

COVID-19 Update: Volunteer Visitation Policy

From National CASA / GAL Association for Children

The novel coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak has continued to evolve since we first heard about it in the past few weeks. Our primary concern is always for the well-being of the children, families, volunteers and staff who are associated with CASA/GAL.

There have been new guidelines about how we interact socially including the use of social distancing, minimizing participation in large gatherings, and changes in business operations. We continue to closely follow the evolution of COVID-19 and its potential impact on the operations of National CASA/GAL and the network. In particular, we have had a number of inquiries about National CASA/GAL policies in light of the spread of the virus; particularly the question around CASA/GAL volunteers visiting children.

Volunteer Visitation Policy

Regarding the National CASA/GAL Standard (Standards for Local CASA/GAL Programs 2012 version – Standard 7.E.5.f.) for volunteers to visit the child in person with the child once every 30 days at a minimum, please be reminded that the standard also allows for an exception to this practice. Specifically the standard with exception reads as follows:

“The CASA/GAL program assures that volunteers have regular and sufficient in-person contact with the child to enable them to have an in-depth knowledge of the case and make fact based recommendations to the court. The CASA/GAL volunteer shall meet in person with the child once every thirty (30) days at a minimum. An exception may be granted in the discretion of the CASA program staff; however, the decision to permit less frequent in person contact shall be documented as to the justification for and reasonableness of the exception.”

Taking precautions and addressing these legitimate concerns by opting to exercise the exception due to the coronavirus is sufficient justification for documenting permission for volunteers to see children less often than that required by the Standard. We also strongly encourage programs to take guidance from their courts in this regard as well and consider how their local child welfare agency is handling visits with children and families.

Coronavirus Messaging

A number of you have asked for messaging to your volunteers and other stakeholders. Some of the key elements to include in a message are:

- Health and safety are of the utmost importance
- The virus, and guidance from health officials, should be taken seriously
- Please stay home if you are ill or feel ill; and call your doctor's office for guidance
- Stay away from gatherings with large crowds
- Keep your "social distance"
- Wash hands regularly, for at least 20 seconds, with soap and water (click here for more details on effective handwashing: [Handwashing Best Practices](#))
- Use hand sanitizer regularly
- Disinfect surfaces regularly
- Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when you cough or sneeze, then dispose of the tissue and wash your hands immediately. If you do not have a tissue to hand, cough or sneeze into your elbow rather than your hands.

Public Health Resources

We will continue to monitor information from public health officials and the [U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention \(CDC\)](#), [World Health Organization \(WHO\)](#) and recommend you monitor these as well as information from your local health department.