



CASA

Court Appointed Special Advocates
FOR CHILDREN

**THE NATIONAL COURT APPOINTED
SPECIAL ADVOCATE ASSOCIATION**

CASA/GAL Pre-Service Volunteer Training Curriculum

Facilitator Manual

CHAPTER TWO



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CHAPTER 2:

The Well-Being of the Child

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Facilitator Prep



Facilitation Tips

- This chapter takes approximately 3 hours and 15 minutes.
- This chapter contains activities that allow participants to apply what they are learning to the Bleux case. Reread the case before facilitating this chapter, so you can provide a brief recap of the case.
- One focus of this chapter is child development. As a facilitator, you need to distinguish between all there is to know about child development and what a CASA/GAL volunteer needs to know to do his/her job. The goal is not for volunteers to master all the information, but to help them develop their intuition and be able to “red flag” situations that should be evaluated by a professional or discussed with a supervisor.
- Acknowledge and build on what participants already know. Connect the content with their personal experience—we were all children once upon a time and many participants currently have children in their lives.
- Post a flipchart page at the front of the room with the heading “Parking Lot.” Note (or “park”) issues unrelated to Chapter 2 and make a plan to address them later.



Supplies Checklist and Advanced Prep

Item (Activity #)	Advanced Prep
<p>General (found with your local program)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Name tags• Flipchart and markers• Masking tape• Three-hole punch• Sticky notes• Envelopes (2A)	<p>Gather supplies as needed.</p> <p>Activity 2A: Gather enough envelopes for each pair of participants to have one envelope. These envelopes will hold the Ages and Stages Cards.</p>
<p>Flipchart Pages (facilitator must create)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Parking Lot• Child's Needs (2B)• A Strengths-Based Approach (2H)	<p>Activity 2B: Prepare a flipchart labeled "Child's Needs."</p> <p>Activity 2H: Prepare a flipchart labeled "A Strengths-Based Approach." Below the title, create a column labeled "Benefits" and a column labeled "Drawbacks."</p>
<p>A/V Equipment (found with your local program)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Computer, LCD projector and screen	
<p>Electronic Presentations and Videos (found in the Online Resources)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• "Interviewing Skills: Meeting with a Parent" (2H)• Chapter 2 PowerPoint presentation	<p>Activity 2H: Download the video into the local folder where you have the Chapter 2 PPT for ease of use.</p> <p>Activity 2J: As needed, use your program's court report template to customize the Chapter 2 PowerPoint presentation.</p>



Supplies Checklist and Advanced Prep

Item (Activity #)	Advanced Prep
<p>Chapter 2 Pre-Work Packet (found in the Online Resources)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• How Children Grow and Develop• Children's Needs• Importance of Attachment in Child Development• Recognizing Child Abuse and Neglect• State Definition of Abuse and Mandatory Reporting Laws (<i>facilitator must create</i>)• Risk Factors for Child Abuse and Neglect• Court Report Template (<i>facilitator must create</i>)• Sample Court Report for Bleux Case (<i>facilitator must create</i>)	<p>At least one week before the Chapter 2 training session, prepare the electronic Pre-Work packet and send to participants. Note: You must update the packet with:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Your state's definition of abuse and mandatory reporting laws• Your program's court report template<ul style="list-style-type: none">– See Advanced Prep for this activity for recommendations on what to include in the court report.• A prepared sample court report for the Bleux case (add to the Pre-Work packet) <p>Use the Pre-Work Email Template accessed on the Getting Started page of the curriculum website.</p> <p>Volunteers can access the Pre-Work files from the following link (include this link in your email): http://nc.casaforchildren.org/files/secure/training/preservice-curriculum/Curriculum_QuickLinks_Guide_Volunteer.pdf</p> <p>Volunteers should complete the Pre-Work prior to the Chapter 2 module and bring it with them to class. Make copies of the Pre-Work, the Volunteer Manual and the Chapter 3 Pre-Work documents for reference and use during and after class.</p> <p>If you feel it is useful, you may choose to print out a few copies of the Pre-Work Handouts for each chapter and make them available to those who didn't complete their assignment before the training.</p>



