



PROCEDURES GUIDE FOR VOLUNTEER COORDINATORS

2019



INTRODUCTION

This guide is intended to give a CASA Volunteer Coordinator/Advocate Supervisor (VC from this point forward) a better understanding of their role and expectations.

For a more extensive guide to volunteer coaching and retention, refer to The Art of Coaching for Volunteer Retention and Volunteer Coaching and Advocacy resources on the Texas CASA website.

Note: *An editable version of the guide is available online for programs to customize with their own procedures and policies.*

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SUPERVISION & COACHING OF VOLUNTEERS

Objectives:

The VC will:

- Establish an atmosphere of trust and confidence to enhance the relationship with the Volunteer and the VC,
- Guide and coach the Volunteer through clearly stated expectations and open lines of communication, and
- Be available to answer questions and address concerns.

Communication:

The VC will:

- Schedule monthly meetings with the Volunteer,
- Prepare a Case Review completing as much as possible prior to the meeting so that the time can be focused on the needs of the Volunteer (In the event the Volunteer is not available, this should be recorded in the program's databased system or contact log), and
- Maintain frequent contact via telephone, text, email or other means between the scheduled meetings to sustain strong communication and provide opportunities for the Volunteer to ask questions, seek guidance or express concerns about the case.

Tips for Coaching & Supervision:

- Advocacy work is demanding, sometimes frustrating or even frightening. Frequent contact will offer the Volunteer opportunities to express concerns and frustrations, and add an opportunity to provide coaching and guidance.
- Begin with a sense of compassion and turn towards curiosity when coaching the Volunteer. Focus on their desired outcome and remain solution- and future-focused by using open-ended questions. Rely on powerful coaching questions and coaching strategies including active listening, reflection and using a strength-based lens.
- Ensure that the Volunteer is aware of the difference they are making. They have not had the opportunity to compare their case to others, which would broaden their perspective. Identify successes that have occurred because of their work.
- If a Volunteer has difficulty meeting deadlines or appears to struggle with management of time, schedule a meeting and express a willingness to help seek a solution. The problem may be due to a need for more direction and clarification



of the expectations, a lack of emotional involvement with the child(ren), time constraints or other factors worth helping them explore. If the problem persists, discuss the Volunteer's commitment and ask what is keeping them from completing their tasks. Further concerns should be discussed with the VC's immediate supervisor or Executive Director. Seeking coaching and feedback from coworkers is also helpful.

- Resist doing the work for them. Direct communication from the CPS worker and other professionals to the Volunteer. The Volunteer will experience a sense of empowerment and case ownership as they successfully meet the challenges of their CASA role.
- Plan future meetings as a team allowing the Volunteer to make suggestions about areas they want to address.
- Celebrate big and small victories.
- Be proactive with your communication if there are concerns or potential issues that could arise.
- Remember that good communication concerning all aspects of the case, including the exchange of information, is vital to the Volunteer's confidence and success.
- Practice self-care, and encourage the Volunteer to do the same.



CASE ASSIGNMENT

Objectives:

The VC will:

- Develop a relationship with the Volunteer, and learn their strengths and areas that need improvement;
- Provide the Volunteer with the necessary tools and information to begin the case and a clear understanding of the next steps;
- Empower the Volunteer to set goals for the case and effectively advocate for the child(ren);
- Learn the specifics of the case; and
- Set expectations for submitting monthly documentation and timesheets.

The Volunteer will gain an understanding of:

- The specifics of the case;
- The steps that will be taken to effectively advocate in all areas (permanency, education, legal, physical, wellbeing);
- How and where to gather information, what questions to ask and to whom; and
- Submitting monthly documentation and timesheets.

Volunteer Personnel File:

The file should be carefully reviewed when working with a new Volunteer.

The Volunteer Personnel File may contain:

- Personal interview notes;
- Evaluations of the Volunteer's previous performance, if applicable; and
- Identification of the Volunteer's strengths, needs and any previously noted areas of concern.

The Volunteer File will:

- Be complete and accessible to the Volunteer through the data management system in place, and
- Include the necessary documents for case acceptance.



First Contact:

The VC should contact the identified Volunteer within 2 days of court appointment, introducing oneself if necessary. State that a case has been matched to their profile, and give them general case specifics. If they are interested, schedule a face-to-face meeting with them to review the case together. After they have reviewed the file and asked questions, the Volunteer will then formally accept or decline the assignment.

If the Volunteer declines, they should be reminded that the confidentiality agreement signed during training forbids release of any information related to any case they are presented or learn about through the CASA program.

Formal Acceptance:

When a Volunteer accepts a new case, especially a new Volunteer, the VC should remind them the child(ren) can be moved at any time from their current placement and possibly outside of the region. Clarify the expectation is they will remain their Volunteer throughout the case and continue seeing the child(ren) in their placements.

The VC will explain the organization of the CPS, court and CASA program documents and present any new information received. The Volunteer will review the material and make note of questions concerning the case or any missing information they need. The VC should check with the Volunteer periodically during their review of the case.

The Volunteer will sign the Case Acceptance and Case Confidentiality forms.

The questions that developed during the review may indicate areas in which the Volunteer needs clarification. Use this opportunity to review possible sources of information and begin to guide the Volunteer in the role.

Case Review:

The next step for the VC is to complete an Initial Case Review (or the equivalent). Identify areas that may be of concern for the Volunteer. Complete, with the Volunteer, the Advocacy Plan, recording the agreed procedure which will include:

- Read the case files at CPS;
- Meet the child(ren) and foster parent(s), biological parent(s), Attorney ad Litem (AAL) and CPS caseworker;
- Gather information about potential relative placements for the child(ren); and
- Any other steps you and the Volunteer agree need to be taken in these first weeks.

Inform the Volunteer that you will notify all parties the case has been assigned.



Check for clarification of the first week's tasks and schedule a follow-up meeting within 2 weeks. Let the Volunteer know you are available to them and encourage them to reach out with any questions, concerns or good news.

Before the Volunteer Leaves:

- Establish possible dates to read the CPS file and for the follow-up meeting;
- Make 2 copies of the Case Acceptance and Case Confidentiality forms and 1 copy of the Initial Case Review sheet, and give these forms along with a copy of the court order appointment;
- Include copies of all documents pertaining to the case and the acceptance in the Volunteer's file;
- Ensure their understanding that monthly contact logs begin at the acceptance meeting;
- Review entering contact logs in the database system if applicable or needed;
- Confirm the Volunteer has your contact information and answer any questions that may remain; and
- Establish what form of communication the Volunteer prefers; phone, text, or email.

After the Volunteer Leaves:

The VC should upload or place the original Case Data Sheet, Case Acceptance, Case Confidentiality, and Initial Case Review in the case file and upload a copy of each in the Volunteer's personnel file.

Notify all the parties of the assignment and provide the Volunteer's contact information the Volunteer chooses to disseminate. The Volunteer may request only certain parties have their personal phone or email, and other parties may contact the CASA office to reach the Volunteer. In this case the message will be taken and will be promptly given to the Volunteer.



READING CPS CASE FILES

Objectives:

The VC will:

- Guide the Volunteer on the reading of the file and how to obtain relevant information, and
- Accompany new Volunteers to the CPS office or as requested by Volunteers.

The Volunteer will:

- Become familiar with the format of CPS files and forms,
- Learn to locate needed information,
- Become familiar with the facts of the case and family members, and
- Begin building a relationship with the CPS caseworker.

Preparation:

After the VC has informed the CPS worker of the assignment and the Volunteer is comfortable, the Volunteer may email the CPS worker to initial their relationship and to set up a date to read the case file. The person emailing will copy one another on this email. Establish the date and hour for the appointment at the CPS office with an approximate length of time necessary to accomplish the objective.

Review the rules of confidentiality, especially with regard to maintaining the anonymity of the abuse reporter.

Reading the Case File:

New Volunteers will need assistance during the first case reading. The VC should explain each section of the CPS records. The Volunteer should make note of appropriate information for future use and indicate which pages need to be copied or scanned.

Discuss questions that may emerge during the reading. Encourage further investigation of the case (i.e. medical and educational history, special medical needs, family members lived with in the past, previous investigations, etc.) and identify sources for relevant information (internet, Texas CASA Learning Center, Commend the Volunteer for insight into specifics of the case).

If copies of records are needed, determine with the caseworker who will be responsible for this task. Locate the equipment and demonstrate its operation. If appropriate, the document can be scanned and emailed or uploaded directly to the case file. It is



important to explain why taking pictures on their phones of confidential records is inappropriate.

