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CHAPTER 7

Communicating as a CASA/GAL Volunteer

CONTENTS

Homework Recap, Goal & Objectives	7-2
UNIT 1 Developing Communication Skills.	7-3
UNIT 2 Communicating with Children	7-11
UNIT 3 Dealing with Conflict	7-15
UNIT 4 Understanding Confidentiality	7-23
Homework.	7-28

CHAPTER 7

Communicating as a CASA/GAL Volunteer



HOMEWORK RECAP

RESOURCE MATERIALS EXPLORATION

Look at the Chapter 7 Web Resources or the Chapter 7 Resource Materials. Pick at least one website or article to explore, and bring back what you learn to share with the group, the facilitator, and your local CASA/GAL program. When you come to this training session, write up a brief description of the resource on an index card provided by the facilitator.

COMMUNITY RESOURCES

Continue to gather information regarding the community resource you selected to report on in the Chapter 9 training session.



GOAL

In this chapter, I will practice communication skills that will help me interview and observe children, deal with conflict, and work collaboratively with others on a case. I will increase my understanding of confidentiality and privacy issues as they relate to building a trusting relationship with the children and families I will encounter in my CASA/GAL volunteer work.



OBJECTIVES

By the end of this chapter, I will be able to . . .

- ✓ Name the basic elements of effective communication
- ✓ Recognize that communication patterns differ across cultures
- ✓ Observe children and establish rapport and trust
- ✓ Identify different styles of dealing with conflict
- ✓ Practice a collaborative approach in my work as a CASA/GAL volunteer
- ✓ Apply the rules of confidentiality

Developing Communication Skills

You will come into contact with many people during your investigation and monitoring of a child's case. Relationships characterized by respect and credibility will assist you in doing your job. Respect is earned as others on the case see your commitment to the child and to your role as a CASA/GAL volunteer. Credibility is established when you do what you say you will do in a timely manner, when you make recommendations built on well-researched and independently verified information, and when you maintain your proper role as the child's advocate.

Effective communication is critical to your ability to advocate for children. Good communication requires:

- Self-awareness
- Sensitivity
- Skills

Understanding the basic elements of communication can increase your skills in gathering the information you need to successfully advocate for a child.

Activity 7A: Ways People Communicate

Part 1: As a group, brainstorm a list of ways people communicate. The facilitator will record your responses on a flipchart.

Then, using this list, fill in your responses to the following questions:

Which of these methods of communication are my strengths?

Which of these methods of communication challenge me?

What is one strategy I can use to communicate more effectively, build on my strengths, and improve in areas that challenge me?

Part 2: Read the following information about the basics of communication and underline the key points. If you have questions, share them in the large group.

“Respect” can be defined as esteem or admiration.

“Credible” can be defined as being believable or reliable.

 **LEARN MORE!**

For more information about strategies for effective communication, see the Chapter 7 Resource Materials.

The Basics of Communication

Communication is a two-way street. It is defined as an interchange or an exchange of thoughts and ideas. Often the message a person intends to send is not the message that is received. What is said can be interpreted differently depending on the nonverbal cues that accompany the words. Communication experts suggest that words and their dictionary meanings are only one-third of any speaker's message.

Communication has three components:

1. **Verbal:** The verbal component refers to the actual words spoken, the elements we traditionally think of as language and refer to as "communication."
2. **Nonverbal:** The nonverbal component refers to gestures, body movements, tone of voice, and other unspoken means of conveying a message. The nonverbal code can be easily misread.
3. **Feelings:** This component refers to the feelings that are experienced in the course of an interaction. While the verbal and nonverbal components can be directly observed, the feelings component is not easy to observe.

Ideally, these three components match—that is, there is no conflict between what people say, what they convey through body language, and what they feel. Sometimes, however, people send mixed messages. Whenever there is a discrepancy between the verbal, the nonverbal, and the feelings components of a message, the receiver of the message will tend to believe the nonverbal. Given all the variables involved, it is easy to see why misunderstandings occur between people.

As a CASA/GAL volunteer, you will communicate with children, their families, caseworkers, and others involved in a case. It is important that you understand how to convey your message consistently using all three components of communication—verbal, nonverbal, and feelings. It is also essential that you learn to observe whether people's verbal and nonverbal messages match or are congruent. It is important to "hear" the silent messages. Listening for meaning requires three sets of ears—one set for receiving the message that is spoken, one for receiving the message that is conveyed silently, and one for receiving the feelings of the sender.

Adapted from "Learning to Listen to Trainees," Ron Zemke, and "Learn to Read Nonverbal Trainee Messages," Charles R. McConnell.

Activity 7B: Cross-Cultural Communication

Read the information below and consider the chart describing the cultural meanings of different types of nonverbal communication, including postures, expressions, and body movements. In pairs, list three ways you communicate nonverbally that could be misinterpreted by a person from a different culture or could make a person from a different culture uncomfortable.

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

Nonverbal Communication Across Cultures

When dealing with families from different cultures, it is important to keep in mind that the meaning of an action may differ with the culture. There are few, if any, nonverbal signals that consistently have the same meaning. Nonverbal communication incorporates cultural norms and actual body language. For example, the use of eye contact can convey different messages depending on a person's culture. In some cultures, a person who makes direct and sustained eye contact is perceived as honest and forthright, while in other cultures this same behavior would be perceived as rude and disrespectful. As a CASA/GAL volunteer, you must learn to communicate with families and children within the terms of their culture and language—to treat families as the families would like to be treated, not as you would like to be treated.

