

CASA Lake County

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

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.

“You do what I cannot do.”

--Juvenile Court Judge Valerie Ceckowski
Speaking to CASA Lake County Volunteers

- You see and know the child.
- You experience the child's home, school and surroundings.
- You talk directly with key people who impact the child's life (family, caregivers, teachers, physicians, therapists, etc.

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

CASA volunteers are the eyes and ears of the court.

- Your manager works with you to make your report as effective as possible in court. Then, your manager sees to it that your report goes to:
 - The Judge
 - The Guardian Ad Litem (GAL)
 - The State's Attorney
 - The Case Worker
 - Other attorneys involved in the case such as the public defender or private attorneys
 - The Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) Legal Office

*Others, including parents, may see your report.
Discuss any concerns with your manager.*

Who Sees Your Court Report

Your manager supports you at every step.

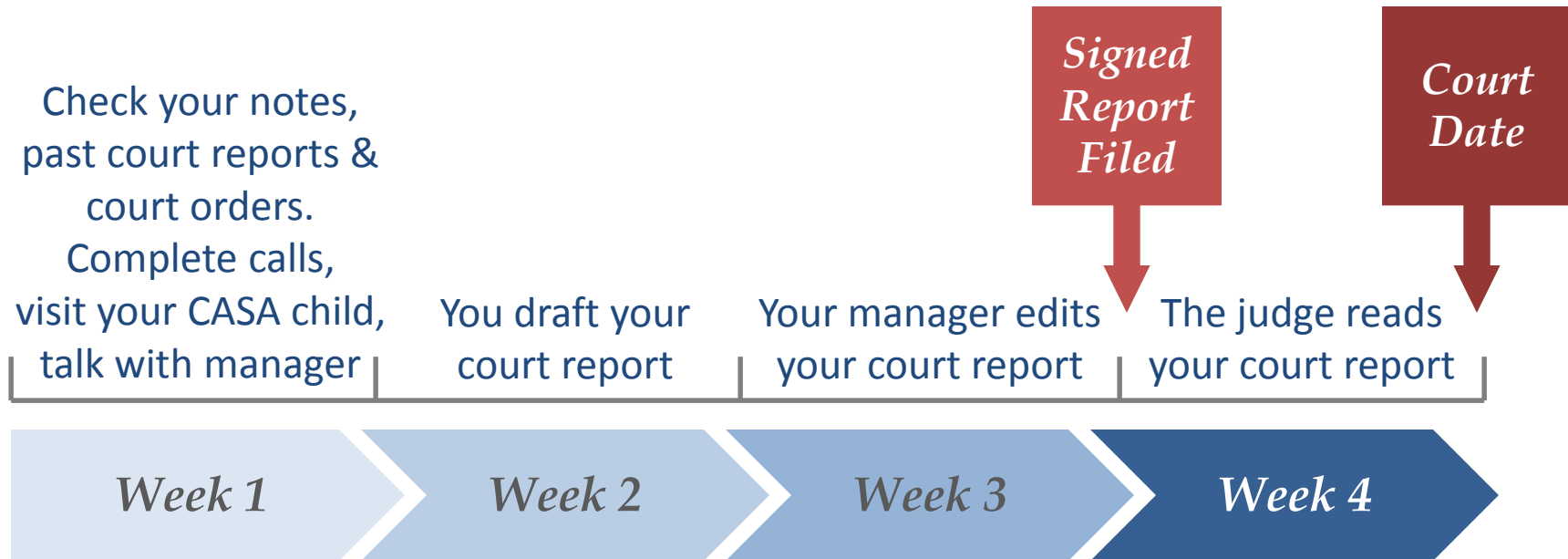
- Your manager will help you format your first report using the CASA Lake County court report template.
- Your manager will write the first case summary so you can focus on your findings and recommendations.

Your *will* *draft*
• ~~You're~~ manager ~~might~~ edit your [^] report and talk with you about the ~~rules~~ behind suggested changes. *reasons*

- Your report will be submitted to the court only if you and your manager agree on the content.

Court Report Timeline

Prepare well in advance and submit your report on time.



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

Court Report Template

www.casalakecounty.com

Volunteer Pages



CASA Lake County

Judge's Name

CASA Report to the Court

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

In the interest of: **DOB** **Age** **Docket No.**
If more than one child, list by docket number, lowest to highest.
DOB should be a standard format of xx/xx/xxxx (09/25/2004)
Age should be indicated by year and month in the format x.x (6.1)
Docket no should follow the format xx JA xx

Date of Hearing
Insert date here. Please do not add any other information here. In this instance the date should be the written out month with numerical day and year, e.g. November 1, 2010

Case Summary
Tell why and how the case came to the attention of the court and include brief information on the children's current placement. This case summary will remain mostly static for the life of the case with the exception of any significant updates and/or placement changes. For the first court report your Advocate Manager will write the case summary. The CASA is responsible for updating the summary in future reports as needed.