Conclusion:

Allow for time for dialogue with all Volunteers regarding the facts of the case, their personal reaction, or any barriers or challenges they anticipate thus far. Explain that meetings with the VC are the appropriate settings for discussion of questions, problems, and emotional responses.

Debriefing after the case file review with the Volunteer will allow the VC to respond empathetically to any emotional reactions. This also provides the opportunity to coach them through any challenges they anticipate.



MEETING THE CPS CASEWORKER

Objectives:

The VC will:

- Assist the Volunteer in establishing a positive working relationship with the CPS caseworker, and
- Provide coaching and guidance in obtaining information from the caseworker.

The Volunteer will:

- Build a positive working relationship with the caseworker,
- Listen to the caseworker's perception of the case,
- Obtain additional information related to the case and provide information gathered, and
- Communicate with the CPS caseworker at least monthly for the duration of the case.

Preparation:

Prior to the meeting, the VC should review with the Volunteer the role of the caseworker, the numerous tasks for which they are responsible and the demands of their job. Providing insight on CPS's limitations due to policies will be helpful to the Volunteer.

Discuss methods of communication that have been successful (email, telephone, text, etc.) with that particular caseworker. Stress that the Volunteer must not use texting to communicate confidential information; however, texting can be used to communicate dates and times of meetings or visits.

Assist the Volunteer with identifying questions the Volunteer needs and wants to ask. Review what information is available from the caseworker and possible alternative sources for other details.

Remind the Volunteer of the need to remain independent and neutral, and to corroborate information from the original source. For example: The caseworker could report that the mother in the case has not been attending parenting classes: the Volunteer would need to verify this with the parenting class provider's attendance records.

Discuss with the Volunteer strategies to build a positive working relationship with the caseworker, recognizing that they both are working toward a common goal with the



welfare of the child(ren) at the center. Withholding information is unproductive, disadvantageous, and could lead to mistrust in the relationship.

Consider what contact information should be obtained from the caseworker and what should be shared. Remember that it is CASA policy not to give out Volunteers' personal contact information to anyone other than professionals involved with the case, and their consent must first be obtained.

Meeting the Caseworker:

VCs should accompany new Volunteers to the first meeting with the caseworker. After introductions, explain that you and the Volunteer work together, but the Volunteer will be the primary contact person and will be responsible for writing court reports, court appearances, observational visits and case contacts. Confirm dates for future hearings or meetings, and request that the Volunteer be appraised of changes in dates or times. Provide contact information for you and the Volunteer. At this time, the Volunteer will take charge of the meeting asking the predetermined questions.

Conclusion:

After the meeting and away from CPS personnel, answer any questions the Volunteer may have about the meeting or the caseworker. Clarify any misconceptions or biases that may have emerged about the caseworker or CPS. Use this opportunity to assess the professional interaction skills of the Volunteer.

Review the Advocacy Plan for the case, check for understanding of expectations of both you as the VC and the expectations of the Volunteer, and encourage the Volunteer to contact you at any time with questions or concerns. Confirm the next scheduled meeting. Remind the Volunteer they are expected to communicate with the CPS worker a minimum of once per month, though more frequent contact is ideal. Direct all communication initiated by the CPS caseworker to the Volunteer throughout the duration of the case.



MEETING THE CHILD(REN) & PLACEMENT

Objectives:

The VC will help the Volunteer:

- Establish and provide clarification of their role as the Court Appointed Special Advocate,
- Establish a positive relationship with the child(ren) and placement,
- Develop a procedure to obtain information about the child(ren) from the placement,
- Develop techniques for handling difficult questions, and
- Learn the process for scheduling visits if their child(ren) are placed in a shelter or facility.

The Volunteer will:

- Begin to establish a positive relationship with the child(ren) and placement, and
- Obtain information from the foster parent(s) or caretakers regarding the child(ren).

Preparation:

Preparation for the first meeting should include:

- Providing the Volunteer with contact information for the placement;
- Procedures for initial contact and an age/developmental-appropriate introduction to the child(ren);
- A review of key points such as: how to handle difficult questions and questions related to the case, and that no promises are to be made to the child(ren);
- Reviewing of some behaviors that might be expected from the child(ren) and an appropriate response; e.g. A child may be indiscriminately affectionate, hostile or aloof;
- Reflection on rules of professional behavior; e.g. Speak only positively about the child(ren)'s parent(s) and refrain from engaging in negative discussions, speak positively about the child(ren) and avoid engaging in negative conversations in child(ren)'s presence or within hearing range, and maintain the boundaries of the CASA role;
- Clarifying the need to be sensitive to age/development of child(ren) and appropriate interactions;
- Discussion of methods for securing information from caretaker with understanding that all facts should be corroborated with the original source;



- A reminder to schedule the appointment at a mutually convenient time and request directions; and
- A reminder that the Volunteer must always notify the placement with adequate advance notice if there is any change in the appointment.

Visits with the Child(ren):

Minimum requirements for contacts on a case are as follows (as outlined by Texas CASA Standard 5.5.B):

- b) Have regular and sufficient in-person contact with the child where they live to ensure in-depth knowledge of the case and make fact-based recommendations to the court. The CASA Volunteer shall meet in-person with the child once every thirty (30) days at a minimum. An exception may be granted:
 - i. If the child(ren) are placed more than 1 but less than 3 driving hours away, CASA will meet in person with the child(ren) at least once every 3 months.
 - ii. If the child(ren) are placed more than 3 driving hours away, CASA will meet in person with the child(ren) at least once every 6 months.
 - iii. In addition to in-person contact, have other types of monthly age appropriate contact with the child(ren) including telephone calls, emails, video conferencing and letters as applicable for the child's age and interests.

The above are the very minimum expectations, and more frequent visits allows Volunteers to continue to develop a relationship with the child(ren) and provide quality advocacy. The VC should encourage and coach their Volunteers to exceed the minimum number of visits and exceed minimum standards in all areas of advocacy.

Plan the Visit:

- The Volunteer will schedule the initial visit at a time that is convenient for the placement, the Volunteer, and the VC;
- The VC will observe the Volunteer's performance, ask them how they felt about the visit, provide feedback and make suggestions after the visit, when appropriate; and
- Provide child(ren), if age-appropriate, contact information.

Conclusion:

After the visit, take time to debrief with the Volunteer. Offer praise and examples of what went well. Include constructive comments and ways to develop particular skills.



Encourage the Volunteer to voice any concerns, comments or questions about the child(ren), placement or other aspects of the meeting.

Review the Volunteer's advocacy plan for the case, encourage communication, and confirm the next scheduled face-to-face meeting with the VC.

Remind the Volunteer of the reporting policy if they suspect abuse or neglect of any child(ren) in the placements visited.



MEETING THE PARENT(S)

Objectives:

The VC will help the Volunteer:

- Establish and clarify their role as the CASA,
- Establish positive relationships with the parent(s),
- Use a strength-based lens,
- Maintain appropriate and positive boundaries, and
- Develop techniques for skillfully gathering information and handling difficult questions.

The Volunteer will:

- Establish and clarify their position as a CASA with the parent(s);
- Begin to build a positive relationship with the parent(s);
- Maintain appropriate and positive boundaries with the assistance of the VC; and
- Gain information about the family, history of the child(ren) and present circumstances.

Preparation:

The VC will review the following with the Volunteer:

- The process of introduction and techniques for developing a working relationship with the parent(s);
- How to establish that the Volunteer has been appointed by the judge to be the Guardian ad Litem (GAL) or Friend of the Court (if applicable);
- Establish a differentiation between CASA, CPS and the AAL;
- The meaning and role of GAL and CASA;
- CASA's responsibility, which is to advocate for the child(ren)'s best interest; and
- What to expect from the CASA's visits and contacts.

The VC will accompany the Volunteer on at least the first visit to the parent(s). The Volunteer can expect parent(s) may be upset about the removal of their child(ren) and, therefore, the first meeting may be difficult for the Volunteer, especially if this is a first experience.

To help prepare for the initial encounter, discuss a variety of ways the parent(s) may react. Develop a plan of action for responding to difficult questions such as: "Are you going to help me get my kids back?" "When can they be returned to me?" Provide



helpful phrases and respectful answers to expected questions. Consider role-playing beforehand.

Design questions that will reveal the parent(s) understanding of:

- Why the child(ren) were removed,
- What support systems the parent(s) have,
- Relatives or fictive kin who might be considered for placement of the child(ren), and
- Their strengths, support system and needs.

Discuss additional information the Volunteer would like to obtain and how to word the questions in a positive, non-accusatory manner.

Discuss the contact information that will be appropriate to give to the parent(s). Volunteers should have available business cards with their name, the CASA office phone number and address.

