

FAQ - Is CASA for You?

Does the child or children have to stay at my home?

No, you should never take the child to your home. You do visit with the child wherever they are placed.

Do I have to be a lawyer or social worker? NO. People from all walks of life become CASAs. After you have been accepted into the CASA Program, you will receive a minimum of 32 hours of training to prepare you for your work as a CASA, and ongoing support from CASA staff.

Do I have time for this? Many of our CASA volunteers work full-time, and find the CASA experience flexible enough to accommodate their schedules. Normally, you will go to court about 4-5 times a year and attend a few daytime meetings. The rest of a CASA volunteer's work is done on their own time – visiting the child, reading reports and records, and preparing Court Reports. They also visit, email, and call others involved in the case – such as the Caseworker, caregivers, parents and extended family, teachers, therapists, doctors, and anyone else who touches the child's life. Throughout the child's case, volunteers typically spend an average of 10-15 hours a month on their case, including travel time and phone calls.

Can I handle this emotionally? CASA volunteers are assigned to a case after the alleged child abuse or neglect has occurred and the child is placed in foster care. The CASA's focus is on determining the child's current and future needs. CASA staff provides emotional support and guidance throughout the case, and accompany volunteers to court hearings.

What kinds of children will I be working with? These children are victims of abuse and neglect who have been removed from their homes. They are traumatized and suffering. They need a caring individual who will speak up for them and advocate for their best interests. These children could be living in an emergency shelter, a foster home, a residential treatment center, or the home of a relative or fictive kin (family friend). They range in age from newborns to teenagers, and in numbers from one child to a large sibling group. Volunteers can choose an age range that they prefer to work with and also whether they prefer to work with a sibling group or a single child. But, our goal is always to provide a CASA to every child who needs one.

Will I be safe? CASA volunteers are never expected or encouraged to place themselves in dangerous situations. The work of CASA is challenging, but you will always have the support of a CASA staff person.

How does a CASA volunteer differ from an attorney? A CASA does not provide legal representation in the courtroom. A CASA takes into account what a child may want and speaks specifically to what is in the best interest of the child – while an *attorney* who is appointed as the child’s Attorney Ad Litem (AAL) must represent what the child *wants* – even if that is *not* in the child’s best interest.

What kinds of people serve as CASA volunteers? Being a CASA volunteer requires no specialized degrees or legal experience. It does require special people over the age of 21 who have:

- A concern for children;
- A genuine desire to help;
- The ability to remain objective;
- The maturity to deal with emotional situations;
- The commitment to complete a 32-hour-minimum training course;
- Sensitivity to people who are different from themselves;
- Access to transportation and a flexible schedule; and
- A willingness to devote at least one year to a child’s case.

How do I know what to recommend to the judge in a case?

CASA volunteers make recommendations based on the time they spend with the child, the review of records, interviews with the caseworker, the attorney for the child, the foster parents, teachers, relatives, parents, and the CASA supervisor.

Why would the judge listen to me? The judge appoints CASA to represent the best interest of the child and make recommendations to the court. Judges respect CASA volunteers, and take their recommendations into account when making decisions. As a CASA, you have no special interests to protect (other than those of the child), you are not making a salary for your representation, and you have no complicated laws and regulations to follow – knowing this, the Judge sometimes trust your opinion more than that of anyone else involved in the case.

Will my time make a difference? Absolutely. CASA volunteers offer children a consistent helping hand to guide them through the foster care system and a strong voice advocating on their behalf. As a result, children represented by CASA are more likely to:

- receive the services and resources they and their families need;
- maintain stable placements while in foster care;
- avoid the court system once their case is dismissed.

Are there any other agencies or groups that provide the same service? No. There are other child advocacy organizations, but CASA is the only program where volunteers are appointed by the court to represent a child’s best interest. While attorneys are appointed to represent the child’s *legal* interests and advocate for what the child *wants*, CASA’s duty is to advocate for what the child *needs*.