



CASA Volunteer Handbook

Advocates for Children CASA

Table of Contents

Purpose of this CASA Volunteer Handbook	2
About the CASA Program	3
Overarching Vision: (Standard 7.A)	3
Job Description (Standard 7B)	3
CASA Volunteer	3
National Court Appointed Special Advocates Code of Ethics (Standard 2)	4
Roles & Responsibilities of CASA Volunteers (Standard 7E)	6
Online Communication and Social Media Guidelines	8
CASA Volunteer Roles & Work Flow	10
Transportation of CASA Children or Family Members: (Standard 7.E.8)	12
Reporting: (Standard 11)	13
Advocacy	15
Corrective Action (Section 7.F)	20
Handbook Acknowledgement & Agreement	23

Purpose of this CASA Volunteer Handbook

Concrete Objective:

To provide Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) Volunteers with clear guidelines, expectations and program practices to support their service to children.

CASA Volunteers must abide by the policies and procedures set forth by the National CASA Organization. This policy and procedure handbook has been developed in alignment with the guiding principles of the National CASA Standards for Local CASA Programs (2013 Edition).

*Standards indicated in superscript red font.

About the CASA Program

Overarching Vision: ^(Standard 7.A)

All Children dream, thrive and grow with a sense of belonging and empowerment to build a successful future. ^(Standard 7.A.3a)

Objective & Mission Statement: Speaking up for abused and neglected children through Court Appointed Special Advocates, CASA volunteers. ^(Standard 1A)

Description

Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASAs) are trained volunteers who represent the best interests of children who have been abused or neglected. CASA volunteers are appointed by a Judge and serve as the voice of the child in the courtroom. The CASA volunteer helps to ensure that the children are in safe, permanent and thriving environments. CASAs make independent recommendations to the court that include a child's placement, school, and emotional well-being. The volunteer remains with that child throughout the duration of a case. The CASA volunteer is oftentimes one of the only stable and caring adults that the child can turn to during a difficult time.

Job Description (Standard 7B)

CASA Volunteer

Reports to: CASA Program Staff/Case Coordinator

Purpose: The Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) is a trained volunteer Child Advocate who: Speaks up for the interests of abused and neglected children in court; and works to ensure that the child's right to a safe, permanent home is addressed quickly and with due consideration.

Qualifications:

- Interest in children, their needs, and rights
- Completion of 32+ hours of pre-service training hours, court observation and 12 hours of additional in-service hours per calendar year
- Maturity, stability, confidence, common sense
- Ability to work with a broad spectrum of the community in a sensitive, positive and objective manner
- Good Communication skills
- Must be at least 21 years of age
- Ability to pass background checks
- Volunteers will be on probation for the first six (6) months of the case

Duties:

- Attendance at pre-service and in-service trainings;
- Commitment of a minimum 18-month assignment, averaging 3-10 hours a week
- Conduct an independent investigation into each case; meet with the child at least twice a month and other relevant persons, review all pertinent records and documents
- Attend court hearings as availability permits and give verbal reports in addition to written report submitted before the hearing.
- Maintain complete and accurate records of time and activities through the contact log
- Conduct on-going documentation/child assessments through Optima, the program's web based data tracking system.
- Submit quality written reports two weeks in advance of the case court date
- Assist in the identification of resources appropriate to meet the needs of the child
- Maintain strict confidentiality

Benefits:

- Training, support and supervision from the staff of Advocates for Children CASA
- Opportunity to learn about Juvenile Court and Social Service Systems
- Opportunity to develop skills and abilities
- Satisfaction from contributing to community services on behalf of abused and neglected children

National Court Appointed Special Advocates Code of Ethics

(Standard 2)

This Code of Ethics provides National CASA Association members with guidelines for professional behavior and ethical conduct. The Association may not, however, be held liable for the actions of its members. (Section 2.C)

Conduct (Section 2.C)

1. Members of the National CASA Association will abide by the NCASAA Code of Ethics and all laws and regulations governing their activities.
2. Members of the National CASA Association will uphold the credibility and dignity of the CASA concept by conducting all business in an honest, fair, professional, and humane manner.
3. Employees of CASA programs and CASA volunteer Child Advocates will not use their authority inappropriately, nor condone any illegal act or unethical practices related to their program or community.
4. CASA programs and individuals who are members of the National CASA Association may not use CASA for personal gain.
5. Members of the National CASA Association will avoid any action which could adversely affect the confidence of the public in the integrity of the Association.
6. National CASA and its member programs will serve and respond to requests without bias because of race, religion, sex, age, national origin or handicap.

