

Session 6



TEXASCASA
Court Appointed Special Advocates
FOR CHILDREN



OVERVIEW

This is a 3½-hour session with a sample timeline based on a training taking place from 6:00 p.m. to 9:30 p.m. Please adjust the timeline as you see fit to match your program's class size and timing.

Keep in mind that some participants may have personal experience with domestic violence. Be sensitive to this fact, and work to compassionately support participants in learning to self-assess how their own experiences might affect their advocacy. The 911 call included in this chapter can evoke strong reactions and painful feelings. Prepare participants for this so it is not a surprise. Be prepared to debrief or take a break if necessary.

This chapter encourages participants to reflect on their values and perceptions when working with children and families from backgrounds different than their own. Create a space where volunteers can explore these topics respectfully, connecting the material to the CASA role and helping trainees understand the importance of examining any assumptions or generalizations that might impact their advocacy.

In the Amarillo case study, which covers working with an undocumented youth, emphasize the importance of using person-centered language like “undocumented immigrant,” rather than terms that can feel dehumanizing. For some, this might be a new way of thinking. If needed, emphasize that immigrant families are equal to all other families CASA serves.

Before facilitating this session, familiarize yourself with Special Immigrant Juvenile Status (SIJS). This law gives some undocumented youth in foster care a unique opportunity to apply for Lawful Permanent Resident status (also known as receiving a Green Card). For more information, visit the Texas CASA Learning Center and search for the webinar titled, “Advocating for Undocumented Youth.”

SUPPLIES AND CHECKLIST

Supplies:

- Name tents from previous class

Flip charts:

- Your “parking lot”
- Your expectations
- Your group agreements
- A flip chart for each group to use during the Amarillo case study exercise

Handouts:

- Print the Challenges You May Face scenarios and post them around the room before class begins.
- If your program doesn’t have a list of domestic violence resources in your community, prepare a handout with the names of organizations, their contact information and information about the services they provide. Make copies to distribute during activity 6A.
- Create a list of resources in your community that can help participants with their individual action plan. Prepare a handout to distribute during part 2 of activity 6F.
- Case study materials for the Amarillo case.
- Copies of the Session 6 Evaluation.

Videos:

- Why We Stayed
- Lisa’s 911 Call

Slide 1



- Greet participants with enthusiasm as they arrive and invite them to grab their name tents.
- Once participants have found a seat, fade your background music out and welcome your class back for session 6!
- Lead everyone in an opener exercise.

INTRODUCE TRAINING GOALS

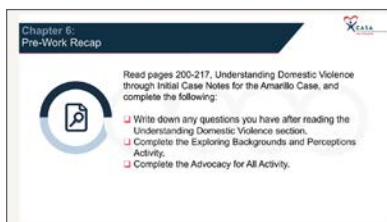
Advance to slide 2



- Briefly go over the training topics for this session to help learners feel oriented to the day's agenda, including when they can anticipate a break.

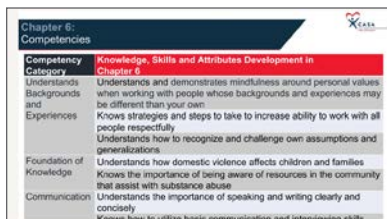
PREWORK RECAP

Advance to slide 3



- Celebrate and thank your trainees for the time they invested in completing their Pre-Work. Invite any questions learners have in response to their Pre-Work, and capture any questions that will be covered later on the parking lot.

Advance to slide 4



- Explain that this slide shows which topics from the Competencies Checklist they'll be tackling together today.

Advance to slides 5 and 6



- Define domestic violence, explaining that domestic violence happens to people of all genders, races, educational backgrounds and socioeconomic levels.
- Briefly recap the homework reading about domestic violence, and then give an overview of the information in the manual about the intersection of domestic violence and CASA/GAL volunteer work. Distribute copies of the handout with information about domestic violence resources in your community. Be sure to answer any questions participants have about the power and control wheel, and the many different types of abuse people can experience.

Advance to slide 7



- Introduce this video by stating that for people without personal experience, it can sometimes be difficult to understand why someone might stay in an abusive relationship. This video shares some of those reasons from survivors themselves. Play the video “Why We Stayed.”