Double space between paragraphs.

This case is before the court today for a XXXXXXXX hearing.

Findings

At the discretion of the Advocate Manager please include the length of time the CASA has been on the case. This may be used to either add credibility to the CASA's recommendations due to longevity on the case or to indicate to the judge that the CASA is newly appointed which would explain their more limited amount of findings.

"Findings" includes information from the last court date to present.

Organize your observations and facts based on the relevancy of the information. It may be chronologically, by child, or by topic, whatever works best for your case and information. Please discuss these options with your Advocate Manager.

Before drafting your report, make sure you have the most current information available so your report will be accurate. Use bold *italics* for subheadings to break up this section if you are presenting a large amount of information. Information should be presented factually, avoiding judgments or statements of conclusion. Make sure you supply dates and attribution for your information so the judge will know how current your information is and how you obtained the information. Whenever possible highlight the dates of visits and conversations by positioning them along the left margin and in bold. This helps the judge to locate and extract critical information more quickly.

Recommendations

1. Simple numbered statements recommending what you want the judge to do or what you want to happen.
2. Each recommendation should be supported in the findings section.
3. If you have a recommendation regarding placement this would typically be your first recommendation.

Respectfully submitted:

Court Appointed Special Advocate

Date of Report:

(Type your name here)

Staff Signature

(Type your advocate manager's name here)
Advocate Manager

CASA Lake County
24647 Milwaukee Ave.
Vernon Hills, IL 60061
847-377-7975


CASA Court Report Template

- *Standard for all CASA Lake County 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.*

Court Report Template

www.casalakecounty.com

Volunteer Pages



Judge's Name _____

CASA Lake County
CASA Report to the Court

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

In the interest of: **DOB** **Age** **Docket No.**
If more than one child, list by docket number, lowest to highest.
DOB should be a standard format of xx/xx/xxxx (09/25/2004)
Age should be indicated by year and month in the format x.x (6.1)
Docket no should follow the format xx JA xx

Date of Hearing
Insert date here. Please do not add any other information here. In this instance the date should be the written out month with numerical day and year, e.g. November 1, 2010

Case Summary
Tell why and how the case came to the attention of the court and include brief information on the children's current placement. This case summary will remain mostly static for the life of the case with the exception of any significant updates and/or placement changes. For the first court report your Advocate Manager will write the case summary. The CASA is responsible for updating the summary in future reports as needed.

Double space between paragraphs.

This case is before the court today for a XXXXXXXX hearing.

Findings
At the discretion of the Advocate Manager please include the length of time the CASA has been on the case. This may be used to either add credibility to the CASA's recommendations due to longevity on the case or to indicate to the judge that the CASA is newly appointed which would explain their more limited amount of findings.

"Findings" includes information from the last court date to present.

Organize your observations and facts based on the relevancy of the information. It may be chronologically, by child, or by topic, whatever works best for your case and information. Please discuss these options with your Advocate Manager.

In the Interests of: *Identifying information about the child.*

Date of Hearing

Case Summary: *Your manager writes this very brief summary of key events. You may add additional milestones as they occur.*

Findings: *What you have observed and learned since the previous hearing; child-centered information that supports your Recommendations.*

Court Report Template

www.casalakecounty.com

Volunteer Pages

Recommendations: *Simple numbered statements that say what you want the judge to do or what you want to happen for your CASA child...tied clearly and directly to your **Findings**.*

Signatures: *You and your manager sign the report before it is submitted to the court.*

Before drafting your report, make sure you have the most current information available so your report will be accurate. Use bold *italics* for subheadings to break up this section if you are presenting a large amount of information. Information should be presented factually, avoiding judgments or statements of conclusion. Make sure you supply dates and attribution for your information so the judge will know how current your information is and how you obtained the information. Whenever possible highlight the dates of visits and conversations by positioning them along the left margin and in bold. This helps the judge to locate and extract critical information more quickly.

Recommendations

1. Simple numbered statements recommending what you want the judge to do or what you want to happen.
2. Each recommendation should be supported in the findings section.
3. If you have a recommendation regarding placement this would typically be your first recommendation.

