

COLONIAL CASA

MAKING A DIFFERENCE



THE ABC's OF BEING A CASA VOLUNTEER

*Imagine the **CASAbilities**.
Think of the **CASAbilities**...
with your support, the **CASAbilities** are endless!!!*

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INTRODUCTION

ROLE OF THE CASA TO THE CHILD

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In our training it's easy for us to say what we are not to the child. We are not Big Brothers or Big Sisters. We are not guardian angels. We are not attorneys speaking the child's wishes or social workers planning for the entire family. We are the "friend of the court," the "eyes and ears" of the court, making independent, objective recommendations regarding the child's best interest.

That's all well and good for training, but how do we deal with a child who NEEDS us? How involved do we become? What criteria do we use to determine if our role is appropriate, legitimate?

I think we look to the child and his or her circumstances to give us the answer. Will we become a meaningful part of that child's life, and then leave, as many other adults in his or her life have done? Who are the primary caretakers? Will we usurp their role? Will our best interest promote fantasies for the child that can never be met in their real world? And most important, whose needs are we meeting, theirs or ours?

Each situation is unique. However, the very best we can do for a child is to insure that the Judge has all the facts before him/her so that he/she can make informed decisions that will be in the child's best interest.

Colonial CASA

Colonial CASA became operational on February 13, 1995. Colonial CASA serves James City and York Counties and the Cities of Williamsburg and Poquoson. The primary impact of Colonial CASA is three-fold. First, providing the court with a reliable and consistent source of information, from an independent perspective, leads to enhanced decision making by the judge.



Without the resources of CASA, unnecessary court delays and continuances may occur. Secondly, continuous monitoring by a volunteer reduces the likelihood of further abuse and neglect and allows for faster response time by the court if such events occur. Finally, CASA serves as an important asset to other agencies, such as the Department of Social Services, in planning to achieve the goal of a permanent home for child victims within 18 months of reported injury.

A CASA IS...



1. An Investigator

As an investigator, it is the job of the CASA to elicit all the information about the child and the child's family. This is done by interviewing all the parties to the case (DSS, G.A.L., the parents and/or guardian, the child if age permits, parents' attorneys) and any secondary sources such as teachers/school personnel, therapists, and physicians that may have knowledge of the child's situation. Once the investigation is completed, the CASA submits a written report to the Court, which includes objective recommendations based on the facts.

2. A Reporter

As a reporter, it is the job of the CASA to ensure that all of the *facts* are before the court. The facts are presented to the court in the form of a written report, which includes the factual information gathered through interviews and record reviews, an assessment of the child's situation, and recommendations regarding placement and provision of services to the child and the child's family.

3. A Monitor

As a monitor, it is the job of the CASA to monitor the family in terms of compliance with the court order. It is also important to monitor the various agencies involved to ensure that they are making a good faith effort in providing services in a timely fashion and are not the cause of unnecessary delays. The child must be monitored in terms of his/her environment and in terms of his/her educational,

therapeutic, and medical needs. If non-compliance is discovered, the CASA contacts the CASA office, DSS, and the GAL.

4. An Advocate

The fourth and most important function of a CASA is that of an advocate. Most children have natural advocates – their parents. In child abuse/neglect cases, the CASA may be the only person who is, first and foremost, the child’s advocate. The CASA is the one person who can speak for the child and voice the child’s needs.

5. A Mandatory Reporter

The Code of Virginia names CASAs as mandatory reporters; and you are, therefore, required by law to report any case of suspected abuse or neglect. If during the course of your work as a CASA you have firsthand knowledge or suspicions that a child is being abused or neglected, you **must** report your concerns immediately to DSS and the CASA office.

JOB RESPONSIBILITIES

1. Complete an intensive independent investigation of the child’s circumstances.
 - a. Interview the child, the child’s family, and any other relevant parties.
 - b. Observe the child’s interactions with family members.
 - c. Review appropriate records and reports.
2. Report findings to the court.