Advance to slide 8



- Lead the large group in a discussion of the following questions:
 - What was going through your mind as you watched the video?
 - How do you think hearing these stories might influence your advocacy?
 - Was there a “Why I Stayed” reason that surprised you or spoke to you?
 - Which reasons were not covered?

The video mentions fear, love, lack of resources, isolation from support systems, religion, and self-blame as barriers to ending abusive relationships.

Some other barriers to leaving could include:

- Disability: Living with a physical or mental disability can sometimes lead a victim of domestic violence to feel dependent on their partner, which can make it harder to leave the relationship.
- Immigration status: If a person is undocumented, they may feel unsafe reporting the abuse out of fear of possible deportation. The abusive partner could also threaten to report them to the authorities if they tried to leave.
- Custody of children: Abusive partners may threaten to take custody of the children, which can be terrifying for the victim. If shared custody is granted, the safe parent may fear that if she is not present to protect the child from the abusive parent, things will be worse.

Point out that leaving is often the most dangerous time, because abuse is about power and control. When a victim attempts to leave, they are taking control and threatening the abusive partner's power, which could cause the violence or psychological manipulation to escalate. Mention that volunteers **should not try to persuade a victim to leave due this danger. Volunteers can provide resources and information if the victim is interested in connecting with help.**

ACTIVITY 6B: 911 CALL

7:00 – 7:25

Advance to slide 9



- Play the recording of six-year-old Lisa's call to 911 during a domestic violence incident in her home. Prepare volunteers ahead of time by alerting them to the intensity of the call. Keep in mind that listening to this recording may be very difficult for participants, especially those who have experienced domestic violence. Allow any participants who are worried about listening to it to leave the room during this part of the activity.
- After the call give a short follow-up about what happened to Lisa's family. According to press information from the New York State Office for the Prevention of Domestic Violence, "Responding officers charged Pierre [Lisa's stepfather] with assault and child endangerment, took photographs of the scene and of Cindy's [Lisa's mother's] visible injuries, and collected statements from Cindy and Lisa. Prosecutors subpoenaed the 911 tape and transcript, and Pierre pled to the charges. He served almost a year in jail." Lisa has consented to the public release of the recording to "help people understand what things are like for kids."

Advance to slide 10



- Ask the class what struck them about Lisa. What was Lisa experiencing? What were their impressions of Lisa's mother and stepfather?
- Direct the class to pages 220 and 222 in their manual, which list services and supports for people in abusive

relationships. Lead a group discussion on the following questions:

- What services might you recommend for Lisa's family? Ensure that volunteers understand the importance of advocating for appropriate interventions specific to intimate partner abuse rather than anger management services. Research shows that anger management techniques can be counterproductive to changing abusive and controlling behaviors. Stress that couples counseling can be unsafe for victims if the dynamics of power and control have not been adequately addressed.



Ask, "How might you approach your first interview with Lisa? What barriers might be present when interviewing Lisa? How might you overcome those barriers?"

The goal is to help volunteers focus on building rapport.

Advance to slide 11



- Quickly go over what a CASA/GAL volunteer can do aside from recommending appropriate services. If time allows, open your web browser to the National Domestic Violence Hotline's website at www.thehotline.org and briefly show participants how they can search for more information.

ACTIVITY 6C: CHALLENGES YOU MAY FACE

7:25 – 7:45

Advance to slide 12

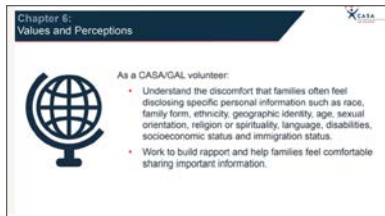


- Post the Challenges You May Face scenarios around the room before class begins. Have volunteers move around the room to read them. Ask them to choose three 'hot button' issues they believe would be particularly challenging for them and have them mark an X on that scenario. The scenarios are:

- A man who leaves his child in the car while he drinks at a bar until closing time.
 - A father who fondles his four-year-old child.
 - A mother who does not get out of bed for days due to depression, leaving her children without care or food.
 - An abusive partner who believes his wife deserves to be hit.
 - A mother who uses drugs throughout her pregnancy.
 - A parent who blames the child for the beating they received.
 - A parent who lives in a deplorably dirty home with human/animal waste and no water.
- Ask a few people to share in the large group. Emphasize that we all have biases, but it is important to recognize them and set them aside in order to advocate for the child with impartiality.
 - Lead the class in a discussion of how our own personal values might impact our effectiveness and objectivity when faced with challenging situations on a case. If volunteers need support remaining unbiased, they can seek help from their supervisor.