Confidentiality (Section 10.D)

7. CASA programs and volunteer Child Advocates will respect the right to privacy of all individuals, and will keep all information about CASA cases confidential.
8. Persons affiliated with CASA will not use confidential information obtained through their work with CASA for personal benefit.

Knowledge and Understanding (Standard 7.C.5)

9. Individuals working in CASA programs as staff and/or volunteers must be trained in the operations of the court and child welfare systems, and in the nature of child abuse and neglect.

10. CASA programs and volunteers must respect a child's inherent right to grow up with dignity in a safe environment that meets the child's best interests.

National Affiliation (Standard 4.A.4)

1. A CASA program which is a member of the National CASA Association must operate in accordance with the NCASAA Code of Ethics, goals and purposes.
2. Official CASA designations may be used only for purposes in accordance with the goals and purposes of the National CASA Association.

Colorado Children's Code (Standard 5.A.1)

3. The role of the CASA volunteer Child Advocate is outlined in the Colorado Children's Code and adopted by the 18th Judicial District Courts and the Departments of Human Services as evidenced by the signed Memorandums of Understanding between CASA, the courts and human services.

Roles & Responsibilities of CASA Volunteers (Standard 7E)

The CASA Volunteer engages in the following activities to ensure that the best interests of the child are met at all times:

- Investigation
- Facilitation
- Monitoring
- Advocacy

The goal is to promote strong teamwork between CASAs (Court Appointed Special Advocates), GALs (Guardian Ad Litem), and DHS (Department of Human Services), with each group retaining their independent pursuits while striving to meet the needs of each child.

The CASA Volunteer shall not provide direct service delivery to any parties that could (but not limited to):

- a. Lead to a conflict of interest or liability problems
- b. Cause a child or a family to become dependent on the CASA

Examples of inappropriate volunteer practices include could (but not limited to):

- a. Taking a child to the volunteer's home or any home other than the child's current placement
- b. Giving legal advice or therapeutic counseling
- c. Making placement arrangements for the child
- d. Giving money or expensive gifts to the child, child's family or caregiver. This does not include small gifts, birthday acknowledgment, holiday recognition, or taking them out to eat
- e. Accepting money or gifts from the child, child's family or caregiver

Conflict of Interest:

A CASA Volunteer should not be related or have a relationship to any parties to the case, or be employed in a position or with an agency that may result in a conflict of interest. (Standard 7.E.7.f)

Confidentiality:

CASA volunteers must adhere to the confidentiality policy. (Standard 7.E.7.b)

Violation of this policy will be grounds for termination of the court appointment and ongoing service as a CASA.

- A. The CASA shall maintain strict confidentiality as to the case and all proceedings in which the volunteer is involved. The CASA shall request only that information which the volunteer is authorized to receive.
- B. If it is necessary to obtain any privileged/confidential information about someone who is directly related to the case but is not the child(ren), the CASA must obtain from that person a written release of information which allows the professional, hospital or treatment center to discuss the matter with the CASA.
- C. While a person may sign a release allowing the CASA to obtain confidential information he/she may not want to authorize disclosure to other parties on the case and/or their attorneys. The CASA should review the signed release form very carefully and seek guidance from the Coordinator if the CASA Volunteer has any questions at all.

- D. The CASA is not allowed to disseminate documents to any of the parties, their attorneys, and or collateral sources, which are, covered by state and/or federal confidentiality laws. These documents may include drug and alcohol evaluations/records; involuntary mental health treatment and rape crisis center information; and some criminal histories. Those covered by federal law usually are stamped, "This information has been disclosed to you from records whose confidentiality is protected by Federal law (and) prohibits you from making any further disclosure." A general authorization for the release of medical or other information is NOT sufficient for this purpose."
- E. The CASA will take appropriate measures to ensure that confidential records may not be observed by casual observers (family members, etc.)
- F. The CASA should not promise a child or a party to the case that statements will be kept secret or confidential. The CASA should proceed on the assumption that all statements made or relied on in reaching recommendations will be subject to disclosure to the court and other parties.
- G. The CASA may discuss a case in hypothetical terms for purposes of illustration at seminars or meetings designed to provide education on child protection issues. The CASA must not mention names of individuals involved in the case or provide facts which would identify the case or parties. The CASA must never discuss a case for purely conversational purposes, even in general terms, with anyone.

Media Contact:

CASAs should not make any comments, to the media, about any CASA cases. Any general comments about CASA should be discussed with program staff prior to talking with the media. All comments or questions should be directed to the Executive Director, Chief Operating Officer or Board Chair.

