



## PLEDGE OF COMPLIANCE Advocate Policies and Procedures

\_\_\_\_\_  
First and Last Name (print)

Relationship to CASA:  
(Circle Applicable)

Advocate  
Helping Heart  
Employee

I, \_\_\_\_\_, acknowledge by my signature on this page that I have received and fully understand CASA policies that govern Advocates. Further, I agree to execute my duties in strict accordance with these policies. It is my clear understanding that, if I violate CASA's policies, I am subject to immediate termination of my relationship with this organization.

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## **ADVOCATE POLICIES AND PROCEDURES**

### **Mission:**

Our mission is to provide and promote court appointed advocacy so that every abused and neglected child can have the opportunity to thrive in a safe, nurturing permanent home.

### **CASA Advocates:**

CASA Advocates are the heart of our organization. Through dedicated efforts of our Advocates, CASA is able to service abused and neglected children in our community. Having Advocate policies demonstrates to our community that CASA Child Advocates of Montgomery County (CASA):

- Respects and protects the children we serve
- Values the time, skills and commitment of our Advocates
- Maintains policies and procedures for accountability and effective management
- Works to continually evaluate and improve the CASA Program

The policies in this CASA Advocate manual are intended to provide overall guidance and direction for our Advocates so that they can effectively advocate in the best interest for the abused, neglected and/or dependent children of CASA.

CASA Advocates are welcome to direct questions about these policies to the CASA program staff at any time.

## Section 1 - General Policies

### 1.1 Requirements to Become a Child Advocate

- Minimum age of 21
- Complete 30 hours of pre-service training, including at least 10 hours of in-person training
- Observe three hours of Child Protective Services (CPS) court
- Complete a written application
- Complete an interview with the Recruiting Director
- Pass National criminal, National sex offender and Child Abuse and Neglect Central Registry background checks. Specifically, these include: a Texas criminal record check (obtained from the Texas Crime Information Center maintained by the Texas Department of Public Safety); a national criminal background check (obtained from the National Crime Information Center (NCIC) maintained by the Federal Bureau of Investigation) that includes a fingerprint check; Social Security number verification; Texas and National Sex Offender Registry check (Child Abuse and Neglect Central Registry maintained by the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services) including other counties and states where the potential volunteer has lived in the previous 7 years. (Refusal to sign the release of info or to do the background check will disqualify a potential volunteer.) The required record checks will be repeated for each active volunteer at least every two years.
- Provide 3 or more satisfactory unrelated personal references prior to pre-service training
- Take an oath of confidentiality
- Complete 12 hours of continuing education training annually after the first year of service
- Advocate should be able to speak and write English
- Advocate should have access to a computer

A qualified CASA volunteer who transfers to CASA Child Advocates of Montgomery Co. from another program must complete the full application and screening process. They **must complete the full pre-service training for this county.**

If a volunteer has been inactive for more than **one** year, the volunteer will need to complete the pre-service training again.

CASA does not accept or retain Advocates if they or an immediate family member, have been convicted or have prior charges, or have charges pending for a felony or misdemeanor involved in a sex offense, violent act, child abuse or neglect, or related acts that would pose risks to children or to the CASA program's credibility. Advocates must immediately notify CASA of any charges of Class B misdemeanor or higher and of any criminal conviction.

Advocates are prohibited from having direct or indirect financial interest in the assets, leases, business transactions or professional services of the program.

Advocates shall not serve as foster parent for any child whose conservatorship is through CPS unless the Advocate is related to the child.

Advocates shall not be related to any parties or litigants involved in the case, or are employed in a position and/or agency that might result in a conflict of interest.

Advocates shall not serve as CPS mediators.

Advocates shall never engage in anything that could decrease the perception of their objectivity in their case.

Each volunteer will sign an Acknowledgement that they have read and understand the Advocate Policies and Procedures, and they will receive a copy of the Advocate Policies and Procedures.

## **1.2 Child Abuse, Non-Violent Verbal/Non-Verbal Disciplinary Methods**

Rarely will an Advocate be faced with a situation where it is appropriate to discipline a child. However, it is reasonable to assume this situation may occur. Therefore, CASA takes the following position regarding disciplinary methods.