Nonverbal Communication

HEAD & FACE

UNIT 1	Pat the head of someone; tousle someone's hair	A friendly gesture	Western countries
		To insult or degrade someone	Thailand, Burma, Fiji, Indonesia, Singapore
UNIT 2	Nod the head up and down	To indicate "yes"	Most countries
		To indicate "no"	Iran and most of Greece, India and Bangladesh
UNIT 3	Shake the head side to side	To indicate "yes"	Bulgaria, Serbia, Turkey, Sri Lanka
		To indicate that someone is very intelligent, or has a lot of common sense	Western Europe; English-speaking countries
UNIT 4	Tap the forehead near the temple	"I'm thinking about it" and "Leave it to me"	South America; English-speaking countries
		Rotate the index finger against the temple or pulse points	"He/she is crazy!" "A screw is loose!"
	Tap the middle of one's forehead	"He/she is crazy!"	Holland, South Africa, parts of Indonesia

MOUTH

Stick out the tongue	To mock or deride someone	English-speaking countries
	An involuntary sign of concentration	Universal
	To greet a friend	Tibet
Giggle	Amusement	Universal
	Embarrassment; women often cover their mouths with the hand or a piece of clothing when they giggle	China, Taiwan, Japan, Hong Kong, Malaysia, India, Bangladesh, Tibet, Nepal, Philippines, Singapore, Pakistan
Cover the mouth with the hand	To politely cover a yawn	Widespread
	Because it is rude to display an open mouth; for example, cover the mouth when laughing or using a toothpick	Women in China, Japan, Indonesia, Thailand, Korea, Burma
Eat in the street	Vulgar	France, Poland
Use fingers to eat	Unnecessary, vulgar	France, Japan, Bolivia

EYES

Stare at someone	Rude behavior	Australia, Britain, Ireland, New Zealand, Thailand, Japan, Korea, Western Europe, North America, Zimbabwe
	The only way to find out something	China, Taiwan, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia

Avoid eye contact	As a general practice	Africa, Caribbean
	As a gesture of respect or deference	Britain, North America, Japan, South Africa, Ghana
	By women in order to avoid a suggestion of romantic interest, if men are present	Zambia, Colombia, Mali, Turkey and Muslim countries
	Embarrassment	England
Wink	"I'm in the know" and "We share a secret"	North America, Ireland, Australia, New Zealand, Western Europe
	Impolite gesture	Hong Kong
	Flirtatious signal	Western countries
	"I'm not serious, I'm kidding"	North America, Australia, Britain
Remove sunglasses when entering a home or if speaking to someone	Because it is impolite to look at someone with "dark eyes"	Indonesia, South Korea, Japan

NOSE

Wrinkle the nose	If there is a bad smell	Western countries
	Expression of disgust	Western countries
Thumb the nose	To insult, mock, or jeer at another	Nearly universal
Pinch the nose	If there is a bad smell	Nearly universal
	If a scheme, project, or product is seen as a failure	North America, Britain, Australia, New Zealand
	An insulting gesture	Tunisia
Push the nose up with the index and middle finger	It's so easy that I can do it with my fingers stuck up my nose	France
Blow the nose	To clear it	Widespread
	Only in private, never in public because it's considered rude	Korea, Japan
	Never at the dinner table because it is rude	Malaysia

EARS

Tug or squeeze at one's own earlobe	Apologize to superiors for an error; for example, breaking a glass object	India
	Submission; for example, younger brother to older brother	India
	As self-punishment for a misdemeanor; for example, a child speaks out of turn in the school classroom	India
	To express appreciation	Brazil
Make circular motions around the ear with the index finger	To signal that someone or something is crazy or stupid	North America
	To signal to someone "You're wanted on the telephone"	South America, Holland, South Africa

Adapted from *The Naked Face*, Lailan Young, New York: St. Martin's, 1994.

LANGUAGE & CROSS-CULTURAL COMMUNICATION

Culture and language are very closely related. As a CASA/GAL volunteer, you will need to interact effectively with people who speak English but have different cultural backgrounds from yours. You may also need to communicate with families who speak limited English or none at all. Whether you speak the same language as the child and his/her family or must use a translator, it is important that you use plain language without professional jargon.

Speaking a language different from the mainstream has a strong effect on family and individual development. Language is a powerful vehicle for communicating culture. It can be the glue that holds a cultural group together, and at the same time it can be a barrier to gaining access to needed resources such as education or jobs. Many immigrants eager for citizenship and full acceptance strive to acquire English while maintaining their own language. Language also influences a family's connections with the larger community, as those who do not speak English often feel isolated and excluded from the community. If children are the first to learn English, as often happens in immigrant families, the balance of power can shift as parents and grandparents rely on children to translate and interpret information from agencies and others in the community.

Immigrant families want to improve their quality of life; it is often their main reason for moving to the United States. They want their children to have a better life. They know that to attain this dream, their children need to learn English. Yet, maintaining their native or home language while learning English can benefit all involved.

Adapted from Empowerment Skills for Family Workers, Christiann Dean, Cornell Empowering Families Project, August 1996. Used with permission.

