

ADVOCATE POLICY & PROCEDURE MANUAL



REVISED and BOARD APPROVED AUGUST 2020

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HISTORY OF CASA

CASA of Galveston County ("Galveston CASA) is one of over 950 programs in 50 states affiliated with the National Court Appointed Special Advocate Association. The local names of these programs vary, but they include: Court Appointed Special Advocate, Guardian Ad Litem, and Voices for Children.

The original Guardian Ad Litem program was established in 1977 in Seattle, Washington. Judge David Soukup conceived of the idea that individual citizens could serve as representatives of the community to advocate for children who have no one to stand up for them once they are removed from their families because of abuse or neglect. A trained force of volunteers was designed to serve one case at a time as the eyes, ears, and legs of the court to inform it about the child's circumstances. The volunteers are to see that the child's best interests are served by placing the child as soon as feasible with his family or one in which he or she could attain adulthood in a safe, nurturing environment.

The phrase "permanency planning" refers to this kind of plan. The goal of the child welfare/justice system process is to avoid lengthy stays in one foster family after another, which frequently occurred before reforms at the federal level were instituted. As a result of a variety of studies, it was noted that a high proportion of juvenile offenders had been abused, neglected, placed often in foster families, and alienated in general through the lack of an opportunity to feel a sense of belonging and identity.

During the late 70s and early 80s, the concern for what happens to children left in the limbo of a temporary situation in foster care led to federal reform. Model laws were developed at the national level. Every state now has laws modeled after the national laws so that they can be eligible for federal funds. In all states when children are removed from their families by the court and placed in foster care, someone is appointed to advocate for their best interests.

Usually this appointed person is an attorney Ad Litem, but in some states he/she may be a Court Appointed Special Advocate. There must be a judicial review at least every 5-7 months on each case, and the state child protection agency must review its case plan for each child every 5-7 months. In 1984, public law 96-272 was implemented. This mandates that the Child Protective Service caseworkers must show the judge that an effort was made to avoid long-term removal of the child from his family and that a case plan discussed with the family sets forth the expectations the family must satisfy to ensure return of their children.

The National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges responded to the growing awareness of the problem of "foster care drift" by teaming up with the Edna McConnell Clark Foundation to seek reforms in the child welfare system. This foundation granted funds to the national office of the National Council of Jewish Women to set up five pilot programs modeled after the Kings County Guardian Ad Litem program in Seattle. In 1979, it was demonstrated in Dallas, TX; Harrisburg, PA; Worcester, MA; Jacksonville, FL; and St. Louis, MO that the Seattle program could be duplicated. A start-up manual was published. Similar programs were instituted in other

localities: some funded by the court system, some by the Junior League and National Council of Jewish Women and, increasingly, some through federal grants.

The national organization first met in 1982 with 25 groups represented and was named “Court Appointed Special Advocate.” Since then, the movement has spread throughout the country.

The Galveston County CASA program was formed by the Resource and Crisis Center after the Board of Directors was approached in the early part of 1993. The Family District Judge requested that the agency consider developing a CASA program. CASA trains volunteers to work with children who are in the custody of Children’s Protective Services (CPS), providing an impartial adult whose only task is to make recommendations about the best interest of the child. The program staff works closely with the Texas Department of Regulatory and Protective Services, the Family District Court and the Galveston County District Attorney’s Office.

In Texas, there are now over 72 established programs, and more are in the planning stage. There is a state organization called Texas CASA, which serves as a state network. It encourages the growth of new programs and works on legislative issues as well. In 1985, the state legislature passed a bill, giving volunteers with court approved training the right to represent abused and neglected children in court. This bill appears as a line in the Texas Family Code along with a provision for immunity from liability if CASA work is done in good faith.

As of September 1, 2014, Galveston CASA separated from RCCGC and became an independent nonprofit organization. This change, more than a year in the making, was undertaken for the program to receive the awareness necessary for it to thrive and serve a higher percentage of children leaving approximately 225 without an advocate. Programs with population sizes and geographic areas like Galveston County serve 90-100% of children in their service area. Increased awareness and support are already occurring through responses to publications in the media, direct community outreach, and development activities by an Executive Director and Board of Directors solely dedicated to the program.

MISSION STATEMENT

The mission of Galveston CASA is to provide trained community volunteers who advocate for the best interest of abused and neglected children in the foster care system in an effort to secure safety and permanency while increasing awareness about child abuse.

Welcome to Galveston CASA! Thank you for agreeing to volunteer to help abused and neglected children. This manual outlines the policies for advocates. To ensure your success with CASA, please read the manual carefully. If you have any questions, ask your Advocate Supervisor.

CASA reserves the right to modify, amend and change the policies and titles set forth in this manual at any time.

This manual is not an agreement or contract.

No one, other than the Executive Director and/or Board of Directors, has authority to alter or amend the provisions of the manual through oral or written statements or promises. Any agreement or promise, which contradicts or alters these policies and procedures in this manual is limited to writings signed by the Executive Director.

OFFICE HOURS

The CASA office normal business hours are 8:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m., Monday through Friday.

During emergencies/disasters as directed by national, state, county, and local authorities the CASA office may adjust their offices hours and will notify staff, volunteers, and community as necessary.

Section 1: AMERICANS WITH DISABILITIES ACT

Galveston CASA is committed to complying fully with the American with Disabilities Act (ADA) and ensuring equal opportunities for qualified persons with disabilities. Per-service inquiries are made regarding only an applicant's ability to perform the essential functions of the position. Reasonable accommodation is available to all disabled volunteers in situations in which their disability affects the performance of job functions. All selections are based on the merits of the situation in accordance with defined criteria, not disability of the individual. Galveston CASA is also committed not to discriminate against any qualified volunteers because they are related to or associated with a person with a disability. Galveston CASA will follow any state or local law that provides individuals with disabilities greater protection than the ADA.

Section 2: INCLEMENT WEATHER/EMERGENCIES/DISASTER

It is our policy to maintain essential services and operations during any severe weather, emergency or disaster (such as Pandemic) condition while providing for the protection, safety, and health of our volunteers. Severe weather/emergency conditions are defined as ice accumulations, floods, snowstorms, hurricanes, or tornado damage that significantly affects the normal operations of Galveston CASA and other emergencies as directed by national, state, county, and local authorities (such as a Pandemic).

Executive Director will take proactive action to maintain the health of the organization, our employees and volunteers in case of an emergency/disaster situation. As these decisions are made, the Executive Director will communicate with staff, volunteers, and necessary collaterals regarding our work status.

To keep staff healthy and free of exposure to illnesses that may affect our staff and volunteers the Agency may invoke a limited remote work policy. If this plan were to impede any agency necessary deadlines, trainings, or other business-related needs there may need to be rescheduling and additional communication to our volunteers and stakeholders. All team members will assist with these tasks.

The agency will follow national, state and local official's direction and implement any protocols communicated which could result in adjusting and modifying Galveston CASA's workflow including minimum expectations of our volunteer advocacy including closing CASA of Galveston County's physical office to staff, volunteers, and visitors; also altering training, child visitation, volunteer activities, and also may require a remote work period.

If the official office hours are modified, an email message will be distributed, if possible, indicating the hours modified.

- Executive Director will maintain contact with Texas CASA, CPC judiciary, local authorities, and other stakeholders as identified to ensure CASA of Galveston County communicates timely, accurate information about continued operations to volunteers and staff
- CASA of Galveston County will establish method for regular situational awareness update messages to all staff and volunteers (regarding both the disaster and CASA of Galveston County's operations)
- CASA of Galveston County shall maintain Minimum Standards of operation, as possible, through the disaster

Section 3: REPORTING SUSPECTED CHILD ABUSE

1. Galveston CASA employees, volunteers, and board members are expected to report any suspicion of child abuse. Texas law requires you to report abuse immediately. Professionals, such as you, must report suspected abuse within 48 hours.
2. Child abuse and neglect are against the law in Texas, and so is failure to report it.
3. If you suspect a child has been abused or mistreated, you are required to report it to the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services at 1-800-252-5400.
4. If you observe a child being abused or mistreated, you are required to call local law enforcement.

Section 4: CASA ADVOCATE SERVICE REQUIREMENTS

Section 4.1: Job Description.

| | |
|-----------------|----------------------------------|
| Position Title: | Court Appointed Special Advocate |
| Responsible To: | CASA Advocate Supervisor |

Section 4.2: Purpose of Position.

1. To recommend to the court, based on fact finding and investigation, the best interest of a child in Child Protective Service custody.
2. To work for and to achieve the mission of CASA.
3. To facilitate timely resolution to cases.

Section 4.3: Qualifications of the Position.

1. Must be a minimum of 21 years of age.
2. Complete an application.

3. Volunteers must provide 3 references of non-relatives.
4. Volunteers must have a valid driver's license, a good driving record, proof of current automobile insurance, and reliable transportation.
5. Good human relations skills and the willingness to be open and objective.
6. Ability to communicate both orally and in writing.
7. Sensitivity toward cultural and ethnic differences.

Section 4.4: Responsibilities of the Position.

