



**CASA**

Court Appointed Special Advocates  
**FOR CHILDREN**

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CASA OF WALKER, SAN JACINTO & TRINITY COUNTIES

## VOLUNTEER POLICY MANUAL

Updated and Approved 5/15/2026

### 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.*



# Welcome ...

...to CASA of Walker, San Jacinto, and Trinity Counties! We are honored to have you as a part of our program, and have no doubt that you will do great things in your new role. We are excited to have you as part of the CASA team, and I look forward to working alongside you in serving our children, who need you so, so much!

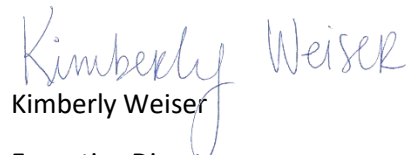
This handbook will outline for you the most basic, essential information that you will need to know regarding our program and services, and the guidelines within which you will be expected to volunteer. While this does not provide you with ALL that you need to know to perform your duties effectively, this will certainly be a useful tool to guide you as you move forward with CASA.

Here at CASA we have an “open door” philosophy – and that means ALL doors are open! While I am always available personally to answer questions, address concerns, and provide support for you as a member of our team, you are also encouraged to utilize your supervisors and your fellow advocates for additional support and assistance. We are all in the same boat, working toward the same goal – no question is too big nor too small for any member of the CASA team to address.

It my sincerest hope that you will find your time with CASA rewarding and fruitful in more ways than you even expect at this time! While I hope to have you with us for many years to come, I also hope that when you leave CASA you will have identifiable growth, both personally and professionally, as a result of your experiences with us. I hope that we are able to successfully utilize all of the skills and talents that you have to offer, in a way that effectively serves CASA and is equally enjoyable and fulfilling for you!

With all that said, I wish you the best of luck as you dive into your new role! I am always available to you for any needs that may arise in your time with us, and hope that you will seek me out often for the support offered!

Respectfully,

  
Kimberly Weiser

Executive Director

## Contact Information

Phone: 936-291-CASA

[www.casaofwalkercounty.org](http://www.casaofwalkercounty.org)

[information@casaofwalkercounty.org](mailto:information@casaofwalkercounty.org)

### Mailing Address

PO Box 275  
Huntsville, TX 77342

### Physical Address

2515 Pine Shadows Dr.  
Huntsville, TX 77320

## CASA STAFF

### Executive Director

Kimberly Weiser  
[k.weiser@casaofwalkercounty.org](mailto:k.weiser@casaofwalkercounty.org)  
ext. 101

### Program Director

Rachel Drake  
[r.drake@casaofwalkercounty.org](mailto:r.drake@casaofwalkercounty.org)  
ext. 106

### Development Director

Laura Green  
[l.green@casaofwalkercounty.org](mailto:l.green@casaofwalkercounty.org)  
ext. 105

### Advocate Supervisor

Katy Thompson  
[k.thompson@casaofwalkercounty.org](mailto:k.thompson@casaofwalkercounty.org)  
ext.104

### Advocate Supervisor

Catharine James  
[c.james@casaofwalkercounty.org](mailto:c.james@casaofwalkercounty.org)  
ext.107



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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

## Court Appointed Special Advocate

### *Guardian Ad Litem*

#### PURPOSE OF THE POSITION

A CASA volunteer is a trained community volunteer appointed by a district or family court judge to speak for the best interests of an abused and/or neglected child in the child welfare system. He/she respects a child's inherent right to grow up with dignity in a safe environment that meets that child's best interests.

A CASA volunteer is an official part of the judicial proceedings, working alongside attorneys and social workers. By handling only one or two cases at a time, a CASA volunteer has time to explore thoroughly the history and circumstances of each assigned case.

#### PREREQUISITES AND SKILLS

- Must be 25 years of age or older.
- Must have obtained at least a high school diploma or a GED.
- Must successfully complete screening requirements, to include a written volunteer application (including a consent and release for criminal background investigations), personal interview, reference checks (3 unrelated references), and criminal background investigation.
- Has reliable access to transportation
- Ability to communicate effectively both orally and in writing.
- 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 and be sworn in by a Judge as a Court Appointed Special Advocate.

#### TRAINING

- Must complete at least 30 hours of pre-service training and 2 hours of courtroom observation before being appointed to a case
- Must complete 12 hours of in-service/continuing education training annually
- Must attend all mandatory volunteer in-services

#### TIME COMMITMENT

- Required to make a minimum twelve-month commitment to the program
- Spend, on average, 15 hours per month on each case assigned
- Attend all court hearings to advocate for the child's best interest and provide testimony as needed

- Volunteers are expected to be available for case assignment and to accept cases immediately upon completion of pre-service training, unless other arrangements have been made.

## A CASA Volunteer:

- Identifies and advocates for the best interest of the child(ren) at every stage of the case, and makes written recommendations to the court concerning the outcome that would be in the child's best interest.
- Maintains complete confidentiality regarding information about the child(ren), as well as information regarding other parties involved in the case.
- Obtains first-hand a clear understanding of the needs and situation of the child(ren) by
  - facilitating a prompt and thorough review of the case.
  - conducting an ongoing review of all relevant documents and records
  - interviewing appropriate parties (the child, parents, social workers, teachers and other persons with knowledge of the case) to determine the facts and circumstances of the child(ren)'s situation and to make recommendation regarding the child's best interest
- Monitors the child(ren) to ensure the child(ren)'s safety and to advocate against unnecessary relocations of the child to multiple temporary placements.
- Has regular and sufficient in-person contact with the child(ren) where they live to ensure in-depth knowledge of the case and make fact-based recommendations to the court. CASA volunteers shall meet in person with the child(ren) once every thirty (30) days at a minimum.
  - *An exception may be granted if the child(ren) are placed more than 60 but less than 120 miles away (from the courthouse in which their hearings are held), in which case CASA will meet in person with the child(ren) at least once every other month. If the child(ren) are placed more than 120 but less than 300 miles away, CASA will meet in person with the child(ren) at least once every three months. If child(ren) are placed more than 300 miles away from the location of the courthouse from which their hearings are held, the child must be visited in person at least once every 6 months. For any child not seen by a volunteer advocate within the prescribed timeline without an approved exception, the Advocate Supervisor (or his/her designee) must visit the child within 10 days.*
  - In addition to in-person contact, CASA's will have other types of monthly age appropriate contact with the child(ren) including telephone calls, emails, video conferencing and letters as applicable for the child's age and interests.
- Communicates with the DFPS/SSCC caseworker after appointment and at least one time per month for the duration of the case.
- Communicates with the child's parent(s) at least one time per month for the duration of the case.
- Meets in person with the child(ren)'s primary placement provider, in a timely manner, after placement occurs and communicates with the placement provider at least once per month thereafter for the duration of the child(ren)'s case.
- Communicates at least once monthly with his/her CASA supervisor and participates in case conferences as scheduled.