Social Media:

Social media tools, when used appropriately, can be a powerful tool to increase awareness, support and a sense of community for those engaged in advocacy for abused and neglected children. A thoughtful approach to online conversation and interaction among people online (on blogs, social networking, link-sharing, etc.) can enhance the reputation of *Advocates for Children* CASAs' movement and help recruit needed supporters and volunteers.

While *Advocates for Children CASA* encourages CASA staff, board members and volunteers to join the global online conversation, we also believe it is important that those who choose to do so understand what is recommended, expected and required when they discuss CASA-related topics—whether at work or on their own time. Our ability to serve children as a cause depends on the trust and support of the public, and it is critical that we tell our story well—and handle the confidential information entrusted to us responsibly.

The following guidelines will help you engage in online conversations about your involvement with *Advocates for Children CASA's* cause in a way that is appropriate, yet still interesting.

Online Communication and Social Media Guidelines

- 1. Be transparent.** Identify yourself and your role at the CASA program (staff/volunteer/board member) when you discuss CASA-related matters. Write in the first person. If you have a vested interest in something you are discussing, be the first to point it out. Be clear that you are speaking for yourself, that the opinions expressed are solely those of the author and do not necessarily represent the views of *Advocates for Children CASA* (unless, of course, you are posting as part of your employment responsibilities for the program—as an outreach director, for example.)
- 2. Always comply with the law in regard to copyright/plagiarism.** Never post someone else's work without his or her express permission (other than short quotes that comply with the "fair use" exceptions).
- 3. Be aware of laws related to libel and defamation of character.** Defamation of character can lead to lawsuits against the author of the statement and will reflect negatively on the CASA cause. In choosing your words or content, imagine your supervisor and your family reading everything you post.
- 4. Be respectful.** Don't pick fights. Be the first to admit and correct your own mistakes. You should show proper consideration for other's privacy and for topics that may be considered objectionable or inflammatory, such as politics and religion.
- 5. Be considerate.** Remember that anyone, including fellow volunteers and CASA staff, may be actively reading what you publish online. Refrain from any communication intended to bash, discredit or embarrass the CASA program, families, board members, donors or your colleagues. If you have suggestions for improvements, please state them constructively or, better yet, go through the proper channels to air your concerns and share your suggestions.

6. **Be accurate.** Even though your posts may be primarily made up of personal opinion, do your research well and check that your facts are accurate. Make sure you have permission to post any copyrighted or confidential information (e.g., images, statistics), and be careful about posting or linking to items that may contain viruses.

7. **Be committed.** If you decide to jump into online communication, do so with a commitment to post regularly and well. Link to others and show your unique contributions. Make it interesting and have fun!

8. **Try to add value.** Does your posting provide worthwhile information and perspective? Does it help you, your coworkers, volunteers and supporters better understand and feel more connected to our cause? Does it build a positive sense of community?

9. **Respect work commitments.** Please remember that blogging and other social networking activities—unless specifically assigned as part of your employment—are personal and should be done on your own time. The obvious exception is if you have specifically been assigned to perform an online activity related to your responsibilities as a CASA employee or volunteer.

10. **Don't reveal confidential information.** Sharing stories that illustrate the value of CASA advocacy for children is often the most powerful way to engage the public in our cause and promote empathy for the children we serve. However, National CASA Quality Assurance standards and the policy of *Advocates for Children CASA* require:

- Respect for the children's and families' rights to privacy in regard to personal information
- Adherence to the confidentiality restrictions imposed by law and CASA policies and procedures

It is unacceptable to discuss online any identifiable details of cases and to post pictures that include children from a dependency and neglect case.

It is acceptable to discuss general details and to use non-identifying pseudonyms so long as the information provided does not contain information recognizable to the family or others associated with the family or case. For example, use general terms such as "youth" instead of "14-year-old girl." You should be careful to protect the dignity of families, children and social agencies, even if they are not named.

Volunteers and staff should not link to personal pages (or become online “friends”) of families or children they may encounter in their capacity with the CASA program. This includes email addresses, instant messenger names, blogs, photo sharing sites and social networking sites such as Facebook, SnapChat, Twitter, Instagram, LinkedIn and YouTube.

11. When in doubt, do not post. Staff and volunteers are responsible for their words and actions, wherever they are. Exercise sound judgment and common sense, and if there is any doubt, DO NOT POST IT. In circumstances where you are uncertain please contact your CASA Coordinator, the Chief Operating Officer, the Director of Marketing and Development or the Executive Director for guidance.