1. Identify and advocate for the best interest of the child by obtaining first hand a clear understanding of the needs and situation of the child, by conducting an ongoing review of all relevant documents and records and by interviewing the child, parents, social workers, teachers and other persons to determine the facts and circumstances of the child's situation.
2. Have regular and sufficient in-person contact with the child where they live to ensure in-depth knowledge of the case and make fact-based recommendations to the court. The CASA volunteer shall meet in-person with the child once every thirty (30) days at a minimum. An exception may be granted:
 - a. If the child(ren) are placed more than 2 but less than 3 driving hours away, CASA will meet in person with the child(ren) at least once every three months;
 - b. If the child(ren) are placed more than 3 driving hours away, CASA will meet in person with the child(ren) at least once every six months.
3. In addition to in-person contact, the advocate will have other types of monthly age appropriate contact with the child(ren) including telephone calls, emails, video conferencing and letters as applicable for the child's age and interests.
4. Meet in person with the child's primary placement provider, in a timely manner, after placement occurs. Communicate with the placement provider at least once per month thereafter for the duration of the child's case.
5. Maintain complete records about the case, including appointments, interviews and information gathered about the child and the child's life circumstances and return all records to the program after the case is closed.
6. Record volunteer hours and miles by updating online case database by the **last day** of each month.
7. Communicate with the DFPS caseworker after appointment and at least one time per month for the duration of the case.
8. Communicate at least once monthly with CASA supervisor and participate in case conferences as scheduled.
9. Appear at and participate in all case-related meetings and hearings to advocate for the child's best interests and provide testimony as needed.

10. Provide at every hearing, reports which include findings and recommendations, including specific recommendations for appropriate services for the child and, when appropriate, the child's family.
11. Submit court reports **a minimum of 20 working days or 4 weeks before hearings** to be reviewed by Supervisor and processed by the CASA office and submitted to court.
12. Discuss court reports with Advocate Supervisor prior to preparing report. An advocate supervisor may not alter a report without the knowledge or consent of the volunteer.
13. Encourage families to utilize resources and services offered. Advocate for the child's best interests in the community through regular contact with attorney ad litem, mental health, educational and other community systems to assure that the child's needs in these areas are met and seek cooperative solutions by acting as a facilitator among parties.
14. Monitor the case to ensure court orders are being carried out, and that services to the child are being furnished and placement is appropriate. Determine the child(ren)'s permanent plan, access the educational portfolio and health passport and make recommendations regarding permanency, and education and medical services, as appropriate.
15. Familiarize self and communicate with group home, residential treatment center, foster homes, relatives and parents where children may be placed to ensure it is relevant to child's best interests. May provide additional sibling visits.
16. Advocate for permanency for the child(ren) whether that means returning to the home of a family member, freeing for adoption, or finding a long term permanent, stable placement.
17. Maintain confidentiality of case information at all times and complete online case acceptance form to be uploaded in case and volunteer profile in Optima database.

Section 4.5: Requirements of the position.

1. Complete the screening process with background checks including fingerprinting, child abuse registry checks, and social security number verification.
2. Complete Pre-training interview after submission and review of volunteer application.
3. Complete the initial 30-hour pre-preserve advocacy training as required by National and Texas CASA standards. Additional 3 hours of courtroom observation either in person or virtually. 10 hours of training must be in-person with CASA Training Staff or as allowed by waiver during times when emergency provisions are in place and waivers for this standard are in effect.
4. Appear before the court and be sworn in as a representative through the CASA program.
5. Maintain a minimum of 12-hours per year of continuing education that assist in providing direct service to children and/or the program services.
6. Participate in advocate evaluations to discuss strengths, areas of growth, and impacts made on the case.
7. Willingness to work within the guidelines, policies and standards of the court and CASA of Galveston County.
8. Commitment to represent the "Best Interest" of the children you are assigned to.
9. Time, interest and the energy to do the job.
10. Ability and willingness to receive guidance from the program staff.

11. Ability to work as part of a team.
12. Ability and commitment to maintain clear documented records throughout the assignment.
13. Ability to formulate and maintain an independent position throughout the case assignment.
14. Understanding the importance of confidentiality and the personal commitment to maintain confidentiality at all times.
15. Sign the acknowledgement statement included with this Advocate Policy Manual.
16. Upon each case acceptance complete the online case acceptance form and commit to upholding confidentiality.

Case Closure and Evaluation Process

Advocates and supervisors will participate in Case Closure Evaluations at the close of an advocate's case. One form is used in this instance and is filled out by the volunteer: Case Closure Form.

Case closure forms are to be completed as soon as possible after the advocate's case closes. This form is a chance to gauge the volunteer's experience working the case and desire to take a new case. It is not meant to take the place of the annual evaluation.

Advocates and supervisors will also participate in Annual Evaluations during the anniversary month of the advocate's swearing in. Two forms are used in this process: 1) CASA Volunteer Evaluation Form Part A: Supervisor and 2) CASA Volunteer Evaluation Form Part B: Volunteer.

Supervisors schedule with their advocates one month in advance for their evaluations. Evaluations are scheduled for one hour. If an advocate is assigned to two cases with two different supervisors, both supervisors participate in the evaluation meeting. For an annual evaluation, both supervisors fill out Part A.

Prior to the evaluation, supervisors send Part B to the volunteer to complete and the supervisor completes Part A. Both forms are shared at the meeting. During the hour-long evaluation, the supervisor and volunteer go through each Part together. This process is designed to gauge advocate performance and for the advocates to provide feedback so the supervisors know how they can improve their guidance.

Modifications to Minimum Expectations During Emergency/Disaster Declaration

VOLUNTEERS

- All staff managing volunteers will maintain no less than bi-monthly supportive phone and/or email contact with each volunteer on their caseload which is an increase in standard protocol,
- Continued Quarterly Face-To-Face will be required via technology available to maintain adequate relationships with volunteers.
- Volunteers are asked to maintain business as usual until direction from local authorities or CASA of Galveston County – otherwise, those in high risk categories are encouraged to seek a waiver of face-to-face contact to protect their personal health as necessary

- In case of limited or long term deferred face-to-face contact (as advised by state, local or national authorities and approved by Texas and National CASA to waive program standards), volunteers are asked to maintain regular, other, non-face-to-face contact with children (as developmentally appropriate), placements, CPS, case parties, and their CASA supervisor and document same in Optima. In instances that a child is too young or unable to communicate and if available, request placements send videos or pictures of the children to be uploaded in Optima for “visit” verification.

CASE/CHILD

- CASA staff shall continue to attend meetings, hearings and other case-related activities until directed otherwise
- If remote work is required, CASA staff shall attend all scheduled case activities via phone or other available technology as advised by the meeting convener or scheduler. Staff will notify volunteers of scheduled meetings to stay informed of case related progress and updates.
- CASA staff and volunteers shall maintain timely and complete records in Optima regarding their case activities including uploading documentation related to emergency/disaster proclamations upon receipt and notated accordingly.
- Volunteer will remain compliant with Court Report submission requirements. Advocate Supervisors shall be responsible to ensure court reports for statutory hearings on their cases are submitted timely for editing to Director of Advocacy and E-filed as required by the court.
- CASA Staff will submit to the Executive Director or other designated staff any requests for records via fax by sending via email the fax coversheet, and any appointing documents necessary to complete the request. The Executive Director or other designated staff will notify requester of fax completion.

Section 4.6: Background Checks.

Record checks are completed on each volunteer utilizing the Fingerprint Background Check (FBC) and the Child Abuse and Neglect registry maintained by the Texas Department of Health and Human Services, which includes Texas criminal records, Texas sex offender registry, national criminal records, national sex offender registry, social security number check and child abuse registry check. Advocates are required to complete these background checks by any other agency Galveston CASA may choose to utilize. No person is considered qualified who has had prior convictions for child abuse or neglect, or related acts that would pose a risk to children or to the program’s credibility.

During emergencies/disasters and by direction of our national, state, county, and local leaders a modification in the availability of FBI Background check systems might alter this requirement until full background checks can be completed and cleared. The Executive Director will provide information necessary to ensure the agency remains in compliance with our state and national standards for background checks. Volunteers will be asked to adjust their advocacy as directed by the Executive Director until otherwise notified.

Galveston CASA will unsubscribe to DPS Fingerprint subscription within 48 hours of notification the advocate is not actively assigned to a case. When they advocate becomes actively assigned to a case Galveston CASA will subscribe to their DPS Fingerprint record ensuring that the rap back service is validated. If during the unsubscribed time the advocate violates any of the background requirements the advocate may be ineligible to continue active their active status and will be notified immediately. At that time the advocate will be dismissed from the program active status and will be in-eligible for reinstatement.

Advocates will be eliminated for consideration based on, but not limited to the following:

- *Zero tolerance for all registered sex offenders.
- *Zero tolerance for all convictions of crimes against children.
- *Zero tolerance for all convictions of violent acts.
- *Persons with pending charges for child abuse and neglect, sexual assault, and violent acts offenses will be considered only after resolution of such charges.
- *Driving is required from CASA Advocates, Galveston CASA will not consider applicants who have had felony convictions involving a motor vehicle in the last 10 years or have misdemeanor DWI offense within the last 10 years.
- *Any other offense that could hurt the credibility of the CASA organization will be considered on a case-by-case basis.

