



**CASA**

Court Appointed Special Advocates  
**FOR CHILDREN**

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CASA OF WALKER, SAN JACINTO & TRINITY COUNTIES

## CASA COMPANION MANUAL

### MISSION

*CASA of Walker, San Jacinto & Trinity Counties provides a trained court appointed volunteer advocate to every abused and neglected child in CPS custody.*

### VISION

*The program's goal is a safe, permanent, nurturing home for every child it serves.*

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# Volunteer Bill of Rights

Every volunteer has:

- The right to be treated as a co-worker and not as “free help”
- The right to a suitable assignment, with consideration for personal preference, temperament, life experience, education, and employment background
- The right to know about the organization’s mission, its policies, its people, and its programs
- The right to training for the job, thoughtfully planned and effectively presented
- The right to sound guidance and direction by someone who is experienced, well-informed, patient, and thoughtful
- The right to a workplace that is orderly and suitable for the job to be done
- The right to enhance skills and knowledge
- To right to be heard and to have respect shown for comments and suggestions
- The right to recognition through means of appreciation and by being treated as a bona-fide co-worker

# Job Description: CASA Companion

## PURPOSE OF THE POSITION

A CASA Companion is a trained spouse, significant other, close friend, or relative of a current CASA Advocate. CASA Companions serve in a limited role to support and encourage the work of actively assigned CASA Advocates.

## PREREQUISITES AND SKILLS

- Must be 21 years of age or older.
- Must successfully complete screening requirements, to include a volunteer application, reference checks, and criminal background investigation.
- Ability to respect and relate to people from various backgrounds.
- Ability to maintain objectivity.
- Ability to exhibit professionalism in behavior and appearance.
- Must take an Oath of Confidentiality

## TRAINING

- Must complete the CASA Companion Training Course (generally 5-7 hours)
- Must attend CASA's annual mandatory volunteer in-service
- Must complete 6 total hours of in-service/continuing education training annually

## A CASA Companion:

- Serves as a confidant and voice of encouragement for actively assigned CASA Advocates.
- Serves as a sounding board for CASA advocates and helps CASAs process thoughts and feelings about CASA cases/children.
- Serves as a travel companion to CASAs on child visits or when other long-distance travel is required.
- Maintains complete confidentiality regarding information about the child, as well as information regarding other parties involved in the case.
- Reports any new incidents of abuse or neglect to the Child Abuse Hotline and to the CASA Supervisor.

## BENEFITS

Although there are not monetary rewards, there are many benefits to being a CASA volunteer. These include the opportunity to:

- Make a difference in a child's life and future.
- Help a child find permanency in a safe, loving home.
- Assist judges in obtaining a clear picture of a child's life and needs.
- Gain an understanding of district and family courts, legal proceedings, and social service agencies.
- Develop/utilize communication skills.
- Utilize your past experience/skills.
- Form friendships with like-minded people.

## SECTION 1: Introduction to CASA of Walker, San Jacinto, & Trinity Counties

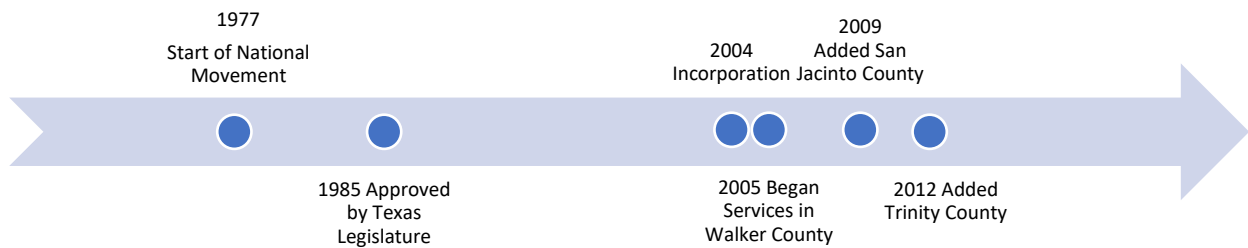
### 1.1 History

CASA is part of a national volunteer movement that began in 1977 when Judge David Soukup in Seattle decided he needed to know more about the children whose lives were in his hands. His solution was to ask community volunteers to act as a “voice in court” for abused and neglected children. These Court Appointed Special Advocate® (CASAs) provided him with the detailed information he needed to safeguard the children’s best interests and ensure that they were placed in safe, permanent homes as quickly as possible. The program was so successful that it was copied around the nation.

The programs made their way into Texas and in 1985, the Texas state legislature passed a bill giving volunteers with court approved training the right to represent abused and neglected children in court. This bill appears as a line in the Texas Family Code, along with a provision for immunity from liability if work is done in good faith. CASA has continued to serve abused and neglected children in Texas for more than 35 years, providing trained community volunteers for every child who was assigned to the program through the court.

CASA of Walker, San Jacinto & Trinity Counties is a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization governed by a volunteer board of directors. The program started as “CASA of Walker County” and was incorporated as a non-profit organization during the summer of 2004. The first Executive Director was hired, and the program implemented services under her leadership in January 2005.

CASA of Walker, San Jacinto & Trinity Counties is a member of the National and Texas CASA Associations. There are over 1,000 CASA programs nationwide and 74 CASA programs in the state of Texas.



### 1.2 The Board of Directors

The Board of Directors is made up of a diverse representation of community volunteers who must have the expertise, commitment, and time to carry out the Mission and Philosophy of the organization. This 9 to 25 member board is the governing body of the organization, and is responsible for determining the direction of long and short term plans, setting policy, establishing goals, and managing the budget.

The Board of Directors employs an Executive Director who serves as the direct line of communication with the board, unless delegated otherwise for a specific purpose. The Executive Director is accountable for keeping the Board of Directors updated.

