



Texas CASA Pre-Service Training Curriculum  
**Facilitator's Guide**



**TEXASCASA**  
Court Appointed Special Advocates  
FOR CHILDREN

# OUR VISION

We envision a safe and positive future for all Texas children.

# OUR MISSION

The mission of Texas CASA is to support local volunteer advocacy programs and to advocate for effective public policy for children in the child protective system.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This guide is the work of many hands. We are grateful to everyone who originated and contributed ideas, including the dedicated staff members of CASA of Travis County who created and piloted the first revision and activities, the staff of National CASA who initiated the curriculum and provided its structure, and the staff of Texas CASA who revised and wrote the new manual and guide to match the most current directions of training and advocacy.

We are proud to offer a curriculum that is truly specific to Texas. We hope that the work of many hands can support the best possible preparation for both trainers and new advocates, and instill the belief that together, we can provide a CASA for every child.

Design by Tablo Consulting

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STRENGTHENING THE VOICES OF CASA STATEWIDE

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## **User Agreement for the Pre-Service Curriculum Manual**

This manual is only to be used as a pre-service curriculum for potential advocates that have been recruited and screened by CASA programs in good standing with Texas CASA and National CASA.



# THE ART OF FACILITATION

Welcome! This guide was created to support CASA trainers and facilitators in offering the Texas CASA Volunteer Pre-Service Curriculum in a dynamic, energizing and unforgettable way.

As a trainer and facilitator, you have a profound opportunity to inspire and educate volunteers so that they serve with the greatest care and skill. The required 30 hours of learning that each volunteer must complete prior to serving as a Court Appointed Special Advocate sets the stage for the volunteer’s experience with your organization, and lays the groundwork for their ability to meet the constantly changing challenges of advocacy. As a facilitator of pre-service training, you build the most important relationship with new volunteers before they serve a child.

We invite you to do it with our motto, called *The CASA Way*: “We have an uncompromising belief that we will achieve what others think impossible, and that each of us is an essential part of the solution.”

This may sound like a bold statement. Considering the condition of the child welfare system in Texas and our country, however, how could we do less?

Your passion will ignite the passion of prospective volunteers. We have created this workbook to help you develop the skills you need to become a stellar guide and to provide a clear roadmap for each session.

We are here to back you up, cheer you on and support your expertise. Thanks for guiding the future of the CASA movement!

” As a facilitator of pre-service training, you build the most important relationship with new volunteers before they serve a child.

## GET PREPARED FOR YOUR SESSIONS

### 1. Download In-Class Videos and Handouts from the Texas CASA Website

Prepare for your sessions by downloading the videos and handouts that you'll need for each meeting from the Pre-Service Volunteer Training page at the Texas CASA website, [learn.texascasa.org/preservice](http://learn.texascasa.org/preservice).

Most class sessions involve case study activities in which participants practice gathering information and developing recommendations. These case studies are designed to help learners dive deeper into the topics addressed in their Pre-Work. Each case study introduces complex and nuanced issues for volunteers to consider. Before facilitating each session, carefully review each case study packet, and prepare to guide a debrief discussion at the end of the activity.

### 2. Alert Participants to the Pre-Work Requirements

Before the first meeting and at the end of each session, facilitators should communicate what Pre-Work trainees will need to complete before the next session. They will need to complete a portion of reading before they come into the first training. The Pre-Work is an essential piece of the learning process that enables volunteers to explore topics in more depth as they prepare for the next session.

Participants may read the Pre-Work in the manual or complete it online at Texas CASA's Learning Center.

### 3. Provide Participants with Five Program-Specific Documents

There are five documents specific to your program that you will need to distribute to volunteers via email before class and in hard copy during the training:

- Advocate Job Description
- Program Policies
- Optima or Documentation Guide
- Court Report Template and Instructions
- The Bleux Case Court Report

Both the manual and the online version of the Pre-Work course refers volunteers to read these documents. Since the advocate job description, program policies, documentation guide and court report instructions vary widely from program to program, we have not included general examples in the Volunteer Manual. However, in the back of this guide, you

will find sample versions of these items, if you'd like to adapt them. You can email [training@texascasa.org](mailto:training@texascasa.org) for templates.

As part of their Pre-Work for session 2, participants are directed to read a court report for the Bleux case provided by their facilitator. Please download the Sample Bleux Case Court Report from the facilitator portal and customize to fit your program's court report template. Email your finalized court report to your participants or handout hard copies at the end of session 1.