- Seeks to elicit, in a developmentally appropriate manner, the name of any adult, particularly an adult residing in the child’s community, who could be a relative or designated caregiver and/or connection for the child, and immediately provides the names of those individuals to DFPS/SSCC.
- Advocates for the child(ren)’s best interests in the community through regular contact (at least quarterly) with attorney ad litem, legal, mental health, educational and other community systems (subject to confidentiality limitations), to assure that the child(ren)’s needs in these areas are met.
- Accesses the child’s educational portfolio(s) and makes recommendations regarding educational services, as appropriate.
- Reviews (at least quarterly) medical care provided to the child(ren) (including health passport reviews), and elicits as appropriate, the child’s opinion on medical care provided.
- Seeks cooperative solutions by acting as a facilitator among parties.
- Makes recommendations for services for the child(ren) and child(ren)’s family, including referrals to existing community services.
- Seeks information about whether a permanency plan has been created for the child(ren) and makes recommendations concerning permanency that encourage the permanent placement of children with their families, relatives, or timely placement with adoptive families
- Provides, at every hearing, reports which include findings and fact-based recommendations, including specific recommendations for appropriate services for the child(ren) and, when appropriate, the child(ren)'s family.
- Participates in all case-related meetings.
- Monitors implementation of service plans and court orders assuring that court-ordered services are implemented in a timely manner and that review hearings are held in accordance with the law.
- Informs the court promptly of important developments in the case
- Maintains complete records about the case, including appointments, interviews and information gathered about the child(ren) and the child(ren)’s life circumstances and returns all records to the program after the case is closed.
- *For a child at least 16 years of age:* Ascertains whether the child has received the following documents:
  - A certified copy of the child’s birth certificate
  - A social security card or replacement card
  - A Driver’s License or personal identification certificate
  - Any other personal document DFPS determines appropriate.
- Reports within 24 hours any new incidents of abuse or neglect, or any situation in which the volunteer has reason to believe that a child is in imminent danger to the appropriate authorities, the CASA Supervisor, and the assigned CPS caseworker.

## **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 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.

This agreement is entered into for the purpose of providing the best possible advocacy for the child(ren) with whom I work. I fully understand that failure to complete or comply with any of the above requirements may result in my termination from the volunteer team of CASA of Walker, San Jacinto, and Trinity Counties.

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Volunteer Signature

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Date

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Volunteer Supervisor Signature

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Date

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

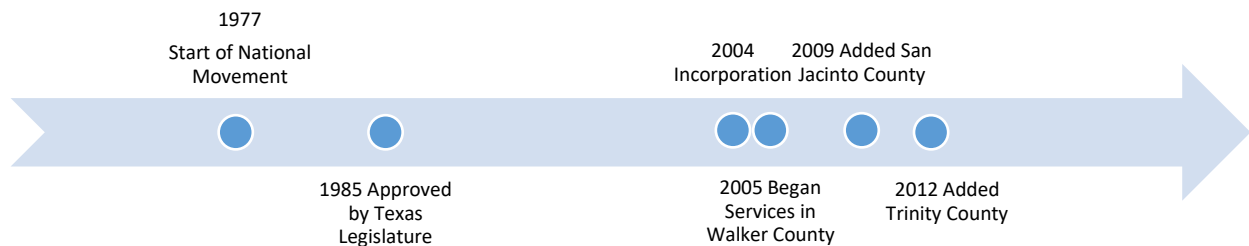
### 1.1 History

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 25 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 Guiding Principles

CASA is guided by the following core principles:

We recognize the importance of family preservation and/or reunification:

- We acknowledge that children experience trauma when separated from their family
- We acknowledge that strengthening families is in the child’s best interest to achieve stability and/or reunification
- We demonstrate respect for parents and all other parties
- We ensure the family’s strengths and child wishes are both represented in reports to the court

**We recognize the importance of diversity, equity and inclusion:**

- We acknowledge that ALL children (regardless of age, race, ethnicity, national origin, color, religion, gender, gender expression, sexual orientation, disability, or physical challenge) should be safe, have a permanent home and an opportunity to thrive
- We acknowledge the existence of implicit bias and takes steps to minimize and/or eliminate implicit bias
- We demonstrate an understanding of disproportionality impacting children who are in the child protection system due to allegations of abuse or neglect

**We recognize the importance of collaboration:**

- We cooperate and coordinate with other volunteer and public service agencies, the courts, community groups, families and individuals to improve services & advocate for change when conditions adversely affect the children served
- At least once in a two-year period, we conduct a survey of volunteers, judges and other key stakeholders to assess whether the program is meeting the needs of children served.

### 1.3 Program Services

**The CASA program consistently offers services in a manner that reflects:**

- 1) CASA program mission
- 2) Adherence to the guiding principles
- 3) Available personnel and financial resources
- 4) Program's funding sources and requirements
- 5) Roles and responsibilities required by law

### 1.4 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.

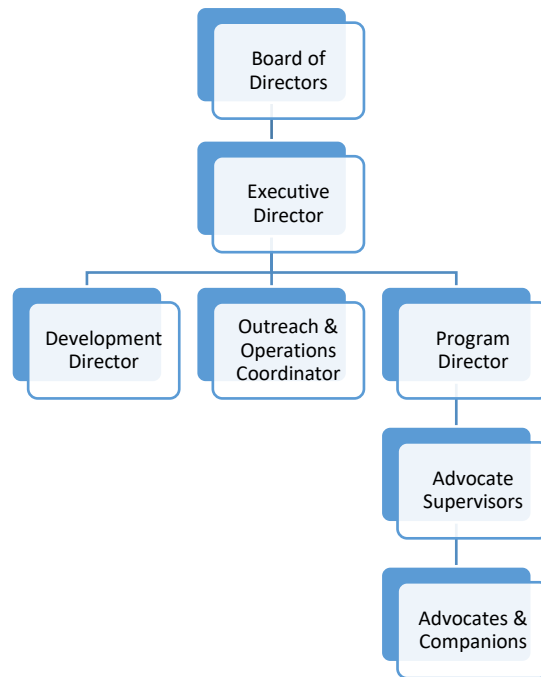
The Board of Directors employs an Executive Director who serves as the direct line of communication with the board, unless delegated otherwise for a specific purpose. The Executive Director is accountable for keeping the Board of Directors updated.

### 1.4 Board Advocate Representation

CASA recognizes the importance of having advocate representation on the board. Appointed advocates have experiential program knowledge and are often in the best position to recognize and communicate concerns, considerations and/or recommendations. In recruiting for the board, CASA will consider the degree to which advocates are represented and will recruit accordingly, doing their best to ensure that at least one current CASA is serving on the board at all times. Advocates who are interested in joining the board may seek information from the Executive Director at any time.

## 1.5 Organizational Structure

The board of directors is responsible for the overall governing and wellbeing 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 employees 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.



## 1.6 Diversity and Inclusion

CASA of WST Counties is strongly committed to promoting diversity and inclusion. All directors, employees, and volunteers performing work on behalf of CASA are expected to adhere to the laws and regulations that apply to their work activities and demonstrate ethical behavior in all decisions and interactions. CASA is committed to acknowledging and valuing volunteer differences and to creating an environment in which every individual's unique strengths and abilities are developed and valued.

All CASA volunteers share in the responsibility for creating this environment, and are expected to demonstrate mutual respect and acceptance in the work place. At CASA, we believe that utilizing our volunteers' uniqueness enhances communication, problem-solving and decision-making skills, thereby improving organizational productivity and performance. We also believe that if our Board, employees, and volunteers mirror the diverse make-up of our communities and those we serve, we will be able to understand, and more effectively respond to our community's needs.

## 1.7 Volunteer Recognition

CASA greatly values the contributions of its volunteers. CASA has several volunteer recognition and appreciation programs throughout the year. An outstanding and committed volunteer base is the hallmark of a strong organization, and CASA is no exception. Our volunteers are recognized for their outstanding quality, dedication, and commitment. Creating our formal recognition programs provides us with more way to celebrate creativity and a commitment of excellence in all of our activities.

## 1.8 Policy on Policy

When extenuating circumstances are present, the Executive Director, with consultation with the President of the Board of Directors (or his/her designee), may make exceptions to the policies within this manual. Any exceptions made to written policy must be reported to the Board of Directors at the next regularly held meeting.