12. Know that the internet is permanent. Once information is published online, it is essentially part of a permanent record, even if you “remove/delete” it later or attempt to make it anonymous. If your complete thought, along with its context, cannot be squeezed into a character-restricted space (such as Twitter), provide a link to an online space where the message can be expressed completely and accurately.

13. Be mindful that what you post can be a reflection on CASA and can influence the perception and reputation of the program. Be respectful of all individuals, races, religions and cultures.

CASA Volunteer Roles & Work Flow

The following sections describe the activities and roles of the CASA Volunteer.

Investigation: (Standard 7.E.5)

The CASA Volunteer should determine whether court orders are being followed in an appropriate and timely manner; whether a permanency plan has been created; whether appropriate services, including reasonable efforts, are being provided to the child and family; and whether the court ordered treatment plan is in compliance. Involvement with the family in these related areas should be focused on the best interests of the child(ren) on the case. The CASA should participate in any planning or treatment team meetings involving the child to stay informed of permanency plan developments. The volunteer should monitor the case by visiting the child twice a month or more if necessary to ensure that essential needs are being met. The CASA should also research permanent connections for the child(ren).

Court Order: (Standard 5.A.1)

Once a CASA Volunteer accepts a case, a court appointment acceptance form is filed with the court and a Court Order is signed by the Judge or Magistrate. All parties to the proceeding will receive copies.

Meetings: (Standard 7.E.5)

- **With the Caseworker, GAL and other professionals:** The CASA will meet with both the caseworker and the GAL. CASAs should notify the caseworker, GAL and other professionals by email of their appointment to the case within one week of appointment. It can be helpful to schedule a meeting with both parties, but if this is not possible the CASA may wish to meet individually with these professionals.
- **Children:** Arrange for an initial meeting with the child/children on your case within 2 weeks of appointment. It is required that you meet with your child/children at least twice per month. An exception may be granted at the discretion of program staff and documented in Optima.
- **Parents:** If appropriate, arrange a brief introductory meeting with the family to explain the CASA role and answer any questions the parents may have. If the children are in the home, this is a good time to introduce yourself to the children. It may be helpful to have this meeting with the GAL so that both roles can be defined at one time. This should be done within three weeks of receiving court appointment to the case.
- **Foster Parents/Children:** If children are in a foster home, the CASA will contact the foster parent to let them know a CASA has been appointed, let them know about the program and arrange to meet with the child and foster parents. A meeting should also occur within three weeks of the appointment. CASA may want to take the children for a walk or sit in another room to assure confidentiality of conversation with the children.
- **Other Professionals:** If the children are school age, the child's teacher will generally be the next person contacted to gather pertinent information regarding the child. If the child is in special education it is expected that the CASA will attend the IEP (Individual Education Plan) staffing. All CASAs are required to complete an educational advocacy checklist for children who are in preschool or older. School records can be obtained by contacting the secretary at the school children attend. In addition to educational advocacy, other contacts might include: therapists, doctors, lawyers and counselors who are working with the child or the parents.

Telephone Numbers:

A CASA should carefully consider the implications of giving their work and home telephone numbers to children or family members. The decision to give out these numbers is up to the CASA. The CASA may wish to consult with the CASA Case Coordinator in making this decision or obtain at own expense a cell phone. Messages may be left at the CASA office and they will be relayed to the CASA.

Transportation of CASA Children or Family Members: (Standard 7.E.8)

For liability and safety reasons, CASA Volunteers must submit requests to transport CASA children to their Coordinator in advance. Advocates for Children CASA recommends that CASAs be judicious in their requests to transport children. Transportation may be approved in certain situations, as determined by the Coordinator, if the following are in place:

- A. Advocates for Children CASA must have a current copy of the volunteer's driver's license and auto insurance.. Volunteers who do not have a current and valid driver's license on file, or do not have proof of adequate, current and valid auto insurance will not be allowed to transport children
- B. CASA Volunteer should have adequate auto insurance coverage in compliance with Colorado state law
- C. CASA Volunteer must accept responsibility for transporting the youth and sign a **Transportation Waiver** before the transportation may take place. This waiver can be signed in person, scanned and emailed or faxed. The original will be placed in the office case file and uploaded to Optima.
- D. The CASA Volunteer must document each time they transport a child via Optima contact logs. This documentation will include: date, time of transportation, total time spent transporting the youth, location and purpose of visit.
- E. The CASA Volunteer will abide by all federal, state and local transportation and safety laws.

