

Policies & Procedures

In California, CASAs are considered officers of the court. Black's Law Dictionary states: A person who is charged with upholding the law and administering the judicial system. Typically, officer of the court refers to a judge, clerk, bailiff, sheriff, or the like, but the term also applies to a lawyer, who is obliged to obey court rules and who owes a duty of candor to the court.

Who else is an officer of the court? Judges, Attorneys, coroners, medical examiners, sheriffs, police officers, interpreters, process servers, court clerks. And, CASAs. We are held in very high esteem with these law professionals. When making a decision about whether to do something on your case or with your child, ask yourself if one of those other officers of the court would do it.

A lawyer, judge, police officer, or any of the other officers of the court all follow a plethora of policies and procedures to make sure they are acting within the laws and regulations of their roles. If laws are not followed, even something as simple as not notifying someone in time for a hearing can cause the case to be thrown out. The rules of dependency court are huge and a Judges and attorneys have to be very careful not to make any mistakes. The attorney's will aim to help the Judge and remind them of any procedures or laws that must be abided by, and vice versa.

This is also true of CASAs. The policies and procedures we abide by are determined by the National CASA Association in partnership with the Judicial Council. It is imperative to read the manual and follow the policies. If at any time you are unsure, contact your Advocacy Supervisor. Your supervisor, like the Judges or Attorneys, will work with you to be sure you are not removed from the case because you violated these important policies and procedures devised by the council.

Talk to your Advocacy Supervisor **before**, not after, making decisions that have not been covered in the manual or that you don't think are clear.

Your advocacy supervisor is your right hand on your case. Contact with them will make your chances of being a successful advocate for your child far greater. It will also make report time much easier as you will be prepared to answer all the questions required of you. You will never, ever be a nuisance to your supervisor. More communication is always better than less.

Following is a list of "real life" scenarios experienced by advocates. Please determine whether they are ethically acceptable, and provide an explanation to support your opinion.

1. You learn that the mother has been diagnosed schizophrenic from reviewing her psychological evaluation that was in the social services practitioner's files. In discussing the case with the child's attorney, you learn that the attorney is unaware of the psychological evaluation. Because the attorney was going to recommend that the child be returned to the mother, you shared the mother's diagnoses with the attorney.
2. In your advocacy role, you have been given a case in which the child was sexually molested by her stepfather and subsequently placed with a relative. In gathering

information on the case, you tell the child's first grade teacher about this molestation so that she'll know to protect the child from the stepfather.

3. You are attending a cocktail party and notice an attorney involved in one of your cases. You need some information, so you approach her, saying, "Mrs. Green, I am the Court Appointed Special Advocate for the Davis children, and I need to know if you've read the recent report from Dr. Smith?"
4. At the same party, you tell an acquaintance that you are a volunteer with Voices for Children and presently have a case involving three children who have been taken away from their mother and put in foster care.
5. You have had difficulty meeting with the mother of your case children. A treatment team meeting is scheduled at the children's group home. You are aware that the mother does not have transportation. You offer to drive her to the meeting so you can get a chance to talk with her.
6. You help your teen child successfully age out of the system. You plan to remain an active CASA by taking on another case. Since the one child is no longer a dependent, you decide to invite him to your home for dinner so he can finally meet your family.
7. As a child, you were placed in a foster home for a period of three years. Twenty years later, you are an advocate working on a case with an especially difficult teenager who is continually sabotaging her foster home placements. During your investigation, you explain to the child that you, too, had hated your foster home, but it all worked out for you and could for them also.
8. You have been working on a case for more than a year. Your case child's second adoption just fell through one month before finalization. The social services practitioner says the child, now 8 years old, will probably go to long-term foster care and remain in the system until he is 18. The child's already had 10 placements and is currently at Polinsky Children's Center. You decide to speak to the social services practitioner about adopting your case child.
9. You are never able to reach your case child at his placement. You decide to give him your old cell phone so you can be in better contact with him. Since that phone had been a gift to you, it is not breaking the spending limit.
10. Your case child has had no contact with any members of his family for many years. You find an uncle who is willing to visit with the child. Do you reintroduce them to each other?
11. Your child tells you that she misses attending her church. You make arrangements to transport her to and from her church. Knowing that Voices prohibits CASAs from

attending services with the case children, you wait for her in your car in the church parking lot.

12. Your child desperately needs some dental work and Denti-Cal denied the claim. Your friend is a dentist and has offered to do the work for free, so you schedule the appointment.
13. The social services practitioner calls you and tells you they have the finalized IEP for you. They tell you it's easier and quicker if they e-mail it to you. You give them your e-mail address and continue on the telephone waiting for the e-mail to reach your inbox so the social services practitioner and you can discuss it right away.
14. You arrive at the caregiver's home for a visit with your case child. The caregiver tells you they need to run errands. The caregiver asks you if you can stay at the home and watch the child while they head off for a short while.
15. During a case related meeting, such as a CFTM or IEP, a professional asks for your e-mail address. You give it because you created a special e-mail address for your Voices for Children work.
16. The SSP on your case calls you and asks you to take your case child for a haircut as the caregiver and the SSP do not have the time. You explain this is against VFC policies, but the SSP tells you it should be fine and they will just talk to your supervisor.
17. You are at Court, waiting in the hallway for your case to be called. The case child's parent asks you for a copy of your Court Report.
18. Your case child found a new apartment. They have been searching for one close to their college campus for a very long time. The leasing department needs a co-signer and your case child tells you that you are the only adult she knows.