### 1.3 Organizational Structure

The board of directors is responsible for the overall governing and well-being of the organization. They employ an Executive Director who is responsible to the Board for the day-to-day administration and

management of the agency. The Executive Director employs and supervises the necessary staff, who are each individually responsible for implementing programs, services, and a budget that reflect the direction of the board. Every member of staff has a direct supervisor and is always expected to refer to their supervisor for advice, direction, training, and conflict management. Each staff member supervises volunteers, who are the primary individuals responsible for child advocacy within CASA of WST Counties.



## SECTION 2: Screening, Eligibility & Training

### 2.1 Criminal Background Checks

The program has established election and screening procedures that include:

- 1) TCIC – Texas Criminal Information Center (criminal record check)
- 2) NCIC – National Crime Information Center (criminal record check/fingerprinting)
- 3) Texas Public Sex Offender Registry
- 4) National Sex Offender Registry
- 5) TxDFPS – Texas Department of Family & Protective Services (child abuse registry)
- 6) If the individual has lived in another county and that jurisdiction is not covered by the national criminal background check utilized, the program secures county and state criminal record checks in any county and state in which the person has resided for the previous seven years.

Volunteers may at any time view the Criminal Background Check policy, in full, which outlines offenses barring participation in the CASA program.

### Frequency of Criminal History Checks

CASA of WST reserves the right to conduct a criminal history check at any time during a volunteer’s tenure. Criminal background checks will be renewed at a minimum of once every two years.

Records found on criminal history checks that were not present at the start of volunteer service, may result in dismissal of the volunteer from service with CASA of WST Counties.

### **Responsibility to Notify**

All volunteers are required to immediately notify their supervisor of any criminal charges. In such cases, the Volunteer Supervisor shall inform the Executive Director.

### **2.2 Eligibility to Serve**

In order to serve as a companion for a CASA Advocate, the appointed advocate must:

- 1) Have been an active CASA for a minimum of 3 months AND
- 2) Have visited the child without the Companion at least two times to form an initial bond with the child(ren) and family.

In certain circumstances these requirements may be waived by the Advocacy Coordinator. In such cases, a written request for an exception should be sent to the Advocacy Coordinator for approval.

### **2.3 CASA Companion Training**

In order to increase knowledge, skills, and abilities necessary to fulfill the roles and responsibility of a CASA Companion, all CASA Companions must participate in at least 5 hours of initial training.

This initial training course will include training regarding:

- 1) Roles and Responsibilities of the CASA Companion
- 2) Operation of the court, court process, and child welfare system
- 3) Guiding Principles of CASA
- 4) Confidentiality
- 5) Cultural Competency
- 6) Family Strengths and Values

### **2.4 Documentation of Training**

It is the responsibility of the Training Coordinator to document completion of all CASA Companion training.

### **2.5 Continuing Education**

CASA Companions are expected to complete 6 hours of continuing education throughout the calendar year. The number of in-service training hours required for newly trained volunteers will be adjusted (or prorated) dependent on the time of the year that the volunteer was trained.

CASA of WST Counties will provide periodic training opportunities and will notify volunteers of other outside opportunities as they arise.

Volunteers may also acquire continuing education credit from outside sources that they learn of on their own (including college classes) so long as they are approved by CASA staff and are relevant to CASA work (i.e. children's issues, family issues, the legal system, case management, or other relevant topics). Continuing education is documented in the volunteer's file.

## SECTION 3: Confidentiality

### 3.1 General Confidentiality

CASA of WST Counties believes that we have the moral and ethical responsibility to diligently protect and maintain the confidentiality of those served by our program, as well as employees, volunteers, board members and any others related to the agency. CASA of WST Counties is committed to ensuring the confidentiality of information and materials pertaining to those individuals. Disclosure can be made only under specified conditions for reasons specifically referenced in this policy manual, or relating to legality, grantor requirements, and/or fulfillment of our mission. Persons working in any capacity of this agency may not use their position to obtain or access confidential information.

Confidential information shall include but is not limited to:

- 1) The names and/or identifying information of employees, volunteers, board members, cases, and donors unless the person involved provides written permission.
- 2) All personal information of cases, employees, volunteers, board members and donors, to include home phone numbers, and the addresses of employment, residence, and/or other family addresses.
- 3) Communications, observations, involvement, and information made by and between or about cases, employees, volunteers, and board members to anyone outside of this agency.

Volunteers must maintain a professional boundary concerning confidentiality. These individuals must not discuss any individual's records with unauthorized individuals whether on or off duty.

By adhering to the confidentiality policy volunteers shall not disclose any of the information listed above to anyone outside of this organization unless authorized by the Executive Director or a signed release of information form. Confidentiality must be maintained even after the volunteer leaves volunteer service with this agency.

The following guidelines govern specific circumstances in which the CASA requests or receives information. However, these guidelines cannot cover every possible situation that may arise. Any questions and/or concerns the advocate has regarding confidentiality or the application of the policy should be discussed with CASA staff. All questions will be considered on a case-by-case basis.

- A volunteer is not allowed to disseminate documents to any of the parties, their attorneys, and other collateral sources that are covered by state and federal confidentiality laws. These documents generally include drug and alcohol evaluation/records; mental health treatment evaluations; 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.
- A volunteer should not promise a child or any party to the assigned case that his/her statements will be kept secret or confidential.
- The volunteer must disclose confidential information learned during the course of an investigation in three circumstances:
  - 1) When consulting with the CASA staff or Attorney Ad Litem of the child who must be provided all significant case specifics known to CASA.
  - 2) When ordered by the court in a hearing or trial.



- 3) When the CASA thinks that there is reasonable cause to believe that a child has suffered physical and/or sexual abuse.
- A CASA may disclose confidential information and discuss case specifics in two circumstances:
    - 1) When the person whom the information concerns is a legal adult who has signed a Release of Information form.
    - 2) When the court orders the disclosure.
  - The volunteer may discuss a case in hypothetical terms for purposes of illustration at professional meetings designed to address issues promoting the best interest of the children. Volunteers shall not, however, mention the names of any individuals involved in the case or provide facts which may identify the case or parties.

