
ADVOCATE CASE PLAN OUTLINE

Step 1. Advocate receives email/phone call regarding case

Step 2. Advocate and advocate supervisor meet to discuss assignment of case

Step 3. Read case file

- a. Read all official documents, as well as any other additional items contained in the document tab of Optima
i. **Petition** – sent out immediately with the Affidavit and Order Setting Hearing

NOTICE: THIS DOCUMENT CONTAINS SENSITIVE DATA		
CAUSE NO. 18CPXXXX		
IN THE INTEREST OF	§	IN THE DISTRICT COURT OF
	§	
JOHN DOE	§	GALVESTON COUNTY, TEXAS
	§	
A CHILD	§	306 TH JUDICIAL DISTRICT
ORIGINAL PETITION FOR PROTECTION OF A CHILD, FOR CONSERVATORSHIP, AND FOR TERMINATION IN SUIT AFFECTING THE PARENT-CHILD RELATIONSHIP AND ORDER SETTING HEARING		

1. Cause number
2. Name of child/children in the case
3. Sex of child/children in the case
4. Birthdate of child/children in the case
5. Request for temporary orders for protection of child and temporary managing conservatorship (TMC)

- ii. **Affidavit** – written by CPS (Investigator or FBSS)

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IN THE INTEREST OF	§	IN THE DISTRICT COURT OF
	§	
JOHN DOE	§	GALVESTON COUNTY, TEXAS
	§	
A CHILD	§	306 TH JUDICIAL DISTRICT
AFFIDAVIT		

CASE PLAN OUTLINE

1. Cause number
2. Name of child/children in the case
3. Date of birth of child/children in the case
4. Place of birth of child/children in the case
5. Places the child has lived
6. Family members
7. Allegations
8. Facts necessitating removal of child
9. CPS history of each parent/adult in home
10. Criminal history of each parent/adult in home
11. Conclusion – reason for removing after interventions

iii. **Order Setting Hearing**

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CAUSE NO. 18CPXXXX		
IN THE INTEREST OF	§	IN THE DISTRICT COURT OF
JOHN DOE	§	GALVESTON COUNTY, TEXAS
A CHILD	§	306 TH JUDICIAL DISTRICT
ORDER SETTING HEARING		

1. Date for temporary orders to be set
2. Appointment of ad litem
3. Appointment of CASA*
4. Appointment of attorneys for parent(s)
5. Appointment of mediator
6. Notice of dates of pre-adversary mediation, adversary hearing, status hearing, 2 permanency hearings

iv. ***Order Appointing CASA** - If case was assigned before 2017, CASA may not have been appointed as guardian ad litem in the Order Setting Hearing. If this is the case, the Order Appointing CASA will be necessary for receiving information instead of the Order Setting Hearing

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CAUSE NO. 18CPXXXX		
IN THE INTEREST OF	§	IN THE DISTRICT COURT OF
JOHN DOE	§	GALVESTON COUNTY, TEXAS
A CHILD	§	306 TH JUDICIAL DISTRICT
ORDER APPOINTING CASA		
<p>1. Appointment of Guardian Ad Litem</p> <p>The Court finds it is in the child/ren’s best interest that _____, previously appointed as attorney AND guardian ad litem is hereby relieved of the role of guardian ad litem. _____ shall continue solely in the capacity of an attorney ad litem.</p> <p>The court appoints CASA, as guardian ad litem of the child/children. As such, an approved Volunteer Advocate, may appear at court hearings as an advocate on behalf of the child/ren as pursuant to § 107.002, Texas Family Code.</p>		
<p>2. Release of Confidential Information</p> <p>The Court finds that it is in the best interests of the child/ren of the subject of this suit, is essential to the administration of justice, and is not likely to endanger the life or safety of any person to release all files, reports, records, communications, and working papers used or developed in the investigation or in the providing of services to the child/ren by the Department of Family and Protective Services, the District Clerk, and any other entity possessing records related to the above child/ren to the appointed Volunteer Advocate.</p> <p>IT IS THEREFORE ORDERED that the Department of Family and Protective Services, the District Clerk, and any other entity possessing records related to the above child/ren make this information available, without the necessity of editing any information mad confidential by § 261.201 of the Texas Family Code, to the appointed Volunteer Advocate.</p>		

CASE PLAN OUTLINE

- v. **Notice of Advocate Appointment** – a document created by CASA to connect Advocates to the case they serve (provided to all advocates)



January 1, 2018

306th District Court
600 59th Street
Galveston, TX 77551

CASA of Galveston County has assigned _____
as the Court Appointed Special Advocate on _____
Docket # _____ as of _____

This is a notice for the Court Case File.