Activity 7C: Introducing Yourself as a CASA/GAL Volunteer

Part 1: One of the first tests of your communication skills as a CASA/GAL volunteer will occur when you introduce yourself and describe your role. The facilitator will hand out helpful resources for introducing yourself to children and families. Here is one example of what you might say to introduce yourself to a family:

Hello, I'm a Court Appointed Special Advocate (or guardian ad litem). I'm a volunteer appointed by a judge to gather information by interviewing the child and surrounding adults. I will provide objective written reports to the court about the child's best interests.

Using what you've learned about communication so far in this unit, write what you would say to introduce yourselves to . . .

Kathy Price.

Ben Harris.

Robert Price's teacher.

Part 2: Divide into trios, and using what you wrote, take turns introducing yourself as a CASA/GAL volunteer. One member of the trio acts as the CASA/GAL volunteer; another member plays the role of Kathy Price, Ben Harris, or Robert Price’s teacher; the third member is the observer. Rotate roles until each member of your group has had a chance to perform an introduction.

As the speaker, think about what you would like to convey and how best to convey it. Keep in mind the strategy you identified in Activity 7A. Consider tone of voice, posture, language, etc. As the listener, try to reflect back what you hear. If necessary, ask the speaker to clarify his/her point.

After each turn, take a minute to share feedback. Those in the role of the CASA/GAL volunteer should go first, sharing what they liked about the introduction, then what they would change the next time. The other two members of the trio should then share what went well and offer suggestions for improvement. Pay attention to nonverbal communication!

In the large group, share any questions you have.

Adapted from an activity contributed by Norma Laughton,
North Carolina GAL district administrator.

Communicating with Children

Activity 7D: Observing Children

Part 1: In small groups, look at the photos of children. What fact-based observations can you make about how each child might be feeling? Record the behaviors and expressions that you believe indicate how the child is feeling. Compare your responses. Share a sample of your group's responses in the large group.

Child 1: _____

Child 2: _____

Child 3: _____

Child 4: _____

Child 5: _____

Child 6: _____

Child 7: _____

Part 2: Read the following section, "Considerations for Observations." In the large group, answer the following questions:

- In addition to observing behaviors and expressions, what other ways can you learn about what children are feeling?
- How do these ways differ from the ways you learn about what adults are thinking and feeling?
- How might your observations be influenced by your assumptions?

Considerations for Observations

Knowledge about communication is important to the specific ways you will gather information from children. Some children can talk about their situations and their wishes, but other children do not have verbal and developmental skills sufficient to express their needs and wishes. Because the verbal skills of children vary, fact-based observations about a child are a vital part of your investigation and court report as a CASA/GAL volunteer.

Because it is impossible to observe everything a child does, it is important to think about what specific information you want to know about the child while trying to keep your mind open to unexpected information. Reading over the following questions several times before you begin observing a child will help you remember what to look for.

- 1. What is the specific situation in which the child is operating?**
What other activities are going on? What are the general expectations of the group at the moment and what is the general atmosphere of the room—calm, noisy, boisterous, quiet?
- 2. What is the child's approach to materials and activities?**
Is the child slow in getting started or does he/she plunge right in? Does the child use materials in the usual way or does he/she use them in different ways, exploring them for the possibilities they offer?
- 3. How interested is the child in what he/she is doing?**
Does the child seem intent on what he/she is doing or does the child seem more interested in what others are doing? How long is his/her concentration span? How often does he/she shift activities?
- 4. How much energy does the child use?**
Does the child work at a fairly even pace or does he/she work in spurts of activity? Does the child use a great deal of energy in manipulating the materials, in body movements, or in talking?
- 5. What are the child's body movements like?**
Does the child's body seem tense or relaxed? Are movements jerky, uncertain, or poorly coordinated?
- 6. What does the child say?**
Does the child talk, sing, hum, or use nonsense words while he/she works? Does the child use sentences or single words? Does the child communicate with others using words or gestures?
- 7. What is the child's affect (visual emotions)?**
What are the child's facial expressions like? Does he/she appear frustrated? Happy?
- 8. How does the child get along with other children?**
Does the child play alone, with only certain children, or with a variety of children? Is the child willing or unwilling to share toys? Does the child always initiate or always follow along with group ideas?

9. What kinds of changes are there from the beginning to the end of an activity?

Does the child’s mood change during that period?

10. What is the child’s relationship with you?

11. What is the child’s relationship with others: parents, caseworker, attorney, foster parents, etc.?

12. What seems “different” or “troubling” about this child as compared with other children of the same age?

13. Are there issues that you think should be checked out by a professional (vision, hearing, dental health, cognitive development, physical development, psychological development, etc.)?

Adapted from “Assessing a Child’s Welfare,” Eunice Snyder, ACSW, and Keetje Ramo, ACSW, School of Social Work, Eastern Washington University, 1984.

Activity 7E: Establishing Rapport & Trust with Children

Read the following information on establishing rapport and trust with children. Name three concrete things you can do to establish rapport and trust with the children you will encounter as a CASA/GAL volunteer. Share your ideas in the large group.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

“Rapport” can be defined as a relationship, especially one of mutual trust or understanding.

“Trust” can be defined as confident expectation, or belief in another person’s integrity.

Establishing Rapport & Trust

A relationship characterized by rapport and trust . . .