The CASA Companion, upon acceptance of this manual, accepts all responsibility for maintaining confidentiality and the private nature of all records and information. The CASA companion is personally responsible and liable for any violations of this policy.

## **SECTION 4: General Guidelines**

### ***4.1 Personal Appearance***

In order to project a positive and professional environment, CASA volunteers are expected to maintain a good general appearance and be well groomed at all times when conducting CASA business. Clothing should be neat and clean, not distracting, and conducive to a professional image. See-through and/or otherwise sexually provocative clothing is prohibited.

### ***4.2 Contact Guidelines***

The work of a CASA (and Companion) is by nature sensitive and involves a certain level of risk. The youth we serve look up to volunteer advocates and may hang on their every word, watch every move, and crave attention. As the adult in the situation and as the person holding the power in the relationship, CASA volunteers are responsible for managing and maintaining healthy relationships with CASA youth. This means we set the limits and we are the role models for healthy boundaries.

The CASA Contact Guidelines described below specify ways to decrease the risk of inappropriate interactions between volunteers and program participants (CASA children), protecting children from continued abused or trauma experienced as a part of their relationship with their CASA. At the same time, these guidelines protect our advocates/companions and reduce the likelihood of false allegations against the volunteer. CASA volunteers should be familiar with these tools and be sure that these guidelines are followed at all times.

### ***VERBAL INTERACTIONS***

Employees and volunteers are prohibited from speaking to minors in a way that is, or could be construed by any observer, as harsh, coercive, threatening, intimidating, shaming, derogatory, demeaning, or humiliating. Employees and volunteers must not initiate sexually oriented conversations with minors. Employees and volunteers are not permitted to discuss their own sexual activities with minors.

CASA's policies for appropriate and inappropriate verbal interactions are:

<p><b>DO:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use reinforcement such as “I see” or a nod of your head to encourage responsiveness.</li> <li>• Give praise for positive accomplishments</li> <li>• Ask how they are doing (any welfare questions)</li> <li>• Encourage the child</li> <li>• Explore the child’s interests/needs/desires</li> <li>• Use age-appropriate terminology when speaking with the child(ren)</li> <li>• Include caregiver on sensitive topics</li> <li>• Feel free to use/offer general pleasantries (Ex: “You look nice today.”)</li> <li>• Respect children’s attachments to their parents. Remain neutral and non-judgmental about their parents</li> <li>• Document the content of your conversations</li> </ul>	<p><b>DON’T</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Make specific and/or inappropriate comments regarding physical appearance</li> <li>• Use sexual/sensual tones</li> <li>• Allow secrets or make promises</li> <li>• Scold, shame, or put down</li> <li>• Verbally abuse/punish</li> <li>• Yell or raise your voice</li> <li>• Use profanity or harsh language that may frighten, threaten, or humiliate children</li> <li>• Initiate conversations about sexuality, sexual health or bodily functions</li> <li>• Over share personal information, discuss sexual encounters, or involve children in personal problems/issues in any way</li> <li>• Defame, put down, or make derogatory comments against parents, family, or other parties to the case</li> <li>• Probe or introduce the specifics of abuse. Be especially careful when discussing issues in sexual abuse or other potential criminal cases.</li> </ul>
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***PHYSICAL INTERACTIONS***

Our organization’s physical contact policy promotes a positive, nurturing environment while protecting minors and adults. Our organization encourages appropriate physical contact with minors and prohibits inappropriate displays of physical contact. Any inappropriate physical contact by adults toward minors in the organization’s programs will result in disciplinary action, up to and including termination of employment.

CASA’s policies for appropriate and inappropriate physical interactions are:

<p><b>APPROPRIATE PHYSICAL INTERACTIONS:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Abide by the “Rule of 3” (an additional adult present at all times) and minimize physical interactions of any kind in one-on-one situations.</li> <li>• High-fives, hand-slapping, and handshakes</li> <li>• Hugs</li> <li>• Pat on shoulder, back, or head</li> <li>• Unclasped hand holding (in escorting situations or when providing comfort)</li> <li>• Use age appropriate interactions</li> </ul>	<p><b>INAPPROPRIATE PHYSICAL INTERACTIONS:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tickling/wrestling</li> <li>• Kissing</li> <li>• Dressing/Undressing in the presence of the children/caregivers</li> <li>• Have extended embraces</li> <li>• Touching private parts (genitals/breasts/butt)</li> <li>• Massaging</li> <li>• Spanking, hitting, or physical punishment</li> <li>• Place children on lap without supervision</li> <li>• Interlocked fingers (clasped hand-holding)</li> </ul>
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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Holding infants and toddlers and allowing pre-school aged children to sit on knees/lap</li> <li>• Document the nature and purpose of all physical contact</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Participation in unsolicited touching – must ask permission</li> <li>• Piggy back rides</li> <li>• Hugging or showing affection in isolated areas (one on one interactions)</li> </ul>
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**ONE-ON-ONE INTERACTIONS**

In those situations where one-on-one interactions are necessary/approved, adults should observe the following additional guidelines to manage the risk of abuse or false allegations of abuse:

<p>DO:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tell caregivers where you intend to be and for how long</li> <li>• Be sure caregivers/Supervisors know they are welcome to check in at any time</li> <li>• Stay in public line of sight on outings (other people must be present)</li> <li>• Inform someone of the whereabouts of the child</li> <li>• Keep doors open</li> <li>• Maintain a 1:2 (adult: child) ratio</li> <li>• Escort children to bathroom areas when needed</li> <li>• Keep hands to yourself</li> <li>• Document all contact in detail</li> </ul>	<p>DON'T:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Be secluded or obtain unnecessary privacy</li> <li>• Encourage secrets of any kind</li> <li>• Participate in any physical play or other physical interactions (hugging, etc.)</li> <li>• Assist with clothing or disrobing the child(ren)</li> <li>• Change diapers</li> <li>• Enter bathroom stalls with children</li> <li>• Spend more than 30 minutes alone with the child</li> <li>• Schedule outings or visits away from the home without prior written approval of your CASA Supervisor</li> <li>• Visit in movie theatres or dimly lit areas</li> <li>• Visit water parks/pools</li> </ul>
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**GIFT GIVING**

