardian ad litem, and CASA volunteers improve representation of children.

For citations and further study, visit www.casaforchildren.org

Advance to slide 10



- Pass out copies of your program’s **Volunteer Advocate Job Description**. To transition to the volunteer role, ask a question such as, How do you, as a courageous CASA volunteer, help us reach our mission? What specifically do CASA volunteers do that contributes to these stronger outcomes for the children we serve?

- Circle back to the description of the CASA role that learners reviewed as part of the Pre-Work for this session. Fill in details from your program’s Volunteer Advocate Job Description to help trainees understand the requirements specific to your program.
- Give an overview of the four main components of the CASA volunteer role: investigation, advocacy, facilitation and monitoring. Ask if a volunteer can explain the difference between what a CPS investigator does and our investigation work.



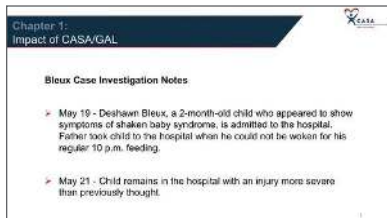
Help make these roles less abstract for learners by sharing a brief story to illustrate each of the four components.

Advance to slide 11



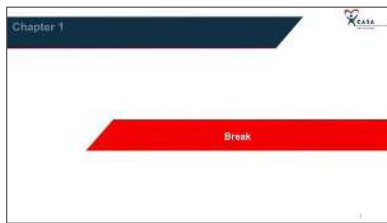
- Ask volunteers to think back on the Bleux case, which they read before coming to class. Ask them to quickly share what information they remember about the case.

Advance to slides 12 and 13 to reiterate timeline of Bleux case so far



Pose the question: “Based on what you learned about the four key components of the CASA volunteer role, how could a volunteer make a difference if assigned to this case?” (Some ideas might be: family engagement, medical care and observation of visits.)

Advance to slide 14; turn on music at low volume



ACTIVITY 1D: VOLUNTEER SKILLS

7:30 – 7:55

Advance to slide 15

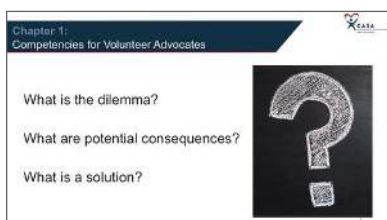


- Divide volunteers into small groups for this exercise. Ask volunteers to open their manual to the Volunteer Competencies list (beginning on page 10). Ask them to each share one area of strength and one area they want to develop in the small group.
- Ask each group to be prepared to share with the larger group common areas of strength and common areas for further development.
- Wrap up by inviting each group to report to the larger group. To help volunteers feel supported, discuss how they will be able to enhance the skill they want to develop throughout pre-service and in-service training. Tell participants that you will revisit the Competencies Checklist during the final training session to check in on which areas they've strengthened through training and which areas they want to continue to work on with their supervisor.

ACTIVITY 1E: PARAMETERS FOR CASA VOLUNTEER RELATIONSHIPS

7:55 – 8:25

Advance to slide 16



Before facilitating this session, make copies of the **Volunteer-Child Relationship Dilemmas** worksheet. If beneficial, add or substitute your own dilemma scenarios based on your program's experiences. Also prepare copies of your program's policies and procedures concerning the dos and

don'ts for volunteers (for example, volunteers should not give legal advice; volunteers should not give money or expensive gifts to children or families; volunteers should not give counseling or provide direct services; etc.).

- Divide class into small groups and pass out **Policies and Dilemmas** to groups.
- Introduce the activity:

As a CASA volunteer, you'll need to have enough direct contact with a child to gather information about the child's circumstances, including the child's needs and wishes, so you are able to make sound, thorough and objective recommendations in the child's best interest.

This should occur in person to provide you with firsthand knowledge of the child and their unique personality, abilities and needs. While social contact with the child can help to develop trust and a meaningful relationship, your role is that of an objective advocate for the child and not the child's attorney, caseworker, counselor, mentor or parental figure.

It's important to keep in mind that we do not provide direct services to the child, such as supervising visitation; however, it is appropriate for you to observe visitation to gather more info about parenting dynamics. CASA advocates never take a child into our home, provide shelter for the child or take the child on an overnight outing. As an advocate, your role is to identify challenges, as well as possible resources and solutions without risking the child's safety, your credibility as a professional and the integrity of the CASA program.