## SECTION 2: Screening & Training

The CASA program ensures and monitors the screening of all volunteers and completes and documents all screening before the volunteer is accepted by the program. This screening process includes:

- 1) Written application
- 2) In-Person Interview
- 3) Reference Checks (3 unrelated references)
- 4) Criminal Background Checks

Written verification of all screening measures are maintained on file with the CASA office.

### 2.1 Criminal Background Checks

The program has established election and screening procedures that include:

- 1) Verification of Social Security number.
- 2) TCIC – Texas criminal record check
- 3) NCIC – National criminal record check/fingerprint
- 4) Texas Public Sex Offender Registry
- 5) National Sex Offender Registry
- 6) TDFPS – child abuse registry
- 7) 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. Consent and release for the above-stated background checks are included as part of the volunteer's application process.

### 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. Generally, CASA will receive notification of any new criminal offenses through the rap-back subscriptions applied as part of the criminal record check process. For any checks that do not have rap-back capability, the CASA program will re-check criminal records at least once every two years.

CASA Volunteers who elect to take a leave absence for 180 days (6 months) or less will remain subscribed through CASA's background check systems. For any leave of absence lasting longer than 90 days, CASA will remove the volunteer from the criminal history subscription and will re-subscribe when the volunteer returns to Active Status.

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 (including those on a leave of absence) are required to immediately notify their supervisor of any new criminal charges (within 3 business days). It is not necessary for volunteers to report charges related to parking or routine traffic violations (i.e. speeding tickets). When charges are disclosed the Advocate Supervisor shall inform the Executive Director and Training Coordinator of the disclosure and associated charge(s).

## 2.2 Pre-Service Volunteer Training (PSVT)

In order to increase knowledge, skills, and abilities necessary to fulfill the roles and responsibility of a CASA volunteer, all CASA volunteer advocates must participate in at least 30 hours of initial training (PSVT). Each volunteer must spend a minimum of 10 hours of such training in personal contact with and under the supervision of CASA staff, in order for staff to evaluate the applicant's appropriateness to serve as a volunteer. Training is provided by qualified facilitators (CASA staff members) with occasional collaboration with various professionals from the community such as attorneys, judges, Child Protective Service workers, and others who are participants in child abuse cases. All training provided by guest speakers will be provided under the guidance and supervision of qualified facilitators PSVT will include training regarding:

- 1) Roles and Responsibilities of the CASA volunteer
- 2) Operation of the court, court process, and child welfare system
- 3) Dynamics of families, including mental health, substance abuse, domestic violence, and poverty
- 4) Relevant state laws, regulations, and policies
- 5) Relevant federal laws, regulations, and policies to include:
  - a. Adoption and Safe Families Act (ASFA)
  - b. Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA)
  - c. Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) (with compliance information and resources)
  - d. Multi Ethnic Placement Act (MEPA)
- 6) Confidentiality and record keeping practices
- 7) Child development (as well as the background and needs of children served by CASA of WST Counties)
- 8) The nature and effect of child abuse and neglect
- 9) Permanency planning
- 10) Community agencies and resources available to meet the needs of children and families
- 11) Communication and Information gathering
- 12) Effective advocacy
- 13) Cultural Competency
- 14) Special needs of the children served

## 2.3 Documentation of Pre-Service Training

All pre-service volunteer training will be documented in the volunteer's Optima training records by the CASA Training Coordinator.

## 2.4 Court Observation

Each volunteer is required to visit the court served by the CASA program while the court is in session (if allowed by the court) to observe abuse/neglect proceedings before appearing in court for an assigned case.

## 2.5 Swearing in as Officers of the Court

Volunteers will be sworn in as officers of the court only after successfully completing (with documentation) the required initial training and all screening requirements.

## 2.6 Continuing Education

Volunteer advocates are required to attend 12 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.

In-Service training opportunities will include (but are not limited to):

- 1) cultural competency, disparity & disproportionality,
- 2) guiding principles
- 3) Background & needs of children served
- 4) Operations of the court and child welfare system(s)
- 5) Nature and effects of child abuse (recognizing abuse)

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.

CASA will host periodic (typically annual) mandatory volunteer in-services. Mandatory trainings are required for all advocates, even if continuing education hours for the year are completed. The program staff will inform volunteers of all training requirements in pre-service training and will issue periodic reminders of these requirements throughout the year.

It is the responsibility of the volunteer advocate to document all continuing education in his/her Optima Training Logs.

## 2.7 Training Materials

Training materials will be provided to all volunteers at the start of pre-service training. Volunteers may keep the materials provided following training and/or may request to have an electronic version supplied.

CASA will also maintain a library of books, videos, and other training materials to be utilized by CASA advocates for completion of ongoing continuing education. Advocates may check out these materials from the CASA library through the Training Coordinator per his/her designated procedures. The CASA program reserves the right to collect collateral or request reimbursement for any lost or damaged materials.

## 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.
- 4) All information related to cases or children served including: the child's full name; the child's location; the child's placement; the child's history of abuse and neglect; records regarding social services, law enforcement records, school records, records of a probate or court proceeding, medical, mental health or drug or alcohol treatment record; or any relevant records related to the child obtained as Guardian ad Litem or CASA advocate.

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.

- If it is necessary to obtain any privileged or confidential information about someone who is directly related to the case but is not the child, the CASA may be required to obtain from that person a written release of information which allows the professional, hospital, or treatment center to discuss the matter with the CASA. When requesting information in these instances, it is imperative that the CASA be careful not to disclose information of a confidential nature.
- While a person may sign a release allowing the CASA to obtain confidential information, he/she may not want to authorize disclosure to the other parties to the case or their attorneys. The

CASA should review the signed release form very carefully and seek guidance from CASA staff if there are any questions.

- A CASA is not allowed to disseminate documents to any of the parties, their attorneys, and or 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 CASA should not promise a child or any party to the assigned case that his/her statements will be kept secret or confidential.
- A CASA shall never visit with the child while in the presence of any of the CASA’s family members, unless covered by the CASA Companion Policy.
- The CASA 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 CASA 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. The CASA 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 agrees to return all information he/she has gathered, together with any printed materials or notations relevant to any and all cases to which he/she has been assigned at the close of a case or when service to CASA ends.

All volunteers are required to take an oath of confidentiality upon completion of pre-service training. And are required to submit a signed statement of acknowledgment of confidentiality policies upon initial case assignment, and at the acceptance of each new case.

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

### 3.2 Confidential Paper, Oral and Electronic Transmissions

CASA is committed to treating information of children, families, volunteers, donors, board members, employees, and other stakeholders and interested parties with the utmost care and confidentiality.

In order to be eligible to access confidential information, volunteers must have a reasonable and demonstrable need to use, disclose, create, receive, maintain, access, or transmit the information to carry out his/her obligations related to his/her Authorized Purpose.

Volunteers must access, create, maintain, receive, use, disclose, transmit and destroy confidential information in a secure fashion that protects against any reasonably anticipated threats or hazards to the security or integrity of such information or unauthorized uses.

Users of confidential information may NOT use, disclose, create, maintain, or transmit confidential information outside of the United States

### **Maintaining Confidentiality:**

#### *When Accessing Digital Materials*

1. All users must lock their screens whenever they leave their devices to reduce the risk of unauthorized access.
2. All computing devices that access or store confidential information shall lock after 15 minutes of inactivity.
3. All users must keep their work area clear of any sensitive or confidential information when they leave.
4. All users must keep their passwords confidential and not share them.