Supplies Checklist and Advanced Prep

Item (Activity #)	Advanced Prep
<p>In-Class Handouts and Signs (found in the Online Resources)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ages and Stages Cards (2A)• Ages and Stages Signs (2A)• Child Development Chart (2A)• Child's Needs Pages (2B)• Checklist for Applying the "Best Interest" Principle (2E))• Case Assessment Questions (2I)• Asking the Right Questions and Planning Your Next Steps Supplemental Materials (2I)	<p>Make copies of the Volunteer Manual.</p> <p>Activity 2A:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Copy and cut one complete set of the Ages and Stages Cards. Mix up the cards. Gather enough envelopes for each pair in the class to receive an envelope. Place the cards in the envelopes, making sure each envelope contains cards from multiple age groups.• Print out one set of the Ages and Stages Signs.• Make copies of the Child Development Chart for all participants. <p>Activity 2B: Print a set of the Child's Needs sheets.</p> <p>Activity 2C: Come up with two or three brief examples of children, who have experienced disrupted attachment, to share with the participants.</p> <p>Activity 2E: Make copies of the Checklist for Applying the "Best Interest" Principle.</p> <p>Activity 2I:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Make copies of the Case Assessment Questions. (If your program has a similar list, you may want to use it instead.)• Make copies of the "Asking the Right Questions and Planning Your Next Steps" supplemental materials. <p>Activity 2J: Although not typical in most jurisdictions, if your CASA/GAL programs assign cases prior to adjudication, be prepared to discuss how your program specifically addresses Pre-Adjudication hearings and the CASA/GAL role.</p>



Supplies Checklist and Advanced Prep

Item (Activity #)	Advanced Prep
<p>In-Class Handouts and Signs (cont'd)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">– Local Program Service Area Abuse and Neglect Statistics (Chapter 2 Wrap-up)	<p>Chapter Wrap-Up</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Prepare abuse and neglect statistics for your local program area.• Make copies of the statistics to handout as an additional resource.
<p>Chapter 3 Pre-Work Packet (found in the Online Resources except where noted)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Pre-Work Instructions• “Shane’s Story” Video• Information on Understanding Child Trauma• Basic elements of Communication - Communication and CASA/GAL Volunteer Work• Information on Open-Ended vs. Closed Questions• Information on CASA/GAL Interview• Initial case notes for the Black-Smith case• “Interviewing Skills: Talking with a 4-Year-Old Child” Video, Part 1• Interviewing a Child Assignment Sheet• “First Impressions: Exposure to Violence and a Child’s Developing Brain” Video	<p>Familiarize yourself with the Chapter 3 Pre-Work assignment. This can be found in the Chapter 3 Pre-Work on page 54 of this chapter.</p>

CHAPTER 2:

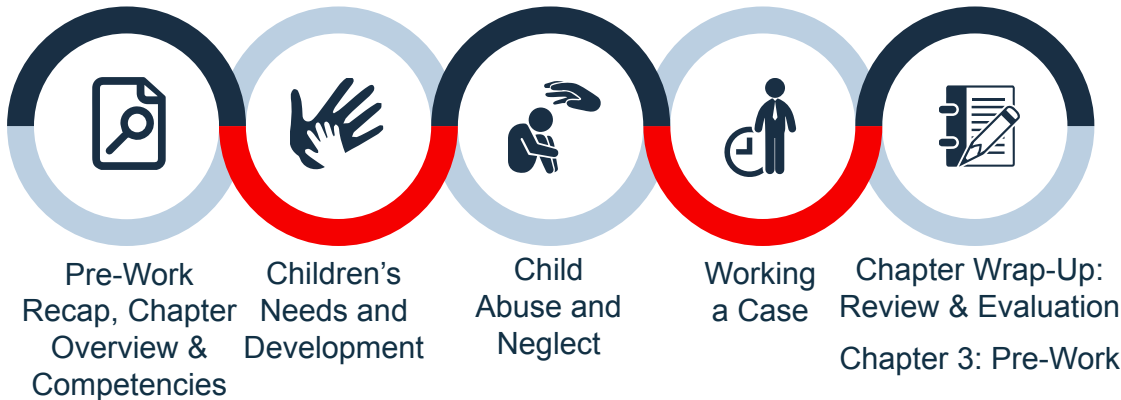
The Well-Being of the Child

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Welcome, Housekeeping and Ground Rules

