

Capital City CASA

# Writing Your Court Report

*“The most essential aspect of  
your work as a CASA volunteer”*



# In this Session

*Preparing you to be a strong and effective advocate in court*

- Objectives
- Who sees your report
- Timeline
- Template
- Findings
- Recommendations
- Style tips
- Preparing for court

“This report presents the findings and recommendations of the CASA volunteer serving in an advisory capacity to the Court.”

# Court Report Objectives

*CASA court reports are uniquely centered on the child.*

- Report what you have observed and learned while acting as the Judge's eyes and ears in the field (Findings)
- Represent and advocate for the best interests of the child (Recommendations)

## *Child-Centered Court Report*

*You tell the story.  
The child is the star.*



# Court Report Objectives

*CASA volunteers are the eyes and ears of the court.*

- The Judge considers the information you report...
  - When preparing for hearings
  - When ordering services and actions that affect your CASA child
  - When making decisions that impact your child's safety, welfare, placement and permanent home
- Your report becomes part of the official court record.
- Your report helps to build CASA's reputation as an objective, thoughtful and trustworthy source.

# Who Sees Your Court Report

- Your Coordinator works with you to make your report as effective as possible. Aside from your Coordinator the following will be able to read your report:
  - The Judge
  - The Guardian Ad Litem (GAL)
  - The Juvenile Office's Attorney & Deputies(DJO)
  - The Caseworker

\*Parents' attorneys involved in the case may request a copy of your report from the court. You do not provide them with a copy.

