



# Volunteer Handbook

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## WELCOME TO THE VOLUNTEER HANDBOOK!

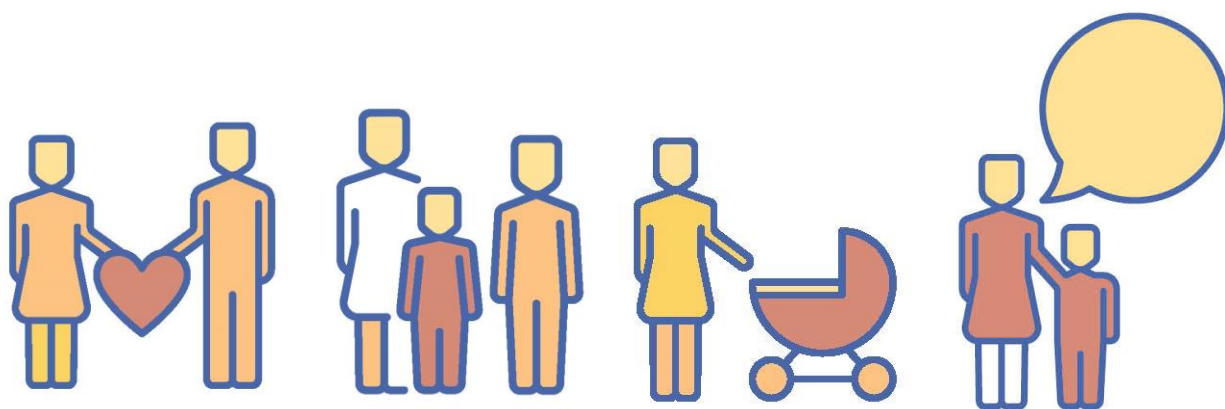
Dear CASAs,

Thank you for your service to CASA/LA and the children/youth of Los Angeles County. The volunteer work you do takes heart, patience and a lot of support from your team. We hope this volunteer handbook will be an important tool for you on your CASA journey.

The handbook provides information on your role, CASA/LA program policies and guidelines for effective CASA advocacy. We also know that not every CASA situation fits neatly into a handbook! Use this handbook as a reference, and continue to check-in with the CASA program and your advocate supervisor for case assistance.

Questions about the handbook or any of the CASA/LA policies and procedures can be directed to your advocate supervisor, the director of advocacy or the CEO.

We are so grateful that you are part of our CASA family. Thank you for volunteering and for making a difference in the life of a child/youth in Los Angeles County.



## THE CASA ORGANIZATION

### WHAT ARE WE ALL DOING HERE?

#### MISSION STATEMENT

CASA of Los Angeles mobilizes community volunteers to advocate for children who have experienced abuse and neglect.

### WHAT DRIVES US?

#### VISION STATEMENT

CASA/LA's vision is a Los Angeles in which every child in the child welfare system has an advocate and the opportunity to thrive.

### WHO DOES WHAT AT CASA?

#### CASA PROGRAM ORGANIZATION

CASA of Los Angeles (CASA/LA) is an independent, non-profit organization dedicated to mobilizing community volunteers to advocate for children who have experienced abuse and neglect. CASA/LA is led by a chief executive officer with oversight from the CASA/LA board of directors.

CASA/LA has three distinct departments that collaborate to support CASA volunteers:

- **Recruitment and Outreach:** Led by the director of recruitment and outreach, this team of outreach and recruitment coordinators is active throughout Los Angeles County recruiting potential CASA volunteers.
- **Volunteer Services:** Led by the director of training and volunteer relations, the volunteer training specialists and volunteer training manager prepare CASAs for advocacy with pre-service and ongoing in-service trainings.
- **Advocacy:** Led by the director of advocacy, the team of advocate supervisors and advocacy team managers provides on-going coaching and support to volunteers who are appointed to a child/youth.

## HOW DO I FULFILL THE MISSION?

### ROLE OF THE CASA VOLUNTEER

A Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) volunteer provides intensive advocacy for children/youth through a unique one-on-one relationship between a trained and supported adult and a child/youth (aged 0-21) who has experienced abuse, neglect, or abandonment. CASA volunteers are sworn officers of the court whose job is representing the best interests of the children/youth in their appointed cases.



Your mission, should you choose to accept it, is to:

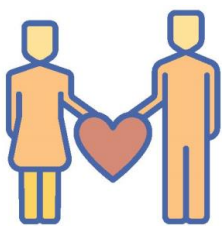
- Establish a relationship with the child/youth, visiting the child/youth no less than once a month to better understand the child/youth's needs and desires
- Review available records regarding the child/youth's family history, education, behavior, and medical or mental health history
- Explain the CASA role, duties and responsibilities to all parties associated with a case
- Communicate and coordinate efforts with the child/youth's social worker, attorney, and caregiver
- Participate in case planning or treatment team meetings regarding the child/youth whenever possible.
- Identify and explore potential resources that will facilitate family preservation, early family reunification or alternative permanency planning.

- Ensure that DCFS implements court-approved plans for the child/youth.
- Attend all court hearings.
- Inform the court of the child/youth's needs through written reports and recommendations.
- Document meetings, visits, interviews and information gathering in the child/youth's CASA case file (ETO).
- Participate in monthly case review meetings with your advocate supervisor.
- Report any incident of child abuse or neglect to your advocate supervisor and the appropriate authorities (DCFS Hotline and/or law enforcement).

## QUICKSAND AHEAD!

The following activities are outside the boundaries of a CASA role and are prohibited via California Rules of Court, 5.655:

- Taking the child/youth to your home or the home of your friends or family.
- Introducing the child/youth to your family, friends and/or pets.
- Giving legal advice or therapeutic counseling.
- Making placements for the child/youth.
- Transporting the child/youth to services without a specific court order authorizing it.
- Being related to any party involved in the case, or being employed in a position or agency that may create a conflict of interest, or the appearance of a conflict of interest.
- Investigating or making recommendations about allegations of abuse/neglect.
- Giving money or expensive gifts to the child/youth.
- Monitoring visits.



## HOW DOES A GOOD CASA VOLUNTEER ACT?

### VOLUNTEER CODE OF CONDUCT

The CASA volunteer is an officer of the court and is asked to gather information about the best interest of the child/youth to whom they are appointed. This is a role of considerable importance and public trust. As such, you are expected to demonstrate conduct which is responsible, ethical, law-abiding and respectful of the parties and participants.

As a CASA volunteer, you agree to:

1. Use the rights and powers vested in the role appropriately to advocate for the best interests of the child/youth.

2. Comply with applicable laws and rules – both state and federal, as well as court rules, policies of the judicial branch and program policies.
3. Maintain confidentiality.
4. Avoid impropriety or the appearance of impropriety.
5. Disclose any real or potential conflict of interest as soon as possible to the CASA program.
6. Not use the CASA position for personal advantage.
7. Establish appropriate boundaries with children/youth, parties and participants (see below).
8. Take reasonable steps to ensure personal safety.

## HOW DO I AVOID RELATIONSHIP QUICKSAND? BOUNDARIES

Boundaries are the rules, guidelines, limits, and standards set between people. Good boundaries are fair, reasonable, predictable, and appropriate for the age and maturity of the child/youth. Having good boundaries is key to being successful as a CASA. While you may feel connected to your child/youth, it is inappropriate for you to foster a relationship in which a child/youth becomes so dependent on their relationship with you that when the case ends and you are relieved, the child/youth suffers another significant loss. Your job is to help the child/youth build relationships elsewhere; to make sure that the support system is provided through others who will be available to the child/youth over the long term. You can use the following guidelines to help manage these boundaries in the volunteer role:

### Physical boundary guidelines

- Consider the age of the child you are working with; it may be appropriate to hold a baby and engage in play with a younger child.
- Understand and respect the underlying issues of power and control that relate to physical contact.
- Set appropriate physical boundaries based on the individual situation of the child or youth.
- Always let the child or youth initiate any physical contact. This empowers them to be the ones who make the decision, and have the right to have others respect the boundaries they set.