Chapter 2: The Well-Being of a Child



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- Welcome the group to the training. Have them make name tags and tell them that there will be activities to help you get to know them and them to get to know each other.
- Share “housekeeping” information, such as where to find restrooms, snacks and telephones, and when you think the session break(s) will occur.
- Establish ground rules about confidentiality, respect, etc. This is important because it sets the tone for how the group works together. Create a Ground Rules flipchart page and post it at every session.
- Inform participants about the value and necessity of Pre-Work, which is assigned in advance of each chapter. Stress the purpose of Pre-Work: To provide a foundation of knowledge on the topics covered in class and to start everyone “on the same page” with regard to relevant background information.
- Tell the participants that they will read through and work on many cases before and during the sessions to enhance their knowledge and skills.

Welcome, Housekeeping and Ground Rules, Cont'd.

- Inform the participants that these cases introduce them to broad concepts related to child abuse and to the skills involved in working with children and families. Later in the training, they will also be working through a few cases to introduce them to the court process and related CASA/GAL volunteer tasks, such as note taking and report writing.
- Introduce the Parking Lot, a flipchart page where you can note (or “park”) issues unrelated to the current chapter and make a plan to address them later. Post this flipchart at the front of the room.
- Point out to learners that all activities appear in their Volunteer Manual and that the designers were intentionally transparent about the format of this training. The learners should know what they can expect the facilitator to do (e.g., establish an environment conducive to learning, keep things moving, adjust the activities or timing to better meet the needs of the group, be a resource, etc.). Participants also need to know what they will be expected to do (e.g., attend the sessions, participate in the activities, ask questions, take responsibility for their own learning, etc.).
- You may want to introduce basic names or acronyms that you will be using throughout the training. For instance, the Volunteer Manual sometimes refers to child protection agencies as CPS. Inform them what this acronym stands for and let them know the name and acronym of the child welfare agency in your area, if it is not CPS.
- Transition into the chapter material by introducing the competencies to be developed by the end of this chapter.

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 abuse definition 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	<p>Understands age-appropriate behavior and the development of children</p> <p>Understands a child's basic needs</p> <p>Understands why the MSL standard is in the best interest of children</p> <p>Understands the cycle of attachment</p> <p>Understands what constitutes abuse and neglect</p> <p>Understands risk factors for child abuse and neglect</p> <p>Understands the benefits and steps to using a strength-based approach</p>
Sound Judgment	<p>Knows how to evaluate what is in the child's best interest</p>
Communication	<p>Understands the elements of a court report</p>

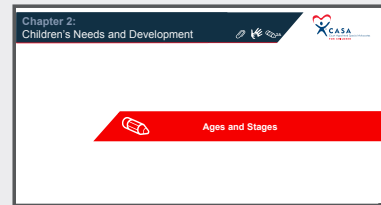
Children's Needs and Development

Ages and Stages: Activity 2A



Suggested Time: 15 minutes

Goal: To help participants recognize what they already know about child development and to provide additional information.



Advanced Prep

Copy and cut one complete set of the Ages and Stages Cards, which appear in the Chapter 2 In-Class Handouts. Gather enough envelopes for each pair of participants to have one envelope. Mix up the cards before placing them in the envelopes. Make sure each envelope contains cards from multiple age groups.

Print out one set of the Ages and Stages Signs, found in the Chapter 2 In-Class Handouts. Finally, make copies for all participants of the Child Development Chart, also found in the Chapter 2 In-Class Handouts.