If a call is made to the parent(s) from the Volunteer's home, office or cell phone, they are encouraged to dial *67 before the number to block the Volunteer's number and prevent the receiving party from using Caller ID. It is important that the parent does not experience any confusion about the CASA role and that the Volunteer's personal and work identity be protected.

The first visit to the parent(s) home should be scheduled, although subsequent visits may be both announced and unannounced. Unannounced visits should be discussed with the VC and a judgement made on if the Volunteer will want and/or need accompaniment from the VC or CPS worker.

If counsel has been appointed or retained by the parent(s), the Volunteer will need to contact the attorney prior to making the initial contact and determine if the attorney wishes to be present for the first meeting.

After necessary arrangements have been made, review with the Volunteer the format for the initial visit. Remind the Volunteer to notify all parties if there is any change in the appointment.

The Meeting:

The Volunteer should have face-to-face contact with the parent(s). Preferably, contact will occur at the parent(s)' residence unless their whereabouts are unknown or there are safety concerns. The Volunteer should schedule the visit at a time that's convenient for the parent(s), the Volunteer and the VC.



Plan the Visit:

- Determine who shall take the lead for the first meeting;
- Clarify the Volunteer's role;
- Observe the Volunteer's performance;
- Respectfully and tactfully interject if information being given by the Volunteer is incorrect, not appropriate for the meeting, or if the communication turns argumentative;
- Pose predetermined questions to the parent(s);
- Provide parent(s) with appropriate contact information; and
- Remind the Volunteer they are not to engage in giving legal advice or therapeutic counseling.

Conclusion:

Following the meeting, schedule time to discuss:

- Reaction of the Volunteer to the parent(s),
- Information gathered during the interview including family strengths,
- A plan to discuss with the child(ren) any family members and fictive kin given by the parent(s),
- A plan to contact family members or fictive kin,
- Assessment of parent(s)' willingness to provide information,
- Evaluating the parent(s)' understanding of why the child(ren) were removed,
- Constructive feedback on the Volunteer's performance,
- The Volunteer's plan for handling the case,
- Any initial concerns for and/or needs of the child(ren), and
- Confirming the next scheduled meeting with VC.

Encourage the Volunteer to call with any concerns, questions or problems.



OBSERVATION OF SUPERVISED VISITS

Objectives:

The VC will:

- Review rules for observation and provide DFPS guidelines for parent(s), and
- Review tools to assess interaction between child(ren) and parent(s).

The Volunteer will:

- Follow the rules for observation,
- Assess the interaction between child(ren) and parent(s), and
- Contact their VC if they have any questions or concerns.

Preparation:

Clarify the frequency of observing supervised visits with the Volunteer. To prepare for these observations, the Volunteer should have previously met with the child(ren) and the foster parent(s). The Volunteer may decide, on occasion, to schedule an additional meeting with the child(ren), foster parent(s) or parent(s) prior to or following a supervised visit, especially if the child(ren) reside out of the county.

Outline for the new Volunteer how the visits are arranged by the CPS office. The caseworker should be advised of the Volunteer's intent to attend and time and date should be confirmed. Supervised visitations are frequently rescheduled; therefore the Volunteer may want to confirm with the CPS worker the day of the scheduled visit. Remind the Volunteer not to interfere with the time allotted for child(ren) and parent(s) to visit.

Review:

- Behaviors to be noted,
- Interaction of parent(s) with the child(ren),
- Child(ren)'s reaction to parent(s),
- Interaction to or among siblings, and
- If relatives other than parent(s) are involved, discuss how this may influence the visit.



The Supervised Visit:

Record observations in your program's data management system of the visit. For new Volunteers, the VC may be present to answer questions and interject information/directions as needed.

Conclusion:

The VC will follow up with the Volunteer to:

- Discuss reactions to the visit,
- Summarize observations and information gathered (all information must be documented and submitted with monthly contact logs), and
- Remind the Volunteer to contact the foster parent(s) or caretakers within 3 days following the visit to assess any change in behavior of the child(ren).

The Volunteer will observe the visit from the CPS room, and never in the company of the parent(s) and child(ren). In the event of inappropriate behavior, the CPS caseworker needs to be notified immediately and will intervene. If redirection of parent(s) is warranted, it is the responsibility of the caseworker, not the Volunteer.



TRANSPORTATION OF CHILD(REN)

Objectives:

The VC will:

- Present policy and training requirements for transportation of children,
- Gather and provide information to the executive director for a decision of approval/non-approval, and
- Maintain transportation-approval renewal dates.

The Volunteer will:

- Understand policy and training requirements for transportation of children, and
- Complete all requirements and obtain approval before transporting any child.

Conclusion:

Once transportation of a child has been approved by the Executive Director, the VC will ensure that the transportation training has been completed before the Volunteer transports. The training will consist of the VC reviewing and providing the Volunteer with a copy of the Transportation Policy, Transportation Agreement, and Emergency Procedures. The VC will upload a copy of all of the above in the Volunteer's file and case file.

The VC will also note the date that the transportation approval will expire. On or before the date of expiration of approval, the VC will submit the above again if the Volunteer wishes to continue to transport.

The program will follow the Texas CASA Standard 7.E.7 (a-g), that pertains to transportation in addition to the program's procedures and policies.



DOCUMENTATION

Objectives:

The VC will:

- Collect and approve monthly documentation from the Volunteer;
- Ensure documentation is uploaded in the appropriate case file;
- Read documentation for content and address any concerns immediately;
- Document all contacts with the Volunteer including emails, phone calls, in-person meetings, meetings attended together or individually regarding the case; and
- Update changes in placement, caseworker, Volunteer, court hearings, schools, etc.

The Volunteer will:

- Submit case logs monthly;
- Include fact-based information and observations; and
- Include face-to-face, phone, and email communication pertaining to the case.



COURT REPORTS

Objectives:

The VC will:

- Present a template for the court report,
- Assist in identifying appropriate information to be included, and
- Clarify the submission date at least 3 weeks from the court date.

The Volunteer will:

- Understand what information is necessary for an effective report,
- Become familiar with the format for the court report, and
- Submit the court report in a timely manner in accordance with the program's policy.

Preparation:

Review the court report that defines the information needed for each section and identifies the source. (e.g. “The therapist recommended Bobby’s individual counseling be increased to 2 times a week during this next transition period.”)

To prepare for presentation in court it is important for the VC and Volunteer to:

- Read from each party’s perspective;
- Remain factual and evidence-based;
- Present a complete picture of the child(ren) and their needs to the judge;
- Use the Holley Factors as a reference point to consider best interest;
- Use Minimum Sufficient Level of Care as a guide to mitigate personal biases and personal value judgements in their recommendations;
- Present material in a neutral manner;
- Discuss any new information or recommendations that could come as a surprise to CPS, AALs, or the prosecutor;
- Include specific requests and directions from the judge;
- Support all recommendations in the body of the court report;
- Determine date for completion of the report allowing time for corrections or revisions;
 - The Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) for CASA and DFPS requires the court report be sent to all parties 5 days prior to the court date. The DFPS court report will be received 10 days prior to the hearing and a copy must be given to the Volunteer. Contact the CPS caseworker if the report is not received 10 days prior to the court date; and



- Contact the Volunteer prior to the completion deadline for the court report to clarify any questions and reconfirm the due date.

Review of the Court Report:

Read the court report, making suggestions where appropriate. Determine the method for communication with the Volunteer to finalize the report. Comments should highlight positive sections as well as those that need to be changed.

Although the report must have CASA program approval before being finalized, it primarily represents the voice of the Volunteer in court. The VC assists in the development of this document, but the Volunteer does the writing. After the court report is finalized, no changes will be made to the document without the Volunteer's consent.

If a significant disagreement occurs between the VC and Volunteer regarding the child(ren)'s best interest recommendations, follow the program's protocol.

Filing & Distribution of the Court Report:

Example: After the report is finalized and signed by the Volunteer, the VC and the Program or Executive Director, it is the responsibility of the VC to ensure that a copy of the report is filed with the court and e-filed to distribute to all parties on the case.



COURT HEARINGS

Objectives:

The VC will:

- Discuss strategies that will help the Volunteer be most effective during the hearing,
- Review all expected proceedings of the court hearing, and
- Support and empower the Volunteer to be assertive when speaking in court.

The Volunteer will:

- Develop an understanding of the court hearing processes, and become capable of being assertive in communication and confident in expressing recommendations in the courtroom;
- Employ strategies that will focus on the best interest of the child(ren);
- Notify their VC immediately if they cannot attend the court hearing; and
- Give the child(ren) or youth an opportunity to submit their own court report or participate in the court hearing.