- b. Review all associated parties in Optima
- c. Mark all court dates in personal calendar
- d. Record placement contact information
- e. Document time spent reviewing files in Optima (case research)

Step 4. Recordkeeping

- a. To ensure proper recordkeeping, keep track of all contacts in Optima
 - i. Date of contact
 - ii. Name of person contacted or document that is the source of information
 - iii. Information obtained from contact
- b. Document mileage for contact (distance to/from contact, if any)

Step 5. Advocate sends out assignment notification

- a. Introduce self/advocate to all parties in the case
 - i. In email, include introduction of self, provide best contact information
 - ii. Parties may include: CPS caseworker, parent attorneys, attorney ad litem
 - 1. Ask parents attorneys if they would like to be present when speaking with their client
 - 2. Connect with Ad Litem and discuss their view of the child's placement
- b. Document contact in Optima (caseworker contact, attorney contact)

Step 6. Visit with CPS Caseworker

- a. Schedule face-to-face and obtain information:
 - i. Current family goal
 - ii. Child's well-being in placement

CASE PLAN OUTLINE

- iii. Collateral information – those connected to the family
 - iv. Previous case information not in Optima
 - v. Contact for doctors that have examined children not in Optima
 - vi. Parental cooperation with service plan/follow-through
 - vii. Visitation schedule, supervised or unsupervised?
 - viii. Sibling visits, supervised or unsupervised?
- b. Document contact in Optima (caseworker contact)

Step 7. Visit the child/children

- a. Using the contact information for placement found in Optima, call and schedule an initial visit with child/children. Record this phone call in Optima (placement contact)
- b. Introduce self and explain your role to the child in age appropriate language
 - i. Tell the child that you cannot keep secrets from the court and the information you receive will be reported to the court.
- c. Ask questions appropriate to child's age/development level
 - i. This is only a guideline for meeting with the child, for smaller children reading a book, playing a game, or coloring can assist with establishing trust
 - ii. Ask the child if they like where they are living, if not, why?
 - 1. Find out if they feel safe where they are.
 - 2. Ask if they understand why they are there. If they do not, explain it to them.
 - iii. Find out what the child wants to happen. We need to understand their wishes, even though it may not line up with advocating for their best interest.
 - 1. Find out if the child wants to go live with parents, but if possible, do not ask directly. It tells you more about the desire to go home if they tell you without being asked. If they share without being asked, be sure to indicate this in your notes.
 - 2. If the child does want to go home, find out if they would feel safe at home, and if they would not feel safe, find out what change needs to occur for them to feel safe going home.
 - iv. Find out if the child thinks the family has any problems that need to be fixed. If so, what are they?
 - 1. Give some feedback about what is realistic to expect to change and what is not realistic, and how long change may take.
 - 2. Be sure not to criticize the parent(s) or give the impression that they should give up on their parent(s).
 - v. Ask the child if they feel that they have any problems that they want to work on.
 - 1. Be careful about what you say that you can do and be very realistic with the child about what is in your power to change and what is not.
 - 2. Make sure to follow-up with child/children about what you said that you would do.
 - vi. Ask if there is anything that the child needs.
 - vii. Ask if the child is happy.
 - viii. Ask the child about their health.
 - 1. Do they currently take any medication?
 - a. If so, find out what medication and why are they taking it.
 - b. This information will complement the information from the foster parents and prescribing physician.
 - ix. Ask the child if they are visiting their parents.

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1. If so, how often? Is it supervised? By whom? How does the child feel about these visits?
2. Without asking directly, if possible, find out if they would like to see the parent(s) more or less.
- x. Ask if there any relatives the child would like to see
 1. Get names, contact information, addresses
 2. If they do not know this information, make a note to follow up with parents or caseworker to obtain contact information.
- xi. Find out how school is going.
 1. Ask about grades, attendance, homework, friends
 2. Find out if they have any problems at school. If so, who do they talk to at school about these problems?
- xii. Find out what the child enjoys doing
- xiii. Note the child's demeanor
- xiv. Observe the child's room at the placement
- d. Do not take notes while visiting with the child, but record important information after leaving the child (in your car)
- e. Record notes about visit in Optima (child contact)

Step 8. Interview Foster Parents, Caregiver, Case Manager

- a. It is important to check in with placements. You are not only assessing the placement as appropriate, but also whether the caregivers are appropriate. Half of visits (6) each year must occur at the child's placement.
 - i. Find out how the child/children are doing in the placement, and whether they are having difficulty adjusting to living there.
 1. If the placement is a foster placement, ask for name of foster agency and case manager's contact information
 2. If the placement is a kinship placement, ask for kinship worker and contact information
 - ii. Ask for the child's daily schedule
 - iii. Find out about eating habits
 - iv. Ask about child's sleeping
 1. What is their sleep schedule?
 2. Does the child wet the bed, have nightmares, have issues with going to sleep/staying asleep?
 - v. Find out if the child/children ask about their parents.
 - vi. Ask about parent visits.
 1. Are they visiting their parents?
 - a. If so, where and how often?
 - b. Are the visits supervised? By whom?
 - c. How does the placement think the children are feeling about parent visits?
 - d. Are there any issues before or after visits? If so, what are the problems? Have they discussed these issues with CPS caseworker or therapist?
 2. If they are not visiting, why?
 - vii. Find out if there been behavioral problems in the home or at school (i.e., discipline problems, skipping school, missing curfew, running away, acting out, being sexually active, temper tantrums, fighting, hurting self/others)
 1. If so, find out if the placement aware of anything that might be triggering such behavior.
 - a. Has the child said what is bothering them?

