



CASA

Court Appointed Special Advocates
FOR CHILDREN

**THE NATIONAL COURT APPOINTED
SPECIAL ADVOCATE ASSOCIATION**

CASA/GAL Pre-Service Volunteer Training Curriculum

Volunteer Manual

CHAPTER TWO



HEARST *foundations*



This project was supported by
Award No. 2015-CH-BX-K001
awarded by the Office of Juvenile
Justice and Delinquency
Prevention, Department of Justice.

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Version 2, November 2017

CHAPTER 2:

The Well-Being of the Child

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Pre-Work Recap

**Chapter 2:
Pre-Work**



Read through the pre-work packet, which gives you a foundation in:

- ✓ Children's growth and development
- ✓ Children's needs
- ✓ The importance of attachment in childhood
- ✓ Recognizing child abuse and neglect
- ✓ Your state's abuse definition and mandatory reporting laws
- ✓ Risk factors for child abuse and neglect
- ✓ Our program's court report template
- ✓ Sample court report for Bleux case

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Prior to this training session, you should have completed the reading assignments in the Chapter 2 Pre-Work packet that gave you a foundation in children's growth and development, children's needs, the importance of attachment in childhood, recognizing child abuse and neglect, your state's definition of abuse and mandatory reporting laws, risk factors for child abuse and neglect and your program's court report.

Chapter Overview and Competencies

This chapter gives an overview of the needs and development of children and describes what constitutes child abuse and neglect, including indicators and risk factors.

Competency Building in Chapter 2	
Competency Category	Knowledge, Skills & Attributes Development in Chapter 2
Foundations of Knowledge	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Understands age-appropriate behavior and the development of childrenUnderstands a child's basic needsUnderstands why the MSL standard is in the best interest of childrenUnderstands the cycle of attachmentUnderstands what constitutes abuse and neglectUnderstands risk factors for child abuse and neglectUnderstands the benefits and steps to using a strength-based approach
Sound Judgment	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Knows how to evaluate what is in the child's best interest
Communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Understands the elements of a court report

Ages and Stages: Activity 2A



In your work as a CASA/GAL volunteer, it is important to be able to assess age-appropriate behavior for children from birth through adolescence. The facilitator will divide you into pairs and give each pair an envelope that contains cards with behaviors written on them. Several different age groups' behaviors are represented in each envelope. Determine the appropriate age category for each of your cards and place the card under the corresponding sign for that age group. After all pairs have finished placing their cards under the corresponding age group signs, the facilitator will distribute a chart listing developmental milestones for each age category. In the large group, go around to each age category and discuss what you learned and any questions you have.

Children's Needs: Activity 2B



In order to grow and develop optimally, children must have their needs met appropriately. In speaking for children in the foster care system, it is imperative that you recognize the full range of children's needs.

Part 1: The facilitator will divide the class into four groups and give each group a handout representing a category of children's needs: physical, emotional, developmental or cultural. Working in your group, think back to the Bleux case and to the child development information from the previous activity, and write a list of Deshawn Bleux's needs for your assigned category on your handout. Once you have completed your list, attach your list to the flipchart at the front of the room.

Part 2: Recall the Pre-Work reading assignment on children's needs. In the large group, consider Deshawn Bleux's needs listed on the flipchart. Discuss the following questions:

- What other needs would you add to this list in light of the information you read in your Pre-Work?
- Which of the needs listed would you identify as child protection issues?
- How might the needs of two 5-year-old children be both the same and different?

Attachment: Activity 2C

Listen as the facilitator briefly recalls information from your Pre-Work about the importance of attachment in child development and the risks for children who lag developmentally or lose the ability to attach to a parent or caregiver. When the facilitator gives examples of specific children who never had a healthy attachment to their caregiver or have had that attachment broken, discuss where in the cycle the attachment was broken. In the large group, share any questions you have.

Minimum Sufficient Level (MSL) of Care: Activity 2D

Part 1: Read the summary on pages 7 through 9 describing minimum sufficient level of care, the bottom-line standard for a child to remain in his/her home. In your small groups, answer the following questions.

