

COVID-19 Update 3/25/2020

We hope you are staying healthy during this extraordinary time. We are thinking about all of you and appreciate all you are doing to help keep our children safe and connected.

The CASA staff has been working to provide you with some additional resources we hope will help you. Please follow the link below to get up to date COVID-19 information, links to tips, tools and resources as you switch your advocacy efforts from in-person to the virtual world.

<https://atlanticapecasa.org/volunteer/advocate-corner.html>

Now more than ever I cannot stress enough the importance of staying in contact with the children we serve. Not only are the children depending on us, but the court and DCP&P are as well, to help ensure that together we do all we can to protect our vulnerable children.

Judge Sheppard shared the following, ***“We are going to try to hear as many cases that we can to make sure our children are safe. It is comforting to know CASA will be there for the children.”***

Conducting virtual visits is the only alternative we have to “see” how our children are doing. Please review the guidelines below for conducting virtual visits, if you have any questions at all about this contact your Program Coordinator today to discuss.

### **Conducting Virtual Visits**

CASA volunteers and staff may use video calls or online chat applications (such as Zoom, Messenger Kids, and FaceTime) to communicate with children. The following best practices are recommended for video conferencing

- Take the call from a private location with no other people around
- Ask the child if she or he is in a safe place with no others around
- Do not discuss private information about the child (as you do not know who is listening in)
- Do not record the chat (either audio or visual)
- All calls should be prefaced with a verbal disclosure agreement to verify the above parameters are met and agreed upon at the beginning of each call.
- Remember that confidentiality cannot be guaranteed when using video chat technology.

***Special Note: National CASA does not have an age restriction for use of video technology with children. However, the federal Children’s Online Privacy Protection Act (COPPA) sets limits on the use of services like these, along with other Internet sites, by children under the age of 13. In order to comply with COPPA and industry standards, the following practices should be followed:***

- Place the video call with the phone app on the smart phone. These video calls would not trigger the same COPPA issues as using a platform like Skype.
- Do not have children under 13 create user accounts (and do not create user accounts for them) with the video chat providers
- Do not otherwise provide any personal information about the children to the video chat provider (including through a text chat feature)
- Choose technologies that permit use by children under 13 (Zoom, Messenger Kids, and FaceTime permit use, while Skype does not)

**Court Update**

As of today, March 25, Cape May began conducting remote hearings on a few of the cases scheduled. CASA staff is participating in the remote hearings being held. We anticipate that Atlantic County will soon follow. We are continuing to submit reports to the court on cases. Please remember

- It is critical you have the most up to date information documented in Optima, on what is currently happening with the child, family, status of service delivery, additional needs resulting from current crisis etc. so that we can bring that to the court's attention during the remote hearing.
- If there are areas of your report (recommendations, observations, information obtained) that need to be highlighted, clarified, or brought to the court's attention, please communicate that with your Program Coordinator so that CASA staff can bring that to the court's attention during the remote hearing.

I hope you all are well. Please be in touch with your Program Coordinator or CASA staff if you have any additional questions, concerns, or by letting us know how we can better support you during this challenging situation.