Section 5: RECRUITMENT AND SELECTION

Inclusiveness and diversity are essential components of Galveston CASA's recruitment efforts. Galveston CASA actively seeks individual who respect a child's inherent right to grow with dignity in a safe environment that meets that child's best interest. Galveston CASA includes targeted strategies to attract volunteers from diverse cultural and ethnic backgrounds and from a variety of age groups and socio-economic levels.

A volunteer trained by Galveston CASA is appointed by the court to advocate for children who have come into the care of the Department of Family and Protective Services (DFPS); a result of abuse or neglect. A CASA Advocate volunteer is responsible for advocating for the child's best interest at every stage of the case once appointed by the court.

Galveston CASA strives to recruit volunteers who further CASA's mission:

- by selecting individuals with experience and qualifications that best meet the needs of the child(ren);
- by enhancing opportunities for internal mobility and the promotion of qualified candidates who are current volunteers;

- by enhancing advocacy for women and minorities in areas which they are underrepresented; and
- by considering candidates without discrimination based on race, national and/or ethnic origin, gender, marital status, sexual-orientation, handicap/disability, religion, veteran status, age, or any other unlawful factor.

Section 5.1: Advertising.

Paid and non-paid advertisements are used, including but not limited to:

- Community collaboration
- Media – social and print
- Outreach
- Speaking Engagements
- Cultural awareness events
- Colleges
- Churches

Section 5.2: Volunteer Qualification.

- Must be 21 years of age, successfully pass the application and screening process, complete Galveston CASA pre-service training, and swear in with the court to advocate for children in DFPS care as a result of abuse or neglect.
- Must be able to speak and write in English.
- Respect a child’s inherent right to grow up with dignity in a safe environment that meets that child’s best interest.
- Advocate for the child’s best interest at every stage of the case once appointed by the court.
- Does not serve as foster, foster/adopt or adoptive parent for any child in the conservatorship of Child Protective Services (CPS) unless the volunteer is related to the child.
- Participate in an in-person interview to determine acceptance into pre-service training. During emergency and disaster declarations this interview may be conducted via means other than in-person.

All screening is completed before the volunteer is assigned to a case and written verification is placed in the volunteer file.

Section 5.3: Application.

An application is considered a public document and is subject to disclosure, upon request, whether the application is submitted as a written document or online.

All CASA volunteer applicants are required to:

1. Complete an application containing information about educational background, training, employment history, and experience working with children.
2. Submit the names of 4 references or more with valid email addresses, at least three of whom are unrelated to the applicant.
3. Authorize the CASA program and other appropriate agencies to secure the following checks:
 - a. Social Security Number verification
 - b. Texas Criminal Record Check
 - c. National Criminal Record Check
 - d. State Sex Offender Check
 - e. National Sex Offender Check
 - f. Child Abuse and Neglect Central Registry Check

Fingerprint-Based Background Checks (FBC) include state and national sex offender and criminal records checks. If the prospective volunteer has lived in another state within the past seven years, CASA will secure the local/county and state record check for each area the person has resided.

4. Attend and participate in an in-person interview with CASA program personnel. During emergency and disaster declarations this interview may be conducted via means other than in-person.

Section 5.4: Rejection of Application.

- Applicant refuses to sign a release of information form or refuses to submit the required information or fingerprints for any of the checks required.
- Applicant is found to have been convicted of, or charges pending for a felony or misdemeanor involving a sex offense, child abuse or neglect of related acts that would pose risks to children or the CASA program's credibility. If any of these charges apply to a volunteer's family member, the volunteer is also rejected.
- Any other offense that could hurt the credibility of the CASA organization will be considered on a case-by-case basis.
- Felony convictions involving a motor vehicle in the last ten (10) years or misdemeanor DWI offense in the last ten (10) years.
- CASA volunteers cannot serve as CPS mediators or CPS court-appointed attorneys.

Section 6: TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT

The purpose of training is to increase the knowledge, skills and abilities of volunteers so that they can fulfill the roles and responsibilities of a CASA volunteer. This training provides information about the backgrounds and needs of the children the program serves.

Section 6.1: Pre-service Training Agreement.

1. Participation in a minimum of 30 hours of Pre-Service Advocate Training and a Courtroom Observation visit is required and essential. Pre-service training includes Pre-work and 30+ hours in person contact with and under the supervision of the program staff. Special in-person exceptions may be imposed, if necessary, if emergency and disaster plans are implemented or advised by State and National Associations.

The following topics are included:

- a. The CASA/GAL Volunteer Role
 - b. The Well-Being of the Child
 - c. Trauma, Resilience and Communication Skills
 - d. Mental Health, Poverty and Confidentiality
 - e. Substance Abuse, Diversity and Disproportionality
 - f. Domestic Violence, Bias and Cultural Competence
 - g. Educational Advocacy, Older Youth and LGBTQ Youth
 - h. Court Report Writing
2. **Attendance:** If the potential advocate misses a session, they will be required to make up the missed sessions at a future training class before they can qualify to be sworn in or take a case. In addition, should it become necessary for them to miss a session, they will make every effort to notify CASA staff prior to the missed session.
 3. In addition to the 30+ hours of pre-service training, the program requires each volunteer to visit the court served by CASA while court is in session to observe abuse/neglect proceedings before appearing in court for an assigned case. The in-person court observation may be conducted via other means as determined by the Executive Director.
 4. The Pre-Service Advocate Training Interview is a part of the screening process, and acceptance to participate in the training does not guarantee that the potential advocate will be sworn in as a CASA or that they will be assigned to a case. The potential advocate or CASA can choose to discontinue their involvement in the training/screening process at any time without further obligation on the part of either party.
 5. Upon completion of training, as well as other screening processes (returned reference forms, criminal record check, social security number check, and CPS check) the volunteer will be reviewed for the purpose of determining the eligibility to be assigned to a case as a CASA volunteer.

During an emergency or disaster declaration the facilitation and participation of the necessary pre-service training requirement may move to an on-line visual method to satisfy the in-person training requirement. The Executive Director will make a decision and all participants will be notified of the change.

Section 6.2: Continuing Education.

Volunteer advocates are required to attend 12 hours of continuing education throughout the calendar year. The number of required in-serve training hours for newly trained volunteers will be prorated according to when the volunteer completed training. (i.e. If an advocate is sworn in during May, only seven hours of continuing education would be required).

Galveston CASA will provide training opportunities throughout the calendar year and will notify volunteers of other outside opportunities as they arise.

Volunteers may also acquire continuing education credit from outside sources that they learn of on their own (including college classes) so long as they are approved by CASA staff and are relevant to CASA work (i.e. children's issues family issues, the legal system, case management, or other relevant topics) and to include annual cultural competency training. Continuing education opportunities are posted on the CASA of Galveston County website at www.casagalveston.org/resources. Continuing education will be documented by the volunteer in the Optima database system and approved by their supervisor.

Section 6.3: Volunteers Transferring to Galveston CASA.

A CASA volunteer who transfers from another CASA program must complete a Galveston CASA volunteer application and undergo all required background checks. Participation in an in-person interview and a volunteer refresher is also required. Transfers from other CASA programs can be subject to full retraining at the discretion of the Executive Director.

Section 7: CONFLICT OF INTEREST

CASA advocates are expected to act in good faith and in the best interests of CASA at all times.

All parties shall avoid any actual conflicts of interest and situations, which might give rise to the appearance of a conflict of interest or other impropriety (regardless of whether or not a conflict of interest or other impropriety actually exists). All parties will not use their association with CASA to promote personal gain or to avoid any type of penalty.

A CASA advocate cannot accept or be assigned to a case in which the advocate is related to any parties involved or to be employed in a position or with an agency that might result in a conflict of interest.

All CASA staff, paid consultants, governing body members, and volunteers are prohibited from having direct or indirect financial interest in the assets, leases, business transactions, or professional services of the program.

Any situation involving a potential conflict of interest, including any and all relevant information pertaining to the possible conflict, shall be disclosed to the management of CASA and put in writing to the Board of Directors.

Directors and management staff will weigh carefully all circumstances in which there exists the possibility of accusations of competing interests. Those involved in the possible conflict may not participate in any decision-making process related to the matter. Furthermore, involved parties shall excuse themselves from the room when there is any deliberation and decision on the matter of interest. The minutes of the board and or committee meetings shall reflect that the conflict of interest was disclosed and that the interested person was not present during the deliberation and decision on the matter of interest.

It is recognized that volunteers may be offered gifts or similar favors from persons utilizing the services of CASA and common courtesy may require the acceptance thereof. However, gifts cannot be accepted if they are offered (or appear to be offered) as an inducement to perform an act inconsistent with the best interest of CASA or if acceptance, directly or indirectly, places the recipient under any obligation to the donor. In no event should a person accept: 1) cash payments or 2) gifts or similar favors having a value in excess of \$25, or a total annual value of \$100.