Preparation:

Although the Volunteer has observed at least 3 hours of court hearings during initial training, it is appropriate to review the format and the purpose of each hearing. Hearings may have different objectives and purposes, so allow time prior to the appearance at each hearing to analyze the procedure and answer questions that may have arisen.

Further preparation can include:

- Reviewing facts to support recommendations;
- Rehearsing the presentation of the Volunteer's recommendations;
- Reviewing materials to bring to court including extra copies of the court report (Any notes brought into the courtroom can be requested and reviewed by all parties. The Volunteer may want to highlight areas of concern and vital information in their court report prior to the hearing.);
- Reviewing order of persons participating;
- Reminding that each attorney has the right to question the person presenting a report;
- Confirming date, time and location of the hearing (It is the responsibility of the VC to notify the Volunteer of any change in date, location or time of the hearings.);



- Determining an appropriate arrival time; and
- Reminding that the interaction of various parties prior to the hearing could provide important information.

The Court Hearing:

Upon arrival at the court, provide an opportunity for the Volunteer to communicate any last-minute questions or concerns.

Communication between the Volunteer and VC during the hearing may take place in the form of written questions, which will be exchanged.

It is the responsibility of the VC to ensure that all parties to the suit received a copy of the CASA court report.

Notes from the court hearing taken by the Volunteer and VC will be submitted with other case documentation.

Conclusion:

After the hearing, the VC should:

- Summarize the proceedings with the Volunteer and enter their respective contact logs;
- Answer questions about the process, information exchanged or behavior of participants;
- Determine if there are areas in which the Volunteer feels a need for more coaching or guidance;
- Give a constructive evaluation of the Volunteer's performance with an emphasis on positive aspects of their performance;
- Remind the Volunteer to document their time in court; and
- Express the appreciation for the Volunteer's time, commitment and dedication – written acknowledgment by email, note or card, of their importance to the child(ren) and the case is also appropriate.



PERMANENCY CONFERENCE MEETING (PC)

Objectives:

The VC will:

- Notify the Volunteer of the meeting's time and location as soon as received from CPS,
- Provide a clear understanding of the purpose and format of the PC,
- Clarify the roles of each of the expected participants, and
- Clarify the Volunteer's role and expectations of their participation.

The Volunteer will:

- Become familiar with their role in the meeting,
- Develop the skills to advocate for their child(ren) during meetings, and
- Voice the child(ren)'s needs and desires during the meeting along with any concerns.

Preparation:

To prepare for this meeting the VC will:

- Notify the Volunteer of the date, time and location of the PC in a timely manner;
- Review the purpose of the PC;
- Define the timeframe and what format can be expected;
- Discuss the progress of services for both parent(s) and child(ren), if applicable;
- Explore services or recommendations that the Volunteer may want to address during the meeting; and
- Identify the appropriate time to advocate for these services.

The PC:

The VC should attend the PC with the Volunteer to:

- Provide support during the meeting,
- Introduce previously agreed upon topics that may be overlooked by the Volunteer,
- Observe the Volunteer's performance,
- Complete the meeting notes, and
- Upload a copy of the notes to the case file.



Conclusion:

- Summarize with the Volunteer the information presented, and any progress made during the PC;
- Review important information gleaned during the meeting;
- Identify the steps to follow up on decisions made;
- Provide constructive evaluation on the Volunteer's performance;
- Confirm the next scheduled meeting;
- Encourage the Volunteer to communicate concerns or questions; and
- Thank the Volunteer for their recommendations and time spent at the PC.



MEDIATION *(IF APPLICABLE)*

Objectives:

The VC will:

- Provide a clear understanding of the purpose and format of mediation, and
- Direct the Volunteer in the most effective way to advocate for the child(ren).

The Volunteer will:

- Understand the process of mediation and their role.

Preparation:

The VC should clarify the purpose of mediation as it relates to the Volunteer's case. Outline the recommendation of CASA and discuss the possibility of negotiations according to the best interest of the child(ren). At any time during the mediation, the VC and/or the Volunteer may request a recess for private discussion.

Review the rules of confidentiality. No part of the discussion during the mediation process may be repeated. All notes taken during the session must be shredded or given to the mediator at the close of the meeting.

It is permissible to report only the results of mediation - an agreement was reached, or no agreement was forthcoming. If an agreement was successful, the terms may be reported.

Mediation:

The role of the VC at mediation includes:

- Observation of the performance of the Volunteer,
- Support of the Volunteer,
- Reminding the Volunteer to raise concerns through verbal prompts or written messages,
- Requesting for private conference with the Volunteer if necessary,
- Verification that any agreement is reviewed and signed by the Volunteer and VC, and
- Confirmation that copies of any agreement are in hand at the close of mediation.



Conclusion:

Summarize with the Volunteer the progress of the mediation. Review the agreement if one was reached, and decide what steps are necessary to carry out its terms. Provide a positive, constructive evaluation of the Volunteer's performance.



TRIALS

Objectives:

The VC will:

- Review strategies to enable the Volunteer to present a strong and effective argument, and
- Clarify the format and process to assure a confident performance by the Volunteer.

The Volunteer will:

- Understand the process and be confident in their role as advocate for the best interest of the child(ren); and
- Understand the importance of well-documented, clearly stated information supporting their recommendations.

Preparation:

The Volunteer should:

- Review the case file at CPS;
- Contact all sources throughout the case, and just prior to the trial, so information is current;
- Create a base of fact-based information, e.g. timeline, outline, etc.; and
- Discuss this information with the VC.

The VC and Volunteer need to:

- Meet in person to outline the CASA recommendations and the supporting facts,
- Ensure that information has been gathered from all sources and is current,
- Review tips for testifying, and
- Understand that important information that has been omitted during questioning may be interjected through an independent statement to the court as GAL.

The VC will arrange a meeting with the attorney most closely aligned with the CASA position. The attorney, VC and Volunteer will discuss the upcoming trial, relevant information, grounds (if applicable) and the type of questions that could be asked. If the



Volunteer is under time constraints regarding the trial, the attorney can advise the approximate point when they will be called to give testimony.

If termination is recommended, define the evidence and ascertain that it is in accordance with the Texas Family Code and in the best interest of the child(ren).

If a court report is being filed, deadlines should be established so the process can be finalized. The day before the trial, the VC should contact the Volunteer to air any concerns, discuss new information, review the recommendations, and confirm the time and location.

The Trial:

The Volunteer should be prepared to pass written information to the attorney, as needed, during the trial. If the Volunteer can be present for only a portion of the trial, the VC will fulfill that responsibility and take notes so the Volunteer can be fully informed. The VC should be present for the entire trial. Prior to their testimony, the VC should convey to the Volunteer their confidence in their ability to perform successfully.

Conclusion:

At the conclusion of the trial, the VC should commend the Volunteer for a complicated and challenging achievement. Discuss the emotions that surfaced during the trial, the outcome, and any questions the Volunteer may have. Inquire if there were areas where the Volunteer felt that more guidance or coaching was needed.

The VC should express the gratitude felt by all at CASA for the Volunteer's time, dedication and commitment to the case. Follow up with a thank you card signed by the VC and the Executive Director, and let them know that they made a real difference in the life of the child(ren).

The VC should state that contact will be made for a meeting to plan the next step or close the case, depending on the outcome of the trial.



CLOSING A CASE

Objectives:

The VC will:

- Complete forms to bring case to closure,
- Provide time to debrief with the Volunteer all aspects of the case,
- Evaluate the Volunteer's performance during the case,
- Conduct a case closure interview, and
- Close the case within 2 days of dismissal.

The Volunteer will:

- Complete closure procedures;
- Express emotional reactions to the process, the outcome of the case, and experience closure; and
- Bring all documentation and files concerning the case to the CASA office within 3 days of case closure.

Preparation:

The VC will complete the Performance Measures and the VC Evaluation of Volunteer, and Case Closure forms.

The VC, Program Director and the Executive Director will evaluate the performance of the Volunteer and discuss recommendations for their continued involvement with the program.

The VC will remind the Volunteer to bring all hard copy case notes and/or documents to the CASA office within 3 days of case closure.

Volunteer Conference:

- The VC and Volunteer will bring closure to a case at a scheduled conference.
- The VC will confirm that answers on the performance measures, based on the Volunteer's involvement, are accurate. This instrument will provide the basis for evaluation, discussion of the Volunteer's strengths, as well as areas of growth.
- The VC shall ascertain the Volunteer's plans for future involvement, if it has been predetermined that they are eligible to continue in the CASA role.
- If the Volunteer is interested in taking another case after a period, discuss a target date for their return.



