

# Contact with School Personnel

## The Basics

- Understand that it can be easier to obtain information and address concerns if you have developed relationships with school personnel prior to needing to.
- Understand your role as a CASA volunteer and the role(s) of those with whom you want to speak.
- Clarify why you are, let them know what information you need to gather, and be sure to concentrate on your specific youth's school status and progress.
- When requesting information and/or a meeting, be precise as to what you are looking for. If you are requesting a meeting, be specific on what you would like to discuss and hope to accomplish from the meeting.
- Ask each LEA/School what their particular policies or procedures are for accessing the youth's information for whom you are advocating. Different school districts or sometimes even different school buildings have different policies and procedures. Your program supervisor may be able to assist you in finding out about any unique policies or procedures you should be aware of. Also, be sure share any new information that you learn with your local program supervisor.
- When communicating with school personnel, listen actively, communicate respectfully.
- Ensure that you understand and implement the confidentiality needs of all educational information obtained. Ask, but don't tell or share information unless ordered or allowed to do so.
- When seeking information from school personnel, use the five Ws + one H to help form questions: Who, What, Where, When, Why and How.
- As you are developing your plan for ensuring a youth's education success, be sure to consider a youth's school situation from different perspectives: the youth's, the teacher's, the family's.

## Initial Contact

The following are suggestions for your initial contact with school personnel.

- Call first to schedule a meeting that will be convenient for you and school personnel. Remember, they have many youth to serve throughout the school day and to be respectful of their time.
- Be ready to explain the role of a CASA volunteer, including how you speak for the youth's interests in court (this is important to teachers).
- Offer to send or deliver the order appointing you as the CASA volunteer.
- Request copies of the student's education records, to include but not limited to a copy of their 504 Plan or IEP, if applicable.
- Request contact information for the teacher (i.e., phone number or email).
- Request a telephone or school meeting with the youth's teacher and school counselor.
- Ask the teacher and school counselor if they have any concerns regarding the youth.  
(Additional suggested questions for the teacher and school counselor are available on the *Interview with School Personnel* form.)
- Request an opportunity to observe the youth in the classroom.
- Take thorough notes on contact(s) for future reference.
- Leave your name and contact information, along with an invitation to contact the CASA program office at any time if there are any concerns related to the youth.

## To Avoid

- Making "You should..." types of statements to education providers.
- Becoming too adversarial. Don't make meetings seem too much like a legal proceeding.
- Badmouthing the child's family or home situation. Rise above the temptation to join in with such gossip, even if you hear others doing it.
- Sharing information you get from one education source with another education source, even within the same building. For example, the school psychologist or counselor may share information with the CASA volunteer that is not to be shared with the teacher. If such confidentiality is breached, it will be difficult to enlist friendly cooperation in the future. However, your sources should be aware that a CASA/GAL volunteer cannot keep secrets from the court.
- Signing papers in the school setting regarding the child, such as medical status, permission to test, or school transfers. That is the job of the parent/guardian or educational surrogate. However, you may be asked to sign forms indicating attendance at some school meetings.
- Making educational recommendations that don't fit with recommendations of the education team at school (especially as related to special education).
- Dropping in at the school. Always call in advance to request an appointment or, at the very least, to notify the staff that you will be visiting.