



Policies Governing Expectations and Prohibitions of Advocates, Both Volunteers and Employees

Table of Contents

Code of Conduct	2
Mission, Vision, Values and Ethics Statements	
Program Policies	4
1. Minimum Expectations of Service to a Case and Best Practice Recommendations	4
A. Advocate Duties	
B. Volunteer’s Role as it Relates to CASA of Travis County	
C. Grounds for Immediate Dismissal from CASA	
2. Advocate-Child Relationship.....	8
A. Maintaining Appropriate Boundaries with Children	
B. Appropriate Discipline and Prohibited Abuse	
C. Maintaining Appropriate Communication with Children	
D. Transportation	
E. Gifts or Financial Assistance for Children or Families	
F. Other Prohibitions	
3. Safe and Drug Free Workplace Policy.....	11
4. Case Closure	12
5. Confidentiality	13
6. Communication.....	15
A. Official Communication	
B. Informal Communication	
C. Media	
D. Online Communication and Social Media Guidelines	
E. Digital and Social Media Communication Guidelines for Casework Purposes	
7. Conflict of Interest	20
8. Harassment.....	21
9. Abuse Between Children	21
Acknowledgement	22

CODE OF CONDUCT

Mission Statement – CASA of Travis County exists to promote and protect the best interest of children who have been abused or neglected, by training volunteers to advocate for them in courts, in schools, and in our community to help them find safe, permanent and loving homes.

Vision Statement – For every child who needs us, CASA of Travis County envisions a trained volunteer advocate, a safe home and a promising future.

Values Statements – In working to achieve our vision, we act on the following core values:

- Excellence in all our endeavors.
- Inclusiveness, diversity, respect for all cultures and ethnicities: for children, families, volunteers, staff, Board, and supporters.
- Empowering the community through strong screening, training, supervision and support of volunteers.
- Honorable and respectful involvement in the child welfare system, with the courts and all parties.
- Independent and educated recommendations, true to our understanding of each child’s best interest, that prioritize children’s safety and, wherever possible, preserve connections to their families.
- Responsible use of resources to maximize our positive impact on the child welfare system.

Ethics Statement – It is CASA’s duty to promote the safety and well-being of the children we serve. We shall protect children from abuse and from practices that are emotionally and physically damaging, disrespectful, degrading, dangerous, exploitive or intimidating.

Our commitment as an organization is to create an environment for children and youth that is safe, nurturing, empowering, and which promotes growth and success for the children we serve. This Code of Conduct outlines specific expectations of employees and volunteers as we strive to accomplish our mission together.

1. Children and youth will be treated with respect at all times.
2. Children and youth will be treated fairly regardless of race, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, age, gender, gender identity and gender expression, relationship status, physical abilities, national origin, immigration or citizenship status.
3. Employees and volunteers will not swear or tell off-color jokes in the presence of children or youth.
4. Employees and volunteers will not discuss with children or youth private details of their personal lives or sexual encounters or in any way involve children in their personal problems or issues.
5. Employees and volunteers will not use or be under the influence of alcohol or illegal drugs in the presence of children or youth.

6. Employees and volunteers will not have sexually-oriented materials, including printed or internet pornography, in the presence of children or youth.
7. Employees and volunteers will not have secrets with children or youth.
8. Employees and volunteers will avoid wearing provocative or revealing attire in the presence of children or youth.
9. Employees and volunteers will not stare or comment on a child's or youth's body.
10. Employees and volunteers will adhere to uniform standards of affection.
11. Employees and volunteers will avoid affection that cannot be observed by a third party.
12. Employees and volunteers shall not abuse children or youth in anyway, including the following:

Physical abuse: hitting, spanking, shaking, slapping, unnecessary restraints

Verbal abuse: degrading, threatening, cursing

Sexual abuse: inappropriate touch, exposing oneself, sexually-oriented conversations

Mental abuse: shaming, humiliation, cruelty

Neglect: withholding food, water, shelter

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.

Employees and volunteers will report concerns or complaints about CASA employees, volunteers or children to the Senior Director of Advocacy, Senior Director of Community Engagement, Chief Program Officer or the Chief Executive Officer, all of whom can be reached at 512.459.2272.

Persons who have been convicted of, or determined by a child welfare agency to have been responsible for, child abuse, indecency with a child, injury to a child or other offenses related to harm of children, or who are under investigation for similar offenses at the time of their application to CASA, are not eligible to be employed by, or volunteers for, CASA of Travis County. If a current CASA employee or volunteer is under investigation for any offense relating to harm of a child, they will be placed on leave and removed from work with children and families until the investigation is resolved. If, after investigation, a CASA employee or volunteer is formally charged with a crime or determined by a child welfare agency to have been responsible for harm to a child, they will be immediately terminated from CASA. Any current CASA employee or volunteer subject to an investigation for any offense relating to harm of a child must immediately inform CASA of that investigation. Failure to do so will result in immediate termination.

CASA OF TRAVIS COUNTY'S PROGRAM POLICIES

1. Minimum Expectations of Service to a Case and Best Practice Recommendations

Advocates will not be assigned more than 2 cases at a time without a reasonable justification provided in writing and at the discretion of the Senior Director of Advocacy.

All cases will be assigned during a case matching meeting with the approval of the Intake and Retention Manager, Training Director and at least one Advocacy Program Manager or the Senior Director of Advocacy. Child Safety considerations will be addressed and documented for each case matched with a volunteer.

