

# CASA Kane County

## Report Writing Guidelines - General

CASA reports to court will be written so that the judge, CASA GAL attorney, the State's Attorney, and all other parties will have credible information that they can rely on to make the decisions in the best interests of children.

- Our reports should speak for us. It is not often that a volunteer will speak in open court. If you are asked to testify, the CASA GAL Attorney will work with you to prepare.
- Keeping our format consistent helps readers to find the information in the same place for easy reference.
- Review the Report Writing Guidelines, Template and Sample Report for each report you are writing. These resources will provide you with the most current information needed, section by section, to write a thorough report.
- It is imperative that the CASA/GAL do her/his own fact finding to present an independent assessment and recommendations to the court.
- Providing the source of information for all facts is key and makes our reports credible, leaving no question as to where the information came from.
- In the Interviewed and Reports and Materials Reviewed sections, include only those interviewed and reports read since the last court date. You will never include attorney notes as Materials Reviewed as those are confidential.
- The Case History section is important as it provides the court with the factual reasons why a case came into care. It will never be updated as it is the history. All new information that occurs after a case came into care will be included in the Findings Section. The only exception to this rule is if a child or parent is deceased – you would add this information in the Case History section to bring it to the immediate attention of the court.
- Make sure to list all Placement information from the start of the case. Some children may have been in more than one placement. The most current placement is listed first.
- Findings section:
  - Be specific rather than general (for example, “experiencing difficulties after visits” is less clear than “cries uncontrollably for two to three hours after each visit”). Paint a picture with your words.
  - Include direct observations, exactly what happened, exactly what was said, and list the behaviors observed with children, parents, etc.



- Don't confuse statements of opinion or judgment with fact. Provide information on things that are confirmed and do not include information on things that are not.
  - Use dates sparingly but pay attention to when they help substantiate an issue. For example, "Kathy Price, mother, stated on March 1, 2020, that she requested daycare assistance for Rose. As of November 3, 2021, daycare service has not been provided by the agency."
  - Do not use full names of Foster Parents or their families. Use only first name and last initial. Do not include names for children of Foster Parents.
  - Introduce the name and title of the person you are referring to one time, then refer to them by first name and last initial for Foster Parents, or Mr./Ms. Last Name for all others throughout the report.
  - Tactfully call to the court's attention any services not delivered and orders not being followed without making direct accusations toward other agencies. For example, "the psychological evaluation ordered three months ago has not yet been accomplished".
  - If a parent is incarcerated, list the charge/conviction and location.
  - Use factual statements that are nonjudgmental. For example, instead of saying "Ms. Price has been uncooperative," state "Ms. Price has not complied with requested drug drops" or "Mr. Price has attended 1 of 5 scheduled appointments" instead of Mr. Price has only attended 1 of 6 scheduled appointments".
- Recommendations section:
    - All recommendations must be supported in the Findings section of the report. A recommendation that comes out of nowhere is ineffective.
    - Reserve recommendations for things that have been newly identified, or things that should have been happening but haven't started. Examples include:
      - a. If you have recommended a new evaluation for individual counseling for a parent or child.
      - b. If a parent has been referred for counseling but hasn't started.
      - c. An I/A recommends Domestic Violence classes, but the agency has not referred the parent for that service.
    - Do not include things that should continue that you discussed in the findings. Examples are:
      - d. If a parent has been attending AA meetings and should continue.
      - e. If a parent has been submitting for drug tests and should continue.
- General Tips:
    - Use short paragraphs instead of long text.
    - Use 12-point font and double space between headings and paragraphs.
    - Use quotation marks only to indicate direct quotations of speech. It may be safer to paraphrase. Do not enclose social work, medical, or legal terminology in quotation marks.
    - Use upper- and lowercase throughout. The all-capital letters style is very difficult to read and looks like screaming.
    - Bullets are acceptable especially for lists, but make sure that important information is not unnecessarily shortened to fit the bullet format.
    - Proofread. CASA Kane County strives for professionalism in all areas. Review your report for spelling and grammatical errors.

- Once your report is written, set it aside and re-read it later. Does it make sense and give a complete picture to a person who knows nothing about the case? Read it out loud to catch unclear bits and fragments. Don't assume that the judge knows or remembers all the facts. No action can be taken without accurate and complete information reported to the court.
- Start working on your report early. Virtually all reports can be improved upon, so allow time for that part of the process. Start by roughing out your notes according to the sections of the report. Refine the notes into complete sentences and related topics. Run Spellcheck to catch typos.
- Turn your report into your Advocate Supervisor no later than 3 weeks prior to the court hearing. This allows time for the review process, and it allows CASA to submit the report to the court a week in advance, so the judge has time to read and process the information.