PowerPoint Slide(s): 6-7 Volunteer Manual, page 3

Facilitator Instructions

Post the Ages and Stages Signs around the room. Briefly recall and discuss important points from the Pre-Work reading assignment: How Children Grow and Develop. Distribute the envelopes with the mixed-up cards, and have pairs work to determine the appropriate age group for each card. Have participants place the cards under the sign of the appropriate age category. When all pairs have finished placing their cards, hand out copies of the Child Development Chart, and go around the room to discuss the development markers of each age category. Be sure to discuss the fluidity of developmental milestones and how they are affected by environment and circumstances. Answer any questions participants have.

If your training group is very small, consider doing a variation on the activity with the whole group. Copy and cut apart the Ages and Stages Cards and put them all in a basket. Then write each age group on a separate sheet of paper and place the papers in a line along a table. Participants then work together as a group, asking each other questions as necessary, to match the cards with the appropriate age group.

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

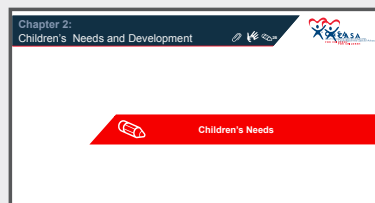


Suggested Time: 20 minutes

Goal: To help participants identify a child's basic needs.

Advanced Prep

Print a set of Child's Needs Pages found in the Chapter 2 In-Class Handouts.



PowerPoint Slide(s): 8-11 Volunteer Manual, page 4

Facilitator Instructions

Part 1: Divide the room into four groups. Give each group one of the Child's Needs Pages: Child's Physical Needs, Child's Emotional Needs, Child's Developmental Needs, Child's Cultural Needs. Explain to participants that in speaking for children in the foster care system, it is imperative they recognize the full range of children's needs. Ask the groups to think back to the Bleux case and to the child development information they learned in the previous activity. Direct the groups to write a list of Deshawn Bleux's needs for their assigned category, using everything they have learned so far. For example, regarding physical needs, Deshawn (as well as every child) needs ongoing health screening with a medical provider. Once the groups have completed their lists, invite them to place their completed list on a flipchart at the front of the room. (8 minutes)

Part 2: Remind participants of the hierarchy of needs information they should have read as part of their Pre-Work. Maslow's hierarchy of needs uses the terms "physiological," "safety," "belonging" and "love," "esteem," "self-actualization," and "self-transcendence" to describe the pattern that human motivations generally move through. For the purposes of training CASA volunteers, your goal as facilitator should be to convey that this is a widely respected and important examination of human behavior that is most likely familiar to many in the class. It creates a foundation of understanding for human's potential lack of stability even when provided support and resources.

Children's Needs, Cont'd.

- Many individuals struggle with empathizing with parents who neglect their children. Combined with ACEs (i.e., Adverse Childhood Experiences), Maslow can be a helpful tool in allowing them to hold parents accountable, without judging them. It can also help them identify needs of parents as well as children.
- Specific to a case, according to Maslow, recognition of a child's full spectrum of needs can inform your recommendations. If you observe and can confirm the degree to which a child's needs are being met, you can represent those needs appropriately. If through ACEs you can view their behavior as a result of exposure to stress and trauma, you can motivate systems to respond to the need in an informed way. (**Note:** ACEs will be specifically discussed in Chapter 3).
- The work of Edward L. Deci, in the field of social psychology, addresses motivation for making positive change that supports positive behavior. As an application of self-determination theory, posited by Deci and other researchers, we can encourage volunteers to think broadly about transformation to positive life choices, and decrease belief in the static condition of children and families in need. This positive perspective will aid in making recommendations that will improve conditions for children and families.

In the large group, review Deshawn Bleux's needs listed on the flipchart. Lead a group discussion about the following questions (7 minutes):

- 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?

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

Suggested Time: 5 minutes

Goal: To help participants understand attachment theory and identify how disrupted attachment might affect a child.



Advanced Prep

Think of two or three brief examples of children, who have experienced disrupted attachment, to share with participants.

