



CASA of Liberty/Chambers County's

ADVOCATE COORDINATOR HANDBOOK

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General Information

Advocate Coordinators will not carry more than 30 cases and will not coordinate more than 30 Advocates at a time.

Advocate Coordinators are expected to respond to all emails and phone calls/voicemails **within 1 business day**.

Advocate Coordinators should submit weekly employee timesheets to Program Director each **Monday** for the preceding week.

Advocate Coordinators should submit Monthly VOCA timesheet to Executive Director by the 5th of the month.

Program Director will email New Advocate Coordinators in a zip folder all forms needed to complete their job.

New Case Assignment

Advocate Coordinators will be assigned new cases by the Executive Director or Program Director.

1. When a new case is received, the Advocate Coordinator should enter the new case in Optima (see Optima Guide for instructions) **within 3-5 business days of receiving the case, or by the last day of the month, whichever is first**.
2. When a new case is received, the Advocate Coordinator will be given a green file folder; in it will be the Affidavit, Advocate Case Opening Packet, CASA Court Report, CPS Documents or Legal Documents.
3. Initial Contacts:
 - a. The Advocate Coordinator should **immediately** notify all parties of CASA's appointment to the case via email, so documentation of this notification can be verified.
 - b. The Advocate Coordinator should **immediately** notify all parties via email of the assignment of a CASA Advocate to a case and enter into Optima.
 - c. The Advocate Coordinator should find out from CPS Investigator where the child is placed if not in initial Documents, when/if family visits are occurring, and if there is any additional information since the affidavit was written. They will stay in contact with the investigator until the adversary hearing for any changes or updates in the case.
 - d. The Advocate Coordinator should fill out a CASA Appointment to be given to Judge to sign at Adversary hearing.
 - e. The Advocate Coordinator and/or Advocate assigned to the new case should visit the child and placement before the adversary hearing (or contact by phone if placement is out of town).
 - f. The Advocate Coordinator and/or Advocate assigned to the new case should contact parents at Adversary Hearing and inform them of CASA's appointment, explain CASA role and provide

contact info. The Advocate Coordinator should make all initial contacts with the parents if it is the Advocate's first case or as needed or requested by the Advocate.

- g. After the adversary hearing, the Advocate Coordinator and/or Advocate should find out who the CPS conservatorship caseworker will be and the Advocate Coordinator and/or Advocate should maintain a minimum of monthly contact with the CPS caseworker thereafter.
4. Case Connection:
- a. Upon assignment to a new case, the Advocate Coordinator must request access from CPS to Case Connection.
 - b. Email Kimberly Williams at Kimberly.Williams2@dfps.state.tx.us or Jennifer Heimbach at Jennifer.Heimbach@dfps.state.tx.us with a request to assign the Advocate Coordinator to the case in Case Connection. Please send her each child's name, CV# and Caseworker. Requests for access to Case Connection should not include Advocates, but ask that they put the Program Director on all cases.

Casework

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1. Minimum requirements for contacts on a case are as follows:
(as outlined by Texas CASA Standard 5: E)
 - Notification to all parties of the case of CASA's appointment.
 - Communication with DFPS caseworker after appointment and at least one time per month for the duration of the case.
 - Documentation of meeting with child in a timely manner after appointment and in person with the child at least one time per month.
 - If the child is placed two to three driving hours away, then CASA will meet in person with the child at least once every three months. If the child is placed more than three driving hours away, then CASA will meet in person with the child at least once every six months.
 - If a child is not seen monthly, an In-Person Contact Exception form must be completed and filed into Case File in Optima.
 - Courtesy assistance may be used to make contact with children but does not meet the face-to-face requirement. To set up a courtesy visit, the Program Director should contact the Program Director for the CASA program in the area the child is placed and make the request. The Advocate Coordinator should send the courtesy program the information requested and maintain contact thereafter to ensure courtesy visits are being made.
 - At least 50% of the in-person visits with the child must be made in the placement; preferably 75%.
 - Other types of age appropriate contact with the child, including telephone calls, emails, text and/or letters as applicable for the child's age and interest.
 - In-person meetings with the child's primary placement provider in a timely manner after placement occurs, and communicate with the placement provider at least once a month thereafter for the duration of the assignment of the child's case.