Duly elected Directors shall review the policy annually. Revised manuals will be distributed to all advocates after board approval.

Section 8: COMMUNICATION

Communication is an important part of doing business; therefore, we want you to be aware of what is happening within the CASA organization.

There is also information available via our website, www.casagalveston.org and Facebook page –CASA of Galveston County..

The best way to keep yourself aware is to become involved; if you have a question, please ask.

Section 9: CONFIDENTIALITY

Part of the responsibilities of a CASA advocate requires that all information provided regarding the child(ren) and families will be held in strictest confidence. Failure to comply with confidentiality can be grounds for immediate dismissal from the CASA program.

Guidelines for maintaining confidentiality include:

- Maintain confidentiality upon completion of Pre-Service Training
- Keeping all written records in a secure place.
- Upon acceptance of a case the advocate will complete the online case acceptance form agreeing to the confidentiality statement and to return all records the

advocate may have in their possession at the end of the case or when they are no longer an active participant.

- Not discussing the case with anyone other than those parties approved by CASA supervisory staff.
- Following all CASA procedures regarding which records may be kept and which must remain in the CASA office.
- Returning all case records to the CASA office within 10 days of case closure or resignation from the case or program.

The law that governs the confidentiality of our case files is in the Texas Human Resources Code (40.005) which provides that, a person who is authorized to receive confidential information shall maintain its confidentiality and shall prevent disclosure of the information to a person who is not authorized to receive the information. It is a Class A misdemeanor to disclose, without authorization, confidential information contained in the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services records, papers, files, or communications.

Section 10: CRIME VICTIMS COMPENSATION

A child might be eligible for Crime Victims' Compensation (CVC) due to them being a victim of a crime that resulted from their abuse/neglect case or referral. While their case is open, the state/Medicaid pays for any medical care or therapy our children need, but when they are out of state custody, CVC funds can begin to pay for this care.

CASA of Galveston County will perform the following preliminary assessment to assist the Department of Family and Protective Services (DFPS) in identifying potentially eligible children in their custody:

1. CASA supervisor will review and determine from the original removal affidavit and/or research on the Galveston County Sheriff's website whether charges were filed in relation to the removal of the child (e.g. physical abuse, drug-related crimes where child is named as victim, kidnapping, human trafficking, assault, sexual assault, family violence, or any other potentially eligible crime)
 - a. This will be logged in Optima as Case Research: researching case documents and crime information
2. CASA supervisor will print a copy of the blank CVC application and paperclip it with a CVC flyer
3. CASA advocate or supervisor will take this paperwork on their first/next home visit to provide to the placement or sent via US Postal Service if unable to visit

the home in person due to an emergency/disaster declaration and face to face visits have been suspended.

- a. This will be logged as Placement Contact: during your visit, note in placement contact log that you gave the CVC application and flyer to the placement and;
 - b. CVC Application to Placement: using this contact type, note that you gave the CVC application and flyer to the placement
 - c. *Note CASA does not complete the application or do any more than provide the blank application to the caregiver
4. CASA advocate or supervisor will send an email to DFPS caseworker with the blank application and the crime information found on the Sheriff's website (or from the affidavit) to let them know the application has been provided to placement
- a. This will be logged as Caseworker Contact: email CPS with the blank application, letting them know you provided this to the placement, and the crime information you found on the Sheriff's website and;
 - b. CVC Application to Caseworker: using this contact type, note same as above
5. During the next contact with placement after having given them the application, the CASA advocate or supervisor will follow up to see if placement or CPS has completed the application
- a. This follow up with be logged as CVC Application Status
3. If a child changes placements and they are potentially eligible:
- Provide blank application to new placement (Placement Contact and CVC Application to Placement)
 - Update CPS that you have provided application (Caseworker Contact and CVC Application to Caseworker)
4. If a child changes placements and CPS has already completed their application and received an eligibility letter:
- Provide eligibility letter to placement (Placement Contact and CVC Application Status)
 - Update CPS that you have provided letter to placement (Caseworker Contact and CVC Application Status)

Sometimes charges are not brought until the middle or end of a case. The advocate and supervisor will remain abreast of any potential criminal charges, especially those related to positive drug tests in our children. This process can and will be completed anytime criminal charges come up related to the child, not just those that come up at removal or at the beginning of the case.

Section 11: DIVERSITY

Galveston CASA is committed to promoting diversity and inclusion. All directors, employees, and volunteers performing work on behalf of Galveston CASA are expected to adhere to the laws and regulations that apply to their work activities and demonstrate ethical behavior in all decisions and interactions. CASA is committed to acknowledging and valuing volunteer differences and to creating an environment in which every individual's unique strengths and abilities are developed and valued.

All CASA volunteers share in the responsibility for creating this environment and are expected to demonstrate mutual respect and acceptance in the workplace. At CASA, we believe that utilizing our volunteers' uniqueness enhances communication, problem-solving and decision-making skills, thereby improving organizational productivity and performance. We also believe if our Board, employees, and volunteers mirror the diverse make-up of our communities and those we serve, we will be able to understand, and more effectively respond to, our community's needs. CASA in-serve training opportunities include cultural competency training.

Section 12: PROFESSIONAL IMAGE

In order to project professionalism, CASA volunteers are expected to maintain a good general appearance and be well-groomed at all times when conducting CASA business. As such, it is extremely important that our Advocates be concerned with their professional appearance. Advocates are expected to dress in an appropriate manner while on CASA business, using good judgment as guidelines. CASA reserves the right to discuss with any advocate his/her dress and to require changes, if deemed necessary. If you are in doubt as to what is appropriate, please consult with your supervisor.

When appearing in court in-person or via virtual technology, and or other CASA related meetings including the CASA office, a professional appearance is expected. Attire should enhance the dignity of the court and all persons must adhere to the following guidelines:

- No tee shirts or shirts with any writing on them other than the name brand.
- No tank tops, camisoles, or midriff-baring tops.
- No shorts, denim shorts or sweatpants.
- No backless or strapless blouses or dresses.

- No short dresses or skirts
- No baggy pants.
- No flip flops, shower clogs, or similar footwear
- No visible piercings (except ears) or tattoos.

Section 13: MINIMUM EXPECTATIONS OF SERVICE

- In a timely manner after appointment, obtain firsthand a clear understanding of the needs and situation of the child by reviewing all relevant documents and records and interviewing the child, parents, social workers, teachers and other persons to determine the facts and circumstances of the child's situation.
- Maintain confidentiality of all issues and records of the case, returning all case files to the CASA program after the case is closed.
- Notify all parties to the case of CASA's appointment.
- Communicate with the DFPS caseworker after appointment and at least one time per month for the duration of the case.
- Meet the child(ren) in a timely manner after appointment and meet in person with the child(ren) at least one time per month – 50% of these visits must be where the child lives. During an emergency/disaster declaration these required minimum expectations may be modified as directed by State and National CASA Associations in conjunction with information and directives by local authorities. The Executive Director will provide ongoing communication regarding child contact.
 - a) If the child(ren) are placed up to two (2) driving hours away, then CASA will meet in person with the child(ren) at least once every month.
 - b) If the child(ren) are placed two (2) to three (3) driving hours away, then CASA will meet in person with the child(ren) at least once every three months.
 - c) If the child(ren) are placed more than three (3) driving hours away, then CASA will meet in person with the child(ren) at least once every six months
- Have other types of age appropriate contact with the child(ren) including telephone calls, emails, and/or letters as applicable for the child's age and interests.
- Meet in person with the child's primary placement provider in a timely manner after placement occurs and communicate with the placement provider at least once a month thereafter for the duration of the assignment of the child's case.
- Advocate for the child(ren)'s best interest in the community by interfacing with mental health, medical, legal, educational and other community systems to assure that the child(ren)'s needs in these areas are met.

- Determine if a permanent plan, an educational passport, and a medical passport has been created for the child(ren).
- Participate in all scheduled case related meetings. During an emergency/disaster declaration these meetings may take place via visual technology and not in person. The Advocate Supervisor will keep the volunteer informed of the method of communication.
- Seek cooperative solutions by acting as a facilitator among parties maintaining communication with the child(ren)'s parents, family members, attorney ad litem, teachers, and other service providers as applicable.
- Appear at all hearings to advocate for the child(ren)'s best interest and permanency. Provide testimony when necessary, making recommendations for specific appropriate services for the child and when appropriate, the child's family. Provide written court reports for all permanency and review hearings. During emergency/disaster declarations these hearings may be conducted via visual technology and not in-person. The Advocate Supervisor will keep the volunteer informed regarding hearing requirements.
- On each case, assigned CASA staff and CASA volunteers will communicate at least once a month to update records, submit volunteer activity logs, and participate together in scheduled case conferences.
- Inform the court promptly of important developments in the case through appropriate means as determined by court rules and statute.
- Monitor implementation of service plans and court orders assuring that court-ordered services are implemented in a timely manner and that review hearings are held in accordance with the law.
- Participate in a minimum of 12 hours of on-going training per year of service.
- Refrain from introducing or involving your own family with the child/ children or any other persons involved with the case.
- Input all case activity, communications, miles driven, and meetings attended by the end of every month into the case management system.