- a. Provide a written report documenting the investigation and providing assessments and recommendations to the court.
 - b. Be present at court hearings concerning the child, as needed.
3. Ensure representation of the child's best interests.
 - a. Attend all court proceedings to ensure that all relevant facts are presented to the court.
 - b. Attend appropriate inter-agency meetings and conferences regarding the child.
 - c. Confer with the child's *guardian ad litem* to assist in protecting the child's legal interests.
 - d. Facilitate the location and acquisition of public assistance whenever possible to aid the family and lessen the time for resolution of the case.
4. Monitor the case after a court hearing or court decision to ensure compliance with court-ordered courses of action.
5. Attend educational courses as required by National CASA.
 - a. Attend New Volunteer Education Program course sessions (@ 42 hours total).
 - b. Complete courtroom monitoring of child abuse and neglect cases (6 hours total).
 - c. Attend Continuing Education Opportunities (12 hours total per year).
6. Consult regularly with the Program staff concerning the assigned case.
 - a. Develop a case plan.
 - b. Discuss preliminary findings.
 - c. Review progress in the case.
 - d. Review reports before submitting to the court.
 - e. Submit Monthly Reports and Court Reports, on time.

7. Participate in evaluation of volunteer performance.
 - a. Evaluate quality of the volunteer's work.
 - b. Assess the volunteer's job satisfaction.
 - c. Set learning and performance objectives.
 - d. Evaluate the quality of supervision received from the program staff.

EDUCATION PROGRAM



Volunteers in the CASA program are required to attend each of the New Volunteer Education Program course sessions. The New Volunteer Education Program is approximately 36 hours in length with approximately 22 hours of independent self-study and on-line training; five 1.5 hours of face-to-face or video conferencing with a CASA Supervisor and 6 hours of courtroom observation. During this time, volunteers will continue to be monitored for program suitability. Upon completion of the New Volunteer Education Program and courtroom observation, the CASA is eligible for Induction and subsequent case assignment.

Continuing Education Units throughout the year are required and can be inclusive of independent study. Attendance at these sessions, or other approved community trainings, must total at least 12 hours per year. The CASA will also receive direct supervision and guidance from the Program staff.

REQUIRED SKILLS/ABILITIES

1. Ability to keep all client and court information confidential.

2. Ability to communicate effectively both orally and in writing.
3. Ability to respect and relate to people from various backgrounds (economic, cultural, educational), and in a variety of settings.
4. Ability to provide your own transportation to conduct the case investigation and participate in court proceedings.
5. Basic computer literacy: Microsoft Word, internet search, and e-mail abilities.
6. Ability to deal with hostility, anger, and other emotional expressions which may be encountered during the case investigation.
7. Ability to maintain objectivity in providing the court with assessments and recommendations to serve the child's best interests.
8. Ability to gather and accurately record factual information.
9. A basic understanding of child development.
10. A basic understanding of family relationships.
11. Be able to commit to at least one year of service.
12. Not travel for more than 30 consecutive days.
13. Possess mature judgment, a high degree of responsibility, and sufficient time to assist in advocating for the best interest of the child;
14. Be 25 years of age.

TIME COMMITMENT

Volunteers are required to commit to the program for one year after induction and may not leave the local area for more than 30 consecutive days without making prior arrangements for the monitoring of their case(s). Volunteers are expected to be available for case assignment and to accept cases upon request of the program staff unless:

- a. a serious conflict in values exists between the CASA and an issue relative to the case;
- b. the CASA has previously informed the program staff of a pre-planned vacation or personal commitment;
- c. the CASA cannot participate due to illness; or
- d. the CASA has requested a temporary respite from service.



CASE ASSIGNMENT

Cases will be assigned by the Program staff with consideration to the suitability of the volunteer's background and education and any prior experience as a CASA. Generally, new CASAs will be assigned to a case with a mentor, a seasoned CASA advocate, to guide them during their first case, until the first court report has been submitted.

Conduct

The CASA role is a unique position for a volunteer. The nature of the problem is very sensitive and the role requires a high level of visibility in the community and frequent interaction with professionals. It is important to observe standards of conduct that will facilitate, rather than restrict, the acceptance of the CASA as a part of the community's skilled team responding to child abuse/neglect. CASAs must always identify themselves to clients and professionals as a Court Appointed Special Advocate from the Colonial CASA Program of the Ninth District Juvenile and Domestic Relations Court. Picture identification cards are provided to each Advocate, which should be presented for clarification of identification.