#### **4. Prepare for Court Report Assignment**

A significant part of the new curriculum includes a court report writing assignment as part of the Pre-Work for session 8. Learners practice writing a court report based on the Redd case, using your program's court report template and guidance. Determine how you would like them to learn this skill, and see instructions in session 7 for more guidance. Prior to session 8, you will email them a Word version of your court report template, your program's instructions for writing a court report and a de-identified court report from a sample case as an example of how they can organize the information. They will fill out the sample court report and email it back to you.

We suggest giving participants one week to complete this activity and providing careful, specific, strengths-based feedback to help them gain confidence and skills.

If your program requires additional outside assignments such as a court observation, be sure to communicate these expectations at the beginning of the training process.

## EMBRACE PARTICIPANT-CENTERED LEARNING

Advocates' learning outcomes—how well they understand the material, how confident they feel when practicing or using the skills and how they can translate the information into action—can have an incredible impact on their case outcomes as CASA volunteers. For that reason, we use best practices in adult learning, called participant-centered learning.

In the past, education often meant that information and content was delivered from someone who stood at the front of a room and talked; it was a transfer of knowledge

from expert to learner in a

standard manner using lectures. In the ideal contemporary classroom, the teacher is now a facilitator: one who makes learning take place. Everyone is a student, practice is the journey, and learning is a group social experience.

In this new Pre-Service Curriculum, people learn the content and information ahead of time during Pre-Work or homework, and the face-to-face class time is used for experiences, role-play, modeling, discussion, and experimentation. In education terms, this is called “flipping the classroom.” This approach results in much better memory retention, confidence and ability on the participants' part.



**Tell me and I will forget.**

**Show me and I might remember.**

**Involve me and I will understand.**

## MAKE AN ACCESSIBLE, WARM AND TRAUMA-INFORMED SPACE

The creation of a trauma-informed space involves recognizing emotions and that each person's past and present may possibly be activated by the stories and content in the training. We encourage participants to pay attention to themselves, stay connected, and say what they need to. Expressing emotions is a vital part of feeling safe and able to learn.

Keeping yourself well and energized is also part of a trauma-informed environment; you also count. Make sure you have plenty of water, sleep, nourishment and support as you guide others.

The creation of an accessible space means that it provides equal access to all and is welcoming and easily navigated by people with disabilities, including invisible ones.



## DESIGN YOUR LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

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One important way to empower your learners to succeed is to create a comfortable space for learning. The material can be difficult, but we create an environment of hope focused on appreciation and the motivations that we are joining around: making a positive difference for children and the exciting process of beginning that journey. Here are some ways to do that.



**Music** – Have upbeat music playing in the room when people come in and begin to mingle. Also play music again after class as people are getting ready to go and chatting with each other, and circulate among the participants thanking them for coming.



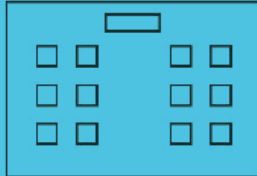

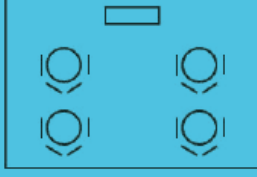
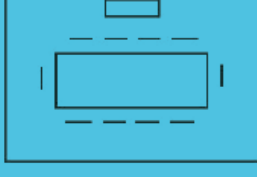
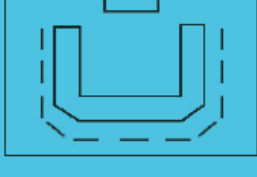

**Physical Needs** – Make sure the temperature in the room is not too cold or too hot. Water and snacks should be freely available throughout the training. Encourage learners to get up and move around or visit the restroom whenever they need to, not just during breaks. Our bodies are important!



**Two Facilitators** – If your program has the capacity, it is an excellent practice to have two facilitators at each training. It's an energy-intensive process and great to trade off. With two trainers, a greater diversity of background and perspectives can be represented.



**Collaborative Room Arrangement** – Choose from the room arrangements below to find the setup that works best for your space and number of participants, while creating the most open and collaborative feel.

