

Advocate Refresher: Building Rapport

The primary goal of a CASA Volunteer is to help our children reach a safe and permanent home as quickly as possible. To achieve this goal, our CASA Volunteers must speak with all parties involved in the case to gather accurate and objective information. One of the most important but overlooked factors in gathering information and providing advocacy to your CASA child is rapport building.

Why is rapport building important?

When gathering and reporting information to the court, you want to make sure the information is accurate and recent. Rapport building is important as it allows two individuals to develop a mutual trust between one another. When an individual trusts you, they will be more likely to be honest and forthcoming with you and most often in a more time-friendly manner. There are many ways to build rapport with the parties involved in your case. It is important to understand that rapport building takes time and each relationship will look differently.

Tips for rapport building with your CASA child:

- Be consistent. Do not make any promises to your CASA child that you cannot keep.
- Let the child open up to you on their own time. Do not pry or ask difficult questions when getting to know the child. Just play!
- Get on an equal level with the child, even if that means sitting on the floor with them. Remember at least one thing the child told you from the previous visit and ask the child about it. For example, if the child tells you they like basketball, on the next visit ask them “Have you gotten to play any basketball since I last saw you? I remember you told me it was your favorite sport!” This makes the child feel important and heard.

Tips for building rapport with parents:

- Be empathetic and understanding of their situation. Take the time to get to know them on a personal level beyond their case plan compliance.
- Acknowledge positive strides the parents have made. Even if they are small strides.
 - Be respectful and listen to what they have to say.

Tips for building rapport with foster parents:

- Understand that our foster parents are often very busy. When scheduling with the family, make sure you give plenty of notice. Therefore you are not rushing at the end of the month to get your visit in.
 - Do not make false promises that you are not able to keep.
 - Respect their home and wishes while visiting with your CASA child.

If you are having issues with building rapport, make sure to contact your supervisor. Each situation is unique and they will be able to better guide you in the right direction. Remember, rapport building takes time and most importantly, be respectful!