Advocates must:

- Maintain contact with the Program Staff, communicating on matters of progress, problems, general direction, and desired outcome of cases.
- Accept supervision from the Program Staff, including direction, guidance, job description, technical assistance, and policy statement.
- Demonstrate an understanding of professional relationships and the ability to receive constructive criticism.
- Refrain from personal criticism of other CASAs or professionals involved in the system.
- Dress in accepted attire.

- Refrain from use of drugs or alcohol during or prior to contacts made as a part of the CASA role.
- Demonstrate courtesy and respect for any persons contacted on behalf of the program (clients, professionals, and collateral sources).
- Resolve conflicts constructively.
- Use designated channels of communication; complaints **must** go through the Executive Director.
- Complete assignments and submit reports within allotted time frames and in the manner prescribed by the Program Staff.
- In situations involving imminent danger to the child, the CASA will contact DSS and the police department immediately. The CASA must document date, time, place, persons involved, actions taken, and persons contacted. The CASA Program Staff should be contacted as soon as possible.

CASAs serving the Colonial CASA program should not provide direct services to any parties that could:

- Lead to a conflict of interest or liability problems; or,
- Cause a child or family to become dependent upon the CASA for services that should be provided by other agencies or organizations.

Examples of *inappropriate CASA practices* are the following:

1. Taking a child home or sheltering a child in the

home;

2. Giving legal advice or therapeutic counseling;
3. Making placement arrangements for the child;
4. Giving money or expensive gifts to the child or the family.



**Under no
circumstances will a
CASA:**

1. *Transport a child or family member of a child;*
2. *Attempt to intervene in any physically violent situation;*
3. *Take the child off the premises;*
4. *Provide shelter in the CASA's home; or*
5. *Fail to report the child's whereabouts*

y. A Volunteer with the Colonial CASA Program shall not be related to any parties involved in the case or be employed in a position and/or agency that might result in a conflict of interest. If during the course of serving on a case, a CASA becomes aware of a potential conflict of interest, the Volunteer shall immediately disclose such conflict to the Executive Director.

A Volunteer with the Colonial CASA Program may not engage in activities which jeopardize the safety of the child, the integrity of the program, or the objectivity of the volunteer; nor may the CASA engage in activities which are likely to result in

conflict of interest or expose the program or the CASA to criminal or civil liability. A CASA will be given a copy of and abide by the National CASA Code of Ethics.

The Colonial CASA Volunteer will not, without explicit authority from either the Board of Directors or the Executive Director, represent herself/himself as a spokesperson for the organization. Any media announcements, interviews, etc. relating to the Colonial CASA program shall be approved in advance by the Executive Director.

CODE OF ETHICS

The CASA Volunteer shall support the Constitution of the United States and the Constitution and of the Commonwealth of Virginia.

1. The CASA Volunteer shall recognize that he/she occupies a position of responsibility and shall faithfully perform all of the duties pertaining to his/her position as **Court Appointed Special Advocate** to the best of his/her knowledge and ability.
 - a. The CASA Volunteer is an officer of the court, the voice for a child and a representative of the community and has a responsibility to each of these three entities to assist the court in determining the best interest of the child.
 - b. The CASA Volunteer should not neglect the responsibility vested in him or her and should strive to achieve the highest standards at all times.

- c. The CASA Volunteer should be careful not to provide services that he or she is not qualified to provide. Although it is appropriate for the Volunteer to give common sense responses or instructions on topics including budgets, nutrition, discipline, etc., it is not appropriate for the volunteer to provide therapy, counseling, legal advice or to draw professional conclusions.
 - d. The CASA Volunteer should refrain from becoming involved in domestic relations and criminal proceedings or the aspects of those proceedings related to the CASA case and should focus on the treatment plan and the status of the child.
2. The CASA Volunteer shall not breach the trust vested in him or her but shall recognize, respect, and protect the confidentiality of the cases assigned to the Volunteer and the information he or she shall learn and report to the Court in that capacity.
- a. The CASA Volunteer must at all times preserve the confidentiality of the information he or she learns during the CASA case.
 - b. The CASA Volunteer should gather information, but not dispense information, to anyone other than the CASA staff, the G.A.L., or the court by means of written report and testimony. The CASA report is not public information and cannot be disclosed to others by the CASA Volunteer.
 - c. The CASA Volunteer should recall that the parties to the case are the child, Department

of Social Services, the G.A.L., and the parents or significant other adults acting in a parental role for the child. The parties to the case do not include foster parents, teachers, relatives, interveners, neighbors, etc.