- Advocate for the child’s best interest by assuring the child's needs are met:
 - Educational Advocate: contact with school, teacher, counselor, ARD, verify/update educational portfolio (green binder)-quarterly.
 - Medical Advocate: contact with psychiatrist, psychologist, doctor/nurse, verify/review Health Passport. Get a copy of Medical documentation from placement-quarterly.
 - Legal Advocate: contact with the attorney ad litem, immigration attorney, juvenile probation officer, etc.
- Verify a permanency plan/concurrent plan has been recommended for the child(ren).
- Participation in all scheduled case related meetings, as applicable: notes, documents, forms
- Attendance at all hearings to Advocate for the child's best interest and permanency. Provide testimony as allowed, making recommendations for specific services for the child and when appropriate, and the child's family. Provide written court reports for adversary, status, initial permanency, permanency, review hearings; Recommendations i.e. permanency/concurrent plans, services, visitation
- Communication between assigned CASA staff and CASA volunteers at least once per month so as to update records and contact logs and discuss scheduled case conferences for each case.
 - The Advocate Coordinator should have communication with each Advocate at least once per month
- Documentation of a process in a timely manner after appointment to obtain first hand a clear understanding of the needs and situations of the child by reviewing all relevant documents and records and interviewing the child, parents, social workers, teachers and other persons to determine the facts and circumstances of the child’s situation. i.e. persons interviewed: child, parents, CPS, teacher, placement provider/shelter; i.e. documents/records reviewed: order of CASA appointment, court record, CPS record, school record, medical record
- Beyond Minimum Expectations for Service to a Child:
 - Older youth are being prepared for a transition to adulthood (i.e. PAL, CASA volunteer, CPS transition center, Foster Futures).
 - The CASA volunteer/program conducts a thorough search for family members and engages family-CFE (Collaborative Family Engagement).
 - Children/youth are given a copy of and discuss with their volunteer (as is age appropriate) Rights of Children and Youth in Foster Care.
 - Helping child with court report.
 - Additional face to face contact with the child.

1. Documentation:

- a. All paper documentation received should be filed in Optima *in a timely manner*.
- b. The Advocate and Advocate Coordinator is responsible for documenting, in writing, all contacts with the child and any other party in the case and entering these notes in Optima *within 5-7*

- business days from the date of contact.*** This includes any home visits, meetings, phone calls, notes from Advocates, emails, etc.
- c. The Advocate Coordinator should update the hearing screen in Optima ***within 3-5 business days following the hearing*** and add the date of next hearing at that time (see Optima Guide for instructions).
 - d. The Advocate should copy and paste all emails (sent and received) by the Advocate and/or Advocate Coordinator into Optima ***within 5-7 business days from the date of the email.***
 - e. The Advocate Coordinator should update the child’s placement screen in ***Optima within 2 business days from when notice of a new placement is received*** (see Optima Guide for instructions).
 - f. Child Contact Logs are to be completed by the Advocate or Advocate Coordinator (if no Advocate is on the case on a monthly basis), ***no later than the 4th of the following month.*** The Advocate Coordinator must ensure the Advocate has put all time into Optima and if they have not the Advocate Coordinator must put in the Advocates Contact Logs, ***no later than the 5th of the following month.*** This is done under the child record in Optima and a new contact log is created for each contact. (See Optima Guide and Funding Definitions for instructions). Explanation of the contact should be put into notes; if it was an email it should be copied and pasted into notes.
2. The Advocate Coordinator should submit Advocate Checklist and Visits not made form to the Program Director ***by the 10th of the following month.***
 3. The Advocate Coordinator should respond to any case related emails or voicemails ***within two business days.***

Court Reports

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1. CASA will submit a court report for every hearing with the exception of the Motions, Pretrial and Trials. For Trials Best Interest (Holley Factors) questions should be filled out by the Advocate and put into the case file in Optima. The need for reports for special hearings will be determined by the Program Director according to the case.
 2. CASA court reports become public record and should only include facts and observations, not opinions.
 3. Court reports are to be filed no ***later than 1 week prior to the hearing date.*** All court reports must be submitted to the Executive Director for approval and signature prior to being filed with the court.
 4. The Filed Stamped Court Report and the Draft are to be put into Optima by the court date.
 5. Advocates should be encouraged to do as much of the report as they are comfortable with and the Advocate Coordinator will edit and suggest revisions as needed. The Advocate Coordinator should begin working with the volunteer on the court report approximately one month prior to the hearing date. The Advocate Coordinator should email a copy of the Court Report Draft to the Advocate that has a new court date along with the new Court Hearing Name. Court reports that have been edited by staff should not be turned in with the Advocate’s name until the Advocate has been provided a copy and is in agreement with any changes or additions made to the report.