ACTIVITY 6D: EXPLORING BACKGROUNDS & PERCEPTIONS 7:45 – 7:50

Advance to slides 13 and 14



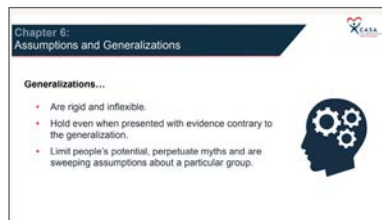
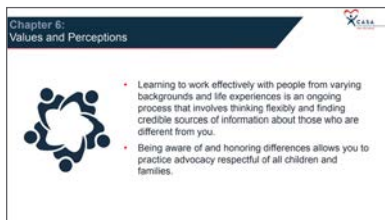
- Ask the participants to recall the activity on Exploring Backgrounds and Perceptions that they have completed as Pre-Work. Discuss any questions that they may have.
- Help participants understand how difficult it can be for parents to disclose deeply personal information with people in positions of power. Ask them to consider what it would be like to walk in Susan Mailer’s shoes. Share that it can be challenging to work with a parent who is not fully honest or forthcoming, and emphasize the need to practice compassion in these situations. When there is so much at stake, sometimes a lack of honesty may be motivated by fear or by a desire to present oneself in the way we believe will look best to others.

Advance to slide 15



- Ask the participants to recall the activity that they completed as part of their Pre-Work.

Advance to slides 16 and 17



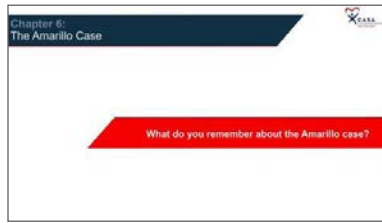
- Provide a brief overview of the differences between generalizing and understanding, which volunteers reviewed before class. Invite any questions about this material and about the 10 Benefits of Practicing Advocacy for All on page 207 of their manual.
- Ask the class to think of a time they felt categorized or generalized because of the way they identify. How did that feel? How might a foster child feel? Ask if any volunteers would like to share their experiences.

Advance to slide 18



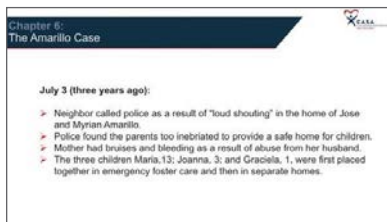
- Ask them to recall the Individual Action Plan that they have prepared.
- Provide a brief overview of the article and the purpose of the plan. Ask participants to share some of their ideas for resources in your community, and then pass out the list of community resources that you created.

Advance to slides 19 and 20

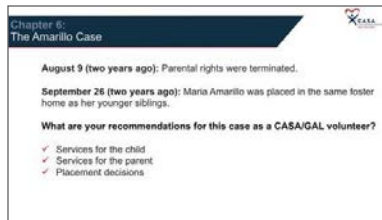


- Ask the class to briefly recap what they know so far about the Amarillo case. *Click through slides 21 through 24 to summarize the case information.* Emphasize here the importance of using people-centered language when discussing immigration status.

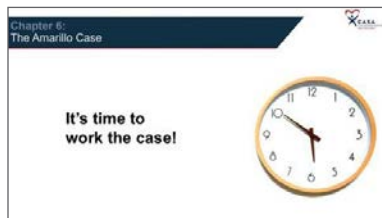
Slides 21 and 22



Slides 23 and 24



Advance to slides 25 and 26



- Remind the class how case studies work and recap the four roles: Runner, Scribe, Moderator and Questioner. Explain that as they collect information they should be preparing to make recommendations to the court.

- Give each group about 30 minutes for interviews.

Interviews available for the Maria Amarillo case:

(This list is for your use only. Groups must decide on their own who they want to interview.)

- Medical History: Maria Amarillo
 - CPS Caseworker: Alberta Gillis
 - Maria Amarillo: First Contact
 - School Guidance Counselor: Julia Mansfield
 - Foster Parents: Stanley and Karen Becker
 - Maternal Aunt: Consuela Amarillo
 - Kinship Relatives: Pedro and Anna Valdez
 - Maria Amarillo: Second Contact
 - CASA Supervisor
- After 30 minutes, give the groups five minutes to discuss and write down their recommendations.
 - Ask participants to move around, stretch and walk around the room to read the other groups' recommendations.
 - As a large group, debrief and address any questions. Make sure to attend to the two issues detailed below.

