



**CASA**

Court Appointed Special Advocates

**FOR CHILDREN**

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**THE NATIONAL COURT APPOINTED  
SPECIAL ADVOCATE ASSOCIATION**

CASA/GAL Pre-Service Volunteer Training Curriculum

# Volunteer Manual

**CHAPTER FOUR**

**HEARST** *foundations*



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## **CHAPTER 4:**

# Mental Health, Poverty and Professional Communication

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# Pre-Work Recap

## Chapter 4: Pre-Work Recap



- ✓ Read the article on mental illness in families.
- ✓ Read the articles about medicating children in foster care and a multimodal approach to managing mental health disorders in children and be prepared to discuss the points brought up by the author. Also, be prepared to discuss the questions that advocates should ask.
- ✓ Read the article on Why Are Poor Children More Likely to Be in the System?

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Prior to this training session, you should have completed the following Pre-Work assignments:

- Read the article on mental illness in families.
- Read the articles about medicating children in foster care and a multimodal approach to managing mental health disorders in children.
  - Be prepared to discuss the points brought up by the author.
  - Be prepared to discuss the questions that advocates should ask.
- Read the article “Why Are Poor Children More Likely to Be in the System?”
- Research answers to these questions:
  - What is the minimum wage in your state?
  - What are the current poverty guidelines for a family of four in your state?
  - What percent of people of color in your state fall within the poverty guidelines? What percent of the white population in your state fall within the poverty guidelines?
- Complete the activity on examining poverty vs. neglect scenarios.
- Read the article on how to obtain confidential case-related records.

## Pre-Work Recap, Cont'd.

- Read the article “Confidentiality and the CASA/GAL Volunteer.”
- Read the article “The Necessity of Timely, Effective Communication.”
- Read the article “The Fine Art of Team Work (Child Protection is Not an Individual Sport).”
- Read the Initial Case Notes for the Greene Case.
- Visit an agency by taking public transportation (the facilitator will decide whether to assign this optional exercise).

## Chapter Overview and Competencies

This chapter introduces two common societal issues that may impact the children and families you are working with: mental illness and poverty. This chapter also offers additional information about communication skills, including requesting confidential information and working with professionals on a case.

### Competency Building in Chapter 4

Competency Category	Knowledge, Skills, Attributes, Behavior Development in Chapter 4
CASA/GAL Role	Understands how to obtain relevant confidential information
Foundation of Knowledge	Understands how mental illness affects families Understands strategies to advocate for children and adolescents with mental health disorders Understands how poverty can impact families and children
Sound Judgment	Understands the confidentiality requirements of being a CASA/GAL volunteer
Communication	Knows how to effectively articulate a point of view while advocating for the needs of a child Understands the importance of speaking and writing clearly and concisely

# Mental Health

## Understanding Mental Illness: Activity 4A



**Part 1:** The facilitator will distribute a handout with mental health statistics. Read the information and circle any information that surprises you. Then, share with a partner the statistics you noted. The facilitator will ask for a few volunteers to share.

**Part 2:** Recall information you read about the impact of mental illness on families and children as Pre-Work and listen to the facilitator's review of this information. In the large group, answer the following questions based on what you know so far about the Greene case:

- How might parental mental illness affect Marky?
- What might you do as a CASA/GAL volunteer to gather additional information about the impact of parental mental illness on Marky?

## Mental Health Treatment for Children in Care: Activity 4B

Considering the information you read for Pre-Work on mental health for children in care and a multimodal approach to managing mental health disorders in children, discuss the following question in small groups:

- How might CASA/GAL volunteers advocate for children and adolescents with mental health disorders?

In the large group, share your answers and any questions that arose in your group's discussion.



# Poverty

## Poverty Pre-Work Debrief: Activity 4C

**Part 1:** For Pre-Work, you were asked to research these questions:

- What is the minimum wage in your state?
- What are the current poverty guidelines for a family of four in your state?
- What percent of people of color in your state fall within the poverty guidelines? What percent of the white population in your state fall within the poverty guidelines?

Share what you found during your research. Then discuss the following questions in the large group:

- Why do you think this information is relevant for your work as a CASA/GAL volunteer?
- What are common assumptions about why certain populations experience poverty at a higher rate?
- Would you have to make changes in your life to live below the poverty threshold in your state? If so, what might they be?
- What skills or strengths does it take to live in poverty?

**Part 2:** If the facilitator assigned the optional Pre-Work to visit an agency by taking public transportation, use the questions below to discuss your experiences in the large group:

- Describe the preparations you had to make to do this assignment.
- How many buses (or other forms of public transportation) did you have to take to get to your destination? What was the cost?
- How long did it take you to get to your destination? If you were driving a personal vehicle, how much time would it take to get to your destination?
- What/who did you expect to see while riding public transportation? What/who did you actually see?
- What was your initial reaction or feeling when you learned that part of your assignment was to ride public transportation?
- How did you feel after riding public transportation, as compared to how you felt before riding it?

