

# CASA of Santa Cruz County

## VOLUNTEER HANDBOOK

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## **SECTION I: INTRODUCTION TO COURT APPOINTED SPECIAL ADVOCATES**

### What is a Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA)?

A CASA is a trained volunteer child advocate appointed by a judge of the Juvenile Court to represent the best interests of children who are defined as “Court dependent” by the California Welfare & Institutions Code section 300 et seq. During the time the child remains in the Juvenile Court system, the CASA investigates the child's circumstances, provides fact-based information and makes recommendations to the Court while becoming a friend and source of support to the child.

CASAs act independently, but work closely with department workers, therapists, attorneys and other professionals involved in a child's case. CASAs always work in partnership with the CASA program staff to further the child's welfare.

The CASA's ultimate goal is to move the child out of temporary placement, usually in the foster care system, into a safe and permanent home. This could be reunification with the parents, adoption, appointment of a legal guardian, or some other permanent living arrangement that satisfies the Court and fulfills the child's needs.

### Qualifications of a CASA

1. Be at least twenty-one years of age;
2. Demonstrate an interest in children and their welfare;
3. Be able to respect and relate to people from various lifestyles and cultures (economic, educational, etc.) in a variety of settings;
4. Be objective, open-minded and flexible;
5. Be able to deal with hostility, anger, and other emotional attitudes **in an appropriate, professional manner**;
6. Be able to gather and accurately record fact-based information related to the people and circumstances in a child's life;
7. Be able to communicate effectively, both orally and in writing;
8. Be able to keep all client and Court information confidential;
9. Make a minimum commitment of 24 months;
10. Pass a security check consisting of an FBI fingerprint check, DMV record check and provide three references;
11. Be able to work independently as required, as well as the ability to accept supervision and direction from CASA staff;
12. Be able to transport self to a variety of locations;
13. Have a basic understanding of child development and diverse family relationships.

### Non-Discrimination Policy

The goal of CASA of Santa Cruz County is to recruit a representative cross-section of the public who will effectively and compassionately serve as advocates for the dependent children of Santa Cruz County. It is the policy of CASA of Santa Cruz County to provide equal opportunity to all volunteers and staff in recruitment, screening, training, and supervision. CASA respects the dignity and diversity of

our community and will not discriminate on the basis of race, national origin or ancestry, marital status, religion, age, disability, sex, sexual orientation, political affiliation, or socioeconomic level.

### Training

After screening and acceptance into the CASA training, the potential child advocate completes a minimum of 35 hours of training classes provided by CASA staff, therapists, attorneys, social workers and other professionals from cooperating agencies and departments. A part of the training includes Juvenile Court observation and Mock Trial.

A training manual is provided to each CASA trainee, who is expected to study and understand the material contained therein. Handouts and community resources are also distributed during training.

CASAs attend additional continuing education training, at least 12 hours per year. There are other relevant workshops and seminars offered from time to time by different organizations. Continuing education will be designed to keep volunteers engaged in developments in the fields of child development, child abuse, child advocacy, and changes in the law.

### CASA Volunteer Commitment Statement

As a Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA), I will be an ethical member of the CASA team. I will perform all my work with confidentiality, disclosing information only to other officers of the Court. I will act in the best interest of the child. I will collect information in such a way as to maintain consistent progress on my case.

In order to provide the above mentioned goals, I agree to do the following:

1. To read the training manual and complete the training and Juvenile Court observation.
2. To commit my time to the CASA program for a minimum of 24 months.
3. To maintain contact logs detailing each activity and contact made with regards to the child's case. I will submit the contact logs monthly.
4. To consult at least monthly with my case supervisor to update the case file and to obtain approval of my activities and recommendations. I will keep the CASA office apprised of all changes in names, addresses, phone numbers, etc. for all individuals involved in my case. I will follow the guidelines for my case as established with my case supervisor, understanding that any time my actions are deemed inappropriate, I may be removed from the case.
5. To attend 12 hours of continuing education yearly in order to maintain my Court-appointed status as defined by the Welfare and Institutions Code, section #100, and Santa Cruz County CASA Policies and Procedures.
6. To communicate any concerns, issues and successes directly to CASA program staff. I will notify the CASA office of any accident, injury, child abuse report or any other incident involving the CASA and/or the child within 24 hours.
7. I understand that I am a mandated reporter of any suspected incidence of child abuse or neglect pertaining to my case.
8. To turn in written Court reports to the CASA office two weeks in advance of the child's review hearings. I will obtain permission from my case supervisor before submitting any written documents or correspondence pertaining to my case.

