

## **Excerpt from Policy Section of Guardian ad Litem Training Manual Chapter 12, pp. 1-2**

### **Code of Conduct**

The guardian ad litem is appointed to represent the best interests of a child within the child protection/court process. This is a role of considerable importance and public trust and as such, the guardian ad litem is expected to demonstrate conduct which is responsible, ethical, law abiding and respectful of the parties and participants. This expectation applies to all program staff, whether paid or volunteer.

The guardian ad litem will:

1. Utilize the rights and powers vested in the role appropriately to advocate for the best interests of the child
2. Comply with applicable laws and rules—both state and federal, as well as court rules, policies of the judicial branch and program policies.
3. Maintain confidentiality
4. Avoid impropriety or the appearance of impropriety
5. The guardian ad litem will disclose any real or potential conflict of interest as soon as possible to the program and/or court, including current, former or potential relationships of a personal or professional/business nature which may compromise the independence and credibility of the guardian ad litem on an individual case; or compromise the program's purpose and goals
6. Not use the position for personal advantage
7. Establish appropriate boundaries with children, families and parties/participants
8. Take reasonable steps to insure personal safety.

Once appointed, the guardian ad litem is a representative of the program and the court. As such, the guardian ad litem is expected to demonstrate conduct which is responsible, ethical, law abiding and respectful of all parties concerned.

Volunteers can unwittingly abuse their clients by creating overdependence. Giving special favors can be a subtle form of seduction and extra familiarity can create confusion for the client. How much should you tell a client about yourself? Keep it minimal and general. Self disclosure should always be in the service of the client: don't burden the clients with your problems and don't let the client worry about you, the volunteer.

Some clients perceive friendliness and attention as personal friendship. If you give more than you should, resentment can poison the relationship. A helping relationship is temporary and is not a friendship. The involvement of the guardian ad litem is only for the duration of the case. It

is inappropriate to foster a relationship in which a child becomes so dependent that when the case ends and the guardian ad litem withdraws, the child suffers another significant loss. The job of the guardian ad litem is not to be the support system, but to help the child build relationships elsewhere; to make sure that the support system is provided through others who will be available to the child over the long term.

Volunteers need to remember to take care of themselves while still serving the clients. Don't say "yes" just to win approval and acceptance; avoid hurting someone's feelings; put others in your debt; or be thought of as a "can do" person. Say "no" to thoughtless, inappropriate requests; violations of your own values; doing what others should do for themselves; requests that conflict with your priorities; committing others against their will; requests that don't meet the "is this the best use of my time?" test.

And when you do say no, say it promptly -- before the hopes of others are raised. Don't feel obligated to justify every refusal. Reply to the request without impatience or anger; and whenever appropriate, offer to compromise when making a difficult refusal.