It is expected that CASA Advocates will comply with all laws regarding child abuse as specified in the Texas Family and Criminal Codes. Furthermore, CASA does not endorse or condone any form of violent disciplinary methods toward children. Physical discipline may not be used by anyone representing CASA under any circumstance. Using language or mode of speech that is degrading or embarrassing (i.e. abusive verbal communication) is not an acceptable means of discipline. Discipline must be constructive and educational in nature. Correction must be fair, reasonable, consistent and related to the specific misbehavior. Discipline should be individualized and age appropriate. **Discipline will never involve any physical or mechanical restraints.**

Any incident of unacceptable verbal/non-verbal discipline (as described/defined above) of a child that occurs while conducting CASA business will be considered child abuse and appropriately reported to the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services. Any staff or Advocate who is alleged to have engaged in any form of child abuse will be reported to the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services and immediately placed on administrative leave for the duration of the investigation. If child abuse allegations are substantiated, the Advocate involved will be subject to immediate termination.

If any Advocate has reason to believe a child has been mistreated, that person has an obligation to comply with the Texas Family Code 261.101 regarding the requirement to report child abuse and neglect. Child abuse can be reported to TDFPS at 1-800-252-5400.

## **1.3 Confidentiality**

CASA Advocates often work with confidential, proprietary information and materials. Confidential information (and all documentation and information relating thereto) will be kept strictly confidential by Advocates.

All confidential documents should be marked "*Confidential.*" It will be the recipients' responsibility to control and return the documents.

**Confidential Information:**

It is important that each Advocate is able to identify what information is considered confidential. Listed below are items which must be kept confidential:

- Case files
- Donor, Advocate, board member, staff personnel records
- Any information related to the cases assigned to CASA and any information to the families and children served by CASA Advocates. This includes but is not limited to the following: medical and psychological reports or information regarding the child and/or their family members.
- Any CASA documentations such as staffings or discussions related to information that may be included in a case file
- Attorney's offices, staff/Advocate generated court reports and communications with attorneys
- Any documents from CPS, law enforcement, the District Attorney's offices, the County. This includes but is not limited to the following: the name and identifying information of the individual who initially reported abuse and neglect to CPS.
- Any document (hard copy or electronic media) marked "Confidential"

**Precautions for Individuals Working with Confidential Information:**

**Maintaining Confidentiality:**

- Keep all confidential documents out of view and/or locked away in your desk
- Close all doors when confidential discussions occur
- Confidential information on your personal computer should be password protected and never left open when you step away. Confidential documents should not be stored on your personal hard drive.
- CASA central case file records are not allowed to leave the CASA office. The Advocate must maintain the security of all confidential records when in their personal possession, and must maintain the security of those records when they are not in the person's possession, such as when they must be temporarily left at home or in a vehicle. Case records and notes shall be secured and kept private and inaccessible to unauthorized persons.

**Maintaining Confidentiality when Printing, Copying and/or Disposing:**

- Monitor the printer when printing confidential documents. Do not leave such print jobs unattended.
- Remove all confidential documents from the copy machine. In the event of a jam, make sure all confidential papers are removed.
- Shred confidential documents at the CASA office.

**Maintaining Confidentiality on the Telephone:**

- Close doors when confidential conversations are being made on the phone.

- All conference calls where confidential information may be discussed should be conducted behind closed doors.
- Individuals should be careful what they say when leaving voice mail messages that may contain confidential information.
- Be discrete in communications with others to ensure that unauthorized disclosures do not occur.

#### **Maintaining Confidentiality when Mailing:**

- Confidential mail sent by regular mail or courier should be sent in sealed envelopes and marked "Confidential."
- Mark all confidential information mailed from the CASA office as "Confidential."

#### **Maintaining Confidentiality When E-Mailing**

- Before sending any confidential information via electronic mail, individuals should make sure the intended recipient is the sole user of the address.
- Discretion should be used when sharing confidential information by electronic mail since it can be accessed fairly easily by experienced users.
- The following confidentiality notice should be included on all confidential electronic mail:

***“CONFIDENTIALITY NOTICE: This communication and any attachments may contain confidential and privileged information for the use of the designated recipients named above. This transmission is strictly confidential. If you are not the intended recipient of this message, you may not disclose, print, copy or disseminate this information. If you have received this in error, please reply and notify the sender (only) and delete the message. Unauthorized interception of this email is a violation of federal criminal law.”***

#### **Maintaining Confidentiality in Optima and other electronic information sources**

- Child data may not be put on a thumb drive (which can be easily misplaced)
- All child records should be viewed in Optima and not downloaded to personal hard drives.