PowerPoint Slide(s): 12-14 Volunteer Manual, page 5

Facilitator Instructions

Using the Chapter 2 PowerPoint presentation, recall and give a brief overview of the material on attachment that volunteers should have read in the Chapter 2 Pre-Work. Share one or two examples of specific children who never had a healthy attachment to their caregiver or have had that attachment broken. Hearing about children in the CASA/GAL volunteer's community makes this issue real for the participants. After each story, refer to the attachment cycle visual aid and ask the group where in the cycle the attachment was broken.

If you cannot think of an example from your community, talk about a 3-year-old who will go to anyone, sit on anyone's lap and show no emotion when the primary caregiver leaves. This child had numerous caregivers as a child because her mom was in jail. She has no specific attachment. A second example would be a 7-year-old child who hoards food in foster care. As an infant being raised by heroin-addicted parents, this child was sometimes left to cry for hours and at other times fed on demand.

Attachment: Activity 2C

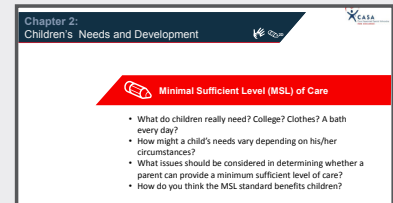
Listen as the facilitator briefly recalls information from your Pre-Work about the importance of attachment in child development and the risks for children who lag developmentally or lose the ability to attach to a parent or caregiver. When the facilitator gives examples of specific children who never 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

Suggested Time: 20 minutes

Goal: To familiarize participants with minimum sufficient level of care (MSL) standards and how to apply this knowledge when working with children.



Facilitator Instructions

PowerPoint Slide(s): 15-16

Volunteer Manual, page 6

Part 1: Ask participants to read the summary describing minimum sufficient level of care on pages 7 through 9 in the Volunteer Manual. When they are done reading, have them work in small groups to 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 whether a parent can provide a minimum sufficient level of care?
- How do you think the MSL standard benefits children?

Ask groups to share some of their responses. (8 minutes)

Part 2: Approach this topic from the standpoint of the ethical responsibility the government, court and community have to intervene in the life of a family, if a child's most basic needs are not being met. Note that with this responsibility, it's also important to allow families their cultural and individual differences, if those basic needs ARE being met. Ask participants to imagine if there's someone out there somewhere who could give the participants' own children a better home, a better school, better clothes and so on and then ask, "why is it important that your children stay with you?" (10 minutes)

Minimum Sufficient Level (MSL) of Care, Cont'd.

In the large group, ask participants to react to 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. (2 minutes)

Note: MSL standards are based on state and federal definitions, but elements of MSL, such as commonly accepted child-rearing practices and reasonable limits, will vary from place to place.

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 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,” 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,” 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



Suggested Time: 8 minutes

Goal: To familiarize volunteers with the principle of “best interest” and their role in reporting the needs of the child.



Advanced Prep

Make copies of the Checklist for Applying the “Best Interest” Principle, found in the Chapter 2 In-Class Handouts.

PowerPoint Slide(s): 17-20 Volunteer Manual, page 10

Facilitator Instructions

You may want to begin this activity by asking participants, “How many of you have children?” and then “Who decides what’s best for your children?” This anchors the activity in their experience.

Using the Chapter 2 PowerPoint presentation, introduce the principle of “best interest.” Emphasize the CASA/GAL volunteer’s role in helping to advocate for the child’s best interest. At the end of the activity, distribute copies of the Checklist for Applying the “Best Interest” Principle, and suggest to participants that they refer to this list when they are working on a case.

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 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 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.

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

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

Suggested Time: 12 minutes

Goal: To help volunteers recognize signs of abuse.

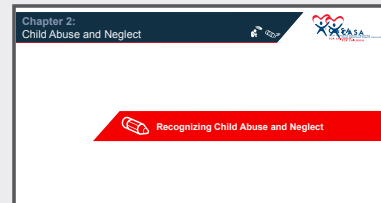
Advanced Prep

Update Chapter 2 Pre-Work with your state's legal definition of abuse and mandatory reporting laws.