A. Advocates will:

1. In a timely manner after appointment, obtain firsthand a clear understanding of the needs and situation of the child by reviewing all relevant documents and records and interviewing the child(ren), parents, relatives, social workers, teachers, doctors, therapists and other persons with significant knowledge of the child to determine the facts and circumstances of the child.
 - a. *Best Practice Recommendation:* Documents should be reviewed by the volunteer within 14 days and by the CAS within 7 days. Children should be interviewed within 14 days of appointment transfer from Early Family Engagement (EFE) and other relevant parties should be interviewed within 30 days of transfer from EFE.
2. Maintain confidentiality of all issues and records of the case and return all case documents to the CASA program after the case is closed.
 - a. *Best Practice Recommendation:* Records should be returned within 30 days for hard copies, and by the end of the calendar month in which the case is closed for uploading all digital files into Optima and deleting from volunteer's possession.
3. Notify all parties to the case of CASA's appointment.
 - a. *Best Practice Recommendation:* Notify parties within 2 business days of Child Advocacy Specialist (CAS) and/or volunteer appointment to the case.
4. Communicate with the Department of Family & Protective Services (DFPS) caseworker after appointment and at least one time per month for the duration of the case.
 - a. *Best Practice Recommendation:* Contact the DFPS caseworker within one week of appointment.
5. Communicate with the attorney(s) ad litem appointed to the child(ren) after appointment and at least one time per month for the duration of the case.
6. Meet the child(ren) within 30 days after transfer from EFE, in person with the child(ren) at least one time per month if they live within 60 miles of the Texas State Capitol, and within 30 days of a placement change.
 - a. *Best Practice Recommendation:* Meet child(ren) in person within 14 days of transfer from EFE. Children will be seen in person one time per month for regular visit at the placement, and one time per month face-to-face contact, such as observing a visit, transporting child

- to activity or service, court, school meeting, etc. When possible, children should be notified in advance when the visit will occur. In the event that the visit has to be canceled, the advocate will notify the child directly whenever possible.
- b. Visit child(ren) at their placement within 14 days of any placement change.
- If children are placed:
 - Between 60 and 180 miles from the TX State Capitol, then the advocate will meet in person with the child(ren) at least once every three months.
 - *Best Practice Recommendation:* Children will be seen every 60 days in person.
 - 181 miles or more from the TX State Capitol, then the advocate will meet in person with the child(ren) at least once every six months.
 - *Best Practice Recommendation:* Children will be seen no less than once every three months in person, if in the state of Texas.
 - The majority (more than 50%) of the advocate’s in-person contacts should occur where the child lives.
 - When monthly visits are not required (based on location), advocates will supplement with other types of monthly age appropriate contact with the child(ren), including video conferencing, telephone calls, e-mails, and/or letters as applicable for the child’s age and interests. All contacts (whether electronic or otherwise) should be documented and are considered to be part of the case file. The CAS should be copied and included in the volunteer’s supplemental correspondence whenever possible.
 - *Best Practice Recommendation:* If the advocate is not seeing the child in person every month, the child should receive at least one letter/postcard, email or text message, when age-appropriate, in the months they are not seen. It is also best practice to use FaceTime or Skype to speak to children in months that face-to-face contact cannot be made. This communication should be documented in Optima, and photos/scanned images of any non-digital correspondence should be uploaded and shared with the CAS.
7. Meet in person with the child’s primary placement provider in a timely manner after placement occurs, and communicate with the placement providers at least once a month thereafter for the duration of the assignment of the child’s case.
 - a. *Best Practice Recommendation:* Initial contact with the primary placement provider should occur within 2 business days of CASA appointment and in-person contact should occur within 14 days of placement. Communication with the placement provider should occur at least 2 times per month for the duration of the case.
 8. Advocate for the child(ren)’s best interest in the community by interfacing with mental health, medical, legal, educational and other community systems to assure that the child(ren)’s needs in these areas are met.
 - a. *Best Practice Recommendation:* The advocate will check in with collaterals, such as teachers/school staff, therapists, attorneys, medical/dental health professionals, or any other person involved in the treatment of, or who has a professional/client relationship with the child, at least once per month either in person, via phone/text, or email.
 9. Determine if a Permanency Plan, an educational passport, and a medical passport have been created for the child(ren).
 - a. *Best Practice Recommendation:* When appropriate, the advocate will serve as the child’s Surrogate Parent for Education, after having completed the one-hour training and being appointed as such by the Court.

10. Participate in all scheduled case-related meetings.
 - a. *Best Practice Recommendation:* The advocate should participate in person; however, when in-person participation is not possible, the volunteer will participate by phone and ensure that the CAS or another CASA staff member is able to attend in person. The volunteer will confer with the CAS prior to each scheduled meeting regarding CASA's position and expected topics of discussion.
11. Seek cooperative solutions by facilitating and maintaining communication with the child(ren)'s parents, relatives, attorney ad litem, social workers, teachers, doctors, therapists and other service providers as applicable.
12. Appear at all hearings to advocate for the child(ren)'s best interest and permanency. Provide testimony when necessary, making recommendations for specific appropriate services for the child and when appropriate, the child's family. Provide written court reports for all permanency and review hearings.
 - a. *Best Practice Recommendation:* Reasons for each recommendation should be documented. The CAS or other approved CASA staff must be the CASA representative to sign all court orders. Both the volunteer and CAS will sign court orders in person that result from a hearing in which the volunteer is present. The volunteer will meet in person or over the phone with the CAS prior to any courtroom presentation, whether it be a regularly scheduled hearing or specific testimony. The volunteer will adhere to CASA of Travis County's guidelines/expectations of courtroom presentations/testimony. Court reports will be submitted to the CAS no later than 14 business days before the court hearing date, as long as the hearing was announced more than 3 weeks in advance.
13. On each case, assigned volunteers and CAS will communicate with one another at least once a month to update records and contact logs and participate together in scheduled case conferences.
 - a. *Best Practice Recommendation:* All contact logs will be entered in Optima within 7 days of the activity date. The volunteer will meet with the CAS at least once quarterly in person. The volunteer will initiate contact via phone or email with the CAS at least twice per month, not including submitting contact logs in Optima. Court reports will be completed for all hearings announced with at least 2 weeks' notice.
14. Inform the court promptly of important developments in the case through appropriate means as determined by court rules and statutes.
 - a. *Best Practice Recommendation:* Inform the legal parties, and Court when appropriate, of any case updates or substantial issues in a timely manner, including a change in CASA's position or Permanency Plan.
15. Monitor implementation of service plans and court orders assuring the court-ordered services are implemented in a timely manner and that review hearings are held in accordance with the law.
 - a. *Best Practice Recommendation:* Follow up with DFPS regarding court orders/referrals/mandated case meetings within 2 weeks after each hearing. The advocate will ensure that the parent(s) are provided with a Release of Information form as soon as possible after meeting them in person.

