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## **Essex County CASA Program** **Advocate Policies and Procedures**

### Roles and Responsibilities of a CASA Advocate

#### **What is a CASA Advocate?**

A CASA Advocate is a trained child advocate appointed by the Presiding Judge of the Juvenile Court to represent the best interests of children who have been abused and neglected and removed from their homes through care and protection petitions. The CASA Advocate investigates the child's circumstances, visits the child at least once a month, provides fact-based information and makes recommendations to the court while becoming a source of support for the child.

The CASA program is independent, but works closely with the court, social workers, therapists, attorneys, care providers and other professionals involved in a child's case. CASA Advocates work under the direct supervision of the CASA Program staff to further the child's welfare and to expedite the case through the system.

The CASA Advocate's ultimate goal is to have the child moved out of temporary placement, usually in the foster care system, into a safe and permanent home. This could mean return to the parent's care, adoption, the appointment of a legal guardian, or some other permanent living arrangement that satisfies the court and fulfills the child's needs.

#### **A CASA Advocate shall:**

- a. Report any incident of child abuse or neglect to CASA Program Staff, Social Services Hot Line, and any other appropriate parties to the proceedings.
- b. Maintain complete written records about the case, including appointments, interviews, observations and other pertinent information gathered.
- c. Determine if a permanent plan has been created for the child, and whether appropriate services, including reasonable efforts, are being provided to the child and family.
- d. Ensure that the child's best interests are being represented in all facets of the case by attending court hearings, attending foster care reviews and school meetings, writing timely court reports and advocating verbally to parties involved.
- e. Monitor the case by visiting the child no less than once a month and contacting involved parties to determine whether the child's essential needs are being met and whether the Court's orders are being followed.
- f. Participate in meetings of service providers.
- g. Remain actively involved in the case until formally discharged by the Court and/or the CASA Program.

- h. Provide monthly documentation of case activities to the Program through submission of Monthly Supervision Report.
- i. Respond to all inquiries from CASA Program Staff.

A CASA Advocate **shall not** provide direct service delivery to any parties that could:

- a. Lead to a conflict of interest or liability problems or
- b. Cause a child or a family to become dependent on the CASA Advocate for services that should be provided by other agencies.

Examples of inappropriate volunteer practices are:

- a. Sheltering a child in the home
- b. Giving legal or therapeutic advice
- c. Making placement arrangements for the child
- d. Giving money or expensive gifts to the child or family
- e. Excessive or inappropriate contact with the child
- f. Providing unauthorized transportation of parent or child

An Advocate normally does not provide transportation to children. However, CASA staff grants exceptions in certain cases. Before being considered for an exception, the CASA Advocate must have performed his/her duties to the satisfaction of CASA staff for a minimum of six months, have a valid driver's license and be insured. A copy of driver's license and current insurance coverage must be provided to the program.

The CASA Advocate must discuss the need to provide transportation for a child(ren) with CASA Program Staff. The CASA Program Staff will make a determination whether to grant a waiver to the general rule. If a waiver is granted, CASA Program Staff will request written permission from the DCF social worker assigned to the case stating that the Advocate has DCF permission to transport the child(ren). The Advocate must have this letter with her/him when driving with the child(ren). In addition, a copy of the letter is kept with a copy of the Advocate's car insurance and driver's license in the CASA office.

A CASA Advocate may not be related to any parties involved in the case or be employed in a position which might result in a conflict of interest.

A CASA Advocate may not give children or family members their personal home or work numbers unless expressly given specific permission by CASA Program Staff.

### **Duties of a CASA Advocate**

1. Conduct an independent investigation.
  - Review all relevant documents, including DCF, police, court, medical, school and any other information obtained during investigation.
  - Conduct direct interviews with the child, parents, social workers, relatives, therapists, school personnel, and other's having knowledge of the facts in the situation.
  - Maintain complete written records about the case, including a log of appointments, and contacts and information gathered about the child, records reviewed, and time spent on the case.
  - Report any incidents of child abuse or neglect to CASA Staff and/or appropriate authorities immediately.