	Description	Advantages	Disadvantages
<p><b>Classroom</b></p> 	<p>The traditional setup we're all familiar with from school.</p>	<p>Good for lectures and presentations where the speaker is the one doing all or most of the talking.</p> <p>Also great when the audience must take notes or for computer-based training.</p>	<p>Can be difficult for everyone to see the speaker, presentation.</p> <p>Does not encourage group work or discussions.</p>
<p><b>Theater</b></p> 	<p>As the name implies, simulates the setup of a theatre or auditorium.</p> <p>This set up allows the most people for a given size of room.</p>	<p>Good for very large groups, i.e., 100 or more people.</p> <p>Great for seminars and conferences.</p>	<p>Communication tends to be one-way and does not allow for much interaction.</p> <p>Not good if participants need to take notes or for any sort of group interaction.</p>
<p><b>Chevron</b></p> 	<p>Also known as "cabaret-style" or "clusters" allows for medium to large numbers of people divided into groups of 6 – 10.</p>	<p>Good for workshops where each group will work independently from others.</p> <p>Encourages mixing and allows trainer to easily circulate throughout the room.</p>	<p>Some participants will have poor visibility.</p> <p>May encourage lack of attention.</p> <p>Often requires addition of co-facilitators to manage group work and interactions.</p>
<p><b>Boardroom</b></p> 	<p>The traditional setup for board or committee meetings.</p> <p>Typically reserved for meetings not training or facilitation.</p>	<p>Good for small groups of peers who will spend most of their time talking.</p> <p>Good for seeing and interacting with others and sharing resources.</p>	<p>Not good for groups of 10 or more.</p> <p>Encourages hierarchical seating (and thinking).</p> <p>No "front" makes presenting difficult.</p>
<p><b>U-Shaped</b></p> 	<p>Open at one end the U or horseshoe shape allows for groups of up to 50 people to all see each other and presenters.</p>	<p>Preferred by many trainers as it allows eye contact with all and greater intimacy with participants.</p> <p>Encourages participation in group discussions.</p> <p>Optimal for presentations and demonstrations.</p> <p>Discourages "Hierarchy positions."</p>	<p>Limited to small or medium-sized groups.</p> <p>Those seated closest to the presenter or screen must turn to be able to see.</p>
<p><b>Circle of Chairs</b></p> 	<p>The open circle of chairs can be arranged in any shape (square, rectangle, etc.) and precludes the use of tables.</p>	<p>Excellent for group discussion with up to 50 people.</p> <p>Doesn't allow a place to "hide" and encourages interaction and discussion.</p>	<p>Makes note taking difficult.</p> <p>Limited to small or medium-sized groups.</p>

## GROUP AGREEMENTS

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Begin your training weeks by creating Group Agreements. The purpose of this is to form an open and respectful environment in which individuals feel safe sharing their ideas and opinions, and can think creatively. We recommend having your core “group agreements” already written, and inviting learners to add to it.

Here is a sample set of group agreements:

- Participate fully.
- Maintain confidentiality.
- Respect everyone’s viewpoint.
- Take care of yourself.
- Ask for help when needed.
- Silence all electronics.
- Have fun!

## PROVIDE ROAD MAPS

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A road map is an agenda. People relax and enjoy the ride more when they have a map! There are two kinds of maps to provide learners in a training: visual and verbal.

### Visual

- Before each session, post a list of the activities and agenda of the session on flip charts.
- When writing on a flip chart or whiteboard, use a different color marker for every other line or to note layers of information.
- Use the PowerPoint presentations that accompany this guide to keep things on track.

### Verbal

- When explaining an activity or transition:
  - Call people’s attention once or twice, and give them time to stop talking.
  - Consider using a bell or chime to call people’s attention and mark transitions.
  - Tell them, “In a moment, we will...” or “Now, we will...”
  - Repeat directions 2-3 times.
  - When asking people to turn a page, give them time to do so.
  - Let people know that for writing activities, sharing is always optional.

## GUIDE DISCUSSION

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Discussion is a great way to honor and invite the expertise that is in the room. Every participant knows something that they can contribute, and giving them time and opportunity to do so will help bond the group.

After you ask a question to the group, wait at least 15 seconds for someone to respond. If no one speaks up, ask for volunteers. When someone shares or asks a question, start your response with "Thank you!" Ask if others have a similar experience or question; encourage reflection. Ask for volunteers to read material out loud instead of having facilitators read it aloud; ask for volunteers to write on the parking lot, pass out handouts, and do the other business of the session. Give everyone an opportunity to be seen and heard.

At times, however, the facilitator has to redirect people who get off topic, have too much to say or derail the conversation. You can handle challenging people with a positive, gentle touch if you address the behavior and not the person, using one of these strategies:

- Remind everyone that the session has to stay on the agenda to finish on time.
- Ask if you can save their questions or ideas for break time to address one-on-one.
- Compliment them on their awareness, and return to the main point.
- Invite people who haven't spoken in the session yet to speak up.
- If necessary, interrupt by saying, "Thanks for sharing that," and then move on.