- What do children really need? College? Clothes? A bath every day?
- How might a child's needs vary depending on his/her circumstances?
- What issues should be considered in determining if a parent can provide a minimum sufficient level of care?
- How do you think the MSL standard benefits children?

In the large group, share some of your responses.

Part 2: Listen as the facilitator discusses the ethical responsibility to ensure children's most basic needs are being met, while allowing space for cultural and individual differences if those needs are being met.

Listen as the facilitator reads the following statement:

Some people believe that the best place for children to grow up is in their own homes, with their own families—even if a foster family can provide material things that the children will never have if they are returned home.

Share your thoughts about this statement.

What Is “Minimum Sufficient Level of Care” (MSL)?



Removing a child from his or her home because of abuse and/or neglect is a drastic remedy. Because removal is so traumatic for the child, both the law and good practice require that agencies keep the child in the home when it is possible to do so and still keep the child safe. Children should be removed only when parents cannot provide the minimum sufficient level of care. This standard describes what must be in place for the child to remain in the home. The same standard is also used to determine whether or not parents have made sufficient progress so that a child can be safely returned to the family home. The minimum sufficient level of care is determined by a number of factors, each of which must be looked at specifically in relation to the case at hand.

Factors to consider include:

The Child's Needs

Is the parent providing for the following needs at a basic level?

- Physical (food, clothing, shelter, medical care, safety, protection)
- Emotional (attachment between parent and child)
- Developmental (education, special help for children with disabilities)

Social Standards

Is the parent's behavior, within or outside, considered as commonly accepted child-rearing practices in our society?

Here are some examples: In terms of discipline, whipping a child with a belt was generally thought to be appropriate during the first half of the twentieth century, but is now widely considered abusive. Contemporary families frequently use a short “time out” as a punishment for young children. In terms of school attendance, it is a widely held expectation that parents send all children to school (or homeschool them) until they reach the age limit at which attendance is no longer compulsory. Social standards also apply in medical care, where immunizations and regular medical/dental care are the standard.

What Is “Minimum Sufficient Level of Care” (MSL), Cont’d.

Community Standards

Does the parent’s behavior fall within reasonable limits, given the specific community in which the family resides?

Here are some examples: The age at which a child can be safely left alone varies significantly from urban to suburban to rural communities. The age at which a child is deemed old enough to care for other children is largely determined by cultural and community norms. Even something as simple as sending a 9-year-old child to the store might fall within or outside those standards, depending on neighborhood safety, the distance and traffic patterns, the weather, the child’s clothing, the time of day or night, the ability of the child and the necessity of the purchase.

Communities can be geographical or cultural. An example of a non-geographical, cultural community is a Native American tribe in which members live in a variety of locales, but still share a common child-rearing standard. According to the Indian Child Welfare Act, the minimum sufficient level of care standard must reflect the community standards of the child’s tribe.

WHY THE MSL STANDARD IS USED

- It maintains the child’s right to safety and permanence while not ignoring the parents’ right to raise their children.
- It is required by law (as a practical way to interpret the “reasonable efforts” provision of the Adoption Assistance and Child Welfare Act).
- It is possible for parents to reach.
- It provides a reference point for decision makers.
- It protects (to some degree) from individual biases and value judgments.
- It discourages unnecessary removal from the family home.
- It discourages unnecessarily long placements in foster care.
- It keeps decision makers focused on what is the least detrimental alternative for the child.
- It is sensitive across cultures.

What Is “Minimum Sufficient Level of Care” (MSL), Cont’d.

KEY PARAMETERS OF THE MSL STANDARD

- The standard takes into consideration the particular circumstances and needs of each child.
- It is a set of minimum conditions, not an ideal situation.
- It is a relative standard, depending on the child’s needs, social standards and community standards. It will not be the same for every family or every child in a particular family.
- It remains the same when considering removal and when considering reunification.