#### **Maintaining Confidentiality When Faxing:**

- When using a fax machine to transmit confidential information, make arrangements for recipient to be available to monitor the fax machine to retrieve the document.
- Verify all fax numbers prior to sending information by facsimile and include the notice of confidentiality with all faxes:

***“CONFIDENTIALITY NOTICE: This communication and any attachments may contain confidential and privileged information for the use of the designated recipients named above. This transmission is strictly confidential. If you are not the intended recipient of this message, you may not disclose, print, copy or disseminate this information. If you have received this in error, please contact us immediately upon receipt.”***

#### **Maintaining Confidentiality with Social Media:**

- No pictures of CASA child, no identifying information about a CASA child/case/court hearing will be placed on social media – Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, etc.
- Advocates will not discuss frustration with CPS, foster parent, kinship, child, CASA or the “system” on social media.

#### **1.4 Identification**

- The CASA program staff will provide all CASA Advocates with a copy of the Court Order and Certificate of Acceptance to the case. The CASA Advocate should have these items in their possession when executing any of their roles and responsibilities as a CASA Advocate. All CASA Advocates will be given an identification badge upon completion of the training. All Advocates should show this badge to interested parties to validate the Advocate's involvement in the case and should always wear this badge when on CASA business.
- CASA Advocates should not use their personal physical address in any communication or correspondence related to the execution of their duties as a CASA Advocate. If the CASA Advocate is asked to provide his or her contact information, the Advocate should give the CASA office contact information. Should an individual request further information, the Advocate should refer him/her to the CASA program staff.
- Each CASA Advocate will be provided with an email address to be used for CASA business.

#### **1.5 Public Access Statement**

CASA will not allow public access to the information in the custody of CASA that relates to an Advocate's home address, home telephone number, social security number, or any information about their family members without written consent from the Advocate.

#### **1.6 Conflict of Interest**

A CASA Advocate should not be related to or otherwise acquainted with any party involved in his/her case, or be employed in a position and/or agency that might result in a conflict of interest. A CASA Advocate should not enter into a business, service or professional agreement with any party to the case to which he/she is currently assigned. This includes, but is not limited to, client families and attorneys.

#### **1.7 Sexual Harassment and Discrimination**

CASA will seek to maintain an environment within the program which is free from intimidation, discrimination, coercion or harassment. **Discrimination against a child or caregiver on the basis of age, race, religion, national origin, sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression will not be tolerated.** Discrimination against an Advocate on the basis of age, race, religion, national origin, marital status, **sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression** will not be tolerated. In the event of a question, complaint or allegation regarding the harassment or discrimination of any kind, the Advocate should speak with the CASA Supervisor. If the allegation involves the CASA Supervisor, the Advocate should speak with the CASA Program Director. If the allegation involves the Program Director the CASA should speak with the CASA Executive Director. If the allegation involves the Executive Director then the Advocate should speak with the Chairperson of the CASA Board of Directors. Contact information is available in the CASA office. The matter will be investigated in a discreet and confidential manner and after consideration of the facts; appropriate action will be taken in the best interests of the Advocate and the program. Such action may include recommendation for counseling, disciplinary warnings and termination.

## **1.8 Weapons**

Advocates are prohibited from possessing firearms, weapons, ammunition or explosives on the property of Child Advocates of Montgomery County, Inc., or while engaged in the duties or functions as employee, volunteer or Board member of Child Advocates of Montgomery County Inc. Currently active law enforcement agents are exempt from this policy.

## **1.9 Substance Abuse**

Advocates are prohibited from being under the influence of, using, possessing, selling or otherwise being involved with illegal drugs or alcohol while engaging in their role as a CASA Advocate. CASA reserves the right to randomly drug test any Advocate who is believed to be under the influence of a substance while performing his/her role as a CASA Advocate. The cost of this testing is paid for by CASA and the results are confidential.

