

CASA Information Gathering Checklist

Strategies to help make your CASA advocacy productive and effective

This is not a script for your visits. There is no single, standardized approach to organizing your CASA advocacy. Every case is different, and your activities will depend on the trajectory of your case and the needs of the child. As a CASA volunteer, you can use the following notes to guide your advocacy work and focus on the issues that affect the well-being of children and youth in your case. Use these suggestions to gather information that will help you prepare effective and useful reports to the court.

Placement details and your observations of the child

When you observe children in the current placement setting, at school or during visits with parents and siblings, what do you notice?

- Affect
- Moods, mood changes
- Developmental stages
- Child's physical appearance
- Physical ability or constraints
- Health, dress
- Verbal ability
- Relationship, interactions with others
- Intellectual ability
- Eating habits
- See the child's sleeping arrangements (quarterly, not every visit). Does child have his/her own room, own bed, toys?
- Other people present/ other residents
- Physical environment (including childproofing)

Interaction with Child/Youth

- Important family connections
- Important relationships (foster families, friends, teachers, coaches, mentors)
- Wishes and desires for the future
- Challenges or areas in need of help
- Likes/dislikes
- Information and feelings regarding visits with parents, siblings, other family
- Feelings about the placement
- Whether they feel safe in the placement
- What does the child report to you about school/daycare?
- Feelings about and activities toward planning for emancipation if needed
- Jobs, life skills, housing, medication, permanency goals
- Post-high school planning
- Ethnic & cultural background or needs
- Children's interests and hobbies

Interaction with therapist or other mental health provider

Note: your Advocate Manager has resources to help you navigate the specifics of Mental Health Advocacy

- Has child regularly attended therapy? If sessions were missed were reasons given?
- Frequency of therapy – is it adequate for effective treatment? If not, what's recommended?
- What sort of assessment was done before beginning therapy? What were the recommendations of the assessment?
- Are further assessments needed?
- Does the child have a diagnosis?
- What are the treatment goals and do they address the issues that brought the child into foster care?
- Is the child participating in therapy? Are there circumstances that make it difficult for the child to participate?
- Is the child prescribed medication? What is it and what does it treat? How long has the child been taking it? Is the child in compliance with the dosage & frequency? When should there be follow-up and what follow-up would that be?
- Any concerns about parent visits?
- Any concerns about the child's placement?
- Any other concerns that should be brought to the court's attention?

Interaction with caseworker or other professionals providing services

- Progress towards overall goal, including parents' participation in services
- Concurrent planning, if any
- What services were recommended for the children and which are they receiving?
 - Frequency
 - Progress
 - Concerns
- Barriers to delivery of services
- Who provides those services?
- Visitation plan (NPs and siblings)
- Compliance with visitation plan
- Any recommended services as yet unmet or unscheduled?

Interaction with school or daycare staff

Note: your Advocate Manager has resources to help you navigate the specifics of Educational Advocacy

- Have the child's previous school records been transferred to his/her current school? Have records of any special education plans transferred to the current school?
- Is the child performing at grade level? On-track to progress to next grade? If not, what are the top issues to address?
- Child's grades? Resources available to help?
- Child's school schedule, transportation, extracurricular activities
- Child's behavior, appearance, strengths & challenges, socialization, friendships, likes & dislikes, changes noted
- School attendance – is it regular? How many absences? Were they excused?
- Any visits to school nurse, social worker, or other support personnel?
- Does the child need or receive tutoring?
- If this is a residential (group) placement, confirm whether an Educational Surrogate has been appointed by Illinois Board of Ed to advocate for, and consent to, educational services for the child
- Have any concerns been identified that would warrant a request for a (special education) evaluation – e.g. vision, hearing, health, and/or behavior?
- Does this child have a current IEP or 504 plan?
 - What types of services or accommodations are involved?
 - When is the next evaluation or meeting? Request to be notified so you can attend.
 - Obtain a copy of the plan documents if you can.
- Does the child currently participate in extracurricular activities? Have a desire to participate? What are barriers/options re: transportation, fees, equipment, and other necessities?
- If applicable: the child's access to & involvement in resources for post-HS education or vocational opportunities.
- Upcoming school projects, deadlines, tests, papers, standardized testing dates? Resources available to help?
- What is FP's/NP's involvement with the school? Any school staff observations re: caregiver, child's demeanor toward them

Interaction with Caregiver

Note: your Advocate Manager has resources to help you navigate the specifics of Health Advocacy

*Get specific information from foster parent about the child's daily life
and about the child's behavior related to:*

- Child's daily functioning
- Behavior: problems and strengths
- Details of children's services and any barriers to participation
- Contacts made by parent through letters, phone calls, etc.
- Child's adjustment to separation and loss
- Activities, extracurriculars
- Child's sleeping habits
- Child's eating habits
- How does the child behave around pets?
- Child's interactions with other household members
- Child's school performance and attitude toward school
- Adjustments in school
- Does the caregiver report any concerns or outstanding needs?
- Do caregivers work? Is after-school care required? What are the details? Daycare?
- Caregiver's views on permanency (at the appropriate time later in the case)
- Health Status
 - Physical health: immunizations, well-visit status, DCFS required medical exams, medical issues
 - Dental
 - Hearing, vision
- Medical records & resources
 - Does caregiver have a current medical card for the child?
 - Is the caregiver in touch with HealthWorks of IL, the medical case manager and record-keeper for youth in care? Your manager can provide information about HealthWorks. Remember: HealthWorks is not authorized to speak with CASAs, only with CWs and Caregivers.
 - Does the caregiver have a copy of the HealthWorks Passport, the child's current medical records?
 - Has the caregiver identified a "medical home" for the child (a consistent primary care provider who sees and knows the child over time)?
- Medication
 - Details of meds and dosing. Your manager can guide you in obtaining this information
 - Next psychiatrist appointment