If a volunteer's comments appear to discriminate against any legally protected group, be prepared to make trainees aware that CASA does not discriminate and our goal is serve all children.

If a volunteer displays strong negative feelings, anger or resentment toward a particular children or families, they may require one-on-one coaching, opportunities for further learning or even dismissal from the program. **Keep in mind that Pre-Service training is an important part of the screening process, and carefully follow up on any red flags.**

## KEEP ENERGY MOVING

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Physical movement and unexpected fun are the lifeblood of trainings! Get people moving, do energizers (at the end of this section), raise enthusiasm and return people's attention to the present.

Help people take off the many hats they wear outside of the classroom, and get themselves into the training experience. As the session progresses, use connection activities to help build a sense of community among learners.

## ASK PARTICIPANTS TO EVALUATE EACH SESSION

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Feedback is the lifeblood of a great group experience. Every group and member is different. At the end of each session, pass out evaluations to participants. Encourage them to be honest and help your training team improve and grow (find an evaluation form online at [www.texascasa.org/preservice](http://www.texascasa.org/preservice)).

Use these to evaluate and help you make improvements in the future.

- What challenges came up during the course?
- Were there any technical problems?
- Were students confused by any activity instructions?
- Were students effectively engaged by the activities?
- Did things flow smoothly from content to activities?
- Was there anything that didn't feel quite right?
- What worked well and felt great?
- What should you definitely NOT change?

- Were there any “pleasant surprises”?
- Are there any issues to address at the start of the next session?

## CONNECTION ACTIVITIES: OPENERS AND CLOSERS

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### Openers

Use brief, high-energy activities to open and end each session, as time allows. We include some here, and also invite you to find your own.

#### Name Game

- Stand in a circle.
- Each person chooses an attribute or characteristic for themselves that starts with the same letter as their first name. Example: “Abe is Affectionate,” “Jonathan is Jamming” and “Margaret is Magical.”
- The next person repeats the first person’s name and then adds their own. It goes around the circle, each person repeating all of the names that came before.

*Alternative:*

- Have each participant give their name and something they like that begins with the same first letter.
- Each subsequent participant does the same and repeats the name and like of everyone that went before. Example: The first person says “I’m Christopher and I like candy. The next person says “He’s Christopher and he likes candy, and I am Sylvia and I like swimming.”

#### High Fives

- Ask everyone to walk around the room for three minutes. They have to give a high-five to every single other person in the room. As the facilitator, you can say, “Look around—is there anyone you haven’t high-fived? Time is running out!”

#### Whoosh and Bing

- In a standing circle, pass a “whoosh” around the circle. This is done by saying “whoosh!” and throwing your hands toward the person next to you. After it goes around a couple times, stop the “whoosh!” and send a “bing!” going the opposite way, using a different hand gesture.

## Tiny Dance Party

- Cue up one song on the sound system and say, “Let’s all stand up. I want everyone to start by moving just ONE part of your body, like your shoulder or your foot, to the music.” (Give that a minute or two.)
- Continue by prompting, “Great! Now add two more parts of your body, like your hands or your head.”
- Finally, say “Great! Now use your whole body to move while this song plays. Then we’ll move to the next activity.”

## Ha!

- Participants stand or sit in a circle. Explain that you will give the group a word, and an important part of this exercise is to be serious and not to laugh.
- The first person will say the word once to the person on their right. They must make eye contact as they do.
- The person to their right will say the word twice, to the person on their right. They must also make eye contact.
- That person will say the word three times to the person on their right, while making eye contact.
- This will continue around the circle.
- Give them the word: “Ha!”
- Continuing around the circle, it will look like this:

Ha

Ha, ha

Ha, ha, ha

Ha, ha, ha, ha

Ha, ha, ha, ha, ha

The actual goal is to get everyone laughing.

## One Word Closers

A fast way to bring a meaningful closure to each session is for participants to go around the room and say one word in response to a prompt question you offer them, such as:

- “I’d like each person to think of one word to describe what you will remember or want to take away from tonight. Let’s go around the circle and each say our word.”
- “If there was one thing you would give to the children we learned about tonight, what would it be?”

- “Share a word that describes how you are feeling right now.”

After all have spoken, clap for everyone.



**FACILITATOR REFLECTIONS**

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**How would you describe your personal style as a trainer?**

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**What do you think your gifts are as a communicator?**

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**What skills would you like to strengthen?**

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# NOTES

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