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**Transportation Policy**

*This Policy and Procedure will be in effect as a Pilot Program for a period of one year beginning July 1, 2017 and ending June, 30, 2018. At that time, the program and policy will be reassessed. The Transport Pilot Program will begin with no more than 10 Advocates willing to transport and monitor their experience closely for 6 months and then add additional Advocates, as practical. It is recommended that the Advocate transporter include enough information in the post- visitation report so as to have effective documentation for later program evaluation. It is also important that this program doesn’t generate or add a significant amount of work, record keeping and administrative duties to the current staff. It is solely the CASA Advocate responsibility that all documents required to transport are in place and on file at the office in Conroe, Texas. This Pilot Program may be halted at any time by the Executive Director or Board of Directors.*

It is recognized by Child Advocates of Montgomery County that a limited subset of youth in the Foster Care system and regularly seen by their Advocates may benefit from extra time and attention given by their volunteers and therefore, may grant those volunteers permission to transport children under limited conditions and certain guidelines.

Transportation of children is not mandatory. It is recognized that many children will be ineligible to be transported by CASA and that some Advocates will not be comfortable with assuming the liability involved. It is expected that transporting children will be an exception rather than the rule, and will be a very small part of CASA’s work.

It is recognized that the roles of Children’s Protective Services (CPS) and CASA are different. This should be respected and never confused or blurred. CPS works with all foster care children, under many conditions and transports children for many reasons. CASA’s role in transporting ideally would be limited to the Goals and Conditions described below, but at the Program Directors’ discretion CASA Advocates may transport for other reasons if CPS and CASA are in agreement on the need and conditions and sign off accordingly.

**Goal of Transporting**

The goals of transporting children are:

* To develop and enhance the trust and bond between the Advocate and the child;
* To foster open and more effective communication; and
* To give the child a sense of a “normal life” experience.

It is not the goal of CASA to provide routine transportation for which CPS or the caretaker should be responsible.

Common sense and good judgement must be used in every situation and the child’s welfare and safety must always be paramount.

**Qualifying to Transport**

* An Advocate may qualify to transport for a specific child. Permission for each child will be assessed separately.
  + No child under 6 will be transported. Children between 6-12 years of age should be harnessed in the backseat of the vehicle. Children 6-7 year old must ride in an approved car seat.
  + No DFPS Intense level child will be transported by CASA.
* The Advocate must complete CASA’s Transporting Children training.
* The Advocate must provide:
  + A copy of the current driver’s license for the CASA office.
  + A current copy of their driving record from the Texas DMV. A copy will be kept on file in the CASA office. The driver also must not have had more than two moving violations or accidents within the past three years, and may never have been convicted of a DWI or driving under the influence.
  + Proof of current automobile liability insurance of at least $100,000 Bodily Injury, each person and $300,000 Bodily Injury, each occurrence and $100,000 Property Damage, each occurrence; including a copy of the coverage, the declarations page and agent information in the automobile. Copies will be kept on file in the CASA office and must be updated every six months. This is the Advocate’s responsibility.
  + Proof that car(s) used for transport will be in compliance with Texas vehicle inspection requirements. The vehicle used shall have an up-to-date safety inspection from the State of Texas prior to transport and possess airbags and safety harnesses.
* The Advocate must sign the Volunteer Transportation Contract/Request Form, indicating agreement and compliance with the policy.
* The Advocate must have been on the case for at least 90 days.

**Approvals and Notifications**

* The Advocate (together with Case Supervisor) must gain written approval from the CASA Case Supervisor, the CASA Program Director and CPS to transport a specific child.
* The Advocate must have written approval in advance from the Case Supervisor for each specific instance of transport.
* The Advocate will notify CPS and the Residential Treatment Center (RTC), Foster Parent or Primary Care-giver that an individual in their facility or home will be driven to an identified location and returned after the event or outing. If this is done by phone rather than in writing, the Advocate will make that note for the records.
* The Advocate will keep a log of all CASA transports, and submit to CASA with the mandatory monthly time and mileage report.
* A signed copy of the Volunteer Transportation Contract/Request Form should be taken with the Advocate while performing the visit.

**Specific Instance of Transporting**

* Transporting must support the child’s plan of service.
* All destinations must be public places. A child may never be taken to any private residence, including the Advocate’s home.
* There will be no overnight transporting.
* There must be two adults in the car with the child at all times. A non-Advocate must have completed Helping Hearts training and a background check and must sign a confidentiality agreement for the specific case.
* No non-approved individuals will be in the vehicle with the children.
* The child may never be transported by motorcycle or scooter.
* Every occupant of the vehicle must wear seatbelts and shoulder harnesses at all times while the vehicle is moving.
* The driver may not text or talk on a cell phone while the vehicle is moving.
* No smoking is allowed at any time while the child is in the automobile.
* Advocates or other individuals in the vehicle are prohibited from carrying weapons, including knives, firearms, or ammunition of any kind while transporting. This is in concordance with Texas CASA Standard 10.F.6.
* Automobile safety is a priority and the volunteer will report immediately to the Executive Director if there is an accident or moving violation of any kind.
* The volunteer will obey all traffic rules including seat belt and child car seat laws and posted speed limits.

It is the CASA Advocate’s responsibility that all documents required to transport are in place and on file at the CASA office. The CASA Program Director and Case Supervisors will make transport decisions based on each individual case and may for any reason rescind or deny approval to transport a child. Any willful breach of this policy and procedure will be taken very seriously by the CASA leadership and may result in the volunteer transporter being removed from the CASA program.

Prior to any transport, it is recognized that the CASA Advocate transporting any child has read this document and understands the risks and limitations of this policy and procedure, does this in a voluntary capacity, and is knowledgeable of the potential personal risk and accepts all personal and legal liability.

Texas Booster Seat laws. Texas requires that child safety seats are used based on manufacturer recommendations. NHTSA recommends that booster seats be used in the back seat from ages 4-8 and when the child weighs over 40 pounds unless the child is 4’9″ or taller. Texas requires that child safety seats are used based on manufacturer recommendations. NHTSA recommends that booster seats be used in the back seat from ages 4-8 and when the child weighs over 40 pounds unless the child is 4’9″ or taller.