- Determine if a permanent plan has been created for the child, and whether “reasonable efforts” were made to provide services to the child and family. Is this plan appropriate and in the best interest of the child?
2. Determine the best interest of the child.
    - Utilize as many factors as possible in making this determination, including:
      - Current age and sense of time
      - Level of maturity
      - Culture and ethnicity
      - Degree of attachment to family members, including siblings
      - What situation would best provide continuity, consistency, a sense of belonging, and identity.
    - Monitor the case by visiting the child monthly to observe whether the child’s essential needs are being met.
    - Participate in any planning or treatment team meetings involving the child in order to keep informed of the child’s permanent plan. Seek cooperative solutions, if possible.
    - Monitor the development and/or revisions of a case plan, ensuring inclusion of specific tasks with target dates for completion.
    - Review the service plan with workers and ask questions to ensure all the child’s needs are being met by the plan and suggest additional services, if necessary.
  3. Advocate for the child.
    - Assure the child’s best interests are being represented at every stage of the disposition of the case.
    - Attend all court hearings.
    - Make written recommendations to the court on what decision is best for the child.
    - Urge the court, through written reports, to enter specific and clear orders for evaluation, assessment, services, and treatment for the child, and the child’s family.
    - Point out concerns about the case to the court.
    - Help the child using age appropriate language to understand the court process.
  4. Remain actively involved in the case until formally discharged by the court. Once a case terminates and/or a CASA Advocate is no longer assigned to it, all notes and other associated paperwork must be returned to the CASA office.
  5. Abide by all laws and regulations governing activities; conduct all business in an honest, fair, professional and humane manner; use authority appropriately; and do not use CASA to promote a personal agenda or for personal gain.
  6. Respect the right to privacy by keeping information that would identify parties involved in CASA cases confidential.
  7. Disqualify self from involvement in a case if you are related to any parties in the case, if your employment might result in a conflict of interest; or if for any other reason circumstances arise or you know parties well enough that it becomes impossible for you to remain impartial and/or unbiased.

Failure to perform the above described duties or infractions of the prescribed ethical standards would be reason to consider dismissal of the Advocate from the CASA Program. Administrative policy is to aid and facilitate

the work of the Advocate, to openly discuss any problems and concerns with the Advocate; but, at all times, to establish and maintain the integrity and credibility of the CASA Program.

### **Qualifications of a CASA Advocate:**

1. Must be 21 years of age or older.
2. Must successfully pass screening requirements, which include a written application, criminal record check including social security number verification, sex-offender registry, police, social services, personal interview, and three personal references.
3. Must successfully complete initial training provided by the CASA Program. Any sessions missed must be made up by the applicant before being appointed to a case.
4. Once appointed to a case, must be able to make a 2 year commitment to a case (in addition to initial training time), entailing 2-3 hours per week on the average.
5. Must be accepted as a volunteer by the CASA Program Director and appointed by a Presiding Justice.
6. Must be willing to participate in ongoing training amounting to 12 hours per calendar year.
7. Must accept supervision and seek feedback from the CASA Program Staff on a regular basis.
8. Must be able to keep information confidential and to work within established program guidelines.

### **Advocate Recruitment**

Advocate recruitment will be an on going function of the organization and coordinated by CASA Program Director and Program Staff. The Advocate recruitment effort will be the responsibility of every member of the organization and can be accomplished in any community setting.

It is the responsibility of the CASA Program Director and Program Staff to recruit volunteers and to coordinate and assist the efforts of other organizational members to recruit other volunteers.

Recruitment can be accomplished at community gatherings, local colleges, presentations to local community and church groups, through local media (print and radio), through word of mouth from other volunteers and board members, and through other sources.

Formal presentations should include information about volunteering for CASA, general information about the organization and its mission and funding sources.

### **Advocate Screening**

All Advocates will be screened for acceptance and assignment to the CASA program through an application and initial interview process prior to commencement of basic training. The application and interview will be in-depth and designed to determine if the prospective volunteer will be appropriate for CASA work. The screening interview will be conducted face to face and not over the phone.

The Advocate will fill out a complete application form and submit names of three (3) references. There will also be a criminal record, background check social security number verification check, sex-offender registry check, police and social services check. The proper information and proper permission must be obtained for the check to be done.

The CASA Program Director and Program Staff will be responsible for conducting the screening interview. The screening interview will be designed to gather the following information about the prospective volunteer:

1. CASA Staff will explain the roles of the CASA Advocate.

2. How did they learn about the CASA Program?
3. How and why did they decide to become a volunteer?
4. Have they held other volunteer positions? If so where, how long and the position? Are they still involved?
5. Will they attend all trainings, meetings, and other in-service sessions as they are scheduled to the best of their ability?
6. What do they hope to accomplish from becoming a CASA Advocate?
7. Have they had previous contact with the child welfare system or juvenile court?
8. Have they ever been of victim of abuse, violent crime and/or domestic violence?
9. Have they ever had issue with alcohol or drugs? Or know someone who has?
10. How do they feel working with abused and neglected children will affect them emotionally?
11. Do they understand their role as an Advocate is to gather information and report to the court? Providing that information assists the parties in making informed decisions about services and placement. There may be times when the CASA Advocate may strongly disagree with the decisions made by DCF.
12. How do they handle stress in their lives?
13. How do they handle themselves when frustrated?
14. Would they be willing to go into someone's home to interview them or assess the home environment?
15. What skills, strengths, and/or personal characteristics do they possess that would make them an effective CASA Advocate?
16. Are they organized and able to take detailed notes to then incorporate in monthly supervision and court reports? Are they able to keep a calendar of important meetings, deadlines, and visitation schedules?
17. How much time can they give to being a CASA Advocate? Other responsibilities?
18. Do they have any questions about the CASA program?
19. Are they willing to travel outside the Greater Lawrence area?
20. Can they commit to 2 years of continuous service?
21. How does the person react to the presentation of controversial topics such as AIDS, abortion, drug abuse, alcohol abuse, etc.?
22. Are there any conflicts of interest with the volunteer service?

### **Equal Opportunity Clause**

As stated in the By-Laws of CASA: The Corporation shall not restrict its services, employment, membership of the Board of Directors, and all other public involvement by the Corporation because of race, creed, color, nationality, sexual orientation, marital status, disability or sex.

### **Non-Discrimination Statement**

CASA provides equal opportunities to all volunteers, without regard to sex, race, color, religious belief, national origin, age or disability, except where the disability is such that the volunteer cannot perform the duties and responsibilities required of him/her.

### **Confidentiality: Your Responsibility as a CASA Advocate**

Advocates must respect children's and families' rights to privacy in regard to personal information.

- Disclosure or verification of case information shall not be made to anyone who does not have a professional reason for receiving such information.
- No information shall be released to anyone not authorized to receive it, without the express written and dated consent of the party.
- Confidential information shall only be shared with professional staff at CASA, DCF, attorneys, and the court.
- Case records and notes shall be secured and kept private and inaccessible to public view.
- Discussions of case-related material are not to be held in hallways, elevators, or other public places.

It is the CASA Advocates role to provide the information he/she collects to the court. It is important to let all parties to a case know this at the beginning of a case.

No one outside of CASA personnel may have access to a CASA case record without a court order. Copies of the CASA Report to Court are provided prior to a court review or hearing to the DCF attorney and attorneys appointed to the case.

Any confidential materials received from another individual or agency may not be disclosed to anyone outside CASA's professional staff, except by court order or written consent of the party involved.

### **Duty to Disclose**

CASA Advocates have a duty to immediately disclose information to their supervisor in the following situations:

- If child abuse or neglect is suspected
- If you learn someone may harm himself or others

### **Completion of Training**

The Advocate must successfully complete 30 hours of CASA core training, and sign the Advocate Agreement form, and confidentiality oath. In-service training is offered throughout the year. It is up to the Advocate to take advantage of in-service training opportunities. If the CASA Program Director feels an Advocate needs additional training, the volunteer will be required to participate in order to continue as a CASA Advocate.

## **Training**

All CASA Advocates will be provided with a training manual that includes copies of pertinent federal, state, and local laws. It will also include policies and procedures that relate to the program. CASA will provide training to any interested agency or persons that require knowledge of CASA and how to work with CASA effectively. CASA will conduct a minimum of 2 basic training courses per year.

The training consists of at least 30 hours of pre-service training and 12 hours of required in-service training per year. These sessions will be scheduled at the convenience of the volunteers to the extent possible. Documentation for attendance at training sessions will be provided for on sign-in sheets made available at each session. The CASA Program Director will maintain these sign-in sheets in a training file.

## **Steps for Preparation of Advocate Training**

1. Advertise for volunteers and upcoming basic training course.
2. Schedule dates, times, and place where training is to be held.
3. Screen and interview prospective volunteers.
4. Conduct pre-service training which includes addressing the following topics:
  - Roles and responsibilities of a CASA Advocate
  - Juvenile court process.
  - Dynamics of families including mental health, substance abuse, domestic violence and poverty.
  - Dynamics of families.
  - Relevant state and federal laws including the Adoption and Safe Families Act (ASFA), the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA), the Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA), the Multi Ethnic Placement Act (MEPA) and Fostering Connections to Success and Adoption Act..
  - Confidentiality and record keeping practices.
  - Child development.
  - Child abuse and neglect.
  - Permanency planning.
  - Community agencies and resources available to meet the needs of children and families.
  - Communication and information gathering.
  - Effective advocacy.
  - Cultural awareness.
  - Poverty.
  - Special needs of the children served: differences in cultural and socio-economic norms, values, and heritage.
5. Allow an opportunity for each volunteer to visit the court while it is in session to observe proceedings.

