

Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA)

(Revised 09/08/23)

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Background

The Child and Family Well-Being (CFWB) Department partners with [Voices for Children](#) (VFC), a non-profit organization that operates the only Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) program in San Diego County. CASAs are volunteers who are appointed by the court to advocate for dependent children/youth's best interests and to "ensure each dependent child's right to a safe, permanent home."

CASA volunteers undergo extensive background checks and participate in 35 hours of training prior to serving as a CASA. Active CASAs are responsible for an 18-month commitment and are required to spend time with their child/youth monthly. Additionally, CASAs spend time gathering information on the child/youth via teachers, social workers (SW), caregivers, therapists, etc., and attending meetings like Child and Family Team (CFT) and school meetings. Under guidance and support from their VFC Advocacy Supervisor, CASAs prepare their own court reports and attend hearings to advocate for the best interests of the child/youth. Visit the [Voices for Children](#) site for more information on CASAs and their volunteer program.

A CASA's primary role is advocating for the best interest of the child/youth. This may include providing support to parents, caregivers, and other professionals working with the child/youth. All parents are informed of the CASAs appointment via their attorneys. CASAs involvement with the parents is determined by the parent's counsel's advice and the parent's comfort level.

CASA Appointment

VFC reviews all court reports in JELS (Justice Electronic Library System) and determines whether to assign a CASA based on the child/youth's needs. CASAs are sometimes appointed prior to the Jurisdictional/ Dispositional Hearing. VFC considers a variety of factors when matching a CASA to a child/youth, such as but not limited to, culture, interests/hobbies, personality, and professional experiences.

When a CASA is appointed, the SW will be notified by VFC via email, and receive a copy of the court order with the name of the appointed CASA. The CASA's name is also added to the JELS profile for the child/youth by court staff. The CASA may contact the SW to arrange a time to review the child/youth's case file. If a CASA is removed, VFC informs the court via a removal letter and court staff will update JELS. The VFC supervisor will also inform the SW via email.

CASA Appointment (cont.)

The SW can request a CASA be appointed if a child/youth does not have one by contacting the VFC administrative office. When making the request, the SW will describe any special needs of the child/youth (e.g., medical, psychological, educational, culture), to assist VFC in assigning a CASA.

CASA Responsibilities

CASA responsibilities include but are not limited to:

- Taking responsibility for one child/youth and visiting on a regular monthly basis.
- Gathering facts about a child/youth's family background through an independent comprehensive investigation and reviewing available records.
- Communicating the child/youth's needs to the court in written reports and recommendations.
- Ensuring that court-ordered services and case planning are provided in a timely, effective manner.
- Providing emotional support for the child/youth during this stressful period in their lives.
- Communicating and coordinating efforts with the child/youth's SW, attorney and other professionals involved in the case.
- Attending Child Family Team Meetings (CFTM) to support the child/youth services planning. See Child and Family Team Meetings for more information.

CASAs can be named by the court as the holder of Educational Rights/Developmental Rights, and as such are authorized to sign Individual Education Plans (IEPs), Individual Family Service Plans (IFSPs), Individual Program Plans (IPPs) and other educational and developmental documents. See Educational Rights for Foster Youth for more information.

NOTE: The aforementioned list is not exhaustive, and other family centered services policies list additional CASA roles and responsibilities.

SW Responsibilities

SW responsibilities include but are not limited to:

- Creating a collateral notebook in CFWB/CMS with the CASA and their supervisor's information and updating as needed.
 - Documenting CASA assignment in all court reports and Ex Parte's to ensure the CASA receives copies of reports.
 - Keeping the CASA informed at all times of the child/youth's placement status and caregiver contact information.
 - If a child/youth is at Polinsky Children's Center, adding the CASA to the child/youth's contact list. See Visitation at Polinsky Children's Center for more information.
 - Per WIC 106, notifying the CASA of any Special Hearings, continuances, or changed hearing dates, and adding them to the Notice of Review Hearing worksheet.
 - Sharing the child/youth's medical, psychological and educational records and information with the CASA to assure that the child/youth is receiving the treatment/care needed (e.g. notice of Psychotropic Medications JV 220 applications).
 - Notifying the CASA of Child and Family Team Meetings.
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**SW Responsibilities
(cont.)**

If a youth is an Nonminor Dependent (NMD), refer to EFC - General for policy related to CASAs and NMDs.

SWs with concerns about a CASA's actions or requests should consult with their PSS, who will contact the CASAs supervisor to discuss.

CASA Transportation

CASAs are permitted to transport children/youth unless indicated by the SW. CASAs can only transport their assigned child/youth out of county with advanced request and approval from their VFC supervisor and a court order or with written permission on CFWB letterhead. CASAs can transport child/youth within their county of residence if placed out of county.

CASAs cannot transport child/youth as follows:

- on motorcycles, off-road vehicles or motorized cycles, boats/watercraft.
- child/youth under five (5) years of age without VFC supervisor approval.
- the child/youth's parents.
- the youth is AWOL risk, concern the youth may harm themselves or others, or the youth is detained at a psychiatric hospital.

NOTE: For children/youth at PCC, the CASA must be on the contact list to take the child/youth off campus.

**CASA Case File
Reviews**

For case file records, local rule 6.6.4 (A) authorizes release only on the basis that (1) disclosure will be in the best interest of the child and (2) the information is necessary and relevant to a court proceeding.

When first assigned to a child/youth, CASAs may review the case file. The SW and Protective Services Supervisor (PSS) will be available to assist the CASA, answer questions and make copies of requested documents.

The CASA can:

- make copies of documents about the child/youth e.g., IEPs, school records, medical records, therapy reports, etc. Review Confidentiality Guide for additional information.
- Receive copies of court reports while assigned to the case.

The CASA cannot:

- take photos of documents from the case file.
 - view or make copies of any of the following:
 - documents specifically about the parent(s) e.g. Psychological Evaluations, Medical Reports, Drug testing results etc.
 - documents that identify the report party (RP) (such as Emergency Referral Documents)
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**CASA Case File
Reviews (cont.)**

- HIV information
- documents labeled “Confidential Attorney-Client Privilege”

VFC and the County of San Diego have a secured email connection. SWs can email VFC supervisors using this email: info@speakupnow.org. Do **not** email CASAs at their personal email addresses.

Alignment with SET

This policy supports SET [Value 1](#): Relationships with Children, Youth, and Families Are the Foundation by focusing on the safety and voice of the child/youth, SET [Value 3](#): Helping Children and Youth Achieve Their Full Potential and Develop Lifelong Relationships by working with others to ensure the child/youth’s school, medical, dental, and emotional needs are being met, and SET [Value 5](#): A Strong Working Relationship with the Legal System by collaborating with partners associated with the legal system to ensure the child/youth’s best interests and legal rights are maintained.