16. Participate in 12 hours of Continuing Education training per year, including at least one training on preventing child sexual abuse (CASA provides an online training via the Armatus system).
 - a. *Best Practice Recommendation:* The Continuing Education hours should be documented in Optima by the volunteer no later than 30 days after completion. CAS will check in with the volunteer during the quarterly in-person meeting to ensure that Continuing Education requirements are being met, and will regularly recommend Continuing Education opportunities that would meet the volunteer's individual needs for growth and improvement in their role. The volunteer will also seek out their own opportunities for Continuing Education and will discuss with their CAS.

B. Volunteer's Role as it Relates to CASA of Travis County

It is rare for a volunteer and the CASA staff to be in conflict regarding their positions on a case, however at times this situation may exist. When a volunteer and CAS or Advocacy Program Manager have a conflict that cannot be resolved among themselves, the Senior Director of Advocacy and/or the Chief Program Officer will act as a mediator to resolve the conflict. If a volunteer and the staff cannot reach consensus it is imperative the volunteer understand that CASA of Travis County is appointed as the guardian ad litem to every child served by its program. Volunteers act as designated representatives of the CASA program. Therefore, volunteers are expected to discuss areas of controversy and conflict and defer final judgment to CASA of Travis County.

Best Practice Recommendation: Refer to rights and duties of GAL (Texas Family Code FAM § 107.002). Should a volunteer not adhere to the policies set forth, but not qualify for immediate dismissal from CASA, the CAS may implement an Advocacy Improvement Plan after staffing the situation with the Advocacy Program Manager and the Senior Director of Advocacy. To the extent that it is appropriate, the volunteer will be included in the development of the Advocacy Improvement Plan.

C. Grounds for Immediate Dismissal from CASA

1. Taking action without CASA or court approval that endangers the child or is outside the role or powers of the CASA of Travis County program.
2. Initiating *ex parte* communication with the court.
3. Violating a CASA policy, court rule, or law.
4. Failing to complete required pre-service and in-service Continuing Education training.
5. Failing to demonstrate an ability to effectively carry out assigned duties.
6. Falsifying a volunteer application or misrepresenting facts during the screening process.
7. Failing to report to CASA that you are under investigation for child abuse or neglect or any other act relating to harm of a child.
8. Experiencing an irresolvable conflict of interest.

2. Advocate-Child Relationship

The advocate must establish a relationship with the child that promotes the child's well-being and enhances the advocate's objectivity while serving as the guardian ad litem. **In order to establish such a relationship, adherence to the following policies is required:**

A. Maintaining appropriate boundaries with children

Appropriate standards of affection help to promote a positive, nurturing environment for children, while protecting them from harm and protecting employees and volunteers from misunderstandings.

The following guidelines must be carefully followed by all employees and volunteers working with children:

Appropriate physical interactions include: Side hugs; Pats on the shoulder, back or head; High-fives, hand-slapping and handshakes; Verbal praise; Holding hands (with young children in escorting situations); Allowing pre-school or kindergarten-aged children to sit on employee's or volunteer's knees. If a child is verbal, the advocate will ask the child's permission before initiating any physical contact.

Inappropriate physical interactions include: Full-frontal hugs; Kisses; Showing affection in isolated areas; Sleeping in a bed with a child; Allowing children older than kindergarten-aged to sit on employee's or volunteer's knees; Wrestling, piggyback rides, tickling; Any type of massage given by or to a child; Any form of affection that is unwanted by the child or the employee or volunteer; Compliments relating to physique or body development; Touching bottom, chest or genital areas.

During the course of their CASA work, specifically while on outings in the community, it is possible that the advocate will need to facilitate the child's use of the bathroom. Children who are on an outing with an advocate are not to be sent to bathrooms without adult supervision. At minimum, when a child is using a multi-stall bathroom, the advocate should check the public bathroom for potential risks prior to child(ren) entering, be standing near the entryway so they can have auditory supervision of the child. Advocates can and are encouraged to be inside the facilities, when possible, so they can be easily seen by the children and so they are able to immediately stop any inappropriate activity. They should not, however, be behind closed doors with a child. For single stall bathrooms, the advocate should be positioned outside of the bathroom to make sure no one else enters the restroom.

In rare situations, diapering or bathroom assistance of a young child may be required. When diapering, advocates should be in a visible area of the room where they can be observed by others. Diaper changing should be documented in an activity log in Optima. If assisting young children with the bathroom, care should be taken to assist only as needed and as efficiently as possible while being mindful of the child's privacy and avoiding being alone behind a closed door with a child, if possible. Bathroom assistance should be documented in Optima.

Advocates should never be in a placement or home without other adults present and are not permitted to babysit. In the event of an unexpected one-on-one meeting with a child or if something unusual occurs during a private meeting, the volunteer will notify the CAS immediately and the interaction will be documented in Optima within 1 business day.

B. Appropriate Discipline and Prohibited Abuse

Rarely will an advocate be faced with a situation where it is appropriate to discipline a child. However, it

is reasonable to assume this situation may occur. Therefore, CASA of Travis County takes the following position regarding disciplinary methods.

It is expected that advocates will comply with all laws regarding child abuse as specified in the Texas Family and Penal Codes. Furthermore, CASA of Travis County does not endorse or condone any form of violent disciplinary methods toward children. **Physical discipline may not be used by anyone representing CASA of Travis County under any circumstance. Further, using language or mode of speech that is degrading or embarrassing (i.e., abusive verbal communication) is not an acceptable means of discipline.** Discipline must be constructive and educational in nature. Correction must be fair, reasonable, consistent and related to the specific misbehavior. Discipline should be individualized and age-appropriate. Examples of appropriate discipline include giving the child choices, connecting then correcting, etc.