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- b. Does the behavior occur only at certain times? (e.g., before or after visit with parent)
- 2. Do not lead anyone into blaming all behavior problems on parental visits. Keep in mind, a certain amount of disruption is likely to happen around visits anyway.
- viii. Find out about the child/children's health and whether there are any medical issues that need attention. Record names of service providers (doctor, dentist, therapist)
- ix. Find out if the child taking any medications.
 - 1. If so, ask what they are.
 - 2. Look at medicine bottles and record type, name, dosage and frequency, prescribing doctor, find out why it is prescribed from placement
- x. Ask about the child's mental health and find out if they are seeing a therapist. If so, record name and contact information of therapist
- xi. Find out if the foster parents happy with this placement.
 - 1. Do they have problems with the child/children?
 - 2. Are they willing to have them remain in their care?
- b. Record notes about visit in Optima (placement contact)

Step 9. Contact Schools

- a. Obtain contact information for each child's school.
 - i. Elementary school – contact the teacher(s), and if a child has an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) contact the Special Education Coordinator as well
 - ii. Middle school or high school – contact the school counselor, and if a child has an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) contact the Special Education Coordinator as well
- b. Discuss child's progress, behavior, etc.
 - i. Ask how the child/children are doing academically
 - 1. Ask for their academic records
 - 2. Find out how this compares to before they were removed
 - ii. Find out about child's attendance
 - 1. Ask for attendance records
 - 2. Find out how this compares to before they were removed
 - iii. Ask about behavioral problems in school (i.e., truancy, detention, suspension, fights, acting out)
 - iv. Find out if child is handing in homework
 - v. Ask if the child has an Individualized Education Plan (IEP)
 - 1. Obtain a copy
 - 2. Find out when it was last reviewed
 - 3. Find out when it is going to be reviewed next
 - 4. Ask to be invited to any educational meetings and sent copies of all progress reports/report cards when issued
 - vi. Find out if they feel there are any unmet educational, social, or psychological needs
 - vii. Ask if the child is seeing a school therapist or guidance counselor on a regular basis. If so, get contact information so that you can follow up.
 - viii. Find out if the parents are active in the child's education
 - 1. Do they ever come to the school to speak with teachers/counselors about child?
 - 2. Are they attending meetings about the child?
 - ix. Find out if the individual has any concerns about the child/children

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- x. Ask if the child/children have ever expressed any fear/concern about their home situation.
- c. Record notes about conversations in Optima (education) and upload any documents obtained to documents tab

Step 10. Contact Physicians

- a. Includes medical, dental, vision care, and any other medical providers the child/children see
- b. Find out date of last examination
 - i. Record type of examination, doctor, outcome, and any prescriptions provided
 - ii. Find out if there are any concerns or follow up necessary. Ask if referrals were made.
- c. Find out date of last office visit (other than annual or bi-annual visits) and the reason for the visit.
 - i. If there was a medical problem that precipitated a visit to the doctor, be sure to explore thoroughly. (ex., if the child was admitted to the hospital with head injuries, it is important to know how the doctor thinks these were caused)
 - ii. Advocates are not responsible for doing the investigation and can refer to doctor's report if one is available, but if other parties fail to follow up on such detail you can do so.
- d. Find out if child/children are up to date on immunizations, and if not, find out what is outstanding.
- e. Inquire about the child's overall health and if there are any medical problems which need attention.
- f. Find out if the child is growing normally, and recommendations from the doctor if not
- g. Ask about the child's medical history (ex.: if they are being brought in repeatedly for the same problems, have never seen a doctor before, or if medications were prescribed and not administered)
 - i. If prescribed medications, call the prescribing doctor or psychiatrist and ask about the type of medication, name of medication, reason for taking it, dosage and frequency.
- h. Record notes about conversations in Optima (doctors are physical/behavioral health, psychiatrists are psychological/mental health) and upload any documents to documents tab

Step 11. Contact Therapist(s)

- a. Find out the diagnosis, goals, and attendance of sessions
 - i. Ask about when therapy began, and how many times they have seen the child
 - ii. Inquire about any missed appointments and if there was a known reason for missing
 - iii. Find out who brings child to the appointments
 - iv. Find out how long the therapist expects therapy to continue, and the diagnosis/prognosis, as well as any recommendations they have for the child/children
- b. Find out if parents are participating in sessions, and whether they are conducting individual therapy, family therapy, or both.
 - i. If a parent is participating, find out how the therapist feels the child is doing.
 - ii. Ask about the goals of this therapy and who holds responsibility for these goals
- c. Find out if a psychological assessment has been completed
 - i. Obtain a copy
 - ii. Determine recommendations from the assessment
- d. Find out if the child has mentioned any relatives to which they are attached, or if they mention anyone with whom they have serious problems/concerns.
- e. Ask if the child has expressed concern about returning to their home situation.
- f. Inquire about any medications for mental health issues
 - i. List name of medication and what the medicine does, as well as prescribing doctor

