



VOLUNTEER POLICY AND PROCEDURE MANUAL

April 2021

*“There can be no keener revelation of a society’s soul than the way
in which it treats its children.”*

Nelson Mandela

Child Advocates of SW Connecticut (CAC) is pleased to welcome you as a volunteer. Since June 2010, CAC has recruited, trained and supervised over 165 court appointed and community volunteers who work to ensure that each abused or neglected child has a safe, loving and permanent home.

This manual will provide you with CAC’s Volunteer Policies and Procedures.

- As a volunteer, you are the heart of CAC’s program
- As a volunteer, you mean something different to a child than a paid worker
- As a volunteer, you bring a community perspective to your case and to CAC
- As a volunteer, you have the ability to focus on one or two cases
- As a volunteer, you have the ability to evaluate critically because your livelihood is not at stake
- As a volunteer, you have perceived credibility because you chose to be an advocate
- As a volunteer, you bring gifts of talent, time, perspective and caring to our work

Thank you for your dedication and support!

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Purpose of Policies and Procedures

The purpose of the CAC Volunteer Policy and Procedure manual is to provide overall guidance and direction to CAC volunteers. Volunteers will be required to sign an acknowledgement indicating that they have read, understood, and will comply with all the policies and procedures. Volunteers will be notified of any changes made to this policy and procedure manual.

These policies do not constitute, either implicitly or explicitly, a binding contractual or personnel agreement. CAC reserves the right to change any of these policies and procedures at any time. The current policies and practices of CAC are in effect at the time of publication. Please read thoroughly as all previously issued manuals, policy statements or memoranda are superseded by this Volunteer Policy and Procedure Manual.

CAC Mission

Child Advocates of SW Connecticut (CAC) is a non-profit that transforms the lives of vulnerable children and youth by providing trained and supervised one-on-one volunteer advocates in the courtroom and the community. CAC volunteers are community members who have been specially trained to work with abuse and neglect cases. A CAC volunteer can be appointed by the Superior Court for Juvenile Matters, the Probate Court or through a community referral. CAC volunteers play an integral part in assuring that children do not become lost in the system. The CAC program is dedicated to the premise that all children are entitled to grow up in safe and loving homes.

Recruiting of Potential CAC Volunteers

CAC recruitment efforts are directed at obtaining volunteers from a variety of socioeconomic levels and ethnic backgrounds in accordance with the demographics of Fairfield County. Interested volunteers who live outside Fairfield County may, at the discretion of the CAC Executive Director, be accepted into the CAC Program, provided their residence is within a reasonable distance of the CAC Court(s) and the volunteer is committed to driving as needed. Recruitment efforts may include, but are not be limited to, multi-media outreach, speaking engagements, CAC website, referrals from national CASA website, CAC events, CAC brochures, listings in local volunteer Centers of the United Way, and on-going news coverage of CAC.

Each potential volunteer is contacted by a CAC staff member. Each potential volunteer will receive a Volunteer Information Sheet, which explains the purpose of the CAC program, the role and responsibilities of the CAC volunteer, information concerning the commitment of time involved, and answers to other frequently asked questions.

Screening of Potential CAC Volunteers

Each potential CAC volunteer shall complete a CAC Volunteer Application containing information regarding their educational background, employment history, personal experiences with child abuse and neglect and other information. In addition, each applicant will be required to submit the names of three or more persons, unrelated to the applicant, as references.

Each applicant must complete a CT Department of Family and Children Background Check Form and consent to a background check with state and local law enforcement. CAC will not accept applicants if they have been convicted of, or have charges pending for a felony or misdemeanor involving a sex offense, child abuse or neglect, or related acts that would pose risks to children or to the CAC program's credibility.

If the volunteer meets the qualifications listed below, the CAC Program Director will contact the potential volunteer to review the volunteer responsibilities. If the Program Director determines that the applicant has the potential to become a CAC volunteer, the Program Director will conduct a personal interview with each applicant. Acceptance into the CAC training program for new volunteers is at the sole discretion of CAC.

Qualifications of a CAC Volunteer

- Have an interest in children, their rights, and special needs
- Successfully pass screening requirements, which include: written application, criminal record and child abuse registry checks, personal interview, and three personal references
- Successfully complete Pre-Service Training program
- Complete a minimum of 12 hours In-Service Training hours annually
- Have the ability to work with a child, the child's family members, and professionals, using tact, concern and basic human relations skills
- Have the ability to respect and relate to individuals from various backgrounds and cultures in a caring and sensitive manner
- Have the ability to communicate effectively verbally and in writing
- Possess emotional maturity, stability, and common sense
- Be available to attend court hearings during the business day
- Be able to keep information confidential
- Be willing to commit to the program for a minimum of 18 -24 months, at least until one assigned case is closed
- Willing to accept supervision, training and evaluation from the Program Director and CAC staff
- Able to provide own transportation

- Able to work well with Program Director, attorneys, court personnel, service providers, etc.
- Able to maintain case information in Optima system
- Minimum 21 years of age

Reporting relationship:

- The volunteer reports to the CAC Program Director

The final decision regarding acceptance into the program will rest with the Executive Director.