The criteria listed above are from the Texas CASA minimum standards requirements policies. Should these standards change, we reserve the right to change the minimum expectations for volunteer service.

Section 13:1: Collaborative Family Engagement (CFE) Best Practice

CASA of Galveston County believes that every child has a family and a right to know them, and that all family members deserve to be heard and provided a chance to show themselves as safe and caring. CASA of Galveston County believes every child deserves to thrive, and children thrive in

healthy, positive relationships. Connections and relationships are critical for well-being and feeling safe, which is why CASA of Galveston County will use the Collaborative Family Engagement (CFE) approach as a best practice on all cases.

CASA's role as the Guardian Ad Litem, according to the Texas Family Code, already assigns supervisors and advocates with the duty of interviewing people who has knowledge of the child.

Sec. 107.002. POWERS AND DUTIES OF GUARDIAN AD LITEM FOR CHILD.

(b) a Guardian ad litem appointed for the child under this chapter shall:

(1) within a reasonable time after the appointment, interview:

(A) the child in a developmentally appropriate manner, if the child is four years of age or older;

(B) each person who has significant knowledge of the child's history and condition, including educators, child welfare service providers, and any foster parent of the child; and

(C) the parties to the suit;

The CFE approach makes this easier to do.

If you are unsure about using CFE on your case ask yourself this, "Is this child still connected to connections they had before they came into care." If the answer is no, then the need for CFE is there. Talk to your supervisor about the next steps.

Section 13:2: Restricted Activities

A CASA volunteer shall not:

- Take action without program or court approval that is outside of the CASA program role or powers of the CASA program.
- Take a child to the volunteer's home or any other home other than the child's
- Give legal advice or therapeutic counseling.
- Make placement arrangements for the child.
- Give money or expensive gifts to the child, the child's family, or caregiver.
- Take a child on an overnight outing.
- Cause a child or family to become dependent on the volunteer for services that are provided by other agencies or organizations. Such activities may jeopardize the safety of the child, the integrity of the program, or the objectivity of the volunteer.
- Engage in activities which are likely to result in conflict of interest or exposes the program or volunteer to criminal or civil liability.

- Submit recommendations to the court without prior discussion with their supervisor.
- Knowingly put a child in contact with someone who has a criminal history involving violence, child abuse, neglect, drugs, or a sex-related offence.
- Authorize medical treatment for the child(ren)
- Give the child(ren) medications or any types of vitamins.
- Give treats or feed the child without consulting the caregiver for dietary restrictions.
- Probe or introduce the specifics of abuse. Be especially careful when discussing issues in sexual abuse or other potential criminal cases.

Section 14: ADVOCATE CONDUCT

The mission of CASA is to recruit, train, and supervise court appointed volunteer advocates who provide constancy for abused and neglected children while advocating for services and placement in safe and permanent homes. CASA will conduct its relationships and operations in accordance with this purpose and uphold its fundamental commitment to serving abused and neglected children. CASA advocates are committed to the highest standards of responsibility and conduct and subscribe to the following guidelines in regards to its responsibilities and actions.

A CASA Advocate:

1. Practices and maintains the highest of sound management practices including efficiency, integrity, and economy of operations.
2. Observes the highest standards of personal conduct at all times and ensure that board members, employees, and volunteers are treated in a professional, business-like manner.
3. Avoids impropriety and/or the appearance of impropriety in all activities, business and personal.
4. Practices standards of conduct, which will promote community confidence in the values and mission of CASA.
5. Strictly uphold the laws, bylaws, rules, policies and regulations relating to the operation of CASA.
6. Guards against the use of affiliation with the CASA program for personal or financial advantage or special privilege.
7. Promotes and protects always the best interests and reputation of CASA and avoid and resist influences and practices which are detrimental to it.

8. Reports any incident of child abuse or neglect, or any situation in which the CASA advocate has reason to believe that a child is in imminent danger to the CASA supervisor and appropriate authorities, following state legal requirements as mandated in the Texas Family Code.
9. Should not accept or be assigned to a case in which the advocate is related to any parties involved or be employed in a position or with an agency that might result in a conflict of interest.
10. Discusses all recommendations concerning the case with the Advocate Supervisor prior to submitting recommendations to the court. Advocate Supervisor will not alter any recommendations or report content without consultation with the Volunteer.
11. Under no circumstances does an advocate record (audio or video) a visit with a child or any other party in the case.
12. Under no circumstance does an advocate record any phone conversations with any party in the case.

Please Note: The no recording policy refers to conversations and visits between the parties. Using a phone/ computer application or recording device to document one's case notes after a meeting/ conversation is acceptable.

Violations to any of the above criteria will result in IMMEDIATE termination as a CASA volunteer advocate.

Visits with Clients/Children

Galveston CASA advocates/staff are never under any circumstances to take friends, children, or other family members to visit clients.

Section 15: ADVOCATE TRAVEL AND EXPENSES

CASA is unable to reimburse advocates for travel. Under extraordinary circumstances and if funds are available reimbursement for mileage and travel may be reimbursed on a case by case basis and must be approved by the Executive Director before the commencement of travel.

From time to time, an advocate will be asked to attend an out of town conference.

Advocates traveling out of town on authorized business, at the request of CASA, will be reimbursed for meals and other pre-approved attendant expenses. Your Advocate Supervisor will assist in accurate completion of expense report and documentation requirements. Receipts must be provided. False or misleading documentation will result in release from Advocate Service.

Section 16: ADVOCATE SUPERVISOR RESPONSIBILITIES

Supervision and Coaching

Galveston CASA assigns each volunteer and Advocate Supervisor to provide support appropriate to the volunteer's needs and complexity of the case assignment. The Supervisor is easily accessible and provides timely and thorough guidance to the volunteer. CASA Advocate Supervisor will be available to meet with volunteers as needed, but no less than one (1) time per month. Supervisors will ensure that case progress is reviewed on a regular basis and will verify accurate completion of all written case records. Volunteers are encouraged to take advantage of case conferences to ask questions, address concerns, and discuss anticipated recommendations for upcoming court hearings.

Section 17: CASE ASSIGNMENT

Section 17.1: Case Assignment Process

1. Selecting cases to present to advocates
 - a. Team selection of advocate
 - i. By advocate supervisors and executive director
 - ii. We all participate in training so we get to know the advocates well; we can gauge what cases would be good fits for which advocates (including any advocate's particular skill set (i.e. former teacher, former nurse)
 - b. Advocate preferences- what does that advocate want in a case?
 - i. Age of children
 - I.e. Babies, school-aged, older youth
 - ii. Gender of children
 - iii. Sibling group or single child
 - iv. Placement
 - Near the advocate's home or work
 - We tell advocates that placement is never for sure and they could not only be moved, but they could be moved far away- so do not let placement be the sole deciding factor of whether or not to take a case

Section 17.2: Assigning/Accepting a Case.

1. From the advocate preferences and what our team deems a good fit, we choose our first choice, second choice, and sometimes third choice advocate for a case
2. We reach out to first choice advocate, if they cannot commit, we go onto second choice, etc.
3. We schedule an in-person meeting with the advocate to discuss the case in detail, give them a chance to read the affidavit, ask any questions they may have
4. If after this meeting, the advocate feels it is a good fit, we assign them to the case
5. Once the advocate accepts the case they must complete the online Case Acceptance and agree to maintain confidentiality. The electronically signed form will be uploaded into the volunteer record in Optima under documents and included in the documents of the case.

Section 17.3: Notification of Advocate

1. Once assigned, we fill out our notice to the court, which includes the advocate's name
2. We file this with the court and then email a copy to all parties

Ideally, a volunteer will only be assigned to one case at a time. However, a volunteer may be assigned to 2 cases at a time, at the discretion of the CASA staff. However, the decision to make such an assignment will have to be justified and reasonable. Should CASA staff assign a volunteer more than 2 cases, **the reasons a supervisor may assign a volunteer more than two cases shall be documented. Furthermore, each subsequent additional case assignment beyond the first assigned case, shall have documented justification.** At no time, and under no circumstances, will a volunteer be assigned to more than five cases.

Section 18: CASE NOTES AND DOCUMENTATION

CASA Volunteers are required to keep case notes and records of advocacy activities and proceedings of their designated case. This documentation is recorded in our case management system and on an ongoing basis and is to be kept up to date.

Section 19: COURT REPORTS

CASA Volunteers are required to submit completed court reports to their supervisor no later than 20 business days (4 weeks) prior to the court date. The CASA volunteer is responsible to discuss all recommendations concerning the case with his or her supervisor prior to submission of the recommendations to the court. The CASA Advocate Supervisor may make amendments to such report based on the results of this discussion and submit final report to the court and necessary parties. A CASA Volunteer has the final authority regarding recommendations – A program supervisor may only alter the report or recommendations with knowledge and agreement of the appointed CASA Volunteer.