CASE PLAN OUTLINE

- g. Record notes about conversations in Optima (psychological/mental health) and upload any documents to documents tab

Step 12. Interview Parents

- a. Coordinate with attorneys if they wish to be present. Submit your interview questions to your Advocate Supervisor prior to the interview to see if they have additional question suggestions.
 - i. Explain your role as a CASA to the parent.
 - ii. Ask the parent to explain the events that led to the opening of the CPS case
 - iii. Obtain family history
 - 1. Ask about their upbringing as a child, education, employment, skill training.
 - 2. Ask about family, extended family, supports, friends, organizations they belong to.
 - 3. Find out what the parent sees as their strengths and ask what they need to strengthen within their family to overcome the events that led to the removal.
 - iv. Find out about parent's goals.
 - 1. Find out if they want their child/children back and what they think needs to be done for that to happen.
 - 2. Ask what steps they are going to take to make certain that these things happen.
 - 3. When do they think this will realistically be accomplished?
 - v. Find out if they have been visiting with their child/children.
 - 1. If so, how often?
 - a. Find out how long visits are, if they are supervised, and if so, by whom.
 - b. Ask how they feel visits are going.
 - c. Find out if there are any behavioral or discipline problems.
 - d. Ask if they are bringing snacks, activities, or supplies to visits.
 - 2. If the parents are not visiting the children, why not?
 - a. Do not sound accusatory.
 - b. Find out if they are having transportation issues, or issues with getting off work.
 - vi. Ask if they have met with the CPS Caseworker about their service plan.
 - 1. If so, have they signed the service plan?
 - a. If they agreed to the plan, go over each task and ask about progress
 - b. If a collateral is involved, obtain the person's name, the name of the program, and any contact information they have so that you can follow up.
 - c. If there are tasks to be completed, get a feel for why they have not been completed.
 - 2. If not, what are the problems with it?
 - vii. Ask them about their child/children. Ask them to describe each child. What are their likes, dislikes, sleep habits, any food issues, etc.
 - viii. Ask if there are any relatives who are available to be involved with the children, either as a visiting resource or as caretakers, if appropriate. Obtain contact information.
- b. Record notes about visit in Optima (parental contact)

Step 13. Contact Law Enforcement (if applicable)

- a. Call records department of any jurisdiction that parents have resided and speak with clerk in the office (this can also serve as a great point of contact if further incidences occur)
 - i. Send appointment letter, court order, and an introduction to the clerk

CASE PLAN OUTLINE

- ii. Most local jurisdictions are familiar with CASA and are prompt to provide requested information. If they are not familiar, a brief explanation of our role in the court may be necessary
 - iii. Request all records for a range of dates and provide names and birthdates of involved parties
 - iv. Get records on cases involving domestic violence, criminal activity, or drug activity, or other records and restraining orders regarding any party
- b. If parents are incarcerated – contact records department of prison and obtain information regarding length of stay and date of possible release
 - c. If parents are on probation or parole – contact their probation/parole officer and find out their orders and compliance
 - d. If party is suspected sex-offender – check local and national websites to verify
 - e. Record notes about conversations in Optima (case research) and upload any documents to documents tab

Step 14. Contact Parent Service Providers

- a. Contact providers of parent services to verify attendance and compliance
 - i. Verify dates of attendance, class curriculum, participation, and completion
 - ii. Obtain documentation of attendance if possible
- b. Record notes about conversations in Optima (case research) and upload any documents to documents tab

Other Case Information

Obtaining Records

- Any records obtained through investigation must be sent directly to the CASA office (if faxed)
- These records will then be dispersed to the advocate
- Any documents obtained at a meeting should be immediately uploaded into Optima under the documents tab

Order of Events for Cases

- Abuse or neglect is reported to CPS
- CPS Investigators gather information about the abuse or neglect
- CPS determines whether there is reason to believe that abuse or neglect occurred
- With the information from their investigation:
 - CPS may refer to Family Based Safety Services (FBSS), sending the child to live with a friend or family member while the caretaker works services
 - If there is a lack of compliance with FBSS or no change from these services, CPS may file for a non-emergency removal or emergency removal depending on circumstances
 - If change occurs and the children can safely return home, CPS is no longer involved
 - Request a non-emergency removal of children due to ongoing risk of abuse or neglect
 - A judge is required to sign the removal order
 - CPS must show reasonable effort to avoid removal, and case may be dismissed if reasonable effort was not shown
 - Facilitate an emergency removal of children due to immediate danger to the children
 - CPS must show reasonable effort to avoid removal and threat of immediate harm
 - If a judge does not feel that there was reasonable effort the case may be dismissed, and the child will return home