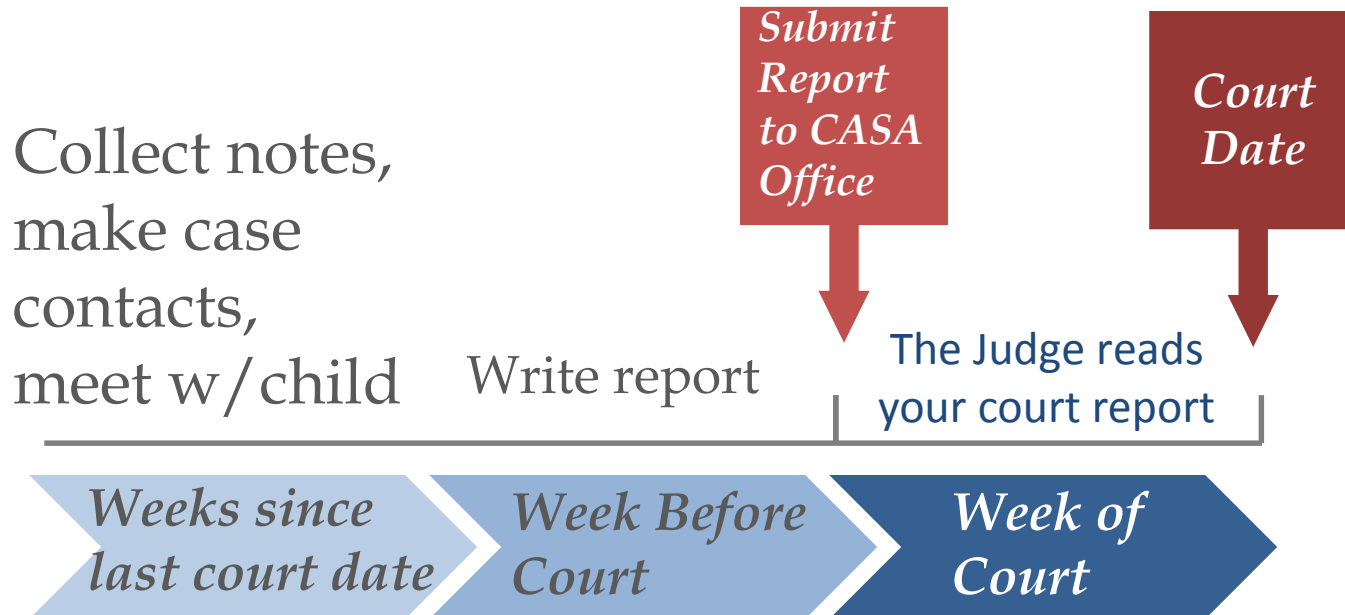
# Who Sees Your Court Report

*Your Coordinator supports you at every step.*

- Your Coordinator will assist with any questions you have while writing your report.
- After completing your report, forward a copy to your Coordinator. Then, upon approval, you will forward your report to the Caseworker, JO and GAL assigned to your case.
- Your report will be submitted to the Judge by your Coordinator.

# Court Report Timeline

*Prepare well in advance and submit your report on time.*



- Submit your report to your Coordinator the Wednesday prior to your child's court day.
- Wait for Coordinator's approval before forwarding your report to the Caseworker, GAL and JO.

# Court Report Template

*www.capitalcitycasa.org*

*Advocate- Forms & Reports*

## ***CASA Court Report Template***

- *Standard for all Capital City CASA court reports*
- *Organizes key information in a way the judge expects to find it*
- *Helps ensure that CASA's contribution is respected and taken seriously*

## ***Accessing Report Template***

1. *Go to Capitalcitycasa.org*
2. *At the top of the Home page place your mouse on "Advocate"*
3. *Under the drop down menu screen, select "Forms & Reports"*
4. *Select "Court Report Template (Microsoft Word)"*



# Court Report Template

*www.capitalcitycasa.org*  
*Advocate- Forms & Reports*

## CAPITAL CITY CASA – Court Report

Case Number:  
Child's Name/DOB:  
Parent(s):  
Hearing Date:  
CASA Volunteer:  
Date Appointed:

### COURT APPOINTED SPECIAL ADVOCATE REPORT

#### Background Information

#### Current Situation of Parents

Mom:

Dad:

Other:

Family Supports and Strengths:

### **General Case Information:**

*Provide basic information to identify the case*

### **Background Information:**

*A summary of the background of the case that brought the child into protective custody. This will not change from report to report.*

**Current Situation of Parents:** Update the court on the parents' compliance with the Written Service Agreement, observations of the child/parent interactions, and other information that would have impact on the child's best interest.

**Family Strengths:** Inform the court on the ability and/or resources of the family to provide for the child's physical, mental and emotion well-being (housing, employment, extended family, etc.).

# Court Report Template

*www.capitalcitycasa.org*  
*Advocate- Forms & Reports*

## Current Situation of Child

### Current Placement:

The Child is safe from threat of physical injury and emotional abuse in his/her current circumstance.

PPI yes P no If no, why:

### Physical/Mental Status of Child:

### Does the child(ren) understand his/her role in the court procedures?

- YES
- NO (check below)
- too young
- too traumatized
- medically unable

other (explain)

## Other Case Activities

### FST Meetings attended:

### Persons interviewed/Contacts made:

### Professional reports reviewed:

**Current Status of child:** *A detailed, objective statement of findings on how the child is doing physically, emotionally, educationally, medically and psychologically*

**Other Case Activities:** Detail persons interviewed (include dates), FSTs attended and reports reviewed to lend credibility to your report

# Court Report Template

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*Advocate- Forms & Reports*

**Barriers:** List and explain what specific obstacles exist that prevent the child from finding a safe, permanent home

**Concerns:** Include any questions you have regarding pertinent information needed to progress your case

**Recommendations:** *Simple bullet-pointed statements that state what you want to happen for your CASA child...tied clearly and directly to your Findings*

Permanency Plan and Concurrent Permanency Plan

Permanency Plan:

Concurrent Permanency Plan:

Length of time child has been in care:

Barriers to Reunification/Permanency:

CASA Concerns and/or Questions

CASA Recommendations to Protect and Promote the Best Interests of the Child

Date:

Respectfully submitted,

Capital City CASA

# Court Report Template

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*Advocate- Forms & Reports*

## ***How Long Should My Report Be?***

***Depends on the number of children  
and the complexity of their needs***

- *Short enough to hold the Judge's attention*
- *Long enough to cover the important and pertinent facts that support your recommendations for each child*
- *Talk with your Coordinator about report length for your specific case if you have questions*

# Focus on Findings

*Plan before you start to write your court report*

- What are the key points you want the Judge to know (Findings)?
- What do you want to happen for your CASA child (Recommendations)?