PowerPoint Slide(s): 22 Volunteer Manual, page 12

Facilitator Instructions

In the large group, highlight key information from the material they read in their Pre-Work about recognizing abuse and your state's definition of abuse and reporting laws. Emphasize to participants that it is not their role to determine whether or not certain actions constitute child abuse or neglect; the child protective services system will decide this. It is, however, necessary for them to be able to recognize abuse and neglect in order to advocate for a safe home for a child. Answer any questions they have on the material they read about abuse. (12 minutes)



Child Abuse and Neglect: Activity 2F

Recognizing Child Abuse and Neglect

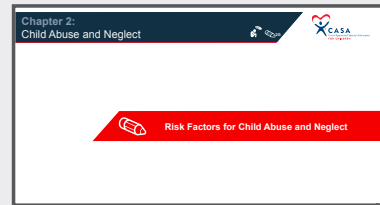
Share any questions you have on recognizing child abuse and neglect, or your state's definition of abuse or mandatory reporting laws, you read about in your Pre-Work.

Risk Factors for Child Abuse and Neglect:

Activity 2G

Suggested Time: 20 minutes

Goal: To help CASA/GAL volunteers understand the factors that may contribute to child abuse and neglect.



PowerPoint Slide(s): 23-25 Volunteer Manual, page 13

Facilitator Instructions

Convey to participants that at some point all families encounter change, stress and perhaps even crisis—the family moves, a parent is laid off, childcare arrangements fall through, a new stepfamily comes into being, the car breaks down, a child becomes ill, the rent goes up and on it goes. The families that participants will encounter in their work as CASA/GAL volunteers are, by definition, under stress and are likely to be in crisis—if for no other reason than that the state is now involved in determining whether their child remains in their care and custody. Some families cope well and adapt effectively to stress and crisis; others do not and become overwhelmed. Families that are not able to cope well are often isolated from resources, face a variety of challenges and are stressed by numerous problems that compound one another. These families may develop patterns that lead to and then perpetuate abuse and neglect.

Part 1: Briefly highlight key information from the risk factors for child abuse and neglect information that volunteers read as part of their Pre-Work. Divide participants into groups and assign each group one category of risk factors (child-related, parent-related, social-situational, family, triggering situations). Have each group list the factors in their category that were present in the Bleux case.

Allow time for questions or comments from participants. The meaning of these conditions can be difficult to grasp. Stress that in many families, more than one condition contributes to the reason child protective services files a petition for the court's intervention. As groups report back, offer examples if participants do not come up their own. (13 minutes)

Risk Factors for Child Abuse and Neglect, Cont'd.

Part 2: In the large group, lead participants in brainstorming the types of services or interventions that should be implemented to alleviate the issues in the Bleux family. (7 minutes)

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

Suggested Time: 35 minutes

Goal: To help participants recognize that all families have strengths and deficits.

Advanced Prep

Prepare a flipchart labeled “A Strengths-Based Approach.” Below the title, create a column labeled “Benefits” and a column labeled “Drawbacks.” Download the video “Interviewing Skills: Meeting with a Parent.”

PowerPoint Slide(s): 26-29 Volunteer Manual, page 14



Facilitator Instructions

Part 1: Have participants take a few moments to think about their families (either their family of origin or their current family), trying to focus first on an event that illustrates the strengths in their family and then on an event that exemplifies the weaknesses or deficits. Ask them to write down one strength and one weakness and share their responses with a partner. After pairs have finished sharing, ask for a couple of volunteers willing to share in the large group. (5 minutes)

Part 2: Using the Chapter 2 PowerPoint presentation, provide an overview of what it means to use a resource lens in CASA/GAL volunteer work. This information also appears in the Volunteer Manual on page 16.

In the large group, ask participants what might be some benefits of using a strengths-based approach in their work as CASA/GAL volunteers? What might be some of the drawbacks of using a strengths-based approach? Record their responses on the flipchart you prepared. (10 minutes)

Family Strengths and Weaknesses, Cont'd.