- Should be built on a sincere interest in the child as a person as well as the child’s well-being
- Takes time and energy
- Involves actively listening to the child’s words and observing his/her nonverbal cues
- Needs regular nurturing
- Requires honesty in all communication with the child
- Is developed for the benefit of the child, not the adult

The children for whom CASA/GAL volunteers advocate have been traumatized by the abuse or neglect that brought them to the attention

CASA/GAL volunteers should know that the children have been hurt.

So even if you get a cold shoulder, just understand that they don't know

who to trust. Don't think they are bad, it is just a security wall.

Words spoken by a 16-year-old about the CASA/GAL volunteer relationship with a child.

of the child protective services system and by all of the life changes that have occurred as a result of agency intervention. As a CASA/GAL volunteer, you are likely to be one more new person in a long line of new people in the child's life.

In order to be an effective advocate, you must perform a thorough independent investigation of a child's situation and best interests (not the allegations that brought the child into care). In the course of that investigation, you will meet and talk with the child, the child's family, the child's extended family and neighbors, and the professionals who are working with the child and his/her family.

Developing rapport and trust with the child is one of your most important responsibilities. It is the foundation of your relationship with the child. Respecting privacy is critical to establishing a trusting relationship. You can assess what the child needs and what the child wants only if you have established a relationship that allows the child to honestly share his/her feelings.

Activity 7F: José L.'s Story

Watch José L.'s story from "Powerful Voices: Stories by Foster Youth." In the large group, respond to the following questions:

- How did José's CASA/GAL volunteer break his trust?
- What could she have done differently?

Dealing with Conflict

As a CASA/GAL volunteer, you will be gathering information from various sources in order to form your recommendations on behalf of the child you represent. It is inevitable that these various sources will hold different points of view and, in some cases, will come in conflict with you or with each other. Many of us are wary of conflict. It may stir up uncomfortable feelings and negative associations. Our past experience with conflict may lead us to believe that it is destructive. We may try to avoid it, or we may feel inadequate to the task of addressing and resolving it.

But conflict is a natural part of life, and it can be a positive and constructive force. It can clear the air, help us articulate our point of view, and help to define a problem in a way that ignoring it never can. What follows is some information about how to manage conflict that may help remove some of its negative associations and help us see its positive aspects.

Whether we are aware of it or not, we all have a preferred style of handling conflict. We most likely learned it within our family of origin, and we keep at it because it feels part of who we are, how we do things. It's a familiar response that we do not often examine. But, as you will see, each of the conflict styles described below is available to all of us. Think of them as tools in a toolbox. Just as different jobs call for different tools, so different situations call for different conflict management styles.

Activity 7G: Conflict Management Styles

Part 1: Listen as the facilitator gives an overview of the five conflict management styles. As you listen, think about which style you use the most, which you use the least, which you like the most, and which you are least comfortable using.

“Conflict” can be defined as the perception that desired outcomes are mutually exclusive.

Conflict Management Styles

The following framework, developed by Kenneth Thomas and Ralph Kilmann to describe conflict management styles, is used extensively in business and educational programs. A person's style in dealing with a particular conflict depends on the importance of the task or topic at hand and the importance of the relationship between the two parties in conflict.

DIRECTING—“WHAT I SAY GOES” OR “THIS IS NOT NEGOTIABLE”

You are confident that you know the best way, so you don't bargain or give in. You may feel that you need to stand up for what you believe is right. You may also feel you need to pursue your concerns rather than the other person's concerns.

Potential Uses:

- When immediate action is needed
- When safety is a concern
- When you believe you are right

Potential Limitations:

- Intimidates people and can force them to react against your position
- Does not allow others to participate in the decision-making process

AVOIDING—“DON’T MAKE WAVES” OR “THIS ISN’T WORTH THE BOTHER”

You don’t address conflict because you are attempting to be diplomatic or because you want to address it at another time.

Potential Uses:

- When confrontation is too damaging
- When a cooldown period might be helpful
- When you want to buy time to prepare
- When you believe the situation will resolve itself in time

Potential Limitations:

- Important issues might not get addressed
- The conflict might escalate or return later

ACCOMMODATING—“IT DOESN’T MATTER TO ME”

You yield to the other person’s point of view for the sake of a positive relationship. You may give in for now but expect to get your way another time when the matter is more important to you.

Potential Uses:

- When the relationship is more important than the issue
- When you want to keep the peace and maintain harmony
- When the outcome is more important to the other person than it is to you

Potential Limitations:

- If used too often, your needs don’t get met

COMPROMISING—“LET’S SPLIT THE DIFFERENCE” OR “HALF A LOAF IS BETTER THAN NONE”

You seek a middle ground that everyone can agree on. Each party must give up something to reach an agreement that each can live with. Compromising is often quick and easy, and most people know how to do it.

Potential Uses:

- When parties of equal strength have mutually exclusive goals
- When all else fails

Potential Limitations:

- May avoid discussion of real issues
- Everyone may walk away dissatisfied

COLLABORATING—“TWO HEADS ARE BETTER THAN ONE” OR “LET’S WORK IT OUT”

You work with the other parties to explore your disagreement, examine alternative solutions, and attempt to find a mutually satisfying solution (“win-win”) rather than telling them what you think is best or right.