## *Talk with Your Coordinator*

*Your Coordinator can help you organize your thoughts, decide what is most important and write in a way that is most effective in communicating to the Court.*

# Focus on Findings

*Effective court reports make you a trusted source and advocate.*

1. **Child-Centered:** Information about the child that is pertinent to the case
2. **Objective:** Statements of fact, based on your observations and investigation
3. **Accurate and Attributable:** Backed up by dates and sources you name
4. **Usable:** Information that is clear, direct and easy for the Judge to find

# Focus on Findings

*Examples: Child-Centered*

*Since the children moved in with paternal aunt, I have to drive 62 miles round-trip for every visit.*

## **New Foster Placement with paternal aunt**

On 5/6, the children moved to relative foster care with paternal aunt. Visits were held at paternal aunt's home on 5/12, 6/14 and 7/10.

*Child-centered court reports are about the child, not the natural parents. They are also not about the CASA. We avoid self-reference in court reports. The CASA is "invisible."*

# Focus on Findings

*Examples: Objective and Factual*

*The house was dirty and smelled bad. It is not a suitable environment for children.*

The house smelled of rotting food and urine. In the kitchen, feces lay on the floor near a pan of cat litter.

***Objective and factual court reports do not offer personal opinions...  
...they provide factual observations.***



# Focus on Findings

*Examples: Accurate and Attributable*

*Jon is having trouble with reading, even though he is getting extra help.*

On 12/15, Jon's third-grade teacher said that Jon is still reading at a beginning first-grade level, despite extra attention from a teacher's aide.

*Attributable facts provide who said what, where, and when.*

# Focus on Findings

*Examples: Usable*

Topical headings within template sections help the reader find and retain important facts. Examples:

- CASA visits
- Supervised visits with Natural Mother
- School
- Medical status
- Transition to independent living
- Permanency planning

## *Usable and Easy-to-Find Information*

*Use headings to organize and highlight information. Consistent topics from one report to the next can help track progress.*

# Focus on Recommendations

*Promote and protect the best interests of the child*

CASA recommendations are:

- Appropriate to the legal stage of the case
- Child-centered
- Clearly tied to your findings
- Stated in brief, bullet-pointed sentences

# Focus on Recommendations

*Promote and protect the best interests of the child*

## Child-Centered

<b>Not Child-Centered</b>	<b>Child-Centered</b>
Natural mother should be able to see the children as long as she isn't left alone with them.	Children are to have supervised visits with natural mother.

# Focus on Recommendations

*Promote and protect the best interests of the child*

Clearly tied to your findings

Finding	Possible Recommendation
During the four supervised visits observed, natural father rarely talked directly with Eric. On 9/5, Eric said, "He doesn't like me. I can't talk to him."	Eric and natural father to receive family counseling