CASE PLAN OUTLINE

- If removed, legal guardians of the children will be served a notice of the removal and reasons for removal, a pre-adversary mediation and adversary hearing will be scheduled, and dates included in the material provided to guardians.
 - Documents provided to all parties:
 - **Original Petition for Protection of a Child, For Conservatorship, and For Termination in Suit Affecting the Parent-Child Relationship and Order Setting Hearing**
 - **Affidavit** – written by FBSS Caseworker or CPS Investigator
 - **Order Setting Hearing** – document appointing CASA as guardian ad litem
- **Pre-adversary Mediation**
 - In attendance: mediator, mother if she has been served, father if he has been served, CPS, ADA, CASA, court appointed attorneys (ad litem, mother’s attorney, father’s attorney if legal father)
 - Purpose: create a service plan for parents to allow children to return home, award temporary managing conservatorship (TMC) to the state, create Docket Control Order. If an agreement cannot be met, the case will continue to the adversary hearing and a judge will order the service plan and TMC.
 - Documents provided to all parties (if agreement is met):
 - **Mediated Settlement Agreement and Agreed Temporary Orders** – a document stating agreements reached in mediation, ordering services for parents, which is created by the mediator assigned to the case
 - **Docket Control Order** – a document that sets the dates of pre-trial mediation, pre-trial conference, and trial for the case
 - **Family Service Plan** (created by CPS) – a document that indicates permanency goals, service plan goals, tasks and services to be completed by respondents (will be filed as a court order at Status Hearing)
 - **Mediation Sign in Sheet** – this is a great resource for contact information for all parties in the case
 - **Caregiver Resource Form**
 - **Medical History Form**
 - **ICWA Questionnaire**
 - **Release of Information**
 - **Visitation Plan** (provided by CPS Investigator)
 - **Visitation Plan** (ongoing, provided by CVS Caseworker)

Case Name: Jack Doe Case #: 18CPXXXX
FAMILY SERVICE PLAN Substitute Care
IDENTIFYING INFORMATION:
Name(s) of Parent <u>Jack Doe</u> <u>Jane Doe</u>
Children’s Names <u>John Doe</u>

- **Adversary Hearing** (if agreement not met in pre-adversary mediation)
 - In attendance: judge, mother if she has been served, father if he has been served, CPS, ADA, CASA, court appointed attorneys (ad litem, mother’s attorney, father’s attorney if legal father)

CASE PLAN OUTLINE

- Purpose: hearing for judge to award TMC to the state and ordering parents to fill out paperwork
- Documents provided to all parties:
 - Follow up to request documents from CPS if an agreement was not met and the documents were not signed previously (Caregiver Resource Form, Medical History Form, ICWA Questionnaire, Release of Information, Visitation Plan)
- **Status Hearing**
 - In attendance: judge, mother, father, CPS, ADA, CASA, court appointed attorneys (ad litem, mother's attorney, father's attorney if legal father)
 - Purpose: hearing for judge to order a service plan, CVS worker testifies as to contents of service plan. The judge will admonish parents as the service plan has now been filed as a court order.
- **Permanency Hearing (there will be 2 of these)**
 - In attendance: judge, mother, father, CPS, ADA, CASA, court appointed attorneys (ad litem, mother's attorney, father's attorney if legal father)
 - Purpose: review parent compliance with service plan, update court on child's well-being (regarding medical, education, current placement), judge will order child remain in current placement or be moved, judge will find parents compliant, non-compliant or partially compliant with service plan
- **Pre-Trial Mediation**
 - In attendance: mediator, mother, father, CPS, ADA, CASA, court appointed attorneys (ad litem, mother's attorney, father's attorney if legal father)
 - Purpose: determine if agreement can be reached for permanency for the children
 - May lead to case extension
 - May lead to monitored return
 - May lead to extended parental visits or transitional monitored return
- **Pre-Trial Conference**
 - In attendance: judge, mother, father, CPS, ADA, CASA, court appointed attorneys (ad litem, mother's attorney, father's attorney if legal father)
 - Purpose: determine the length of trial and dates and times set for trial by judge, or let judge know if an agreement has been reached at mediation
- **Trial**
 - In attendance: judge, mother, father, CPS, ADA, CASA, court appointed attorneys (ad litem, mother's attorney, father's attorney if legal father)
 - Purpose: judge hears case on merits and determines whether parental rights should be terminated, or children should be returned to parents

CPS and CASA Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) Summarized

- I. Overview: The purpose of this MOU is to define and foster a collaborative relationship between CASA programs and Texas Department of Family and Protective Services, Child Protective Services Division (CPS). This document outlines the policies and procedures that will be enforced and adhered to by state and local leadership of CASA and CPS.
- II. Respective Roles:
 - a. CPS – investigate allegations of abuse and neglect, act in child's best interest when managing conservator (regarding placement, education and medical care, services for family, permanency planning, and others)
 - b. CASA – provide advocacy and best interest representation for children whose families are involved in a CPS case, adhere to National and Texas CASA standards

