

Court Appointed Special Advocate/Guardian ad Litem Program
Crisis Management and Communication Plan¹

Date: February 1, 2007

Purpose: (Program Name) is committed to taking a preemptive, network-wide approach to planning for crisis management, including managing media involvement during a crisis. Accordingly, the **(Program Name)** has adopted the following crisis management plan, based in part on the State Association Crisis Management Plan. This local plan will serve as guidance for the local program staff, and volunteers, and includes measures for communication with the State Association staff.

Definition of “crisis”:

An unstable condition involving an impending, abrupt or decisive change.

Examples of crises include but are not limited to:

1. Death of a child served.
2. Harm to a child by a caregiver
3. Harm to a child by a CASA/GAL
4. CASA/GAL failure to adhere to program policy resulting in harm to a child (such as failure to report possible abuse/neglect, transporting child, etc)
5. Media providing negative information about the work of the CASA/GAL program.

It is critical that actions taken during a crisis, and all communication with the news media during a crisis, be conducted in a thoughtful and coordinated fashion, consistent with the Juvenile Court policies on the subject.

The Program Director (PD) or designee will be responsible for leading a team (Team), with direction from the Juvenile Court Judge (Judge) and Juvenile Court Executive Director (ED), which will develop and manage crisis activities and communications at the local level. These communications and activities will be communicated to the State Association Executive Director or designee (State ED), who will advise the PD. Additionally, the Judge and ED, along with the PD, may review and update this Plan as needed and will advise the State ED of changes in the Plan as needed.

Individuals who will serve on the team (as standing members) will be PD, ED and the Judge. Others to be considered as appropriate to serve on the team should be the CASA/GAL Volunteer, Prosecutor/ and or Program Attorney, DJFS Supervisor, Counselor/Therapist, and Court Security Officer. The Judge, PD and Ed will make the initial determination for the first meeting but others can be added or eliminated as appropriate and determined at the team meetings.

The following outlines specific steps to be taken in crisis situations.

¹ Used with permission from the Ohio CASA/GAL Association

LEGAL CRISIS ACTION STEPS

1. **Team to determine the severity of the crisis.** Gather as many facts as possible about the situation. Document all information gathered and review the case history.
2. **PD or designee to contact the CASA/GAL Volunteer appointed to the child, if applicable, to obtain input on the case situation and request that they attend the team meetings, as appropriate.** This should be done as soon as possible.
3. **PD or designee to immediately inform the Judge and ED, and the State ED, regarding the crisis. After consultation with them, if deemed appropriate by the Judge, Ed and PD, contact the County Commissioners and Prosecutor to advise of the situation and plan of action.** Note: Should a crisis arise at a State level which would specifically impact a particular local program, the State ED will contact that local program.
4. **PD or designee to inform CASA/GAL staff.** Communicate the situation as needed to appropriate staff members and emphasize the importance of not discussing the crisis externally including the media. Advise the staff who will be the contact and lead person handling this situation that all information, discussion and communication will be handled by that individual and should be directed to that individual.
5. **PD or designee to confer with attorney (ED and/or CASA/GAL staff attorney and/or Prosecutor.)** Consult and discuss the legal aspects of the issue. If the attorney cannot be reached, contact the State Association for additional legal resources.
6. **Team to determine course of action.** Based on the above discussions, determine course of action to resolve crisis. This step includes assigning appropriate person(s) to particular tasks. Discussion on the following topics should be included: contents of statement to be released; if volunteer assigned on case should continue to serve on that case; crisis support plan for those affected; appropriateness and time to contact DJFS and/or parents' attorney; supports needed if DJFS and/or police investigations involved; the need for release of information forms prior to statements being made; and when to send statement to other CASA/GAL volunteers and information to include.
7. **PD or designee to send a written statement to CASA/GAL volunteers, as approved by the team,** reminding volunteers about the policy regarding external and media communications and confidentiality, a summary of the situation and the team's plan of action.
8. **Team to determine crisis intervention needs of CASA/GAL volunteer and staff.** Intervention should occur within 72 hours to avoid lasting effects of trauma. Discuss and arrange counseling needs and decide on time factor. Discussion should include the cost and determine responsibility for expense incurred.

9. **Team to prepare a statement.** Prepare a clear, concise, written statement providing only the confirmed facts. Create key messages (usually three or four) about the situation and about CASA's role. Use the statement and messages as needed; generally, this statement will not be released externally.
10. **Team to finalize draft statements with the Judge, ED, PD and as appropriate the State ED.** The State Association is available to assist in preparing and finalizing media statements and messages.
11. **The Judge, ED and PD will determine who will be the designated spokesperson** to manage all communications about the situation, both externally and internally.
12. **PD or designee to provide regular updates.** Until the crisis is over, provide regular updates to include: the State Association, Judge, ED and staff, as appropriate.
13. **PD or designee to ensure documentation is maintained regarding all communications and team decisions.**
14. **PD or designee/team to review all internal procedures and improve as needed.**

MEDIA INVOLVEMENT ACTION STEPS

1. **Notify the PD, Judge, ED, Friends, and the State Association of Public Statement(s).** All staff, board members, and volunteers are to notify the PD of issues that arise. The PD will consult as appropriate with the Judge, ED and the State ED prior to communicating with the media.
2. **Team to notify staff and State Association of the plan of action.** All interested parties should be consulted in the process of the following steps.
3. **The Judge, Ed and PD will determine the designee who will be responsible for communications with and response to media inquiries when ready (but by their deadline).** If you receive a call from a reporter, you do not have to answer questions immediately in most instances. Ask the reporter what he or she is looking for and find out the deadline for the information. Advise PD or designee, who will call back after answers prepared, and after consulting with the Judge and/or Juvenile Court Executive Director. PD or designee to notify the State Association of the response. It is almost never advisable to give an immediate response.
4. **Individual who had been designated by the Judge, ED and PD to answer media questions is to only provide KNOWN facts and information known to be pertinent, appropriate and factual. Do not divulge proprietary information or discuss rumors. Do not divulge confidential information.**

5. **PD to consult with State Association staff.** They can assist in researching the reporter and crafting the response.
6. **PD or designee to prepare a statement.** Prepare a clear, concise written statement, providing only the confirmed facts. Use this statement as needed; generally, you will not send this statement out to all media outlets.
7. **PD or designee, with Team, to create key messages to prepare you for any interviews.** Create key messages (usually three or four) about the situation and the role of a CASA/GAL volunteer. Have these messages in front of you during any interviews. These messages can be used both internally and externally.
8. **Over-communicate internally, NOT externally.** Be wary of over-publicizing a situation.
9. **Send note to reporter and editor to thank them for reporting fairly and for respecting our boundaries, if applicable.**

NATIONAL CASA ASSOCIATION NOTIFICATION

1. The State Association and local programs recognize the importance of providing a timely notification of any crisis situation to the National CASA Association.
2. If a crisis occurs at a State or local program level, the Executive Director of the State Association will be responsible for contacting the Midwest Regional Program Director no later than one business day after notification is received.
3. The State Association will be responsible for providing follow-up information to the National CASA Association, as necessary.