9. To attend Court sessions pertaining to my case or to advise and work with CASA staff to attend in his/her place.
10. To maintain an open, positive attitude regarding CASA policies.
11. To create a private area in my home to keep all case files, notes and correspondence confidential.
12. To obtain the approval of the child's social worker and caregiver when I want to take my child on any special outings out of county.
13. To operate a motor vehicle only with a valid, California driver's license. I will notify the CASA office within 48 hours if my license is suspended or revoked. I will obey all traffic and other laws while performing the duties of a CASA volunteer.
14. To maintain automobile insurance while working as a CASA. Proof of insurance will be submitted to the CASA office, and I will submit my annual proof of insurance to the office. I will notify the CASA office within 48 hours in the event that my car insurance is terminated or revoked.
15. To strive to become a culturally skilled advocate and to communicate openly and sensitively to all people of this community.
16. Not to act as a public spokesperson or a representative of CASA of Santa Cruz County in any public forum or speak to the press regarding CASA without direct permission from the Executive Director.

Because the CASA agency is based on volunteers, paid staff and volunteers are equally valued. I have a right to say no, to have my feelings heard, and to have a place to communicate my concerns. I also recognize the need for me to be reliable and timely in all my responsibilities and to work respectfully with the CASA program staff and other volunteers.

My signature indicates that I have read the above Commitment Statement. I agree to become a sworn Officer of the Santa Cruz County Juvenile Court.

## **SECTION II: CASA PLACEMENT PROCEDURE**

### Case Assignment

After successfully completing the training, the CASA is sworn in as an Officer of the Court. The new CASA confers with the CASA Court Liaison/Case Supervisor and they agree on the first case assignment. CASAs are assigned one child (or several children in a family group). The CASA program must take the best interest of the child into consideration first when matching them with a CASA volunteer.

The CASA program is committed to working with all children with an understanding of ethnic and cultural differences. The CASA staff will make every effort to match children with child advocates who will take into account the context of the child's cultural background, extended family and social community. Here the CASA's role is to create trust between the child's family members and service workers so the case is resolved in the child's best interests.

### Types of Cases Appropriate for CASA Appointment

CASAs are appointed to cases on the Court's own motion or at the request of any interested party with the Court's approval, usually after the Court's jurisdiction over the child has been established.

It is the CASA program's goal to provide a volunteer advocate for every Court dependent child in the 300 system who needs one. The immediate goal of the case selection policy is to determine those cases and children most likely to benefit from the appointment of an advocate. It is the intent of CASA of Santa Cruz County to have volunteer advocates serve first on those cases where the children most need a voice in Court. Any dependent child may be considered eligible for appointment of a CASA.

Santa Cruz County CASA will strive to provide qualified trained advocates to serve any cases that the Juvenile Court judge appoints. All CASA appointments and assignments will be made by a Court order with notice to all parties.

The Court may appoint a CASA volunteer at any time following the detention hearing. A CASA will preferably be assigned to a case at the conclusion of the jurisdictional hearing. The presiding Juvenile Court judge or his or her designee may appoint a CASA volunteer prior to the establishment of jurisdiction. In such cases the judicial officer shall be particularly specific as to the duties of the child advocate.

In developing the criteria for selection of cases and assignment of a volunteer, the CASA program considers the complexity of the case; the availability of alternative support persons in the child's life; the age and sex of the child or children; the cultural, ethnic, linguistic, religious, and other background characteristics (including any disabilities) of the child and family; the potential assistance a volunteer could provide; the availability of a particular volunteer to meet the specific needs of the child; and such other factors deemed relevant to the assignment of the most effective CASA volunteer for the case.