CASA staff and volunteers are encouraged to keep gifts to children and their families at a minimum. Giving money and expensive gifts is prohibited. The agency does have programs and procedures for providing presents to children for Christmas and birthdays as well as resources to supply some of the clothing, shoes, diapers, etc. needed by the children. Volunteers are welcome and encouraged to contribute through these programs and projects. Volunteers should keep in mind that the best thing they can give the children is their gifts of time, attention and advocacy.

The following guidelines should be considered when giving gifts to CASA children:

DO:	DON'T:
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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Feel encouraged to give Christmas and Birthday gifts to your CASA child(ren)</li> <li>• Utilize the gifts provided/made available through the CASA office</li> <li>• Inform your Supervisor of intended gift giving ahead of time</li> <li>• Check with caregivers before giving gifts &amp; food</li> <li>• Consult your Supervisor if you question the appropriateness of your gift</li> <li>• Consider food and treats as gifts</li> <li>• Feel encouraged to bring lunch, snacks or treats</li> <li>• Look for alternate resources</li> <li>• Be realistic of their gift receiving future</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Give gifts valued over \$35.00 without approval of your CASA Supervisor</li> <li>• Ask for anything in return</li> <li>• Spend more than \$150 (per child) on gifts annually</li> <li>• Give gifts such as bikes and scooters without proper safety attire (helmets)</li> <li>• Give money as a gift</li> <li>• Show up with a gift at every visit</li> </ul>
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***GIFT ACCEPTANCE***

Sometimes it may be difficult to refuse gifts from youth or their families. In many cultures, people give gifts to reflect their appreciation for people or services. In order to be respectful of youth and their families, CASA makes reasonable allowances for acts of gratitude involving small gifts of appreciation from youth and/or their families that have a monetary value not exceeding \$20.00. Employees and volunteers must disclose all such gifts to their immediate supervisor. Under no circumstances can money be accepted from youth or their families as a gift.

If a parent or youth approaches an employee or volunteer with a gift that exceeds this \$20 amount, the employee or volunteer should politely decline the gift and refer to this particular policy. The employee or volunteer can also encourage the parent or youth to speak with an immediate supervisor if they have any questions.

***FAITH BASED COMMUNICATION***

CASA youth, families, staff, and volunteers come from a diverse background of religious beliefs. All program participants have the right to practice (or not practice) any faith-based activities within their own level of comfort and preference. We do not want to impose our own personal belief system onto any person served by the CASA program, or expose youth and families to harm through potentially traumatic religious pressure. With these things in mind, the following guidelines should be followed regarding faith-based communication and practices.

<p>DO:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Allow children to initiate/lead conversations about faith and their own beliefs</li> <li>• Have open conversations with children about what they believe, what their belief means to them, and how their beliefs impact their life and relationships</li> </ul>	<p>DON'T:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Harm, or make room for harm to the child (emotional or physical)</li> <li>• Share about your faith (beliefs or practices) without prompting from the child</li> <li>• Push your own beliefs onto the child(ren), family or caregiver</li> </ul>
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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Share, in general what you believe or your own religious practices (i.e. “I enjoy attending church.” Or “I am a Christian.”) only if prompted by or if discussion is initiated by the child</li> <li>• Redirect questions surrounding sensitive or potentially damaging topics (i.e. “What does your religion believe about homosexuality?” or “Do you believe atheists will go to hell?”)</li> <li>• Feel free to pray with a child if requested by the child</li> <li>• Express any discomfort or concern surrounding opposing beliefs to your CASA Supervisor</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Share personal beliefs/opinions on sensitive topics (i.e. homosexuality, abstinence, etc.)</li> <li>• Allow your own beliefs to interfere with your ability to advocate for the child’s best interest</li> <li>• Invite a child to participate in any religious ritual/gathering/practice without written approval from your CASA Supervisor</li> </ul>
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**SOCIAL MEDIA COMMUNICATION**

On some cases, especially with older youth, social media tools like Facebook & Instagram may be the only way a youth will communicate with an advocate or a means of gathering crucial information about a youth who is missing or a family member who may not be telling the truth about a situation. As an advocate, you must keep in mind confidentiality, privacy, and maintaining appropriate boundaries, so if you need to use any online or social media tool in your casework, here are some important guidelines:

- 1) Before using social media, evaluate whether or not it is a necessary tool for communication with the child(ren) you’re appointed to and consult with your supervisor before making any decisions. Using social media to communicate with youth should be a last resort.
- 2) If deemed necessary, you should only connect online with the youth you’re appointed to. Don’t connect with family members or other parties connected to the CPS case.
- 3) Only use direct/private messaging to communicate with anyone involved in a case. You should never publicly post to a youth or family members wall or comment on a post. Do not tweet at a youth or family member. Do not tag a youth or family member in any of your posts and never publicly mention meeting locations/dates/times.