Potential Uses:

- When everyone’s needs are worth meeting
- When you want to improve relations between parties
- When parties are willing to learn from each other’s point of view

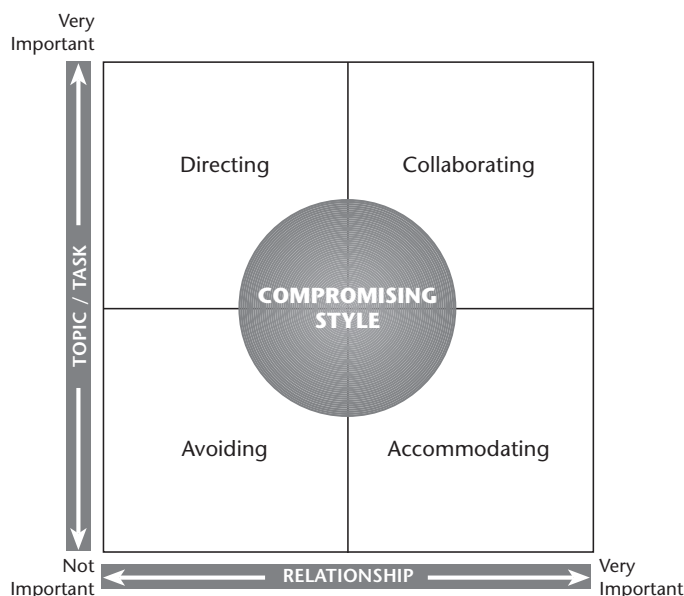
Potential Limitations:

- This method takes time
- It will not work unless everyone is willing to participate
- It requires trust

Adapted from the Thomas-Kilmann Mode Instrument.

One way to determine which style is the most effective in any given situation is to weigh the importance of the relationship against the task or topic at hand (see chart that follows). For example, the accommodating style is most effective when the relationship is more important than the task (e.g., one person lets another choose the movie they’ll see because it’s the company that’s important, not the movie). Conversely, the directing style is most effective when the task is important and the relationship is not (e.g., a police officer evacuating a burning building won’t be concerned if you like him, just that you escape safely).

Many of us fall back on the same conflict management style out of habit, but the relative weight of task and relationship will vary from situation to situation. It’s important to consider each instance and use the most appropriate style. Each style will be useful to you at different times in your work as a CASA/GAL volunteer.



Activity 7G: Conflict Management Styles

Part 2: In small groups, read the scenarios below and identify which conflict management style is used by the various people in each scenario. Would a different style have produced a better result in any of the scenarios?

“A BARKING DOG DOES NOT BITE”

Mr. Smith has a Chihuahua, Tiny, in his home that is his only company. There have been several complaints to the police about the barking. Mr. Smith does not understand why his neighbors complain so much because he says Tiny only barks when someone he doesn't know comes onto the property. Mr. Smith wants his neighbors to leave him alone. He says his neighbors are too picky and not very friendly. The dog is Mr. Smith's best friend since his wife died two years ago. He misses her terribly and feels very alone.

Mrs. Ross lives next door to Mr. Smith. Her bedroom faces Mr. Smith's yard, where he keeps his dog. She has had it with hearing the dog all day because she works at night and has to get her rest in the daytime. She has gone to Mr. Smith and told him exactly what he needs to do. She wants Mr. Smith to get rid of the dog. She has gone to the police, but they don't do anything. She is thinking of going to the town council and forcing Mr. Smith to put the dog to sleep.

Mr. Melrose lives on the other side of Mr. Smith. He doesn't think Mr. Smith should have to get rid of his dog, but doesn't want Tiny to bark so much—it is getting more and more annoying. If Mr. Smith would just train Tiny, the situation would be much better. He has gotten calls from Mrs. Ross urging him to support her point of view, but he hasn't said anything to Mr. Smith because he doesn't want to hurt his feelings.

“THE LONELY ORANGE”

Luisa is doing her weekly shopping at the supermarket, tired from a double shift at work. As she is checking her list, she sees that she still needs an orange for a recipe she wants to make. When she gets to the produce section, she sees that there is only one left and as she reaches for it . . . another hand moves to grab it! It is Sam, who has come into the store for just a few items and is in a hurry to get back home. Luisa and Sam each feel they got to the orange first and that their reason for wanting it is the most important.

Luisa is making a special cake with orange frosting for her daughter Elena's seventh birthday. She had promised it to her and really wants to follow through because she has been working so many hours lately and hasn't been able to spend much time with her. She really needs the zest for her special recipe.

Sam is in a hurry to get back home to his dad, who is staying with him as he recuperates from an operation. Sam has been trying, without much success, to get his dad to drink plenty of liquids and just tonight his dad asked for “a little glass of fresh-squeezed orange juice.”

As Luisa and Sam explain to each other why it's so important that they each respectively get the orange, they realize they need different parts of the orange. After splitting the cost, Luisa takes a chunk of the rind, and Sam takes the rest of the orange.

“JLO VS. GODZILLA”

Tyrone and Sonia are making plans for the weekend. They can only go out one night because of school and family obligations. Tyrone wants to go to the arcade because he heard that they just got in the latest action game and his friends will be there. Sonia hates arcade games and thinks the newest ones are too violent. Besides, Tyrone gets going with his friends and she feels left out. She wants to see the latest Jennifer Lopez movie because it's supposed to be very romantic. Tyrone isn't into that mushy stuff, but agrees to go because he wants to spend time with Sonia and she really wants to see it.