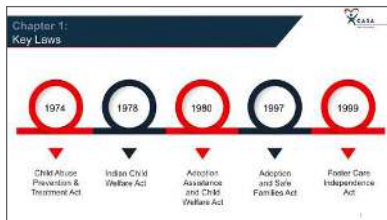
- Ask each table to discuss their dilemmas and answer three questions: What is the dilemma? What are the potential consequences of the dilemma? What is one possible solution?
- Give them 10 minutes to discuss, and then bring them back to large group to share. Be sure to also illuminate any specific problems and possible solutions that participants do not cover in the discussion. There are a number of possible solutions for each dilemma, and some will depend on your program's policies and procedures. If there is a best way to handle each situation in your program or if local rules apply, let participants know what is expected.
- Highlight ways to prevent each dilemma, such as by being honest with parties about the limits of the volunteer role.
- Let volunteers know that they will be reviewing the policies in more depth as part of their Pre-Work, and that you will be breaking them down as they progress through training.

Advance to slide 17 to transition into the Child Welfare System



- Have volunteers think back to what they learned about the laws in their Pre-Work, and ask for any questions they have about the laws.

Advance to slide 18



Highlight the takeaways of major child welfare laws:

- **Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA): 1974**
 - Requires that states have reporting laws, that they investigate abuse and neglect reports, and that they provide a guardian ad litem for each child.



Ask: Are CASA volunteers mandated reporters in Texas?
Yes! Everyone is.

- **Adoption Assistance and Child Welfare Act: 1980**

- Requires that states recruit culturally diverse foster and adoptive families.



Why is it so important for our community to have a diverse pool of foster and adoptive homes?

- Requires that states provide “reasonable efforts” to prevent or eliminate the need for removal of the child from the home or to make it possible for the child to return home.



Why do we believe that this is important?

- **Adoption and Safe Families Act (ASFA): 1997**

- Emphasizes the temporary nature of foster care and requires that permanency planning begin as soon as a child enters care.



Share a brief case story that can help learners understand why we need this law.

- **Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA): 1978**



Ask the class: Can anyone share some background about why this law was created?

Here is background to offer if no one knows:

According to the National Indian Child Welfare Agency (ICWA), studies in the 1970s began to reveal that large numbers of Native children were being separated from their parents, extended families, and communities by state child welfare and private adoption agencies. In fact, research found that 25–35% of all Native children were being removed; of these, 85% were placed outside of their families and communities—even when safe and willing relatives were available to care for the children. Congressional testimony documented the devastating impact this was having on Native children, families and tribes. The intent of Congress under ICWA was to “protect the best interests of Indian children and to promote the stability and security of Indian tribes and families.”

- Recognizes that Indian children have special rights as members of sovereign nations within the United States.
- Lays out placement preferences for children who have been determined to be Indian children.
- Establishes the right of certain entities to appear as parties, including the tribe and the Indian custodian, if one exists.



What steps can we take as CASAs to comply with ICWA?

- ◆ Stress for volunteers the importance and urgency of asking parents and family members whether the children have Native American heritage. Although caseworkers are also mandated to ask about this, it often falls through the cracks.

- ***Foster Care Independence Act: 1999***

- Allows states to serve and provide resources to youth up to age 21.
- Increases federal funding to assist young people transitioning from foster care. *Let the class know that we will talk in greater depth in session 7 about the experiences and needs of older youth in foster care.*

- ***Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act: 2008***

- Requires child welfare agencies to work with schools to support the education needs of children in foster care.
- Increases federal funding to assist and serve young people transitioning from foster care.
- Specifies that independent living services may be provided to young people at “various ages” and various stages of achieving independence, “including children waiting for adoption or other permanent options.”

Takeaways:

- It's important to acknowledge that our child welfare system is an imperfect system with an imperfect history.
- The laws that govern it have continued to change and evolve over the last century and will continue to change.
- One critical takeaway is understanding how the system has failed to account for the cultural needs of many children and the additional trauma this creates.
- Let the class know that throughout your time together, you'll have ongoing discussions about the importance of practicing cultural humility as CASA volunteers, as well as honoring and advocating for the cultural needs of our children.

ACTIVITY 1G: THE CHILD WELFARE SYSTEM

8:40 – 9:00

Advance to slide 19

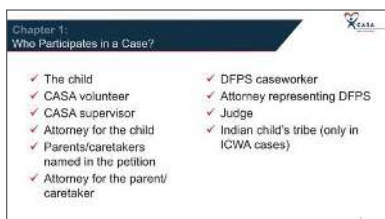


- Ask participants to open their manuals to the Child Protective Services flowchart and to take notes as you describe how a case moves through the system. Point out any differences between your jurisdiction and the flowchart, including names of hearings and timelines.