#### Duties of a CASA Volunteer:

1. To read the records and files of the Court and Social Services, and reports from any school, hospital, doctor, therapist or other individual or agency regarding the child you have agreed to represent.
2. To interview, research, investigate and evaluate facts and circumstances of the child's life, including, but not limited to, meeting and talking with the child, parents, siblings, relatives, foster parents, teachers, counselors, and other caregivers. This is done at the CASA's discretion when he or she feels it is necessary, and upon consultation with the case supervisor.
3. To keep all information confidential, disclosing only to the Court, social worker, or attorneys involved in the case. Information will always be shared with the CASA case supervisor. Under no circumstances should any information regarding the case be revealed to anyone without legal interest in the proceedings.
4. To keep all written case data in a secure, confidential area.
5. To attend conferences and/or Court hearings regarding the child or consult with the case supervisor.
6. To report to the Court, in concise written form, the facts and findings resulting from your investigation and to make independent recommendations to the Court.
7. To assure that all relevant facts are before the Court at all hearings.
8. To communicate on a regular basis with the representatives of the various offices, agencies and parties involved in the case.
9. To facilitate and monitor fulfillment of the orders of the Court.

10. To bring to the attention of the Court prior to the next scheduled hearing any change in circumstances that may require modification of the Court orders.
11. To consult regularly with the CASA staff concerning developments in the case and your findings and opinions and to accept supervision from the CASA staff.
12. To terminate your involvement in the case only upon Court approval or at the time the case is vacated from Juvenile Court.
13. To return all paperwork associated with an assigned case to the CASA office once your responsibility has ended.
14. To conduct yourself professionally at all times, being respectful, tactful, and patient while performing your duties as a volunteer child advocate, keeping in mind that you are acting under direct authority of the Juvenile Court.
15. To notify the CASA staff when you are available to accept a new or additional case assignment.
16. Not to use alcohol or medications which may affect driving ability or alertness, or controlled substances when with assigned children.
17. To report any incident of child abuse or neglect or any suspicion of such to Child Protective Services within 24 hours and follow up with a written report within 36 hours.
18. To recognize that CASA is a non-profit organization that holds ongoing fund-raising projects. Your participation may be requested, but will not be mandatory.
19. To be aware that CASA is a countywide organization. You may be expected to travel throughout the county or into neighboring counties to visit a child or parent.

#### Guidelines Regarding Cultural Sensitivity

The CASA program sees cultural sensitivity as an awareness of one's own attitude regarding racial and cultural differences. An on-going self-assessment is required. The CASA must also know his/her feelings about the social-political system's treatment of minorities.

The following guidelines are provided supporting CASA's nondiscriminatory policy:

1. A culturally skilled CASA is one who has become aware and sensitive to his or her own cultural attitudes.
2. A culturally skilled CASA is aware of his/her own values and biases and how they may affect minority persons with whom he or she works.
3. A culturally skilled CASA is one who is comfortable with differences that exist between the CASA and others in terms of race and beliefs.
4. A culturally skilled CASA is sensitive to personal biases, ethnic identity, socio-political influences, etc., that may dictate referral of the minority client to a CASA of his or her own race and culture.
5. The culturally skilled CASA must obtain specific information about the particular ethnic or cultural group with which he or she is working.
6. The culturally skilled CASA must be able to generate a wide variety of verbal and nonverbal responses and be aware of communication and interviewing skills that are culturally sensitive.

#### Termination, Resignation or Dismissal

A volunteer may be removed from an individual case at any time by order of the Juvenile Court judge. A volunteer may resign from the program by submitting a written notice to the case supervisor. The CASA program is not obligated to disclose the reasons concerning the non-acceptance of a volunteer

into the program. CASA of Santa Cruz County is not obligated to assign, or actively seek to assign a volunteer to a child. The Executive Director of CASA of Santa Cruz County has the authority to terminate any advocate or applicant from a case or from the CASA program.

Appropriate grounds for dismissal include, but are not limited to:

1. Falsification of the volunteer application or misrepresentation of facts during the screening or evaluation process.
2. The volunteer taking action without program or Court approval that endangers the child or is outside the role of the CASA program.
3. The volunteer violating a program policy, Court rule or law.
4. The volunteer demonstrating an inability to effectively carry out the duties of a CASA.
5. The volunteer failing to complete required ongoing training.
6. The volunteer demonstrating an inability to work effectively with necessary parties.
7. The volunteer failing to maintain contact with their CASA supervisor and follow their direction.
8. Failure to maintain confidentiality.
9. Initiation of ex-parte communication with the Court.