## Poverty Pre-Work Debrief, Cont'd.

- How does riding public transportation put you in touch with the experiences of poor families who have no other means of getting around?
- What agencies did you visit? What services do they provide?
- How did it feel to be in an office that provides public assistance? Were you embarrassed and if so, why?
- How does this experience help you understand the stigma associated with being poor?

## Higher Rate of Poor Children in the System: Activity 4D

### Why Are Poor Children More Likely to Be in the System?

In pairs, discuss the following questions. There are many possible answers for each question.

- What effect might living in poverty have on access to education, healthcare and daycare?
- What effect might current poverty have on the likelihood of future poverty?
- Is poverty viewed differently in different communities, geographic regions, neighborhoods and/or religions? Why or why not?
- Are the experiences of poor families of color different from those of poor white families? What about Native American families? Why are race and income level interconnected issues?

The facilitator will ask for a few volunteers to share in the large group.

## Poverty vs Neglect: Activity 4E

Recall the scenarios that you examined on child safety in the Pre-Work. In the large group, describe some of the factors you considered as you finished each sentence in each scenario. During the discussion, think about these situations from different perspectives by answering questions such as:

- What is the family's economic level?
- Are cultural issues present that might cause the family not to ask for help?
- Are there language or literacy barriers that prevent the family from accessing resources?
- Is the situation temporary or permanent?
- What is the age of the child?
- Are other risk factors, such as substance abuse or mental health disorders, present?

## Skill Building: Professional Communication

### Obtaining Confidential Records: Activity 4F

**Part 1:** Recall the information that you read about obtaining confidential records for children and parents involved in a child protection case as Pre-Work. Listen as the facilitator presents information about local policies and practices. The facilitator will also distribute copies of local release forms that you will use in your work as a CASA/GAL volunteer.

**Part 2:** In small groups, discuss the following questions:

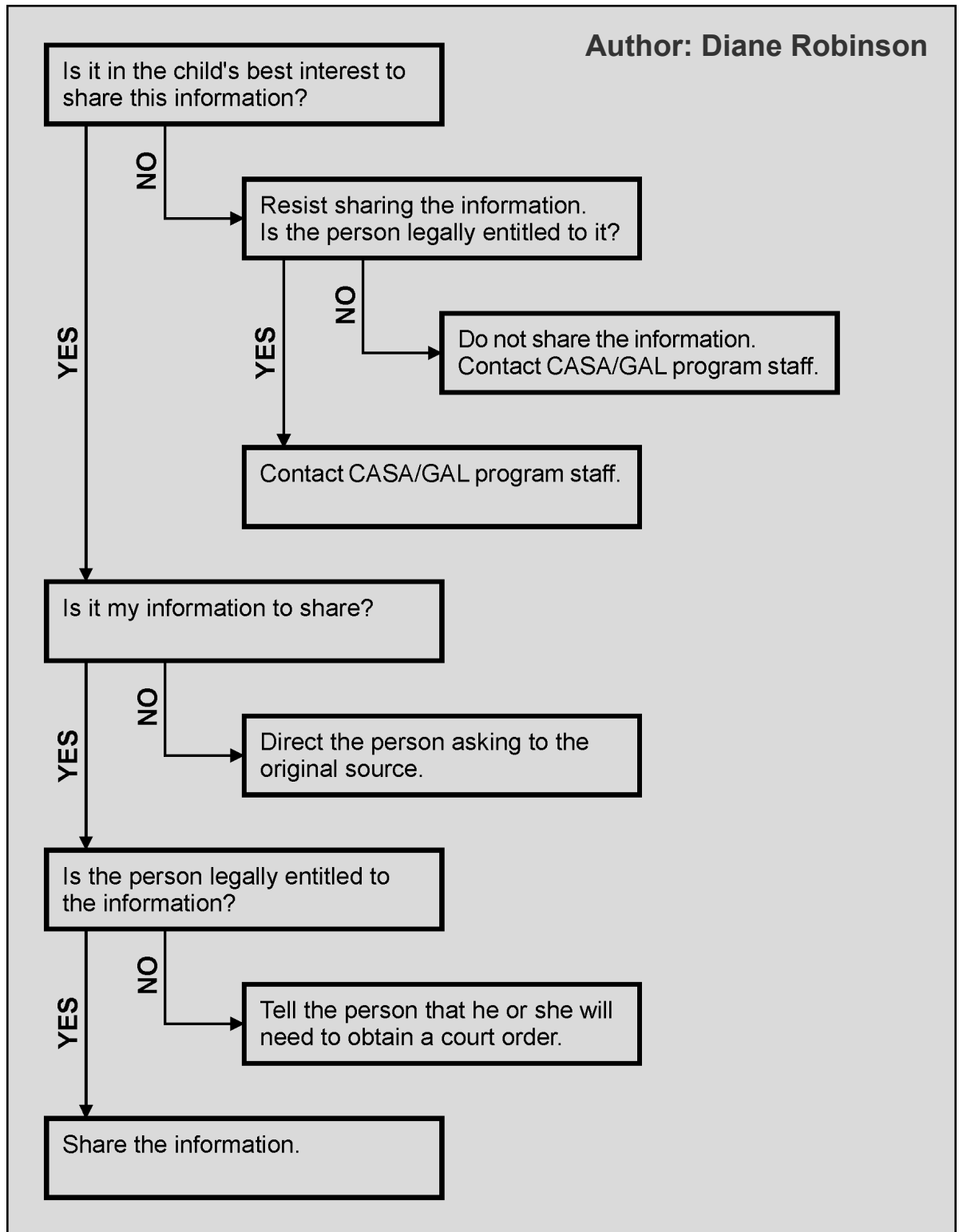
- List several types of confidential records concerning children and how having access to these records would benefit you as a CASA/GAL volunteer. What is one important confidential record concerning Marky Greene that you want to review?
- List several types of confidential parental records and how having access to that information would benefit you in your volunteer role. What is one parental record that you want to review in the Greene case?