Section 20: ADVOCATE RECORDS

Galveston CASA keeps advocate records for each advocate. It is important that these records be as accurate as possible. Your responsibility is to inform your Advocate Supervisor within 30 days of changes, such as your home address, telephone number, and email address or update your own personal information that is maintained in online case management system. This information is confidential and will not be shared with non-staff persons or members of the board of directors without your permission. All notices, including those required by law will be sent to the last address on file.

If you wish to review your advocate file, please speak to your Advocate Supervisor to set a convenient time. No advocate is allowed to remove original documents from an advocate file.

Section 21: VOLUNTEER ADVOCATE STATUS

Nothing herein shall be construed as creating an obligation on the part of CASA to utilize the services of a volunteer advocate for any particular length of time. Volunteering with CASA is “AT WILL” meaning that either party may terminate the relationship at any time, with or without notification.

Active

An active volunteer is currently appointed to and working a case.

Inactive

An inactive volunteer is a volunteer who is currently not assigned to a case and is not fulfilling any other duties of a Galveston CASA volunteer (in-services, contact with supervisor, etc.). A volunteer may be inactive for a period of up to 12 months (see Leave of Absence Below).

Leave of Absence

A volunteer may request a leave of absence from all duties associated with Galveston CASA at any time. **The length of the leave may be up to 12 months from the beginning date of the leave.** If a volunteer returns to active volunteer status after 6 months but before 12 months of inactivity, the volunteer may be required to complete a refresher course with the curriculum to be determined by the Executive Director and documented before active status will be granted. **After 12 months, the volunteer will no longer be eligible to return to their duties as a Galveston CASA volunteer unless they complete the full 30 hours of required pre-service training discussed in Section 23.**

Ineligible

An ineligible volunteer is a volunteer who is currently not eligible to be assigned to a case due a period of inactivity greater than permitted by the requirements above and without completing any refresher or full retraining. **An ineligible volunteer will need to complete the required training as determined by the length of their inactivity and at the discretion of the Executive Director before reinstatement as an active advocate.**

Dismissed

A dismissed volunteer is a volunteer who has been asked to leave Galveston CASA. Any volunteers dismissed from the program will be considered ineligible for future reinstatement as an advocate.

Duration of Volunteerism

At Galveston CASA, volunteerism is at-will, that is, the volunteer or Galveston CASA may terminate with or without cause and with or without notice at any time. Nothing in this handbook or in any document or statement will limit the right to terminate at-will. No manager, supervisor, employee, or volunteer of Galveston CASA has the authority to enter into an agreement for volunteerism for any specified period or to make an agreement for volunteerism other than at-will.

Section 22: CASA VOLUNTEER SAFETY

Safety

When performing your CASA volunteer duties, always use common sense. Never put yourself in a situation that feels unsafe. Please call your Advocate supervisor whenever you have questions, concerns, or need advice. Your safety is important to us, so please do not take risks.

The following safety tips should help you make some decisions, but please use your judgement to ensure your safety.

- Ensure you have the correct address before visiting a home or placement.
- Confirm the date, time and location of your visit before traveling to the location. If the family does not have a phone, try contacting them via mail or speak with them in person at a court hearing or supervised visit.
- Visit unverified placements (homes of respondent family members and relatives who have not been thoroughly check out) with your Advocate Supervisor.
- Take a cell phone with you. If you do not own a cellular phone, borrow one.
- Carry pieces of identification
- Do not wear expensive clothes or jewelry. Drive an inconspicuous car if possible.

- Use *67 to block Caller-ID services when calling from your personal phone. If the number you are dialing does not accept anonymous calls, call from the CASA office.
- If you must leave a message, give the CASA office phone number.
- Do not give your CASA child your personal phone number. Use the CASA office phone number. Give your number to the professionals such as caseworkers and therapists only at your discretion and with the understanding that the number does not become a part of the case record and will not be available to others.
- If anyone asks why you won't give out your home information-blame us. Let them know it is one of the strict agency policies that you agreed to uphold when you become a CASA volunteer.
- If the neighborhood does not look or feel safe, do not go through with the home visit, even if you have already set an appointment.
- Only make home visits in the daytime if possible
- Do not let children visit your home or know your home information. Your home is not a temporary housing option, even for one night.
- Always know your location and call 911 if there is a problem.

WAIVER for FACE TO FACE CONTACT

The agency may seek an overall waiver from face to face contact with a child/children during a time of emergency/disaster by making such request to Texas and/or National CASA if one has not been provided to the overall network to ensure ongoing standards compliance by both membership associations.

- The Executive Director will be responsible for requesting, receiving and communicating such waiver and the staff will document a waiver via Contact Log in Optima.
- The staff and volunteers shall be considered to have no requirement for any face to face contact for CASA business until such a time that the waiver has been lifted and face to face contact has been reinstated.
- The staff/volunteer on waiver shall be responsible to maintain regular contact with children (as developmentally appropriate), CPS, placement, case parties and their CASA supervisor, and for documentation of these contacts in Optima. It is preferable from a safety standpoint that communication with children be increased during this waiver to more frequent contact; suggested weekly to twice monthly.
- The staff supervising their case shall be responsible to maintain no less than twice monthly phone and/or email contact with the volunteer to coach and guide their case contacts, and to support them as needed.

- The staff and volunteer together shall maintain responsibility to prepare court reports for any statutory hearings or motion/progress settings in accordance with above protocol.

Transporting Children

It is the policy of CASA Galveston County, that at no time and for any reason is an advocate or staff allowed to transport any child or family member with whom the advocate/staff is working; nor is it permissible for the advocate to invite and/or receive clients into his/her home.

The Galveston CASA advocate or staff is never, under any circumstances, to ask a member of the advocate's or staff's family or friend of the advocate/staff to transport clients or their families. An advocate/staff should not suggest to any client that such transportation is a possibility.

Galveston CASA has established this policy for the protection of the advocate/staff and the CASA agency itself against any liability, which would result from an accident or injury to a child or other person being transported by an advocate/staff.

Failure to comply with this policy will result in immediate termination from your role as a CASA advocate.

Section 23: REINSTATEMENT

It is the policy of Galveston CASA to require 30+ hours of pre-service training to any CASA Volunteer who takes a leave of absence for a length of time that exceeds one (1) calendar year from the time of departure.

For CASA Volunteer to be considered reinstated, a documented discussion with the Advocate Supervisor must be approved by the Executive Director, with completion of the Galveston CASA required training certificate. The Executive Director will then place this document in the volunteer file.

A volunteer who has been dismissed is not eligible for reinstatement.

Section 24: ADVOCATE EXIT

We hope you will find a rewarding and enjoyable volunteer experience with CASA; however, we realize that for one reason or another, sometimes the volunteer relationship must end.

If you voluntarily decide to leave the program, please give as much notice as possible in writing to your Advocate Supervisor. Written notice should include the reason for the resignation and the last day the advocate will work their case, along with the advocate's signature and the date notice is being given.

If CASA ends your relationship, we will contact all the parties involved in the case and discuss next steps to ensure the best interest of the children, you were serving, are met.

All records and the CASA badge must be returned within 10 days of last day of working the case.

Section 25: EXIT INTERVIEWS

Upon leaving CASA's service, you may be asked for your comments concerning your period of volunteerism. Your input helps us to evaluate our policies, procedures, benefits, work environment, and other variables affecting your volunteer experience with us.

Section 26: NON-VOLUNTARY DISMISSAL

The CASA Executive Director has the authority and discretion to discharge an advocate from his/her responsibilities with CASA. Appropriate grounds for dismissal include but are not limited to the following:

1. The advocate takes action without program or court approval or is outside the role of the powers of the CASA program.
2. The advocate violates a program policy, court rule or law.
3. The advocate demonstrates inability to effectively carry out assigned duties.
4. The advocate fails to participate in required ongoing and continued education training.
5. The advocate falsifies volunteer application or misrepresents facts during the screening process.
6. Existence of a child abuse or neglect allegation against advocate.
7. Initiating an ex-parte communication with the court.
8. Existence of a conflict of interest, which cannot be resolved.

If it appears a CASA Advocate has violated one or more of the above, the CASA staff will speak with the advocate and explain the violation, gather an explanation and then discuss future action by outlining specific guidelines.

If the CASA Advocate does not then follow the specific guidelines discussed, the CASA Advocate is subject to discharge or termination from the program.

Once a CASA Advocate has been terminated, the advocate's file will be closed and the CASA Advocate will be expected to return their badge as well as any and all case file information immediately.

Section 27: REFERENCES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

It is the policy of CASA not to provide references regarding former advocates. CASA will only verify dates of service and only with the expressed permission of the advocate. No other advocate or staff member may give a personal or professional reference without the approval of the Executive Director. CASA may, in its sole discretion, make exceptions to this policy; however, such exceptions normally will not be made unless CASA receives a written authorization and release from the former advocate. If you have any questions or concerns, please see your Advocate Supervisor or Executive Director.

Section 28: GRIEVANCE POLICY

A grievance is any concern that arises in the application of policy, procedures, or practices. The policy set forth is intended to serve as a means for respectful problem resolution. All grievances by an advocate or a community member should be addressed in writing and should go to the appropriate person as identified in the process steps below. A form to facilitate this process is located at the end of this policy.