### Emotional boundary guidelines

- Be clear with your child/youth about the CASA role and what the CASA can or cannot do.
- Set your own emotional boundaries, prior to taking on a case. This includes avoiding the role of rescuer and recognizing early if there are symptoms of “compassion fatigue” or burn-out.
- Be consistent in actions and follow through. This demonstrates stability to the child or youth, and respect to their social worker, attorney, and caregiver.
- Don’t make promises.
- Don’t lie or tell half-truths. The goal is to build trust with the child/youth, as well as their social worker, attorney, and caregiver. Children and youth in the dependency system have strong survival skills and will see through falsehood.
- Use caution with self-disclosure and only share personal information on a minimal and general basis. Self-disclosure should always be in the service of the child or youth, not burdening the child/youth with problems or creating situations where the child worries about you.
- Avoid gift giving. Giving special favors or gifts can create confusion for the child/youth. You are prohibited from using your own resources to obtain services for the child without prior discussion with your advocate supervisor and the child’s team.

### Mental boundary guidelines

- Understand and respect the beliefs, history, goals and needs of the child/youth.
- Recognize that CASAs have biases. (Who, ME?) When these biases come up, discuss them with an advocate supervisor, and avoid allowing them to alter the best advocacy for the child.
- You should not allow your own values or expectations to guide the advocacy. Focus on the child or youth's situation, and recognize the best outcome for the child is not always the "perfect" outcome that you might prefer.

## **Expectations**

Expectations are the stories we tell ourselves about what will happen in the relationship. These include the anticipated actions you create about your child or youth, and the anticipated actions the child or youth creates about the CASA, based on what you share and how you act.

- Work within the framework of the child or youth's history and story. Empower them within the context of their own experience.
- Manage the expectations the child/youth has for you. Be direct, honest and consistent about your role and the limits.
- Model healthy communication and professional relationships. When working with other service providers, maintain healthy, open communication. You are not expected to do crisis management or be the sole person the team relies on to provide support
- Stay child-focused.
- Don't say "yes" simply to win approval or acceptance, or to avoid hurting someone's feelings. If you feel that a request is inappropriate, outside the CASA role, or in conflict with your current CASA priorities, discuss it with an advocate supervisor.

## **Techniques for Creating & Maintaining Healthy Professional Boundaries and Expectations**

- As early as possible in the relationship, you can establish clear agreements regarding what a CASA does, the times people can reach you and the best way to communicate. Expect to explain all this multiple times as you meet different people in the child/youth's life.
- Talk to an advocate supervisor when there are questions or concerns regarding boundaries—particularly when you feel that boundary issues are impacting the ability to provide objective, compassionate advocacy.
- There's only one of you. If you are working with a team of service providers, remember to promote and model positive, open communication and respectful sharing of information. Trust that team members are fulfilling their roles as service providers, and remember that you shouldn't take on every role for the child/youth they are assigned to.
- Self-care is always on the menu while serving the child or youth. You should find self-care practices that work for you, such as getting enough sleep, eating well, spending time with friends and family, exercising, seeking supervision as needed, connecting with other CASAs for support and sometimes taking a break. The CASA role does not require being available all the time.



## HOW DO I ACKNOWLEDGE THE GOOD STUFF? USING A STRENGTH-BASED APPROACH

CASA volunteers are asked to maintain a strength-based approach when working with young people and their families. A strength-based approach doesn't place blame. It considers the child/family strengths and honors the unique situation and environment the child/youth and their family is in. The approach recognizes that the child/youth and their family are the experts of their own situation and encourages engagement and collaboration with the child/youth and family to better understand their needs. You are encouraged to utilize the child/family strengths in developing their advocacy goals.

You should use language that is non-biased and respectful of an individual's identity and reflective of your professional identity as a CASA volunteer. This includes the use of an individual's preferred gender pronouns based on their expressed gender identify (she/her/hers, he/him/his, they/theirs). Refrain from making derogatory, hurtful or discriminatory statements regarding any person on your case.

## DOES THIS MAKE ME LOOK CONFLICTED?

### CONFLICT OF INTEREST

As a CASA volunteer, you may not engage in activities or employment that may result in a potential ethical or legal conflict with the standards, practices, and policies of CASA of Los Angeles and/or the National CASA Association. This includes (but is not limited to) being employed by DCFS and/or being an active resource parent in Los Angeles County. You should not accept cases where you know the family and/or child/youth through personal or professional relationships.

You should not engage in any financial dealings with the family and/or child/youth during your advocacy. This includes, but is not limited to, lending money, raising money (even if for the child's needs), selling items to or purchasing items from the family or child/youth, cosigning on a bank account or loan or any other similar practices.

You are required to report conflicts or potential conflicts of interest to an advocate supervisor. Engaging in activities that present a conflict of interest may result in your being relieved from their case and resigned from the CASA program.

## WHO GETS TO KNOW?

### CONFIDENTIALITY

As a CASA, you have access to sensitive and confidential information about the child/youth to whom you are appointed. When you are sworn in as a CASA by the judge, you take an oath of confidentiality to protect case-related information. In general, "case-related information" is any information that would lead a person to be able to identify a child/youth, such as:

- Basic information about the youth/child, such as their name, and current placement information.

- Personal information about the youth/child's life, such as their gender identity, sexual orientation, race/ethnicity, socio-economic status, educational information, behavior/mental health treatment and diagnosis and medical treatment and diagnosis. This may also include information about the child/youth's family, including names, addresses and their current circumstances and relationship with the child/youth.
- Court information, such as information about the sustained WIC 300 petition, dates and outcomes for dependency and delinquency court proceedings, criminal charges brought against the child/youth and /or their family. This may also include information about the current case plan for the child/youth.

As a CASA, you gather information and use it to advocate for a child/youth's best interest, while keeping confidentiality in mind. In general, you can use the 'one way street' method: data that comes in to you does not go out to anyone else except the social worker and child/youth's attorney. When you are speaking with the social worker or attorney, you can use the 'two way street' method: you can exchange information. **When sharing information with other people involved with the child/youth, consider the following questions:**

- Is it in the child/youth's best interest to share information?
- Is the person legally entitled to have this information?
- Is it the CASA's information to share?
- Is it the appropriate setting to share this information?

Always consult with your supervisor if you have questions about what information to share with the child/youth's team. If a service provider or caregiver is requesting information from you and you are unsure about releasing the information, you can always refer the individual to the child/youth's social worker or attorney.

Confidentiality of Records: Never release any records on behalf of the young person without written permission from the child's attorney. Okay, now you want to know the exception. Here it is: if you are also the child/youth's education rights holder or developmental decision maker, you can release necessary information but you should discuss with your supervisor and/or child's attorney prior to release. You may request records from the child/youth's school, doctor, mental health therapist, regional center coordinator, group home or placement, or the court file. You must go through an advocate supervisor to inspect the child/youth's court file.

Confidentiality and electronic communication: Always use your advocate e-mail for CASA case-related matters. If you suspect child abuse, do not use email to report or discuss it. If you are using text messaging to communicate with the youth to whom you are appointed to or another individual related to the case (i.e. CSW, parent/caregiver, therapist, other service provider), refrain from using specific information about the case such as name, birth date, address, or situations happening with the case. Use first name and last initial instead of a child/youth's name when communicating via e-mail or text message. Use text messaging or similar apps only for brief communication such as confirming or rescheduling a visit. When the child/youth or family are in crisis, do not rely solely on electronic communications. Please see the [CASA Social Media Policy](#) for guidelines about communication over social media.

Photos: As a CASA volunteer, you may take photos of your children/youth for the limited purposes of: 1) attaching to the CASA court report or 2) providing memories (life books) for the young person or family. Photos must be uploaded to a Case Documents Touchpoint on ETO and deleted immediately from the CASA's personal phone and/or camera. Photos may not be used for your personal use and cannot be shown

to anyone outside the case, including posted on social media. You may take/post photos of/with your non-minor dependent with the express permission of the young adult.

**Non-Minor Dependents:** If you are working with young adults, 18-21, you should recognize that non-minor dependent's (NMD) own all of their personal information and must give consent to that information being released. When working with service providers, educational institutions, and other professional teams, you should always involve the NMD to ensure they agree to what information is being shared and discussed. In best practice, the NMD should be the one to release information.