## **1.10 (Deleted)**

## **1.11 Training**

All CASA Advocates are required to achieve a minimum of twelve (12) Continuing Education hours following completion of their first full year, CASA records training hours on a grant year (9/1 - 8/31) and in-service hours will be prorated so that all Advocates are on the same recording schedule.

## **1.12 Speaking on Behalf of the Agency**

Advocates are encouraged to speak about the program, in general, throughout the community. However, the Recruiting Director must be informed of any speaking engagements the Advocates may wish to arrange on behalf of CASA, so the staff may assist with written materials or go with the volunteer to help with the presentation.

Advocates are prohibited from speaking about details of any case within the CASA program. Advocates are prohibited from speaking to the media about CASA, unless granted permission to do so from the Executive Director. Failure to follow this policy can result in dismissal.

## **1.13 Immunity**

CASA adheres to Texas Family Code 107.009 which states: (a) A guardian ad litem, an attorney ad litem, or an amicus attorney appointed under the chapter is not liable for civil damages arising from an action taken, a recommendation made, or an opinion given in the capacity of guardian ad litem, attorney ad litem, or amicus attorney. (b) Subsection (a) does not apply to an action taken, a recommendation made or an opinion given: (1) with conscious indifference or reckless disregard to the safety of another; (2) in bad faith or with malice; or (3) that is grossly negligent or willfully wrongful.

## **1.14 Access to Legal Counsel**

CASA does not and will not appoint an attorney for an Advocate's personal use. CASA does not and will not provide legal consultation for an Advocate's personal use. CASA does not and will not participate in any legal activities in which a current, former and/or prospective Advocate is

involved, unless subpoenaed by the court. CASA will monitor any legal case pertaining to a current, former and/or prospective Advocate, in the interest of preventing a risk to the credibility of CASA.

CASA does not provide access to legal counsel with relevant legal expertise to clarify the meaning of laws or regulations governing its program or operations.

### **1.15 Religion**

Advocates will respect the beliefs of the child and/or family for whom they are advocating. Advocates may not attempt to persuade a child or family with regard to any religious belief or moral conviction.

### **1.16 Exception to Policies**

On occasion, certain exceptions may be made to any of these policies at the discretion of the Executive Director.

## **Section 2 - Program Policies**

### **2.1 Advocate-Child Relationship**

The Advocate is responsible for establishing a relationship with the child that promotes the child's well being and enhances the Advocate's objectivity while serving as the Guardian ad Litem. In order to establish such a relationship, the Advocate is prohibited from the following:

- Introducing or identifying the child as a CASA child to anyone not professionally related to the child's case
- Involving the child with anyone who is not related to the child's case
- Taking the child to the Advocate's home or to the home of the Advocate's personal friends or family
- Purchasing expensive gifts or providing significant material support to the child or family
- Accepting expensive gifts or significant material support from the child or family
- Giving legal advice or therapeutic counseling
- Making placement arrangements for the child
- Taking the child on an overnight outing
- Causing dependency for services that other agencies provide
- Transporting the child in the Advocate's car or on any public transportation, unless approved in advance, and in accordance with our current Transportation Policy. (It is not expected that all Advocates will transport children: if you are interested in this, see the attached Transportation Policy.)

### **2.2 Direct Services**

Advocates shall not become inappropriately involved in a case by providing direct service delivery to any parties that could (a) lead to a conflict of interest or liability problems; or (b) engage in activities which are likely to result in conflict of interest or expose the program or

Advocate to criminal or civil liability; or cause a child or family to become dependent on the Advocate for services that shall be 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.

### **2.3 Length of Commitment**

CASA Advocates are asked to commit to the CASA program for a minimum of twelve (12) months or until the case to which they are assigned is closed by the Child Protection Court.

### **2.4 Supervision**

CASA Advocates are assigned a CASA Case Supervisor. Each CASA Advocate is responsible for submitting information to their supervisor **monthly and upon request**. Each CASA Advocate is responsible for submitting a court report to the Case Supervisor **two weeks** before the court date. The supervisor will not change or alter the court report without the knowledge and agreement of the Advocate. CASA Advocate shall discuss any recommendations to the court with the supervisor prior to court. Failure to adhere to this policy can result in the dismissal of an Advocate.