CASE PLAN OUTLINE

- III. Appointment of a CASA: judges can appoint CASA at any point in a case, and appointment continues until case is closed or CASA is removed by court order. CASA appointment may continue for a youth aged 18 in extended jurisdiction or trial independence if the young adult consents and court continues the appointment.
- IV. Local CASA – Program Courtesy Assistance: CASA programs will assist each other in fulfilling responsibilities on a case as resources allow and notify CPS of this assistance
- V. CASA Responsibilities:
 - a. Notification of Appointment: CASA provides notification of appointment to CPS, the attorneys, parents, and all other parties to the case identifying CASA staff and volunteer assigned to the case and contact information for both
 - ~~b. Obtaining Court Order and Access to Child Files: When not appointed as GAL, the CASA program will seek a court order to gain access to child's records~~
 - c. Assist in Identifying the Child's Best Interest: CASA reviews all records and documents, interviews child, interviews each person who has significant knowledge of child's history and condition to determine facts and perspectives of the child and child's situation (including foster parents and parties to the lawsuit, ex: parents, social workers, teachers, child's medical and mental health providers)
 - d. Maintain Regular Contact with the Child:
 - i. Meet in person with the child as required by CASA standards
 - ii. CASA and CPS may visit together but should visit separately most of the time
 - iii. Only qualified volunteers and staff will have contact with the child assigned to CASA
 - iv. CASA will have other age-appropriate contact with the child (phone calls, emails, video-conferencing, letters) as applicable to age and interests of child
 - ~~e. Transportation of Children: If transportation is allowed by local CASA program, CASA will notify the CPS caseworker and secure written permission if planning to transport the child~~
 - f. Volunteers Assisting Advocates: All volunteers will complete background checks, sign a confidentiality statement, and participate in training
 - g. Represent the Child's Best Interest
 - i. Verify Case Plan, Education Portfolio and Health Passport have been created and maintained
 - ii. Participate in meetings for permanency planning and child service plans, assist in engagement of family members and children in family meetings
 - iii. Give input for the TARE profile, life book, targeted recruitment and preparation for adoption
 - iv. Appear at all hearings, provide written court reports and testimony when making recommendations for the child or child's family
 - v. Participate in mediation regarding the child
 - vi. Report on progress of child and family service plans
 - vii. Review medical care, discuss with medical consentor and seek the child's opinion on medical care (in a developmentally appropriate manner)
 - viii. Review educational needs and issues and serve as surrogate parent if appointed
 - h. Confidentiality: all CASA volunteers with access to confidential information are background checked
 - i. All information about a child's case is kept confidential
 - ii. If sharing confidential information with outside parties (foster parents, placements, schools, health care providers) is necessary for care and protection of the child, the information should be the minimum necessary and within CPS and/or CASA policies
 - iii. Confidential information from DFPS Case Connection remains confidential
 - iv. Once a case is closed/dismissed, CASA will destroy or safely store all CPS records

CASE PLAN OUTLINE

- i. Participation in DFPS Case Connection: CASA will ensure that all volunteers or staff with access to DFPS database have read and understood the security requirements and signed the agreement
- j. Courtesy assistance is not available through Case Connection, CASA will not assign cases to courtesy workers in Case Connection
- k. Notification of CASA Dismissal, or Staff or Volunteer Change of Assignment; Removal from Case Connection:
 - i. If removed by the court from an open case, CASA notifies CPS within 2 business days unless CPS was present at the hearing. CPS will terminate all assignments to the case.
 - ii. If a volunteer or staff have been removed from an open case the CASA program must either:
 - 1. Terminate Case Connection account within 2 days if volunteer or staff is terminated, automatically terminating all case assignments
 - 2. Notify CPS within 2 days if volunteer or staff are removed from case but still in program, CPS will manually terminate the case assignments
 - iii. Failure to terminate a dismissed advocate's access to Case Connection may result in loss of access to Case Connection temporarily or permanently
- l. Notice and Remedy for Security Breach: if there is a security breach and confidential information is disclosed to a party not authorized to have the information, CASA must immediately notify CPS

VI. CPS Responsibilities:

- a. Access to Child's Records and Information: CPS will provide other records permissible by law and/or court orders
- b. Access to Parent Records: CASA will be granted access to parent records when a court order allows or a release has been signed
- c. Access to Child: CPS will provide information about the child's placement in a timely manner (contact information, location and address), and will ensure access to the child for visits and communication
- d. Notifications and Invitations

Notifications

- i. CPS will notify CASA in a timely manner of all hearings and intent to non-suit, and provides a copy of the visitation plan and any updates or changes as they occur
- ii. CPS will notify CASA of mediations and other significant events
- iii. CASA will give information about child's needs to attach to CPS file and help with placement

Invitations and Collaborations

- i. CPS will invite CASA to permanency and service plan meetings, and CASA may assist CPS in engagement of family members and children in family group meetings. Invitations should occur as soon as possible after meeting is scheduled
- ii. CASA volunteer and CASA supervisor are invited by CPS to participate in mediation
- iii. CPS will consult CASA volunteer in placement decisions, except for emergency placements

VII. General Provisions Applicable to Both Parties: CASA and CPS will collaborate for the child's safety, well-being, and opportunities for permanency and acknowledge that sharing information benefits the children, prevents disagreements, and helps to secure the best and most timely permanency outcome for the case.