Using the Bleux case as an example, use sample dates to illustrate how long it could take for a child to achieve permanency.

- Explain the purpose of each hearing, and provide examples of what volunteers would do along the way, such as conducting interviews, engaging family members, making observations, connecting with community supports for parents and placements, identifying opportunities for the child to engage in community activities and submitting court reports. Tie this back to the four main components of the CASA volunteer role (investigation, advocacy, facilitation and monitoring) to help learners see how their role fits into the life of a case.

Advance to slide 20



- Next, ask participants to take notes as you describe the roles of the key players involved in the child welfare system, including the child, CASA volunteer, parent(s)/ caretaker(s), family and close community members, judge, attorneys, tribe members, caseworkers, child protection

agency and other service professionals. Clarify what each role is called in your area.

- Explain how the volunteer will work with each professional in order to develop a clear picture of the child’s situation and develop recommendations that would protect and promote what is in the child’s best interest.
- Share any tips or best practices from your program area for working with each group of people (for example, that caseworkers may be most responsive to text messages rather than email).

ACTIVITY 1H: INTRODUCTION TO COURT REPORTS

9:00 – 9:15

Advance to slide 21 to transition into the Working a Case section



- Introduce court reports as one of the most important vehicles of communication CASA volunteers have with the court and other legal parties. Explain that court reports are narrative documents where volunteers summarize the key points of the work they have completed on the case in between each hearing.

Advance to slide 22

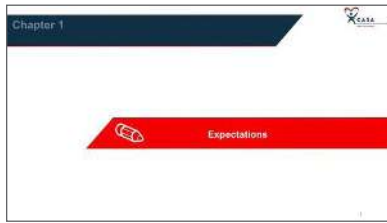


- Hand out copies of your program’s court report template and instructions for writing a court report. Let participants know that you will be breaking down the different sections of a court report throughout training, so they will need to bring these court report handouts with them to each

class. Explain that the court report is the most important way to effectively communicate the child’s needs to the court. Although it can sound daunting, completing the court report does not have to be a difficult task. Keeping detailed notes and contact logs during their advocacy work will help them to write each section of their report. Previous CASA reports, DFPS court reports and the service plan should also be reviewed to compare what was expected to happen with what actually occurred during the time between hearings.

- Share information about what processes DFPS caseworkers use in your area to write their reports, and what communication should look like between the CASA volunteer and the caseworker as they are preparing their independent reports.
- Give a brief overview of what is in a court report, and reiterate that the class will learn more about each section of the court report as they progress through training.

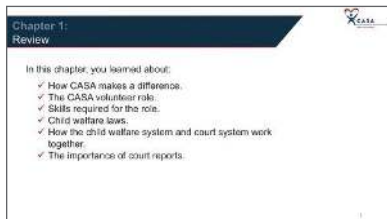
Advance to slide 23



- Now that volunteers have had an introduction to the training and their role as a CASA, ask your learners to write what they hope to gain from the training process on a sticky note and place it on the expectations flip chart in the front of the classroom. This can be a specific competency they hope to strengthen or something broader. Let them know that you will circle back to these at the end of the training process to check in on whether or not these expectations have been met.

REVIEW, EVALUATION AND PRE-WORK ASSIGNMENT

Advance to slide 24



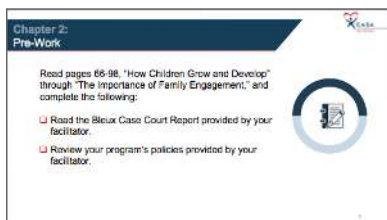
- In summary, quickly review the objectives from the beginning of the session to check in about volunteers' comfort level with the content. Invite any remaining questions.
- Share information with volunteers about ways they can learn more about the topics covered in this chapter.

Advance to slide 25



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

Advance to slide 26



- Go over assigned Pre-Work for session 2 and ensure everyone has a clear understanding about what to tackle before the next session. Hand out copies of the Bleux Case Court Report for them to read or let them know they will receive this from you by email. Explain that time has passed since the case opened; Deshawn is out of the hospital and in foster care.

- Close the session by speaking from your heart about the courage, compassion, commitment or other powerful qualities these advocates-to-be are demonstrating in choosing to become a CASA volunteer. Let them know how grateful you are, and that you're inspired by their choices.