This policy allows for limited transportation on a case-by-case basis. Although some transportation will be allowed, this policy is intentionally restrictive for liability and safety reasons and strict guidelines will be adhered to.

When considering transportation of CASA children, the following points are important to remember:

- It is not the role of the CASA Volunteer to transport kids or adults to appointments, court hearings, visits, staffings, etc. This is the role of the caregiver and/or placement provider.

- Although it is important to establish a relationship with the child(ren) on your case, it is also important to remember appropriate boundaries.

If you wish to transport a child, you must adhere to the above policy. All requests must be submitted to your Coordinator. Your Coordinator will make a decision as to whether the request is appropriate. **We must have a copy of current and valid driver's license and current and valid car insurance on file!**

Reporting: (Standard 11)

Maintaining Accurate Records:

- A. The case file for CASA is kept in Optima, the program's web based online data tracking system. The court file or portions thereof can be copied and scanned into the electronic file for the volunteer to use in making contacts related to the case.
- B. All records obtained from other agencies should be sent to the CASA office and uploaded into Optima. Confidential records are not to be electronically transmitted to computers used by persons other than the volunteer. If a volunteer has a fax or e-mail, which is strictly confidential, this should be noted in the volunteer's file and materials can be electronically transferred.
- C. Forms for these reports in hand-written and/or electronic form will be provided by Advocates for Children CASA. Records are not to be altered after the original writing of the record. If records are kept electronically, it must be in a confidential file. These completed forms may be electronically transmitted to the CASA office.

Contact Notes: Each CASA keeps a log in Optima, which notes all contacts (in-person contacts, telephone, fax, e-mail, or written) with all individuals who are significant to the case, including attempts to reach parties which were unsuccessful. This log will include the time spent, the type of contact (phone, personal, etc), miles/expenses, and date of the contact and should include appointments, interviews and information gathered about the child and the child's life circumstances. These notes should be objective.

On-Going Documentation: On an on-going basis and at least by the end of each month, the CASA will ensure all activities related to CASA work is entered into Optima. This also includes statistics on the amount of personal contacts, hours, mileage and dollars that the

volunteer contributed. CASA's are also required and trained to complete regular Child Assessments in Optima prior to each court hearing, or every 90 days.

Court Reports: Court reports are required at every hearing (unless excused by your Coordinator) and will be provided to all parties to the case. As part of the court report, CASAs will make recommendations for specific appropriate services for the child, and when appropriate, for the child's family. These official documents are written by the CASA and reviewed by the Case Coordinator prior to submission to the court. The program staff will not alter the reports or recommendations without the knowledge or agreement of the CASA. The pertinent case information will be shared with all parties on the case. Reports shall be submitted to the CASA office 2 weeks prior to the court hearing. If the Case Coordinator does not receive the report 2 weeks prior to the court hearing, the CASA may not be able to speak at the court hearing. This time allows for the review and editing of reports if necessary. Case Coordinators are responsible for final editing and distribution of all court reports. They will correct grammatical and spelling errors automatically. Although Case Coordinators have final discretion on what is turned into the court, the factual information included by the CASA will not be significantly changed. CASAs may not distribute any written material to any parties to the proceedings involved in your case or outside your case, without initially discussing it and providing the material to the Case Coordinator first for edit and consideration.

Reporting Suspected Child Abuse and Neglect: (Standard 7.E.7.a)

- A. The CASA should immediately report any suspected child abuse or neglect which is observed or discovered during the course of the CASA assignment. A report should be made by calling the child abuse and neglect hotline at **1-844-CO4KIDS**.
- B. The CASA should notify the appropriate parties that this report has been made. The CASA should also report to the program staff as soon as possible after making the report.
- C. The CASA does **not** investigate the possible abuse. The social services department will determine the need for and whether to complete an investigation.

Cooperation in Criminal Investigation of Alleged Child Abuse

If any officer, director, employee or volunteer of the organization should be asked to produce information or documents, or discuss the facts of any alleged child abuse with any investigator or counsel of record for the office of the prosecuting attorney or the defense attorney:

- No documents (written reports of the incident) shall be produced without having been properly subpoenaed. Cooperation to facilitate the service of subpoenas should be extended as professional courtesy.
- In the event that any investigator or attorney of record wishes to conduct a personal interview, the person requested to appear may appear with legal counsel at such interview.
- If a telephone interview is given, care should be taken to assure the identity of the contact person. It is suggested that the staff or volunteer call the office through the main switchboard and be transferred to the person requesting the interview.
- It will not be necessary to be subpoenaed to this personal interview, although every effort should be taken to coordinate the time and date of the interview with the legal counsel.
- Before granting an interview, the volunteer and staff should review what may be discussed in the interview.