- d. The CASA Volunteer should consider information received by individual parties, attorneys, caseworkers, therapists, neighbors, doctors, etc. to be information that is to be kept confidential between the Volunteer and the information source. This information can be included in the Volunteer's report but is otherwise received as background and should not be repeated to other parties outside the CASA program, the G.A.L., the Social Worker or the court.
- e. The overriding responsibility of protecting the confidentiality of information about an individual child is founded largely on the critical impact such information could have on the child's future if it were to become public. The CASA Volunteer should be mindful of this dangerous potential at all times.
- f. The CASA Volunteer, in speaking to friends and acquaintances outside of the program, may tell interested individuals the types of cases the Volunteer is working on, whether the child is at home and whether there are siblings. However, under no circumstance can the Volunteer disclose identifying or personal information such as names, geographic location of the child, age, sex or other details about the child or his/her family.

- g. The CASA Volunteer may not remove from the CASA office any written records without the express permission of the CASA staff. The CASA Volunteer should return all information that he/she has gathered and any printed matter or notations relevant to any and all cases to which that Volunteer has been assigned at the close of each case, or if the Volunteer's service to CASA comes to an end.
- 3. The CASA Volunteer shall recognize that the principle on which that Volunteer's responsibility is founded is the desire to protect the best interests of the child.
 - a. This principle includes the Volunteer's evaluation of whether the child's placement is appropriate, whether the basic physical, emotional, and spiritual needs of the child are being met, and whether the treatment plan is adequate and feasible.
 - b. The Volunteer should recall that, although the best interests of the child is the focus of the Volunteer's inquiry, what the child wants or believes he/she wants is not necessarily in the child's best interest; moreover, the Volunteer is not merely an echo of the child's spoken desires.
- 4. The CASA Volunteer shall support the orientation of the Commonwealth of Virginia and the CASA Program that the goal of the Program is to work toward reuniting the family and to do all that is possible in that effort.
 - a. The CASA Volunteer should remember at all times that every child is entitled by law to be raised by and with his family except

when the conditions in that family are not conducive to a safe nurturing environment.

- b. The Volunteer should recognize that the physical, emotional and spiritual development and safety of the child in each case are paramount and the Volunteer should also consider whether the treatment program is fair to the parents and whether they have the capacity to fulfill those requirements, whether they can be retrained and whether the plan is reasonable. If there is no compliance with the treatment plan, the Volunteer should inquire why there is a lack of compliance and whether the system is doing what it should to help the family comply.
5. The CASA Volunteer shall not act as Judge and Jury but shall investigate, evaluate, and make recommendations by written report to the Court based upon the facts.
- a. The CASA Volunteer, on the first contact with the parties or players in the case, should tell each person contacted that the Volunteer is acting as a child advocate to report to the court, both orally and in writing, the information gathered by the Volunteer.
 - b. The CASA Volunteer should repeatedly look for problems and solutions, look for successes as well as failures, and determine whether the information sought and received will be helpful to the court.
 - c. The CASA Volunteer's reports should be based on first-hand observation or the professional conclusion of experts. The

conclusion and recommendations of the Volunteer must have solid factual foundation, and must be supported by clear, logical reasoning and not vague indefinite feelings.

- d. Remember at all times, in an abuse and neglect case, the judge must decide whether to permanently terminate a parent's parental rights to his or her child. A decision as serious and long lasting as this one must be founded on comprehensive research, accurate reporting, thorough and unbiased investigation and frank common sense input from the CASA Volunteer. Anything less would be a disservice to the parents, the child and the community.

COLONIAL CASA POLICY STATEMENTS

Please note: The following is an abbreviated version of the Colonial CASA Program Policy Statements. It has been altered for the specific purpose of inclusion in this booklet and contains information pertinent to the requirements, responsibilities, and program expectations of the CASA advocate. The complete version is included in the New Volunteer Education Program Manual.

Mission Statement

All children deserve to live in a safe and permanent home. Colonial CASA provides child advocacy services by way of well-trained community volunteers who advocate on behalf of community children that have been found to be abused and neglected. Colonial CASA

works to ensure that while these children are within the court's supervision, they are safe, receiving the necessary services in a timely manner, and ultimately will live in a safe and permanent home.