### **2.5 Professional Conduct**

All CASA Advocates are expected to conduct themselves in a professional manner at all times. Personal and Professional conduct should uphold the credibility and positive reputation of CASA in the courtroom and community. CASA Advocates should dress appropriately for court and other meetings the CASA Advocate needs.

### **2.6 Advocate Minimum Expectations**

1. In a timely manner after appointment, obtain first hand 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. *I.e. persons interviewed: child, parents, CPS, teacher, placement provider/shelter; records/documents reviewed: CPS case file; school record, medical records; court record, order of CASA appointment.*
2. Maintain confidentiality of all issues and records of the case, returning all case files to the CASA program after the case is closed.
3. Notify all parties on the case of CASA's appointment.
4. Communicate with DFPS caseworker after appointment and at least one time per month for the duration of the case.
5. Communicate with the Attorney ad Litem at least quarterly for the duration of the case.
6. Meet with the child in a timely manner after appointment and meet in person with the child at least one time per month. *50% of these visits each year must be where the child lives.*

- If the child is placed one to three driving hours away, then CASA will meet in person with the child at least once every three months. *50% of these visits each year must be where the child lives.*
- If the child is placed more than three driving hours away, then CASA will meet in person with the child at least once every six months. *50% of these visits each year must be where the child lives.*

*Note: if the child is placed outside of the driving capabilities of CASA, a request for courtesy assistance from appropriate nearby program may be made.*

7. For children second grade or older Advocate must have a second contact with the child each month. Acceptable types of contact may be a visit with the child, a telephone call, email(s) and/or letters as applicable for the child's age and interest.
8. 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.
9. Advocate for the child's best interest in the community by interfacing with mental health, medical, legal, educational and other community systems to assure the child's needs in these areas are met at least once every three months. *i.e. psychologist, psychiatrist, doctor/nurse, educators, daycare providers, attorneys*
10. Determine if a permanent plan (including: Permanency & Concurrent Goal; Child's Plan of service, and Family Plan of Service), educational passport (binder), and health passport (binder) has been created for the child.
11. Participate in all scheduled case related meetings. *i.e. ARD, FGC, PC, COS, informal conferences, mediations*
12. Seek cooperative solutions by acting as a facilitator among parties maintaining communication with the child's parent, family members, attorney ad litem, teachers, and other service providers as applicable.
13. Appear at all court hearings to advocate for the child'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 report for all required hearing. *i.e. Court reports: status, initial permanency, permanency, permanency after final order; Recommendations: permanency/concurrent plans, services, visitation*
14. On each case assigned CASA **Supervisor** and CASA volunteers will communicate at least once per month so as to update records and contact logs and participate together in scheduled case conferences.
15. Inform the court promptly of important developments in the case through appropriate means as determined by the court rules and statute.
16. Monitor implementation of service plans and court orders to assure court-ordered services are implemented in a timely manner and that review hearings are held in accordance with the law

17. Participate in a minimum of twelve (12) hours of ongoing training per year of service.
18. Refrain from introducing or involving the Advocate's family members or friends not appointed to the case with the child or any other persons involved in the case.
19. Document in Optima all visits and contacts with associated parties in the case (CPS Caseworker, attorneys, caregivers, and supervisor). Enter all casework time and mileage and training hours in Optima.

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

## **2.7 Case Conflict**

It is rare for an Advocate and Supervisor to be in conflict regarding their positions on a case; however, at times this situation arises. When an Advocate and Supervisor have a conflict that cannot be resolved among themselves, the Program Director will act as a mediator to resolve the conflict. The Program Director will make the final decision.

## **2.8 Case Closure**

The role of a Court Appointed Special Advocate is by nature a transitory one. An effective Advocate recognizes that abused and neglected children face many unpredictable transitions in their lives. In order to lessen the negative impact of such transitions, an Advocate is responsible for providing a healthy transition for the child/children when CASA is dismissed from the case. It is CASA's expectation that each Advocate will carefully plan and execute their final contact with their CASA child/children, and that their exit from the case not be abrupt. CASA expects Advocates to cease contact with the child/children after their case is closed, unless the family of final placement or an aged-out youth requests continued contact. An Advocate's Case Supervisor can provide resources to assist in smooth transitions for children. Advocate shall return all case files to the CASA office immediately upon closure of the case. The Case Supervisor will conduct an in-person review of the case, and an evaluation of the volunteer's work at case closure. The Advocate will return their copy of the case file to the CASA office.

