

COMMUNICATION TIPS

Effective communication is critical to your ability to successfully advocate for children. Most cases are derailed by communication issues.

Under Communication: When someone does not communicate with you on a regular basis or in a timely manner. This can lead to frustration and the desire to quit communicating with that person. Example: The social worker does not return your emails or phone calls or takes a week or more to do so.

Over Communication: When someone is communicating with you ALL THE TIME by calling or emailing you daily or sending multiple emails without giving an opportunity to respond to the first one. Example: CASA emails social worker every day for updates on the case or with new questions in each email.

Miscommunication: a failure to communicate clearly or effectively.

Lack of Communication: Pretty self-explanatory...when people stop communicating. This is what generally happens when there is under communication or over communication and does not help to foster a collaborative relationship.

Tips to foster effective communication

- Maintain contact with your coordinator and CASA program
- Share your contact information and the best way to get in touch with you
- Explain your role (more than once)
- Maintain regular contact with all the parties on your case
- Maintain regular contact with the providers and caregivers
- Give people a chance to respond: Is it really an emergency?
- Get back to people in a timely manner
- Be specific about what you are requesting
- Know that there are always more sides to the story
- Meet people face to face, if possible

General “Interviewing” Tips

- Go to interview with clear idea of what information you need
- Make sure the person you are speaking with knows your role in the case and why you are speaking with them
- Make sure the person knows what you plan on doing with the information they give you
- Build rapport prior to asking your laundry list of questions
- Paraphrase to ensure you understand what they are saying correctly

- Ask general, get-to-know-you questions at first
- Cultural Considerations

CONVERSATION STARTERS FOR CASAs SPEAKING TO CHILDREN

With the requirement that CASAs report to the court children's expressed wishes related to the matters before the court, we want CASAs to approach this new responsibility carefully. It is so easy to hint at the desired answer if you are not a highly trained child interviewer. It is also difficult not to unnecessarily raise the child's anxiety or hopes.

Use this list of child friendly questions as a starting point for your thinking before going out to see a child. Pick out a couple of possible questions that seem appropriate for the age of the child and that might appeal to their interests or personality. Some of these can serve as ice-breakers to get conversation going. If the child is not cooperative, let it go. Simply put in your court report that the child declined to express their wishes (about visits, placement, sibling contacts, etc.)

If the child states a wish for something impossible, unsafe or highly unlikely, just empathize with their feelings and report it to the court. Be sure to tell children that you just pass along their views so they can have a say but that other grown-ups, including the judge, will make the decisions.

If you could wave a magic wand and change one thing about your life, what would it be?

If you had three wishes, what would they be?

What was the funniest/most surprising/happiest thing that happened to you today?

What was the nicest thing you did for someone else today?

If you were writing a newspaper article about your day, what would the headline be?

Teach me one thing that you don't think I know.

If you won the lottery, what is the first thing you would buy?

Describe your perfect day from the time you wake up until you go to bed.

What superhero would you like to be?

- Use age-appropriate language
- Get down on their level
- Do an activity while asking questions
- Only one concept per question
- Avoid leading questions
- Children are very literal & are normally pleasers
- Have a consistent routine
- Make no assumptions about meanings of words, ask for clarification

- Recognize that children do not have to answer your questions

Maximize the Information you get at an FTDM

Date and Time

Who is Present and their relationship to the case?

Request a copy of the sign in sheet at the end of the meeting - make sure information is legible!

- From the Department (facilitator, social worker(s), supervisor(s))
- Family Members (child, mom, dad(s), extended family)
 - Try to find out if someone was invited but wasn't present- and get their contact info.
- Family Friends (neighbors, fictive kin)
- Community Members (service providers, teachers, daycare, etc.)

Take Notes

Take as many notes (fact based- not your conclusions) about the case as you can.

Things to document if/when it comes up:

- Who are the kids? Names, ages and who their parents are if it's not clear (e.g., do they have same or different dads?)
- Where are the kids currently placed?
 - If out of home, how long have they been out of home?
 - How are they out of home? (VPA/Protective Custody)
- Who is at the FTDM and how do they relate to the kids (if it comes up)
- Family History
 - Is this the first involvement with the Department?
 - Has there been out of home placements in the past?
 - Where? Are those placements a possibility?
 - Are there siblings who are not included in this FTDM?
 - If so, where are they? Placement with them a possibility?
- What are the issues that brought the case to the table?
- What are the strengths? Concerns?
- Is the family already involved in services?
 - If so, who are the services providers? Details/Contact info?

Get contact information (name, number and DOB if possible) for anyone who is mentioned as a resource (whether for placement or visits) but is not present at the FTDM.