CASA volunteers are appointed to a case by the Juvenile Court judge and serve until they are relieved by the Court, usually when the case is dismissed from the jurisdiction of the Juvenile Court or the child is in a permanent plan which no longer requires advocacy in Court. While CASAs make a commitment to continue with a case until it is dismissed, there may be circumstances that require a CASA to resign. Resignations must be made in writing, so that the CASA office can notify all parties involved and immediately assign another CASA if necessary. All parties will be notified as soon as possible of the assignment of a new CASA.

Any party in a case, or their representative, may request in writing to the CASA program, that a CASA be dismissed, stating the reasons for the request. The CASA case supervisor will investigate the alleged basis for dismissal. The advocate may appeal to the Executive Director. Pending the completion of the investigation, an advocate subject to investigation may be suspended from his or her case at the sole discretion of the Executive Director of CASA of Santa Cruz County.

If the Executive Director determines that dismissal is appropriate she/he can dismiss the volunteer or bring the matter before the Juvenile Court judge for his/her decision. Either the judge or the Executive Director can dismiss a CASA from a case or the CASA program.

A notice of dismissal will be distributed to the CASA, all parties to the case, and their representatives. The CASA will be provided with a confidential memorandum identifying the reasons for the dismissal. CASA volunteers serve at the discretion of the Court and the CASA program and all dismissals are final.

#### Case Closure

In all terminations, resignations or dismissals, CASAs shall immediately return all case records to the CASA office. In addition, a case closure form must be completed and an interview conducted with the program supervisor. A CASA's responsibility does not end until these steps have been completed.

## **SECTION III: CASA ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES**

### **CASA as Investigator**

The CASA seeks to ascertain all facts relevant to the case and ensures that these facts are presented to the Court. Upon proper authorization, the CASA has access to information regarding the case to which they have been appointed. The Court order appointing the CASA to the case is sufficient to give the CASA access to records regarding the child, including medical, psychological, and school reports. Social Services files are open to CASAs and CASAs are allowed to take notes about any document for use in working on the case. The CASA office will also be provided with reports from social workers on an ongoing basis.

CASAs do not have access to the name of the person(s) reporting the abuse, which is confidential by statute, or to information from federally funded drug/alcohol centers. Other information is available when the person about whom the information is desired has signed a release or when the judge orders release of the information to the CASA.

The CASA program will receive copies of all legal notices regarding the matter, including motions, notices of hearings, petitions, etc. It is the responsibility of the party filing the motions to forward a copy to the CASA program office.

CASAs begin to gather facts right after appointment to a case. Their investigation may therefore be concurrent with Family & Children's Services investigation. While the investigations are independent, CASAs work cooperatively with the social workers who investigate for the state. Open communication will facilitate good case planning, and CASAs are encouraged to communicate frequently with social workers to relay information. It should be noted that CASAs do not do the investigatory work of either the social worker or law enforcement agencies. Neither do these persons do the CASAs investigatory work. It is important that the CASA's investigation be independent.

In addition to reviewing all written reports about the child and the family, the CASA interviews all the individuals who have knowledge of the child's situation, including the child, parents, relatives, teachers and others.

CASAs do not interview children about specifics of the abuse that is alleged to have occurred. They rely on social workers and other persons who have expertise in conducting such interviews. CASAs are instructed to be particularly sensitive to the trauma surrounding disclosure of sexual abuse and of the other interviews which the child may have had.

If the child raises the topic of the abuse/neglect and wishes to discuss it, CASAs are to listen and respond appropriately, but not to probe or ask questions. Any new or corroborative information disclosed to the CASA must be relayed to the social worker (see also CASA as Monitor under Part III) and a report filed.

CASAs may wish to observe a visit between parent and child. Generally, this is appropriate. The observation should first be arranged with the social worker, and the parents (and child, if appropriate) should be allowed to consent.

When the majority of the dependent children CASA serves do not live with the parents and Children's Protective Services wants to ensure the children's security and safety, arrangements are made for visits under Department supervision. CASAs do not provide transportation or supervise these visits. During a visit with the CASA child, the child must never be left in the care of anyone other than the CASA.

### **CASA as Advocate**

CASAs investigate all the circumstances of the child's life in order to help the Court determine what actions will be in the child's best interest. The information they gather will be shared with the Court and used to formulate and support recommendations for disposition of the case.