Advocacy

The CASA Volunteer has several important functions which are described in this section.

Formulating Objective Recommendations

The CASA, with the support and supervision of program staff, will make recommendations in the court report regarding placement, visitation and appropriate services for the child and family.

Staffings and related meetings

CASAs should attend staffings and other related meetings that are significant to the safety and well-being of the child.

Appear at Hearings

The CASA may attend all court hearings to present information and advocate for the child's best interests. The CASA is responsible for being aware of scheduled court dates and preparing in advance by gathering information and submitting reports. If the volunteer is unable to appear at a hearing, the volunteer should notify CASA program staff as far in advance as possible. The CASA should assure that the child's best interests are being represented at every stage of the case.

Facilitation: (Standard 7.E.5.c)

The CASA is often in a position where it is appropriate to facilitate communication between parties in the case. In difficult situations or when conflicts arise on cases, it is often appropriate to have a staffing, which is a meeting where all parties are invited to discuss the future direction

of the case and what services should be provided. Although it is typically not the role of the CASA to call a staffing, it is appropriate on an as needed basis. Please discuss this option with your Case Coordinator if you think it may be appropriate.

CASAs are expected to communicate with all parties to the proceedings. Failure to communicate can result in dismissal from the case. It is recommended that CASAs email their Case Coordinator, GAL, and Caseworker about any visits, important contacts, or important information gathered regarding the child on the case.

Appointment to a Case: (Standard 7.E)

- A. After acceptance and completion of training by Advocates for Children CASA, Volunteers will be sworn in as Officers of the Court by the presiding juvenile judge.
- B. Your assigned Case Coordinator and/or Program Manager will choose several case options for CASAs to review based on submitted preferences. The general issues in a case will be discussed with the CASA and the CASA has the option to accept or reject a specific case based on their experience.
- C. CASAs will be assigned to one case at a time and may work on more than one case simultaneously only in exceptional circumstances. Exceptions for more than two open cases at the same time may be granted with the discretion of program staff.
- D. The CASA has no authority to function on a case until officially appointed by order of the court, after being assigned to a specific case by the program staff. All authority ceases when the Order of Termination is submitted.
- E. When a CASA is appointed, emphasis must be on the children in need of support rather than the needs of the parents. SAFETY of the children is the primary goal.
- F. The first six months of service will be a probationary period during which extra supervision and support will be provided by program staff.

Supervision and Support: (Standard 7.D)

- A. After being assigned to a case, a CASA will meet with the assigned Case Coordinator to discuss initial planning for action on the case. A preliminary case plan will be outlined to be used as a guide for the CASA's first steps on the case. Program staff will schedule regular case conferences (in person or via telephone) to review progress on the case with the CASA. Frequency of these consultations will be based on the stage of the case and the experience level of the volunteer.
- B. CASAs are encouraged to contact program staff at any time when questions arise about their work as a CASA. In addition, CASAs and their Case Coordinator will communicate on

at least a monthly basis via email or telephone regarding your case, including information such as:

- Child Well-Being assessments in Optima
 - Develop and review a child advocacy plan for independent fact gathering
 - Discuss findings and observations
 - Review progress in the case
 - Discuss strategies for serving the best interest of the child
- C. Program staff and the CASA will discuss the CASA's work on the case, on-going documentation and child assessments in Optima, court reports, in-service training and comments from the judge and other parties, noting areas of achievement and areas in which additional support is needed. The CASA will have an opportunity to request an internal staffing at any time to problem-solve ideas and solutions related to their case.
- D. Advocates for Children CASA values its volunteers and has ongoing programs to recognize the efforts, dedication and hard work of our volunteers, both on an individual basis and in group settings. (Standard 7.D.5) Advocates for Children CASA believes input from our volunteers is important to our success. A volunteer survey will be conducted twice per year. All volunteers are encouraged to provide their feedback.
- E. A CASA shall be considered active if s/he participates in at least one case, gives time to CASA in outreach activities at least once per year or is an ongoing supporter of CASA. If the CASA is unable to do any of the above, the CASA will be inactivated and removed from mailing and emailing lists. If a CASA decides to become active again by participating in the above activities, s/he must contact CASA and a decision about how to proceed will be made at that time. After an extensive period between cases, the CASA may be required to participate in certain areas of the initial training. If there are special circumstances involved in a volunteer's inability to participate, the ability to remain active within CASA is at the discretion of the Chief Operating Officer and the Executive Director.
- F. Transferring CASA: A qualified CASA volunteer who transfers to a new program must complete, at a minimum, training regarding the local court, laws, program policies and procedures, investigation and report writing. (Standard 7.B.2)

In-service Training: (Standard 7.C.2)

In-service training will be offered throughout the year and all CASAs should schedule a minimum of 12 hours of continuing training each calendar year. All training provided by the CASA organization will be eligible for training hours. In-service hours will be entered into the training logs in Optima by the

organization.