Advocate Assignment & Supervision

1. When assigned a new Advocate, the Advocate Coordinator should make contact with the Advocate **within one business day**. The Advocate Coordinator and Advocate should schedule a time to meet in person as soon as possible for the Advocate to get their case assignment.
2. Case Assignment:
 - a. The Advocate Coordinator should meet with the Advocate to give them the case notebook, provide all known information, and formulate plan for the Advocate.
 - b. The Advocate Coordinator will put a notebook together for the Advocate receiving a new case.
 - The case notebook should include:
 - Original Petition and affidavit
 - Court order appointing CASA
 - Certificate of Acceptance
 - Case Opening Packet
 - c. The Advocate Coordinator will prepare a Certificate of Acceptance for each new case an Advocate is assigned to. The Advocate Coordinator and Advocate will both sign and a copy will be given to the Advocate and one kept in Optima.
 - d. The Advocate Coordinator should discuss with the Advocate, expectations for case work and contact between Advocate and the Advocate Coordinator. The Advocate should be requested to Cc the Advocate Coordinator on all emails sent/received regarding the case and to send notes regarding all contacts made by the Advocate to the Advocate Coordinator.
 - e. The Advocate Coordinator should make the initial home visit, CPS visit, and other initial contacts with a new Advocate and be available to make additional home visits or contacts with the Advocate as needed or requested.
 - f. The Advocate Coordinator should **immediately** notify all parties via email of the assignment of a CASA Advocate to a case.
3. Documentation:
 - a. If the Advocate Coordinator receives information, updates or documentation that is not sent to the Advocate, the Advocate Coordinator should contact the Advocate and share the information **immediately**.
 - b. If documentation is received, the Advocate Coordinator should notify the Advocate **immediately** that the documentation is in Optima.
4. Communication/Notifications:
 - a. The Advocate Coordinator should notify Advocates **immediately** upon learning the date of any hearing, PC Meeting, or other meeting. At that time, go over what will be presented at the hearing/meeting and what information still needs to be gathered for the event.
 - b. If the Advocate receives any information or documentation that is not sent to the Advocate Coordinator, they are expected to notify the Advocate Coordinator and provide copies immediately.
 - c. The Advocate Coordinator should notify Advocates **at least one month in advance** of court hearings in order to begin working on the court report. Work with each Advocate to determine how best to put the court report together, noting the court report criteria and due date.

5. Advocate Support/Contact:
 - a. The Advocate Coordinator should have contact with Advocates on a regular basis, no less than **once per month**. Communicate with the Advocate when something has gone well, when something has gone wrong and when they need support. Do not wait for the Advocate to contact you with questions, be proactive in your communication with them.
 - b. The Advocate Coordinator should always be available to the Advocate. Advocates need strong support and encouragement. Let Advocates do as much of the casework as possible and have ownership of their case. Recognize Advocate's birthdays and anniversaries with CASA, Monthly Birthday and Anniversary Cards are distributed for signature by Advocate Coordinator and Program Director at staff meeting by Administrative Assistant.
 - c. The Advocate Coordinator should respond to any emails or voicemails from Advocates **within 1 business day**.
6. Advocate Case Assignment Status:
 - a. If an Advocate is assigned to more than two cases, Program Director's approval must be received before assignment to a third case and the 'Volunteer Assignment Exception Form' must be completed and filed in the Advocate file.
 - b. If an Advocate is no longer able to continue on their case, they should notify the Advocate Coordinator and a Volunteer Resignation Form should be completed by the Advocate and submitted to their Advocate Coordinator who will give to the Program Director. The form should be filed into the Advocates file and the case file in Optima by the Advocate Coordinator.
 - c. The Advocate Coordinator should then notify the Administrative Assistant, Executive Director and Program Director via email **within two business days, or by the last day of the month, whichever is first**.
 - d. If the Advocate Coordinator loses contact with an Advocate, the Advocate Coordinator will make every attempt to reengage the volunteer, offering support, suggestions and possibly an alternative case assignment. The Advocate Coordinator will make a minimum of **8** attempts to contact an Advocate before the Advocate is dropped from the case. All attempts to contact the Advocate should be documented. Before an Advocate can be dropped from the case, the Advocate Coordinator must, at a minimum:
 - Attempt telephone contact and leave 3 messages. These attempts should be made once a week.
 - Attempt email or written contact 4 times (copies of the correspondence should be kept in the Advocate file if the volunteer is subsequently removed from the case; these should be provided to the Administrative Assistant for filing). These attempts can be made in conjunction with the telephone attempts and should be over a one month period.
 - If all previous attempts to contact the Advocate have been unsuccessful, send one additional letter notifying the Advocate they will be removed from the case if they do not respond to the letter. Provide a date response is required by and if by that date the Advocate has not responded, the Advocate will be dropped from the case. A copy of the letter should be put in the Advocate file.