#### *When Printing, Copying, and/or Disposing:*

Volunteers shall monitor the printer used when printing confidential documents; Confidential print jobs should not be left unattended. Confidential documents shall be promptly removed from the copy machine and when ready for disposal, these documents should be shredded.

#### *On the Telephone:*

Individuals shall be discrete in communications with others to ensure that unauthorized disclosure does not occur. When attending to Conference Calls or phone calls where confidential information may be discussed, volunteers are encouraged to conduct such business behind closed doors. When leaving voicemails, Individuals must be careful not to include or disclose any confidential information.

#### *While Texting*

Text messaging is not a secure way to relay confidential case-related information. When discussing case related information via text, individuals must conceal the identity of those individuals being discussed (For example, by using initials instead of full names).

#### *When Mailing*

Confidential mail sent by regular mail or courier must be sent in sealed envelopes and marked "Confidential".

#### *When E-Mailing*

Volunteers will be assigned a CASA email address. This will allow the volunteer access to Office 365 and maintains confidentiality needed for emailing confidential case related information.

Before sending any confidential information via electronic mail, individuals must make sure the intended recipient is the sole user of the address. Discretion must be used when sharing confidential information by electronic mail since it can be forwarded and/or accessed fairly easily by experienced users.

The following confidentiality notice must be included on all confidential electronic mail:

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

#### *When Faxing*

When using a fax machine to transmit confidential information, individuals should make arrangements for recipient to be available to monitor the fax machine to retrieve the document. Fax numbers should be verified prior to sending information by facsimile and the following confidentiality notice must be included on all confidential faxes.

*CONFIDENTIALITY NOTICE: This transmission is intended only for the addressee shown above. It may contain information that is privileged, confidential or otherwise protected from disclosure. Any review, dissemination or use of this transmission or any of its contents by persons other than the addressee is strictly prohibited. If you have received this message in error, please contact us immediately upon receipt*

### 3.3 Breaches of Confidentiality

Any reported or discovered breach of confidentiality must immediately be documented through an incident report and appropriate notification to all parties. The Board of Directors and Texas CASA will be notified in writing by CASA Staff within 24 hours of discovery.

Staff and volunteers are required to report any breach of confidentiality that they are responsible for or aware of. An incident report must be started immediately. A full and complete investigation shall be conducted upon discovery, committing all necessary and appropriate staff and resources to expeditiously respond, report and notify appropriate parties.

The decision to take disciplinary action as a result of the investigation will be one that is appropriate to stop and deter future confidentiality violations. Program leadership will assure disciplinary policies are followed and act consistently in the responses to any breach.

### 3.4 CASA Companions

In an effort to promote the well-being of children served by CASA, this policy is in place to allow qualified spouses and others with a direct relationship to a sworn-in CASA, (hereafter referred to as CASA Companions) to have limited access to a child(ren) being served by an advocate. A qualified spouse is one who has submitted to a personal interview, child abuse background check and a criminal background

check to be executed by CASA, and has participated in PSVT, Chapter 1 and either Chapter 3 or 4. In addition, the qualified spouse will be required to sign a policy outlining guidelines the CASA Advocate and qualified spouse must adhere to when having contact with the child served by CASA.

In the course of having contact with a CASA child, a qualified spouse may obtain privileged or confidential information about the child or another person directly related to a case. Just as a sworn-in advocate, a qualified spouse is prohibited from sharing or repeating any information received from any other person. Information that is relevant to the case, should however be shared with CASA staff. All information received should be held to the highest level of confidence at all times.

Guidelines are in place to assist sworn-in advocates and their qualified spouses in knowing what boundaries are appropriate when having contact with children served by CASA. These guidelines will be discussed during the personal interview with a CASA staff member.

## SECTION 4: Volunteer Status

Volunteers can be classified in one of five categories, listed below.

### 4.1 Active/Assigned

An active volunteer is currently appointed to and working a case.

### 4.2 Inactive (Leave of Absence)

An inactive volunteer is a volunteer who is currently not assigned to a case and is not fulfilling any other duties of a CASA volunteer (in-services, contact with supervisor, etc.). A volunteer may be inactive for a period of up to 6 months (see Leave of Absence Below).

### 4.3 Available/Unassigned

An available/unassigned is a volunteer who is currently not assigned to a case, but continues to meet all annual continuing education requirements (and submit documentation of such), maintains monthly contact with the CASA program, and attends all mandatory volunteer trainings/in-services. Generally, unassigned advocates are available for appointment to new cases.

Volunteers may stay classified as available/unassigned for a period of up to 12 months, less the number of months spent in a period of inactivity (i.e. if the volunteer takes a 3 month leave of absence, he/she may remain unassigned for up to 9 additional months).

### 4.4 Ineligible

An ineligible volunteer is a volunteer who is currently not eligible to be assigned to a case due a period of inactivity greater than permitted by the requirements above. An ineligible volunteer will need to complete 15 hours of Pre-Service training as a refresher course and meet one-on-one with the Training Coordinator before reinstatement as an active advocate.

### 4.5 Dismissed

A dismissed volunteer is a volunteer who has been asked to leave the CASA program. Any volunteers dismissed from the program will be considered ineligible for future reinstatement as an advocate.

## 4.6 Leave of Absence

A volunteer may request a leave of absence from all duties associated with CASA of WST Counties at any time. The length of the leave may be up to six (6) months from the beginning date of the leave. After six months, the volunteer will no longer be eligible to return to his/her duties as a CASA volunteer unless he/she resumes status as Available/Unassigned, is assigned to case and returns to Active status, or completes the 15 hours of required training.

# SECTION 5: Working your Case

## 5.1 Personal Appearance

In order to project a positive and professional impression, 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 attire is prohibited.

When appearing in COURT, a professional appearance is expected. Attire should be in a manner enhancing the dignity of the court. In this setting, the following attire is prohibited:

- Jeans/denim
- T-shirts (and/or any clothing) printed with any message
- Attire that reveals underwear or midriff
- Anything low cut or unbuttoned showing considerable chest
- Anything excessively tight or form fitting
- Strapless, spaghetti strap or tank tops, unless covered with a jacket/sweater.
- Sagging/baggy pants, shorts, sweat pants, or athletic attire
- Torn, dirty, or frayed clothing
- Dresses/skirts that are shorter than fingertip length

At child visits, meetings, scheduled staffings or other meetings related to CASA work, dress is permitted to be more casual, but should still be neat and not distracting. The following attire is prohibited:

- Any clothing that is inappropriately revealing or distracting (short skirts/dresses/shorts, low cut or unbuttoned tops, etc.)
- Attire that reveals underwear or midriff
- Anything excessively tight or form fitting
- Strapless, spaghetti strap or tank tops, unless covered
- Torn, dirty, or frayed clothing

## 5.2 General Case Contact

Volunteer Advocates are expected to complete all monthly & quarterly case contact requirements (see Job Description). Volunteer MUST make contact with their CASA child(ren), the child(ren)'s caregiver, the CPS Caseworker, the child(ren)'s parent(s), and the CASA Supervisor every month. These contacts should be documented in Optima within the timelines outlined in policy 5.10.

### 5.3 Email

All CASA volunteer advocates will be provided with a CASA issued email address when assigned to his/her first case. This email address shall be used for all electronic business conducted on behalf of CASA and should be used exclusively for CASA -related business. CASA Advocates may not use personal email addresses for any CASA business including but not limited to contact with children and caregivers, contact with attorneys and other parties to the case, and submission of court reports or other official documents.

CASA Volunteers are required to use their CASA-assigned email for all case-related or otherwise confidential communications. Failure to protect confidential information through use of this assigned email could be deemed a breach of confidentiality, resulting in discharge from service as a CASA Volunteer.

