

DSS Policy and Procedure Guide

Division 03: Child Welfare

Chapter 01: Administration

Item 012: Working with Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA)

Suggested changes send to: [DSS PSOA Mailbox](#)

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References: Welfare & Institutions Code 100-110;
California Rules of Court 5.656; [Local Rules of Court 6.3.17](#); [CWS/CMS Quick Guides for New Users](#)

Revisions in Red

Replaces Issue: **May 3, 2013**

Preamble

Child Welfare Policy and Procedure Guides are meant to be used as tools to relay best practice and staff expectations. It is understood that specific case scenarios may not always align themselves with the stated practices and that at all times what is of paramount importance is the Safety and Well-being of the children we are charged to protect.

Policy

The Department of Social Services strongly believes that court dependent **children, their families, and their support systems** can best be served when the Department of Social Services (DSS) Child Welfare staff develops and maintains a close and effective working relationship with CASA of Fresno and Madera Counties and with any CASA appointed to a particular case.

Purpose

The purpose of this Policy and Procedure Guide is to assure that DSS Child Welfare staff has a clear understanding of their role and responsibilities in working with CASA.

Introduction

On May 23, 2000, the Fresno County Board of Supervisors (BOS) approved and authorized an Agreement of Protocols between the DSS (then DCFS) and CASA of Fresno County. The agreement formalized the roles and responsibilities of CASA and DSS staff in providing services to children and families under the jurisdiction of the Fresno County Juvenile Dependency Court. The Protocol formalized the duties and responsibilities of DSS staff and CASA staff and the court appointed advocates. The Protocol specified that:

- The CASA program serves at the discretion of the court.
- **Advocates** are appointed by the court to help define the best interests of children involved in Juvenile Court dependency proceedings.
- **CASAs** are court officers bound by all court rules.
- A CASA is required to provide independent, factual reports to the court and to provide the report to DSS prior to any hearing dates.
- Upon the request of DSS, share all materials used to prepare the court reports.
- The CASA works cooperatively with the DSS and other agencies to coordinate services for the child.

Per the [Local Rules of Court 6.3.17](#), the CASA's functions include:

- To support the child throughout the court proceedings.
- To establish a relationship with the child to better understand his or her particular needs and desires.
- To identify and explore potential resources which will facilitate early family reunification or alternative permanency planning,
- To the fullest extent possible, to communicate and coordinate efforts with the **DSS Case Managing Social Worker (CM SW)**.

NOTE: A mutual goal of the DSS and CASA is to preserve the family as a unit when it is in the best interest of the child.

Procedure

Receipt of an Appointing Order

When an Appointing Order is received by the CM SW indicating a CASA has been appointed by the court on behalf of the child (ren) on one **their** cases, the CM SW will:

- Document the appointment of a CASA in CWS/CMS by listing CASA as a Collateral party.
- Document the appointment of a CASA in CWS/CMS on the "ID" page under case alerts.
- Document the appointment of a CASA in the Special Projects page in CWS/CMS.
- Respond promptly to CASA's initial request for a copy of all case records identified in the request or as court ordered.
- **Attend a Meet and Greet meeting with the CASA, CASA Supervisor, CM SW, and DSS CASA Liaison. The CASA Supervisor will coordinate the Meet and Greet. The CASA Supervisor and DSS CASA Liaison will facilitate the Meet and Greet.**

The Meet and Greet shall:

- Be a venue for discussing the role, responsibility, and expectations of the CASA and the CM SW.
- Provide the CM SW an opportunity to discuss their work styles and preferences with the CASA, i.e., preference for voice mail, e-mail or in-person communication; appointments vs drop-in office visits; etc. to help maintain ongoing communication and collaboration.
- Discussion topics should also include, but not be limited to, family and individual strengths, progress with the court ordered case plan, the CM SW's perception of the family dynamics, placement, services and visitation.
- Conclude with the CASA providing the DSS CM SW a sheet requesting any needed documents for the CASA case file.

CM SW Responsibilities

Document all contacts with CASA in a timely manner.

Identify areas in which the CM SW would value additional information in which the CASA can obtain regarding the case, i.e., school visits, conversation with therapists and other service providers, etc.

Advise the CASA of meetings that pertain the child's case, including but not limited to:

- Team Decisions Meetings (TDMs)
- Permanency Teaming Meetings (PTMs)
- Transition Conferences
- School related meetings, such as Individualized Education Plan (IEP) and Student Study Team meetings (SSTs)

Provide timely notice of all court hearings to CASA.

Provide discovery as court ordered to CASA.

E-mail a copy of all court reports to the CASA reports in-box at courtreports@casafresno.org no later than **noon, ten** judicial days prior to the hearing.

Whenever possible, discuss the DSS' recommendations to the Court with the CASA in advance of a Court hearing so that the recommendations can be explained.

NOTE: The CASA is responsible for distributing copies of their reports to all parties, including DSS, in advance of court hearings, per the [Local Rules of Court 6.3.17](#), the CASA will e-mail the CASA report to the assigned social worker and to the [CWS Child Focus Team](#) in-box no later than **two** judicial days prior to the hearing.

Although conversations prior to court hearing may not always be possible, it is best practice to do so to avoid possible conflicts in court.

To the fullest extent possible engage in ongoing regular communication concerning the child's best interests, current status, and significant case developments with the CASA.

Child Welfare CASA Liaison Responsibilities

Review the CWS/CMS collateral section to ensure the assigned CASA's information is entered, and if not, enter the required information at that time.

Review the CWS/CMS case alert section to ensure it indicates there is a CASA assigned, and if not, enter the case alert at that time.

Review the Special Projects page in CWS/CMS to ensure the CASA special project code is entered, and if not, enter the code at that time; and

Advise the assigned DSS Social Worker via e-mail that the collateral and case alerts sections in CWS/CMS have been updated.

Upon receipt of the email from CASA containing the CASA report, Child Focus Team (CFT) support staff or the CASA Liaison will import the CASA report into the child's CWS/CMS case ([refer to the CWS/CMS Quick Guides for New Users, page 30](#)).

Upon the request of the CM SW, CM SWS, CASA or CASA Supervisor, the CASA Liaison may attend any meetings held regarding the minor.

CASA Liaison will make monthly contact with the CASA Program Manager (staff) to discuss ongoing cases.

CASA Liaison will submit CASA referrals when recommended by the Child Focus Team.

Upon the request of the CM SW, CM SWS, CASA or CASA Supervisor, the CASA Liaison may be asked to mediate any issues or concerns related to practice decisions or the working relationship between the assigned DSS and CASA staff.

Provide consultation to CM SW's in order to determine if a CASA referral is appropriate for a child's case. In the event that it is agreed a CASA referral shall be made, the CASA Liaison shall make the referral.

Ongoing Training

Per the Agreement of Protocols CASA shall provide ongoing training on the CASA Program to DSS Child Welfare employees.

Conflict Resolution

When there is a conflict, disagreement or difficult working relationship between the CM SW and the CASA, and this cannot be resolved by the CM SW and the CASA, the CM SW shall take the following steps:

Confer with their Social Work Supervisor (SWS) regarding the issue(s).

If necessary, the CM SW and/or SWS may confer with the CASA Supervisor.

The CM SW, CM SWS, CASA or CASA Supervisor, may confer with the CASA Liaison.

If there is still an unresolved issue, the SWS should discuss it with their Program Manager (PM). The PM, in turn, can discuss the issue with the CASA Program Director.

Although it is suggested that the CASA Liaison be contacted prior to PM involvement, the CASA Liaison may be brought into the case at any point by request of either the CM SW, CM SWS, CASA or CASA Supervisor.