

THE CASA/GAL INTERVIEW HANDOUT SESSION 3 GREENE CASE



CASA/GAL Interview

In your role as a CASA/GAL volunteer, you will have the chance to interview many people related to a case: the child, the parent(s), other relatives, the child's teacher, medical professionals, the caseworker and so on. Because you may have a limited amount of time to seek information and interview everyone you deem necessary before your first hearing or report is due, it is important that you make the best possible use of interview time by determining what information is needed and crafting questions to ask ahead of time.

The interview is a powerful tool in your CASA/GAL volunteer toolbox and should be controlled by you, the fact gatherer. CASA/GAL volunteer interviews are neither friendly chats nor inquisitions. The structure of the interview should be non-threatening. Start with comfortable material and lead to more sensitive areas. You may face the tendency to turn the interview into a personal conversation, but keep in mind that it is possible to make someone feel at home and to show an interest in him or her while still presenting yourself as the one in charge, the professional. It is rarely appropriate to discuss your personal life or your past experiences. Never discuss your own attitudes or biases. Your goal is to gather enough information, in a respectful manner, to produce a factually sound, insightful report and recommendations for the court.

Basic Tips for a Productive Interview

- Display empathy and concentration. Portray an accepting, believing, non-judgmental demeanor.
- Observe gestures, expressions and other forms of nonverbal communication.
- Make notes about the environment. Does the room contain family photos, toys and so on?
- Prepare questions beforehand, but be flexible, asking clarifying questions as needed.
- Do not ask leading questions. A leading question assumes a point of view on your part.

- Listen to understand. Do not interrupt.
- Do not expect to gather all the information needed in one session.
- Encourage subjects to keep talking with phrases such as, “Okay,” “Go on,” or “Please continue,” or allowing five seconds of silence. Do not be afraid of silences.
- Check to make sure you understand what the speaker is trying to convey, using phrases such as “What I’m hearing is . . .” or “It sounds like you are saying . . . Is that right?”
- Do not preach or teach. Avoid arrogance.