Trainings offered by outside agencies must be approved by the Program Manager or Training Manager in order to count as in-service hours. Reimbursement for expenses related to these workshops may be available as the budget allows. CASAs should enter all in-service into their training logs in Optima.

If there is a question about the CASA's status, the Coordinator should be contacted and asked about the Volunteer Status Categories under which a volunteer qualifies.

Home Study: (Standard 7.E.7.b)

Advocates for Children CASA will not perform any "home study" which will be used by the court as approval of a family for placement.

Resignation: (Standard 7.F.1)

The CASA should remain actively involved in the case until formally discharged by the court. The CASA should consider the CASA assignment a serious personal commitment. The CASA should give honest and adequate notice to their Case Coordinator if it becomes necessary to leave an assignment before the conclusion of the case.

Case Closure: (Standard 7.F.2.)

The CASA may be terminated from a case through the following means: CASA program decision, the case being dismissed from court, or determination by a Judicial Officer that the CASA's services are no longer needed. Advocates for Children CASA will have the discretion to terminate a CASA from his/her case.

Mileage: (Standard 11.B.12)

Mileage documentation (based on data in Optima) will be available to volunteers at the end of the calendar year for tax purposes (see a tax consultant for more information on volunteer mileage deduction). CASA must enter their mileage into Optima in order to receive an annual statement.

Equal Opportunity Clause: (Standard 7.A.3d)

Advocates for Children CASA shall not restrict its services or volunteer opportunities on the basis of race, religion, creed, color, disability, nationality, or sexual orientation or gender.

Non-Discrimination Policy: (Standard 7.A.2)

Advocates for Children CASA does not discriminate in the solicitation of business, employment, or volunteers on the basis of race, color, national origin, ancestry, religion, gender, gender variance, gender identity, age, marital status, sexual orientation, military status or physical or mental handicap, provided that an individual or company is qualified and meets the requirements established by the agency.

Volunteer Records: (Standard 7.B.4)

CASA will maintain a written/electronic record for each volunteer that contains, at minimum:

- Application
- Emergency & identifying contact information
- Job description
- Reference documentation
- Documentation of record checks
- Training records
- Performance evaluations and any other applicable documentation related to performance
- Documentation of volunteer status
- Copy of current volunteer's driver's license, motor vehicles records check and verification of automobile insurance, if approved for transportation.

Volunteers may coordinate a time with CASA staff to review their personal file in the CASA office. The CASA Volunteer may submit additions and corrections to their volunteer record. The file may not be removed from the office and will be maintained at the CASA office per the program's record retention policy. These records will be retained while the volunteer is active and for 10 years after a volunteer becomes inactive.

Access to Legal Advice: (Section 2.C.4)

Advocates for Children CASA will provide volunteers access to legal advice and representation, as needed.

Background Check Policy: (Section 7.B.4.c)

As part of the CASA Volunteer screening process, all Advocates for Children CASA Volunteers will participate fully in various background checks. The required background checks that will be conducted on every CASA Volunteer applicant prior to acceptance as a CASA and before being sworn in and before the completion of the initial training program to include: CBI (Colorado Bureau of Investigation), a Social Security Search, a 50 state Sexual Abuse Registry search, Arapahoe & Douglas County Police Department check, and Colorado TRAILS. If a volunteer applicant has lived in the state of Colorado for less than five (7) years, then similar out of state background checks will also be conducted. Volunteer applicants will be required to provide a deposit for their initial background checks. There are scholarship opportunities if payment for background checks is a financial hardship. The CASA program will conduct background checks every four years on all volunteers, at no further cost to the volunteer. **CASA Volunteers must immediately notify the program of any criminal or civil charges filed against them.**

Corrective Action (Section 7.F)

Corrective action may be taken if the volunteer's work is unsatisfactory. Corrective action is within the discretion of the Executive Director and Chief Operating Officer and may include any of the following actions as deemed appropriate:

- Additional supervision
- Temporary leave of absence
- Retraining
- Reassignment
- Referral to another volunteer position
- Separation from the program

Criteria for dismissal from a case or Termination of CASA Assignment:

A CASA may be discharged from a youth assignment by the request of the Coordinator and Chief Operating Officer of Advocates for Children CASA.