CAC Volunteer Pre-Service Training

CAC provides volunteers with at least thirty (30) hours of Pre-Service Training. Attendance at all in-person training sessions is mandatory. Additionally, all outside classroom assignments must be completed in a timely fashion. Training topics include but are not limited to: the roles and responsibilities of a volunteer and other professionals; permanency planning; confidentiality; cultural awareness; child abuse and neglect; community resources; juvenile court process; and court proceedings. All volunteers must satisfactorily complete the training.

Upon successful completion of training, the volunteer will be sworn-in as volunteer advocate.

CAC Volunteer In-Service Training

All CAC volunteers are required to complete 12 hours of In-Service Training (continuing education) each year. CAC offers several In-Service Training Programs throughout the year. If a volunteer is unable to attend 12 hours of In-Service training, CAC will provide educational credit for relevant alternative programs or education.

Volunteer Case Assignment and Case Management

The Program Director, in consultation with the Executive Director, will try to match a volunteer with an appropriate case. A volunteer has the right to refuse a case assignment for any reason.

Once a volunteer accepts a case, he or she must sign a certificate of confidentiality to be maintained in the case file. The volunteer will then receive any documentation necessary to manage his or her case, including, but not limited to, a court order appointing him or her as the Guardian ad Litem (GAL), Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA), or the referral information about the Community Advocate for Children and Youth (CACY).

The volunteer shall maintain a case file on Optima. Any handwritten notes must be placed in a secure place to ensure that all information remains confidential.

Volunteers must submit a court report or some other documentation at court hearings according to direction of the Program Director. All court reports and documentation must be reviewed by the Program Director prior to distribution to parties to the case. Court reports and documentation should be completed for review and provided to the Program Director one week prior to their scheduled court date. Program Directors will not substantially alter reports and recommendations without the prior knowledge of the CAC volunteer. However, upon review of a report, if Program Director believes the report is not appropriate, contains false information, or information detrimental to CAC, the Program Director in consultation with the Executive Director, may alter the report. In such a case, the volunteer will be contacted and the concerns explained.

Program Director will attempt to return all email and phone messages to volunteers within 24 hours of receiving them during the work week. Over the weekends and holidays, if a message is received, CAC staff will respond by the start of the work week. If there is an urgent matter, please indicate "urgent" in the subject of the email. All volunteers will be notified when staff is on vacation. Volunteers are also expected to return phone and email messages from the Program Director in a timely manner.

Volunteers who recognize that they may not have the time or ability to effectively advocate for a child should decline to be appointed, withdraw from the case or request assistance.

At the conclusion of the volunteer's involvement with the case, including resignation by or termination of the volunteer, the volunteer shall destroy or return any handwritten notes to CAC. This includes, but is not limited to, all original documentation of the volunteer's appointment to the case, court documents, documentation of phone calls or other interviews, any correspondence, medical records or other assessments, and any and all personal notes on the case.

Requirements of a CAC Volunteer

1. Training

- Successfully complete the CAC Pre-Service training (30-35 hours)
- Attend 12 hours of in-service training per year (continuing education)

2. Complete an intensive independent investigation of the case

- Sign a confidentiality agreement when accepting case assignment
- Interview the child, if permitted, and all relevant parties to the case

- Review appropriate records and reports—DCFS, schools, healthcare, etc.
 - Obtain signed Releases as needed, see Release Requirements herein
 - Participate in case status conferences concerning the child
 - Visit the child at least once per month, if permitted
 - Determine and assess the child’s permanency options
 - Advocate that appropriate services be provided for the child and family
3. Report findings to the Court
- Provide a written report containing factual information to be reviewed by the Program Director
 - In GAL and CASA cases, provide the Court with as clear a statement as possible to what is in the child’s best interest
4. Ensure representation of child’s best interest
- Attend all Court proceedings to see that all relevant facts are presented
 - Attend appropriate interagency meetings regarding the child or family
 - Monitor the case following a Court hearing or decision as designated by the court
 - Attend administrative case review (ACRs), individual education plan (IEPs), and any other meetings regarding the child or family
 - Maintain contact with the child, family, or others (as ordered by the court) to monitor progress
5. Consult with the CAC Staff
- Report directly to the Program Director
 - Work with Program Director to review the case plan and set goals
 - Discuss preliminary findings
 - Review progress in the case
 - Review court reports
6. Submit volunteer information in Optima
- Maintain case records in Optima and complete Contact Logs
 - Complete Well-Being Assessment in Optima – at start of case, twice a year, and at close of case
 - Complete 12 hours of In-service training hours (continuing education) and report in Optima Training Logs