**Exceptions to Confidentiality:** You are always expected to abide by confidentiality when speaking with parties on the case, with the exception of the attorney and social worker. Further, you can breach confidentiality when making a suspected child abuse report (See section on [Mandated Reporting](#)) or in specific situations:

1. The child/youth is at risk of harming themselves or others.
2. There is a reasonable suspicion that a child/youth is being abused/neglected or at risk of being abused/neglected (mandated reporting).
3. You are court ordered to release the information.
4. You are the appointed holder of educational and developmental decision-making rights. If you are the educational rights holder, you can share educational information and records as you deem necessary to ensure the child/youth's education and can consent to the sharing of educational information for purposes of assessment. However, CASAs as educational/developmental decision-making rights holders cannot provide consent (during assessments or when a 317 educational attorney is appointed) for sharing medical or mental health records.
5. NMD specifically consents to you releasing the information.

Consult the table below to understand confidentiality. Use your advocate supervisor as a resource when navigating confidentiality challenges.

## I NEED A CHART. WHO GETS TO KNOW WHAT?

Receiving party	What information can you share?
<b>CASA Advocate Supervisor/CASA Staff</b>	Any and all case-related issues.
<b>Child/Youth/NMD</b>	<p>Any and all case-related issues that are expressed in an age and developmentally appropriate manner.</p> <p>Make it clear to the child/youth that you are legally unable to keep secrets and may be required to disclose what the child/youth has told you.</p> <p>Exception: Avoid discussing the abuse/neglect allegations with the young person.</p>
<b>DCFS Child’s Social Worker</b>	<p>Any and all case-related issues.</p> <p>Sometimes, you may feel the information is particularly sensitive or be concerned about how a social worker might react. In these cases, you may want to discuss with your supervisor prior to disclosure.</p>
<b>Children’s Law Center (CLC) attorneys and investigators</b>	Any and all case-related issues.
<b>Probation Officer/Delinquency Court Judge</b>	<p>In general, be discerning about what information you share with the delinquency court/probation officer. Consider how the information would be used and how it may impact the young person’s trajectory in the criminal justice system.</p> <p>Always consult with your supervisor and the child’s attorney before disclosing information to the probation officer/delinquency court.</p>

<b>Caregiver (resource parent, group home staff, parent, family member)</b>	In general, you should not be sharing case-related information with the caregiver. If you have information and/or observations that would help that caregiver care for the child or is relevant to their safety, discuss first with your supervisor, CSW and/or child's attorney. It may be decided that you are not the relevant person to provide the information to the caregiver.
<b>Mental Health Service Providers (therapist, case managers, wrap team)</b>	<p>You can share relevant information and/or observations regarding a child's needs to mental health professionals that would result in improved care and/or impact safety.</p> <p>As a general practice, be thoughtful about what mental health-related information you share with the court and other people outside the youth's mental health team. Discuss with your supervisor before disclosing diagnoses, psychotropic medications, and/or other mental health needs to others and/or in CASA reports.</p>
<b>Medical Providers (doctors, nurses, etc.)</b>	In general, do not share case-related information with the child's medical team, unless there is an immediate need based on a medical emergency. If you have information and/or observations that would help that professional care for the child or is relevant to their medical needs/safety, discuss first with your supervisor, CSW and/or child's attorney. It may be that you are not the relevant person to provide the information to the medical team.
<b>Other Attorney (parent's attorney, public defender, district attorney, etc.)</b>	Consult with the child's dependency (CLC) attorney before releasing information to another attorney. Do not disclose information that may be incriminating to a youth unless it meets exceptions (see above).
<b>Education Attorney</b>	You can share relevant information and/or observations about a child's education needs and status to ensure that the education attorney can use it to advocate for the child's educational needs. If there are questions about what information can be disclosed, consult with your supervisor and the child's dependency (CLC) attorney before releasing the information.

<b>Education Teams (teachers, principals, other school staff)</b>	<p>In general, you should not be sharing case-related information with the child's school. You may share information (such as the date of the last IEP or last school attended) or observations that would help the school meet the child's education needs, but may not disclose information from the child's case file. If you have questions about what information to disclose, discuss it first with your supervisor, CSW and/or child's attorney. It may be decided that you are not the appropriate person to provide the information to the school.</p> <p>Educational rights holders can share educational information and records as they deem necessary and can consent to sharing educational information for purposes of assessment. However, educational rights holders cannot provide consent for sharing medical or mental health records.</p>
<b>Non-caregiving family members (ex: siblings, non-custodial parents, relatives)</b>	<p>In general, you should not be sharing case-related information with a child's family member. If you feel there is information that the family member needs to advocate for the child's best interest, discuss with your supervisor before disclosing the information.</p>
<b>Meetings (for example, MDT meetings, CFT meetings, IEP meeting)</b>	<p>When participating in team meetings, you can share relevant information (strengths, challenges, needs) and observations to help move advocacy forward and address the meeting issues. Be mindful of the attendees and purpose of the meeting and how the information they share will benefit the child/youth. Also be aware that the child/youth may be present at these meetings and consider how sharing that information might impact the child/youth in the moment.</p>
<b>Other CASA's</b>	<p>In general, you can share stories about your work with a child/youth with another CASA volunteer in general, non-identifying terms. You can share more detailed case information for the purpose of improving advocacy, such as at a CASA gathering or when working with a CASA peer mentor.</p> <p>CASAs working on sibling sets can share information related to overlapping needs, such as sibling visitation, family/parent issues and</p>

	shared placements or to coordinate your activities with the family. Be cautious in sharing information that is sensitive to the child you are working with and consider the impact/reason for sharing this information with another volunteer.
<b>A CASA's friends and family</b>	<p>You can share stories about your work with a child/youth in general, non-identifying terms.</p> <p>When you use social media, you may share your experience with CASA in general terms without providing information about your child.</p>
<b>Anyone else</b>	You may share your experience with a child/youth in general, non-identifying terms. If you need/want to share additional information, you should consult first with your advocate supervisor.



## DID A LITTLE BLUE BIRDIE TELL YOU?

### SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY AND AVOIDING THE TRAPS

You are welcome to follow CASA of Los Angeles on the following social media handles:

- Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/CASAofLA>
- Twitter: <https://twitter.com/CASAofLA>
- Instagram: <https://instagram.com/casa.la>
- LinkedIn: <https://www.linkedin.com/company/casa-of-los-angeles>

The following represents CASA/LA's policy for contacting, connecting with and sharing information on social media. In order to maintain confidentiality and appropriate boundaries, volunteers should abide by the following guidelines:

- Use your advocate e-mail for all CASA-related business.
- Consider updating your privacy settings to ensure that your account is private.
- Do not search/monitor the social media accounts of CASA children/youth or others involved in the case using your personal social media account.
- Do not add/friend/follow CASA children/youth, your supervisor or others involved in the case on social media.
- Do not private message CASA children/youth or others involved on social media using your personal social media account unless directed by your supervisor (see below).
- Do not post pictures of your CASA child/youth on social media (unless they are a non-minor dependent and have given you permission to do so).

- Do not post your CASA child/youth's name on social media or post any details of your CASA child/youth's case on social media (e.g., the abuse/neglect charges, current life circumstances, demographic characteristics).
- Do not "check in" (share your location on social media) at your CASA child/youth's placement, when you are in court for a hearing, or when on an outing with them.
- Do not complain/vent about your CASA child/youth, providers involved on the case, or details related to the case on social media.

## CREATING A CASA SOCIAL MEDIA ACCOUNT

In certain circumstances, your supervisor may allow you to private message your CASA youth or their family using social media by creating a CASA social media account. This account is for CASA business, clearly identifies you as a CASA volunteer and has no identifying information about you and/or your CASA youth. You may not create this account without prior approval from and discussion with your supervisor.

## SOCIAL MEDIA: FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS FOR CASAS

Q: How is sharing their picture a violation of privacy if I did not include case information?