- The Volunteer will have an opportunity to provide feedback to the VC on their experience with the VC.
- The Volunteer will sign the performance measures.
- The Volunteer will receive a copy of their evaluation forms.
- The VC will collect all the Volunteer's records for the case. If the Volunteer has additional records elsewhere, instruct the Volunteer to return them to the CASA office to be shredded or deleted from their emails and hard drives.

Upon closure of a case, the Volunteer is no longer serving as a GAL. Remind the Volunteer any further contact with the child(ren) will be a personal decision with the approval of the permanent placement.

Conclusion:

The VC will complete the following forms and distribute as stated:

- Performance Measures form: Place original in the Closed Case File and give a copy to the Program Director within 3 working days.
- VC Evaluation of Volunteer Form: Place original in Volunteer's Personnel File and give one to the Program Director within 3 working days.
- Program Evaluation Survey: Place the originals of the returned forms in the Closed Case File and give a copy to the Program Director. A copy may also be sent to the Volunteer, if it is a favorable appraisal of the Volunteer's involvement.
- Notify the Executive Director of the Volunteer's decision regarding future cases.
- Send the Volunteer a card of congratulations for their work and helping the child(ren) achieve safety and permanency.

Note: Dismissal orders can take days, weeks or even months to receive, therefore it is perfectly acceptable, and recommended, to close a case when the judge dismisses the case verbally in court or after a final agreement is signed by all parties.



CRIME VICTIMS' COMPENSATION PROCEDURE

Information regarding resources, eligibility and applications will be provided to the eligible child(ren)'s caretaker.

Website: <https://www.texasattorneygeneral.gov/crime-victims/crime-victims-compensation-program>

Phone: (800) 983-9933

Local CASA programs receiving Victims of Crime Act (VOCA) funds are required under the act to provide assistance to victims concerning Crime Victim's Compensation (CVC) benefit claims. Not all children in CPS custody are eligible for Crime Victim's Compensation; but, when a child is eligible, CVC benefits can pay for needed services that relate to their child abuse when no other funds are available.

The VC will:

- Follow the program's Crime Victim's Compensation written procedures;
- Review the requirements, restrictions, benefit claims and applications with the Volunteer;
- Determine if the child(ren) are eligible for a claim to be filed; and
- Remind the Volunteer to provide Crime Victim Compensation information and assistance to the caretakers and to follow up to ensure they have submitted the application if the child(ren) are eligible for benefits.

The Volunteer will:

- Provide information necessary for the Crime Victims' Compensation application if needed, and
- Remind the caregivers to follow through with the application.



COURTESY COLLABORATIONS

Objectives:

The VC will:

- Explain to the Volunteer the procedure to request a courtesy visit, and
- Make a request for a visit and follow the proper procedures.

The Volunteer will:

- Understand and follow procedures when notifying their VC a courtesy visit is needed, and
- Communicate with the visiting CASA and participate in visits via phone if applicable.

The purpose of a courtesy visit is for a trained CASA to visit a child who is in urgent need of a face-to-face visit, but their Volunteer or program is not currently able to see the child because they are placed out of their region. These visits are considered subsequent visits and do not replace the required visits by the assigned CASA.

Courtesy visits may be requested from the Courtesy CASA Program or through a local CASA program located near the child(ren)'s placement.

Though requesting a visit from the local CASA program is an option, some CASA programs do not perform courtesy visits. In fact, National CASA has expressed concerns regarding a potential lack of legal authority and, consequently, a breach of confidentiality in sharing information with another program. These concerns may be alleviated by providing the assisting program with a court ordered request for a courtesy collaboration.

Requesting a Visit From a Courtesy CASA:

Detailed instructions for how to request a Courtesy CASA visit can be found on the Texas CASA website at <https://texascasa.org/learning-center/resources/courtesy-casa-courtesy-collaboration/> or by searching "Texas CASA Courtesy CASA" through a search engine.

Courtesy Collaboration with Local CASA Programs:

As previously noted, not all local CASA programs accept courtesy visit requests. In this situation a Courtesy CASA visit can be made.



Once a program is located, the VC will:

- Inquire if the program performs courtesy collaborations or would be able to with a court ordered request,
- Establish contact with the staff person who handles courtesy collaborations, and
- Notify the Volunteer of their next steps in the process.

The collaborating agency will request:

- A copy of the court order appointing CASA as Guardian ad Litem,
- A letter from the Volunteer identifying the person(s) to be visited,
- Specific information sought by the requesting program including requests for pictures if applicable ,
- Contact information for the placement, and
- An order from the presiding judge requesting a courtesy collaboration of their program if needed.

The VC will:

- Provide a copy of the Courtesy Collaboration Request form letter for completion by the Volunteer and/or a court order requesting the courtesy collaboration;
- If needed, obtain a court ordered request for courtesy collaboration;
- Review the completed request form letter and provide the form to the collaborating agency; and
- Help the Volunteer determine an appropriate timeline to receive needed information.

The Volunteer will:

- Submit the reason for the request and information about the child(ren) to the collaborating CASA program,
- Notify the placement of the request and who will contact them to schedule a visit, and
- Be available to the collaborating CASA program to answer questions or provide information as needed.



FAMILY GROUP DECISION MAKING MEETINGS

Family Group Decision Making (FGDM) describes a variety of practices to work with and engage children, youth and families in safety and service planning and decision making, including Family Group Conferences (FGC), Single Case Plans (SCP), Circles of Support (COS), Family Team Meetings (FTM), and Collaborative Family Engagement (CFE). CFE meetings are often merged with the FGDMs to reduce the number of meetings for the families.

How It Works:

First, CPS will inform the families they are invited to help make a plan. Then, CPS will set up a meeting. The family helps pick the time, place and who attends. Families can invite anyone who is important in their child(ren)'s lives. If appropriate, the child(ren) can attend.

For family meetings that include CFE, it is recommend that someone at the CASA program co-facilitate with a CPS facilitator. This CASA person should be someone who has been trained by a CFE Coach at Texas CASA.

Basic Values:

- All children should be free from harm;
- Children are best raised in families;
- Family can and should play a role in connections and support for the child(ren), not just placement;
- Family has the responsibility and the ability to safely plan and care for the child(ren);
- Children being connected supports their safety and wellbeing;
- Children should remain connected to their community and culture;
- Children are safest when families, CASA and CPS work together;
- Families must be respected;
- Families are the experts and can learn about their own strengths and needs; and
- Children should be removed only when there is a strong risk of harm.

CFE Core Concepts:

- A collaborative, coordinated effort between CASA, CPS, providers and others in engaging and involving families is beneficial for all involved;
- Engagement means developing trust-based relationships with others - children, families, natural supports, professionals, advocates and providers;



- Developing and supporting networks is necessary for ensuring safety and supports for the child(ren) and the family;
- Family meetings are where the real work happens: casework, planning, healing of the family, forming the network, strengthening it and moving the network to action; and
- Giving the youth and family a role and voice in developing goals and plans is a trauma-informed approach.

CFE & Texas CASA/CPS believe that:

- Child protection interventions are time limited and specific, and services do not equate to safety;
- How we do our work is as important as the work we do;
- Families are the experts on their own lives;
- Families can change; and
- Families and children deserve to be treated with respect.

The Volunteer will:

- Include the family in the advocating for the child(ren)'s best interest;
- Advocate for the child(ren) to be allowed to communicate with those they identify as their support system, including previous teachers; and
- Continue searching for family and meaningful connections for the child(ren) until a strong, supportive and engaged network is found.

Conclusion:

Children must be advocated for in a holistic way, including their family, community and culture. Best outcomes for children come when CASA, families and CPS work in a collaborative, team-based approach. Seeking connection, engagement and involvement with families is paramount. The goal is connections and permanency for the child(ren).



POTENTIAL VOLUNTEER & VOLUNTEER INTAKE

Receiving the Call:


Any staff person can and should take a call from a potential Volunteer. If the recruiter or staff person who normally takes inquiry calls is out, find out their level of familiarity with the program, talk with them more about volunteer opportunities and answer any questions they may have. Using the Inquiry Card or the appropriate section of your program data management system, gather initial information about the potential Volunteer.

Sample phrases:

- “Thank you for your interest.”
- “How did you find us/hear about us?” (Fill in space on form)
- “(Name) is our Recruitment Specialist (or use their program title) and they will be so glad that you called. If I can quickly gather some basic information to pass on, they will contact you as soon as possible.”

Let the potential Volunteer know you will be passing the information on to the appropriate person, and that they will receive a follow-up call soon with more information from that person. Please be sure to get all their contact information (address, phone, email, etc).