After the investigation is complete and the CASA has discussed the case with the social worker, the CASA begins to formulate recommendations. First is a "bottom line" recommendation of the goals that are to be achieved by the family prior to dismissal of the case from the jurisdiction of the Juvenile Court. These goals include behavior that is expected before determination that Department supervision of the family and/or placement of the child is no longer necessary.

The CASA's dispositional recommendations address the following areas:

1. Jurisdiction (continued dependency)
2. Physical placement of the child
3. Visitation with parents
4. Evaluation and treatment for the child
5. Services for the child: mental health, physical health, education, home environment, transition
6. Services for the parent
7. Return home of the child (if indicated)

CASAs are not social workers and therefore do not develop the specifics of the service plans (except in the broad terms, e.g., six months of ongoing supervision). This is the social worker's area of expertise, and it is their specific responsibility to implement case plans. CASAs review the service plan with workers and ask questions to ensure all the child's needs are being met by the plan. CASAs sometimes request additional services or work to ensure that complete services are being implemented.

CASAs prepare and submit a written report of recommendations prior to hearings and reviews. All reports are reviewed and edited by CASA program staff prior to submission to the Court.

CASA staff is present at all hearings on assigned cases. If a CASA volunteer is unable to attend a scheduled hearing the CASA must work with the CASA staff to attend in his/her place.

The CASA is Court-appointed and is entitled to receive copies of all matters filed with the Court by any party.

### **CASA as Monitor**

CASAs monitor compliance with Court orders and bring to the Court's attention any significant changes in circumstances that may require modification of the Court orders. CASAs should determine whether Court-ordered services are being provided and should bring to the attention of the Court any failure to

comply. Monitoring is performed in part by direct contact with the family and child and in part through collateral contact (speaking with social workers, service providers and others). With sufficient notice to all parties, CASAs may bring matters to the Court at a special hearing or early review. Should CASAs find any problems (such as injuries to the child or that young children are left alone), they will immediately report these to the social worker and, after consultation with the CASA case supervisor, file a child abuse report. If the children are in imminent danger and neither the social worker nor the CASA supervisor is available, the CASA will notify the CPS Emergency Response Unit. (The CPS emergency number is operated 24 hours – 499-7153.) – **our advocates need to make a mandated report to the screening unit within 24 hours regardless of whether or not they reach their Case Supervisors or SW’s. The number is 454-4222 or (after hours) 426-7322. A written report needs to follow within 36 hours.**

The CASA will report problems or significant changes on the case to the CASA staff **immediately**.

### **CASA as Facilitator**

The CASA advocates that the Court, Social Services personnel and legal counsel fulfill their obligations to the child in a timely fashion. The facilitator role is an extremely important one. The CASA helps to make sure that the child and family are kept in the system no longer than is necessary to place the child in a safe, permanent home, either with the natural parents, relatives, or with another family. However, CASAs do not work out problems between family members, except by making recommendations to the Court or to social workers.

### **What CASAs are NOT**

CASAs are not social workers or probation officers, nor do they provide ongoing transportation, money for services, or other court ordered services to the children to whom they are assigned, or to their families. In addition, CASAs are not:

- Counselors or therapists
- Tutors
- Santa Claus
- Parent advocates
- Crisis counselors
- Baby-sitters
- Responsible for providing transportation

CASAs must ***never***:

- Have their CASA children in their homes.
- Take physical or legal custody of the child or make arrangements for placement of the child.
- Allow their husband, wife, children, friends, etc. to meet or supervise their CASA child. (If an advocate’s friend is met while in the community, simply introduce the child as your friend.)
- Give a child medication, including cold medicine, aspirin, etc.
- Give legal advice or therapeutic counseling.
- Give money or expensive gifts to the child or family.
- Take a case in which they are related to any parties involved in a case or have any known conflicts of interest.

- Participate in any other activities prohibited by the local juvenile Court.

CASA does have the CASA Children’s Fund which pays for resources such as dance lessons, tutoring, a bike with helmet, a stroller, school clothes, etc., that would otherwise not be available to children through other means. The case supervisor can assist the CASA with this resource.