CAC COURT APPOINTED SPECIAL ADVOCATE (CASA/GAL) JOB DESCRIPTION

Child Advocates of SW Connecticut's (CAC) Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) will work independently to investigate and monitor cases of juvenile abuse or neglect in southwestern Connecticut pursuant to the laws of the State of Connecticut and the guidelines of National Court Appointed Special Advocates Organization.

Duties and responsibilities of CAC CASA/GAL:

- Obtain first hand a clear understanding of the needs and situation of the child by reviewing all relevant documents and records and speaking with the child, social workers, teachers, parents (with permission of their attorneys) and other persons to determine the facts and circumstances of the child's situation
- Identify and advocate for the best interest of the child
- Have regular and sufficient in-person contact with the child to develop a relationship and ensure in-depth knowledge of the case to make fact-based recommendations
- Ensure that the child and his or her family are receiving appropriate services and advocate for those that are not immediately available. Bring concerns about the child's health, education, mental health, etc. to the appropriate parties in the case
- Monitor implementation of service plans to ensure that services are implemented in a timely manner
- When appropriate, support the parents in any way possible for the benefit of the child
- Advocate for the child's best interests in the community by interfacing with mental health, educational and other community systems to assure that the child's needs in these areas are met
- Attend meetings pertaining to the child
- Submit a written court report with recommendations on what placement, visitation plan, services, and permanent plan are in the best interest of the child.
- Appear at all hearings to advocate for the child's best interests and provide testimony when necessary
- Maintain complete records about the case, including appointments, interviews and information gathered about the child and the child's life circumstances
- Complete timely Contact Logs, Training Logs and Well-Being Assessments in CAC's Optima system
- Sign Confidentiality Agreement and return to CAC Program Director
- Complete 35 hours of pre-service training in accordance with National CASA training curriculum. Complete 12 hours of continuing education each year
- All CASA/GAL volunteers must complete the DCF and state and national criminal background checks
- The CASA/GAL reports to the CAC Program Director

CAC VOLUNTEER GUARDIAN AD LITEM PROBATE COURT JOB DESCRIPTION

The CAC volunteer Guardian ad Litem (GAL) in Probate Court will work independently to investigate and monitor cases of guardianship in southwestern Connecticut Probate Court pursuant to the laws of the State of Connecticut.

Duties and responsibilities of CAC Probate Court GAL:

- Obtain a first-hand understanding of the needs and situation of the child by reviewing all relevant documents and records and speaking with the child, parents (with their attorneys' permission), social workers, teachers and other persons as needed (with releases signed by the child's legal guardian) to determine the facts and circumstances of the child's situation
- Identify and advocate for the best interests of the child
- Seek cooperative solutions by acting as a facilitator among parties
- Appear at all hearings to advocate for the child's best interests and provide testimony when necessary
- Have regular and sufficient in-person contact with the child to ensure in-depth knowledge of the case and make fact-based recommendations to the court
- Meet in-person with the child approximately once every thirty days
- Make recommendations for specific appropriate services for the child and, when appropriate, the child's family
- Ensure that the children and their family are receiving appropriate services and advocate for those that are not immediately available. Bring concerns about the child's health, education, mental health, etc. to the appropriate parties in the case
- Monitor implementation of court orders, assuring that court ordered services are implemented in a timely manner and that review hearings are held in accordance with the law
- Inform the Court promptly of important developments in the case through appropriate means as determined by court rules or statute. Update the court on developments with agencies and family members.
- Advocate for the child's best interests in the community by interfacing with mental health, educational and other community systems to assure that the child's needs in these areas are met
- Submit signed written reports with best interest recommendations for all court hearings
- The GAL reports to the CAC Program Director

CAC COMMUNITY ADVOCATE FOR CHILDREN AND YOUTH (CACY) JOB DESCRIPTION

Child Advocates of SW Connecticut's (CAC) Community Advocate for Children and Youth (CACY) will work independently to investigate and monitor cases of vulnerable children and youth neglect in southwestern Connecticut pursuant to the laws of the State of Connecticut.