- e. Anytime an Advocate is dropped, whether at their request or after following the above procedure, the Advocate Coordinator should notify the Administrative Assistant, Program Director, and Executive Director via email **within two business days, or by the last day of the month, whichever is first** so the Advocate's status can be updated.
 - f. The Advocate Coordinator should **immediately** notify all parties via email if a CASA Advocate is no longer assigned to a case.
7. If an Advocate and the Advocate Coordinator do not agree on a recommendation, the Program Director should be notified and the Supervisor/Volunteer Dispute Policy should be followed:
- a. Volunteers and staff are considered to be partners in implementing the mission and programs of CASA of Liberty/Chambers Counties, with each having an equal, complementary role. Volunteers working directly with the children will be considered the primary Advocate and Guardian Ad Litem with direction and guidance provided by staff. Advocate Coordinators shall not alter reports or recommendations of any volunteer without the express knowledge and approval of the volunteer. The Program Director will mediate any unresolved disagreement between a volunteer and staff member. If resolution cannot be reached to both the volunteers and staff member's satisfaction, the Program Director will make a final decision on the issue at hand.

Advocate Timesheet

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1. Advocates are expected to turn in timesheets on a monthly basis or put all time into Optima, **by the 5th of every month**. The Advocate Coordinator is expected to ensure all Advocate timesheets or time in Optima is received and approved (in Optima) each month **by the 10th**. If the Advocate has not put in their time into Optima by the 5th of the month the Advocate Coordinator is expected to log into the Advocates Optima account and put all emails and any verified contact into Optima for them.
 2. When the Advocate Coordinator receives an Advocate timesheet, the Advocate Coordinator should provide a copy to the Administrative Assistant so she can enter into Optima.
 3. The Advocate Coordinator should review the Advocate's Monthly Contact log In Optima to monitor case activity. The Advocate Coordinator should approve Advocate time in Optima on a weekly basis. The Advocate Coordinator should immediately contact the Advocate if there are any gaps in service, questions or if any concerns are recognized.
 4. The Advocate Coordinator should encourage Advocates to send written documentation (notes) of all child visits or activity **at least on a monthly basis, if not weekly** and this documentation should be input into Optima.

If the Advocate Coordinator has not received an email about Advocate's face-to-face child visit or been told there was a visit, by the last week of the month they are to contact Advocate to make sure visit will occur or already has occurred. If the Advocate is not able to visit Advocate Coordinator will visit by end of month if at all possible if not Advocate Coordinator will visit for Advocate on or before the 10th of the following month. If the Advocate Coordinator is not able to visit by the end of the month and the visit is into the next month the Advocate must visit within that next month again to satisfy that month's visit.

Crime Victim Compensation (CVC) Assistance

The Advocate Coordinator should review cases to determine possible CVC eligibility. All new cases should be reviewed when received and existing cases should be reviewed as circumstances change. If a police report has been filed and the child has been the victim of a crime at any time, the following procedures should be followed.