A: While sharing only a picture or only case information without names can seem harmless in some ways, it is still disclosing private information that you are not authorized to release. You also take an oath of confidentiality when you start advocacy work, meaning any disclosure is a violation. Only non-minor dependents can provide consent to allow you to share a photo on your social media.

Q: What if I'm already communicating with others on the case or my CASA youth via social media?

A: Contact your supervisor. Depending on other available ways for you to connect, you may be asked to end your social media contact and restrict electronic communication to phone or email only.

Q: What if my CASA youth contacts me with an emergency?

A: It is not your role to respond to crisis situations. You can connect the youth to the best resources to respond to these situations. You can connect the youth to their attorney or social worker. If communication happens after hours and there is a need for the youth to be picked up, please contact the Child Abuse Hotline at (800) 540-4000 and get in touch with the command post. If the youth is in immediate danger, please contact 911 and the CSW.

Q: How do I set up a CASA social media account?

A: Contact your advocate supervisor to explain circumstances on their case and why you believe you need a CASA account. Your advocate supervisor will determine if it is then appropriate for you to create a CASA account and will give you guidelines on how to create this account.

Q: I've seen articles with CASA youth information in the past. How come I can't post?

A: Prior to releasing photographs and stories, we complete documentation on our end to get necessary permissions to share.

Q: I like to connect on social media and tell friends about CASA's mission. I've gotten friends interested that way before. What can I share?



A: You're welcome to share CASA's mission in a general sense and your dedication to the cause without disclosing private information about your child/youth. You can share CASA of Los Angeles's social media posts.

Q: My youth's parent only contacts me via Facebook. No other method works. What do I do?

A: Communicate these challenges to your advocate supervisor to problem-solve. If your advocate supervisor sees fit, they may encourage you to create a CASA social media account. Your advocate supervisor will give you details on the layout/format of these accounts after approval.

Q: I am joining efforts to help my CASA youth find family members. Permanency is part of my role. Can I still not search for people on social media?

A: Yes, you may after creating a CASA social media account. CASAs supporting search efforts must limit their search to be solely family-focused. This means you can search for family member on social media ONLY, then pass along contact information to P3 Team, CSW, etc. Do not make contact with family members that you find. Your advocate supervisor will give you information on the layout/format of these accounts.

Q: My CASA youth has been missing for weeks and I can't reach them over the phone. I found them on Facebook. Can I message him?

A: Contact your advocate supervisor to let them know you want to make contact. If your advocate supervisor sees fit, they may encourage you to create a CASA social media account. Your advocate supervisor will give you details on the layout/format of these accounts after approval. Maintain contact with your supervisor. Include a message about the attorney/social worker's contact information and offer support if they want to return.

Please note it is not your role to respond to crisis situations. You can connect the youth to resources needed to respond to these situations. You can connect the youth to their attorney or social worker. If communication happens after hours and there is a need for the youth to be picked up, please contact the Child Abuse Hotline at (800) 540-4000 and get in touch with the command post. If the youth is in immediate danger, please contact 911. Do not meet or transport the youth in these circumstances.

Q: My CASA youth just messaged me on Facebook/Instagram. She has been missing for two weeks. Can I reply?

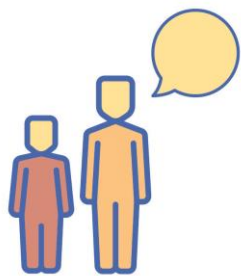
A: Yes, you can reply. Reply using a CASA-only account. Include a message with the attorney/social worker's contact information and offer support if they want to return. Immediately report this to your supervisor.

Please note it is not your role to respond to crisis situations. You can connect the youth to resources needed to respond to these situations. You can connect the youth to their attorney or social worker. If communication happens after hours and there is a need for the youth to be picked up, please contact the Child Abuse Hotline at (800) 540-4000 and get in touch with the command post. If the youth is in immediate danger, please contact 911. Do not meet or transport the youth in these circumstances.

Q: My CASA youth asked me to post a picture of them on my social media. They said it was okay. Can I post it? They aren't even looking at the camera.

A: No. This is still a violation of their privacy and confidentiality. Only non-minor dependents can provide consent to allow you to share a photo on your social media.

## DO I ALWAYS HAVE TO SAY SOMETHING IF I SEE SOMETHING?



### MANDATED REPORTING

All CASA volunteers and CASA staff are mandated reporters. This means you must, by law, report known or suspected child maltreatment. Mandated reporters are required by the state of California to report any known or suspected instances of child abuse or neglect to the county child welfare department (DCFS) or to a local law enforcement agency (local police/sheriff's department). As a mandated reporter, you are not liable for reporting under most circumstances, regardless of whether the allegations are substantiated or inconclusive.

You must complete the following steps in this specific order:

1. Contact a supervisor immediately to discuss the suspected child abuse or neglect.
2. If a report is required, immediately contact the Child Protection Hotline (800) 540-4000 or law enforcement (911) to report the suspected child abuse or neglect.
3. Any report made to DCFS/law enforcement via phone must be followed up with a [written report](#) within 36 hours. A supervisor can assist you with this procedure.
4. Inform the current social worker and attorney of the child whose case you are appointed to.

Important things to keep in mind:

1. Do not question the person disclosing the abuse or neglect allegations, or try to figure out if the allegations are true. Do not inspect a child's body for physical evidence.
2. Make a report as soon as possible and within designated time frames. You must file a written report within 36 hours of the telephone report.
3. Consulting with an advocate supervisor is an important part of this process.

CASAs can learn more about mandated reporting, or take additional training on-line at <http://mandatedreporterca.com>

## WHO'S MY LIFELINE PHONE CALL?

### ROLE OF THE ADVOCATE SUPERVISOR

An advocate supervisor works with volunteers to give case guidance and support. You and your supervisor work together to ensure that a young person's best interests are being met. The supervisor provides resources, feedback, and is available to discuss questions and concerns. The supervisor assists you with the court process, including editing court reports, providing current information on court hearings and staying up to date on ETO documentation.

You are required to complete a monthly case review with your supervisor at least once a month. You can also contact your supervisor anytime you need support.

If you are unable to reach your assigned supervisor and there is an urgent case matter, contact the CASA office and ask to be transferred to the supervisor on-duty.

If you are not in contact with their supervisor for 60 days, without prior discussion (such as for a planned vacation/ health need), will risk being relieved from their case and resigned from the CASA program.

## AFTER HOURS SUPPORT

CASA staff are available between 8am to 5pm to provide support on your case. There may be an urgent situation on your case that occurs after hours or over the weekend. In these situations:

- Get in touch with the child/youth's social worker and/or treatment team to discuss the situation and decide on next steps.
- Call the Child Abuse Hotline ((800) 540-4000) to be connected to a DCFS social worker.
- Call 911 if the child/youth is in imminent danger.

It is not your role to respond in-person to crisis situations. Do not meet or transport the child/youth in crisis, although you may want to stay in communication with the child/youth during the situation to provide support. You should always follow-up with your supervisor, the child/youth's social worker and attorney the next business day.



## WHO ELSE IS ON THE CHILD'S TEAM?

### ROLE OF CHILD WELFARE SERVICES/COURT APPOINTED ATTORNEYS

#### Child Welfare:

The Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) is the child welfare agency for Los Angeles County. DCFS's primary concern is the safety of the young people they serve. The agency is mandated by law to protect young people from abuse and neglect.

Children's Social Workers (CSWs) investigate abuse/neglect allegations, identify and refer young people/families to services, and team with the family to develop strategies that will enable the family to successfully and safely parent their children. There may be multiple social workers assigned to a child's case because they have certain individualized roles at that time in the court case.

#### Court Appointed Attorneys:

##### Minor's Counsel

The Children's Law Center (CLC) represents children/youth who are in care of the dependency system. The attorney represents the young person's interests to the court, protects their legal rights, and advises the court of a child/youth's wishes.

##### Conflict Attorneys:

In some cases, the Children’s Law Center is unable to represent a child/youth due to a conflict of interest. The court will appoint a conflict attorney who can represent a child/youth in dependency court. Conflict attorneys are private attorneys not affiliated with Children’s Law Center.