Sample Inquiry Card:



CASA Inquiry Call Info DATE _____

“Thank you for your interest and calling!” Person taking this call: _____

How did you find us _____ **Which One:** _____

Name _____

Email _____

Phone (cell) _____ **(any other)** _____

Address _____

County _____ **TX** **Zip** _____

Interested in Advocate _____ Friends of CASA _____ Other _____

Notes:



PROCEDURES TO REPORT ABUSE OR NEGLECT

Texas law states anyone who thinks a child, or person 65 years or older, or an adult with disabilities is being abused, neglected or exploited must report it to DFPS. DFPS's 24-hour, 7-days-a-week, Texas Abuse Hotline for reporting child abuse or neglect is 1-800-252-5400. A report can be made online at txabusehotline.org.

When Do I Call the Texas Abuse Hotline Instead of Using the Website?

Call the Texas Abuse Hotline when the situation is urgent. Urgent means someone faces an immediate risk of abuse or neglect that could result in death or serious harm. Call the Texas Abuse Hotline at 1-800-252-5400 for situations including but not limited to:

- Serious injuries,
- Any injury to a child 5 years or younger,
- Immediate need for medical treatment (including suicidal thoughts),
- Sexual abuse where the abuser has or will have access to the victim within the next 24 hours,
- Children age 5 and under are alone or are likely to be left alone within the next 24 hours, and
- Anytime you believe your situation requires action in less than 24 hours.

Adapted from: DFPS

Volunteers who are informed of suspected abuse or neglect by professionals or others involved in a case must direct that person to make the report. They must then report the allegations and any concerns to the CPS caseworker and VC.

Any Volunteer who suspects abuse or neglect must report their concerns to the VC. In addition, any first-hand knowledge of abuse or neglect must be reported to the DFPS Texas Abuse Hotline within 72 hours or promptly if the child is in immediate risk.

Any VC who suspects abuse or neglect must report their concerns to the Executive Director. In addition, any first-hand knowledge of abuse or neglect must be reported to the DFPS Texas Abuse Hotline within 48 hours.

Adapted from: Voices for Children, Inc. CASA of Brazos Valley



SAMPLE DOCUMENTS & RESOURCES

Document 1: CASA Advocate vs. CASA Coach ▪ Who Does What?

CASA Advocate vs. CASA Coach ▪ Who Does What?

There is no doubt about it-when you are in the trenches with your advocates it can be easy to slip into the habit of doing some, or all, of the work. However, our role is not to work the case, but to support the advocate in their advocacy. Below are some examples of tasks and expectations to discuss and negotiate with your Advocates on what one or both of you will do. By ensuring your team and the advocates are is the expectations, you provide structure, guidance, and support as the advocates go about the incredible work of being an Advocate.

Task	Advocate	Coach
Read the CPS file		
Meet with CASA Coach and communicate at least monthly to discuss updates, permanency plans, community resources and evaluations of the case and the volunteer needs		
Meet the child(ren)		
Communicate with the AAL		
Communicate and meet with the CPS worker regularly		
Communicate and meet with the parents regularly		
Communicate and meet with placement at least monthly		
Communicate with service providers to ensure the child(ren)'s needs are being met		
Communicate with teachers and or day care providers		
Document notes into Optima		
Review other important documents related to the case such as educational passport, health passport		
Case mine for family members and members of support network		
Utilize family finding tools		
Attend important meetings such as FGC, ARD, PC etc.		
Write court reports		



Review court reports		
Submit court reports		
Attend Court Hearings		
Maintain appropriate contact with the child(ren) outside of required visits		
Identify and advocate for the best interest of the child including physical, emotional, educational, medical, and cultural		
Determine the child’s permanent plan		
Monitor the service plan and court orders to ensure they are upheld by all parties		
Inform the court of important developments		
Participate in in-service training		
Participates in placement selections by reading home studies and is available for consulting as decisions are being made		
Identifies permanency planning issues for the child(ren) while steadily moving the case forward towards the goal of a safe permanent placement		
Provides timely notification of staffings, meetings and hearings		
Provides guidance, assistance, and support		
Will provide feedback in the form of an evaluation face to face during and after each case comes to an end		
Enhances the opportunity for retention of the Advocate for other cases by coaching new skills, evaluating the Advocate’s experience, and by matching the Advocate with future cases that are matched to their interests and skills		
Ensure the Advocate has clear understanding of the tasks and duties expected of them		
Participates in regular supervision per program policies with direct supervisor		
Supports other CASA Coaches by providing backup for meetings and court hearings, as needed		
Maintains accurate case records within the OPTIMA database		
Maintains accurate case and advocate statistical data		
Maintains professionalism in all circumstances		



Works under time constraints, meets deadlines in a timely manner, and is goal oriented		
Has productive and effective interaction with community professionals		
Maintains strong interpersonal skills by use of professional training and continuing education to cultivate relationships		

What are some individualized tasks you have for your program? List them here, and make sure you communicate expectations clearly so you Advocates have a clearly defined role.

Task	Advocate	Coach



Document 2: CASA Advocate Core Competencies

CASA ADVOCATE CORE COMPETENCIES

Assertiveness | Communication | Cultural Competence | Sound Judgement | Initiative | Knowledge

To help ensure that your Advocates are providing **FIERCE** Advocacy for all the children they serve, it is important that your Advocates not only possess these competencies, but also continues to grow in these six core competency areas. Below are the six competencies and the corresponding knowledge, skills, and attributes that will assist CASA advocates in being successful in their service to children.

Competency Category	Knowledge, Skills & Attributes
<p>Assertiveness Bold, confident statements and behavior</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Diplomatically voices concerns ● Confidently states position in oral and written communications ● Is persistent in the pursuit of facts and information ● Willing to challenge the status quo
<p>Communication How information is shared between individuals</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Effectively articulates their point of view ● Manages conflict effectively ● Treats others with respect and positive regard ● Is an active listener ● Shares information appropriately and upholds confidentiality
<p>Cultural Competence The ability to interact effectively with people of different cultures. To be respectful and responsive to the healthy beliefs and practices of others.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Is aware of and challenges their own biases ● Is open to and respectful of other cultures and perspectives ● Is sensitive and responsive to different cultural circumstances ● Is willing to set aside personal beliefs in light of the child's/family's values
<p>Sound Judgment To assess situations or circumstances intelligently</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Sets boundaries for self and respects the boundaries of others ● Objective in judgements ● Anticipates and recognizes potential problems ● Avoids assumptions ● Bases decisions on the review of all information using a strength-based lens ● Evaluates alternative choices
<p>Initiative The power to act or take on leadership task or roles</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Works independently while realizing the importance of collaboration ● Recognizes when to seek guidance and support ● Action oriented and innovative ● Takes initiative in finding family, supports, and resources ● Always gets information from the direct source



<p>Knowledge Awareness, or understanding of someone or something, such as facts, information, descriptions, or skills, which is acquired through experience or education by perceiving, discovering, or learning</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Impact of trauma associated with abuse and neglect● Child Development● Mental health, drugs and alcohol, domestic violence, poverty● The roles of CASA, attorneys, counselors or therapists, and other parties involved in the case● The systems: CPS, Child Protection Court, education, behavioral health
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Document 3a: Individualize Advocacy & Action Plan – Advocacy Guidelines

Advocacy Guidelines

Advocating for your CASA child(ren) may:

- Help the child self-advocate or stand up for their individual rights. For example: the right to make decisions, the right to dream and set goals, the right to have meaningful relationships, and the right to be safe.
- Help the child find and maintain opportunities for meaningful involvement in the community, including school and learning, recreation, and cultural opportunities.
- Help the child and family gain access to the support and services that they may require in order to have a safe and stable life.

A good start for **FIERCE** advocacy is to know and understand what you and your CASA child(ren) want and need. It is hard to get effective results when you are uncertain about what you want to see happen.

Becoming a **FIERCE** advocate requires learning about advocacy practices, as well as having a lot of patience and perseverance. CASA Advocates are those not easily intimidated by difficult people or situations and have little difficulty in speaking up for themselves or others. Some CASA Advocates can learn to be good advocates over time. Often, they develop these skills because they know they have to be a good advocate to seek out the best interest for their child, and they have a CASA coach who believes in them and wants only the best for them and the child(ren) they serve.

It is important to remember that what CASA Advocates need to accomplish will depend on specific case scenarios. Some situations will be more difficult and trying. They may require action over a period of weeks, months, or sometimes years. Other situations may be resolved more easily and therefore require less effort. Advocacy can be broken down into four main areas: **preparation, communication, documentation or note taking, and follow up.**

The provided chart includes some key information to consider when you are advocating for your CASA child(ren).



