

Getting Started: Advocate Interview Guide



Guideline Advice

The following information is furnished to:

- Help you get started
- Act as guideline for your initial interactions; **it is not a script**
- **Remember to add all information into Optima**

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Getting started with the Resource Parent

- **Call the Resource Parent (generally we do not have email addresses for Resource Parents)**
 - **Leave a detailed voicemail if no one answers**
- **Introduce yourself**
 - CASA Intake Case Coordinator should have contacted Resource Parents notifying them of your appointment
 - Identify yourself as a CASA (Court Appointed Special Advocate)
 - Identify that you have been “appointed” to this case by the court system of
 - Ask if this is a convenient time for the Resource Parent. If not, establish a better time when the Resource Parent can spend 10 to 15 minutes with you.
 - Ask Resource Parent for preferred method of communication – phone, text, or email.
 - Provide Resource Parent with your contact information – cell phone/or CASA office phone number and CASA email.
- **When the Resource Parent has time to talk**
 - Confirm the purpose of CASA and CASAs are trained volunteers
 - Indicate your responsibilities as it relates to the case
 - Ensuring needs of the child are being met
 - Do infants/toddlers have everything they need?
 - Another set of eyes and ears for the judge of the children
 - Reporting to the court
 - Honoring confidentiality however, acknowledging responsibility to share some information with other parties like the caseworker, the legal guardian and the judicial system.
 - Ask about the children
 - How are they doing in placement?
 - School/daycare contact information? Date they started at this school?
 - Do they have everything they need for school?
 - Visitations with
 - Birth Parents
 - Siblings
 - Are there any special needs? How are they being addressed?
 - How is the child/ren doing with physical and mental health?
 - Are there activities that the child especially enjoys?
 - Are there any activities the child/ren cannot participate in for any reasons?
 - Anything the Resource Parent would like to know and you are able to tell them?
 - Anything the Resource Parent would like you to know?
 - Ask about the Resource Parents
 - How are they doing?
 - Do they need any assistance or supports?
- Do a quick recap with the Resource Parent to ensure your understanding

- Recognizing the Resource Parent is very busy, try to develop a plan/schedule that will satisfy your obligations as a CASA but also work for the Resource Parent's schedule
- Assure the Resource Parent your primary and foremost concern is the child/ren but you will provide any assistance you can within the constraints of your role.
- ***Request a date/time when you can meet with the child.***

Note: Recognize there are many different people making demands for the time of the Resource Parent and the children.

Getting started with the Caseworker

- **Contact Caseworker**
 - Introduce yourself via email and follow up phone call - ***CASA staff will send initial email and copy advocate, Peer Coach, and DCP&P Supervisor***
 - Identify yourself as the CASA
 - Identify your appointment including the Case # (NJ Spirit #) and the name of the children in your case.
 - Indicate the purpose of your email
 - Confirm what you currently understand
 - Need to secure high-level information about the case background
 - Ask the caseworker the best way to proceed/preferred method of communication
 - Set up phone call
 - Continue with email correspondence
 - Texts
 - Provide relevant contact information for yourself
 - Cell phone number
 - CASA email address
- **Based on Caseworkers response, proceed to gather information**

Confirmation of current placement and Reason for removal will have been confirmed by Intake Case Coordinator at CASA and should appear in Optima

- Background for children
 - Current status
 - Health and mental well-being of children
 - Siblings
 - Visitation with parents
 - If attending school /daycare – contact information
- Background for Birth Parents
 - Services required

- Level of engagement with services
- Contact Information
- Plan for your future activities
 - Contact and introduction to Children (If it has not yet occurred)
 - Contact and Introduction to Birth parents
- Share your commitment on your part to share information with the caseworker
- Provide update on initial contact with Resource parent and child if applicable
- If having trouble contacting Resource Parents, ask caseworker if it is possible for he/she to inform Resource Parent you will be reaching out to them.

Note: Generally, case workers are very busy and you are one of many constituents they are trying to satisfy. Try to limit any interaction with the case worker to less than 15 minutes unless the caseworker is willing to provide you with more time. This would be the time to set up your next communication if you need more time

Getting started with Birth Parent (s)

- **Call the Birth Parent(s)-**
 - Note: Birth parents may or may not be in a relationship. Our natural inclination may be to talk to the Birth Mom but it is important not to forget the Birth Dad.
 - Also, many people will not answer an unknown number, it may be necessary to leave a voicemail, text, or email.
 - It may be easier to talk with Birth Parents after you have met with the child.
- **Introduce yourself**
 - Identify yourself as a CASA (Court Appointed Special Advocate) trained volunteer
 - Identify that you have been “appointed” to this case by the court system. You are another set of eyes and ears to ensure their child is being well cared for and getting any/all help that they need.
 - Ask if this is a convenient time for the Birth Parent. If not, establish a better time when the Birth Parent can spend 10 to 15 minutes with you.
 - Ask Birth Parent for preferred method of communication – phone, text, or email.
 - Provide Birth Parent with your contact information – cell phone/CASA office phone number and CASA email.
- **When able to speak with the Birth Parent**
 - Confirm the purpose of CASA
 - Indicate your responsibilities as it relates to the case
 - Ensuring needs of the child are being met
 - Another set of eyes and ears for the judge about the children
 - Reporting to the court
 - Honoring confidentiality however, acknowledging responsibility to share some information with other parties like the caseworker and the judicial system.

- Talk about your interaction with the child
 - You have met their child and any general observations
 - *Do not to share identifying information such as resource placement name or location*
 - *Do not share school/daycare name or location*
- Ask about the Parent
 - If you know about required services, ask how the services are going.
 - Ask about visitations and how they are going.
- Ask them to tell you about their child
 - Ask if there is anything special they want you to know about their child.
 - Are there activities the child especially enjoys?
- **Call Wrap up**
 - Do a quick recap with the Birth Parent to ensure an understanding
 - Try to develop a plan/schedule that will ensure ongoing communication.
 - Assure the Birth Parent your primary and foremost concern is the child but you will provide any assistance you can within the constraints of your role.
 - Often the parent(s) will talk to you more freely when they realize you are a volunteer and have the ear of the judge.
- *Please note you may experience some challenges communicating with birth parents, remain persistent and contact your Peer Coach for assistance.*

Getting started with school(s)

- **Call the school/daycare**
 - Introduce yourself and ask for the guidance counselor or person in charge for daycares
 - Explain what CASA is if necessary, especially having a court order from the judge allowing you to speak to and about the child/ren
 - Offer to have CASA staff email or fax a copy of your appointment. Most will not talk to you until they have it. Get information about who to send it to and necessary numbers/emails
 - Obtain names and emails of parties associated with the child/ren
- Set up a time to talk to guidance counselor, teachers, etc.
- **When you speak to a teacher/guidance counselor**
 - Explain your role as a CASA
 - Are there any identified learning and/or behavioral problems?
If yes, do they have an IEP or ISP (individualized student plan)?
Ask for a copy to be emailed to your CASA email and load into Documents
 - How is the child/ren doing in school?
 - Are they passing? Are they working at grade level in younger grades?
 - If not, where are they?

- Does the child have what they need to successfully learn in school?
- What are their interactions with other students like?
- What is the best way to communicate with teacher/counselor? Make sure you give your email and phone number/CASA office phone number to them.