Any incident of unacceptable verbal/non-verbal discipline (as described/defined above) 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 staff or volunteer who is alleged to have engaged in any form of child abuse will be reported to the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services and immediately placed on administrative leave for the duration of the investigation. If child abuse allegations are substantiated, the volunteer and/or staff members involved will be subject to immediate termination.

If any staff member, volunteer or board member 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. **Child abuse can be reported to TDFPS at 1.800.252.5400.**

C. Maintaining Appropriate Communication with Children

Advocates are prohibited from speaking to children in a way that is, or could be construed by any observer, as harsh, coercive, threatening, intimidating, shaming, derogatory, demeaning or humiliating.

Appropriate verbal interactions include: Positive reinforcement, appropriate jokes, encouragement, and praise.

Inappropriate verbal interactions include: Secrets; Cursing, shaming, belittling, name-calling; Harsh language that may frighten, threaten or humiliate children; Derogatory remarks about the child, their family, or other parties in the case; Discussing sexual encounters or in any way involving children in their personal problems or issues; Sexual jokes; Making threats to withhold care.

D. Transportation

In the course of fulfilling the duties as a child's advocate, it will be necessary for the advocate to have in-person contact with their child(ren). An advocate may provide transportation for the child(ren) but is not required to do so.

The advocate acknowledges that the risk of liability is covered only by their own insurance and they choose to accept that responsibility.

An advocate who wishes to provide transportation to the child(ren) must maintain a safe driving record and cooperate with CASA to obtain copies of the same on request. **A signed transportation release form,**

current proof of liability insurance and a copy of a valid and current driver license must be on file in the CASA office before an advocate can transport a child in an automobile.

An advocate may only transport children who meet one of the following criteria:

- 1) Child(ren) are over the age of 5
- 2) Child(ren) are transported with siblings who are over the age of 5, and/or the child's parent
- 3) Child(ren) are transported with 2 adults who are already connected to the case and are unrelated to each other

A volunteer may not transport a child in a vehicle other than a standard automobile. The advocate is required to ensure that children are restrained in age-appropriate safety restraints when being transported. Advocates should be trained in how to install safety restraints and the CAS should note in the volunteer file that the advocate is properly trained prior to any children being transported. **A volunteer must notify the assigned CAS each time they transport the child(ren). All transports must also be documented in the case file (i.e., Optima Contact Log) within 1 business day by either the volunteer or CAS. Documentation should include the date, names of any children transported, and the starting and ending locations.**

CASA of Travis County considers travel and parking expenses incurred by volunteers as an in-kind tax-deductible donation to the agency and therefore does not reimburse volunteers for travel expenses. Additionally, CASA of Travis County does not reimburse volunteers for any case-related expenses incurred while performing the duties of a Court Appointed Special Advocate.

On rare occasions, **for the purpose of acquiring necessary hours to obtain a driver license**, advocates may allow a child to whom they are appointed to drive the advocate's vehicle. Allowing a child to drive the advocate's car may only occur with the express written consent of the Advocacy Program Manager and the child's guardian or the child's managing conservator. Only a child with a valid driving permit should be allowed to drive and only daytime driving shall be permitted. Prior to authorizing a child to drive, the Advocacy Program Manager should verify that the child has a valid permit, that a transportation release, valid driver license and insurance for the advocate are on file, and that permission from the guardian or managing conservator has been obtained. Prior to allowing the child(ren) to drive, the advocate shall document in Optima the date and time driving will occur, the point of origin and the destination.

In some cases, it may be in the best interest of the child(ren) for an advocate to transport parents or other parties on a case. Before transporting adults, the advocate should discuss with the CAS what is in the best interest of the child(ren). Care should be taken not to create a dependence that will compromise the advocate's ability to make objective decisions about best interest and all transportation should be documented in the case file (i.e., Optima Contact Log) within 1 business day by either the volunteer or CAS.

E. Gifts or Financial Assistance for Children or Families

Advocates are prohibited from giving cash to children or families, and from giving gifts or purchasing items for children or families, including activities during outings that cost more than \$25 per child. If a child, caregiver or family needs assistance of greater than \$25, a request can be made through the CAS to CASA's Direct Services fund, which may be authorized by CASA's Chief Program Officer or their delegate. Upon approval by CASA's Chief Program Officer, CASA may provide gifts, financial assistance or stipends for attendance at monthly meet-ups, but individual employees and volunteers are not permitted to give gifts of more than \$25 or to accept gifts of any value. CASA will provide birthday gifts and holiday

gifts for advocates to give to the child(ren). Gifts should be discussed with the CAS, given in the best interest of the child(ren), and documented in Optima. Care should be taken not to create dependence on the advocate or CASA and should be given in accordance with the boundaries outlined above.

F. Other Prohibitions

Additionally, advocates are prohibited from the following activities:

1. Introducing or identifying the child as being appointed to CASA to anyone not professionally related to the child's case.
2. Involving the child with anyone who is not related to the child's case.
3. Taking the child to the advocate's home or to the home of the advocate's personal friends or family. The child may only be transported by the advocate to a home approved by the child's conservator.
4. Giving legal advice or therapeutic counseling.
5. Making placement arrangements for the child or becoming placement, even temporarily, for the child. This includes supervising a child at their placement in the absence of their caregiver or conservator, such as babysitting for family or foster parents, or supervising youth placed at CPS offices.
6. Supervising a family visit.
7. Taking a child on an overnight outing.
8. Bringing a pet to meet a child or family members.
9. Taking a child on an outing that includes aquatic activities (e.g., any water activity that requires changing clothes).
10. Signing a waiver of liability for a child while on an outing (e.g., trampoline park).
11. Engaging in activities which are likely to result in conflict of interest or expose the program or advocate to criminal or civil liability.
12. Causing a child or family to become dependent on the advocate for services that are provided by other agencies or organizations. Such activities may jeopardize the safety of the child, the integrity of the program, or the objectivity of the advocate.
13. The advocate is prohibited from dispensing prescribed or over-the-counter medication to the child except in emergency situations (e.g. an Epipen or rescue inhaler) with the permission and direction of the child's conservator or placement.
14. The advocate is prohibited from authorizing medical treatment for the child.
15. The advocate is prohibited from carrying a firearm or weapon when in the presence of the child(ren), except for law enforcement officers who are required to carry a weapon.