Cultural Considerations

An understanding of a child’s cultural practices is important when considering the MSL standard. For children who are Alaska Native or American Indian, sources for information about cultural practices may include the parents, the tribal child welfare worker, relatives of the child or other tribal members. For other ideas for making sure MSL is applied consistently, you may consider:

- Discussing the MSL standard with your case coordinator or supervisor
- Learning about the various cultural groups in your community (more on this in Chapter 6)
- Systematically comparing the standard for removal and the standard for reunifying a child in the home of origin

Child Abuse and Neglect

The “Best Interest” Principle: Activity 2E



In addition to MSL standards, the “best interest” principle guides your work as a CASA/GAL volunteer. Listen as the facilitator introduces this principle and your role in advocating for a child’s best interest.

The “Best Interest” Principle—What It Means



- A safe home
- A permanent home
- As quickly as possible

Parents typically decide what is best for their children and then provide it for them to the extent that they can. They are their children’s best advocates. The child protection system intervenes in families’ lives when parents cannot or will not protect, promote and provide for their children’s basic needs. A CASA/GAL volunteer becomes the advocate when the parents cannot—or will not—fulfill this role.

Judges use the “best interest of the child” standard when making their decisions in child abuse and neglect cases. Child welfare and juvenile court practitioners and scholars have debated the meaning of “best interest of the child” for years. Books have been written on the subject; however, there is still no concise legal definition for this standard.

In cases where the Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) applies, the law presumes that it is always in the best interest of an Indian child to have the tribe determine what is best for the child’s future.

The Best Interest Principle: What the National CASA Association Says

The CASA/GAL volunteer is guided by the “best interest” principle when advocating for a child. This means that the volunteer knows the child well enough to identify the child’s needs. The volunteer makes fact-based recommendations to the court about appropriate resources to meet those

The “Best Interest” Principle—What It Means, Cont’d.

needs and informs the court of the child’s wishes, whether or not those wishes are, in the opinion of the CASA/GAL volunteer, in the child’s best interest.

What a CASA/GAL Volunteer Can Do

Throughout a case, ask yourself the following questions to help determine what’s in a child’s best interest:

- Is the child safe?
- Is the child’s unique culture being respected?
- What are the special needs of this child?
- Is the child’s sense of time being honored?
- Is the child receiving the emotional nurturance necessary for healthy brain development?
- Can this child speak for himself/herself?
- Should the child be present in court?

Child Abuse and Neglect: Activity 2F

Recognizing Child Abuse and Neglect

Share any questions you have on recognizing child abuse and neglect or your state's definition of abuse or mandatory reporting laws you read about in your Pre-Work.

Risk Factors for Child Abuse and Neglect: Activity 2G

Part 1: Listen as the facilitator summarizes key information from the risk factors for child abuse and neglect information you read as part of your Pre-Work. Then the facilitator will assign you to groups and assign a particular category of risk factor. Working in your small groups, list the factors in your category that were present in the Bleux case. Report your group's findings back to the large group.

Part 2: In the large group, discuss what types of services or interventions should be implemented to alleviate the issues in the Bleux family.

Family Strengths and Weaknesses: Activity 2H

Part 1: Take a few moments to think about your own family (either your family of origin or your current family). Try to focus on one event in particular that illustrates the strengths in your family, and then think of an event that exemplifies the weaknesses or deficits. Write down one strength and one weakness of your family. When you are finished writing, share your responses with a partner.

Family Strength: _____

Family Weakness: _____

Part 2: Listen as the facilitator presents information about the difference between using a resource lens and a deficit lens in your work as a CASA/GAL volunteer and the importance of understanding that strengths may look different in different cultures. In the large group, answer the following questions:

- What might be some benefits of using a strengths-based approach in your work as a CASA/GAL volunteer?
- What might be some of the drawbacks of using a strengths-based approach?