**Education Attorneys:**

The court may request an education attorney to represent the best educational interests of the child/youth. The attorney may be requested or consulted if the child/youth has complicated educational needs and there is a need to ensure the child’s educational rights are protected.

**Public Defender:**

Public Defenders represent children/youth in the juvenile justice system. The public defender represents the young person’s interests to the delinquency court, protects their legal rights, and advises the court of a child/youth’s wishes.

**Parent’s Counsel**

The Los Angeles Dependency Lawyers (LADL) represent parents who are involved in dependency proceedings. Each parent is assigned a separate attorney. LADL attorneys represent the parent’s interests to the court, protect their legal rights, and advise the court of a parent’s wishes.

**County Counsel**

County Counsel represents the Department of Children and Family Services and the interests of the County of Los Angeles in dependency proceedings. County Council does not represent individual social workers. County Counsel represents DCFS’s interests to the court, protects their legal rights and advises the court of DCFS’s position.

**Probation:**

The Los Angeles Department of Probation provides supervision and rehabilitative services for individuals (adults and children/youth) whom the courts and community have deemed criminally at risk.

Deputy Probation Officers (DPOs) supervise children/youth placed on community-based probation supervision. DPOs assigned to designated communities provide case management services (e.g. assessment, orientation, contacts, service referrals, violations, court reports,) and work with children/youth, families, schools and other relevant resources to build on minor/family strengths, evaluate and make efforts to minimize risks and monitor compliance with court orders.

Promote a professional relationship with all members of the team, including the CSW and appointed attorneys. You must stay in regular communication with the CSW and the minor’s attorney throughout the case.

## WHO GIVES THE THUMBS UP ON A CASA APPLICANT?

### APPLICANT SCREENING

The CASA program screening process is designed to ensure that those sworn in as CASA volunteers are of good character, competent to fulfill the role of a CASA volunteer, and willing to commit the time and energy and have the flexibility necessary to effectively present and advance the best interests of a child/youth in

proceedings involving child abuse and neglect. This policy applies to all volunteers seeking to be sworn CASA volunteers in the CASA of Los Angeles program.

The screening process includes:

- An orientation to the CASA program.
- An application process that includes your giving extensive personal and professional background information, including submitting three references by non-relatives, at least one of whom is from a professional/volunteer setting.
- A personal interview and a follow-up interview, if necessary.
- Screening for any significant conflict of interest.
- Prior to admission to the CASA program, the volunteer applicant must be cleared through the Los Angeles Superior Court's human resources department via a local security clearance; live scan (fingerprints) submitted to the Department of Justice (DOJ), Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) and the Child Abuse Central Index (CACI); Social Security number verification; and a check of the National Sex Offender Public Website.
- Providing proof of a valid California class C driver's license and proof of current automobile liability insurance if you are a volunteer applicant who drives. All applicants must authorize CASA/LA to receive an annual driving record report from the Department of Motor Vehicles as condition to becoming a CASA volunteer, or sign the "agreement not to transport".

CASA volunteers may be automatically excluded for:

- Refusal to sign a release of information permitting appropriate background checks;
- Conviction for, and/or acts punishable as any crime in the following categories:
  - Crimes against a child and/or domestic partner
  - Violent felonies
  - Sex crimes
  - Hate crimes
- DCFS involvement with family:
  - Parent of a child who is or has been adjudicated a dependent due to the actions of that parent
  - Spouse or significant other to a parent whose child is or has been adjudicated a dependent and was considered by the court to be an offending parent
  - Adult whose acts or omissions cause them to have been responsible for a child being adjudicated a dependent
- Being an active resource parent and/or employee of DCFS or a person who derives income from DCFS, i.e. attorneys, contractors.
- Other factors left to the discretion of the chief executive officer, director of training and volunteer relations or director of advocacy. These factors will receive individual evaluation for each applicant. The chief executive officer, director of training and volunteer relations or director of advocacy shall consider factors including but not limited to the following as evidence of good character and rehabilitation:
  - The nature of the crime
  - Period of time since the crime was committed and number of offenses
  - Circumstances surrounding the commission of the crime that would demonstrate the unlikelihood of repetition
  - Activities since conviction, including employment or participation in therapy or education, that would indicate changed behavior
  - Granting by the governor of a full and unconditional pardon
  - Character references

- A certificate of rehabilitation from a superior court
- A "Finding of Factual Innocence" as described in Penal Code Section 851.8

## HOW DO I LEARN TO DO ALL THIS?



### VOLUNTEER TRAINING

All CASA volunteers must complete the pre-service training administered by the CASA program before being sworn in and appointed as a CASA volunteer. The main goal of the training is to teach and guide CASAs through the primary responsibilities of a CASA volunteer.

CASA volunteers will complete both in-person and online sessions as part of the pre-service training.

By the end of the CASA pre-service training, CASA volunteers will be able to:

- Name the three goals of CASA advocacy
- Understand disproportionality, systemic racism and cultural humility
- Identify the roles of key players in the dependency system
- Define permanency for a child in foster care
- Write a CASA court report including effective recommendations
- Navigate and enter volunteer hours in the ETO case management software
- Identify resources relevant to CASA advocacy
- Define the CASA role and the parameters of the volunteer-child relationship
- Identify several significant laws that will impact CASA advocacy
- Explain how personal values and skills may affect your work as a CASA volunteer
- Identify risk factors associated with child abuse including substance abuse, domestic violence, mental illness, and poverty
- Examine how personal values and biases about mental illness, domestic violence and substance abuse can effect objectivity regarding the best interest of a child
- Describe family finding and concurrent planning
- Identify educational challenges that children in foster care face
- Explain some of the issues that LGBTQ+ youth in foster care face

To be eligible to graduate and be appointed as a CASA, volunteers must:

- Complete online coursework each week, one day prior to the in-person session
- Attend all in-person training sessions
- Successfully clear all background checks
- Shadow a children's court assistant where available (all background checks must be cleared)
- Complete CASA mock court report and submit the report electronically to course facilitator
- Participate in [The Child's CASA Case File: A Review](#), an ETO training video and complete the survey at the end of the video.
- Observe dependency court proceedings
- Be sworn in by a dependency court judge
- Be available to accept CASA appointment to a child within 60 days of being sworn in

## CONTINUING EDUCATION

You are required to complete a minimum of 12 hours of continuing education training each calendar year in order to stay abreast of new information, services, policies, and legislation. You can earn continuing education training credit through a variety of delivery methods, including attending workshops, watching videos, and reading articles. All content should be related to your role as a CASA volunteer. CASA/LA provides in-service trainings at least once a month on a variety of relevant topics. You are encouraged to visit the CASA/LA webpage to sign up for in-service trainings: <http://casala.org/in-service-trainings/>. You are also encouraged to seek out community events that are relevant to their work. Find a selection of these events at: <http://casala.org/continuing-education/>. If you are unsure if a community event would qualify for continuing education credit, contact your supervisor.

The chart below outlines the amount of credit you can earn for different types of training. Please note that you must complete a **minimum of three hours** of in-person (e.g. attend an in-person event, training, workshop, course, etc.) training each year. Speak to your supervisor if you do not see a specific type of training listed below or would like to know if a certain type of training will qualify for credit. While we encourage all volunteers to take advantage of CASA-related learning opportunities, hours in excess of 12 will not roll over to the next year.

Training Type	Allowable Credit
Articles in magazines, journals and newspapers	Maximum of one hour per article
Internet research for case	Amount of time spent on research
Books	30 minutes for each 50 pages; maximum of 3 hours per book
Film or TV program	Length of film or program
Online training / webinar	Amount of time spent taking the course
Podcast	Length of webinar / podcast
Conference / workshop / seminar	Length of relevant conference session(s)
College course	Length of relevant class time
CASA/LA in-service	Length of in-service course

## IF A DOCUMENT FALLS IN THE WOODS AND NO ONE HEARS IT...

### CASE DOCUMENTATION

## THE CASA CASE FILE

You must maintain current and accurate case notes in the child's CASA file. Your case notes are essential when writing your court report. Having reliable and accurate documentation enhances the credibility of the CASA voice in court. Your supervisor relies on your case notes to stay up-to-date on the case and provide effective support and guidance.