The volunteer advocate's email address will be deactivated upon resignation or dismissal of the CASA advocate. The CASA organization reserves the right to monitor or restrict access to this email account as deemed necessary by CASA Staff.

### 5.4 Online and Electronic Communication

It is always important to keep confidentiality in mind when communicating digitally about your CASA case. You should be the only person who has access to the means by which you communicate with or about children on your case in order to protect this confidentiality. You should:

- Avoid using any shared email accounts accessible by another family member or friend for your casework
- Avoid leaving your CASA email account logged in on computers or devices that are accessible by another family member or friend
- Delete any photos that sync from your phone to a shared device.
- Be conscious of family or group phone plans that sync email, text messaging, and photos across multiple devices.
- Ensure your mobile devices and social media accounts are secure so that others don't have access to your communication about youth.

### 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> <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>	<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> <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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### 5.5 Guidelines for Appropriate Contact: Intro

The work of a CASA 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 and reduce the likelihood of false allegations against the CASA advocate. CASA volunteers should be familiar with these tools and be sure that these guidelines are followed at all times.

## 5.6 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:

DO:	DON'T
<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>	<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>

## 5.7 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>• Unclassed hand holding (in escorting situations or when providing comfort)</li> <li>• Use age appropriate interactions</li> <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>	<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> <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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## 5.8 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><b>DO:</b></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><b>DON’T:</b></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> </ul>
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Visit water parks/pools</li> </ul>
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## 5.9 GIFT GIVING

CASA staff and volunteers are encouraged to keep gifts to children and their families at a minimum. Giving or lending 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:

<p><b>DO:</b></p> <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>	<p><b>DON'T:</b></p> <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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## 5.10 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.

### 5.11 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> <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>	<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> <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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### 5.12 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:

DO:	DON'T:
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<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>	<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.

### 5.13 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.

### 5.14 Restrictions

CASA Volunteers may not:

- Provide transportation for the children served by the CASA program
- Provide transportation for other parties to CASA cases (parents, caregivers, etc.)
- Provide housing, lodging, or bathing facilities for children
- Discuss relinquishment of parental rights with a parent unless he/she is his/her own legal representative. These conversations should generally be referred to the parent’s attorney.
- Allow a child to visit his/her home or visit any home other than the child’s current placement

- Take a child to any location not pre-approved by the CASA Program
- Give legal advice or therapeutic counseling
- Make placement arrangements for the child
- Take or accompany a child on an overnight or late evening outing
- Provide supervision of a child for any shift while the child is in the physical custody of CPS/SSCC
- 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 types of vitamins.
- Give treats or feed the children without consulting the caregiver for dietary restrictions.
- 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
- Make a recommendation or intervene in the physical removal of children to *initiate* a legal case prior to CPS making a recommendation on the removal based on their investigation

### 5.15 Supervision of Visits

CASA Advocates may supervise visits held between CASA children and their sibling, parents, and/or other parties if the visit is taking place in a CPS office or other licensed facility where other adult parties are present and accessible in case of emergency. CASA advocates are welcome to attend/observe visits held in other locations so long as another party (typically the CPS/SSCC Caseworker or Child’s caregiver) is present and providing official supervision of the visit.

### 5.16 Outings

Advocates may at times participate in outings with their CASA children (i.e. going out to eat or shopping). In such outings, the following guidelines must be followed:

- 1) The CASA may not provide transportation to any outing unless granted approval through policy 9.1.
- 2) The caregiver should be present for the duration of the outing. “Present” means that the caregiver is visually accessible to the child (can be seen) at all times. If the caregiver will not be present for the duration of the outing, the CASA must have written approval from his/her CASA Supervisor prior to the outing. The supervisor must be informed of the date, location, and time of the intended outing and have knowledge of what parties will be present.
- 3) The volunteer should pay special consideration to the guidelines outlined in the one-on-one interactions section of policy 5.3 above.
- 4) Volunteers may not take children on outings that include aquatic activities and may not sign any waivers of liability for a child while on an outing (i.e. trampoline park).

### 5.17 Court Reports and Recommendations

When required by the Court for upcoming hearing, volunteers are expected to submit properly completed court reports to supervisors in a timely manner, prior to the court date. **Hearing dates and court report deadlines can be found in Optima at any time.** Generally, a court report is required for all court hearings. Court reports are not required if:

- 1) It has been 45 days or less since the most recent court hearing (with a submitted court report) and there are no significant updates, or
- 2) The next hearing is set for Trial, or
- 3) Your Advocate Supervisor has given specific instructions to NOT complete a report.

After or upon submitting his/her report, the CASA volunteer is responsible to discuss all recommendations concerning the case with his/her supervisor prior to submission of the recommendations to the court. The CASA may make amendments to such report based on the results of this discussion, and submit the final report to the courts and necessary parties. A CASA volunteer has final authority regarding recommendations - A program supervisor may only alter the report or recommendations with knowledge and documented agreement of the appointed CASA Volunteer.

### 5.18 Attendance at Court Hearings

While in court, the CASA will provide verbal testimony when necessary. CASA Volunteers should communicate with the child(ren) prior to any hearing that the child(ren) will be attending. He/she should explain what is expected to occur and explore the child's current reactions and feelings regarding the upcoming hearing.

After the hearing, the CASA should:

- 1) Document hearing notes in Optima
- 2) Ensure that court-ordered services are provided to the child and family.
- 3) Ensure that the judicial and child welfare systems are moving ahead to secure a safe, permanent home for the child.
- 4) Help the child understand the court process.
- 5) Participate in planning or treatment team meetings involving the child in order to keep informed of the child's permanency plan.

### 5.19 Courtroom Conduct

All persons should respect the authority of the presiding judge and shall rise when the Judge enters the courtroom and whenever the Judge leaves the courtroom for recess and adjournment. All persons in the courtroom during any hearing shall be attentive to the proceedings of the Court and shall refrain from any action which is disruptive of the Court proceedings. When Court is in session, all persons, before entering into the courtroom shall silence (or turn off) all electronic devices.

### 5.20 Case Notes (Optima)

It is imperative for volunteers to keep records regarding their activities and the proceedings on their case. Volunteers do this by maintaining and submitting their Contact logs and documents through Optima.

Contact logs should be submitted for the following activities (not all inclusive):

- Child Visits
- Court Hearings
- Permanency Conferences and Family Group Conferences
- Meetings/Supervision with CASA staff
- Case related research
- Time spent preparing reports

- Time spent sending/reading/responding to emails, text messages, and phone calls with parties to the case
- Medical, educational, and legal advocacy

## SUBMISSION TIMELINES

Contact logs are best when submitted sooner rather than later. Advocates are encouraged to submit contact logs within 24 hours when possible. As time passes, details do too. We want to ensure ALL contact logs are as thorough and accurate as possible.

As communication with our children is the most important part of the CASA program, we need to ensure that these contacts are being logged as quickly and thoroughly as possible. All **CHILD VISITS** (or direct child contact) must be logged in Optima within 72 hours. All other contacts/activities (CPS, CASA, Attorneys, Caregivers, meetings, etc.) must be logged within five business days (or one week) of the date the activity took place.

Supervisors will be reviewing and approving contact logs on this same timeline - Child Visit/Contact logs will be prioritized and approved within 72 hours and all others approved/reviewed within 5 business days.

## TIME INCREMENTS

Contact logs should be submitted in quarter hour increments. Activities ranging from 1 to 15 minutes should be documented as .25 hours, 16 to 30 minutes documented as .50 hours, 31-45 minutes documented as .75 hours, and 46-60 minutes documented as 1 hour.