## **2.9 Grounds for Immediate dismissal from a case:**

- Taking action that endangers the child
- Initiating ex-parte communication with the court
- Violating a program policy, court rule or law
- Failing to demonstrate an ability to effectively carry out assigned duties
- Falsifying the application or misrepresenting facts during the screening process
- Existence of child abuse/ neglect allegations
- Existence of a conflict of interest which cannot be resolved

## **2.10 Assignment of Cases**

Advocates shall not be assigned to more than two cases at a time unless they have exception documentation, and will not be assigned more than five cases under any circumstances.

### **2.11 Maintain Complete Records**

Advocates must maintain complete records regarding the case **they are assigned to**. Case files **in Optima** must include complete documentation that minimum expectations of service have been met. **Minimum expectations require each Supervisor to maintain contact with all assigned CASA volunteers at least once per month. Should an Advocate not respond with the required documentation on their case within that month, the Supervisor must document their efforts to communicate with the Advocate in Optima in the contact log and set up a face to face meeting. During that face to face meeting a plan is established between the Supervisor and Advocate as to how this will be corrected and how the Advocate will submit their documentation going forward. The goal is to assist the Advocate in being successful in their advocacy and maintain the connection for the child as well as meet minimum expectations as set by Texas CASA. Should an Advocate fail to submit any documentation in the second month, the Advocate will be removed and a new Advocate will be assigned to the case. If an exception is made to this, it must be approved by either the Executive Director or the Program Director.**

### **2.12 Crime Victim's Compensation Claim (VOCA) Procedures**

*In providing CVC benefit claims, the following procedures have been established:*

- *In cases where CASA has been appointed, the file will be reviewed to determine if criminally injurious conduct has occurred and if the wrongful acts have been reported to law enforcement. CASA will work with CPS to obtain a copy of the filed police report.*
- *CASA will check with the individual caseworker, as agreed with CPS, to determine if the CVC claims application/packet has been completed.*
- *CASA will explain to the permanent caregiver or family that the child is eligible and ensure the application is filled out and submitted to The Office of the Attorney General – Crime Victims' Compensation Program.*
- *Prior to permanent placement and case closure, CASA will follow-up with family or permanent caregiver to ensure that they have been provided with the necessary CVC documentation. Referral to the District Attorney's Victim Assistance Coordinator will also be provided.*
- *CASA staff and Advocates will receive training from the District Attorney's Victim Assistance Coordinator as to changes in the law with regard to eligibility, and/or the proper claim procedures.*

### **2.13 Volunteer Safety**

CASA Advocates should not put themselves in personal jeopardy while performing their volunteer role and carrying out their responsibilities. If a CASA Advocate is uneasy about entering a neighborhood or a particular building, or about meeting with a particular party, the Advocate should discuss these concerns with his/her Case Supervisor to make other arrangements. The CASA Case Supervisor may attend the meeting with the Advocate, to help relieve such apprehension.

**We recommend that Advocates give the CASA office phone number for contact and only give their personal number at their discretion.**



## **Appendix: 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, the child's legal guardian or custodial agency, 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 other than the child's current placement, 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 (See 1.1) and must sign a confidentiality agreement for the specific case.
- No non-approved individuals will be in the vehicle with the children.

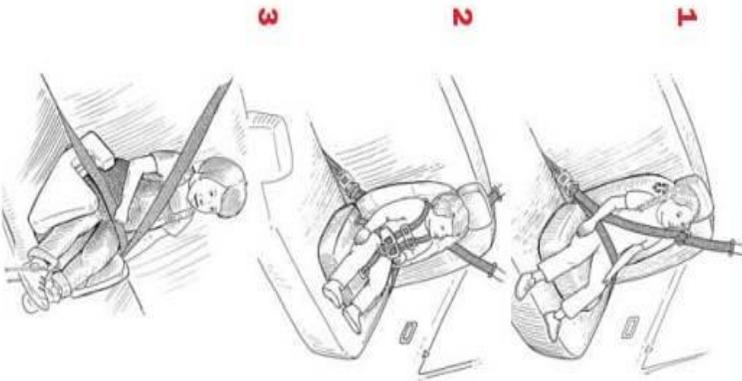
- The child may never be transported by motorcycle or scooter.
- Every occupant of the vehicle must wear seatbelts and shoulder harnesses at all times while the vehicle is moving.
- The driver may not text or talk on a cell phone while the vehicle is moving.
- No smoking is allowed at any time while 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.

