



CASA OF WEST CENTRAL ILLINOIS Foster Parent's Guide to CASA

COURT APPOINTED SPECIAL ADVOCATES

CASA stands for Court Appointed Special Advocates. In Illinois and nationwide, judges appoint CASAs to speak up for children involved in court cases because of parental abuse or neglect. Most children served by CASA are in foster care, while some are at home under court monitoring.

CASA of West Central Illinois matches trained CASA volunteers with the children judges appoint us to serve. CASA's role is to help ensure that the children are protected from further harm and end up in safe, permanent homes where they get the care they need to thrive.

CASA volunteers (called CASAs) meet regularly with the children they serve and speak to foster parents and others who know the children. The CASAs then report to judges about what the children need and how to keep them safe.

CASA OF WEST CENTRAL ILLINOIS

CASA of West Central Illinois is a non-profit 501(c)3 founded in 1994 in Knox County. We serve children in Henderson, Knox, McDonough, and Warren Counties. In the busy, adult-centered court system, we strive to keep children's best interests at the forefront. Our volunteers are supervised by CASA staff, who can be reached at the number/email address listed below.

Thank you so much for the incredibly important role you play in children's lives. Foster parents are tremendous resources for children in need!

CONNECTING WITH YOUR FOSTER CHILD'S CASA

Your foster child's CASA will hope to develop a strong relationship with you. CASAs know that foster parents are knowledgeable about the children in their care and can share information that helps CASAs serve as effective advocates. Ideally:

- CASAs and foster parents will work together to schedule monthly CASA visits at a time that's mutually agreeable.
- CASAs and foster parents will promptly respond to each other's calls and emails. CASAs sometimes need to reach out after visits to make sure the information they plan to report to judges is still up-to-date, and it's helpful when foster parents reach out to tell CASAs about new developments in the children's lives.
- While CASAs ask lots of questions, they often can't answer yours. They are bound by confidentiality rules and can share very little about what they know, except in their reports to judges. (Attorneys, but not foster parents, get copies of those reports.) If you have questions about your foster child's family or history, the CASA will suggest you speak to the social worker. If you have a legal question, the CASA will refer you to the child's CASA attorney.

IF CASA IS APPOINTED TO SERVE YOUR FOSTER CHILD

The assigned CASA will notify you and arrange a visit to your home. CASAs have to meet with the children they serve at least once per month.

While visiting, the CASA will talk with the child to see how things are going. (If the child is too young to talk, the CASA will observe the child and talk with you instead.)

The conversation will vary depending on age, but the CASA will likely ask the child about school, the adjustment to the foster home, favorite activities, the child's hopes and wishes, and whether the child has any concerns or needs help with anything.

The CASA will also want to hear your thoughts about how the child is doing and will ask a range of questions about the child's behavior, health, parent/sibling visits, and overall well-being. The CASA will check in periodically to see if anything has changed.

All along, the CASA will be gathering information from multiple sources to help assess the child's needs and whether he/she can safely return home.

COMPREHENSIVE ADVOCACY

CASA's advocacy is guided by the Illinois Code and standards set by the National CASA, Department of Criminal Justice, and our local program. Below is a brief list of what CASA volunteers are expected to do:

- The CASA will thoroughly investigate the child's circumstances. This includes interviewing people who know the child, such as teachers and counselors, and reviewing pertinent records.
- The CASA will submit a written report to the judge before most hearing with recommendations about the child's well-being and where the child can safely live.
- The CASA will, per National CASA guidelines, "ensure that advocacy is provided for all aspects of the child's life."
- The CASA will assist the CASA attorney.
- The CASA will monitor compliance with court orders.

CASAs ARE...

Community Members who have undergone extensive training and background screening to become child advocates. They become CASAs because they believe vulnerable children deserve to have someone speaking up for them exclusively.

CASAs ARE NOT...

Paid employees. Their service is strictly on a volunteer basis. They don't work for DCFS, and they aren't attorneys, although their professional backgrounds may include social work or the law.

OUR PURPOSE...

CASA of West Central Illinois works diligently to promote children's best interests so they can grow up in safe, stable homes where they have the opportunity to heal and thrive.