## CASE NOTES AFTER CLOSURE/RESIGNATION

Following case closure, dismissal, or resignation from a CASA case an advocate is responsible to ensure that all relevant case contact logs, documents and other case records have been recorded and/or uploaded into Optima. Once verified, all personal case records should be destroyed or turned over to the CASA program for long term storage. The CASA should ensure that he/she is not maintaining any long-term case records in paper format or on any electronic device (phone, computer, etc). The CASA will be given 21 days following closure/dismissal/resignation to complete and/or return all case documentation.

### 5.21 Photos of Children & Families

Volunteers should be careful of photos taken of children and families served by the CASA program. Photos – specifically photos including the face or other identifying features of the child - must be treated as confidential material, and should be diligently protected as such. Photos should be uploaded in Optima when relevant to case communication.

Distribution of photos are allowed only when:

- Requested or required by the court to be included with or in the court report
- Written permission is obtained from the legal guardian or the young adult, if 18 years of age or older

Photos may not be used for social media, marketing, or personal use, unless written authorization is provided by the legal guardian or the young adult, if 18 years of age or older.

Following case closure, all photos should be deleted/disposed of or submitted to the CASA program for long-term storage.

## 5.22 Crime Victim's Compensation

### Training

CASA of WST Counties Volunteers will receive instruction during Pre-Service Volunteer Training about Crime Victims Compensation rights, requirements, restrictions, benefit claims, and applications. They will be given copies of brochures explaining CVC rights and application forms in English and in Spanish so that they can assist any clients who may qualify for CVC services. This assistance can involve various activities including directly assisting the victim or their "caregiver" in filling out the benefit claim, referral to another victim service agency or entity that will fill out the required claim information, and follow-up notification to the victim or their family when the child victim is placed outside of CPS custody.

### Qualification for CVC

Upon acceptance of a new case, CASA of WST Counties volunteers will research qualifications for Crime Victims Compensation and will report their findings to their supervisor. The Supervisor will document in the case file if the case qualified for claim assistance, and any action taken on the part of the program.

### Filing a Claim

A claim should be filed when there is reason to believe there has been a criminally injurious act to the child such as sexual assault, child endangerment or physical abuse and such a crime has been reported to law enforcement. When a child's case documentation submitted to the CASA program indicates that there were possible criminal violations by the parent(s) that may have included elements of child endangerment and these violations were reported to law enforcement, then a claim should be filed. The OAG will investigate the case and determine if elements of endangerment did exist and if the child is eligible for benefits.

### Follow Up for Qualified Families

- If the case qualifies for CVC assistance, the program will contact the family to assist with application completion for all child victims.
- If the child is permanently placed in a foster home the volunteer will follow up to tell the permanent caregiver the information about the child's benefits and how to file a claim.
- If the child finds a permanent home and is placed out of CPS custody, the program will notify the new family that a claim was submitted and the child may be eligible and approved for future CVC benefits.

These actions will also be documented on the CVC Documentation Form in the case file.

## SECTION 6: Supervision & Correction

### 6.1 Case Conferences and Supervision

CASA Volunteer Supervisors are easily accessible and provide timely and thorough guidance to CASA volunteers. Supervisors will ensure that case progress is reviewed on a regular basis and will verify accurate completion of all written case records.

CASA Volunteer Supervisors will be available to meet with volunteers as needed. Advocates should contact their supervisor at least once per month for updates and recommendations for next steps in the case. Face to face visits between volunteers and supervisors will not be required every month for every case; Advocates should however plan to meet face to face with their CASA supervisor no less than once per quarter. In cases where multiple advocates are assigned, both advocates should be in attendance at face to face meetings with CASA Supervisors. Advocates are encouraged to take advantage of case conferences to ask questions, address concerns, and discuss anticipated recommendations for upcoming court hearings.

CASA Supervisors are generally available to volunteers during regular business hours and volunteers are encouraged to schedule conferences and place calls to their supervisor during office hours. The CASA organization understands, however, that many advocates have work, family, and life commitments that prevent meetings from happening during regular business hours. In such cases, volunteer advocates are encouraged to notify supervisors of scheduling constraints and to coordinate a mutually agreed upon time to meet to discuss the case or address the needs of the volunteer/program.

In all cases, volunteers and CASA staff should be considerate of each other's work and personal schedules. Direct unscheduled contact (phone/text) outside of business hours should only be made regarding urgent matters that need to be resolved before the next regular business day.

## 6.2 Evaluation

**CASA Staff is responsible for the ongoing evaluation of CASA Volunteers.** Volunteer Supervisors will conduct an in-person review of a volunteer's work at case closure, or annually for cases lasting longer than 12 months. This evaluation will consider case highlights, actions taken by the volunteer, volunteer strengths, and opportunities for improvement, and will be documented in writing and kept in the advocate's file.

## 6.3 Caseload

Initially, CASA volunteers will be assigned one case each. However, a volunteer may be assigned an additional case if he/she indicates willingness to carry multiple cases and the volunteer's supervisor feels that volunteer would be capable to manage multiple cases adequately. When assigning cases, the nature and difficulty of the tasks assigned, the work and time required to serve each child or to complete each task, past and current performance of Minimum Expectations of Service, and any additional responsibilities held by the volunteer will be considered.

A volunteer will generally not be assigned more than two cases at a time. An exception may be granted at the discretion of volunteer's supervisor, with approval from the Executive Director (or his/her designee). However, the decision to permit a higher caseload shall be documented on a *Case Limit Exception Form* with justification for and reasonableness of the exception. This form should be filed in the volunteer's file. A volunteer may not be assigned to more than 5 cases for any reason or exception.

Only one CASA will be assigned to a case, except in cases where two CASA volunteers are married and wish to serve together on one case or when a specific exception has been granted by the Executive Director.

Upon appointment and agreement to take a case, CASA volunteers are reminded they are committing to stay actively involved for the duration of Court involvement, or a minimum of one year.

## 6.4 Problem Solving & Corrective Action

Corrective action will be taken when a volunteer fails to follow agency policy or procedure and/or when the volunteer's performance fails to meet minimum expectations. Corrective action will also be taken when the volunteer's actions generate a need for problem solving action, including failure to submit reports and/or failure to attend required trainings. Corrective actions are applied in fairness and in the interest of correcting inappropriate or unproductive behavior.

CASA of WST Counties has a system of progressive correction. However, based on the seriousness or frequency of the concern, a supervisor may enter directly into any level of corrective action including:

1. **Reminder** – CASA of WST Counties understands the scope of responsibilities carried by program volunteers, and realizes that all volunteers will make mistakes, miss deadlines, or miss certain responsibilities. Because of that, all supervisors will make efforts to provide frequent group and individual reminders to volunteers to proactively address potential concerns, and to offer opportunities for volunteers to make improvements through his/her own desire to excel.
2. **Warning or Reprimand** – a supervisor may provide verbal counsel to a volunteer to advise him/her of problems or concerns, to make expectations clear, and to give the volunteer opportunity for improvement. When giving verbal warning, supervisors will document such warning in the advocate's file.
3. **Performance Counseling** – The purpose of performance counseling is to address any concerning behaviors, and to develop a problem-solving plan of action to amend the behavior(s). A performance counseling meeting will include written documentation to define the issue that a supervisor is expecting a volunteer to correct or improve.