COMPARISON: Primary Responsibilities of CASA and Social Worker

<b>SOCIAL WORKER</b>	<b>CASA</b>
Gathers information and makes <u>decisions</u> .	Gathers information and makes <u>recommendations</u> .
Gathers information and shares with client, the Court, the CASA advocate and counsel for all parties.	Gathers information and shares with the Court, the social workers and counsel for all parties.
Reviews and evaluates Department information.	Reviews and evaluates all information as a concerned advocate.
Assists state in writing petition and formulating dispositional plan.	Shares information with the workers but has no decision making power in county's petition or dispositional plan.
Presents evidence to support allegations; has burden of proof.	Presents factual information regarding the family situation; may or may not support allegations.
Emphasis must be on state policy for reunification.	Represents best interest of individual child; not bound by county policy to reunify.
Provides and oversees services as recommended.	Recommends services but does not provide them.

**SECTION IV: PROCEDURES FOR THE COURT PROCESS**

The CASA must always be well prepared. With the guidance of CASA staff, the CASA must gather relevant information and begin formation of the Court report well in advance of the Court date. The CASA office must present a written report to the judge detailing findings and recommendations at least ten days before the review hearings. These reports are also to be distributed to all assigned department workers, all attorneys, and any other party legally entitled to receive a copy. Timeliness is very important to assure adequate time to type and disseminate reports to all parties.

CASAs should have at minimum monthly contact with the program supervisor to receive guidance and address questions about their case. At least one month prior to a scheduled hearing date, the CASA should talk first with the CASA staff and then with the social worker to discuss what their respective recommendations will be. The CASA should then submit a draft report to the CASA office. CASA staff will review the draft and ask the CASA to substantiate his/her recommendations. After approval, the CASA makes final changes and submits the report for dissemination. Reports are due in the office two weeks prior to the scheduled hearing. The CASA office copies and disseminates the reports.

All reports must be approved and signed by the CASA case supervisor prior to dissemination to parties to the case. You are encouraged to talk with your case supervisor to determine what you want to speak about in court. He/she can advise you on the best way to make that happen.

Please note that because of the dynamics of some cases, CASAs have to be flexible. It may be necessary for the CASA to write a last minute addendum to his or her report. In other situations, CASAs may present verbal updates in Court and follow-up with a written report. Never wait until the week before Court to write your report! This is not in the best interest of your child.

### Procedures at Court

1. Dress appropriately (i.e., professional attire).
2. Arrive at the Court at scheduled time, usually 8:30 a.m. Obtain a \$2 parking permit as you may be in the Court building more than two hours, the limit for free parking.
3. Let the CASA Court Liaison know you are present. She will ensure that County Counsel is aware you are there. Typically, the judge first hears cases where children are present. Then cases where CASAs are present are heard.
4. When your case is called, CASA's Court Liaison will assist you and you will go the table with all parties and attorneys. If the child attends the hearing, sit next to the child. Encourage the child to speak if there is anything he or she wants to tell the judge.
5. If you want to speak, say, "Your Honor, may I address the Court?" Make your position, concerns and opinions known.
6. Assert yourself to attend all conferences in chambers.
7. When a date is being set for another hearing during the proceedings, the attorneys will consult their calendars. You should do the same & speak up if there is a conflict for you.
8. Note next hearing date, type of hearing and Court location.
9. If appropriate, spend some time with the child and describe what has taken place in Court.

## **SECTION V: CODE OF PROFESSIONAL ETHICS**

### Confidentiality

Few areas are as sensitive or may seem as confusing to the volunteer as questions regarding confidentiality. "CONFIDENTIAL" information is information that the general public is not entitled to, but which may be accessible to certain classes of individuals under certain specific circumstances. All Juvenile Court dependency proceedings are confidential. Thus, with the exception of certain professionals or other persons who are active in one facet or another of the Juvenile Court system and who have been authorized or appointed to work on a specific dependency case, the very existence of the

dependency case, and all information regarding that case, shall not be disclosed. A CASA volunteer assigned to a specific case will have access to information regarding that case to the extent authorized by the Juvenile Court judge.

When the Juvenile Court judge appoints a CASA volunteer to act as an advocate on a specific case, the judge is authorizing the CASA to have access to all documents contained in the Court's juvenile dependency file. Each advocate will receive a copy of his/her Court Order of Assignment. This can be used if an advocate is requesting information from doctors, teachers, etc. If an advocate is an educational surrogate, he/she will receive a copy of that order. The CASA office has a case file on all children referred. After a CASA is assigned, the office continues to receive all documents including the petitions, social worker reports, minute orders which advocates may come to the office and review. These files are be maintained in the CASA program office in a locked file.