- a. Share Information: Share records and information, unless limited by a court order. May include permanency goal/plan, family finding efforts, placement, education, medical/mental health needs and assessments, plans of service for child and family, visitation plan, home studies, adoption preparation, older youth transition/independent living
- b. Communicate with Necessary Parties:
 - i. CPS Caseworker and CASA: communicate monthly
 - ii. Current Primary Caregiver: meet in person after placement and communicate monthly

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- iii. Court: inform court of important developments as appropriate
 - iv. Other Parties: communicate with mental health, medical, legal, educational and other community systems to advocate for best interest and work collaboratively to provide records needed for agencies providing services to children. Confidential information should be shared minimally.
 - v. Search for Family/Fictive Kin: CASA and CPS will work together in Collaborative Family Engagement (CFE) to search, identify, and engage family, fictive kin and natural supports. CASA programs outside of CFE will have access to CFE supports to assist with collaborative efforts to identify family, fictive kin, and significant others for children. CASA and CPS will value the importance of connections and relationships and support planning to benefit child well-being and permanency.
- c. Work together to identify as many family members and fictive kin as possible, sharing diligent search activities, case mining, and family-finding and engagement efforts
 - d. Encourage Self-Advocacy for Children and Youth: ensure children are Rights of Children and Youth in Foster Care “Bill of Rights”
 - e. Encourage Youth Participation: encourage youth to communicate needs, desires, and wishes to court and participate in court process and participate in normalcy activities in placements, education, and recreational settings. For older youth, encourage self-advocacy for transition to successful adulthood, higher education, vocational training, and employment
 - f. Submit Court Reports: provide written court reports for statutorily mandated hearings, sharing information that supports and provides the basis for recommendations
 - i. CASA and CPS may have different recommendations, but it is important to collaborate, discuss, and share information before submission of reports to promote better outcomes
 - ii. CPS will provide CASA with its court report 10 days before a court hearing, CASA will provide CPS its court report no later than 5 days before a court hearing.
 - iii. Local jurisdictions agree on method of sharing court reports
 - g. Cross-Train: CASA and CPS work together to share training information or participate in trainings
 - h. Address Disproportionality: create collaborative efforts to address issue of quality service for all children, with joint training opportunities examining issues of racial identity and disproportionality

VIII. Resolution of Conflicts: CASA and CPS will work together to address conflicts and seek resolutions.

IX. Terms of Agreement

- a. Effective Date: effective upon signatures (8/4/17) and remain effective until:
 - i. Modified by agreement between Texas CASA and CPS; or
 - ii. Terminated by either party (notice not required)
 - b. Review of Agreement: Local CASA and CPS will review this agreement every 2 years
Local Procedures: Local CASA and CPS offices may develop procedures consistent with this MOU to enhance the collaboration without changing provisions of the MOU.
 - c. Judiciary: Local CASA and CPS provide a copy of signed MOU to judiciary responsible for hearing child abuse cases in their region, and when possible, meet annually with judges to further communication and collaboration to improve service and assistance to child victims and their families
- Permanency Planning meetings include: adoption presentations, permanency conferences, transition plan meetings, family group conferences, circles of support, adoption selection staffings, and any meetings that involve developing the Child Plan of Service

CASE PLAN OUTLINE

Collaborative Family Engagement

Studies have found that one of the strongest indicators for child well-being is the number of committed adults in a child's life. After the success of the five-year federally funded Diligent Recruitment project, Texas CASA approached the 84th Legislature and was appropriated funding for a two-year Family Finding collaboration between CASA and the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services (DFPS).

- This new partnership is built around the fact that children have many blood relatives and other important connections that can be identified, located and engaged with a case at its inception.
- CFE is an integrated or embedded approach that establishes a true team between CASA and CPS to work together to complete the steps of Family Finding. This CFE team will share the Family Finding work, and every success will be a cooperative achievement. Open communication and collaboration is encouraged amongst the CFE team, with an emphasis on utilizing the child's CASA volunteer. This teaming approach models the need for and goal of establishing a community of support, or network, around the children and their families.
- CFE takes the "finding" of the family much further by ensuring an authentic commitment from CASA and CPS to truly and meaningfully engage with found connections. We understand the importance of welcoming their presence in the child's life and their continued involvement in the planning and decision making.