“JUST A LITTLE BIT LONGER . . . ”

Nick asks his mom for a later curfew. Currently, he can stay out till 11 p.m. on Friday and Saturday nights, but has to be in the house by 9 p.m. on school nights. Because his friends live in other communities, he often has to leave by 10 on a weekend night in order to make sure he is home by 11. This means he misses out on the end of the game they are watching or has to leave a party way too early. Besides, his friends are starting to tease him about being on a “short leash.” He wants to stay out till 1 a.m. Nick doesn't care about the weekday curfew because he has a lot of homework and school activities always end early.

Nick's mom is concerned that he will want to be out late every night, not just weekends, and she wants to make sure he does his homework and gets enough sleep. Besides, she doesn't want him out on the road at “all hours.” She thinks 1 a.m. is too late and the thought of waiting for him to come home so late (she can't sleep when he is out) makes her feel exhausted.

Nick and his mom talk it over and settle on a midnight curfew for weekends, keeping the same curfew for weeknights. They agree to revisit this decision next year.

Activity 7H: Successful Collaboration

Listen as the facilitator provides a general overview of what it means to use a collaborative approach. Take turns reading aloud the list of keys to successful collaboration.

Using a Collaborative Approach

As a CASA/GAL volunteer, you will interact and communicate with many people who hold many different opinions and beliefs about children and families. Often, addressing a difference of opinion or challenging a firmly held belief will be an integral part of your advocacy. The CASA/GAL program encourages volunteers to use a

The word

“collaboration”

comes from the roots “co”

*(meaning **together**) and*

“labor”

*(meaning **work**).*

UNIT
1

UNIT
2

UNIT
3

UNIT
4

collaborative approach in working with families and with other agencies and organizations in the community. As you work together on a common plan to ensure that the child is in a safe, permanent home, you will see that the collaborative approach brings more creative energy and resources to a situation or problem.

At its best, collaboration means different people or groups working together toward a goal they all agree on, with everyone doing what they do best, within the guidelines set by agency policy. As people from various agencies work together with families, they get to know each other and understand each other's services and approaches. It is important that you only accept activities that fall within the duties of the CASA/GAL volunteer and that you advocate for others to complete activities that fall within their mandated roles (e.g., CASA/GAL volunteers generally do not provide transportation, supervise visits, or do home studies).

When agencies collaborate successfully, the child and all of the participants in the collaboration win. Using this positive approach greatly increases the chance that the child will find permanence without unnecessary delays.

KEYS TO SUCCESSFUL COLLABORATION

- **Develop a Partnership**
The people or agencies in a collaboration need to develop mutually respectful relationships that allow for the development of trust.
- **Assess Reasons for Collaborating**
Collaborators need to clarify their reasons for working together and identify contributions each can offer to the plan. This is an ongoing process.
- **Set Goals and Make a Written Plan**
Parties should write down the goals and the steps needed to reach these goals, indicating who will be responsible for each activity.
- **Learn and Practice Skills**
Group members may need to learn some new skills in order to reach the goals of the group. Collaborators can teach each other and invite additional assistance as needed.
- **Celebrate Accomplishments**
All parties should take the time to celebrate their joint accomplishments with the families, workers, and others who have supported the collaboration.



LEARN MORE!

For more information on collaboration and negotiation, see the Chapter 7 Resource Materials.

“PEOPLE-FIRST” LANGUAGE

As a CASA/GAL volunteer, you will collaborate often with the parents or relatives of a child, as well as with professionals from the agencies that serve children and their families. Collaboration means starting where the other person is instead of where you would like them to be. It is about listening, often listening more than you speak—and when you do speak, paying attention to the words you use. It is important to use “people-first” language. “People-first” language recognizes that people should not be reduced to their conditions. People have disabilities or illnesses—they are not the illness (e.g., “a person who has an addiction to drugs” versus “the drug addict”). Using adjectives that describe a person’s condition as nouns often results in a derogatory label beginning with the word “the” (e.g., people who do not earn enough money to meet their needs become “the poor” or “the disadvantaged”). With this in mind, you are encouraged to ask about concerns, look for strengths, question labels, and work with people as collaborators.

Activity 7I: Conflict in CASA/GAL Volunteer Work

Read the following two case scenarios, and in groups of three, pick one of these scenarios to role-play. One of you will play the CASA/GAL volunteer, one the professional (caseworker or psychologist), and one the observer. These conflict scenarios are based on real situations.

The CASA/GAL volunteer and the professional are to resolve their conflict situation. The observer is to ask the players the following questions:

- What happened in the role-play that helped to resolve the conflict?
- What happened in the role-play that created barriers to resolving the conflict?
- What would you like to do differently next time?
- What style of conflict management did you use?

Share your observations in the large group.

CONFLICT MANAGEMENT SCENARIO 1

CASA/GAL Volunteer

You are a new CASA/GAL volunteer on a case involving twin 3-year-olds. You are having a disagreement with a caseworker regarding the need for developmental evaluations. The state has legal custody of the children. The maternal grandmother, who has physical custody of the girls, has reported to you that the girls have hardly any verbal skills. You have met the girls and they seem to know only a few words. You believe that a professional in child development should decide if the children need evaluations.

The grandmother has no transportation and is caring for two other school-age children. She appears to you to be overwhelmed and genuine in asking for help. She is willing to attend the evaluations but needs help setting them up and getting there. You feel it is a CPS responsibility to set up the evaluations and transport the girls.

