



CASA of Travis County Online Communication and Social Media Guidelines for Staff and Volunteers

CASA of Travis County believes that social media, 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 also believe it is important that those who choose to engage in social media understand what is recommended, expected and required when they discuss CASA-related topics. Our ability to serve children depends entirely on the trust and support of our community, and it is critical that we handle the confidential information entrusted to us responsibly.

When you engage in social media and online communication, you become a public figure. As a public figure that is associated with CASA, you have a responsibility to help protect this organization and our clients. The following expectations, along with both positive and negative social media examples, are intended to give you guidance in both promoting and protecting CASA, and to protect the children we serve.

Online Communication and Social Media Expectations:

- 1. Never 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, our standards and policies prohibit the sharing of confidential information.
It is unacceptable to discuss online any identifiable details of current cases. This includes names, ages, case-specific details, time-specific statements and the sharing of photographs. It is acceptable to discuss general details and to use non-identifying pseudonyms and non-time-specific statements 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.
- 2. Use common sense.** Don’t put anything online that you would not want to see with your name attached to it on the front page of the paper where your boss, your mom, your co-workers and neighbors can read it. Remember, it is possible that you will work with this judge, supervisor, caseworker, lawyer, etc. again in the future or even bump into them on the street, so don’t burn bridges. Even if you don’t see them again, CASA definitely will and it is important not to hurt CASA’s relationships.
Keep in mind that anything you say online is not private. Evaluate what you say about working with CASA in advance to make sure that your online statements will not affect your position in the courtroom when you are advocating for a CASA child.
- 3. Don’t be a hero.** If you see something negative posted about CASA online, don’t jump to our defense immediately because you might just feed the flames of someone who just wants to pick a fight online. Please inform us if you see a negative representation of CASA of Travis County online and we will determine the best way to respond or not.
- 4. Be transparent.** Identify yourself and your role at CASA of Travis County (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 CASA of Travis County.**

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 CASA of Travis County, families, board members, donors or your colleagues. If you have suggestions for improvements please go through the proper channels to air your concerns and share your suggestions. Always show proper consideration for other's privacy and for topics that may be considered objectionable or inflammatory, such as politics and religion.
Always consider how other parties on a case might feel about your statements. While we recognize the tremendous work that CASA volunteers do every day, be careful about implying that another party on a case did not do their job adequately, or accidentally insulting anyone involved with the case, as you could hurt feelings and damage both your and CASA's relationship with those involved in this system.
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 information (e.g., research, statistics), and be careful about posting or linking to items that may contain viruses. Be the first to admit and correct your own mistakes.
7. **Try to add value.** Does your posting provide worthwhile information and perspective? Does it help people better understand and feel more connected to our cause? Does it build a positive sense of community?
8. **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).
9. **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, your family and all parties on your CASA case are reading everything you post.

In #8 and #9 above, CASA of Travis County only wishes to raise awareness of these issues. We believe this is an area in which our staff, volunteers and supporters should be aware of possible risk and try to inform themselves, but we are not offering any legal advice on these matters.



Positive Social Media Examples: *These sample posts tell the CASA story well without revealing confidential information about cases.*

#1: Had a blast with my CASA kid at Austin Park and Pizza. ESPECIALLY, the go-carts, which we did over and over. What a hoot!

#2: Great day at court as a CASA volunteer! Can't believe what a difference one adult can make to a child. Learn more-
<http://www.casatexas.org>

#3: Happy to have played a part in an awesome adoption for my CASA kid & help them have a good future! Become a CASA-
<http://www.casatexas.org> (*This could also be about a family reunification, etc.*)

#4: CASA Superhero Run Sept ??! Come support us CASA volunteers so we can help more abused children!
<http://bit.ly/casasuperrun>

#5: Helped my CASA kids get the school supplies & clothes they needed for a great start to school this year! I'm rooting for their success!

Negative Social Media Examples: *These sample posts either reveal too much information about a case or take a stance that could be damaging to future CASA relationships.*

#1: Great day in court as a CASA volunteer! I was the only one up there who knew the child well and was able to help get the judge make a good recommendation.

#2: Finally the judge ruled correctly on my CASA case! So happy to see my CASA kid get to a happy home.

#3: Had a blast yesterday with my 10-year-old CASA kid at Austin Park and Pizza. He loved the go-carts, which we did over and over. What a hoot!

#4: Just attended the graduation of my CASA kid from Reagan High School. I'm so proud!