Some additional guidelines regarding online/electronic communication include:

<p>DO:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use your CASA assigned email account for all email communication</li> <li>• Ensure Supervisor is informed of all forms of electronic communication being utilized</li> <li>• Electronically retain all communications or messages in its original location (emails, Facebook Messenger, etc.)</li> </ul>	<p>DON’T:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Follow or become ‘friends’ with parties to the case (parents, caregivers, attorneys, etc.) through social media</li> <li>• Use any form of social media for interaction with children without approval from your Supervisor</li> <li>• Communicate with CASA children between the hours of 11:00pm and 6:00am unless there is a dire situation/an emergency</li> </ul>
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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Create segmented lists for CASA youth contacts and limit their ability to see any of your personal information or posts.</li> <li>• Document any written messages, verbatim, into Optima (copy and paste)</li> <li>• Directly report any inappropriate or explicit exchanges/interactions to your CASA Supervisor immediately (within 24 hours)</li> <li>• Discuss with caregivers what forms of electronic communication they are comfortable with</li> <li>• Ensure the caregiver knows about the forms of communication you are using to communicate with the child</li> <li>• Hide any friends/followers lists that include CASA contacts from your public profile.</li> <li>• Review your privacy settings on all accounts and ensure that your CASA child(ren) cannot see any of your personal information or posts.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Utilize social media messaging for children under the age of 12</li> <li>• Utilize email communication for children under the age of 14</li> <li>• Send or request children to send pictures of any part of your/their bodies</li> <li>• Say something you wouldn't say in front of your Supervisor</li> <li>• Engage in "Sexting" or inappropriate communication</li> <li>• Add your CASA child or related parties to any personal accounts (Netflix, Hulu, Pandora, etc.)</li> <li>• Create any pseudonym accounts to attempt to gain greater access to someone on the case</li> <li>• Share confidential information over social media, even if using private messaging.</li> <li>• Use any location sharing social media tools (FourSquare, Facebook Check Ins, etc.) when working on a CASA case.</li> </ul>
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**CONTACT AFTER CASE CLOSURE**

As a CASA volunteer, one will often develop deep, heartfelt care and concern for the children and families served through the program. This care and concern can leave us with the desire to maintain long-term or lifelong relationships, which depending on the circumstances, may or may not be appropriate. When the child or family expresses openness to continued contact following the dismissal of the case, the following guidelines should be followed:

<p>DO:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Explain to the family that the case is closed, and it is up to them how much, if any, of a relationship or contact they would like to continue with the advocate</li> <li>• Explicitly ask caregivers for permission to have contact with their children</li> <li>• Attend public events if the caregivers invite you to attend for the child</li> <li>• Inform CASA Supervisor if you plan to continue contact with the family and child</li> <li>• Prepare the child for the case to close; explain that you might not be around as much</li> </ul>	<p>DON'T:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Add/follow child(ren) on social media until they are an adult</li> <li>• Force contact or relationship if the caregivers do not want it</li> <li>• Keep the same level of "tabs" on the child, (medical &amp; educational advocacy, monthly visits, etc.)</li> <li>• Wear your CASA badge or represent that you are CASA</li> </ul>
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CASA volunteers should understand that any contact between the CASA volunteer and previously served youth after case dismissal is considered separate from his/her role as a CASA. CASA does not maintain responsibility, discretion, or liability for any interactions taking place outside of the scope of the official role of the CASA advocate.

***OTHER RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CONTACT:***

- Treat children with respect. Do not talk down to them or criticize them.
- Reflect children’s feelings without evaluating them and let them know it’s okay to have unpleasant or negative feelings.
- Tell children that what happened is not their fault. With older children who have been in therapeutic treatment and/or state care, confirm the need to accept past problems and assume responsibility for their future.
- Listen with respect.
- Begin with general, open-ended questions such as “Tell me about...” Use closed questions that can be answered with “yes” or “no” or a short answer when you need specific information or when you are not receiving responses to more general questions.
- Respond to questions. When you do not know the answer, say so. If the question is about their legal action, encourage them to contact their attorney. If the question is about services, encourage them to contact their CPS case worker. Confer with the case supervisor to assist you if you are uncertain about the answer to a question.

When CASA companions have direct contact with the children/families served by CASA, the following guidelines should be considered:

- Reflect children’s feelings without evaluating them and let them know it’s okay to have unpleasant or negative feelings.
- Respect children’s attachments to their parents. Remain neutral and non-judgmental about their parents. Do not express your opinion of their parents, even if asked.
- Treat children with respect. Do not talk down to them or criticize them.
- Listen with respect.
- Use reinforcement such as “I see” or a nod of your head to encourage responsiveness.

***4.3 Restrictions***

All CASA Volunteers may not:

- Provide transportation for CASA children or other parties involved in the case (this excludes CPS caseworkers and attorneys).
- Participate in ex-parte communication with a Judge.
- Allow a child to visit his/her home or visit any home other than the child’s current placement.
- Give legal advice or therapeutic counseling.
- Make placement arrangements for the child.
- Give money or expensive gifts to the child, the child’s family, or caregiver.
- Take or accompany a child on an overnight outing.
- Participate in any activity which is likely to result in a conflict of interest or expose the program or volunteer to criminal or civil liability.

- Allow a child to come into contact with someone the volunteer knows has a criminal history involving violence, child abuse, neglect, drugs, or a sex-related offense.
- Authorize medical treatment for the child(ren).
- Give the child(ren) medications or any type of vitamins.
- Probe or introduce the specifics of abuse.

Additionally, CASA Companions may not:

- Visit or communicate with CASA children, caregivers, or other parties separate from the CASA advocate.
- Observe parent/child visits
- Participate in hearings, conferences, or any other meetings around the case without specific approval from the CASAs supervisor. (Note that should a CASA Companion attend a court hearing – even as an observer – there is a possibility that the companion may be called upon as a witness.)

#### ***4.4 Grievance Procedures***

Misunderstandings or disagreements may arise in any organization. CASA of Walker, San Jacinto & Trinity Counties values and wishes to promote a cooperative and pleasant volunteer environment.

We therefore encourage an open atmosphere where concerns, grievances, suggestions, and questions can be discussed with supervisors and staff members. We strive to ensure consistent and honest treatment of all volunteers and as such, staff and volunteers are expected to treat each other with mutual respect. Many problems or concerns can easily be addressed simply by discussing them openly.

