

Confidentiality for Juvenile Cases

Before beginning training, every potential CASA Advocate is asked to sign a Pledge of Confidentiality in order to become a volunteer. Every employee of Child Advocacy Services is annually required to sign a pledge as well. When you are sworn in as an advocate, confidentiality is part of your oath. In addition, your advocate supervisor is constantly reminding you about confidentiality. So why do we hear so much about confidentiality?

First and foremost, it is a law that all juvenile matters remain confidential and this is clearly stated in the Louisiana Children's Code and is a National CASA Standard. Additionally, the children and families that we serve deserve this. Children involved in Child In Need of Care cases are in the situation through no fault of their own and have the right to privacy.

Advocates express on a regular basis that while they know they can't discuss their case with anyone, it is sometimes difficult not to share certain information when advocating for their children. Other advocates have said that they feel that if the communities knew more about the abuse of children that more people would step up to help. Many volunteers have shared it is really hard to stay silent when there is a high profile case that everyone in the community is discussing.

As advocates you are privy to confidential information such as medical history, substance abuse treatment records, mental health records, and legal information regarding the children and their parents that you are assigned to. Additionally, when in court or the DCFS Office you may encounter other families that are involved in CINC matters.

Please make sure that you are adhering to the following protocols:

- Do not share any details regarding the child you are assigned to with family, friends, coworkers, etc. This includes "generic" information such as where they live, how old they are, why they came into care, etc. – Even if you don't give a name, details could identify the child.
- The same applies to the parents of the child, caretakers, or siblings.
- Never show anyone a picture of your CASA child.
- Some of our parents are involved in criminal matters that may or may not be related to your CASA case. Often arrest records and court convictions of adults will be published in the media. Please don't make comments regarding this information or discuss it with anyone other than your advocate supervisor, even if it is "all over the news".
- It is never acceptable for anyone other than your supervisor or the assigned DCFS worker to accompany you on your visit. If you have safety concerns, please discuss that with your supervisor for solutions that don't breach confidentiality.

- If you see other families (especially ones that you know) at the DCFS Office or in court, remember that if they are involved in any Child in Need of Care proceeding, that by law you must maintain confidentiality regarding all juvenile matters. This applies if the child is in court for a delinquency matter also.
- Safeguard your Optima Log In information and NEVER leave it open.
- Protect any court reports that you are working on from a home computer with passwords.
- Never correspond with anyone regarding your CASA case from a shared computer or telephone.
- When in court or at the DCFS office, make sure that any conversations you are having with DCFS workers, attorneys, the family that you are assigned to, and your supervisor are held in a confidential setting.
- Do not give a copy of any documents you obtain to anyone other than your advocate supervisor. This includes sharing this information with the Department of Children and Family Services.

Your advocate supervisor is available to discuss any case matters with you at any time and will be happy to guide you in ways to effectively advocate for your child without breaching confidentiality.