In addition to access to the dependency Court file as described above, the advocate has access to the child's school and medical records. To obtain access to school and/or medical records, the CASA should present his/her Court Order of Assignment to the holder of the records. No consent from the parent, guardian or child is necessary for the advocate to have access to any records relating to the child , except if your child is in Special Education and you do not hold education rights. You may have the person who holds education rights write a letter that states you may have access to those education records.

All documents with respect to a juvenile dependency proceeding in which a CASA has been appointed are to remain confidential. If, in the course of the investigation, the advocate is sent or given documents regarding a case, or when the advocate prepares a report for the Court, these documents shall be forwarded immediately to the CASA office to be kept in the case file. In addition, all notes taken by a CASA volunteer should be kept in a confidential place and shall be returned to the CASA office upon closure of the case and/or the end of the volunteer's involvement. Notes shall not be thrown away without being shredded. The CASA office has an official procedure for the maintenance and destruction of case files.

An advocate shall not disclose information obtained about a case (whether pending or closed) to members of the general public, to family members, or to members of the Juvenile Court system who are not involved with that particular case.

An advocate may prepare a written Court report with respect to a case to which he/she is assigned. All parties to the proceeding and/or their attorneys are entitled to knowledge of the information contained in the report.

**To maintain confidentiality, the CASA advocate must follow these procedures:**

1. A CASA shall not disseminate information about a case to members of the general public who have no legal interest in the proceeding.
2. A CASA does not use first or last names or reveal any other information which would identify the CASA child or family while talking to persons not directly involved with the case.
3. All attorneys and parties to the proceedings are entitled to copies of the CASA's reports.
4. All CASA reports, memos, and letters pertaining to the case, must be approved by CASA staff and disseminated through the CASA office.
5. Once a case terminates and/or a CASA is no longer assigned to it, all notes and other associated paperwork **must** be returned to the office for disposal.

6. All CASA notes and other associated paperwork should be kept in a private, confidential area.
7. All CASAs must sign the Pledge of Confidentiality.
8. All case review, county education, and team meetings are confidential. Never repeat information obtained in these closed sessions.
9. All correspondence must be sent to the CASA office. Do not give out your home address.

### Mandated Reporting

CASAs are mandated reporters at any time they are performing the duty of a CASA on the case. As mandated reporters, regardless of confidentiality or confidential relationships, an advocate shall report to DFCS any reasonable suspicion that a child is a victim of child abuse or serious neglect. If there are any questions regarding this policy and its applications, please refer them to the CASA case supervisor.

### Transporting Children

All CASA volunteers must have a valid California driver's license, a clean, safe driving record and current insurance. Copies of these items are located in their volunteer files. **The volunteer is required to provide updated copies to the CASA office annually or as needed.**

CASA volunteers must obey all safety and traffic laws and shall not exceed the posted speed limit. The CASA volunteer must immediately report any moving violation, including DUI to the CASA staff. Any volunteer who has received a DUI will be prohibited from transporting a CASA child.

**Any child under the age of six or weighing lighter than sixty pounds must be transported in an approved child safety seat or car seat.** If needed, the CASA office has seats available for volunteers needing to transport their CASA children.

All adult passengers (over the age of 18) must wear seatbelts. All children between the age of six and eighteen must wear their own seatbelts and must not sit on an adult's lap.

CASA volunteers are responsible for the passengers in their vehicle. CASA volunteers transporting a CASA child must secure the permission of the CASA supervisor as well as the child's guardian or custodian agency. The CASA Volunteer should discuss with the child (in an age-appropriate manner) both the volunteer's and the child's responsibilities while on outings together. The volunteer is responsible for transporting the child to and from appropriate responsible adults and to keep the child under supervision at all times.

CASA volunteers will not allow their CASA child to drive their vehicle. If there is an emergency the CASA volunteer will call 911 and then the CASA office.