When problems continue where volunteers believe action is necessary beyond open discussion, the following steps should be followed:

- 1) Any grievance should first be heard by the volunteer's staff supervisor. A formal grievance should be discussed within 30 days of the time of the incident, or the volunteer waives their rights to continue with the grievance under this policy. Often, no action past this is necessary.
- 2) If the volunteer is not satisfied with the supervisor's resolution, or if the supervisor is unable to offer resolution, a written grievance should be filed with the Program Director. The written grievance should contain the following:
  - a. a description of the problem
  - b. the date of the incident(s)
  - c. name(s) of individual(s) involved in or witnessing the incident(s);
  - d. the volunteer's suggested resolution and
  - e. the date the grievance is filed with the volunteer's signature.

The Program Director shall consult with the Executive Director on the decision regarding the grievance. This decision made between the Program Director & Executive Director is final.

Although not all problems can be resolved to everyone's total satisfaction, it is through open discussion of problems that staff and volunteers develop confidence in each other. This confidence is important to the operation of an efficient and harmonious environment that benefits all parties.



## SECTION 5: Conduct

### 5.1 CODE OF CONDUCT

*The following policies are intended to assist volunteers in making decisions about interactions with youth. For clarification of any guideline or to inquire about behaviors not addressed here, contact your Executive Director or Supervisor.*

CASA of Walker, San Jacinto, & Trinity Counties provides the highest quality services available to our youth. Our commitment is to create an environment for youth that is safe, nurturing, empowering, and which promotes growth and success for the youth who participate in our Organization. Any type of abuse will not be tolerated and will result in immediate dismissal from CASA. CASA will fully cooperate with authorities if allegations of abuse are made and investigated.

The Code of Conduct outlines specific expectations of CASA staff and volunteers as we strive to accomplish our mission together.

- 1) Youth will be treated with respect at all times.
- 2) Youth will be treated fairly regardless of race, sex, age, or religion.
- 3) Staff and volunteers will not swear or tell off-color jokes.
- 4) Staff and volunteers will not discuss their sexual encounters with or around youth or in any way involve youth in their personal problems or issues.
- 5) Staff and volunteers will not date or become romantically involved with youth.
- 6) Staff and volunteers will not use or be under the influence of alcohol or illegal drugs in the presence of youth.
- 7) Staff and volunteers will not have sexually oriented materials, including printed or internet pornography, in the presence of youth.
- 8) Staff and volunteers will not have secrets with youth.
- 9) Staff and volunteers will dress conservatively in the appropriate uniform and avoid wearing provocative and revealing attire including midriffs, tank tops, halter tops, short shorts, or short skirts.
- 10) Staff and volunteers will not stare or comment on the youth's bodies.
- 11) Staff and volunteers will adhere to standards of affection as outlined in this manual.
- 12) Staff and volunteers will avoid affection with youth that cannot be observed by others.
- 13) Staff and volunteers will not engage in inappropriate electronic communication with youth.
- 14) Staff and volunteers shall not abuse youth in anyway including the following:
  - a. Physical abuse: hitting, spanking, shaking, slapping, unnecessary restraints
  - b. Verbal abuse: degrade, threaten, cursing
  - c. Sexual abuse: inappropriate touch, exposing oneself, sexually oriented conversations
  - d. Mental abuse: shaming, humiliation, cruelty
  - e. Neglect: withholding food, water, shelter
- 15) Staff and volunteers will report concerns or complaints about other CASA staff and volunteers, other adults, or youth to their supervisor within 24 hours.
- 16) Staff and volunteers who work at CASA may not have engaged in or been accused or convicted of child abuse, indecency with a child, or injury to a child.

## **5.2 Harassment**

CASA of WST Counties is committed to providing an environment that is free from all forms of discrimination and conduct that can be considered harassing, coercive or disruptive, including sexual harassment. Actions, words, jokes or comments based on a person's sex, race, ethnicity, race, gender identity, national origin, age, religion, disability, sexual orientation or other legally protected characteristics will not be tolerated.

### **Sexual Harassment**

Sexual harassment in any manner or form is expressly prohibited. All claims of sexual harassment will be promptly and thoroughly investigated. Anyone who violates this policy is subject to disciplinary action commensurate with the severity of the offense up to and including immediate termination.

### **Definitions and Explanations**

Sexual harassment may take numerous forms. It includes verbal or physical conduct, such as sexual advances or requests for sexual favors that are unwelcome.

There are two types of sexual harassment:

- 1) *Quid pro Quo*: Occurs when sexual favors are required or demanded of a volunteer as a condition of assignments or as the basis for assignment decisions affecting that volunteer.
- 2) *Hostile work environment*: Occurs when verbal or physical conduct of an offensive sexual nature permeates the work environment to the extent that it interferes with the volunteer's work performance and seriously affects his or her psychological well-being.

In addition to sexual advances or a demand for sexual favors, the following may also constitute sexual harassment:

- 1) Verbal: Sexual innuendoes, suggestive comments, or sexual jokes.
- 2) Non-verbal: Display of sexually suggestive objects or pictures or obscene gestures.
- 3) Physical: Unwanted physical contact of any kind.

If a volunteer feels he/she has been treated in violation of this policy, he/she should immediately report the alleged act to his/her supervisor and the Executive Director. The conduct should be reported directly to the Executive Director if the alleged perpetrator is the volunteer's supervisor. If the alleged perpetrator is the ED, the report should be given to the Board of Directors.

CASA will immediately investigate all complaints of harassment and discrimination in as discreet and confidential a manner as possible. If unlawful discrimination or harassment is determined to have occurred, CASA will take prompt corrective action against the offending individual. The corrective action may consist of verbal or written warnings or other actions, up to or including termination.

CASA will not tolerate retaliation of any kind against volunteers who report incidents of any kind of illegal discrimination or harassment. However, in the event the investigation reveals that the allegation was false or made in bad faith, appropriate corrective action will be taken.