Duties and responsibilities of CAC CACY:

- Obtain first hand a clear understanding of the needs and situation of the child by reviewing all relevant documents and records and speaking with the child, social workers, teachers, parents (with permission of their attorneys) and other persons to determine the facts and circumstances of the child's situation
- Identify and advocate for the best interest of the child
- Have regular and sufficient in-person contact with the child to develop a relationship and ensure in-depth knowledge of the case to make fact-based recommendations
- Ensure that the child and his or her family are receiving appropriate services and advocate for those that are not immediately available. Bring concerns about the child's health, education, mental health, etc. to the appropriate parties in the case
- Monitor implementation of service plans to ensure that services are implemented in a timely manner
- When appropriate, support the parents in any way possible for the benefit of the child
- Advocate for the child's best interests in the community by interfacing with mental health, educational and other community systems to assure that the child's needs in these areas are met
- Attend meetings pertaining to the child
- Maintain complete records about the case, including appointments, interviews and information gathered about the child and the child's life circumstances
- Complete timely Contact Logs, Training Logs and Well-Being Assessments in CAC's Optima system
- Sign Confidentiality Agreement and return to CAC Program Director
- Complete 35 hours of pre-service training in accordance with National CASA training curriculum. Complete 12 hours of continuing education each year
- All CACY volunteers must complete the DCF and state and national criminal background checks
- The CACY reports to the CAC Program Director

Discrimination

CAC promotes equal employment opportunities to all applicants and volunteers by prohibiting discriminatory policies concerning any individual or group based on race, religious creed, national origin, sexual orientation, physical or mental disability, color, gender, age, marital status, political affiliation, or veteran status.

Staff and volunteers are admonished that racial slurs, ethnic jokes or other disparaging remarks or conduct based on race, religious creed, national origin, sexual orientation, physical or mental disability, color, gender, age, marital status, political affiliation, or veteran status are never appropriate in a professional setting.

CAC will take prompt and immediate action to investigate instances of reported misconduct. Any employee or volunteer found to be in violation of this policy will be subject to disciplinary action, up to and including termination.

CAC Pledge 2021

CAC stands in solidarity against injustice, violence or brutality that inflicts undue harm on or disadvantage to another human being. Racism is reprehensible and has no place in our society. We believe in freedom of expression through peaceful, lawful, demonstration and that every voice has the right to be heard.

The inhumane and senseless deaths that have rocked this nation serve as reminders that there is still much work to be done to address the evils of racism and indifference. They are also stark reminders that inequality, inequity and disproportionality exist across all systems of our society, especially in our work with vulnerable children who have experienced abuse or neglect.

As an organization, we believe it is important to align our mission and vision with anti-racist values among staff and volunteers. CAC will continue to provide high quality volunteer trainings to raise awareness around the complex issues of bias. By doing this, we work to ensure equitable outcomes for all children, regardless of race, gender or sexual orientation.

These sobering times serve as a reminder that it is going to take all of us, working together, to make life better in our communities, especially for the children and families we serve. CAC pledges to do our part.

Safety

The following volunteer safety guidelines have been established to help avoid possible harmful situations while volunteering for CAC:

- Dress in a fashion that is casual and not conspicuous. Avoid wearing or exposing expensive jewelry. Do not carry a large sum of money.
- Exercise maximum care and good judgment at all times to prevent accidents and injuries. If any kind of accident or injury does occur, report it to the Program Director.
- Before going on a visit, verify the appropriate route or become familiar with the area a few days prior to stopping for a visit.
- If you are concerned about visiting a home or any other place, ask the Program Director for guidance.
- Always let someone know where you are and how long you plan to be gone on the visit.
- Visits with children should take place in a public place or with other adults in the near vicinity to avoid claims of misconduct - see Sexual Abuse Policy.
- Bring your cell phone and keep it on.
- Upon approaching a building or other area, if you do not feel totally comfortable for whatever reason, DO NOT ENTER the building or the area. A visit can be made at another time and arrangements can be made to have someone accompany you.

Anti-Sexual Abuse Policy

CAC prohibits and does not tolerate sexual abuse in the workplace or in any CAC related activity.

CAC provides the following procedures for employees, volunteers, family members, board members, patients, victims of sexual abuse, or others to report sexual abuse and disciplinary penalties for those who commit such acts. No employee, volunteer, patient or third party, no matter his or her title or position has the authority to commit or allow sexual abuse.

CAC has a Zero-Tolerance policy for any sexual abuse committed by an employee, volunteer, board member or third party. Upon completion of the investigation, disciplinary action up to and including termination of employment and criminal prosecution may ensue.