16. The advocate is expected to comply with CASA of Travis County's safe and drug free work policy (below) as it applies to employees.

3. Safe and Drug Free Workplace Policy

CASA of Travis County is committed to providing volunteers and clients with a safe, efficient and productive environment. Using or being under the influence of drugs or alcohol may pose serious safety and health risks.

Drinking alcohol while in the presence of clients is prohibited. Additionally, because the children to whom we are assigned may have had extreme experiences concerning abuse of alcohol, it is prohibited that alcohol be consumed prior to (i.e., on the same day) meetings with the clients and is prohibited before transporting of clients.

Volunteers using prescription drugs or over the counter drugs are responsible for being aware of any potential side effects such drugs may have on their judgment or ability to perform their duties. If such use may impair the volunteer's judgment or ability to perform their job, the volunteer should report the potential side effects to their CAS prior to meeting with clients. Together they can plan the best strategy for meeting the client's needs during the time the medication is required.

Any illegal activity will be reported to appropriate law enforcement officials. CASA will cooperate fully with law enforcement agencies in the detection, arrest and prosecution of any employee or other person engaged in such activity.

4. Case Closure

The role of a Court Appointed Special Advocate is by nature a transitory one. An effective advocate recognizes that children who have been abused or neglected face many unpredictable transitions in their lives. In order to minimize the negative impact of such transitions, an advocate is responsible for providing a healthy transition for the child(ren) when CASA is dismissed from the case. It is CASA of Travis County's expectation that each advocate will carefully plan and execute their final contact with the child(ren) on their case, and that their exit from the case not be abrupt. A volunteer's CAS can provide resources to assist in smooth transitions for children.

Best Practice Recommendation: Refer to and utilize the "Healthy Goodbye" document.

CASA of Travis County requires advocates to cease contact with the child(ren) after their case is closed. If a child, family or adoptive family initiates or tries to maintain contact with their volunteer, the volunteer must inform their CAS and should seek to limit that contact. It is not permissible for a volunteer to initiate contact with a former child, family or adoptive family after case closure.

Best Practice Recommendation: If a closed case is re-opened, CASA of Travis County will make best efforts to re-assign the same volunteer from the previous case, if the volunteer is willing/able and it is in the child's best interest. If a closed case re-opens and it is determined that contact by the volunteer was not ceased when it was supposed to, that volunteer **may not** be assigned to the case again.

In very specific cases, when a youth who, is at least 18 years old, is on track to become independent, and is without adult supports or permanency ("aging out"), the volunteer may choose to become a "healthy

adult connection.” This is not an expectation of CASA and the role would not be as the youth’s advocate, but rather as a healthy adult who agrees to be supportive in selective ways. A Permanency Pact is beneficial and encouraged in defining this relationship. If a volunteer is considering this possibility, they should first discuss it thoroughly with CASA staff before speaking with the youth. Again, this arrangement would occur only after the case has closed, after case files have been returned to the CASA offices and the youth is at least 18 years of age. If a youth remains in care past the age of 18 and CASA remains appointed to their case, all policies and recommendations outlined in this document remain in place and should be adhered to. If CASA is dismissed from the case and the youth chooses to remain engaged with the advocate as a supportive adult, recommendations for maintaining appropriate boundaries and communication should continue to be followed.

5. Confidentiality

CASA of Travis County is committed to the confidentiality of certain information regarding its clients, volunteers, staff, Board and donors as a means of ensuring compliance with the law and protection of clients’ safety and anonymity. Confidentiality is defined as the assurance that access to information regarding any client, volunteer, employee, Board member or donor shall be strictly controlled, and that any violation of such control shall be a breach of faith. Information regarding any client, volunteer, employee, Board member or donor of CASA of Travis County shall not be used for purposes that were not intended by the person when the information was provided. Information on individual clients is used solely for the provision of services for them.

Confidential information shall include but is not limited to the following:

- Any and all case files, records or other information regarding a current or former client, including their names, the addresses of employment, residence, and family addresses of clients, staff, volunteers, student interns, donors and board members.
- Photographs taken of clients unless explicit permission is provided to the Chief Executive Officer or their designee by the individual involved.
- The contents of any current or former employee’s personnel file.
- The contents of any current or former volunteer’s file.
- The contents of any current or former donor’s records at CASA.

All board members, employees and volunteers will receive a copy of CASA of Travis County’s Confidentiality Policy and will be asked to sign an agreement of confidentiality. This agreement will cover confidentiality during the board member’s tenure or the employee’s or volunteer’s service, and will also include a provision for maintaining confidentiality after board tenure, employment or volunteer service is over.

All subpoenas for records must be served to the Chief Executive Officer (or their designee) as custodian of records. Response to a subpoena of records will be decided on a case-by-case basis. CASA of Travis County’s custodian of records may consult other legal counsel regarding such subpoena. The response to the request will then become a part of the record. CASA of Travis County has the right to require 24-hour notice for purposes of making the file available.

Except by order of the court, as a general rule, no information pertaining to a client, volunteer, employee or board member may be released without a properly executed written consent form.

Information may be released in an extreme emergency with the express approval of the Chief Executive Officer. This includes but is not limited to suspected child abuse, medical emergencies that are life-threatening to client or child, medical incompetence, or when the safety or welfare of clients is at extreme risk.

CASA of Travis County is required by law to report to the proper authorities any act of child abuse, suspected child abuse, elder abuse, or abuse of a disabled person.

It is CASA of Travis County's policy that it cannot keep confidential any threats to human life of either a suicidal or homicidal nature.