- Write down the Placement Decision as you understand it
- Write down any goals/objectives/things to be done and the priority (if there is one/time frames)
- Anything else you think may be relevant to making placement decisions
 - Did any possible issues with proposed placements come up (like past criminal or CPS history)?
 - Were there any proposed placements that came up that didn't make it on to the placement decision plans, and if so, why was it nixed?

Additional Resources/Websites

Google: www.google.com

Washington Association of Child Advocate Programs: www.wachildadvocates.org

National CASA: www.casaforchildren.org

DSHS Website: www.dshs.wa.gov: You can access DSHS forms as well as contact information for various services

DCYF website: www.dcyf.wa.gov: The new website for “The Department”

DCYF Employee lookup website:

<https://fortress.wa.gov/dshs/ca/EmployeeDirectory/Employee/Index>

InvestEd: www.invested.org/

Provides funding that supports the efforts of secondary schools throughout Washington state. We partner with 660 schools and assist 25,245 students with small amounts of short-term, item-specific, need-based funding – items such as shoes, coats, glasses, sports equipment, and academic fees.

Foster Care Liaison:

- www.k12.wa.us/FosterCare/default.aspx
- www.k12.wa.us/FosterCare/ContactInformation.aspx

The Foster Care Program at OSPI supports students in foster care by encouraging innovative practices that reduce educational disruptions, strengthen school stability, and improve academic performance. As part of the Student Support division, the Foster Care Education Program partners with educators, foster parents, social workers, state agencies, and advocates as they work to support the whole child through evidence-based, best-practices, and collaboration.

Adolescents: Websites that specifically address programs for older kids (teens)

- independence.wa.gov/
- www.dcyf.wa.gov/services/independent-living-skills/independent-living-program
- www.dcyf.wa.gov/services/education-for-foster-youth/etv
- www.dcyf.wa.gov/services/extended-foster-care

www.facebook.com: Social media website where profiles can be searched*

- o *Caveat: you cannot “friend” a party to the case and you can only access what someone makes public.

Education:

- **Treehouse:** www.treehouseforkids.org/take-action/advocate/
Educational advocacy website. Also has reference guides that can be downloaded on educational advocacy for special education kids and how to navigate school systems.
- **Your local school website:** Often has contact information for the teachers so you can just email them. Additionally may have school calendars and other important school information.

Incarcerated Parents:

- www.vinelink.com: Victim Information and Notification Everyday. This website allows you to search for people who are incarcerated all around the state and get alerts when they are released.
- www.doc.wa.gov: Website to find incarcerated inmates in the WA State Prison system and what facility they are located.
- **Your local jail:** Most local jails have a website where you can look at their jail roster.

www.waspc.org/sex-offender-information:

Washington Associations of Sheriffs and Police Chiefs. This site allows you to search for sex offenders in WA State

www.nsopw.gov: National Sex Offender Registry Search website

Native Families

- www.bia.gov: Bureau of Indian Affairs. Allows you to find tribal contacts nationwide as well as other pertinent Tribal information
- **Local Tribal Website:** Many tribes have their own searchable websites

Services/Things for Kids:

Birth to Three

ChildFind

Children's Therapy Center

Children's Fund

Wishing Well

Recommended Reading – A mixture of fiction and non-fiction

In No Particular Order...

Braving the Wilderness, Brene Brown
Barking at the Choir, Gregory Boyle
The Deepest Well, Nadine Burke Harris
Dopesick, Beth Macy
So You Want to Talk About Race, Ijeoma Oluo
The Spirit Catches You and You Fall, Anne Fadiman
Evicted, Matthew Desmond
Before We Were Yours, Lisa Wingate
Look Me in the Eye, John Elder Robison
Hillbilly Elegy, J.D. Vance
Becoming Nicole, Amy Ellis Nut
Just Mercy, Bryan Stevenson
Walk Two Moons, Sharon Creech
Orphan Train, Christina Baker Kline
The Body Keeps the Score, Bessel Van der Kolk
Between the world and me, Ta-Nehisi Coates
Dreamland, Sam Quinones
The Other Wes Moore, Wes Moore
Walk to Beautiful, Ken Abraham
Three Little Words, Ashley Rhodes-Courter
A Long Way Home, Saroo Brierley
The Round House, Louis Erdrich
The Night of the Gun, David Carr
The New Jim Crow, Michelle Alexander
Etched in Sand, Regina Calcaterra
Breakfast at Sally's, Richard LeMieux
Songs of Willow Frost, Jamie Ford
Philomena, Martin Sixsmith
Missoula: Rape and the Justice System, Jon Krakauer
Small Great Things, Jodi Picoult
The Language of Flowers, Vanessa Diffenbaugh
Sleeping Arrangements, Laura Cunningham
And the Mountains Echoed, Khaled Hosseini
Pigs in Heaven, Barbara Kingsolver
Silver Star, Jeanette Walls
Hope's Boy, Andrew Bridge
Tomlinson Hill, Chris Tomlinson