Part 3: Read through the entries on the Strengths in Families Worksheet, which follows the information about the different lenses you can use as a CASA/GAL volunteer. Watch as the facilitator plays a video about the Bleux case. As you watch, try to identify strengths of the Bleux family. Not all programs will provide an opportunity for you to visit with or talk to parents. Watch the video for tone, body language and other techniques that can be used in all interviews – with parents, foster parents, relatives, teachers and so on. The techniques depicted in the video are transferable to all interviews. In the large group, discuss the following questions:

- Based on both the video and the case notes, which of the strengths listed are present in the Bleux family?

Family Strengths and Weaknesses, Cont'd.

- If you don't know whether or not a particular strength exists in this family, how might you gather information to find out?
- How would looking only at strengths or only at deficits affect your recommendations for this family?

Resources vs. Deficits	
If I look through a RESOURCES lens, I am likely to...	If I look through a DEFICITS lens, I am likely to...
Look for positive aspects	Look for negative aspects
Empower families	Take control or rescue
Create options	Give ultimatums or advice
Listen	Tell
Focus on strengths	Focus on problems
Put the responsibility on the family	See the family as incapable
Acknowledge progress	Wait for the finished product
See the family as experts	See service providers as experts
See the family invested in change	Impose change or limits
Help identify resources	Expect inaction or failure
Avoid labeling	Label
Inspire with hope	Deflate the family's hope

*Adapted from materials developed by CASA for Children, Inc.,
Portland, Oregon.*

Seeing the Strengths and Resources in Families



Your ability to identify strengths in families depends partially on which lens—the resource lens or the deficit lens—you use in your work with families. The lens you choose will also influence your work with others involved in the case. Using a strengths-based approach means acknowledging the resources that exist within a family (including extended family) and tapping into them. For instance, you may identify a relative who can provide a temporary or permanent home for a child, you may help a parent reconnect with a past support system or you may identify healthy adults who in the past were important to a child or family. Using a resource lens creates more options for resolution, and it empowers and supports children and families.

Following are a few questions you can ask when using the resource lens to assess a family:

- How has this family solved problems in the past?
- What court-ordered activities have family members completed?
- Does the family have extended family or non-relative kin who could be a resource?
- How are family members coping with their present circumstances?

Cultural Considerations

Strengths don't look the same in every family. Family structures, rules, roles, customs, boundaries, communication styles, problem-solving approaches, parenting techniques and values may be based on cultural norms and/or accepted community standards.

For instance, in a deficit model, a family with a female head of household may be viewed as dysfunctional or even immoral. But using a resources lens, the female-head-of-household structure is appreciated for the strength and survival skills of the mother, and there is a deeper examination of historical and institutional factors that have contributed to the existence of matriarchal families.

In another example, many Western cultures believe that children should have a bed to themselves, if not an entire room. In contrast, many other cultures believe that such a practice is detrimental to a child's development and

Seeing the Strengths and Resources in Families, Cont'd.

potentially dangerous. Additionally, in the United States the ideal of the nuclear family dominates. However, in many communities, extended family have a greater role in childrearing and family may include members of a faith community or others who are not blood relatives.

People in different cultures and socioeconomic classes may use different skills and resources to deal with stress and problems. Material goods are one kind of resource, but some individuals and cultures prize other resources above material wealth. For example:

- Mental ability allows for the access and use of information.
- Emotional resources provide support and strength in difficult times.
- Spiritual resources give purpose and meaning to people's lives.
- Good health and physical mobility allow for self-sufficiency.
- Cultural heritage provides context, values and morals for living in the world.
- Informal support systems provide a safety net (e.g., money in tight times, care for a sick child, job advice).
- Healthy relationships nurture and support.
- Role models provide appropriate examples of and practical advice on achieving success.

Strengths in Families Worksheet

Parent-Child Relationship

These items focus on the parent's relationship with the child. To accurately assess the parent-child bond, it is important to know the attachment behaviors of the parent's culture. How does this culture display empathy? What are appropriate verbal and nonverbal cues? For example, language is highly valued in some groups, and not in others. Eye contact between parent and child is expected by some but considered disrespectful by others.