Screening of CASAs

Applicants must successfully complete screening procedures which consist of a written application, background checks, personal references, a personal interview and review during the training program:

1. Each applicant must complete a written application containing information about educational/employment/volunteer background, and personal experience with child abuse and neglect.
2. Each applicant must sign a release of information for both criminal and Child Protective Services checks. An applicant shall be rejected if he/she refuses to sign a release of information for appropriate law enforcement checks.
3. If the applicant has lived in another state within the past five years, a record of his/her criminal history and Central Registry (CPS) history must be obtained.
4. Each applicant must have three references who will speak to their character, judgment, and suitability for the position of a CASA.
5. Each applicant shall be thoroughly interviewed

by Program staff. Applicants will be observed throughout training by Colonial CASA staff and trainers. A continuing assessment of the applicant's abilities to be an effective CASA will be made at the end of the New Volunteer Education Program.

The CASA Program staff will review and screen each applicant's suitability to be a CASA with the Colonial CASA Program. Applicants will be notified within one week of the panel review of their rejection or acceptance as a CASA. Those applicants who are accepted will be given at least two weeks advance notice of the swearing-in ceremony conducted by the juvenile court Judge.

6. Prior to actual case assignment, prospective CASAs shall complete the following:
 - Initial written application and screening interview;
 - Reference checks;
 - Criminal records check;
 - Child Protective Services records check;
 - New Volunteer Education Program;
 - Closing interview and notification;
 - Statement of Confidentiality and Statement of Commitment;
 - Acknowledgment of Drug Free Workplace Policy
 - Swearing-in ceremony.

New Volunteer Education (Training)

New Volunteer Education

Volunteers in the CASA program are required to attend each of the New Volunteer Education Program sessions. The New Volunteer Education Program is approximately 36 hours in length including 6 hours of courtroom observation. During this time, volunteers will continue to be monitored for program suitability. Upon completion of the New Volunteer Education Program and courtroom observation, the CASA is eligible for Induction and subsequent case assignment.

1. To ensure that volunteers are fully prepared to perform their role as a CASA and to assume the accompanying responsibilities, each volunteer must participate in a minimum of 36 hours of training, through the New Volunteer Education Program, prior to being accepted as a CASA. Credit may not be given towards this 36 hours of training for any previous training obtained by a volunteer prior to application to the Colonial CASA program. **Attendance at training is mandatory.** Absences will be excused only by the permission of the Executive Director.
2. The initial curriculum for a CASA will, at a minimum, include instruction about the following:
 - The delineation of the roles and responsibilities of a CASA, focusing upon the rationale for family preservation/
permanency planning discussion of the basic

principles of advocacy, distinction between the appropriate and inappropriate activities for a CASA, level of commitment required of a CASA involved in a case and the performance expectations, review of the case assignment process and procedures, differentiation between the role of the CASA and other system personnel, and a comprehensive list of the resources available and when and how to utilize these resources.

- The importance of confidentiality in the work of CASAs

Proper recording techniques,

- Scope of state and federal statutes about the confidentiality of records.
- The dynamics of cultural diversity and the development of cultural sensitivity.
- The nature of child abuse and neglect, the impact of drugs/alcohol on the incidence of abuse, identification of the family conditions and patterns which lead to and perpetuate abuse and neglect, and discussions about how social services responds to and assesses reports of abuse and neglect.
- The general principles and concepts of child and family development.
- Permanency planning in the context of state law with consideration of the state's position on

family preservation, family reunification, and alternative permanent plans for a child who cannot be returned to the home.

➤ Basic communication and interview skills, with guidelines for dealing with sensitive issues and the interaction between the CASA and other parties to the case, and practice in conducting interviews and writing reports.

➤ The juvenile court process which should include an outline of the various types of court events, what transpires at each event, the CASA's role at the event, who to contact when there is a question about the court process, a glossary of legal terminology, how to prepare for a hearing, and how to prepare a report to the court.

➤ The development of advocacy skills, such as negotiation and conflict management, and how they may be used by the CASA to improve the conditions for a child.

➤ As part of the New Volunteer Education Program, volunteers will observe six (6) hours of actual court proceedings similar to those in which they would be involved as a CASA. This observation is above and beyond the 36 hours included in the classroom courses.