No person will be allowed to volunteer as a CASA Advocate who has not completed basic training. All Advocates will be appointed by a Presiding Judge. After completion of basic training and completion of all required forms, assignments will be made.

Persons who have missed singular training sessions may make up those sessions at the next regularly scheduled training or individual sessions at the discretion of the CASA Program Director

## **Assignments**

The CASA Program Director will assign a CASA Advocate to a case upon the request of the court. An Advocate may be assigned to two (2) cases if the CASA Program Director feels the Advocate can handle the additional caseload, and the Advocate is closely monitored.

After the judge notifies the CASA Program Director of a new assignment, the CASA Program Director reviews all Advocate files to determine which Advocates are free and best suited for the new assignment. Once a choice is made, the CASA Program Director contacts the Advocate to outline the basic details of the case. The Advocate has 2 days to consider whether or not to accept assignment to the case. If the initial Advocate declines the assignment, another Advocate is chosen from the list. If the Advocate accepts assignment, the advocate will be assigned to the CASA Program Director/CASA Advocate Supervisor/ Peer Coordinator (Case Supervisor) for supervision. The CASA Staff will send to all parties an introductory letter about the program and a copy of the Advocates appointment letter from the court.

## **CASA Guidelines for Contact with Children**

1. Visits and/or contact with children should occur at least monthly while assigned to a case. This is to be done whenever you are assigned to a case. It does not change based on placement. Visit children when they are in Shelter Care, Foster Care, living with relatives or parents regardless of the age of the child.
2. Do not take children home with you. NEVER have a child with you overnight.
3. Ask if the children have questions and answer the questions honestly with facts.
  - a. Do not probe or introduce the specifics of abuse. Be especially careful when discussing issues in sexual abuse and other potential criminal cases.
  - b. Explain your role as a CASA Advocate in words children can understand. Communicate in a manner appropriate for their age and developmental level.
  - c. If appropriate explain to children why they were removed from their home and keep them informed about case events.
  - d. Explain confidentiality. Tell children that you may be asked to tell what they tell you.
4. Visit the child prior to any hearing that the child will be attending. Explain what is expected to occur and explore the child's current reactions and feelings regarding the upcoming hearing.
5. Reflect children's feelings without evaluating them and let them know it is okay to have unpleasant or negative feelings.
6. Respect children's attachments to their parents. Remain neutral and non-judgmental about their parents. Do not express your opinion of the parents even if asked.
7. Treat children with respect. Do not talk down to them or criticize them.
8. Make no promises.
9. Tell the child(ren) that what happened is not their fault. With older children who have been in therapeutic treatment and/or state care, confirm the need to accept past problems and assume responsibility for their future.

10. If the occasion arises that you feel the need to discuss CASA's recommendations with the child(ren), confer with the treatment team (therapist, house parents, shelter or foster parents, social workers, case managers) regarding concerns the child(ren) expresses to you on case matters.
11. Know that your case will have a beginning, middle, and an end. Plan on being in the child's life for only a limited time.
12. Once a case is closed, the Advocate will have no further contact with the child/children or family unless requested by the Court.

### **CASA Advocates Guidelines for Contact with Parents and Family Members**

1. Explain your role as a court appointed special advocate in words parents and relatives can understand. Do your best to develop good working relationships with both parents and relatives.
2. Focus on obtaining information. Find the strengths of the parents and family members. Find the needs of the family. Strive to be non-judgmental.
3. Tell the parents and relatives that you have been appointed by the court. Explain confidentiality; you will gather information about the case, then report facts, observations, and make recommendations to the court.
4. Listen with respect.
5. Respond to questions. When you do not know an answer, say you do not. If the question is about their legal action, encourage them to contact their attorney. If the question is about services, encourage them to proactively contact their social worker. Confer with the program supervisor to assist you if you are uncertain about the answer to a question.
6. Let the parents and family members know you are aware of the stress caused by court intervention.
7. Avoid asking leading questions and making emotional remarks.
8. Use reinforcement such as "I see" or a nod of your head to encourage responsiveness.
9. Begin with general, open-ended questions such as "Tell me about..." Use closed questions that can be answered with "yes" or "no" or a short answer when you need specific information or when you are not receiving responses to more general questions.
10. Strive to understand your attitudes and behaviors, then try to understand the attitudes and behaviors of the parents, family members and foster parents.
11. Be clear about what is to occur next. Consult your supervisor for help in planning your work as a CASA Advocate or assistance with any questions you may have.
12. After contact with parents or family members, carefully document the facts you obtained, and your observations, actions, questions and plans. Use objective statements that describe a specific fact or behavior. Do not make interpretations, diagnostic conclusions or judgments.
13. File your notes and any records you obtain in your file. Original records received from outside agencies should be sent to the CASA office for distribution.

