

National CASA Association Online Communication and Social Media Guidelines for Staff and Volunteers



The National CASA Association believes that social media tools, when used appropriately, can be a powerful tool to increase awareness, support and sense of community for those of us engaged in advocacy for abused and neglected children. We believe that a thoughtful approach to online conversation and interaction among people online (on blogs, social networking, link-sharing, etc.) can enhance the reputation of the CASA and GAL movement and help recruit needed supporters and volunteers.

While National CASA encourages CASA and GAL staff, board members and volunteers to join the global online conversation, we also believe it is important that those who choose to do so understand what is recommended, expected and required when they discuss CASA-related topics—whether at work or on their own time. Our ability to serve children as a national cause depends on the trust and support of the American public, and it is critical that we tell our story well—and handle the confidential information entrusted to us responsibly.

The following 10 guidelines will help you engage in online conversations about your involvement with the CASA cause in a way that is appropriate, yet still interesting. This policy document is built largely on the work of the American Red Cross, IBM, CBS Interactive and CASA of Franklin County, OH. We thank these organizations for disclosing their policies publicly so that all of us can learn from them.

10 Online Communication and Social Media Guidelines

1. **Be transparent.** Identify yourself and your role at the CASA program (staff/volunteer/board member) when you discuss CASA-related matters. Write in the first person. If you have a vested interest in something you are discussing, be the first to point it out. Be clear that you are speaking for yourself, that the opinions expressed are solely those of the author and do not necessarily represent the views of National CASA or your state or local CASA program (unless, of course, you are posting as part of your employment responsibilities for a program—as a communications or online outreach manager, for example).
2. **Always comply with the law in regard to copyright/plagiarism.** Never post someone else’s work without their express permission (other than short quotes that comply with the “fair use” exceptions).
3. **Be aware of laws related to libel and defamation of character.** Defamation of character can lead to lawsuits against the author of the statement and will reflect negatively on the CASA cause. In choosing your words or content, imagine your supervisor and your family reading everything you post.
4. **Be respectful.** Don’t pick fights. Be the first to admit and correct your own mistakes. You should show proper consideration for other’s privacy and for topics that may be considered objectionable or inflammatory, such as politics and religion.
5. **Be considerate.** Remember that anyone, including fellow volunteers and CASA staff, may be actively reading what you publish online. Refrain from any communication intended to bash or embarrass your state or local CASA program, families, board members, donors or your colleagues. If

you have suggestions for improvements, please state them constructively or, better yet, go through the proper channels to air your concerns and share your suggestions.

6. **Be accurate.** Even though your posts may be primarily made up of personal opinion, do your research well and check that your facts are accurate. Make sure you have permission to post any copyrighted or confidential information (e.g., images, statistics), and be careful about posting or linking to items that may contain viruses.
7. **Be committed.** If you decide to jump into online communication, do so with a commitment to post regularly and well. Link to others and show your unique contributions. Make it interesting and have fun!
8. **Try to add value.** Does your posting provide worthwhile information and perspective? Does it help you, your coworkers, volunteers and supporters better understand and feel more connected to our cause? Does it build a positive sense of community?
9. **Respect work commitments.** Please remember that blogging and other social networking activities—unless specifically assigned as part of your employment—are personal and should be done on your own time. The obvious exception is if you have specifically been assigned to perform an online activity related to your responsibilities as a CASA employee or volunteer.
10. **Don't reveal confidential information.** Sharing stories that illustrate the value of CASA advocacy for children is often the most powerful way to engage the public in our cause and promote empathy for the children we serve. However, National CASA Quality Assurance standards require:
 - Respect for the children's and families' rights to privacy in regard to personal information
 - Adherence to the confidentiality restrictions imposed by law and CASA policies and procedures

It is unacceptable to discuss online any identifiable details of cases. It is acceptable to discuss general details and to use non-identifying pseudonyms so long as the information provided does not contain information recognizable to the family or others associated with the family or case. For example, use general terms such as “youth” instead of “13-year-old girl.” You should be careful to protect the dignity of families, children and social agencies, even if they are not named.

Volunteers and staff should not link to personal pages (or become online “friends”) of families or children they may encounter in their capacity with the CASA/GAL program. This includes email addresses, instant messenger names, blogs, photo sharing sites and social networking sites such as Facebook, MySpace, Twitter and YouTube. In addition, many programs prohibit volunteers from giving their email address or cell phone number to the child(ren) or family members on any case to which they are assigned.

Online communications and social media tools enable individuals to share insights and information—and express opinions—within the context of a globally distributed conversation. They support the democratization of knowledge and information and transform all of us from simply content consumers to content producers. If we follow the above guidelines, this exciting, evolving technology can be harnessed to help us all make a difference in the lives of abused and neglected children.