Efforts to Outcomes (ETO) is the online database the CASA organization uses to keep track of volunteer and case-related activity. In addition to seeking assistance from your supervisor, you can use the following resources for more information about using and navigating ETO:

- [ETO Advocate Handbook](#)
- ETO Help Desk: (323) 859-2888 x 6354 or [etohelp@casala.org](mailto:etohelp@casala.org)
- [Tutorial videos on navigating ETO](#)

If you are unable to maintain monthly documentation, you may be deemed ineligible for subsequent case appointment.

### *Baseline Scale*

The baseline scale uses the [Child Baseline and Outcome Scale](#) to assess risk in the areas of safety, permanency and well-being for each child at the beginning of your appointment to the case. Baseline scale ratings reflect the information you gather via review of case documents, interviews, meetings, calls and other activities.

The baseline scale is completed once during your appointment and in discussion with your supervisor. The supervisor records the baseline scale during the first monthly case review, which typically takes place one month after you and the supervisor meet to discuss the appointment packet. The baseline scale cannot be recorded until you have had at least one in-person visit with the child.

### *Advocacy Goals*

Once you and your supervisor complete a baseline scale for a child, you will develop initial advocacy goals and activities. These goals and activities will be based on your understanding of the child's current needs in the areas of safety, permanency and well-being (physical health, mental health and education). Advocacy goals and activities will change and evolve over time.

### *Child Visit Log (1 per month minimum)*

The child visit log is used to record information about your contact (face-to-face and other contact) with your CASA child. It's especially important that you record all **in-person** visits in the child visit log. These notes should summarize your interactions and observations. If you are unavailable to visit the child in-person during the month, you must create a child visit log touch point to document why the visit did not occur.

### *Case Note Log (1 per month minimum)*

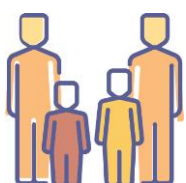
Use the case note log to record your notes about your calls, emails or visits with people involved in the case, such as family members, service providers, caregivers or other individuals in the child's life.

### *Volunteer Hours*



Track the time you have dedicated to your CASA role using the monthly volunteer hours touch point. Include the number of hours spent visiting with your child/youth, communicating with family, caregivers, social workers, attorneys, CASA staff and other individuals involved with the case. Also include any time spent traveling, writing notes, preparing court reports, attending court hearings or other appointments on the child's behalf. You must record any continuing education hours.

## MATCHMAKER, MATCHMAKER MAKE ME A MATCH?



CASE APPOINTMENT

CASE MATCHING

During your pre-service training, you will be asked to complete a CASA profile touch point on ETO, indicating any preferences you have regarding age, gender, and advocacy areas. The matching process is based on the current waitlist of children/youth pending CASA appointment. There is no guarantee that your preferences will be accommodated. You are expected to be open to matches that are not in your preferred geographic region and are expected to remain on a case if the child moves to a new area within Los Angeles County.

Once you are sworn in as a CASA volunteer, your supervisor will contact you with a case match to review. You must accept a case within 60 days of graduation or may be subject to resignation from the CASA program. For step-by-step instructions on how to review a case on the waitlist, please view our [tutorial video](#).

Once matched to a case on ETO, you have (5) business days to review and make a decision about accepting the case. Before agreeing to accept the match, review the “Case Assessment and Summary” as well as relevant case documents on ETO. Discuss the match with your supervisor. During this matching and case review process, do not contact the child, attorney, social worker or any other person related to the case.

Once you agree to work with a child/youth, your supervisor will send the appointment order paperwork to the court. You must have your appointment order before you can begin work on your case. Expect to wait 1-3 weeks for the appointment order paperwork to be completed.

### THE FIRST 30 DAYS

Once the appointment order is processed, you will meet with your supervisor in person to review the paperwork and discuss getting started on the case.

Use the first 30 days for information gathering and to get to know the child/youth and their individual circumstances. You should meet the child/youth and talk to important people in the child/youth's life. Reach out to the attorney and social worker to introduce yourself and discuss how and how often you will be in contact with them and the best way to communicate. Gather information about the child's safety, permanency and well-being – use this information to discuss the baseline scale and advocacy goals. During the first 30 days, you won't have any advocacy goals. Use this time to check in frequently with your supervisor regarding the information you gathered and next steps.



## HOME VISITS

You are required to visit your child/youth at least once per month. Arrange visits in advance with the caregiver and at a date/time that works for you, the child/youth and the caregiver. CASAs should not make unannounced visits to the child/youth's home. Frequency of contact beyond the required monthly visit should be discussed with your supervisor, the caregiver and the child/youth (if appropriate). Make an effort to visit the child/youth in their current placement, although you may also visit schools, daycare facilities or other locations to facilitate information gathering. You may also choose to conduct visits in a neutral setting, such as a park, depending on the comfort/needs of the child/youth. You should consult with your supervisor and the child's caregiver prior to taking the child/youth out.

You should not bring gifts or take your child/youth out on the first visit. Gifts should not be a regular part of your visits and should be reserved for special occasions.

You are expected to be reliable and consistent in your visits. If you are unable to make a monthly visit you must communicate this to your supervisor, the caregiver and the child/youth (if appropriate) with as much advance notice as possible. If you are unable to visit due to other circumstances, such as scheduling challenges with the youth and/or caregiver, communicate this immediately to your supervisor for appropriate follow-up.

If you are not able to maintain consistent monthly visits with your child/youth you will be relieved from the case and resigned from the program.

## CASA SAFETY

The CASA program makes efforts to assess cases for safety and will not accept cases that raise safety concerns for any volunteer. You are expected to exercise caution in your role as you would in your personal life. You should discuss any safety concerns with your supervisor immediately.

## MONTHLY CASE REVIEWS

Each month, you will have **at least** one monthly case review meeting with your supervisor.

The monthly case review may include:

- Progress made toward advocacy goals
- Changes in placement, health, school, social workers or service providers
- Concerns about the case, as well as highlights/accomplishments
- Education around resources, court and/or DCFS process
- Coaching around boundaries, self-care and any other needs

Be proactive about contacting your supervisor. Advise your supervisor when you will be unavailable, such as during vacations or work hours. Immediately inform your supervisor of changes to your contact information.

Your supervisor will make at least three attempts to reach you during the month using the phone number you provided and your advocate email. If you have not been in contact with the CASA program for 60 days, you will be relieved from your case and resigned from the program. See [Volunteer Separation Policy](#) for more information regarding how and why a CASA volunteer may be resigned.

## TRANSPORTATION

You are not required to transport CASA children/youth or other persons in your personal vehicle while performing your CASA duties and responsibilities however many CASA volunteers choose to do so. You should not be transporting CASA children/youth to services and/or court; however, you may transport CASA children/youth to events/activities if you have discussed the ride with the child/youth's caregiver and your supervisor.

Before you transport the child/youth you are assigned to, a copy of your current car insurance and driver's license are required. When your insurance expires, you are responsible for forwarding the renewal or proof of current insurance to the CASA program. If you do not provide these documents, you will be required to sign a "do not transport" statement and must provide them before being granted permission to transport again.

When transporting children/youth, consider the safety of the children/youth as well as your own. Adhere to the following guidelines when transporting CASA children/youth and/or their family members:

- CASA volunteers must have at least two years driving experience and be at least 21 years old.
- CASA volunteers must possess a valid California driver's licenses and have current auto insurance. When a CASA volunteer's insurance expires, it is that volunteer's responsibility to forward the renewal or proof of current insurance to the CASA program.
- CASA volunteers transporting CASA children/youth and/or their family members shall not exceed the posted speed limit.
- CASA volunteers should not transport CASA children/youth and/or their family members if they have consumed any alcohol, marijuana, any illicit substance, or if they have taken any prescribed or over-the-counter medication that may impair their ability to drive.
- CASA volunteers must have a strong and safe driving record. CASA reviews records for the following incidents:
  - In the past three (3) years, CASA volunteers should have no more than:
    - 2 (two) at-fault accidents.
    - 3 (three) minor moving violations.
    - 4 (four) of the following non-moving violations:
      - Failure to appear
      - License not in possession
      - No proof of insurance/registration
    - Four (4) or more in combination of at-fault accidents, moving violations and/or non-moving violations.
  - In the past four (4) years, CASA volunteers should have zero (0) major moving violations such as:

- Driving while suspended/revoked and/or invalid license
- Exhibition of speed – speed contest
- Reckless driving
- Driving under the influence (DUI)
- Vehicular manslaughter
- Leaving the scene of an accident (hit and run)
- Speeding in excess of 100 mph.