Preparation

- The foundation of **FIERCE** advocacy
- Information is power
- Have specific goals you want to achieve
- Identify the key issues and concerns that your child(ren) and/or their family faces
- Develop what you believe are the best possible solutions or outcomes

Communication

- Can be in the form of phone calls, face to face meetings, emails, and text messages
- Clear and concrete
- Assertive
- Listen carefully
- Use strength based and open-ended questions
- If appropriate, use stories and or visuals to help share information

Documentation

- Critical to the advocacy process and aids in all areas of **FIERCE** advocacy
- Use OPTIMA, or your program's database, to record the conversations and information you have gathered, such as telephone calls, emails, face to face meetings, and text messages. Some things to make sure that is included in your documentation are:
 - Name(s)
 - Contact information
 - Title and/or relationship to the child/family
 - Date of contact
 - Time of contact
- Upload documents you receive or written responses to your requests for information into OPTIMA or your program's database
 - Personal notes and official notes from meetings and court hearings
 - Other important documents that are meaningful and part of the case file, such as but not limited to:
 - Court reports - CPS and CASA Advocate reports
 - Notes from the child or a family member
 - Family trees to identify relatives and/or potential placements
 - Pictures of the child
 - Artwork the child has created and shared with you
 - Report cards

Follow Up

Sometimes **Fierce** advocacy does not provide immediate results. **FIERCE** advocacy requires persistence.

- Remain focused even when you are not getting the response or results you want
- Follow the chain of command if issues are not being resolved
- Involve others if you feel like you have done all you can, such as your CASA Coach or other CASA advocates.
- Consider joining the Legislative Advocacy Team (LAT) Team to help change or remove some the red tape that you are experiencing



- Remember that **FIERCE** advocacy is about negotiation - you may not always be successful, be prepared to compromise - sometimes the next best solution is better than no solution at all. Know where you draw the line and if you are willing to compromise.



Document 3b: Individualize Advocacy & Action Plan

Adapted from Child Advocates San Antonio, Hill Country CASA & Denver CASA

1. PLAN FOR VISITING CHILDREN:

Visit/observe children at their placement 1x every _____.

Visit/observe children at school 1x every _____.

Visit/observe children at daycare 1x every _____.

Phone/mail/email/facetime children, as appropriate, every _____.

2. PLAN FOR MEETING PARENTS:

Visit/observe parents when visiting children at _____ 1x every _____.

Monitor parents' compliance with Treatment Plan via treatment providers.

Phone/email contact with parents 1x every _____.

3. PLAN FOR MEETING RELATIVES:

Advocate for and attend a Family Group Conference.

Advocate for Circle of Support.

Research and contact relatives and significant non-relatives of the child.

4. PLAN FOR MEETING WITH CHILD CARE PROVIDERS:

Visit with Foster Parents when visiting the children _____ x/month.

Phone/email contact to Foster Parents 1x every _____.

In-person contact with daycare staff 1x every _____ (when visiting children).

Phone/email contact with daycare staff 1x every _____.

5. PLAN FOR MEETING WITH SCHOOL PERSONNEL:

In-person contact with school personnel 1x every _____ (when visiting children)

Phone/email contact with school personnel 1x every _____.

6. PLAN FOR MEETING WITH HEALTH AND MENTAL HEALTH CARE PROVIDERS:

Advocate for and verify all children have a Health Passport as soon as possible.

Monitor children's medical and mental health status via treatment providers.



Phone/email contact to children’s therapist 1x every _____.

Phone/email contact to children’s doctor 1x every _____.

7. CONTACT WITH PROFESSIONALS (CPS worker, AAL, attorneys):

Phone/email contact to caseworker 1x every _____.

Phone/email contact or email to AAL 1x every _____.

Attend all CPS staffings. (First one will be in _____.)

Attend any staffings held by other agencies/schools in relation to the children.

Access Case Connection information every _____.

8. ADDITIONAL CASE CONCERNS TO BE ADDRESSED:

INDIVIDUALIZED ADVOCACY and ACTION PLAN

CASE SUMMARY

Type of abuse:

Custody of Children:

Resource Needs of Parents:

Needs of Children:

HOW CAN CASA MAKE A DIFFERENCE IN THIS CASE?

Goal:

What is our plan for balancing family preservation, child protection, and permanence?

CASE IMPACT CHECKLIST:

Left-hand column: At case assignment, the CASA volunteer advocate and supervisor will discuss and establish goals, needs, or desired outcomes applicable for the child(ren) in the case. Desired advocacy will need to be updated throughout the duration of the case since the needs and circumstances of the child and family are likely to change.

Right-hand column: The CASA volunteer indicates the specific services that were provided.

<u>Applicable</u>	<u>CASA Advocacy Role</u>	<u>Provided</u>
Medical Advocacy		
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	[1] Recommend or facilitate a needed medical evaluation or assessment, including vision or hearing screens, as well as evaluation of dental or health issues or an evaluation by ECI for children aged 0 to 3.	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	[2] Review the child's Health Passport.	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	[3] Recommend assessments based on specific concerns (FASD, developmental delay, etc.)	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	[4] Search for community resources to address a child's special needs.	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	[5] Recommend to the court special medical treatments for a child.	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	[6] Act as liaison to facilitate communication between caseworkers, caregivers and medical providers (maintaining case confidentiality).	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	[7] Follow-up in placement to ensure the child is taking prescribed medications.	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	[8] Follow-up in placement to ensure the child is receiving occupational therapies (not including medication).	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	[9] Contact the child's medical consentor to discuss any specific medical concerns or issues.	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	[10] Other: _____ _____	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
Behavioral (Mental Health) Advocacy		
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	[1] Discuss the child's prescribed medications with a pharmacist (only providing age, weight and medication types/doses) and request a Psychotropic Medication Utilization Review (PMUR) if needed to address concerns about the overmedication and incorrect medication of the child.	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No



<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	[2] Express concerns to a therapist regarding a child's needs or known issues related to trauma, emotional, behavioral or social functioning.	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	[3] Confirm the therapist has current mental health care records or information needed to provide services.	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	[4] Provide first-hand knowledge of daily-life or weekly-life background information to a therapist, information <i>only you</i> can provide.	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	[5] Attend treatment team meetings and challenge the current treatment plan if it does not meet a child's therapeutic needs or targeted outcomes.	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	[6] Advocate for a new therapist for a child if needed.	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	[7] Recommend training or recommend a community resource for foster parents training related to the psychological or emotional needs of the child in their care as well as trauma, grief and loss.	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	[8] Act as liaison to facilitate communication between caseworkers, caregivers and psychological providers (maintaining case confidentiality).	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	[9] Recommend to CPS and/or the court psychological services that may be helpful in meeting additional needs of the child.	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	[10] Recommend joint family or sibling therapy, if indicated.	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	[11] If indicated, recommend an evaluation for substance use or abuse for the child or youth.	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	[12] If indicated, recommend an evaluation for substance use or abuse for the parent(s).	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	[13] Other: _____ _____	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
Sustaining Family Connections		
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	[1] "Mine" the case record at DFPS by thoroughly reviewing all written information in hard or electronic files for names of relatives (ALL) or anyone who may have a special interest in the child. Pay particular attention to Notice of Hearings.	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	[2] Conduct or request a search from the DFPS Diligent Search Unit on viable relatives (you do not have to limit the number) and/or use free search engines and public records to locate their last known address (ex: white pages, Facebook, searchsystem, rootsweb)	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	[3] Talk with the child/youth about the people you've identified and get their input on who they know, feel close to, would like to have a relationship with, who they feel safe with and what type of relationship they are interested in with various relatives.	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	[4] Make initial contact with everyone you believe to have the potential of either having a positive connection with or being permanent placement for the child/youth. Track your contact and plan for future contact.	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	[5] Provide informal mediation or arrange mediation of a conflict situation among relatives and/or caregivers to maintain current placement.	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	[6] Encourage relatives to contact and comply with Child Protective Services.	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	[7] Notify DFPS of the relatives you've contacted and the degree of interest they've expressed in being a connection for the child. Request DFPS	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No