Yes	No	Unknown		
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	1	The parent shows empathy for the child.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	2	The parent responds appropriately to the child's verbal and nonverbal signals.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	3	The parent is able to put the child's needs ahead of his/her own.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	4	When they are together, the child shows comfort in the parent.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	5	The parent has raised the child for a significant period of time.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	6	In the past, the parent has met the child's basic physical and emotional needs.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	7	The parent accepts some responsibility for the problems that brought the child into care or to the attention of the authorities.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	8	The parent uses positive, nonviolent discipline.

Strengths in Families Worksheet

Parental Support System

These items reflect the quality of the parent's relationships with his/her current support system. The ways in which support systems function vary depending on culture. Because of the value European American culture places on self-sufficiency and independence, parents are expected to make their own decisions, live independently and use the family for emotional support. Other cultures, most notably Native American cultures, expect the total group, biologically related or not, to function collectively to resolve problems. Resolution of problems may lie in the hands of the elders in other ethnic groups.

Yes	No	Unknown		
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	9	The parent has positive, significant relationships with other healthy adults (e.g., spouse, parents, friends, relatives).
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	10	The parent has a meaningful support system that can help him/her (e.g., church, job, counselor).
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	11	Extended family is nearby and capable of providing support.

Strengths in Families Worksheet

Past Support System

The next five items look at extended family and friendships that have been helpful in the past and can be tapped again. If the family system has demonstrated healthy coping abilities in the past, consistent with their cultural norms, this may be a resource for the family in the present as well.

Yes	No	Unknown		
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	12	Extended family history shows family members able to help appropriately when one member is not functioning well.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	13	Relatives came forward to offer help when the child needed placement.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	14	Relatives have followed through on commitments in the past.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	15	Significant other adults (who are not blood relatives) have followed through on commitments in the past.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	16	Significant other adults (who are not blood relatives) have followed through on commitments in the past.

Family History

These items look at the parent's history and cultural heritage. To answer the first item in this section, it is important to know to what extent the family has identified with and participated in its ethnic community.

Yes	No	Unknown		
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	17	The family's ethnic, cultural or religious heritage includes an emphasis on mutual caretaking and shared parenting in times of crisis.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	18	The parent's childhood history shows consistency of parental caregiver.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	19	The parent's history shows evidence of his/her childhood needs being met adequately.

Strengths in Families Worksheet

Parent's Self-Care

The items in this category highlight the parent's ability to function in an adult mode, according to the expectations of his/her culture. Values regarding health, hygiene, housing, education and employment differ from culture to culture, so knowledge about the parent's culture is vital to identifying strengths.

Yes	No	Unknown		
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	20	The parent's general health is good.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	21	The parent uses medical care for self appropriately.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	22	The parent's hygiene and grooming are consistently adequate.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	23	The parent has a history of stability in housing.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	24	The parent has a solid employment history.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	25	The parent has graduated from high school or possesses a GED.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	26	The parent has skills that contribute to employability.

Strengths in Families Worksheet

Child's Development

Finally, these last five items focus on the functioning of the child. Again, appropriate behavior and social skills vary between cultures, so cultural knowledge is necessary.

Yes	No	Unknown		
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	27	The child shows age-appropriate cognitive abilities.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	28	The child demonstrates an age-appropriate attention span.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	29	The child shows evidence of conscience development.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	30	The child has appropriate social skills.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	31	Major behavioral problems are absent.

Adapted from Concurrent Planning: From Permanency Planning to Permanency Action,

*Linda Katz, Norma Spoonemore, and Chris Robinson,
Seattle: Lutheran Social Services of Washington and Idaho, 1999*

Working a Case

Asking the Right Questions and Planning Your Next Steps: Activity 2I



Part 1: Listen as the facilitator gives a brief recap of the Bleux case, which you read prior to training in your Chapter 1 Pre-Work. Then review the list of questions about the Bleux family that you developed while completing that Pre-Work. In small groups, read the Case Assessment Questions handout and identify additional questions you want answered, as well as possible sources for the information. Then, in the large group, come up with a list of your top-priority questions for the Bleux case.