### **CASA Advocates Guidelines for Working with Social Services and other Collaborative Partners**

1. When first contacting an agency, introduce yourself as the Court Appointed Special Advocate. If the person/agency is unfamiliar with the CASA program, explain the role of the CASA Advocate. If seeking information, provide a copy of the Order of Appointment.
2. Receive all records in person or have them sent to the CASA office. To access records on anyone other than the child, contact your supervisor about obtaining a court order or use the release of information form.
3. Document all contacts and conversations in your case notes by entering the date, type of contact, agency and individual names. Enter factorial highlights of conversations and observations.
4. Maintain confidentiality. With contacts other than social services, limit information provided to that necessary to state your request for information.
5. Consider the needs and schedule of the other party. Be brief. State the reason you are contacting them. Provide details only if necessary. Present most important information first.
6. Arrange visits in advance.
7. Watch for opportunities to express appreciation and praise and do so. Specify what was done or said, how it contributed, and why you appreciate it.
8. Practice good listening skills. Affirm that you have heard what was said. Summarize or paraphrase significant statements then ask if you understood correctly. If strong emotions are expressed, affirm your awareness of the feelings of the speaker. Confer with program staff if problem is unresolved. Avoid escalating conflicts.
9. Be certain information you share with and receive from service providers is known by the assigned case worker or supervisor. Provide any significant new information as soon as possible. Confer with parties on the case.
10. Contact service provider(s) to find out about the availability of needed services. If referral seems appropriate, contact social worker and request that a referral be made.
11. Contact the assigned case worker and your supervisor when concerns exist about a child's placement.
12. When appropriate, confer regarding each contact's perception of case needs. Ask if there are specific ways you could help with case activities.
13. Remember that patience is a virtue and persistence—appropriately expressed—is also a virtue.
14. Report suspicion of abuse and neglect to the 24 hour Emergency Hotline in your area.

### **Case Assignment Flow**

A request for a CASA Advocate assignment may come from any of the parties on a case. However, a judge will determine which cases are referred to the CASA program.

- The judge will make the referral or an attorney may motion the court for a CASA Advocate to be assigned.
- The court clerk will attach a copy of the petition and any other forms required to the referral
- The court clerk will mail the appointment letter to the CASA office
- The CASA Program Director will notify CASA Advocates of open cases and discuss the options with the advocates.
- Advocates will be presented a case for consideration
- Advocates always have the right to refuse a case presented to them but should inform the CASA Program Director the reason they are unwilling to take the case.
  - I. Once the Order of Appointment is signed by a judge, a copy of the order will be sent to the parents, foster parents, social services, attorneys, etc along with a letter of introduction to the CASA advocates role.
  - II. The CASA Advocate's first contact will be with the caseworker. If there is a contract agency assigned to the case, after the initial contact with social services, subsequent contacts also will be with the contract agency worker. Next:
    - CASA Advocate contacts all attorneys on the case
    - CASA Advocate contacts child's caretaker
    - CASA Advocate meets caretaker and child
  - III. The CASA Advocate will conduct a thorough assessment of the case. He or she will talk with the child and anyone else deemed appropriate to conduct a thorough assessment.
  - IV. Efforts will be made to share findings of the assessment with the caseworker prior to the written report.
  - V. The written report and copies will be submitted to the court and the attorneys on the case.
  - VI. CASA Advocates will visit or contact the child(ren) monthly while assigned to a case.
  - VII. Correspondence with CASA Advocates will be made via the CASA office, unless otherwise prearranged by the CASA Advocate and other parties on the case.

### **CASA Advocate Supervision**

The Case Supervisor will be responsible for direct supervision of volunteers. The volunteer to staff ratio called for in NCASAA standards is (1) staff person to every thirty (30) volunteers. If utilizing the Peer Coordinator model, each CASA Advocate Supervisor will supervise no more than 12 – 15 Peer Coordinators, Peer Coordinators will supervise no more that 3 – 5 advocates.