Part 3: Have participants read through the Strengths in Families Worksheet in the Volunteer Manual. Then play the video “Interviewing Skills: Meeting with a Parent.” Instruct participants to think about the Bleux family’s strengths as they watch. Note a few items for participants before playing the video:

- Ask participants to watch the video looking for tone, body language and other techniques that can be used in all interviews—with parents, foster parents, relatives, teachers, and so on.
- Mention that not all programs will provide an opportunity for the participants to visit with or talk to parents. In cases where participants cannot talk to parents, underscore that the techniques depicted in the video are transferable to all interviews.
- As appropriate, point out that programs that do not use the term CASA would appreciate volunteers saying, “I am a volunteer appointed by the court to ...” or “I am a court-appointed special advocate” in place of saying “I’m a CASA volunteer.”

As they watch, clarify that the CASA/GAL volunteers would use the case plan (agreed upon by parents/caregivers and social services) as an anchor for their questions. Note that there will typically be fewer questions about supporting the parent and more questions about the progress with meeting the requirements in the plan or court orders from previous hearings than what they observe in this video.

Following the video, in the large group, discuss the following questions:

- Which of the strengths listed are present in the Bleux family?
- 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?

(20 minutes)

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 resources lens or the deficits 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 take on 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

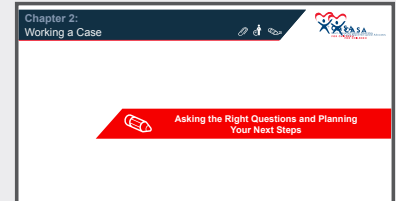
Working a Case

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



Suggested Time: 30 minutes

Goal: To help CASA/GAL volunteers identify key questions, sources of information and next steps in gathering information about a case.



Advanced Prep

Make copies of the Case Assessment Questions and the Asking the Right Questions and Planning Your Next Steps Supplemental Materials, found in the Chapter 2 In-Class Handouts. (If your program has a similar list, you may want to use it instead.)

PowerPoint Slide(s): 31 Volunteer Manual, page 24

Facilitator Instructions

Part 1: Give a brief recap of the Bleux case, which participants read in the Chapter 1 Pre-Work, and ask them to review the case questions they developed when they completed that Pre-Work. Divide them into small groups, and distribute copies of the Case Assessment Questions. Using the handout, groups should identify additional questions they want answered, as well as possible sources for the information (social worker, foster parent, birth parent, child, therapist, etc.). Then, in the large group, ask participants to come up with a list of their top-priority questions for the Bleux case. (20 minutes)

Part 2: In the large group, have volunteers plot out their next steps for working the Bleux case (for example, requesting records (which ones), scheduling interviews, submitting reports, consulting with the program's case supervisor and appearing in court). (10 minutes)

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.

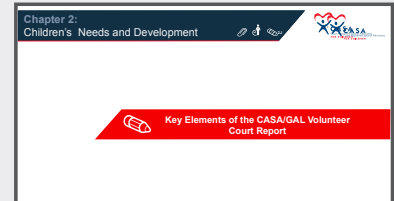
Part 2: In the large group, plot out your next steps for working the Bleux case.

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



Suggested Time: 25 minutes

Goal: To introduce participants to the basic elements of the CASA/GAL volunteer court report.



Advanced Prep

Insert your program's court report template in the Chapter 2 Pre-Work handouts. If you'd like, use your program's template to customize the Chapter 2 PowerPoint presentation.

In addition to the sections listed in the Pre-Work packet, here are other possible categories you will want to consider for inclusion in your program's report template:

- Number and location of all placements
- Summary of matters before the court
- Court ordered services
- Persons contacted, but not reached
- Compliance or non-compliance with visitation orders/plan
- Changes in circumstances of child or family
- Available resources within the family to meet needs identified
- Signature of CASA/GAL Volunteer
- Date of report if not file-stamped by court
- Issue for the court's attention
- Confidentiality note/disclaimer
- Elements of the case plan

Although not typical in most jurisdictions, if your CASA/GAL programs assign cases prior to adjudication, be prepared to discuss how your program specifically addresses Pre-Adjudication hearings and the CASA/GAL role.