Performance Counseling documentation should include the following:

- Date of counseling session
- Explanation of purpose for counseling session (with incident dates where applicable)
- Review of applicable job objectives, policy, or procedure
- Volunteer's response to the issue/incident being addressed
- Outcome of the session to include expectations of the supervisor for change by the volunteer
- Signatures of both supervisor conducting counseling and the volunteer being counseled

The supervisor will discuss the concern with the volunteer and ensure that the expected manner of behavior and/or performance is made clear. The supervisor and volunteer may work together to develop a specific plan of action showing steps each will take for implementing improvements

4. **Performance Counseling with Probation** - At the supervisor's discretion (with consultation with the Executive Director) counseling may include up to a 90 day probation period. This probation period can be used to allow the volunteer:
  - To pursue additional training deemed necessary to improve performance
  - To refresh his/her perspective, and regain objectivity, energy, and commitment to the program
  - To follow through on established goals for improvement

- Time to decide if he/she would like to continue service with the program and follow the guidelines set forth

The volunteer will be expected to resume his/her responsibilities at a stipulated date and time; Upon or prior to his/her return, the plan of action and/or goals will be reviewed with his/her supervisor, and expectations for future conduct will be further clarified. Follow-up reviews occur as needed until the plan for improvement is completed and there is consistent, positive response to expectations.

## 5. Dismissal (See Probation and Dismissal in Section 10)

The objective of Corrective Action is to change behavior patterns that negatively affect children served, job performance, or the smooth and efficient operation of the work environment. Corrective Action is used to correct problems, prevent recurrence of problems, and prepare volunteers for satisfactory service in the future.

CASA of WST Counties hopes that any performance concerns can be corrected at an early stage benefiting both the volunteer and the organization. However, CASA of WST Counties retains the right to determine, in its sole discretion, what corrective action serves the best interests of CASA of WST Counties and to take that action (see policy 10.2 – Probation and Dismissal).

## 6.5 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 Executive 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 decision of the Executive Director is final.

Complainants will be informed of resolution(s) of any complaint in writing, subject to confidentiality limitations, and a copy of the notification is maintained on file at the CASA Office.

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 7: Conduct

### 7.1 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, sexual orientation, age, ability/disability, 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.

## 7.2 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.

### 7.3 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).

### 7.4 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.
- 4) Participate in any other activity that renders the person unable or potentially unable to perform his/her duties in an impartial manner.

### 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.

## 7.5 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, CASA Values, or CASA Guiding Principles 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 as a representative of CASA 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 or his/her designee. Comments to the media regarding CASA or any case handled by CASA of WST Counties, are to be made by the Executive Director and/or Board President only except by express permission of the Executive Director.

## 7.6 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 fundraising).

## SECTION 8: Safety

### 8.1 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 advocates should use their own judgment to assess situations:

- Be certain you have a correct address before visiting a home or other placement.
- Feel free to ask supervisors to accompany you on a first visit if you feel unsafe, unsure, or uncomfortable.
- Confirm the date, time and location of your visit before proceeding to the visit. If the family does not have a phone, try contacting them via email/mail or speak with them in person at a court hearing or supervised visit.
- Request that your supervisor or CPS/SSCC Caseworker accompany you to visits to unverified placements (i.e. homes of respondent family members and relatives).
- Take a cell phone with you. If you do not have one, borrow one.
- Carry identification
- Use discretion when sharing your personal telephone number(s). Feel free to give the CASA office number as a phone number in situations in which you are uncomfortable sharing your own contact information.
- Schedule visits during the daytime when 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.

## 8.2 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.

## 8.3 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.

## 8.4 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 9: Travel & Transportation

## 9.1 Transportation

It is the policy of CASA of Walker, San Jacinto & Trinity Counties that volunteer advocates are prohibited from providing transportation for the children whom they serve as advocates (or any other non-professional parties to the case). In certain cases, volunteers may request an exception to this policy through the Board of Directors. The Board of Directors will consider factors including, but not limited to the volunteer's tenure with the organization, the volunteer's performance history on his/her case, the nature of the relationship between the volunteer and the child/family, and any potential risks in allowing volunteer to transport. The Board has full discretion on all requests. When requests are granted, the Board may offer approval on a one-time or an ongoing basis and may place any stipulations or limitations on the approval as they deem necessary. Any approved requests for transportation must be documented in writing in the volunteer's file. The documentation must be signed by the Executive Director and the Board President and must indicate any limitations on the volunteer's approval to transport (i.e. distance, one-time, specific dates/purpose, etc.).

In any case where the Board authorizes a volunteer to provide transportation, the volunteer must complete the following BEFORE transporting on behalf of CASA:

- 1) Complete a DMV Record check – The volunteer will need to authorize the DMV Record check and provide payment to CASA for the completion of this check. Transportation cannot be provided until the response/result of this check has been received. \*This check must be renewed annually.
- 2) The Volunteer must have written approval to transport the child from both the CPS/SSCC Caseworker/Supervisor and his/her CASA Advocacy Coordinator (Supervisor). This approval must be filed in the Optima Case records.
- 3) The Volunteer must submit a valid copy of his/her driver's license and personal vehicle liability insurance. These will be filed in the volunteer's advocate file. It is the responsibility of the volunteer to provide updated copies when/if these records expire.

## 9.2 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.

## 9.3 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.

## 9.4 Volunteer Travel Reimbursement

At times, the CASA program will be able to provide financial reimbursement for expenses related to volunteer travel. Additionally, sometimes grants are offered through Texas CASA for the purpose of volunteer travel reimbursement. When grants are available through Texas CASA for such reimbursement, CASA will adopt the reimbursement policies associated with such grant, and will reimburse according to the guidelines of the Texas CASA grant. If such grants are not available through Texas CASA, the following travel reimbursement policies will apply. Program staff will communicate with volunteers regarding volunteer travel reimbursements, and which policies apply at any given time.

## Budget

The Board of Directors will determine the budget for volunteer mileage/travel reimbursement at the start of each fiscal/budget year. Volunteer mileage reimbursement will be available to volunteers until this board approved amount has been fully expended. If funds are expended before the end of the fiscal year, travel reimbursement will not be available until the start of the following funding year. Program staff will provide notification to volunteers when 50%, 75%, and 100% of the funds have been utilized.

## Eligibility for Reimbursement

Volunteers may request reimbursement for costs incurred while visiting their assigned children. The total travel distance must be greater than 60 miles round-trip to be eligible for reimbursement.

Any child visits conducted over and above the requirements of the standard exception policy will not be eligible for reimbursement (ex. If the standard exception policy requires that visits be conducted quarterly, volunteers may only request reimbursement for visits once per quarter).

*When multiple travel options are available, the individual shall choose the most economical option. Pre-approval of travel is not required except for out-of-state travel, flights, and lodging.*

## Reimbursement Request Submissions

In order to be considered for travel reimbursement, reimbursement requests must be submitted to the appropriate staff person (generally Advocate Supervisor) no later than 60 days after the date of travel.

## Mileage:

Automobile mileage will be reimbursed at the rate established by the IRS at the start of the calendar year. The rate will only be adjusted once per year.

Reimbursable miles may not exceed the number of miles of the most cost-effective, safest route between a traveler's starting and final duty point.

### *Mileage between residence and duty point*

For personal vehicle mileage claims, Mileage documentation shall include the following:

- All duty points the traveler visited on the trip, including the **full address for each duty point**.
- A map reflecting the route traveled and the associated mileage
- A clear description of the business performed for each duty point
- Signature of the authorized traveler claiming reimbursement and a supervisor's approval signature

### *Four-Per-Car Rule:*

When employees/volunteers travel on the same dates with the same itinerary, they must coordinate travel. When four or fewer travel on the same itinerary, only one may be reimbursed for mileage.