	approve appropriate persons for contact with or visitation with the child/youth.	
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	[8] If the kin or fictive kin is open to becoming a potential placement for the child, provide them with information about DFPS, the application process, a homestudy, and benefit options for kin placements.	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	[9] Make recommendations for sibling, parent, grandparent or other family member, fictive kin visitation needs or on-going contact with the child(ren).	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	[10] Other: _____ _____	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
Educational Advocacy		
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	[1] Confirm the current caregiver has the educational portfolio or, if they do not, advocate with CPS for them to receive it.	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	[2] Verify either the educational portfolio or the appropriate school records and evaluations have been provided to current school personnel.	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	[3] If needed, recommend a better school placement, better academic testing, or a more appropriate "fit" for the child.	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	[4] Request an ARD meeting for the child, if indicated, to evaluate the need for special education services or an Independent Education Plan (IEP).	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	[5] Encourage the foster placement to provide tangible rewards that recognize and encourage the child(ren)'s schoolwork.	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	[6] Build a relationship with school personnel by maintaining regular, on-going contact with teachers.	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	[7] If a child is moved within the same school district, advocate for them to remain in the same school (TX Education Code 54.211)	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	[8] Challenge a teacher's or counselor's academic recommendations and/or actions to advocate for a child's educational needs.	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	[9] Recommend tutoring for a child, if needed, in order to improve their academic standing.	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	[10] Consider accelerated instruction for youth in secondary school or a Graduate Record Examination (GRE) to complete high school.	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	[11] Attend the child's school events.	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	[12] Advocate for and encourage parents or family members to advocate for a child's educational needs.	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	[13] Advocate for an "aging out" youth to obtain copies of their records, and help them apply for vocational school or college.	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	[14] Consider serving as the child's "surrogate parent" with regard to educational needs. Training and certification is required.	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	[15] Other: _____	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
Legal Advocacy		
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	[1] Maintain written or verbal contact with the attorney ad litem.	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	[2] Keep <i>attorneys</i> apprised of placement issues of which you may be aware.	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No



<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	[3] Provide informative, factual, concise court reports to aid the court's decision-making.	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	[4] Advocate for the child's voice in court either through appearance, meeting with the judge in chambers, a child or youth court report, or by teleconference.	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	[5] Recommend court hearing (or trial) arrangements that minimize the stressful impact on the child if they are called to testify.	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	[6] Challenge an attorney's recommendations of a child's expressed interest if they are not meeting with child, consulting or representing the child.	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	[7] Clarify immigration status and advocate for an undocumented child to receive legal residency or citizenship.	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	[8] Advocate for a youth's juvenile records to be sealed prior to their "aging out" of CPS custody.	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	[9] Advocate for the protection and pursuit of a child's legal rights, utilizing the Bill of Rights for Children and Youth in the Foster Care.	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	[10] Participate in a mediation, advocating for a child's best interests.	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	[11] Explain the legal process and system to the child and placement.	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	[12] Recommend plans for a youth who wishes to remain in care past 18.	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	[13] Act as liaison between parties (ad Litem, legal system, CPS workers, child, family) leading up to -- and preparing for -- a trial date.	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	[14] Other: _____ _____	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
Placement Stability Advocacy		
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	[1] Make home visits looking for indicators of placement breakdown due to stressors in the caretakers' life (e.g., marital discord, a parent's serious illness, financial stress, child-care stress).	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	[2] Provide a new placement with (additional) information regarding a child's needs (maintaining case confidentiality).	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	[3] Ensure the foster parent's concerns with the child's behavior (in the foster home) are addressed in order to keep the child from having to be moved.	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	[4] Locate resources for direct necessities (clothes, school supplies, etc.) and extra-curricular activities (band, sports, camp, etc.)	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	[5] Facilitate communication between all parties to ensure stability.	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	[6] Research additional resources for families struggling to maintain custody.	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	(7) Act as a liaison to ensure children 16 and older have the services they need to prepare for independent living.	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	(8) Help access PAL classes for children 16 and older.	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	(9) Act as a liaison with caseworker to ensure that the child(ren) 16 and older who are <u>not</u> able to live independently have been referred to appropriate social service agencies (e.g., APS, MHMR).	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	(10) Other: _____ _____	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No



Document 4: Minimum Sufficient Level of Care (MSL)

From the Texas CASA Volunteer Pre-Service Curriculum Ch. 2

What Is “Minimum Sufficient Level of Care” (MSL)?

Removing a child from their home because of abuse and/or neglect is a drastic remedy.

Because removal is so traumatic for the child, both the law and good practice require that agencies keep the child in the home when it is possible to do so and still keep the child safe. Children should be removed only when parents cannot provide the minimum sufficient level of care required by that child.

The concept of the minimum sufficient level of care is based in the idea that we focus our attention on the child’s basic needs and whether or not they are being met. This is true even when the family’s lifestyle, beliefs, resources and actions are very different from our own or from what we are used to. We are not deciding if the child is in a home with access to extracurricular activities and enrichments, or a home that looks like the homes we grew up in. We each come to this advocacy work with our own unique experiences, worldviews and personal standards, so it is important that we have a reference point to mitigate personal biases and personal value judgments in determining what constitutes a safe home for each child we serve.

The MSL is a baseline that is determined by a number of factors, each of which must be looked at specifically in relation to each unique child. It is an assessment that describes what must be in place for this child to remain in the home, and the same standard is also used to determine whether or not parents have made sufficient progress so that a child can be safely returned to the family home. It is also important that we take into consideration social, cultural and community norms.

FACTORS TO CONSIDER INCLUDE:

The Child’s Needs

Is the parent providing for the following needs at a basic level?

- Physical (food, clothing, shelter, medical care, safety, protection, freedom from abuse)
- Emotional (attachment between parent and child)
- Developmental (education, special help for children with disabilities)

Social Standards

Does the parent’s behavior inside or outside of the home reflect commonly accepted child-rearing practices in our society?



There are many lenses through which to look at commonly accepted practices. Our society has norms, broadly, that help us determine how to raise kids. In terms of discipline, whipping a child with a belt was generally thought to be appropriate during the first half of the 20th century. This practice is now widely considered abusive in Western societies. Contemporary families frequently use a verbal reprimand, withholding of an extra privilege, or a short “time-out” as a punishment for children. A parent who whips their child with a belt is falling outside of social standards.

Community Standards

Does the parent’s behavior fall within reasonable limits, given the specific community in which the family resides?

Here are some examples: The age at which it is deemed safe for a child to be left alone varies significantly from urban to suburban to rural communities. The age at which a child is considered 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 those 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.

Communities can be geographical or cultural. An example of a non-geographical, cultural community is a Native American tribe in which members live in a variety of locales but still share common child-rearing standards.

According to the Indian Child Welfare Act, the minimum sufficient level of care standard must reflect the community standards of the child’s tribe.

WHY THE THE MSL STANDARD IS USED

- It maintains the child’s right to safety and permanence while not ignoring the parents’ right to raise their children.
- It is required by law (as a practical way to interpret the “reasonable efforts” provision of the Adoption Assistance and Child Welfare Act).
- It is a reasonable expectation for parents to reach.
- It provides a reference point for decision makers.
- It protects (to some degree) from individual biases and value judgments.
- It discourages unnecessary removal from the family home.
- It discourages unnecessarily long placements in foster care.
- It keeps decision makers focused on what is the least detrimental alternative for the child.
- It is sensitive across cultures.



KEY PARAMETERS OF THE MSL STANDARD

- The standard takes into consideration the particular circumstances and needs of each child.
- It is a set of minimum conditions, not an ideal situation.
- It is a relative standard, depending on the child's needs, social standards and community standards. It will not be the same for every family or every child in a particular family.
- It remains the same when considering removal and when considering reunification.

CULTURAL CONSIDERATIONS

An understanding of a child's cultural practices is important when considering the MSL standard. For children who are Alaska Native or American Indian, sources for information about cultural practices may include the parents, the tribal child welfare worker, relatives of the child or other tribal members. For children who are immigrants from other continents, or whose parents are, consult with service providers who work specifically with those communities. For other ideas for making sure MSL is applied consistently, you may consider:

- Discussing the MSL standard with your case coordinator or supervisor.
- Learning about the various cultural groups in your community.
- Systematically comparing the standard for removal and the standard for reunifying a child in the home of origin.



Document 5: Holley Factors

From the Texas CASA Volunteer Pre-Service Curriculum Ch. 2

HOLLEY FACTORS

Holley v. Adams, 544 S.W.2d 367, 371-72 (Tex 1976) is a Texas Supreme Court case that is most often used to provide a “non-exhaustive” list of factors to be considered in determining best interest. All the “Holley factors” listed below are considerations that every CASA volunteer must investigate for every child they serve.

The nine factors identified in Holley include:

1. The desires of the child
2. The emotional and physical needs of the child now and in the future
3. The emotional and physical danger to the child now and in the future
4. The plans for the child by the party seeking the change
5. The stability of the home or the proposed placement
6. The parental abilities of the individuals seeking custody
7. The programs available to assist these individuals and to promote the best interest of the child
8. The acts or omissions of the parent that may indicate that the existing parent child relationship is not a proper one
9. Any excuse for the acts or omissions of the parent