You are responsible for passengers in your vehicle. You should not transport any person(s) until such person(s) have complied with the safety guidelines (A-C) detailed below for passengers. **You are required to follow all child safety seat laws in the State of California. If you have additional questions or concerns, you must contact your supervisor.**

As of January 1, 2016, California state law requires infants and toddlers **up to age 2** to sit in a rear-facing infant seat installed in the backseat of an automobile. It is normal for the legs of children between 15 and 24 months of age legs to curl and for their feet to touch the backseat. Please note that a child born prematurely may require a crash-tested infant care bed. **Children between age 2 through 4 or 5** (toddlers and preschoolers) must be secured in a forward-facing full-back car seat with harness in the backseat of an automobile as long as possible, given the height and weight maximums of the specific forward-facing car seat.

As of January 1, 2012, California state law requires all children **under the age of 8** who are smaller than 4' 9" to sit in an above-referenced forward-facing car seat with harness or a booster seat installed in the backseat of an automobile. It is recommended that **children under the age of 13**, regardless of height, ride in the backseat.

You should not use car seats that are more than five years old, were installed in an automobile that has been involved in any collision, or about which you do not know the complete history. If you are driving a vehicle older than model year 1996, the car seat may require a locking clip to ensure that the lap portion of a lap-shoulder belt does not become slack. There are two ways to secure a car seat to the rear seat bench of the automobile: seat belts and latch. Booster seats are only secured with seat belts.

If you have concerns about the installation of any seat, please request an appointment to have the seat installation checked by a California Highway Patrol officer at a location near to you:

<https://www.chp.ca.gov/find-an-office>

Current child safety seat belt laws can be found online here: <https://www.chp.ca.gov/Programs-Services/Programs/Child-Safety-Seats>

### WRITING A COURT REPORT AND ATTENDING COURT



CASA court reports are an important component of CASA advocacy. The court report is your opportunity to provide the judge with an independent update on what is happening in the child/youth's life and to advocate for a child/youth's needs. Write a report for and attend every hearing (even if your child/youth is not in attendance) unless instructed by your supervisor.

For more information about attending court and writing the report, please consult the [CASA Court Report Handbook](#).

## EDUCATIONAL RIGHTS HOLDERS AND DEVELOPMENTAL DECISION MAKERS

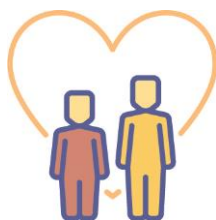
In some situations, a child/youth does not have an adult who is present to make important educational or developmental decisions. This may prevent a child/youth from receiving necessary education services, transitioning to the appropriate school or graduating on time. In other situations, this may prevent the child/youth who has a developmental delay or a developmental disability from receiving appropriate intervention and support services through the regional center. If this is the case, the court may choose to limit the educational and/or developmental rights of the adult and identify a responsible adult to hold those rights.

An educational rights holder investigates the child/youth's educational needs and determines whether those needs are being met. They "stand in the shoes of a parent" and make educational decisions based on the best interest of the child. Educational rights holders must be involved in major educational decisions, like requesting IEPs/assessments, changing schools and/or school disciplinary actions.

A developmental services decision-maker also "stands in the shoes of a parent" to consent for assessments to determine if a child has a developmental delay (under age 3) or a developmental disability (over age 3) and to participate in creating a plan (IFSP/IPP) where goals are established for the child/youth and services are identified to help the child/youth achieve those goals.

You are not automatically appointed as education rights holders /developmental decision-making holder, although this is a frequent and important need for children/youth in the dependency system. If you are asked to hold education/developmental decision-making rights or co-hold these rights with the parent, discuss this responsibility with your supervisor.

### WORKING WITH NON-MINOR DEPENDENTS



A non-minor dependent (NMD) is a young adult between ages 18 and 21 who has chosen to keep their dependency case open.

A NMD must consent in writing to a CASA being appointed even if the CASA was appointed before the youth was 18. Your supervisor will provide you with the NMD consent form to give to your youth, once they have turned 18.

If you are working with an NMD, embrace a collaborative approach to advocacy, which may resemble more of a mentorship relationship. Keep in mind that a NMD makes their own decisions and sets their own goals, as all young adults must learn to do. You can be a supportive person to help the young adult accomplish those goals and provide guidance along the way, no matter the decision the young adult chooses or the outcome. It is also important to remember that young adults own their personal information, including information about their physical health/mental health and education. Consult with the NMD, the court report writing handbook and your supervisor prior to releasing any information to anyone.

### ENDING A CASE

You and your supervisor will determine when you should be relieved from a case. In some cases, court jurisdiction will be terminated by the court and the case will close. In other situations, you and your supervisor may determine that your advocacy goals have been completed, the child/youth/family is in safe and stable place, and further advocacy is no longer needed.

You may be relieved from the case due to issues beyond your control. Your supervisor will discuss these situations with you prior to being relieved. These circumstances may include:

- The child or youth is missing for at least four weeks and has had limited or no contact with you.
- The child is placed out of county
- The child, youth or family is refusing CASA services and efforts to engage the parties have been unsuccessful
- A non-minor dependent does not consent to CASA advocacy, including if the NMD's whereabouts are unknown or the NMD is otherwise incapable of consenting
- There are safety concerns

As part of the case closure process, you and your supervisor will discuss explaining the change in relationship with the child/youth/family.

When a case is closing, you and your supervisor will complete the outcome scale using the [Child Baseline and Outcome Scale](#) to assess risk in the areas of safety, permanency and well-being.

Prior to taking another case, you are encouraged to give yourself time to transition and assess your training needs.

## TAKE ME OUT, COACH?

### LEAVE OF ABSENCE

A leave of absence is available to CASA volunteers who've served a minimum of 12 months, who are in good standing and who wish to take some time off from their advocate role. CASA volunteers may request a leave of absence of up to one year (12 months).

Work with your supervisor to determine whether you are eligible for a leave of absence and, if so, the date you will return to advocacy work. The CASA program will be in touch with you one month before the planned return date to help support your return. You are welcome to return to advocacy prior to your expected date of return or extend your leave of absence up to 12 months (total). Please notify the CASA program with any such changes as soon as possible.

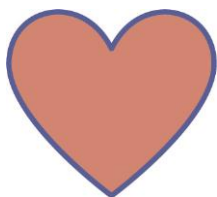
#### **While you are on leave:**

- You may not transport children in any capacity as a CASA volunteer or act as a Court Appointed Special Advocate in any manner.
- You must fulfill the CASA program's continuing education requirement of 12 hours/year.

- You must continue to provide the CASA program with proof of current auto liability insurance and California driver's license.
- The CASA program will continue to maintain your live scan and receive any subsequent arrest notifications from the Department of Justice.
- Depending on the length of the leave of absence, you may be asked to complete **supplemental training**. Your supervisor will discuss training requirements with you when you are ready to return to your advocate role.

#### Important Considerations:

- You may not be able to return to your current supervisor.
- If the CASA program is unable to reach you at the time of their expected return date, your status will be changed to CASA alumni and you will be resigned from the program.
- If you are unable to return after 12 months, your status will be changed to CASA alumni and you will be resigned from the advocate role. CASA of Los Angeles will no longer receive confidential background about your DMV records or Department of Justice information after 12 months of leave (non-advocate volunteers excluded).



## WHO ELSE IS ON MY TEAM?

### ADDITIONAL RESOURCES FOR CASAS

CASA/LA has the following supports for CASA children/youth and CASA volunteers. You should discuss the use of these resources with your supervisor.