## Rental Vehicle:

The traveler may be reimbursed for the cost of renting a vehicle to conduct CASA business. Vehicle size shall be appropriate for the number of travelers. When arranging travel, the costs of a rental car versus the use of a personal vehicle should be compared to determine the most economical option. For any

travel exceeding 500 miles, a rental car must be used. If a personal vehicle is used for traveling a distance over 500 miles, the traveler may only request a mileage-based travel reimbursement for the first 500 miles traveled.

An authorized traveler must retain an original and complete receipt issued by the rental company in order to receive reimbursement.

The rental receipt must include:

1. Name of the rental company
2. Name of the authorized traveler renting the vehicle
3. Starting and ending dates of rental
4. Itemization of the rental expenses incurred
5. Proof of payment

*Mileage reimbursement is prohibited when using a rental car.*

#### Airfare:

Volunteers may be reimbursed for the actual cost of commercial air transportation. First class is a non-reimbursable option. Additionally, overweight/oversize baggage charges are non-reimbursable. Travel by air requires pre-approval from CASA staff.

#### Parking:

- Travelers shall select the least expensive and most efficient parking option available.
- Parking is reimbursable at a hotel, parking garage, etc. and requires receipts. The “daily” parking rate shall be included if parking for multiple days.
- On-site or off-site airport parking is allowable and reimbursable at the Long-Term rate on the main grounds of an airport.
- Travelers with a disability may be reimbursed for ADA-accessible parking. Closed-in parking/garage parking may be reimbursable for an individual with a disability, with proper documentation.
- Metered parking is reimbursable with a receipt, if available, and shall be documented in the mileage log.

Valet parking is not reimbursable unless mandatory. If mandatory, support documentation shall be maintained. (Example: A hotel statement that identifies that only valet parking is available.)

#### Incidental expenses:

- Gasoline purchases incurred for rented vehicles are reimbursable with an itemized gas receipt that includes price per gallon, gallons pumped, and total amount. Pre-pay receipts are not reimbursable.
- Tollway fees necessary to conduct CASA business require itemized receipts or statements and need to include the cost per route.
- Ground transportation such as taxi, rideshare service such as Uber or Lyft, and mass transit are reimbursable when used in conjunction with air transportation with a detailed receipt, excluding tips and gratuities.

### Meal Reimbursement:

Meal expenses are reimbursed if they are incurred on a day the volunteer conducts a child visit with an overnight stay.

**Itemized receipts must be maintained for all meal reimbursement requests.**

Travelers shall be reimbursed for actual meal expense (restaurant meals and grocery purchases, combined) not to exceed the allowable HHSC rate (up to \$ 46.00). Tips/Gratuities are eligible for reimbursement (these funds, however, may not be paid by a grant).

Grocery purchases may be reimbursed instead of restaurant meals but must be food items purchased and consumed on the same day.

### *Prohibited Meal Reimbursements*

- Meals purchased within 50 miles of the traveler's designated headquarters and/or residence, unless it is mandatory and connected with a training, seminar, or conference.
- Any meals incurred while not conducting CASA business.
- Alcoholic beverages are not reimbursable.
- Bulk groceries
- Delivery or "to go" fees
- Room service or service charge fees

### Lodging:

Lodging is reimbursed for overnight trips of more than 150 miles from the designated headquarters/volunteer residence/point of origin.

The volunteer shall be reimbursed for the actual cost of in-state and out-of-state lodging at a commercial establishment not to exceed the TexTravel or GSA rates. For GSA rates, if the city is not listed, but the county is identified, use the rate for the county. For city and county rates not identified in GSA, the volunteer may consult with CASA Staff for guidance. Staff may approve a volunteer to book lodging that is more costly than the established GSA rate. In such cases, the reason for this exception must be noted in the documentation and the additional cost may not be charged to a grant.

All applicable taxes are reimbursable; however, the volunteer shall claim tax exempt status, if applicable.

The volunteer must retain lodging receipts issued by the lodging establishment or the travel agency used to reserve the lodging.

The lodging receipt must include:

1. Name and address of the commercial lodging establishment
2. Name of the authorized traveler
3. Single room rate
4. Daily itemization of the lodging charges
5. Proof of payment - evidence the lodging has been paid with a zero-dollar receipt.

Non-reimbursable lodging costs include movie rentals, personal phone charges, tips or gratuities, laundry/dry cleaning services and Airbnb.

**Out-of-state travel** requires pre-approval from CASA. The request must include:

- Anticipated Travel dates
- Destination
- Purpose of travel
- Estimated costs for:
  - Lodging - number of days x lodging rate=total
  - Meals - number of days x meal reimbursement rate = total
  - Airfare costs
  - Incidental expenses such as parking, taxi, rideshare service, shuttle, etc. Include a description and estimated cost for each item.
  - Total estimated travel cost

**Receipts for all travel expenses must be submitted to the CASA Program for reimbursement.**

#### Travel Advances:

If a travel advance is authorized, the Contractor shall provide to HHSC, upon request, the travel advance documentation and final reconciliation of all invoices and receipts.

## SECTION 10: Leaving CASA

### 10.1 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 as much notice as possible, in writing, to your supervisor. Written notice should include the date of the notice, the reason for resignation and the last day that you intend to work your case.

### 10.2 Probation and Dismissal

The Executive Director (in consultation with other program staff) has the authority to place volunteers on probation or to dismiss a volunteer when it is believed that the volunteer is unable to fulfill his/her role as a CASA and/or abide by all CASA policies and standards.

While acting out of accordance with any agency policy could justify cause for probation or dismissal, the following actions, if not addressed or improved upon, specifically may result in probation or dismissal:

- Loss of or lack ability to formulate objective opinions

- Failure to maintain consistent contact with the CASA program and/or volunteer supervisor
- Acting in an unprofessional manner (treating other volunteers, staff, or other professionals in a demeaning, belittling, rude, or hostile way)
- Difficulty communicating (either orally or in writing) in such a manner that is preventing effective advocacy on a case
- Failure to submit required documentation per the given deadlines
- Making recommendations to the court without consultation with and approval from CASA staff
- 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:

- Abusing or neglecting a position of trust
- 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 that poses a risk to a child
- Failing to complete required pre-service or in-service training
- 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
- Violating policies governing ethical conduct
- Engaging in behaviors/activities that create a negative image for the CASA Program

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.

### 10.3 Exit Interview

Upon leaving CASA's service, volunteers may be asked for comments concerning their period of volunteerism. Volunteer input helps us to establish our policies, procedures, work environment, and other variables affecting volunteer experience with us. Exit interviews will be coordinated through the volunteer's supervisor and/or another member of the CASA staff.

## 10.4 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.

## 10.5 Volunteer Records

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

- 1) Application
- 2) Documentation of personal interview
- 3) Reference documentation
- 4) Documentation of all records checks
- 5) Emergency and identifying contact information
- 6) Training records
- 7) Job description
- 8) Dates of service
- 9) Performance evaluations and any other applicable documentation related to performance
- 10) Documentation of volunteer status

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

Volunteers may make arrangements with their supervisor to review their records and may request additions and corrections by speaking with the Executive Director or his/her designee; the Executive Director (or designee) may or may not allow the changes to be made to the volunteer's record. The CASA program retains the record after a volunteer has left the program in accordance with the program's records retention policy. All volunteer records are stored in locked cabinets or closets.

## Volunteer Manual Acknowledgement

I \_\_\_\_\_ have reviewed, read, and understand all matters set forth in the Volunteer 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 Volunteer Manual.

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Volunteer Signature

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Date

