**STANDARD 1: CORE MODEL AND MISSION**

*Adheres to the National CASA/GAL Association Core Model of providing screened, trained and qualified community court-appointed volunteers to advocate for the best interests of children and youth who are before the court as a result of allegations of abuse or neglect as the subject of a Suit Affecting the Parent-Child Relationship or in the conservatorship of the Department of Family and Protective Services (DFPS), living at home or in out-of-home care, as well as operates in alignment with the mission. CASA/GAL volunteers advocate for children from birth through the age of 21 as defined by Texas statute as the limit to youth remaining in care. All CASA programs in Texas inherently follow the Core Model*

**ELEMENTS OF PRACTICE**

1. Adheres to and operates in a manner consistent with the National CASA/ GAL Association Core Model\*, with the following required elements:
	1. Utilizes community volunteers that:
		1. Are screened, trained and qualified.
		2. Are appointed by the court.
		3. Advocate for the best interests of children and youth.
	2. Serves children and youth:
		1. Before the court as a result of allegations of abuse or neglect as the subject of a Suit Affecting the Parent Child Relationship or in the conservatorship of the Department of Family and Protective Services (DFPS).
		2. Living at home or in out-of-home care.
		3. Birth through the age defined by the state statute as the limit to youth remaining in care
	3. The Texas CASA Board of Directors and state statute may provide for the CASA/ GAL volunteer to take other types of cases
	4. Each CASA/GAL program complies with the requirements and provisions of the contract between Texas CASA and the Health and Human Services Commission.
2. Establishes a CASA/GAL program mission statement that is:
	1. Written.
	2. Consistent with the National CASA/GAL Association Core Model.
	3. Adopted by the CASA/GAL program’s governing board.
	4. Inclusive of volunteer advocacy for children.
	5. Approved by Texas CASA.
3. Establishes CASA/GAL program values that are:
	1. Written.
	2. Consistent with the National CASA/GAL Association Core Model.
	3. Adopted by the CASA/GAL program’s governing board

**STANDARD 2: GUIDING PRINCIPLES**

*Provides best-interest advocacy for children as reflected in these guiding principles, which recognize the importance of child safety, family preservation and reunification, equity, diversity, inclusion and collaboration.*

**ELEMENTS OF PRACTICE**

1. Integrates the following guiding principles into all aspects of CASA/GAL program practices, policies and procedures:
	1. Recognize the importance of family preservation and/or reunification:
		1. It is in a child’s best interests to remain with their family of origin when safely possible.
		2. The CASA/GAL program acknowledges that children experience trauma when separated from their family of origin.
		3. If a child is removed from their family of origin, it is in the child’s best interests to be reunified with their family of origin as soon as safely possible.
		4. If a child is removed from their family of origin, the child should be placed with a relative whenever safely possible and in the child’s best interests.
		5. Strengthening families, through recommendations for services, supports, visitation and communications, is in the child’s best interests to achieve stability and/or reunification.
		6. The CASA/GAL program requires and demonstrates respect for the parents and all parties associated with the case.
		7. The CASA/GAL program ensures that information regarding the family’s strengths is incorporated into reports to the court.
		8. The CASA/GAL program ensures that information regarding the child’s wishes is incorporated into reports to the court.
		9. When a court determines a child cannot be safely reunified with their family of origin consistent with legal mandates, another permanent placement is in a child’s best interests.
	2. Recognize the importance of diversity, equity and inclusion:
		1. All children regardless of age, race, ethnicity, national origin (ancestry), color, religion (creed), gender, gender expression, sexual orientation, disability or physical challenge, or socioeconomic status should be safe, have a permanent home and an opportunity to thrive.
		2. The CASA/GAL program acknowledges the existence of implicit bias and takes steps to minimize and/or eliminate implicit bias.
		3. The CASA/GAL program demonstrates an understanding of disproportionality impacting children who are in the child protection system due to allegations of abuse or neglect.
	3. Recognize the importance of collaboration:
		1. The CASA/GAL program’s governing board and the executive director, along with CASA/GAL program staff and volunteers, cooperate and coordinate with other volunteer and public service agencies, the courts, community groups, families and individuals to:
			1. Improve services for individual children and their families.
			2. Advocate for needed change in the conditions which adversely affect the children served.
		2. At least once in a two-year period, the CASA/GAL program conducts a review through surveys of volunteers, judges and other key stakeholders, which includes assessment of the CASA/GAL program goals, degree to which the CASA/GAL program meets the needs of the children it serves, changing demographics and effectiveness of its services.