PowerPoint Slide(s): 32-33

Volunteer Manual, page 25

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

Facilitator Instructions

Part 1: Remind the volunteers that they reviewed your program's court report template during their Pre-Work for this chapter. Distribute copies of your program's court report template, and give a brief overview of each section of the report and its purpose. Explain how participants will access the report forms or templates, and how and when they will submit their written reports to the program. (10 minutes)

Part 2: Using slide 33 in the Chapter 2 PPT, give participants an overview on writing effective court reports (located on page 26 of the Volunteer Manual), highlighting the most important tips and things that case supervisors check for when reviewing reports. Then, ask participants to answer the following questions using the sample report for the Bleux case, which they read for Pre-Work:

- 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?

Lead the group through a short debriefing. (15 minutes)

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. 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 the 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...”).
- Report objectively and factually; eliminate opinions or diagnoses.

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

- 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.

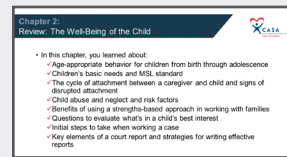
Chapter Wrap-up and Review

Chapter Review

Review—PowerPoint Slide(s): 35

Volunteer Manual, page 31

In summary, you can review the objectives and competencies found at the beginning of the chapter to check in on volunteers' comfort level with the content. Answer any remaining questions.



Evaluation—PowerPoint Slide(s): 36

Hand out copies of the Chapter 2 Volunteer Training Evaluation and collect them before participants leave.

Additional Resources—PowerPoint Slide(s): 37

Handout the Program Service Area Abuse and Neglect Statistics information as an additional resource.

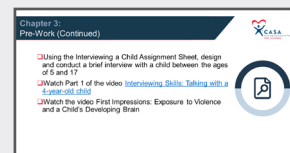


Chapter 3 Pre-Work

Pre-Work Activities

PowerPoint Slide(s): 38-39

Assign the following Pre-Work activities for the Chapter 3 training session and remind participants of the date and time when this session will take place.



“Shane’s Story” Video

Ask the volunteers to watch the video “Shane’s Story” and prepare a list of traumatic experiences for a child.

Chapter 3 Pre-Work, Cont'd.

Understanding Child Trauma

Ask the volunteers to read the information on Understanding Child Trauma in the Chapter 3 Pre-Work packet.

Basic of Elements of Communication

Ask the volunteers to read the information on the Basic Elements of Communication—Communication and CASA/Gal Volunteer Work in the Chapter 3 Pre-Work packet.

Open Ended vs. Closed Ended Questions

Ask the CASA/GAL Volunteers to read the information on open-ended and closed-ended questions in the Chapter 3 Pre-Work packet.

CASA/GAL Interview

Ask the CASA/GAL volunteers to read the information on CASA/GAL Interview in the Chapter 3 Pre-Work packet.

The Black-Smith Case

Ask the CASA/GAL volunteers to read the Initial Case Notes for the Black-Smith Case, in the Chapter 3 Pre-Work packet before attending the Chapter 3 training session.

“Interviewing a Child” Video

Ask the CASA/GAL volunteers to 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, have participants design a brief interview with a child between the ages of 5 and 17 before the Chapter 3 session. Remind volunteers to review the child development information to ensure questions are age-appropriate.

“First Impressions” Video

Ask the volunteers to watch the video “First Impressions: Exposure to Violence and a Child’s Developing Brain,” which appears in the Chapter 3 Online Resources.

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 Shane's story video 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.

Basic 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.

Open-Ended vs. Closed-Ended Questions

Read the information on open-ended and closed-ended questions in the Chapter 3 Pre-Work packet.

CASA/GAL Interview

Read the information on CASA/GAL Interview in the Chapter 3 Pre-Work packet.

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. (The video is 4 minutes, 30 seconds.) Then, using the Interviewing a Child Assignment Sheet distributed by the facilitator, design and conduct a brief interview with a child between the ages of 5 and 17 before the Chapter 3 session. Be sure to get permission from the child’s parent(s) before the interview.

“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.)