1. If the Advocate Coordinator or believes the child is eligible, the child's name, DOB and SSN will be provided to the CASA Compadre OAG Specialist who will then check the status of any previously filed CVC claims by accessing the CVC mainframe through the OAG website.
2. The CASA Compadre OAG Specialist may also contact the local Victim Assistance Coordinator (Bridge haven) to inquire if a CVC application has been filed.
3. If it is believed the child is eligible for CVC and an application has not been filed, the CASA Compadre OAG Specialist must complete and submit a CVC application.
4. If another agency has previously filed a CVC application, a copy of the full application will be requested and filed in the case file.
5. The CASA Compadre OAG Specialist will document in the case file if the case qualified for claim assistance by using the CVC Documentation Form.
6. If the case qualifies for CVC assistance, dates and documentation of assistance given will be recorded by CASA Compadre OAG Specialist in the case file on the CVC Documentation Form and in CASA of the Liberty/Chambers (Optima).

Transportation Approval

When an Advocate requests approval to transport, the Advocate Coordinator should follow the procedure outlined below.

1. Advocate Coordinator will email or give to Advocate the Policy and Procedures for Transporting Youth and the Advocate will return to Advocate Coordinator signed along with;
 - A copy of their Texas Driver's License
 - A copy of their current Automobile liability insurance
 - A current copy of their driving record from the Texas DMV
 - The vehicle used shall have an up-to date safety inspection from the State of Texas
2. Advocate Coordinator will ensure the Advocate has been assigned to the case for the minimum of 6 months and the child is over 2 years of age.
3. Advocate Coordinator will inform Program Director of the Advocate's request for transportation approval.
 - a. If approved by Program Director, proceed to step 4.
 - b. If not approved by Program Director, Advocate Coordinator will inform the Advocate and ask Program Director for clarification or assistance.
4. Once these documents are completed the Program Director will file in separate Advocates driving Document folder and wait for their first request.

5. Once these documents are completed then Advocate Coordinator fills out paperwork to request specific transportation and sends to Program Director when approved Advocate Coordinator will then notify the Advocate.
6. Program Director files in separate Advocates Driving Document folder and waits for their first request.
7. Program Director will review, sign then obtain required signature on the Transportation Release from CPS and will provide a copy to the special Advocate transport file.
8. Advocate Coordinator will notify Advocate all requirements have been met, Advocate is approved for specific transport.
9. Steps 6-8 must be repeated with each transport request.
10. Advocate Coordinator and Advocate will review the transportation release each six months per Transportation Policy and if any significant changes have occurred may discuss with Program Director.

Case Closure

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5. Closed cases or children should be closed in Optima (see Optima Guide for instructions) ***within 3-5 business days of the case dismissal, or by the last day of the month, whichever is first.***
 1. Before case can be closed all of Advocates time on case should be recorded in Optima.
 2. When a case or child closes, the Advocate Coordinator should send an email or give written case information to the Administrative Assistant with notification of the case or child closure after court.
 3. When CASA is going to withdrawal from a case, the Advocate Coordinator will prepare an Order Withdrawing CASA and turn in to the Judge for signature.
 - a. When the Signed file stamp Withdrawal is received back from the court, the Administrative Assistant with put into Optima.
 4. When any child or case is closed, The CASA Compadre OAG Specialist should provide a copy of the CVC informational letter to the child's permanent placement so they have information on possible CVC benefits for the child as well as the application process. When possible, this should be provided in person otherwise, it may be mailed. A copy of the letter and date it was provided should be documented and filed on the CVC documentation form in the case file.
 5. The Advocate Coordinator should meet with the Advocate and complete a Case Evaluation and Impact Checklist on the closed case ***within 2 weeks of the date of closure.*** After the Closing Packet is filled out it should be scanned and put into Optima. The Advocate's case notebook should be returned to the Advocate Coordinator when a case is closed. The Advocate Coordinator should scan files not already in Optima then shred all documents. The Advocate Coordinator should send all parties and Placement the CASA case closure notification. The Advocate Coordinator should close the case in Optima after Advocate has put time in for the month. (Documents can be put into a casefile after case is closed in Optima).
 6. Email Kimberly Williams (Kimberly.william2@dfps.state.tx.us) to take case off of your Case Connection

- The Advocate Coordinator should notify CPS of CASA's dismissal from the case if the dismissal does not occur in court with CPS present. The case file should move into the closed file cabinet with the date the case closed being noted on the file folder.

DFPS LEGAL TIMELINE