3. The Colonial CASA program shall provide volunteers in the New Volunteer

Education Program with the following written materials:

- Copies of pertinent laws, regulations, policies;
- Statement of commitment form clearly stating the minimum expectation of the volunteer once trained;
- A New Volunteer Education Manual;
- An introduction to the Virginia and National CASA Associations.

Continuing Education

The program operates on the philosophy that trained volunteers are capable of representing the best interest of children in court. **CASAs are required to attend 12 hours of continuing education each year** in subjects relevant to their work as CASAs. Meetings, providing volunteers an opportunity to discuss cases and program issues with staff and fellow volunteers, are scheduled the 2nd Monday of every month, and count toward the 12 Continuing Education hours per year.

Continuing Education opportunities within the community are announced to the volunteers.

Attendance at these sessions, or other approved community trainings, is expected, to achieve a total of at least 12 hours per year. A record of attendance at Continuing Education opportunities will be kept in each CASA's file.

The CASA will also receive direct supervision and guidance from the Program Director and other program staff.

ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF VOLUNTEERS

A CASA with the Colonial CASA Program shall recognize that he/she occupies a position of responsibility and shall faithfully perform all duties pertaining to his/her position to the best of his/her ability and knowledge.

A Colonial CASA Volunteer's duties include, among others, the following activities:

1. Maintain complete written records about the case, including appointments, interviews and information gathered about the child, usually in the form of the monthly monitoring reports;
2. Report any incidents or suspicions of suspected child abuse and neglect to the Colonial CASA Program Director and the social worker assigned to the case; Interview parties involved in the case, including the child. Such interviews with the child, however, will not include interviewing the child about the specific abuse or neglect which took place;
3. Monitor the case by visiting the child at least once a month to observe whether the child's essential needs are being met, and whether the judge's orders are being followed;

4. Participate in planning or treatment team meetings involving the child in order to keep informed of the child's permanent plan;
5. Maintain confidentiality of all case information; and
6. Remain actively involved in the case until formally discharged by the court.

A volunteer with Colonial CASA may not engage in activities which jeopardize the safety of the child, the integrity of the program, or the objectivity of the volunteer; nor may the volunteer engage in activities which are likely to result in a conflict of interest or expose the program or the volunteer to criminal or civil liability. All CASAs are given copies of and abide by the National CASA Code of Ethics.

All volunteers with Colonial CASA are given copies of and comply with Colonial CASA's Confidentiality Policy.

1. The Colonial CASA Program and the Court in which we operate requires volunteers and paid staff to comply with established confidentiality standards. Those standards include refraining from discussing any aspect of the client's case in public; not disclosing names or identifying information regarding clients, their family members, or their situation; not discussing or disclosing information gathered from one collateral source to anyone other than CASA staff and other Court personnel, the social services caseworker, the child's *Guardian Ad Litem* (GAL), and the Judge.

2. Exceptions to the confidentiality requirement are as follows:

- a. When the client gives written permission to the release of information;
- b. When child abuse or neglect is suspected, it must be reported to Child Protective Services and the Executive Director;
- c. When maintaining confidentiality serves to assist the client in the commission of a crime, unlawful act, or violation of a court order; and,
- d. When you are subpoenaed to testify in Court.

Members of Colonial CASA will not, without explicit authority from either the Board of Directors or the Executive Director, represent herself/himself as a spokesperson for the organization. Any media announcements, interviews, etc. relating to the Colonial CASA program shall be approved in advance by the Executive Director.

A Colonial CASA volunteer shall not be related to any parties involved in the case or be employed in a position and/or agency that might result in a conflict of interest. If during the course of serving on a case, a CASA volunteer becomes aware of a potential conflict of interest, the volunteer shall immediately disclose such conflict to the Executive Director.

All CASAs must report any suspected incidents of

child abuse to the local department of social services and to CASA program staff. In the event that a CASA or any member of the Program Staff becomes aware of any incident of suspected child abuse and neglect during the course of working with assigned cases, such incident will be reported immediately to the local Department of Social Services, Child Protective Services Unit. During working hours the report will be made directly to the CPS Unit, and then to the CASA Program Staff. After working hours, the report should be made to the Child Abuse and Neglect Hotline number (1-800-552-7096) and then to the CASA Program Staff. The CASA volunteer shall document events immediately, including date, time, place, persons involved, what actions were taken, persons contacted.