## **5.3 Inappropriate Behavior, Abuse, & Molestation**

Our organization will not tolerate the mistreatment or abuse of minors in its programs. Any mistreatment or abuse by a staff member or volunteer will result in disciplinary action, up to and including termination of employment or volunteer service.

Any incident of unacceptable verbal/non-verbal discipline 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 volunteer who is alleged to have engaged in any form of child abuse or molestation will be reported to the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services and immediately removed from participation in casework for the duration of the investigation. If child abuse allegations are substantiated, the volunteer will be subject to immediate termination and possible criminal prosecution.

If any volunteer advocate has reason to believe a child has been mistreated or has reason to believe that a child is in imminent danger, that person has an obligation to comply with the Texas Family Code 261.101 regarding the requirement to report child abuse and neglect. Any suspicion of abuse **must be reported to TX-DFPS no later than the 48<sup>th</sup> hour after the volunteer advocate first suspected that the child was or may have been abused or neglected.** All such suspicions must also be reported to the volunteer's Supervisor. The volunteer should notify his/her supervisor of the date/time that the TX-DFPS report was completed. Child abuse can be reported to TX-DFPS at 1-800-252-5400 or online through [www.txabusehotline.org](http://www.txabusehotline.org).

#### ***5.4 Conflict of Interest***

Each volunteer is expected to work for the best interests of the agency's mission at all times. Each volunteer has an obligation to avoid any activity, agreement, business investment or interest, or other situation that could be construed as a conflict with the agency's best interests or as an interference with the volunteer's duty to serve the agency and/or its clients to the best of his/her ability.

- 1) No volunteer will receive from an individual or agency any form of commission, rebate, or other remuneration for referring clients for services or any other business transaction.
- 2) No volunteers are allowed to have any direct or indirect financial interest in the assets, leases, business transactions, or professional services of the program
- 3) A CASA volunteer shall not provide direct services to a child or his/her family that could lead to a conflict of interest or potential liability or cause a child or family to become dependent on the volunteer for services that should be provided by other agencies or organizations.

CASA Volunteers may not:

- 1) Serve as a foster, foster/adopt, or adoptive parent for any child whose conservatorship is through DFPS, unless the volunteer is related to the child or placement occurred prior to June 1999.
- 2) Serve as a DFPS mediator, nor have any contractual relationship with DFPS.
- 3) Be employed in a position and/or agency that might result in a conflict of interest.

#### **Disclosure of Conflict of Interest**

Volunteers should avoid even the appearance of a conflict of interest, as this affects the corporation's good standing in the community and its ability to fulfill its mission. Volunteers shall disclose to the Executive Director their relationships and interests which present a conflict of interest or the appearance of a conflict of interest as soon as they arise.

Should any volunteer not disclose a conflict of interest prior to the act then disciplinary action may be taken, up to and including dismissal.

## **5.5 Public Relations**

### **Online Communication & Social Media**

For the purposes of this policy, social media means any facility for online publication and commentary, including without limitation blogs, wiki's, and social networking sites such as Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, Flickr, Tumblr, and YouTube. This policy applies to all uses of social media, including personal use, by CASA of WST Counties volunteers, as their position with CASA is likely well known within the community.

Any volunteer who elects or is asked to represent CASA of WST Counties on social media sites is encouraged to be respectful of the audience, the CASA of WST Counties program, and CASA personnel. Users should avoid content that is contradictory or in conflict with CASA of WST Counties and should always be respectful of CASA staff and volunteers. This includes not only the obvious (avoidance of ethnic slurs, offensive comments, defamatory comments, personal insults, obscenity, etc.), but also the careful consideration of topics that may be considered objectionable or inflammatory. It is never okay to publish confidential information on social media.

For all social media participation, users should consider not only topics posted, but also items commented on, discussed, or engaged in alternate ways. Volunteers should avoid engagement in arguments on social media, particularly arguments relating to contradictory issues.

Volunteers should not use social media profiles to defame or embarrass CASA employees, volunteers, child victims or their families, or to act in any way that would interfere with his/her commitment to program volunteers or the children served. If a volunteer's social media participation creates unnecessary controversy surrounding or within CASA of WST Counties, it will be addressed, and he/she may face disciplinary action or dismissal.

### **Media Relations**

No volunteer CASA of Walker, San Jacinto & Trinity Counties will speak with the media without first obtaining approval from the Executive Director as to the purpose and content of the interview. The Executive Director of CASA and a designated member of the Board will serve as primary media spokespersons. Any media contact by a volunteer to publicly air a grievance is prohibited.

### **Crisis Management**

All inquiries from the media, planned or unplanned, including but not limited to the press, television, and radio, regarding CASA of WST Counties are to be directed to the Executive Director. Comments to the media regarding CASA, or any case handled by CASA of WST Counties, are to be made by the Executive Director only, except by express permission of the Executive Director.

## **5.6 Alcohol/Drug Use**

CASA of WST Counties prohibits the illicit use, sale, attempted sale, conveyance, distribution, manufacture, cultivation, dispensation, purchase, attempted purchase, and possession of illegal drugs, intoxicants, or controlled substance, at any time and in any amount or in any manner. Illicit drugs include all drugs for which possession is illegal under federal or state law, including prescription drugs for which the individual does not have a valid prescription.

CASA of WST Counties prohibits the use of prescription medications for which the volunteer does not have a valid prescription, and the use of prescription medication in a manner inconsistent with the prescription.

The purchase, consumption, and possession of alcoholic beverages in facilities under the control of CASA of WST Counties are strictly prohibited except in cases where approval has been sought from the Board of Directors (i.e., in cases of fund raising).

## **SECTION 6: Safety**

### ***6.1 Safety Guidelines***

CASA volunteers should always use common sense in the performance of their duties and should never put themselves in a situation that does not feel safe. The CASA staff is available to discuss safety questions or concerns. Advocate safety is of utmost importance.