Important Meetings

- Depending on the case, there may be multiple meetings for the case that a CASA should attend. These are a few that may come up:
 - **Family Group Conference (FGC):** A Family Group Conference (FGC) is held to develop a plan to ensure the child is cared for and protected from future harm. The FGC includes relatives, friends, CPS staff, CASA volunteer and supervisor, service providers, and any community support persons
 - **Permanency Conference (PC):** A Permanency Conference can be held when DFPS has temporary managing conservatorship (TMC) or permanent managing conservatorship (PMC).
 - If DFPS has TMC, topics usually include reason for the removal, any special needs of the children, family supports, and the service plan
 - If DFPS has PMC, topics usually include efforts made to ensure permanent placement for the child, caregiver's change in willingness to care for the child, issues regarding discharging the youth, and appropriate relationships for the child
 - **Permanency Planning Meeting for Youth 14 and Over:** Youth aged 14+ attend permanency planning meetings to develop a plan for when they age out of care. The youth can invite two appropriate adults to the permanency planning meetings.
 - **Circle of Support (COS):** The Circle of Support conference is held with youth age 16+. The COS conference is held to develop a transition plan for youth who are entering adulthood. During the COS conference, the youth identifies appropriate adults that they may connect with when he/she leaves foster care.
 - **Transition Planning Meetings (TPM):** A Transition Planning Meeting is held when a child reaches age 16 and has been removed from their home. The primary purpose of the TPM is to develop a transition plan for youth who are entering adulthood from foster care. In most cases, the TPM is held as an alternative when a youth does not want a COS, or a COS is unable to be facilitated.
 - **Admission, Review, Dismissal (ARD):** In Texas, an Admission, Review, and Dismissal committee is responsible for determining a child's eligibility for special education services and decision making about a child's special education program. This may also be referred to as an Individualized Education Program (IEP) team, which is the term used in federal law.

Contacts

Minimum Expectations of Contact

	Initial Contact	2 nd Month	3 rd Month	4 th Month	5 th Month	6 th Month	7 th Month	8 th Month	9 th Month	10 th Month	11 th Month	12 th Month
Child	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Placement	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
CASA Supervisor	In person	X	X	In person	X	X	In person	X	X	In person	X	X
CPS	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
AAL	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Therapist	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Mother*	X			X			X			X		
Father*	X			X			X			X		
Parent service providers**	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Siblings	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Aunts	X			X			X			X		
Uncles	X			X			X			X		
Grandparents	X			X			X			X		
Pediatrician	X			X			X			X		
Prescribing Dr.	X			X			X			X		
Specialist	X			X			X			X		
Dentist	X			X			X			X		
School	X			X			X			X		

*Contacts with parents are subject to permissions given to CASA by their attorney

**Contacts with service providers for parents are subject to signed releases by parents; contacts with ongoing service providers may be as needed, not always monthly

This is a helpful guide for an interview and for information that should be recorded in Optima. Never take notes while visiting with a child.



CASA/GAL Volunteer Interview with Child (1 of 2)

Although you wish to gather information from the child, it is important to build rapport first and not bombard him/her with questions. Make it more of a conversation that takes place over several visits.

Name of Child:	Date and Time:
Place of Interview:	CASA/GAL Volunteer:
Placement Phone #:	Case Name:
Name of Interviewer:	
<p>1. The child's feelings about . . .</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This placement: • Whether he/she feels safe here: • His/her sibling(s): • Being separated from his/her parent(s): • Visitation and telephone contact with parent(s) and sibling(s): 	
<p>2. The child's interests/hobbies/friends: <i>(to establish strengths and to discover ways to support the child and normalize his/her experience in care)</i></p>	
<p>3. This child has already discussed the allegations in the petition with the following persons: <i>(It is not the CASA/GAL volunteer's role to reinterview the child about those allegations unless the child wants to discuss them—and even then proceed cautiously because the child may have already been traumatized by multiple interviews, and/or there may be criminal matters pending.)</i></p>	

This is a helpful guide for an interview and for information that should be recorded in Optima. Never take notes while visiting with a child.



CASA/GAL Volunteer Interview with Child (2 of 2)

4. Unsolicited, the child provided the following additional information about the underlying allegations:
5. The child would like the following needs to be addressed or options to be explored:
6. The other people living in this home are:
7. The child's sleeping arrangements are:
8. The child's after-school arrangements are:
9. The child has medical or mental health needs that are being addressed by:
10. The child's primary caretaker provided the following information about the child: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sleeping habits: • Eating habits: • Interactions with other family members: • School performance and attitude toward school: • Other:
11. Other relatives or family friends who might be resources on this case are:
12. My observations about this child are:



CASA/GAL Volunteer Interview with Parent(s) (1 of 2)

Prior to scheduling an interview with the parent, inform the attorney for the parent of your intentions to meet with his/her client. In the initial discussion with the parent, explain that the CASA/GAL volunteer does not work for CPS and is in a neutral, objective role. Acknowledge how difficult the situation is for the parent as well as the child/children.

Name of Parent:	Date and Time:
Parent's Phone #:	CASA/GAL Volunteer:
Place of Interview:	Case Name:
Name of Interviewer:	
1. The parent provided the following general information about the child/children:	
2. The parent provided the following specific information about the child/children:	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School performance concerns: • Medical/dental treatment needs: • Special needs: • Other concerns: 	
3. Information about the history of this family includes:	
4. Events leading to child protection agency involvement include:	
5. Services provided by the child protection agency to the family include:	



CASA/GAL Volunteer Interview with Parent(s) (2 of 2)

6. Services the parent believes would be helpful are:

7. The parent's goals include:

8. Tribal affiliation, and tribal advocates:

9. Other:

Review the Process