### Conflict of Interest

CASA volunteers represent the best interests of the child and are dedicated to maintaining this perspective. Therefore:

1. It is essential that the CASA maintain an unbiased position. The volunteer must independently assess each child's unique circumstances when formulating his or her recommendations.
2. The volunteer shall not use the CASA organization or its relationship to the Court to express his or her own personal views on an issue.
3. The CASA program shall not be used as a vehicle for foster parenting or adoption. Objectivity is impossible if a CASA becomes a foster parent to the assigned child or obtains possession of a child resulting in overnight stays in the CASA's home. The CASA's position will be vacated immediately.
4. The CASA shall not use agency letterhead to express political or other views. Letters requesting case information should be approved by CASA staff.

## **SECTION VI: CASE SUPERVISION**

- CASA staff maintains accurate case assignment records, an up-to-date calendar, and a monthly case log system. A regularly updated list of open cases, with a list of assigned volunteers, will be maintained by CASA staff.
- It is the intent of the CASA program staff to be easily accessible and to make every effort to provide quick and thorough guidance to the CASA advocate when he or she is assigned to a case.
- CASA maintains the right to select or reject any advocate applicant. CASA has the right to suspend any advocate from a case and appoint a different advocate. The advocate has no right to a case/child.
- Monthly, the CASA program will offer support meetings for volunteers to provide a structured educational and problem-solving group.
- The CASA case supervisor will have a minimum of monthly contact with each volunteer to review case progress, status, and planned activities.
- Volunteers shall be provided with a template of a Court report for preparation of written reports to the Court.
- CASA program staff will assist the volunteer with the preparation of the written Court report at least three weeks before the Court date. If there are any changes in the report, CASA staff will discuss revisions with the volunteer.
- If a volunteer has an after-hours emergency, the advocate can call the DFCS hot line at the Parents Center at 426-7322.
- The volunteer or CASA staff will attend all Court hearings, administrative reviews, settlement conferences and interagency meetings that involve the dependent child to whom they are assigned.
- Twelve hours of additional training are required each year. Training opportunities are available through the CASA inservice and trainings. You are required to complete 12 hours of additional training each year. Your case supervisor can assist you with other methods, such as reading appropriate books, watching videos, etc. that can count toward your annual 12 hours.
- Resource persons in law, education, mental health, and medicine will be available to the volunteer through the program staff.
- Annually, the CASA program will evaluate all volunteers using a standardized evaluation to review their performance and effectiveness. A written record of the evaluation will be maintained in the volunteer's personnel file.

- Annually, CASA staff host an event in recognition of CASAs and their work.

### Consultation with Case Supervisor

It is expected that CASAs will communicate at least monthly with their program supervisor regarding current case status and CASA activity.

The case supervisor may not always be available at the time the CASA has a need to consult. Under these circumstances, the CASA may choose one or more of the following:

1. Leave a message with CASA Administrative Manager Jen Hale at 761-2956, ext. 100 and your case supervisor will try to reach you as soon as possible.
2. Speak to the Executive Director, Nancy Sherrod, at 761-2956, ext. 101

## **SECTION VII: TRAINING AND CONTINUING EDUCATION**

The comprehensive training for CASA Volunteers is a 35-hour curriculum, which includes the required observation of the juvenile Court. Trainees also attend a Mock Trial. If an applicant is unable to attend a training session, that session must be made up before the trainee can be sworn-in as an advocate.

Continuing education opportunities will be provided throughout the year and volunteers must attend at least 12 hours yearly. Continuing education may be provided directly by the CASA program, in cooperation with another agency or agencies, or through an outside agency if the substance and quality of the training opportunity and its suitability for the continuing education of CASA volunteers has been approved by the CASA program. Advocates may also use instructional books and tapes to complete part of the yearly requirement. There is a list of approved books and tapes available plus a resource library at the CASA office. Continuing education will be designed to keep volunteers engaged in the fields of community resources, working with key partners such as schools and resource families, child development, child abuse, child advocacy, and changes in the law.

### The Oath

At the completion of training, and before the assignment of any child's case, the CASA volunteer shall take a Court-approved oath describing the duties and responsibilities of the advocate. The CASA volunteer will also have an affirmation of that oath signed by the Executive Director.

I have read and agreed to the Commitment Statement as stated in the Volunteer Handbook of CASA of Santa Cruz County.

Volunteer Name (Print)

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Volunteer Signature

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Date

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Supervisor Signature

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Date