The following safety tips should help in making decisions, but volunteers should use their own judgment to assess situations:

- Be certain you have a correct address before visiting a home or other placement.
- Take a cell phone with you. If you do not have one, borrow one.
- Carry identification.
- Only make home visits during the daytime if possible.
- Do not let children visit your home or know your home information. Your home is not a temporary housing option if placement falls through, even for one night.
- Always know your location and call 911 if there is a problem.

### ***6.2 Accidents & Incidents***

An accident means that a volunteer or another person with them, in the course of CASA business, was injured while performing official duties of the agency. An incident means that something occurred, in the course of performing CASA business that is of a critical nature or caused serious concern but has not resulted in injury.

When an accident or incident occurs, the volunteer needs to report to their supervisor within 48 hours of the time the accident or incident occurred. The Volunteer Supervisor will complete an accident/incident report to document the circumstances and any other necessary information.

### ***6.3 Firearms and Weapons***

The possession of firearms, dangerous weapons or explosives on the property of CASA of WST Counties or while engaged in the duties or functions a volunteer of CASA of WST Counties is prohibited. This prohibition includes those weapons carried under license issued by the State of Texas. Violations of this policy may result in removal from volunteer service. Law enforcement agents are exempt from this policy.

### ***6.4 Harassment & Discrimination***

CASA of WST Counties is committed to maintaining the highest level of professional conduct in the working environment. In keeping with this commitment, any form of discrimination or harassment that would have the effect of creating a threatening or hostile situation for volunteers or others will not be tolerated. All incidents of discrimination or harassment should be reported to the Executive Director for immediate investigation.

## SECTION 7: Travel & Transportation

### ***7.1 Transportation***

It is the policy of CASA of Walker, San Jacinto & Trinity Counties that volunteers are prohibited from providing transportation for the children served by the program.

### ***7.2 Insurance***

CASA of Walker, San Jacinto & Trinity Counties is unable to provide liability insurance for our volunteers. In the event that a third party is injured or sustains a loss, the volunteer's automobile insurance policy will be the primary policy.

If volunteers drive their personal vehicle for CASA business, they must have their own automobile insurance that meets the legal requirements for the State of Texas. CASA does not provide liability insurance that covers any injuries a volunteer may sustain.

### ***7.3 Financial Responsibility***

Volunteers are responsible for the direct costs of general repairs, maintenance, and fuel for their vehicle(s). When appropriate, volunteers may request reimbursements for agency related vehicle use.

## SECTION 8: Leaving CASA

### ***8.1 Volunteer Exit***

We hope that volunteers will find a rewarding and enjoyable volunteer experience with CASA; however, we realize that for one reason or another, sometimes the volunteer relationship must end. If you voluntarily decide to resign from the program, please give notice to your supervisor.

### ***8.2 Probation and Dismissal***

The Executive Director has the authority to place volunteers on probation or to dismiss a CASA Companion when it is believed that the volunteer is unable to fulfill his/her role and/or abide by all CASA policies and standards.

While violation of any policy outlined in this manual could justify cause for probation or dismissal, the following actions, if not addressed or improved upon, specifically may result in probation or dismissal:

- Acting in an unprofessional manner (treating other volunteers, staff, or other professionals in a demeaning, belittling, rude, or hostile way).
- Acting in a way which undermines the credibility of CASA.
- Allowing personal victimizations, history, or viewpoints to affect or interfere with advocacy on an assigned case.
- Engaging in any of the restricted activities listed in Section 5 of this manual.

Appropriate grounds for immediate dismissal of a CASA volunteer include, but are not limited to:

- Taking action without program or court approval that endangers the child or is outside the CASA program's role
- Breaching confidentiality

- Engaging in ex-parte communication with the court
- Violating a program policy, court rule, or law
- Failing to demonstrate an ability to carry out assigned duties effectively
- Falsifying a volunteer application or misrepresenting facts during the screening process
- Having allegations of child abuse/neglect brought against them
- Engaging in criminal activity
- Experiencing an irresolvable conflict of interest

If a volunteer is dismissed from the program, CASA will contact all the parties involved in the case and discuss next steps to ensure the best interests of the child(ren) served are met.

Volunteers may also be dismissed for alternative reasons, if the volunteer's behaviors are deemed to be inappropriate, inadequate, or disruptive for an ongoing period. Supervisors will make all efforts to develop improvement plans with volunteers and to create opportunities for success. However, should the concerning behaviors continue, or expectations not be met, a volunteer may be asked to leave the program.

### ***8.3 Exit Interview***

Upon leaving CASA's service, you may be asked for your comments concerning your period of volunteerism. Your input helps us to establish our policies, procedures, work environment, and other variables affecting your volunteer experience with us. Exit interviews will be coordinated through the Executive Director, or his/her designee.

### ***8.4 References and Recommendations***

It is the policy of CASA of WST Counties not to provide references or service information regarding former volunteers without the volunteer's written consent. Should a volunteer desire a reference or recommendation, he/she should indicate so in writing to the program.

### ***8.5 Volunteer Records***

The CASA program maintains a written record for each volunteer that contains, at minimum, as appropriate:

- 1) Application
- 2) Reference documentation
- 3) Documentation of all records checks
- 4) Training records
- 5) Job description
- 6) Dates of service

Volunteer personnel records shall be accorded the same confidentiality as staff personnel records.

## CASA Companion Manual Acknowledgement

I \_\_\_\_\_ have reviewed, read, and understand all matters set forth in the CASA Companion Manual for CASA of WST Counties, and I agree to abide by all provisions. I realize that changes in the policies may be unilaterally implemented by the Board of Directors.

Nothing in these policies is to be construed as a contract or a provision guaranteeing a specific term or tenure of volunteerism. I understand that my volunteer relationship with CASA may be dismissed at any time, with or without notice or cause.

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

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CASA Companion Signature

Date

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Training Coordinator Signature

Date