CAC Volunteers are to abide by the following rules when working with children or each other:

- a. Avoid being alone. Activities and meetings shall occur in an open-door, well-lit, easily accessible setting. When this is not possible, such as during a closed-door consultation, document the time spent behind closed doors and keep it to a minimum. Intimate or secluded settings are to be avoided.
- b. Do not transport a child in your vehicle. Do not take a child to your home or to any home other than the child's
- c. Avoid violation of "boundaries" of proper behavior such as requesting personal favors, and intimating that success is dependent on personally pleasing or satisfying another.

Definition: Sexual abuse is inappropriate sexual contact of criminal nature or interaction for gratification of the adult who is a caregiver and responsible for the patient or child's care. Sexual abuse includes sexual molestation, sexual assault, sexual exploitation, or sexual injury, but does not include sexual harassment. Any incidents of sexual abuse reasonably believed to have occurred will be reportable to appropriate law enforcement agencies and regulatory agencies.

Physical and behavioral evidence or signs that someone is being sexually abused are listed below. Physical evidence of abuse:

- Difficulty in walking
- Torn, stained or bloody underwear
- Pain or itching in genital area
- Bruises or bleeding of the external genitalia
- Sexually transmitted diseases

Behavior signs of sexual abuse:

- Reluctance to be left alone with a particular person
- Wearing lots of clothing especially in bed
- Fear of touch
- Nightmares or fear of night
- Apprehension when sex is brought up

Reporting Procedure: If you are aware of or suspect previously undisclosed sexual abuse taking place **related to a child in your case**, you must immediately report it to the Executive Director or Program Director. If it is a child who is the victim then you should report the suspected abuse to the CT Department of Children & Families Careline 1-800-842-2288.

If you are aware of or suspect sexual abuse taking place **related to the CAC staff, volunteers, board members or employees of CAC**, you must immediately report it to the Executive Director or Program Director. If the suspected abuse is to an adult, you should report the abuse to your local or state Adult Protective Services (APS) Agency. If

it is a child who is the victim then you should report the suspected abuse to the CT Department of Children & Families Careline 1-800-842-2288.

CAC will immediately report any alleged sexual abuse incident related to the CAC staff, volunteers, board members or employees of CAC, to CAC's insurance agent.

Anti-Retaliation: CAC prohibits retaliation made against any employee, volunteer, board member or patient who reports a good faith complaint of sexual abuse or who participates in any related investigation. Making false accusations of sexual abuse in bad faith can have serious consequences for those who are wrongly accused. The organization prohibits making false and/or malicious sexual abuse allegations, as well as deliberately providing false information during an investigation. Anyone who violates this rule is subject to removal.

Investigation and Follow-up: CAC will take all allegations of sexual abuse related to the CAC staff, volunteers, board members or employees, seriously and will promptly and thoroughly investigate whether sexual abuse has taken place. The organization will cooperate fully with any investigation conducted by law enforcement or other regulatory agencies. It is CAC's objective to conduct a fair and impartial investigation. The organization provides notice that they have the option of placing the accused on a leave of absence or on a reassignment to non-patient contact. The organization will make every reasonable effort to keep the matters involved in the allegation confidential as possible while still allowing a prompt and thorough investigation.

Anti-Substance Abuse Policy

The use, sale, purchase, possession, manufacture, distribution, or dispensing of illegal drugs on or in CAC office, courthouse or during scheduled volunteering time, whether or not it is on or at CAC office or courthouse, is against CAC policy and is cause for immediate removal.

To assure fitness for volunteering, and to ensure the safety of those around us, CAC prohibits volunteers from working under the influence of alcohol, illegal drugs and certain legal drugs at any time when at CAC office, courthouse or performing work on behalf of CAC. Under the influence is considered to be the equivalent of one drink containing alcohol, including one beer. If, based on the observations there is a reasonable suspicion that a volunteer is impaired while volunteering for CAC, the volunteer may be removed.

Volunteer Files

A file of all the volunteers and applicants shall remain confidential and will be maintained in a secure facility and/or database on a computer in the CAC office. Volunteers are responsible to report any changes of address, telephone or other pertinent information to the Program Director. With reasonable advance notice, a volunteer may review material in his or her file, but only in CAC's offices and in the presence of the individual appointed by CAC to maintain the files.

Volunteer Conduct

Volunteers represent CAC and should conduct themselves in the courtroom and the community in a manner that reflects favorably on CAC.

Dress – Volunteers should dress appropriately for court and meetings with other community agencies. Please contact the Program Director with any questions regarding appropriate dress.