# Focus on Recommendations

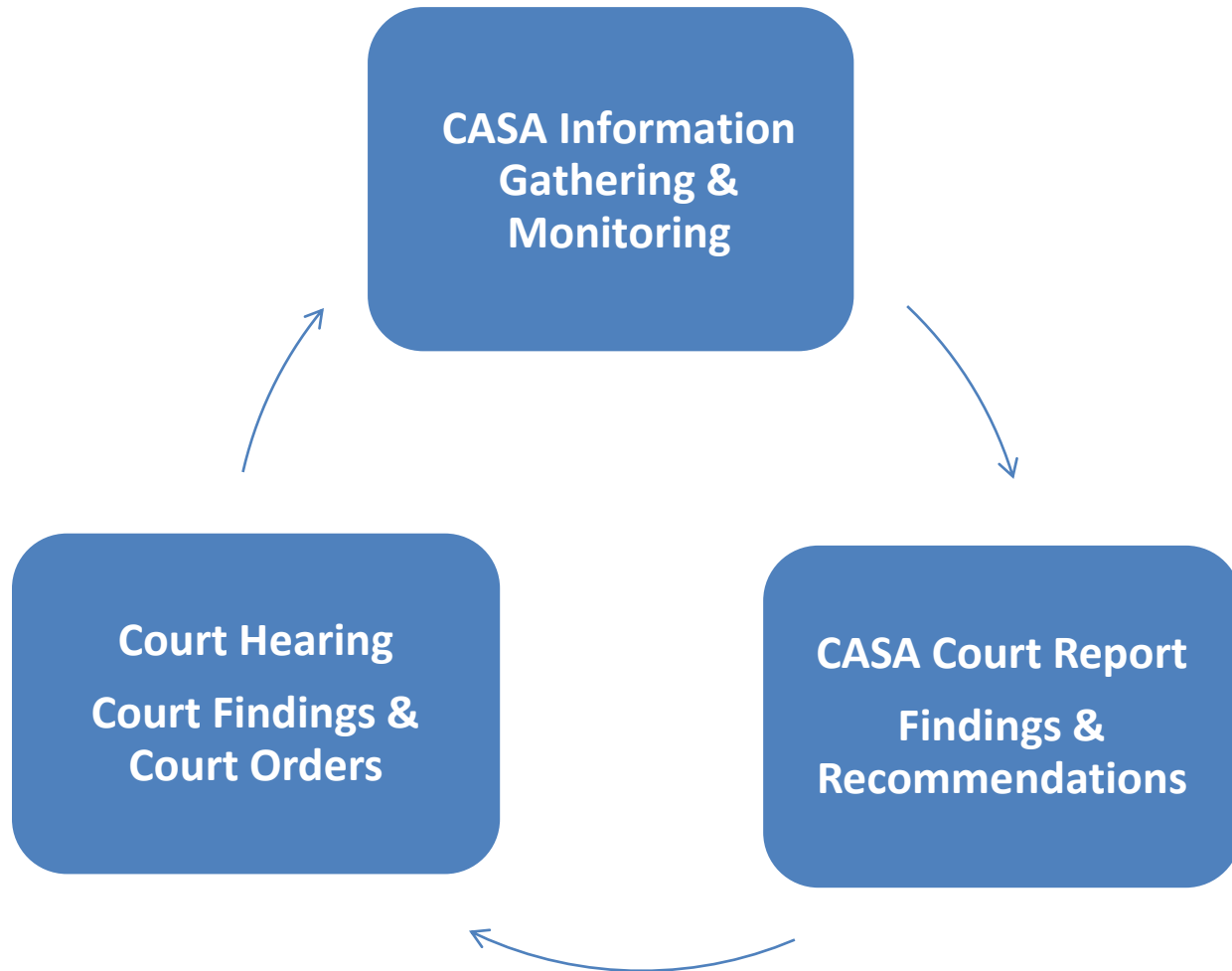
*Promote and protect the best interests of the child*

Brief, bullet-pointed sentences

Child's Interests	Recommendation Examples
Placement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The children to remain in their current foster care placement</li><li>• The children to be moved to a foster home that is clean and free of health and safety hazards</li></ul>
Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Jon to receive a reading assessment</li><li>• Eric to have family counseling with natural father</li></ul>
Permanency Goal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The children to return to natural mother's home</li><li>• The goal to be changed to APPLA</li></ul>

# Court Report Cycle

*Each court date begins a new reporting cycle.*



# Court Report Style Tips

*Make your report as effective as possible.*

- Use short sentences, organized into brief paragraphs.
- Identify the date of the observation.
- Waste no words.
- Use correct grammar, spelling and punctuation.
- Avoid referring to yourself; the report is to focus on the child and your observations. Try to be “invisible.”
- Avoid referencing Caseworker communication; the caseworker will report. Exceptions: when Caseworker shares something the child said or when the information is necessary for completeness/accuracy
- Welcome helpful edits from your Coordinator.