Report back to the large group.

## Confidentiality and the CASA/GAL Volunteer: Activity 4G

Recall the information that you read about what confidentiality means for the CASA/GAL volunteer as Pre-Work. 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. Discuss any questions you have. The facilitator will address all questions in the large group.

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



## Effective Communication with Professionals on a Case: Activity 4H



**Part 1:** Recall the information that you read about the necessity of timely, effective communication as Pre-Work. In the large group, brainstorm ten attributes of good communication in CASA/GAL volunteer work. Keep in mind the volunteer's role in working with caseworkers and other professionals.

**Part 2:** The facilitator will divide the class into small groups and assign to each group one example of successful communication from the handout. In your small group, discuss what made this communication effective.

In the large group, discuss your findings.



## Working a Case

### The Greene Case: Activity 4I



**Part 1:** Your group will receive a hard copy of the initial file for the Greene case, which you read for Pre-Work. Take several minutes to re-familiarize yourself with the information in the case file. You will also receive a list of questions that your Questioner should remind your group to consider as you review documents and make your recommendations. After you review the initial case file, send your Runner to the facilitator to request an additional document (either an interview transcript from a key player you'd like to speak with or another important document you'd find during a case). You may continue to request additional interviews and documents one at a time over the course of 35 minutes to complete your information gathering for the case at this stage. After 35 minutes, your Scribe should legibly write on the flipchart your group's recommendations regarding services for the child, services for the parent and placement decisions.

**Part 2:** Take a few minutes to view other groups' recommendations, and then briefly discuss the debrief questions that the facilitator distributes. In the large group, discuss these questions and any others that arose during the activity.

## Taking Case Notes: Activity 4J

Taking clear and detailed notes is essential to your work as a CASA/GAL volunteer, as these notes will form the basis for your volunteer court report. Each time you meet with or speak to someone regarding a case or review records pertinent to a case, you will need to document what you learned. Your notes should include what was said and what you observed.

Working in the same small groups you were in for the Greene case study activity, have one member of your group read aloud the interview with Monica Morales, the intensive in-home family therapist. Then, working individually, summarize the interview into a paragraph for your case notes.

The facilitator will ask for volunteers to share their summaries in the large group.

## Chapter Wrap-up

### Review

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

### Evaluation

Fill out the Chapter 4 Volunteer Training Evaluation and give it to the facilitator before you leave.

## Chapter 5 Pre-Work

Prior to the Chapter 5 training session, complete the following assignments:

### Substance Abuse

Read the National Institute on Drug Abuse information about commonly abused drugs by clicking on the link provided in the Chapter 5 Pre-Work packet. You do not need to become an expert on this topic; simply familiarize yourself with the variety of abused drugs and their effects. Also read the information in “Substance Abuse Statistics” found in the Chapter 5 Pre-Work packet.

### National CASA Vision Statement and Guiding Principles

Read the National CASA Vision Statement and Guiding Principles found in the Chapter 5 Pre-Work packet.

### Disproportionality and Statistics

Read information about disproportionality and disproportionality statistics found in the Chapter 5 Pre-Work packet.

### Cultural Competence Glossary

Read the Cultural Competence Glossary in the Chapter 5 Pre-Work packet. This glossary will help familiarize you with some of the terms you’ll encounter in Chapters 5 and 6.

## Chapter 5 Pre-Work, Cont'd.

### Initial Case Notes for the Lavender Case

Read the Initial Case Notes for the Lavender Case in the Chapter 5 Pre-Work packet. You will be applying what you know about this case during various activities in Chapter 5.

### Sample Court Reports

Read examples of good and bad court reports found in the Chapter 5 Pre-Work packet and answer the following questions:

- Which statements are opinion-based?
- Which statements are fact-based?
- What's missing from each example?
- What could be improved in each example?