Part 2: In the large group, plot out your next steps for working on the Bleux case.

Key Elements of the CASA/GAL Volunteer Court Report: Activity 2J

Part 1: The facilitator will provide a copy of your local court report template. You should have reviewed this template already in your Pre-Work. Follow along as the facilitator gives a brief overview of each section of the report and its purpose. The facilitator will also explain how to submit your report to the CASA/GAL program office, including deadlines for submission.

Part 2: Listen as the facilitator highlights tips for writing effective court reports (pages 26 through 29). Then, on your own, review the sample court report for the Bleux case, which you read in your Pre-Work. Answer the following questions:

- Was the report organized, grammatically correct, factual, objective, concise and conclusive of what's in the child's best interest?
- Are there questions that were unanswered?
- Are the recommendations supported by facts/concerns that are highlighted in the report?
- Do the recommendations follow logically from other information stated in the report?
- Are there other pieces of information that should have been included?
- If you were the CASA/GAL volunteer on this case, are there other people that you would have liked to interview or documents that you would have liked to review to support your recommendations?
- Based on the report do you feel that the judge would be able to make a decision in the best interest of the child?

In the large group, share your thoughts about the report.

Key Elements of a CASA/GAL Volunteer Court Report



Identifying Information

Include the child's name, ethnicity, tribal enrollment status (if family is of Native American ancestry), the case number, the petition date and the hearing type.

CASA/GAL Volunteer Activity

Describe visits with the child (how many, dates and places), contacts with others involved in the case (dates and type) and reports or records requested or reviewed.

Brief Family Background/Reason for Removal

Briefly recount the incidents leading up to the removal, including reasons the child came into care and history of referrals or arrests related to child's removal.

Placement Information

Briefly describe how many and what types of placements have occurred since the child was taken into custody, including dates and lengths of stay.

Case Plan

Describe basic elements of the case plan.

Case Status

Describe parental progress (or lack thereof) toward the case plan and agency compliance with the goals of the case plan, including whether reasonable efforts have been made.

Status of the Child

Describe how the child is doing in school, the physical and social development of the child, the health of the child, whether the child is in therapy (and if so, for what), independent-living services that are being provided to the child (if relevant), whether and how the child's cultural needs (if any) are being met and the child's expressed wishes.

Key Elements of a CASA/GAL Volunteer Court Report, Cont'd.

Family and Community Resources

Describe strengths, skills or previous successful coping instances of the biological family and any resources within the extended family to provide connection, respite or additional help. Identify community resources that might provide additional support or services.

Issues and Concerns

Consider addressing any of the following:

- The case and/or permanency plan, including obstacles to its implementation
- Current or continuing problems in the case
- Participation in and progress of provided services; services still needed
- Ability of current placement to meet child's needs
- Visitation or lack of visitation

Best Interest Recommendations

Provide a short list of recommendations to meet the child's needs that are specific and are based on information previously documented. Recommendations should include, but not be limited to, placement, services and permanence.

Tips on Writing Effective Court Reports

In writing a report, the following steps are imperative:

- Use the court report format provided to you in training.
- Begin to work on the report at the beginning of your information gathering.
- Maintain detailed and chronological notes.
- Make the report child-centered.
- Be accurate. This means presenting exact information, free from unfamiliar acronyms, grammatical errors and misstatements.
- Check your spelling—not only in the body of the report, but also the names and titles cited in the report.
- Use the active voice (“CASA/GAL volunteer visited the home...”).

Key Elements of a CASA/GAL Volunteer Court Report, Cont'd.