# Court Report Style Tips

*Make your report as effective as possible.*

<b>Don't</b>	<b>Do</b>
<i>Don't stray from the Capital City CASA Court Report Template</i>	<i>Follow the template. If you have questions, talk with your Coordinator.</i>
<i>Don't use the word "kid."</i>	<i>Use the word "child."</i>
<i>Don't use a question &amp; answer style.</i> CASA asked Jason how he felt about being separated from his brother and sister and Jason said that he missed them.	<i>Simply provide the information.</i> Jason said he missed his siblings.
<i>Don't write in a telegraphic style.</i> Spoke to teacher on 9/14. Progress in all subjects.	<i>Write in complete sentences.</i> On 9/14, Erin's teacher reported that Erin is making progress in all subjects.

# Court Report Style Tips

*Make your report as effective as possible in court.*

<b>Don't</b>	<b>Do</b>
<p><i>Don't use a diary style to list your Activities and Findings. For example:</i></p> <p>1/26 – Called Krista's pediatrician, who confirmed the asthma diagnosis.</p> <p>2/18 –Foster mother called to report that natural father had missed another scheduled visit. She also said that Krista's breathing has improved on the new medication.</p>	<p><i>Do use topical headings to help the reader find and retain important facts.</i></p> <p><b><i>Krista's Health</i></b></p> <p><b><i>Visits with NPs</i></b></p>
<p><i>Don't use quotes when the exact phrasing is not significant.</i></p> <p>Foster mother said, "Shawna is seeing her therapist every week at school."</p>	<p><i>Use quotes when the exact words matter and you are confident of the quotation.</i></p> <p>Foster mother said, "Since Shawna started therapy, she's more open with me about her feelings."</p>

# Court Report Style Tips

*Make your report as effective as possible in court.*

<b>Don't</b>	<b>Do</b>
<p><i>Avoid using the word "bonded," which is a therapeutic term.</i></p> <p>Eric is bonded with natural father.</p>	<p><i>Select other words that describe the behaviors you observed that demonstrate the attachment.</i></p> <p>When natural father arrived for the visit, Eric smiled and embraced him.</p>
<p><i><u>Do not</u> reference caseworker communications in court reports (especially information regarding natural parents), unless the information is child-centered.</i></p>	<p><i>The caseworkers report their own findings directly to the judge. The judge expects CASAs to provide their own directly-observed or obtained information.</i></p>
<p><i>Don't use your court report to air issues that may be more effectively addressed in other ways.</i></p> <p><u>For example, don't report:</u> CASA had to call the caseworker many times before the caseworker called back.</p>	<p><i>Talk with your manager about how to address such concerns as:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li><i>• Issues with other members of the service team</i></li><li><i>• Frustrations in your CASA work</i></li></ul>

# Court Report Style Tips

*Make your report as effective as possible in court.*

Photos should be attached to CASA court reports to help the Judge visualize the children.

- Ask permission before taking a picture
- Do not photograph anyone other than the child
- Do not display information that could put a child at risk



# Preparing for Court

*Your Coordinator supports you at every step.*

- With advice from your Coordinator, alert the caseworker and GAL in advance to any significant new findings, concerns and recommendations.
  - Build support on the child’s advocacy team
  - Minimize surprises
- Be prepared to speak in court, if recognized by the Judge:
  - Any significant new findings since the report was filed
  - CASA priorities not yet addressed in hearing
  - Or, you can say, simply: “I stand by my report.”