Case Investigation

CASAs are responsible for the timely arrangement and conduction of interviews/meetings. The purpose of these interviews is to observe and ascertain the child's circumstances; determine whether a plan has been created for the child; determine whether appropriate services are being provided to the child; and develop a basis for all recommendations to the Judge regarding the child's best interest in relation to the child's permanent plan.

As part of the case investigation, the CASA shall:

- 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 and investigate alternative placement, such as relatives or friends, when necessary;

- Assure that the child's best interests are being represented at every stage of the case, attend court hearings, and make a written recommendation to the court on what decision is best for the child;
- Assist in the implementation of any plan prescribed by the court (whether recommended in the CASA report or not);
- Participate in any planning or treatment team meetings involving the child in order to keep informed of the child's permanent plan;
- If, during the course of the investigation, the CASA develops information or identifies resources that may assist the DSS caseworker or GAL in developing a coordinated service plan that furthers the best interest of the child, such information should be conveyed to the DSS caseworker and/or the GAL;

The CASA must keep written records of ALL contacts, whether written or oral, made in the course of conducting the case investigation.

Before the 1st business day of each month, the CASA will submit the Monthly Monitoring Report to the CASA office indicating

- The number of hours devoted in the previous month and the number of total hours on the case;
- The number of contacts made to each of the involved parties;
- The number of miles traveled for each face to face meeting;

A brief summary of the CASA's action and progress Any suggestions for changes to the CASA Investigation Plan; and

Other information that the CASA believes is useful to understanding developments in the case.

Preparation of Written Report to the Court

At least 10 days prior to the scheduled hearing date at which the CASA volunteer's recommendation is to be considered, the CASA will submit a written report to his/her case Supervisor. The report shall be submitted by email. (A Report Format is included in each volunteer's case file). The report will be reviewed, edited, and reproduced by the CASA staff. The report will be delivered to the Court at least 5 business days prior to the date of the scheduled hearing. Distribution of the report to the parties is the responsibility of J&DR Clerk only.

Case Monitoring

Between court hearings, the CASA will monitor the case developments as requested by the Court and submit Monthly Monitoring Reports the CASA Program. Monitoring will include:

Maintaining regular monthly contact with the child;

Maintaining regular monthly contact with the parents and/or guardians or foster parents;

Maintaining regular monthly contact with the GAL;

Maintaining regular monthly contact with the DSS caseworker; and

Conducting additional interviews or investigations as circumstances may require.

ETHICAL CONFLICTS FOR CASAS

CASAs working with parents face a potential conflict between the delicate trust relationship they work so hard to establish with the family and their obligation to protect children. Clients often tell volunteers and professionals differing, even contradictory, accounts of their experiences. A parent may feel that revealing certain information to a professional would result in punitive action, such as the removal of a child. Because of this concern, parents sometimes tell a caseworker only what they think the worker wants to hear. They may treat the CASA in the same manner, because they believe that the volunteer is simply a "spy" for the caseworker or agency.

Parents and children who trust a CASA may reveal things they would not dare say to anyone else, especially if they accept the CASA as a personal friend. The CASA may then be faced with a dilemma -- to whom to be true -- the agency, the family, the parents, or the child.

If professionals are going to be able to depend on CASAs, they must be able to trust them to speak up when a child is endangered. The primary mission of a Child Protective Agency is to protect children. This mission must not be compromised in the interest of rehabilitating parents.

In Virginia, the CASA, even though a private citizen, *is required by law* to report suspected abuse or neglect, or he/she might be compelled to testify in Court against a parent even while still committed to working with the family. Where this conflict occurs, parents and CASA are informed of their rights and obligations so that the best interests of the program, the family, and the child can be served. CASA must face their responsibilities as a friend of the family but also as a protector of the family's children.

Most cases do not involve such a clear-cut conflict between commitment to the family and requirements of the state law. Instead, the basic conflict is usually in terms of what information the volunteer should share with the supervisor or agency, and what information should remain confidential. Resolution of this conflict is much more difficult. At least two factors should be considered:

- A volunteer, working for the Child Protective Service Agency, represents the agency to the family and thus must always be responsible to that agency.
- A volunteer must always place the safety of the child above the relationship with the parents.
- to date;
- Any suggestions for changes to the CASA Investigation Plan; and
- Other information that the CASA believes is useful to understanding developments in the case.



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