Caseworker

You have worked as a caseworker for the state for five years. You have some very difficult cases that are taking a great deal of your time and your caseload has been soaring. Your department has just been reorganized—again—and you have a new supervisor who is very concerned about budget and has been complaining about the high incidence of referrals for outside services (such as developmental evaluations). You don't believe that evaluations on these children are really necessary; you have had some experience with twins whose language development was delayed because they had developed their own ways of communicating with each other and believe that is the situation here. You have also had some contact with the grandmother and are not convinced that she will follow through with plans.

Adapted from material from the North Carolina Guardian ad Litem volunteer training curriculum.

CONFLICT MANAGEMENT SCENARIO 2

Psychologist

For the past six months, you have been providing therapy to a mother whose 7-year-old daughter is in foster care because the mother was so depressed she was unable to care for her properly. The mother has been making good progress in therapy and she reports that visits with her daughter have gone well. You feel that she is ready for longer visits and that weekend overnight visitations with her daughter would enhance the connection between them and prepare for the child's return to the home.

CASA/GAL Volunteer

The foster parent has reported to you that since the child returned from the visit with her mother at which the weekend overnight was announced, the child has developed night terrors, has begun to wet her bed again, and has begged the foster mother not to make her go. While you support visitation, you believe that an overnight visit is too abrupt a change for the child.

Understanding Confidentiality

Activity 7J: Confidentiality & the CASA/GAL Volunteer

Read the materials on the following pages about what confidentiality means for the CASA/GAL volunteer. It is important that you are very clear about what information is, and what is not, confidential—and with whom you can share what pieces of information. As you read, note in the margin any questions you have. We will address all questions in the large group.

Confidentiality & the CASA/GAL Volunteer

When you perform the duties assigned to a CASA/GAL volunteer, you will be responsible for understanding just what is meant by confidentiality. As a CASA/GAL volunteer, you have access to confidential information about children and the people involved in those children's lives. The CASA/GAL volunteer may not release this information except to the child, CASA/GAL program staff, the attorney(s) on the case, the caseworker, the court, and others as instructed by law or local court rule. There are strict guidelines about who can have access to confidential information. By law, CASA/GAL volunteers must keep all information regarding the case confidential and make no disclosure, except by court order or unless provided by law. Mistakes in handling confidential information can be detrimental to the children involved and can bring criminal action against the people who misuse the information. *When in doubt, discuss any confidentiality concerns with your supervisor!*

WHAT INFORMATION SHOULD THE VOLUNTEER SHARE WITH THE CHILD?

It is expected that the volunteer develop a meaningful relationship with the child in order to make sound, thorough, and objective recommendations in the child's best interest. The volunteer also ensures that the child is appropriately informed about relevant case issues, considering both the child's age and developmental level. The child is informed in an age-appropriate manner of impending court hearings, the issues to be presented, the recommendations of the volunteer, and the resolution of those issues. If there is any question about what information should be shared with the child, ask your supervisor.

WHAT IS CONFIDENTIAL?

There are different definitions of "confidential" in the laws of different states—some quite clear and others vague. The facilitator will share with you the definitions and rules in your area. As a CASA/GAL volunteer, you must regard as confidential any information that the source deems confidential. If any source from which you obtain information requires you to show the court order of appointment or inquires about why you are entitled to get such information, you should respectfully produce your court order and photo identification. Your appointment order gives you the authority to obtain a great deal of information that is, in fact,

Confidentiality Flowchart

Should I share information with someone else about this child or this case?

UNIT
1

Is it in the child's best interest to share this information?

NO

UNIT
2

Resist sharing the information.
Is the person legally entitled to it?

NO

UNIT
3

YES

Do not share the information.
Contact CASA/GAL program staff.

UNIT
4

YES

Contact CASA/GAL program staff.

Is it my information to share?

NO

Direct the person asking to the original source.

YES

Is the person legally entitled to the information?

NO

Tell the person that he/she will need to obtain a court order.

YES

Share the information.

Chart contributed by Diane Robinson, former state director, Arkansas CASA.

confidential. Child Protective Services records are confidential and are not available for public inspection. *It is especially important that the name of any person who has made a report of suspected child abuse and/or neglect not be revealed.* School records are also confidential. There are legal privileges that protect attorney/client, doctor/patient, priest/parishioner, psychologist/patient, and caseworker/client communications. Such communication, whether verbal or written, is all confidential and must remain so unless a court order specifically states otherwise. You are not allowed to share information with anyone other than the child, CASA/GAL program staff and attorney(s), the caseworker, and the court unless a local or state order allows for a broader sharing of information.

You need not treat as legally confidential conversations with neighbors and friends who voluntarily give information. Also, if you speak with a teacher who is not providing confidential school records, but rather sharing impressions, these impressions would not be confidential unless the teacher requested that they be kept as such. This information, although not legally confidential, is still private and should not be shared except on a “need to know” basis, and then only with those people who need the information to better serve the child. An example would be sharing a previous teacher’s positive impressions of the child with a new teacher in order to increase the teacher’s sensitivity toward the child during a difficult time.

SHOULD YOU TELL A SOURCE THAT YOU INTEND TO SHARE THEIR INFORMATION?

There does not appear to be any legal requirement that you disclose to a source your intent to share information. It is important to be respectful of the source and to be honest about your intentions with regard to the use of the information. You can never promise that you will not share the information received.

SHARING INFORMATION WITH FOSTER PARENTS

As a CASA/GAL volunteer, you are not the foster parents’ source of information about the child’s case nor are you their advocate. Your job is to focus on the child’s needs. It is your obligation to keep your child informed about the case, but it is not your duty to keep the foster parents informed.