### **Conflict Resolution**

If an Advocate disagrees with any action including correction or separation taken by CASA Program or any of its agents, he or she must first meet with the CASA Program Director and attempt to resolve any disagreement. If the disagreement is not resolved to the satisfaction of the Advocate, the Advocate may file a written complaint with the Executive Director of Family Services of the Merrimack Valley. No further appeal or review is allowed.

### **Conflict of Interest Policy**

This program shall not employ, enter into a contract with, nor accept as a volunteer any individual or entity who has a conflict with the best interest of a client.

### **Dismissal and Corrective Action**

Corrective action may be taken if the Advocate's work is unsatisfactory. Corrective action is within the discretion of the CASA Program Director with input from CASA Advocate Supervisor or Peer Coordinator and may include:

1. Additional supervision
2. Reassignment
3. Retraining
4. Referral to another volunteer position
5. Separation from the Program

Separation from the Program may occur at the discretion of the CASA Program Director and Executive Director of Family Services of the Merrimack Valley. Appropriate grounds for separation include:

1. The Advocate being charged with a crime against a child or any gross neglect or misconduct
2. Breach of confidentiality
3. The Advocate takes action without program or court approval which endangers the child or is outside the capacity or power of the CASA Program
4. The Advocate violates a Program policy, court order or law
5. The Advocate demonstrates inability to effectively carry out their duties
6. The Advocate falsifies volunteer applications or misrepresents fact during the screening process
7. The Advocate becomes inappropriately or over involved with the child or family
8. The Advocate fails to satisfactorily complete initial training
9. The Advocate's references are not consistent with application or screening process
10. Violation of the program's nondiscrimination and/or sexual harassment policy
11. Soliciting or accepting gratuities
12. Neglect of duty or incompetence
13. Failure to contact child on a monthly basis without a legitimate reason
14. No contact with CASA staff for two months including no reports to the office, no replies to letter and/or returning phone calls from CASA staff
15. When the child's best interests are not being served

### **Dismissal from a Case**

An Advocate may be dismissed from a case for the following reasons:

1. At the request of the Advocate
2. At the request of the Juvenile Judge
3. For failure to make court appearances
4. For failure to provide court reports and/or turn them in on time
5. Insubordination or refusal to follow an order
6. For failure to act in a professional manner as deemed by the CASA Program Director

Should the actions of an Advocate result in either dismissal from the case or the CASA program, the Advocate has the same rights as an employee to grievance procedures.

At the time of a Advocate's dismissal all files, notes, and any other materials associated with the assigned CASA case will be returned to the CASA Program Director within five (5) working days of the dismissal.

### **Resignation**

While CASA Advocates make a commitment to continue with a case until it is terminated, there may be circumstances that require a CASA volunteer to resign.

- Resignations must be made in writing so that the CASA office can notify all parties involved and assign another CASA Advocate if necessary
- It is requested that Advocates provide advance notice if at all possible and state a reason for their departure
- Return all case materials and notes

### **General Policies**

Ultimate responsibility for all CASA cases rests with the CASA Program Coordinator. As a volunteer Advocate, you represent CASA and what you do reflects on the organization. Always conduct yourself in a professional way that reflects favorably on CASA and comply with CASA policies and procedures.

**Open Door:** CASA has an “open door” policy. If you have any problems or questions regarding your case or concerning the policies outlined in this manual, you are encouraged to discuss them with the CASA Program Director and/or the CASA Advocate Supervisor.

**Agency Letterhead:** Volunteers act as official representatives of CASA and may use CASA letterhead in normal advocacy situations. Use of letterhead is not permissible for personal correspondence relating to CASA (i.e. letters to the editor expressing personal opinions, etc.).

**Media Communication:** Advocates are not permitted to make statements involving CASA to the communication media without the written consent of the CASA Program Director. Any inquiries concerning CASA, its policies, practices or clients, should be referred to the CASA Program Director. CASA Advocates may be asked by the CASA Program Director to represent CASA at speaking engagements.

**Conference/Workshop Attendance:** Advocates will be notified of conferences/workshops as opportunities arise.

**Direct Service Provision:** CASA is not a “direct service” provider. CASA is a facilitator and may advocate for direct service providers to provide appropriate services to clients.

**Personal Involvement with Children and Families:** CASA Advocates effectiveness and standing in court depends on volunteers maintaining professional relationships with children and families. Volunteers are not permitted to become over involved with CASA children and families. Inappropriate personal involvement with a CASA client can be grounds for dismissal.

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