Notwithstanding any of the above, CASA of Travis County may determine that disclosure of confidential information shall not be made even though all requirements of release have been met. Where CASA of Travis County concludes that the requested release would endanger the client, CASA of Travis County, other clients, staff, student interns, volunteers or board members, the Chief Executive Officer is not bound by the requirements of release. CASA of Travis County may also conclude that disclosure in a particular case will create an appearance of non-confidential services that will undermine the integrity of the program. The Chief Executive Officer (in consultation with an attorney) is authorized to resist disclosure by all appropriate and lawful means, citing statute, public policy, contractual obligation, constitutional privacy claims, etc. Where the client, nonetheless, seeks disclosure, the Chief Executive Officer should advise the President of the Board of the decision to resist and seek board support for their decision since CASA resources may have to be allocated to the protection of confidential information.

Financial or statistical information regarding policies, procedures, or methods of determining eligibility or any other information that does not identify a client is not considered confidential.

Case Records

A confidential, written case record shall be maintained on each child.

- All case records, open or closed, will be regarded as confidential. Records on open cases will be kept in secure, locked files, and may also be stored electronically with appropriate security provisions. Records of closed cases may be kept in offsite storage and/or electronically, with appropriate provisions made for security of both hard copy and electronic files.
- A volunteer officially assigned to a case by CASA of Travis County may possess a copy of the case file and/or Optima access on their assigned case **only**. It is the responsibility of the volunteer to protect the security and confidentiality of this file and to return this file to the CASA office immediately upon their resignation from the case. **Optima access to the case in question will also cease upon case closure.**
 - *Best Practice Recommendation:* The CAS will close the case in Optima within the same calendar month as the Court's case closure date. The volunteer must have all documentation entered by this time.
- CASA of Travis County will release information contained in volunteer files to other CASA programs to which the volunteer may apply in the future only with the express written permission

- of the volunteer.
- Content of Case Records - Case records shall be considered to include all materials containing information provided by the client, other case parties, and professional providers, including tape

recordings, photos, videotapes, interviews, etc. The following shall govern the content of case records:

- The content of case files is limited to information that is required for statistical and funding purposes, establishing goals for permanency and for documenting the need for services.
- Each entry into client files must indicate the name and date of the staff member making the entry.
- Telephone and electronic communications related to the case are required to be documented within the case file.

Former client files and closed cases will be destroyed in accordance with CASA's document retention and destruction policy and schedule.

6. Communication

A. Official Communication

Because the volunteer acts as a representative of CASA of Travis County on the case to which they are assigned, it is required that all official communication (case documents, letters, reports, notices, evaluations etc.) be routed through the CASA of Travis County office utilizing the agency's appropriate contact information. The CASA logo and letterhead are the property of CASA of Travis County and may not be used or reproduced without the express consent of a volunteer's CAS, Advocacy Program Manager, Director of Advocacy or the Chief Program Officer.

Best Practice Recommendation: All electronic communication to/from volunteers will go through a separate email address that the volunteer creates solely for the purpose of CASA communications. The volunteer will have an electronic signature at the end of every email that includes their contact information, as well as contact information for CASA of Travis County. The CAS will be copied on all electronic communication that the volunteer sends and receives.

B. Informal Communication

Throughout the duration of the case, in the course of fulfilling the responsibilities of an advocate, it will be necessary for the advocate to communicate on a regular basis with case participants. Volunteers are required to contact and update their CAS regarding their case **at least once monthly**. Additionally, it is imperative a volunteer's CAS be kept apprised of important case developments. Volunteers are prohibited from making written recommendations to the Court that have not first been discussed and agreed upon with the CAS. Conversely, CAS's may not submit written recommendations to the Court without the knowledge and agreement of the volunteer.

Email communication should be considered as written communication and as such it is essential to maintain objectivity and professionalism when communicating in this manner. All email communication can potentially be subpoenaed in the event of a trial. It is a good practice when utilizing email communication to copy the CAS. CASA strongly discourages advocates from releasing their personal contact information to children and their families.

C. Media

To ensure that the confidentiality of children is always protected, and that CASA has a cohesive, consistent message being delivered to the community, all volunteer communication with media (including television, newspapers, radio, blogs/online publications, etc. - even small publications like church bulletins or organizational emails) should be coordinated through CASA of Travis County's Director of Communications. If a volunteer is contacted by the media, has a media connection or idea they would like to pursue, or has an opportunity to be featured for their volunteer work, they should immediately communicate with their CAS who will connect them with the Director of Communication to consider how this opportunity will be best pursued.

D. Online Communication and Social Media Guidelines

CASA of Travis County believes that social media, when used appropriately, can be a powerful tool to increase awareness, support and sense of community for those of us engaged in advocacy for children who've been abused or neglected. We also believe it is important that those who choose to engage in social media understand what is recommended, expected and required when they discuss CASA-related topics. Our ability to serve children depends entirely on the trust and support of our community, and it is critical that we handle the confidential information entrusted to us responsibly.

When you engage in social media and online communication, you become a public figure. As a public figure that is associated with CASA, you have a responsibility to help protect this organization and our clients. The following expectations, along with both positive and negative social media examples, are intended to give you guidance in both promoting and protecting CASA, and to protect the children we serve.

1. **Never reveal confidential information.** Sharing stories that illustrate the value of CASA advocacy for children is often the most powerful way to engage the public in our cause and promote empathy for the children we serve. However, our standards and policies prohibit the sharing of confidential information.
 - a. **It is unacceptable to discuss online any identifiable details of cases. This includes names, ages, case-specific details, time-specific statements and the sharing of photographs.** It is acceptable to discuss general details and to use non-identifying pseudonyms and non-time-specific statements so long as the information provided does not contain information recognizable to the family or others associated with the family or case. For example, use general terms such as "youth" instead of "13-year-old girl." You should be careful to protect the dignity of families, children and social agencies, even if they are not named.
2. **Use common sense.** Don't put anything online that you would not want to see with your name attached to it on the front page of the paper where your boss, your mom, your co-workers and neighbors can read it. Remember, it is possible that you will work with this judge, CAS, caseworker, lawyer, etc. again in the future or even bump into them on the street, so don't burn bridges. Even if you don't see them again, CASA definitely will and it is important not to hurt CASA's relationships.
 - a. **Keep in mind that anything you say online is not private.** Evaluate what you say about working with CASA in advance to make sure that your online statements will not affect your position in the courtroom when you are advocating for a child.