Foster parents may seek information from you about the children in their care, but foster parents’ contractual relationship is with the child protective services agency or a private licensing agency. In order to provide adequate care, foster parents do need to know relevant information regarding the child. In fact, federal law requires that the child protective services agency provide the foster parent with the child’s health and education records at the time of placement. The records should be updated periodically and each time the child is moved to another placement. These records must include, at a minimum, the following:

- Names and addresses of the child’s healthcare provider and school
- The child’s immunization record, known medical problems, and medications

- The child's school record with current grade level performance
- Other relevant health and education information (e.g., behavioral problems and/or disabilities)

There may be instances, however, where you have information that would help a foster parent care for a child. Suppose, for instance, that you know the child has a history of sexual victimization and that he/she has been moved from an earlier foster home after being found in bed with a younger child. The current foster parent does not have this information and there is another young child in the home. In such a case, it is clearly in the best interest of both the child and other children in the home that this information be shared. After discussing the issue with staff to determine the best approach, you should contact the caseworker and state a clear expectation that this critical background information be shared with the current foster care provider. As a CASA/GAL volunteer, you should *not* share this information yourself.

Activity 7K: Confidentiality Dilemmas

Questions of confidentiality in your role as a CASA/GAL volunteer are often not clear-cut or easily recognized. This activity uses six scenarios to illustrate situations that test the limits of confidentiality.

The facilitator will divide the class into six groups and assign each a scenario. Read the scenario and answer these questions:

- What confidentiality breach do you see?
- What problems could this cause for the child?
- What problems could this cause for the outcome of the case?
- What problems could this cause for the CASA/GAL volunteer or program?
- How might this situation create conflict? As the CASA/GAL volunteer, how could you resolve it?

In the large group, share a summary of the scenario you considered and your answers to the questions.

SCENARIO 1

CASA/GAL volunteer Susan Wong was visiting 6-year-old Haley at her foster home. The foster mother, Shera Franklin, told Susan that Haley was extremely agitated after her most recent visit with her dad. Shera wanted to know what had happened at the visitation. She also wanted to know the details of why Haley came into care and whether Susan was going to recommend that she be returned to her family. Susan answered all of Shera's questions.

SCENARIO 2

CASA/GAL volunteer Janie Bell was in the program office after a court hearing. She overheard another volunteer talking to program staff about a case in which a 4-year-old girl was going to be placed for adoption as soon as her parents' rights were terminated. Janie mentioned this adoption possibility to a friend who wanted very much to adopt a child. This friend then called CPS to inquire about adopting the 4-year-old girl.

UNIT
1**SCENARIO 3**

CASA/GAL volunteer Trent Watson was investigating the case of 14-year-old Jason Street, whose teacher, Mr. Davis, was demonstrating an active interest in his well-being. Mr. Davis asked Trent to keep him informed of things learned in the investigation that would be helpful for him as a mentor to Jason. Trent discovered that Jason's parents both had substance abuse problems and that Jason had recently revealed to his therapist that he had been sexually abused by a family friend who was attending a party at his parents' home. The parents had no knowledge of the sexual abuse. Trent shared all this information with Mr. Davis.

UNIT
2UNIT
3**SCENARIO 4**

Volunteer Shirley Colston was at her neighborhood swimming pool. A neighbor, Stephanie Moore, asked Shirley what she did as a CASA/GAL volunteer. Shirley thought Stephanie would be a great CASA/GAL volunteer and decided to give her an example of what activities she had done on a recent case. Shirley gave no case names and slightly changed the facts in the case to preserve confidentiality. However, as Stephanie heard the altered details of the case, she still recognized the similarities to an open CPS case involving her cousin.

UNIT
4**SCENARIO 5**

CASA/GAL volunteer Tonya Mills was at home working on her court report. She had all of her case notes on her kitchen table when her friend Caitlyn stopped by for coffee. While Tonya was preparing the coffee, Caitlyn read the top page of Tonya's case notes and learned the name of the family and several facts about the case. Later that day, Caitlyn was talking to her friend Amy and mentioned the case to her. Amy is the juvenile court clerk in the county where the case is open.

SCENARIO 6

Eleven-year-old Johnny Barker came to the attention of the court for neglect when he ran away from home because he wanted to quit school. Johnny told his CASA/GAL volunteer, Jack, that he needed to tell him something but that Jack must promise not to tell. Jack made that promise. Johnny divulged that he and his mom had frequently been victims of his father's violent abuse. Jack later realized that he needed to share the information with the court so that Johnny would not be returned home to a dangerous situation.

The scenarios were contributed by Alma Brown, North Carolina GAL western regional administrator. Names do not represent real people.



Homework

THE KAYLEE MOORE CASE

Read the introduction to the Kaylee Moore case, which appears at the beginning of Chapter 8 in your Volunteer Manual. This case is designed to unfold throughout Chapters 8 and 9, as you learn to perform various aspects of your role as a CASA/GAL volunteer.

COMMUNITY RESOURCES

Reminder: Earlier in training, you selected an agency to research. A worksheet was provided as a tool to assist you in gathering information on services provided, access to services, etc. You will share the materials and information you've gathered during the Chapter 9 training session, when community resources will be introduced.

If you are having any trouble collecting information, be sure to ask for help from the staff of your local program.