Gift Giving – Volunteers can give children involved in their case ONLY a small gift of minimal value as an introduction, on a birthday or a special occasion. Volunteers can also send cards. Volunteers are absolutely prohibited from giving money, gifts, or clothes that are not of a minimal value. Examples of permissible gifts include: crayons, coloring books, reading books, cards, small board games, balls, small toys, etc. Please contact the Program Director with any questions about gift giving.

No Reimbursement – As a volunteer based non-profit, CAC is unable to reimburse volunteers for any expenses. Volunteers will not be reimbursed for mileage travelled, gas, gifts, etc.

Providing Direct Service – Volunteers are prohibited from providing direct services such as, but not limited to: transporting parties, intervening in domestic disputes, providing counseling, giving legal advice, offering to provide funds for food or other necessities, taking parties to volunteer's house or place of employment, etc. Volunteers are facilitators. Volunteers work with other parties in the case, or advocate in court, to obtain any direct service needed. NOTE: Volunteers working with youth age 18 and over, may apply to CAC for permission to drive youth in volunteer's vehicle. Speak with the Program Director for complete requirements and to complete the Driving Agreement.

Public Speaking/Media – Volunteers are encouraged to speak about the CAC program in general throughout the community. However, inquiries concerning CAC, its policies, practices, or clients must be referred to the Executive Director. Volunteers are

prohibited from making any statements to the media involving the program or on behalf of the program.

Involvement with the Legal/Welfare System – Volunteers must immediately notify the Executive Director if he/she is charged with or convicted of a criminal offense, or becomes involved in any other court proceeding which might cause a conflict of interest or adversely affect the volunteer’s ability to effectively serve as a volunteer advocate for a child. This includes notifying CAC if the volunteer or any member of the volunteer’s immediate family becomes involved in a case with allegations of child abuse or neglect.

Conflict of Interest – Volunteer effectiveness and standing in court depends on maintaining professional relationships with children, families, DCF workers, attorneys, court personnel, service providers, etc. Volunteers should not become personally involved with any parties to the case or any parties that are professionally involved in child protection matters in the court. This includes not being related to or developing intimate, social or other nonprofessional relationships with any person connected to the case or being employed in a position that might result in a conflict of interest. If a volunteer is involved in a child protection matter, in any capacity unsupervised by CAC, the volunteer cannot serve as a CAC volunteer in the same court as the matter. Immediately inform your Program Director of any situation that may potentially result in a conflict of interest.

Communication with Parties – Volunteers are prohibited from providing legal advice; giving counseling; misrepresenting the role or position of a volunteer; or engaging in any *Ex parte* conversation with a judge. (*Ex parte* is a Latin legal term meaning “from one party” which is used to refer to improper unilateral contact with a judge without notice to another party.)

Confidentiality – Volunteer confidentiality is of the utmost importance. Volunteers become officers of the court upon appointment to a case. Any information pertaining to the children or families, including the foster families, which the volunteer receives in the course of his/her duties is strictly confidential. Discussion of the case may only take place with those directly involved with the case. No discussions of any children or family situations of any kind are to be held in hallways, elevators or other public places. Should there be any questions about confidentiality contact the Program Director.

Duty to Disclose: Exceptions to Confidentiality – Volunteers are responsible to transmit the information they collect to the parties and the court. Volunteer conversations are NOT legally protected by privilege, like a doctor-patient or lawyer-client relationship. Throughout the case, volunteers should carefully inform all the parties regarding what records will be maintained and what information will be shared, with whom, and under what circumstances.

Although not “mandated reporters”, volunteers have an affirmative duty to immediately disclose in instances where the volunteer suspects (1) child abuse and/or neglect; and (2) someone may harm her/himself or others. Such disclosures should be made immediately to the Department of Children and Families Care Line 1.800.842.2288 or the police. Volunteers with a question about disclosure should immediately contact the Program Director.

Email - All electronic communication is confidential. Volunteers should establish an email account for CAC related work that only the volunteer has access to. When referring to a CAC child in email communication between volunteer and Program Director or any other professionals including social workers and attorneys, it is preferred that initials only will be used. Be cautious when using cc on emails and when “Replying All.”

Release Requirements

General Information

Connecticut has confidentiality provisions to protect juvenile abuse and neglect proceedings from public scrutiny. However, CT permits persons with a direct interest in the case, including GALs and CASAs to access certain types and sources of information.

A **RELEASE** is a written legal document signed by a legal guardian (adult or agency) granting a GAL or CASA a legal right to access and gather particular information about a minor child for whom the adult or agency serves as the legal guardian. A release can also be a written legal document signed by an adult granting a GAL or CASA a legal right to access and gather information about the adult him/herself.