## TYPES OF BOOSTER SEATS YOU CAN USE



### 1 HIGH-BACK BELT-POSITIONING BOOSTER SEATS

Two types of high-back belt-positioning booster seats are available. Both types "boost" your child up so the vehicle safety belt fits better.

**1** One type provides head and neck support for your child if your vehicle seat back does not have a head rest. It must be used with the vehicle's lap/shoulder belt, never with the lap belt only.

**2** The other, a combination seat, converts from a forward-facing toddler seat to a booster seat and comes equipped with a harness. This type can be used as a forward-facing toddler seat when your child is age 1 and at least 20 pounds to about age 4 and 40 pounds. When your child outgrows the toddler seat, remove the harness and use the seat as a booster seat with the vehicle's lap/shoulder belt.

### 3 NO-BACK BELT-POSITIONING BOOSTER SEAT

**3** This type also "boosts" your child up so the vehicle safety belt fits better. This booster seat is used with a lap/shoulder belt. It should only be used in vehicles with built-in head rests.

All booster seats are required by law to comply with the same safety standards as child safety seats. Your booster seat must have a label stating that it meets Federal motor vehicle safety standards.

SOURCE: NHTSA

# **Appendix 2: Social Media Policy**

CASA Child Advocates of Montgomery County

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March 21, 2019

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CASA Child Advocates of Montgomery County (CASA) recognizes the importance of the Internet in shaping public thinking about our organization. We also recognize the importance of our employees, volunteers and donors joining in and helping shape industry conversation and direction through interaction on social media. CASA is committed to supporting honest, transparent, and knowledgeable dialogue on the Internet through social media.

As with anything, we need to take some precautions when using social media tools connected with CASA Child Advocates.

## **1. Social Media Roles: Who Does What?**

Establishing a CASA presence on a public social network (Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, LinkedIn, etc.) must be authorized beforehand by the Executive Director. We will only establish presence on an additional site when we have:

- 1) The resources to consistently maintain a dialog appropriate for that site;
- 2) A plan for the site's use, which will generally be held in our Social Media Plan;
- 3) The chosen social media site aligns with our mission; and
- 4) The outreach will increase engagement with a specified, desired audience.

CASA will maintain only one CASA Child Advocates of Montgomery County on any social media site used. Event pages and groups may be added as subsets of the primary site with approval of the Marketing and Communications Director.

As an exception, and on a project-by-project basis with specific, advance approval of the Executive Director, it may be possible to establish an additional site for a specific purpose. This will be a rare exception to the general policy of CASA having only one site on each media.

All official social media accounts are managed by the staff Marketing and Communications Director, including upkeep of accounts and managing ongoing updates. One additional staff member will have administrator rights to monitor accounts and in case of emergency situations. The Marketing and Communications Director, in discussion with the Executive Director, may grant and/or revoke access to other members of staff to administer groups on the platforms and to post content. We reserve the right to block, filter, or restrict by any means any user's access to a social media site without notice for any reason.

Any paid or in-kind social media advertising must be approved by the Marketing and Communications Director.

Any content related to fundraising, recruitment, or programming will be approved by the appropriate Director before going public.

## 2. What Should You Say Online?

These guidelines apply to all posting on CASA sites, including both those posting officially as “CASA Child Advocates of Montgomery County”, and those posting on the sites as staff, friends, volunteers, donors and visitors.

**Think of CNN, your mother and your boss.** Don't say anything online that you wouldn't be comfortable seeing quoted on CNN, being asked about by your mother or having to justify to your boss.

**Respect confidentiality.** Be very careful not to discuss information that is internal confidential, and/or sensitive, including organizational finances, volunteer information, etc. If in doubt - ask the Marketing and Communications Director or the owner of the information you want to share

**Give credit** when you are influenced by another writer, or when you use someone else's photos or art. Properly cite sources. Provide a link to the original content and use the author's/artist's name whenever possible. Use only photos you have taken yourself, or have permission to use.