All records kept by the CASA volunteer must be returned to the CASA office when the assignment terminates.

Termination from a case may occur, at the staff's discretion, if:

- **Monthly Data:** If monthly data is not entered into Optima on a monthly basis and is more than two (2) weeks late and the tardiness occurs more than three (3) times in a calendar year. Copies of contact logs may be requested at any time.
- Adequate and sufficient contacts are not being made.
- Pertinent records and documents are not reviewed.
- Complete and accurate records of time and activities are not documented.
- Close contact with the Advocates for Children CASA Program Staff is not maintained. A minimum of once a month contact either by e-mail, voice mail or personal contact.
- Strict confidentiality is not maintained.
- Professional conduct within the parameters of the case is not maintained.
- Not following the Advocates for Children CASA Conflict Resolution Procedure.
(need to determine/discuss)

Criteria for dismissal from the CASA program:

Involuntary termination of a volunteer must be approved by the Chief Operating Officer or Executive Director, with the input of the program staff. In the absence of the Executive Director and the Chief Operating Director, the Program Manager has the authority to terminate a volunteer from service.

The following include, but are not limited to, grounds for involuntary termination:

- Misuse of CASA Status: CASAs will not use their Volunteer status to promote other causes or for personal gain, unless otherwise stipulated by the Board of Directors. They are to call the Program Office when in doubt.
- The CASA takes action without program or court approval, which endangers the child or is outside the role of the CASA volunteer.
- The CASA engages in ex-parte communication with the court.
- The CASA fails to complete required pre-service or in-service training hours.
- The CASA violates program policy, court rule or law
- Conflict of Interest

- The CASA fails to demonstrate the ability to effectively carry out CASA duties
- The CASA falsifies information on the volunteer application or misrepresents facts during the screening process.
- There are allegations of child abuse/neglect against the volunteer.
- A conflict of interest arises which cannot be resolved.
- Not maintaining close contact with the Advocates for Children CASA Counties Program Staff. A minimum of bi-monthly contact either by e-mail, voice mail or personal contact.

Conflict with CASA Staff Resolution Procedure:

Overall Goal is Communication: Good communication is often the key to avoiding conflicts in any organization or setting. It is hoped that disagreements can be resolved through communication among the parties. In the event that assistance is needed to resolve any issues, the following procedure shall be followed:

A. Meet with your Coordinator:

- I. If a volunteer disagrees with any action, including correction or separation, taken by Advocates for Children CASA, or any of its agents, he or she shall first meet with the with the Case Coordinator.

B. Meet with Program Manager

- I. If the disagreement is not resolved to the satisfaction of the volunteer, the volunteer may elevate his or her concern to the Program Manager.

C. Meet with the Executive Director

- I. If the disagreement is still not resolved to the satisfaction of the volunteer, the volunteer may elevate his or her concern to the Executive Director. If the issue is not resolved at this point, the volunteer can contact the Board of Directors Chair.

Conflict with Other Professionals Resolution Procedure:

A. Meet with Coordinator

- I. If a volunteer disagrees with any action, taken by youth or professional, the

volunteer should first contact the Coordinator on the case in order to express concern.

B. Contact the Professional directly

- I. With the assistance of the Coordinator, the volunteer should contact the professional with whom he or she has a conflict to discuss possible resolutions or compromises. If the volunteer and Case Coordinator believe that the Professional has engaged in inappropriate or unethical behavior, the Coordinator should contact the Professional's direct supervisor or manager in order to issue a complaint. In certain situations, the Volunteer may want to include information regarding the misconduct in court reports.

CASA Volunteer

Handbook Acknowledgement & Agreement

- I have read this CASA Volunteer Handbook in its entirety.
- I agree to contact my Case Coordinator if I have any questions, concerns or challenges.
- I understand that I am representing the Advocates for Children CASA organization.
- I commit to fulfilling my role as a CASA Volunteer and serving child(ren) for the duration of his/her involvement in the program.
- I understand and agree to the roles and responsibilities as a CASA Volunteer.
- I understand and agree to the Transportation policy and procedure.
- I understand and agree to the Confidentiality policy and procedure.
- I am aware I need to comply with all the policies and procedures in this Handbook or it may result in a review of my ability to continue in my role as a CASA Volunteer.

CASA Volunteer

Date

Program Staff

Date

Please submit this signed form to the Training Coordinator or Staff.