CAC Form of Release

CAC has a form of Release for use by GALs and CASAs. A copy of a sample completed CAC Release is attached to this document.

Releases on the CAC Release form are granted in the name of “**CASA OF SW CONNECTICUT, the Court Appointed Monitor, Guardian ad Litem, CASA or designees**” and the volunteer’s name is written in as designee when the case is assigned. Therefore, if a new volunteer takes over the case from another volunteer, the release remains in effect. However, it is best to obtain a new release containing the name of the new volunteer as quickly as possible.

If legal guardianship changes (for example, if commitment is revoked or if the child who originally was not committed is now committed to DCF), then a new release from the legal guardian is required.

CAC recommends expansive language when completing the “Name of the Agency or Individual in possession of the records.” For example, please use the name of the school instead of the name of the teacher or use the name of the agency instead of the name of the therapist. This allows more flexibility if the teacher, therapist or worker is switched.

CAC RELEASE REQUIREMENTS SUMMARY

	GAL/CASA
If DCF is the child’s legal guardian, is a release required to speak to anyone about the child?	Sometimes*. Always required when speaking with providers who have confidential relationship with child, i.e.: doctor, therapist. Consult with Program Director
If the parent or other adult is the child’s legal guardian, is a release required to speak to anyone about the child?	Sometimes*. Always required when speaking with providers who have confidential relationship with child, i.e.: doctor, therapist. Consult with Program Director
If DCF is the child’s legal guardian, is a release required to speak to anyone about the PARENT?	Always *
If a parent or other adult is the child’s legal guardian, is a release required to speak to anyone about the PARENT?	Always *

***Important Note:**

***Always obtain an attorney’s permission to speak to a party to the case when the party is represented by counsel** (for example, GALs and CASAs must always obtain permission from the parent’s attorney before speaking to the parent)

Grievance Procedure

Because volunteers are involved with emotional work that impacts the lives of children and families, this work can evoke a wide range of feeling from all the parties involved. It is therefore expected that there may be criticism from the parties. Every effort should be made to solve problems cooperatively and informally.

Should a complaint arise from someone outside CAC, the Program Director and/or the Executive Director will discuss the complaint with the volunteer. The Executive Director is responsible for deciding if the complaint has any validity and may request a written statement from the party initiating the complaint. In addition, the Executive Director may determine what action, if any, should be taken.

When a volunteer wishes to make a complaint with a policy, practice, condition or decision, the volunteer should first try to discuss the matter informally with the Program Director. If this is not an option or the problem is not resolved to the volunteer's satisfaction, the volunteer may contact the Executive Director to discuss the issue.

Evaluations

Volunteers may from time to time be evaluated. If CAC determines that its best interests are not being served, CAC may work with the volunteer to develop a plan to improve his or her efforts or CAC may choose to terminate the relationship.

Dismissal

CAC reserves the right to dismiss a volunteer.
Grounds for dismissal include, but are not limited to:

- taking action without CAC or court approval that endangers the child or is outside the role of the volunteer or the program
- knowingly and intentionally violating a program policy, court rule or law
- demonstrating an inability to effectively carry out the duties of a volunteer
- demonstrating gross misconduct or insubordination
- being under the influence of alcohol or drugs while performing the duties of a volunteer
- lying or falsifying records or any other documents
- participating in ex-parte communication with the court
- a conflict of interest

Resignation or Leave of Absence

Volunteers may at any time, for whatever reason, decide to resign from their volunteer service with CAC.

If the volunteer wants to become active again without repeating the initial training, volunteer must contact the program within one year of resigning. After one year, the volunteer may be required to re-apply to become a CAC volunteer.

A volunteer may elect to be on a “leave of absence” status for up to two (2) years. However, volunteer must continue to comply with in-service training requirements during the leave of absence.

Child Advocates of SW Connecticut VOLUNTEER CODE OF CONDUCT

The Child Advocates of SW Connecticut (CAC) volunteer should adhere to the following guidelines. Remember to use common sense. If you have any questions, contact your Program Director.