- Report objectively and factually; eliminate opinions or diagnoses.
- Use quotations if you have them, but make sure they are accurate in word and citation.
- Use the fewest number of words possible to describe an action or occurrence.
- Eliminate negative emotions/subjective phrases, check for personal bias and refrain from inserting personal judgments.
- Relay only the most relevant and pertinent information.
- Do not transcribe information from other reports directly into your report; paraphrase information using your own words.
- Report incidents in chronological order of occurrence. The report should be uniform, flow from section to section and be easy to understand.
- Do not assume the reader knows the information you know.
- Ensure the basis for recommendations are supported by detailing the observations and information that led to those conclusions.
- Make sure to address placement, permanency, visitation, education, physical and mental health, necessary services for the child or family and the child's wishes.
- Ensure that the report addresses the case plan and any information about court-ordered services, actions, etc.
- Consider the hearing type and what recommendations are appropriate/timely.
- Scrutinize your report as the parties' attorneys will; do not leave room for unanswered questions.
- Play devil's advocate: Question subjective opinions and push for compelling arguments.
- Submit your report according to the deadline. Keep in mind that the report has to be edited and filed in a timely manner for dissemination to all parties.
- After submission, talk with your volunteer supervisor to discuss ways to improve report writing and be open to constructive criticism.

Key Elements of a CASA/GAL Volunteer Court Report, Cont'd.

Ask yourself the following questions before submission:

- Was the report organized, grammatically correct, factual, objective, concise and conclusive of what's in the child's best interest?
- Are there questions that were unanswered?
- Are the recommendations supported by facts/concerns that are highlighted in the report?
- Do the recommendations flow logically from other information stated in the report?
- Are there other pieces of information that should have been included?
- If you were the CASA/GAL volunteer on this case, are there other people that you would have liked to interview or documents that you would have liked to review to support your recommendations?
- Based on the report, do you feel that the judge would be able to make a decision in the best interest of the child?

Using Child Photos in Court Reports

Many court and CASA/GAL programs believe that photos of the child should be present in the courtroom. The easiest way to make that happen is to include a photo of the child as a cover page in the CASA/GAL volunteer court report. Often, every party is present in the courtroom except the child. As the child's advocate, the CASA/GAL volunteer can help ensure that the child is the focus of every proceeding; a photo is an ever-present reminder of whose life is at the heart of the matter before the court. The facilitator will share whether it is part of your local program's practices to include a child's photograph in the court report.

Chapter Wrap-up

Review

Share any remaining questions you have about the material covered in this chapter.

Evaluation

Fill out the Chapter 2 Volunteer Training Evaluation and give it to the facilitator before you leave.

Chapter 3 Pre-Work

Prior to the Chapter 3 training session, complete the following assignments:

“Shane’s Story” Video

Watch the video “Shane’s Story” and prepare a list of traumatic experiences for a child.

Understanding Child Trauma

Read the information on Understanding Child Trauma in the Chapter 3 Pre-Work packet. (This information is for Activity 3B.)

Basics of Elements of Communication

Read the information on the Basic Elements of Communication – Communication and CASA/Gal Volunteer Work in the Chapter 3 Pre-Work packet. (This information is for Activity 3F.)

Open-Ended vs. Closed-Ended Questions

Read the information on open-ended and closed-ended questions in the Chapter 3 Pre-Work packet. (This information is for Activity 3G.)

CASA/GAL Interview

Read the information on CASA/GAL Interview in the Chapter 3 Pre-Work packet. (This information is for Activity 3H.)

Chapter 3 Pre-Work, Cont'd.

The Black-Smith Case

Read the Initial Case Notes for the Black-Smith Case, which the facilitator will distribute. You will be applying what you know about the Black-Smith case during various activities in the Chapter 3 training session.

“Interviewing a Child” Video

Watch Part 1 of the video showing a CASA/GAL volunteer interviewing a 4-year-old child, which appears in the Chapter 3 Online Resources. Using the Interviewing a Child Assignment Sheet, located in the Chapter 3 Pre-Work packet, prepare an interview for a child between the ages of 5 and 17 before the Chapter 3 session. To ensure questions are age-appropriate, review the child development information for the age of the child chosen.

“First Impressions” Video

Watch the video “First Impressions: Exposure to Violence and a Child’s Developing Brain,” which appears in the Chapter 3 Online Resources. (The video is 14 minutes, 43 seconds.)