3. **Don't be a hero.** If you see something negative posted about CASA online, don't jump to our defense immediately because you might just feed the flames of someone who just wants to pick a fight online. Please inform CASA if you see a negative representation of CASA of Travis County online and we will determine the best way to respond or not.
4. **Be transparent.** Identify yourself and your role at CASA of Travis County (staff/volunteer/board member) when you discuss CASA-related matters. Write in the first person. If you have a vested interest in something you are discussing, be the first to point it out. **Be clear that you are speaking for yourself, that the opinions expressed are solely those of the author and do not necessarily represent the views of CASA of Travis County.**
5. **Be considerate.** Remember that anyone, including volunteers and CASA staff, may be actively reading what you publish online. Refrain from any communication intended to bash or embarrass CASA of Travis County, families, board members, donors or your colleagues. If you have suggestions for improvements please go through the proper channels to air your concerns and share your suggestions. Always show proper consideration for other people's privacy and for topics that may be considered objectionable or inflammatory, such as politics and religion.
 - a. **Always consider how other parties on a case might feel about your statements.** While we recognize the tremendous work that advocates do every day, be careful about implying that another party on a case did not do their job adequately, or accidentally insulting anyone involved with the case, as you could hurt feelings and damage both your and CASA's relationship with those involved in this system.
6. **Be accurate.** Even though your posts may be primarily made up of personal opinion, do your research well and check that your facts are accurate. Make sure you have permission to post any copyrighted information (e.g., research, statistics), and be careful about posting or linking to items that may contain viruses. Be the first to admit and correct your own mistakes.
7. **Try to add value.** Does your posting provide worthwhile information and perspective? Does it help people better understand and feel more connected to our cause? Does it build a positive sense of community?
8. **Always comply with the law in regard to copyright/plagiarism.** Never post someone else's work without their express permission (other than short quotes that comply with the "fair use" exceptions).
9. **Be aware of laws related to libel and defamation of character.** Defamation of character can lead to lawsuits against the author of the statement and will reflect negatively on the CASA cause. In choosing your words or content, imagine CASA staff, your family and all parties on your CASA case are reading everything you post.

In #8 and #9 above, CASA of Travis County only wishes to raise awareness of these issues. We believe this is an area in which our staff, volunteers and supporters should be aware of possible risk and try to inform themselves, but we are not offering any legal advice on these matters.

Positive Social Media Examples: These sample posts tell the CASA story without revealing confidential information about cases.

- Had a blast hanging out with the kids I serve as a CASA volunteer at Austin Park and Pizza. ESPECIALLY, the go-carts, which we did over and over. So much fun!
- Great day at court as a CASA volunteer! Can't believe what a difference one adult can make to a child. Learn more- <http://www.casatravis.org>
- Happy to have played a part in an awesome adoption & help kids have a good future. Become a CASA volunteer - <http://www.casatravis.org> (*This could also be about a family reunification, etc.*)
- CASA Superhero Run Sept ??! Come support CASA volunteers so we can help more children in need. <http://www.casasuperherorun.com>
- Helped the kids I serve as a CASA volunteer get the school supplies & clothes they needed for a great start to school this year. I'm rooting for their success!

Negative Social Media Examples: These sample posts either reveal too much information about a case or take a stance that could be damaging to future CASA relationships.

- Great day in court as a CASA volunteer. I was the only one up there who knew the child well and was able to help get the judge make a good recommendation.
- Finally the judge ruled correctly on my CASA case! So happy to see the kids I serve get to a happy home.
- Had a blast yesterday with the 10-year-old kid on my CASA case at Austin Park and Pizza. He loved the go-carts, which we did over and over. So much fun!
- I'm a proud CASA volunteer! Just attended the Reagan High School graduation of the teen boy I advocate for.

E. Digital and Social Media Communication Guidelines for Casework Purposes

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 youth on your case in order to protect this confidentiality. Issues that could affect this include:

- Avoid using shared email accounts accessible by another family member or friend for your casework.
- Delete any case photos that sync from your phone to a shared device (tablet, computer, etc).
- 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 communications with or about youth.

On some cases, especially with older youth, social media tools like Facebook and 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 youth you're appointed to and **consult with your CAS** before making any decisions. **Using social media to communicate with youth should be a last resort.**
 - a. Keep in mind that typically social networks try and limit usage to only youth who are 13 years or older.
2. If deemed necessary, you should only connect online with the youth you're appointed to. **Do not connect with family members or other parties connected to the CPS case**, even if you're unable to see information on their profile you would like to view.
 - a. Do not create any pseudonym accounts to attempt to gain greater access to someone on the case to gather more information about them.
3. **Only use direct/private messaging** to communicate with anyone involved in a case.
 - a. 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.
 - b. Never publicly mention meeting locations/dates/times.
4. **Your private/direct messages with a youth via social media are part of case record and should be documented and shared with your CAS.**
 - a. It is important to copy and paste all conversations via social media into Optima.
 - b. Please enter these conversations into the Contact Logs under Activity Type: Child Contact: Social Media.
5. Keep your own privacy in mind.
 - a. Create segmented CASA lists for the youth you serve and limit their ability to see any of your personal information or posts (especially on Facebook).
 - b. Review your privacy settings to ensure that your CASA list and the general public (which could include family members and others you're not connected to at all) cannot see any of your personal information or posts.
 - c. If you need to use Twitter or Instagram on a case, consider creating a separate profile just for CASA work that you don't actually post any personal information or photos to.
 - d. Hide any friends/followers lists that include CASA contacts from your public profile.
6. Never share confidential information over social media, even if using private messaging.
7. Never use any location-sharing social media tools (e.g., Facebook Check-Ins) when working on a CASA case.
8. Finally, when the case ends and you say goodbye to the youth you are serving, it is important to end any online connections including un-friending on Facebook, un-following on Instagram, etc.