Immigration Status

Help volunteers understand that a person's immigration status does not impact their ability to act as a placement for a child. Advocates must *not* make an assessment about a person's ability to meet the MSL based on legal status. Although being undocumented can create unique challenges, it does not inherently prevent someone from being able to meet the MSL for a child. This is also a great opportunity to explain how your program addresses language barriers (for example, utilizing bilingual staff members, Language Line or other resources to communicate with family members and others who do not speak English.)

Access to Contraception

Explain that youth in foster care have a right to access contraception. Medicaid covers a wide selection of contraceptive methods including birth control pills, injections, implants, IUDs and others. Children and teens in foster care receive Medicaid benefits, and the federal Medicaid statute guarantees that minors who are covered by Medicaid may give their own consent and receive confidential family planning services by request.

This means that foster youth, regardless of their age, do not need permission from

anyone to receive birth control or reproductive care. Many youth may be unaware of their right to access birth control because it is not explicitly outlined in the Texas Family Code or Children’s Bill of Rights. CASA volunteers, DFPS caseworkers and the child’s attorney ad litem should work together to ensure that youth are aware of their ability to access contraceptives, and understand how to do so.

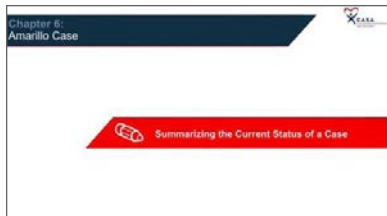
However, this can be complex. Under Texas state law, foster parents can refuse to facilitate a foster youth’s access to contraception and can refuse to care for a youth who uses birth control. Various medical providers may not be aware that federal law takes priority over state law, and that Medicaid has this provision. Encourage volunteers to seek guidance from their supervisor on how to have a developmentally appropriate conversation with youth about their rights to contraception and family planning, as well as how CASA volunteers can help facilitate the youth’s ability to exercise this right when needed. The youth has the right to services.

According to the National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy, a teen girl in foster care is two and a half times more likely to become pregnant by age 19 than her adolescent peers who are not in foster care. Reiterate for volunteers that access to reproductive healthcare is part of a youth’s overall safety, well-being and permanency.

ACTIVITY 6H: SUMMARIZING THE STATUS OF A CASE

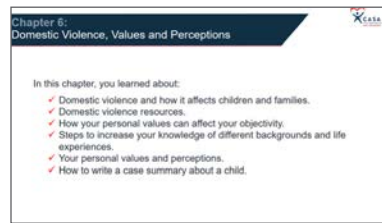
9:00 – 9:20

Advance to slide 27



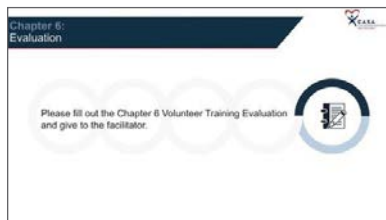
- Have participants write a two- or three-paragraph summary of the current status of the children in the Amarillo case using the appropriate format for your program’s court report. Their summaries should be based on the notes and interviews they read in the previous activity, and should focus on the current status of the children. It could be beneficial to prepare a brief example of what this might look like for another case they have reviewed, such as the Greene case or the Bass case, to help guide them in this activity.
- Once they have completed writing their summaries, discuss in the large group what they included in their case status summaries. Point out any key information they may have left out. The goal is to help volunteers gain confidence in crafting court report summaries.

Advance to slides 28 and 29



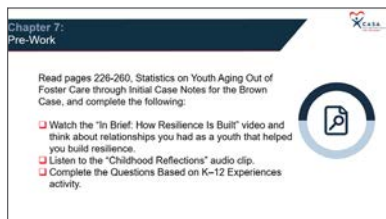
- To wrap up, review the learning objectives to check in about volunteers' comfort level with the content. Answer any remaining questions.

Advance to slide 30



- Hand out copies of the Session 6 Evaluation and collect them before participants leave.

Advance to slide 31



- Go over assigned Pre-Work for session 7 and ensure everyone has a clear understanding about what to tackle before the next session.
- Lead everyone in a closing activity.