**E-Newsletter (The Buzz):** CASA/LA sends a newsletter with information about CASA events, resources and upcoming continuing education opportunities. The Buzz is sent to your CASA email; if you are not receiving the Buzz, please contact the CASA office.

**Baby2Baby:** CASA/LA partners with Baby2Baby, a community organization that gives diapers, clothing and all basic necessities that every child deserves to low-income children aged 0-12. Baby2Baby has a warehouse location in Culver City where CASA volunteers can pick up items for their CASA child and/or family. You may also request special “big-ticket” items such as cribs, booster seats and strollers from Baby2Baby.

**Employee Assistance Program:** CASA/LA contracts with Mutual of Omaha to offer unlimited telephone counseling sessions to volunteers who feel like they need extra emotional support. If you choose to take advantage of this free service, your use of the service will remain confidential. The appointments are available 24/7 by calling (800) 316-2796 (Company Code: CASAOFLA).

**Dillon's Fund:** Each year, CASA board member and CASA volunteer Harriet Zaretsky makes a generous contribution to CASA of Los Angeles in memory of her son, Dillon. Dillon lived a life full of joy and service to others and his parents have kept his memory alive through continued good works in his name. Dillon was adopted and was particularly interested in issues of social justice and healing – a perfect match for CASA.

The purpose of Dillon’s Fund is to prevent children and youth in care from “going without,” as much as possible. Often, CASAs find that the young people they are advocating for need “something” that their caregivers and/or DCFS cannot or will not pay for. These things might include athletic equipment, registration for a summer camp, a musical instrument or many other examples. Dillon’s Fund is set up to pay for these items.

Either you or your advocate supervisor may submit a written request to the director of advocacy including the following:

- Names of the children/youth, CASA and advocate supervisor
- Detailed description of the need
- Other measures that were taken to secure funds (such as requests to DCFS/attempts to gain scholarships)
- Detailed description of where the funds will be used

The director of advocacy will make the decision to authorize the request based on available funds and appropriate requests.

**Gift Cards:** Gift cards for various stores are available for birthdays, holidays, graduations and other special occasions. Availability of denominations and stores varies.

**Quilts:** Quilts are generously hand-crafted and donated to the CASA program by members of the South Bay Quilting Guild and Santa Monica Quilt Guild as part of the Read Me a Quilt Program. Quilts for your CASA children/youth are available in the CASA office on a first come-first served basis. You will be asked to fill out a brief thank you note to send to members of the appropriate Guild for their donation.

**Toys:** Toys are donated from community partners and individuals and are available on a first-come, first served basis at the Monterey Park and Lancaster office locations. The amount and type of toys available vary.

**CASA Connections and Book Clubs:** You can organize social events for other CASAs to help build community and support. These events are organized by CASAs and typically held at a CASA’s home or other another comfortable, private space. If you are interested in hosting a book club or CASA Connection, please contact the CASA office for more information on how to start an event.

## OTHER VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES WITH CASA/LA

The CASA program may need additional support with non-advocacy related activities related to outreach, volunteer support or fundraising. CASA volunteers who are in good standing and who are interested in having other volunteer experiences with the organization can discuss non-advocacy opportunities with their supervisor.



## WHO DOES WHAT WHEN IT'S TIME TO GO?

### VOLUNTEER SEPARATION POLICY

#### RESIGNING FROM CASA

CASA volunteers who are ready to resign from their CASA volunteer role and become a CASA/LA alumni should immediately notify their supervisor and/or the director of training and volunteer relations of their wish to resign. CASA of Los Angeles will no longer receive confidential background about volunteers (DMV records, DOJ information) once you resign. You will no longer have access to ETO and/or their CASA emails when you become CASA alumnus.

If you are interested in returning to CASA, you should contact the director of recruitment and outreach. You will be required to complete a volunteer application and may be asked to take additional training prior to resuming advocacy work.

#### INVOLUNTARY RELIEF

Serious or significant volunteer misconduct may result in immediate relief and resignation of the CASA volunteer. Supervisors will discuss these situations with their team leader and director of advocacy to determine the extent of harm to the child/youth and CASA program reputation and determine appropriate course of action. CASA volunteers may be issued formal warnings or be asked to participate in a volunteer support planning process to address these situations. In instances of severe misconduct, a CASA may be immediately relieved and resigned.

Examples of misconduct by the CASA volunteer include but are not limited to:

- Has committed, been arrested or been convicted of a crime other than a minor traffic offense or other minor citation
- Becomes involved in dependency proceedings in which the CASA volunteer or a member of the CASA volunteer's immediate family is alleged with child abuse or neglect
- Transports a child without a valid driver's license, insurance and/or the use of proper safety restraints
- Transports a child out of county without court permission
- Provides placement to child/youth (taking a child/youth home on a temporary basis or in the process of becoming the appointed child's adoptive parent/legal guardianship/resource parent)
- Gives money or expensive gifts to the child or family
- Gives legal advice or therapeutic counseling
- Violates the CASA conflict of interest policy
- Violates the CASA oath of confidentiality
- Fails to follow mandated reporting protocol
- Violates the CASA code of conduct including:
  - Having inappropriate boundaries
  - Engaging in discriminatory, harassing or other unprofessional behavior toward their CASA child/youth, CASA/LA staff member, other CASA/LA volunteers or a member of the child/youth's team

- Fails to meet the minimum requirements of the CASA role (e.g. attendance at court hearings, timely and complete court reports, and monthly visits with child/youth). This includes CASAs who cannot be reached by their supervisor for 60 or more days

At the time of involuntary resignation, the CASA volunteer must return all case materials to the CASA office. Access to ETO and advocate email will be terminated. All parties will be notified of the volunteer's removal from the case.

CASA volunteers have the right to appeal this decision using the [CASA grievance process](#).

If a former CASA volunteer who has been involuntarily relieved is interested in returning to CASA advocacy, the CASA program will determine if the former volunteer should return to advocacy work. This determination will take into consideration the unique circumstances of the CASA volunteer's history with the CASA program, the CASA volunteer's current situation, and their previous advocacy efforts.

## IS THERE A COMPLAINT BOX?

### GRIEVANCE PROCESS

CASA/LA's policy is to be professional and responsive at all times. However, issues can arise with a CASA volunteer or a member of the CASA staff. Anyone may file a grievance if there are concerns regarding:

- Behavior of a CASA volunteer
- Behavior of a CASA staff member
- Involuntary relief of a CASA volunteer

The first step to submitting a grievance is to call and speak with CASA/LA's chief executive officer at (323) 859-2888. You may also submit a grievance in writing at the address below. The CASA program will hear your grievance, investigate the situation and identify any needed follow-up. Grievances against CASA volunteers are retained in the volunteer's personnel file.

If the grievance concerns a CASA volunteer or staff member, please send a letter along with supporting documents to:

CASA Chief Executive Officer  
201 Centre Plaza Drive, Suite 1100  
Monterey Park, CA 91754

If the grievance pertains to the chief executive officer, the letter should be addressed to:

President, CASA Board of Directors  
201 Centre Plaza Drive, Suite 1100  
Monterey Park, CA 91754

## WHOSE FAULT WAS THAT?

### CASA LIABILITY/INSURANCE

The Volunteer Protection Act of 1997 offers limited legal protections to you as a volunteer, as long as you do not engage in willful or criminal misconduct, gross negligence, reckless misconduct, or a conscious, flagrant indifference to the rights or safety of the individual(s) harmed by you. The Volunteer Protection Act also does not apply if you cause harm by operating a motor vehicle, vessel, aircraft, or other vehicle for which the state requires its operator to possess an operator's license or maintain insurance.

CASA/LA has a volunteer accident policy that covers you in event of an accident while you are performing their volunteer duties.

## WHO DOES THE TALKING HERE?

### STATEMENTS TO THE PUBLIC

The official spokesperson for CASA of Los Angeles organization shall, at all times, be the chief executive officer or the president of the board. All inquiries on cases currently served by CASA volunteers are referred to the director of advocacy. All inquiries from the public, the court, or community organizations and agencies on matters considered sensitive or relating to policy, procedures or issues of CASA are referred to the CEO; and all inquiries from the media (television, radio, press) are referred to the CEO.