7. Conflict of Interest

It is important to avoid any conflict of interest that may arise on a case to which an advocate is assigned. The relationships that are established with case parties need to be treated with the utmost professionalism. A volunteer is considered by other case parties as a paraprofessional on the case. This requires the volunteer to act as a professional throughout the life of the case.

The following policy should be followed when a conflict of interest exists:

Personal

Definition: An advocate taking a personal role in a CPS case involving a friend or family member (e.g., acting as a character witness or placement option in another CPS case).

- Volunteers:
 - **may not** serve as foster, foster/adopt or adoptive parents for any child with an active or open CPS case, regardless of county, unless the volunteer is related to the child or placement occurred prior to June 1999.
- Staff:
 - **may not** serve as foster, foster/adopt, or adoptive parents for any child with an active or open CPS case, unless the staff member is related to the child **or** the child is not in conservatorship in Travis County and the staff member has a previously established (fictive kin) relationship to the child.
- All advocates, whether staff or volunteers:
 - **may** take a personal role in a CPS case involving a friend or family member—such as acting as a character witness—as long as the involvement does not violate the prohibitions stated above. An advocate taking such a role in a CPS case in Travis County must ensure that they will have coverage for any hearing on a Travis County case to which they are assigned that happens on the same day as the case in which they are taking a personal role, so as to avoid any possibility of confusion among other parties.
 - **may not** be related to any party on the case to which they are assigned.

Professional

Definition: An advocate has dual professional roles on the same case - e.g., serving as the advocate and the classroom teacher for the same child. The advocate should not accept that case or resign the case as soon as the conflict becomes apparent. This specifically includes but is not limited to acting as a foster parent to any child in the conservatorship of CPS or acting as an adoptive placement to any child in the conservatorship of CPS.

Endorsements

Definition: An advocate using their Court Appointed Special Advocate status to endorse a political candidate, product, program or service. Using CASA status for anything other than promoting the CASA program or serving as an advocate for a child is considered a conflict of interest and is strictly prohibited.

The advocate should immediately notify their Child Advocacy Specialist or Advocacy Program Manager if they become aware of any situation that has the potential to create a conflict of interest with a CASA case.

8. Harassment

CASA of Travis County is committed to maintaining high standards of professional conduct in the volunteer experience. In keeping with this commitment, we prohibit any form of harassment, which would have the effect of creating a threatening, uncomfortable, or hostile environment. CASA of Travis County categorizes any unwelcome conduct or discriminatory behavior based on a person being in a protected class (e.g., gender, ethnicity, sexual preference) as harassment. Examples of behavior that might be considered unwelcome include jokes, slurs and offensive emails.

It is the responsibility of all advocates to conduct themselves in a manner conducive to creating a harmonious environment that is free of sexual or otherwise unlawful harassment and intimidation. Each advocate will be held individually responsible for their acts of sexual or otherwise unlawful harassment while conducting their responsibilities for CASA of Travis County.

CASA of Travis County also recognizes that our advocates could become victims of harassment by an individual outside of CASA but connected to the advocate's case work. It is the responsibility of each volunteer to inform their CAS (who will inform the Chief Executive Officer) if the volunteer believes they are being harassed by any other individual connected to their case work.

Immediate and appropriate disciplinary action will be taken in response to any incident of harassment. CASA of Travis County will not retaliate against anyone for a good faith claim of harassment.

9. Abuse Between Children

CASA will not allow the mistreatment, bullying (including cyber bullying), or abuse of one child by another child. Any volunteer who observes or learns of the mistreatment, bullying (including cyber bullying) or abuse of one child by another should immediately notify their CAS. These incidents will be documented and reported to the Child Abuse Hotline, as appropriate. As a reminder, if any staff member, volunteer or board member 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. **Child abuse can be reported to TDFPS at 1.800.252.5400.**

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

By **initialing each segment below**, I acknowledge that I have read and fully understand the Code of Conduct as well as CASA of Travis County’s policies governing expectations and prohibitions of advocates, both volunteers and employees:

Code of Conduct

_____ Mission, Vision, Values and Ethics Statements

Program Policies

_____ Minimum Expectations of Service to a Case and Best Practice Recommendations

_____ Advocate-Child Relationship

_____ Safe and Drug Free Workplace Policy

_____ Case Closure

_____ Confidentiality

_____ Communication

_____ Conflict of Interest

_____ Harassment

_____ Abuse Between Children

CASA of Travis County Volunteer Oath: I do solemnly pledge that I will faithfully execute the duties of a Court Appointed Special Advocate as appointed by the District Court of Travis County. I promise to preserve the confidentiality of any and all information I receive. And I pledge that my paramount concern will always be to protect and promote the best interest of each child I represent.

Further, I agree to execute my duties in strict accordance with these policies.

I declare that I have not perpetrated physical abuse, sexual abuse, emotional abuse, or neglect against a child or an adult and that to the best of my knowledge, I am not currently under investigation by any law enforcement or government agency for any of these acts.

I understand that if I am ever under investigation for an act of physical abuse, sexual abuse, emotional abuse or neglect against a child or adult I must inform CASA of Travis County immediately and will be subject to termination if I do not.

I understand that CASA of Travis County’s policies are subject to change at any time. I understand that if changes occur, CASA of Travis County will notify me via electronic communication at the email address that I provide to them and that revisions and policy changes will also be available on the CASA of Travis County website (www.casatravis.org).

I understand that it is my responsibility to stay informed and in compliance with current and future policies of CASA of Travis County.

It is my clear understanding that if I violate CASA of Travis County’s policies, current or as they may be revised in the future, I am subject to the immediate termination of my relationship with this organization.

Name: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____