**Share your opinion appropriately.** Be interesting and authentic. Use normal language that you would be fine in a public forum like school meeting. Disagreements are central to growing ideas, but don't attack anyone personally. Don't spread gossip, hearsay or assumptions. Keep it clean.

**Be safe.** Don't publicly post anything you wouldn't tell a stranger on the street. Opinions and ideas belong in a public forum, your last name, passwords or phone numbers do not!

**Make it look good.** Post *pictures* with comments whenever appropriate and relevant, in order to keep the sites *looking* good.

## 3. Monitoring

The Marketing and Communications Director or his/her delegate will be responsible for monitoring social media channels daily, and will quickly address inappropriate messages or misuse. Inappropriate content includes spam, advertising, offensive statements, inaccurate information, foul language, or unconstructive criticism.

## 4. Responding to Negative Comments

**We are not overly concerned about negative conversations.** We will delete negative comments only if they are vulgar, offensive, threatening, or violate confidentiality.

**We will respond to negative or inaccurate posts if response is warranted.** We will correct misinformation, but not engage in heated arguments.

**Media inquiries coming through social media** should be referred to the Executive Director or Marketing and Communications Director for an appropriate response.

**When disagreeing with others' opinions,** remain appropriate and polite. If you find yourself in a situation online that looks as if it's becoming antagonistic, do not get overly defensive and do not disengage from the conversation abruptly. Ask our Marketing and Communications Director for advice on how to disengage from the dialogue in a polite manner that reflects well on the CASA.

**If the community steps in to correct inaccuracies** or defend the institution, there may be no need for an additional official response.

## 5. Responding to Positive and Neutral Comments

We want our social media sites to be a source of ongoing dialog. We will respond to any comments (on both the CASA site and other sites where CASA is mentioned) if, by responding, we can support an interesting and relevant dialog.

## 6. Privacy and Permissions

Employees should respect the privacy rights of their co-workers and will not disclose information about work-related events involving other employees of the CASA, its volunteers, donors and friends without obtaining their permission. Employees will not post photographs or images of co-workers, volunteers, donors or friends on any social media site without having their express permission to do so. We will protect our constituency by being responsible in how we collect, store, and use data from social media platforms, in compliance with CAN-SPAM laws, privacy policies of social media platform, CASA Confidentiality Policy, and CASA Communications Guidelines.

Stories which are posted on one of our social media sites may be used without additional permission in other formats, including but not limited to:

- The CASA website
- Thank you letters
- Social networking or social media platforms

- Presentations to supporters
- Brochures, direct mail, publications, etc.
- Video footage featuring our care for children

## 7. Personal vs. Professional

When staff communicates through social media, unless authorized to speak on behalf of CASA, they are representing themselves ... use a disclaimer. If you write anything *related to your work at CASA* on a blog or some other online space, make it clear that what you say there is representative of your views and opinions and you are not presenting yourself as a spokesperson for CASA. Share these views under your name and not a pseudonym or fake account. Use a disclaimer such as: "I am an employee of CASA Child Advocates of Montgomery County; however this is my personal opinion." or something to that effect.

Be mindful that using the statement above does not recuse you from any negative outcomes or consequences of your behavior on social media sites. Also, retweeting/sharing can easily be seen as a sign of approval of what you are relaying. Your personal opinions can be linked to/perceived to be linked to CASA.

Tips for sharing/endorsing:

- Share judiciously
- Customize your privacy settings
- Use quotes for what is said by others
- Make an introductory statement, such as "Hey, saw this interesting thing today . . . ."

Remember that what is said on social media platforms (including messaging, emails, and chats) is never truly private. No matter how restricted, anything on a screen can be captured and redirected to a wider audience.

Employees should not engage in any online conduct which:

- Creates a conflict of interest between them and CASA
- Creates a conflict with one of the CASA's program participants, or
- Otherwise harms the interests of the CASA.

If a minor program participant (any program participant under the age of 18) finds a staff member's personal social networking profile and requests to be linked as a friend, the employee must respectfully deny the request and block them from further contact. Employees or volunteers will contact their supervisor if a minor program participant attempts to contact them through the Internet, other than through an email address set up specifically for CASA email.