Extension of times beyond those indicated in the formal steps of the policy outlined below may be secured through mutual (written) agreement of the parties involved. Failure by the advocate or community member to comply with any time limitations shall constitute withdrawal of the grievance. Failure by CASA staff to comply with the time limitations shall constitute the right of the advocate to proceed to the next step of the grievance process.

1. **STEP ONE: ADVOCATE SUPERVISOR/ADVOCACY TEAM LEADER/DIRECTOR OF ADVOCACY**

- a. If informal discussions outlined above fail to resolve the issue, the advocate/community member shall submit the substance of his or her grievance in writing to Advocate Supervisor/Advocacy Team Leader/Director of Advocacy.
- b. The Advocate Supervisor/Advocacy Team Leader/Director of Advocacy shall convey his or her decision in writing to the advocate/community member within five working days of receipt of the grievance.
- c. If the aggrieved advocate/community member is not satisfied by this decision, he or she may submit in writing his or her grievance to the Executive Director within five working days of receipt of the decision.

2. **STEP TWO: EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR**

- a. Upon receiving the written request, the Executive Director shall request copies of all written communications from step one. The Advocate Supervisor/Advocacy Team Leader/Director of Advocacy and Executive Director shall meet within ten working days to discuss the issues.

- b. They shall decide on the matter and the Executive Director shall issue a decision in writing to the volunteer and the Board of Director's President within five working days of its meeting.
- c. Decisions from this meeting shall ordinarily be final.

3. **STEP THREE: BOARD**

In the event the Executive Director is unable to reach a decision and/or the grievance is of such a nature that it might interfere with the normal functions of CASA, then the Executive Director shall bring this matter to the next scheduled board meeting for consideration. The board shall issue its decision in a written statement to the advocate, and the Executive Director within five working days of its meeting. This decision shall be final.

Section 28.1: Grievance Process Form.

Please use this form to describe any concern that you want to resolve. CASA will use the information you provide to conduct an investigation into your concerns and attempt to resolve them. Information about the complaint may be disclosed to others to the extent necessary to complete the investigation.

No adverse action will be taken against you for making a complaint, provided the complaint is made in good faith.

Please be as complete and accurate as you can in describing the problem.

- 1. Date(s) of the event or problem:
- 2. Time(s) of the event or problem:
- 3. Location(s) of the event or problem:
- 4. Description of the event or problem.
- 5. Witnesses to the event or problem:
- 6. Do you have a suggested solution to the problem?
- 7. I verify that the above information is true and correct to the best of my knowledge.
- 8. Signature
- 9. Date

Section 29: GENERAL INFORMATION

Public Statements/Media Communication

Advocates are not to talk to the media regarding CASA matters. If you are asked a question by the media, please ask the media person to call the Executive Director or Board President at 409-572-2552 x1. The Executive Director or the Chairman of the Board will handle all statements made to the media. From time to time, advocates may be requested to assist in public relations matters.

Personal Items

CASA assumes no liability for personal items. If you voluntarily bring personal items to the office, you assume the risk should they disappear.

Telephone Manners

Often the first impression a client receives of CASA is over the phone. Answer with a cheerful expression in your voice and identify yourself when placing or answering a call.

Solicitation of Contributions

An Advocate shall not be required to contribute to any fund or collection. No solicitation or office collection may proceed without the approval of the Executive Director.

Section 30: PUBLICITY RELEASE STATEMENT

I hereby agree that Galveston CASA, a nonprofit charitable and educational organization, and its staff, agents, and affiliates may photograph and video and/or audio record me in connection with CASA educational, informational, promotional, marketing, and other activities (the "Activities").

I agree that CASA will be the sole and exclusive owner of the results of such photographing and video and/or audio recording. CASA shall have the sole and exclusive right, throughout the world, an unlimited number of times in perpetuity, in any media now existing, known, or hereafter created, to use, copy, publicly perform, publicly distribute (including posting on its website), store, publish, prepare derivative works with respect to, and otherwise use, reuse, or license others to use, in any manner, all or any portion thereof in connection with the Activities or otherwise. Photographs or images may include pictures of me in whole or in part, composite or retouched in character or form. I also acknowledge that CASA may choose not to use these materials at this time, but may do so at its own discretion at a later date.

I agree that, in connection with the activities consented to above, CASA may, without compensation, permission or notification, use and license others to use my name, voice, likeness, and any biographical material concerning me which I may provide in any and all media in connection with the activities or otherwise, and I hereby release CASA from any claim based on publicity rights, invasion of privacy, or defamation in connection therewith.

I affirm that I am over the age of eighteen (18) and have the right to contract in my own name. This agreement shall be binding upon me and my heirs, legal representatives, and assigns. I have read this agreement and I fully understand the contents of this agreement.

Section 31: REPORTING CONCERNS

Section 31.1: Policy Against Discrimination and Harassment.

CASA strives to provide all volunteer advocates with an experience that is free from any unlawful discrimination, harassment, intimidation, hostility or other offenses, which might interfere with performance of the volunteer duties. Unlawful discrimination or harassment, whether physical or verbal, is strictly prohibited, and will not be tolerated by an advocate, staff member, board member or others at our Agency. This includes (but is not limited to) racial slurs, ethnic jokes, posting of offensive statements, posters, cartoons, words, signs, pranks, intimidation, unwelcome physical contact, violence, or other similar conduct. Behavior prohibited by this policy also includes requests to engage in illegal, immoral or unethical conduct. All such conduct will not be tolerated and constitutes grounds for immediate dismissal.

Section 31.2: Sexual Harassment

Sexual harassment can occur in many forms, including but not limited to unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, other verbal or physical contact of a sexual nature, leering, gestures, and more subtle advances or pressure inviting sexual activity. Such conduct is unlawful when:

1. Submission to the advances is made a term or condition for continued volunteer advocate status.
2. Submission to or rejection of the advances is used as the basis for making decisions regarding the advocate.
3. Such sexual conduct interferes with the advocate's performance or creates an intimidating, hostile, or offensive working environment.

Section 31.3: Complaint Procedure for Discrimination and Harassment.

If an Advocate feels he/she has been treated in violation of this policy, he/she should immediately report the alleged act to his/her Advocate Supervisor for documentation and appropriate response. The conduct should be reported directly to the Executive Director if the alleged perpetrator is the Advocate's supervisor. If the alleged perpetrator is the Executive Director, the report should be given to the Board of Director. CASA will immediately investigate all complaints of harassment and discrimination in as discreet and confidential a fashion as possible. If unlawful discrimination or harassment is determined to have occurred, the Agency will take prompt corrective action against the offending person(s). The corrective action may consist of verbal or written warnings or other action, up to or including termination. CASA will not tolerate retaliation of any kind against person(s) who report incidents of any kind of illegal discrimination or harassment. However, in the event the investigation reveals that the allegation was false or made in bad faith, appropriate corrective action will be taken.

Section 31.4: Whistleblower Protection.

CASA will protect whistleblowers as defined below.

- CASA will use best efforts to protect whistleblowers against retaliation, as described below. It cannot guarantee confidentiality, however, and there is no such thing as an “unofficial” or “off the record” report. CASA will keep the whistleblower’s identity confidential, unless (1) the person agrees to be identified; (2) identification is necessary to allow CASA or law enforcement officials to investigate or respond effectively to the report; (3) identification is required by law; or (4) the person accused of Fraud Policy violations is entitled to the information as a matter of legal right in disciplinary proceedings.
- CASA staff may not retaliate against a whistleblower with the intent or effect of adversely affecting the terms or conditions of employment (including but not limited to, threats of physical harm, loss of job, punitive work assignments, or impact on salary or wages). Whistleblowers who believe that they have been retaliated against may file a written complaint with the Executive Director or President of the Board. A proven complaint of retaliation shall result in a proper remedy for the person harmed and the initiation of disciplinary action, up to and including dismissal, against the retaliating person. This protection from retaliation is not intended to prohibit supervisors from taking action, including disciplinary action, in the usual scope of their duties and based on valid performance-related factors.
- Whistleblowers must be cautious to avoid baseless allegations (as described earlier in the definitions section of this policy).

Section 31.5: Confidentiality.

It is CASA’s policy not to release information concerning a complaint of harassment to third parties or to anyone within the Agency who is not directly involved in the investigation, unless required by law or to properly complete an investigation. The purpose of this provision is to protect confidentiality, encourage the reporting of any incidents of harassment, and protect the reputation of any person(s) wrongfully charged with harassment.

Section 31.6: Policy for Open Door / Problem Resolution.

The purpose of this policy is to provide advocates an effective way to bring problems concerning them and their CASA work to the attention of CASA management, when warranted. Therefore, this Problem Resolution Policy has been established for the benefit and use of all advocates.

Misunderstandings or disagreements may arise in any organization and should be resolved before serious problems develop. Most incidents resolve themselves naturally; however, should a situation persist that an advocate believes is detrimental to their work for children, the

advocate should follow the procedure described here for bringing the complaint to CASA's attention. CASA values and wishes to promote an amiable and cooperative environment. Our Open Door/ Problem Resolution policy is reflective of our commitment to our values and providing you with the best possible volunteer experience.