MONITORING A CASE:

1. The CAC volunteer should not accept a case assignment where there is any conflict of interest or any potential conflict of interest
2. The CAC volunteer is required to receive ongoing training and work under the direction of the CAC Program
3. The CAC volunteer should not record telephone calls, take photos, videos or audio tapes
4. The CAC volunteer should return ALL CASE FILES AND NOTES at the dismissal or resignation from the case.
5. The CAC volunteer shall adhere to guidelines with respect to maintaining CONFIDENTIALITY AND PRIVACY of others in all matters relating to an assigned case

CONFLICT RESOLUTION:

1. The CAC volunteer should refer concerns about the conduct of professionals (such as attorneys, medical professionals, social works, etc.) to the CAC Program Director
2. The CAC volunteer should inform the Program Director when a personal problem might conflict with the volunteer work or reflect negatively on the CAC Program
3. If a problem or conflict arises between any agencies or providers, the CAC volunteers should inform the Program Director and not try to handle it alone
4. The CAC volunteer should be honest, open, direct and sensitive when dealing with all parties involved in the case

CONTACT WITH CHILD/FAMILY:

1. The CAC volunteer may make appointments to sit in on family and/or sibling visits but should not supervise visitations

2. The CAC volunteer shall NOT provide transportation NOR take a child in his/her car at any time for any reason
3. Always interview children in a semi-public place. (Example: bedroom with door open, on the front porch, at the park, etc.) The CAC volunteer should never be completely alone with the children.
4. Although small token gifts at birthdays are acceptable, the CAC volunteer should refrain from buying gifts for their CAC children. Remember to include other children in the foster family when you give your child a treat.

ETHICS:

1. The CAC volunteer should never give out information such as addresses, telephone numbers and/or documents not already in the court file to anyone
2. The CAC volunteer may recommend resources; however, they should not provide counseling or direct services to any party involved in the case
3. The CAC volunteer should not provide babysitting services for any of the parties in his/her assigned case
4. The CAC volunteer should directly refer any media inquiries seeking information, interviews and/or facts relating to a specific case to the CAC Program Director
5. The CAC volunteer should not represent his or her personal views as those of the CAC Program
6. The CAC volunteer should not mention his/her position as a Court Appointed advocate to gain gifts, favors or influence in the community

Volunteer Acknowledgement Form

I, _____, hereby acknowledge that on _____ (date), I received a copy of the Volunteer Policy and Procedures Manual of Child Advocates of SW Connecticut (CAC). I understand that this Manual contains important information and that it is my responsibility to become familiar with its provisions. I agree to adhere to the provisions contained in the Volunteer Manual.

I also understand that CAC may add, delete or revise any policy or procedure at any time. No provisions of this Handbook constitute legal or contractual obligations of CAC.

Volunteer Printed Name _____

Volunteer Signature _____

Date _____

CAC Form of Release - sample

Child Advocates of SW Connecticut
500 Post Road East, Suite 200 Westport, CT 06880
Phone: 203.642.7020 Fax: 866.881.1041 Email: info@ctchildadvocates.org

RELEASE and AUTHORIZATION

I, Jane Jones (DCF), authorize
Name of person granting permission

Greenwich High School
Name of Agency or Individual in possession of records/information

to speak with or disclose information/records pertaining to:

John Smith 6/24/2004
Child(ren) Name(s) Child(ren) Date of Birth

to CHILD ADVOCATES OF SW CONNECTICUT, the Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA), Guardian ad Litem (GAL) or designees

Allie Sunshine
Name of CASA or GAL

Type of information to be released (check all that apply):

- Mental Health/Psychiatric Medical Education/School Support Services/Special Education (including PPTs)
 Medication Behavioral
 Other (specify) _____

The purpose of this authorization/disclosure is to provide information for use in judicial proceedings related to child protection, development/implementaion of an educational program or any other purpose for which this information can be lawfully used.

The nature and extent of the information to be disclosed will be the entire record, unless otherwise specified.

This authorization will expire in one year, unless otherwise indicated.

I understand authorizing the use or disclosure of the information described above is voluntary. I also understand that I may revoke this authorization by written notification. A revocation will not apply to information/record disclosed prior to the revocation. I understand that the information disclosed may be subject to re-disclosure by the recipient and it is no longer protected by federal law.

A photocopy, scan or facsimile of this original shall serve as a valid original.

If requested, I specifically authorize the release of the following sensitive information from the record:

(Must initial all that apply)

_____ Substance abuse _____ Sexually transmitted diseases
_____ Confidential HIV/AIDS –related information _____ Genetic testing

NOTE: Confidentiality of psychiatric, drug and/or alcohol abuse and HIV/AIDS records is required and no information from these specific records shall be transmitted to anyone else without written consent or authorization under CT General Statutes, Chapt er 899c and 368x and Federal Regulation 42 CFR 2. These laws prohibit the recipient of the records from making any further disclosure without specific written consent of the person to whom the record pertains. A general authorization for the release of this information is NOT sufficient for this purpose.

Signature of person giving permission or authorized representative

Date

Check if this form is signed by a person other than the subject of record:

- parent/guardian attorney other (explain)