CASA encourages an open and frank atmosphere where concerns, suggestions and questions can be discussed. We strive to ensure consistent and honest treatment of everyone involved with CASA. Everyone involved with the CASA program is expected to treat each other with mutual respect. Many problems can easily be resolved simply by discussing them openly.

Section 31.7: Informal Problem Resolution.

Advocates are encouraged to share concerns and feedback with their respective Advocate Supervisor/Advocacy Team Leader. If for any reason, you feel uncomfortable speaking with your Advocate Supervisor/Advocacy Team Leader, please talk the Executive Director. Advocates should feel confident that issues impacting the agency as a whole will be discussed and shared with the Program and Executive Directors.

Section 32: SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY

This policy governs the use of social media by employees, volunteers, and Board members of Galveston CASA. For the purposes of this policy, social media is defined as any facility for online publication and commentary, including, without limitation, blogs, wikis, and social networking sites such as Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, Flickr, Tumblr, and YouTube.

This policy applies to all uses of social media, including personal, by Galveston CASA employees, volunteers, and Board members. Publication and commentary on social media carries similar obligations to any other kind of publication or commentary. All uses of social media must follow the same ethical standards that Galveston CASA employees must otherwise follow. It is never acceptable to publish confidential information on social media.

If you are representing Galveston CASA on social media sites, respect your audience. These groups reflect a diverse set of customs, values, and points of view. Avoid arguments on social media, particularly of controversial issues. Don't try to settle scores, cause controversy, or goad volunteers or co-workers into inflammatory debates through social media. Do not use your social media profiles to defame or embarrass a co-worker, volunteer, program stakeholder, child victim, or their families. Always consider how other parties on a case might feel about your statements. Make sure that your social media use does not interfere with your job or commitments to volunteers or the children you serve. Policy violations will be addressed and subject to disciplinary action, up to and including termination for cause.

Don't say anything contradictory or in conflict with Galveston CASA. Be respectful of your co-workers, volunteers, and Galveston CASA stakeholders. This includes ethnic slurs, offensive comments, defamatory comments, personal insults, obscenity, etc., as well as the careful consideration of topics that may be considered objectionable or inflammatory.

Social Network Guidelines

- Avoid referring to, posting photos of, or revealing information about a child, a family, or a case.
- Avoid comment about the courts, attorneys, foster parents, Child Protective Services, or others you encounter through your staff or volunteer role.
- Galveston CASA volunteers and staff may not friend children served by any CASA program, respondent parents, the children's extended family or kin, or kinship care providers. In the event that someone without access to the child is looking for him or her, this precaution will prevent the child from being located through your social networking profile. It also encourages healthy boundaries.
- Galveston CASA encourages employees to keep privacy settings at a level that restricts your content to people who you have chosen to share with.
- Galveston CASA recommends choosing a profile photo and a profile name that would not embarrass the employee or Galveston CASA in court or divulge any information that should not be shared.
- Galveston CASA strongly discourages employees from using social networking profiles to comment on divisive social, legal or political matters, especially those related to child welfare.

Section 33: SUBSTANCE ABUSE FREE POLICY

CASA is committed to providing a safe, efficient and productive environment. Using, selling or being under the influence of any substance of abuse may pose serious safety and health risks. In support of this commitment, CASA has established the following Substance of Abuse Free Policy.

This policy applies to all individuals on CASA premises. This policy also applies to any person conducting business on behalf of or in the name of CASA, no matter where that business takes place.

Substances of Abuse are defined as:

- Any substance, legal or illegal, consumed, injected, inhaled or otherwise present in the body for purposes other than that for the treatment of a specific illness or disease pursuant to an order from a licensed medical practitioner authorized to prescribe the substance.
- Any substance available without a prescription, which is used for purposes other than those, which are medically recognized for that substance.

- Alcohol: when consumption meets or exceeds the State of Texas legal limits for “intoxication”.

The following activities are specifically prohibited by this policy:

1. Performance of duties while intoxicated or under the influence of any substance of abuse as defined above. “Under the influence” with respect to substances of abuse means any detectable level in the person’s body, which impairs the individual’s ability to perform regardless of when or where it may have been consumed, inhaled or injected.
2. The unlawful manufacture, possession, distribution, sale, transfer, or purchase of any substance of abuse while on CASA property or while acting in the capacity of a Volunteer or representative of CASA, or while attending a CASA sponsored event. This policy does not apply to alcoholic beverages served at a CASA approved or CASA sponsored function. However, under no circumstances is the consumption of alcoholic beverages to exceed legal limits as determined by the State of Texas.
3. The use of any legally prescribed substance which could impair the individual’s performance or attention to safety regulations while on CASA property or while acting in the capacity as a Volunteer or representative of CASA.

In the event that any violation of this policy could constitute a violation of criminal law, either State or Federal, CASA will inform the appropriate law enforcement officials and will cooperate fully with any investigation or prosecution of the individual(s). Any individual covered under this policy convicted under a criminal statute for a violation of the substance of abuse laws, must notify CASA no later than five (5) days after the conviction.

Advocates who have substance abuse problems, regardless of whether they directly affect performance or constitute violations of this policy, ought to seek medical treatment for their problems prior to being found in violation of this policy.

CASA reserves the right to conduct “for cause” searches and inspections of individuals covered by this policy, subject to applicable Federal and State law. CASA, at its sole discretion, can search all CASA property as well as personal effects, including but not limited to baggage, briefcases, purses, or vehicles, brought on CASA premises. Advocates who refuse to consent to a search will be discharged for failure to comply with CASA policy. Other individuals who fail to consent will be removed from CASA premises and will not be permitted to return.

This policy may be amended, revised or updated by CASA at any time without prior notice.

Section 34: NO WEAPONS POLICY

Effective January 1, 2016, properly licensed firearm owners in Texas are able to carry a handgun in most places depending on the location. Galveston CASA prohibits guests and employees from the open carry and concealed carry of firearms anywhere on its property.

Concealed Firearms

“PURSUANT TO SECTION 30.06, PENAL CODE (TRESPASS BY LICENSE HOLDER WITH A CONCEALED HANDGUN), A PERSON LICENSED UNDER SUBCHAPTER H, CHAPTER 411, GOVERNMENT CODE (HANDGUN LICENSING LAW), MAY NOT ENTER THIS PROPERTY WITH A CONCEALED HANDGUN”;

“DE ACUERDO CON LA SECCIÓN 30.06 DEL CÓDIGO PENAL (INGRESO SIN AUTORIZACIÓN DE UN PORTADOR DE UNA LICENCIA PARA LLEVAR UN ARMA DE FUEGO CORTA OCULTA), UNA PERSONA CON LICENCIA SEGÚN EL SUBCAPÍTULO H, CAPÍTULO 411 DEL CÓDIGO DEL GOBIERNO (LEY PARA PORTAR ARMAS DE FUEGO CORTAS OCULTAS), NO PUEDE INGRESAR A ESTA PROPIEDAD CON UNA ARMA DE FUEGO CORTA LLEVA OCULTA.”

Openly Carried Firearms

“PURSUANT TO SECTION 30.07, PENAL CODE (TRESPASS BY LICENSE HOLDER WITH AN OPENLY CARRIED HANDGUN), A PERSON LICENSED UNDER SUBCHAPTER H, CHAPTER 411, GOVERNMENT CODE (HANDGUN LICENSING LAW), MAY NOT ENTER THIS PROPERTY WITH A HANDGUN THAT IS CARRIED OPENLY”:

“DE ACUERDO CON LA SECCIÓN 30.07 DEL CÓDIGO PENAL (INGRESO SIN AUTORIZACIÓN DE UN PORTADOR DE UNA LICENCIA PARA LLEVAR UN ARMA DE FUEGO CORTA ABIERTAMENTE), UNA PERSONA CON LICENCIA SEGÚN EL SUBCAPÍTULO H, CAPÍTULO 411 DEL CÓDIGO DEL GOBIERNO (LEY PARA PORTAR ARMAS DE FUEGO CORTAS), NO PUEDE INGRESAR A ESTA PROPIEDAD CON UNA ARMA DE FUEGO CORTA LLEVA ABIERTAMENTE.”

Carrying or concealing firearms or dangerous and/or illegal weapons while on Galveston CASA property is prohibited. Failure to adhere to this policy will may result in discipline, up to and including immediate termination from employment.

CASA of Galveston County

Section 35: ADVOCATE POLICY MANUAL ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Version: August 2020



I have received, read and understand all matters set forth in the Advocate Policy Manual for Galveston CASA, and I agree to abide by their provisions. I realize that the Executive Director may unilaterally implement changes in the policies. Nothing in these policies is to be construed as a contract or a provision guaranteeing a specific term or tenure of volunteerism. I understand that my volunteer relationship with CASA may be terminated at any time with or without cause or notice.

I specifically agree to all terms and conditions described in the text of this Advocate Policy & Procedure Manual.

Signature

Date

Print Advocate Name