Respectfully submitted:

Court Appointed Special Advocate

Date of Report:

(Type your name here)

Staff Signature

(Type your advocate manager's name here)
Advocate Manager

CASA Lake County
24647 Milwaukee Ave.
Vernon Hills, IL 60061
847-377-7975

Case Name, Date, Page 2

Court Report Template

www.casalakecounty.com
Volunteer Pages



CASA Lake County

CASA Report to the Court

Judge's Name _____

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

In the interest of: DOB Age Docket No.
If more than one child, list by docket number, lowest to highest.
DOB should be a standard format of xx/xx/xxxx (09/25/2004)
Age should be indicated by year and month in the format x.x (6.1)
Docket no should follow the format xx JA xx

Date of Hearing

Insert date here. Please do not add any other information here. In this instance the date should be the written out month with numerical day and year, e.g. November 1, 2010

Case Summary

Tell why and how the case came to the attention of the court and include brief information on the children's current placement. This case summary will remain mostly static for the life of the case with the exception of any significant updates and/or placement changes. For the first court report your Advocate Manager will write the case summary. The CASA is responsible for updating the summary in future reports as needed.

Double space between paragraphs.

This case is before the court today for a XXXXXXXX hearing.

Findings

At the discretion of the Advocate Manager please include the length of time the CASA has been on the case. This may be used to either add credibility to the CASA's recommendations due to longevity on the case or to indicate to the judge that the CASA is newly appointed which would explain their more limited amount of findings.

"Findings" includes information from the last court date to present.

Organize your observations and facts based on the relevancy of the information. It may be chronologically, by child, or by topic, whatever works best for your case and information. Please discuss these options with your Advocate Manager.

Before drafting your report, make sure you have the most current information available so your report will be accurate. Use bold *italics* for subheadings to break up this section if you are presenting a large amount of information. Information should be presented factually, avoiding judgments or statements of conclusion. Make sure you supply dates and attribution for your information so the judge will know how current your information is and how you obtained the information. Whenever possible highlight the facts of visits and conversations by positioning them along the left margin and in bold. This helps the judge to locate and extract critical information more quickly.

Recommendations

Simple numbered statements recommending what you want the judge to do or what you want to happen.

Each recommendation should be supported in the findings section.

If you

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 most important and pertinent facts that support your recommendations for each child.*
- *Talk with your manager about report length for your specific case.*

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 Manager

Your manager can help you organize your thoughts, decide what is most important and write in a way that works best in court.

Focus on Findings

CASA volunteers are the eyes and ears of the court.

1

Big Picture...

The foster home is in a neighborhood of single-family houses and low-rise apartment buildings.

2

Closer to the Child...

FM's house is a three-bedroom bungalow with a fenced yard.

3

The Child's Immediate World...

In addition to FM and the children in this case, the foster household includes FM's husband and the couple's 19-year-old daughter.

4

Focus on the Child

Michael and Marcus share a bedroom that is furnished with bunk beds and a chest of drawers.

A snapshot of NM is taped to the wall beside the beds.



Focus on Findings

CASA volunteers are the eyes and ears of the court.

Limits on the facts you write in your court report:

- Safety
- Confidentiality
- CW is not a source
- Pertinence to the case at the time of your report



Safety First

CASA court reports do not provide details that could put a child at risk or compromise confidentiality. This includes names, organizations, schools, and locations.

Talk with your manager for guidance.

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. **Useable:** Information that is clear, direct and easy for the judge to find

Focus on Findings

Examples: Child-Centered

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

New Foster Placement with PGM

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

Child-centered court reports are about the child, not the NPs. 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 aid.

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

Focus on Findings

Examples: Useable

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

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

Useable 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, numbered sentences

Focus on Recommendations

Promote and protect the best interests of the child

Appropriate to the legal stage of the case

- **Example:** Information about parents does not appear in pre-trial CASA court reports.
- **Example:** Recommendations about the goal are appropriate in a report for a 2-28 permanency hearing.
- Talk with your manager about recommendations you plan to make in your court report.

Find Your Place in the Legal Life of a “Typical” CASA Case

Talk with your manager before drafting your report.

Focus on Recommendations

Promote and protect the best interests of the child

Child-Centered

Not Child-Centered	Child-Centered
NM should be able to see the children as long as she isn't left alone with them.	The children to have supervised visits with NM

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, NF rarely talked directly with Eric. On 9/5, Eric said, “He doesn’t like me. I can’t talk to him. ”	Eric and NF to receive family counseling

Focus on Recommendations

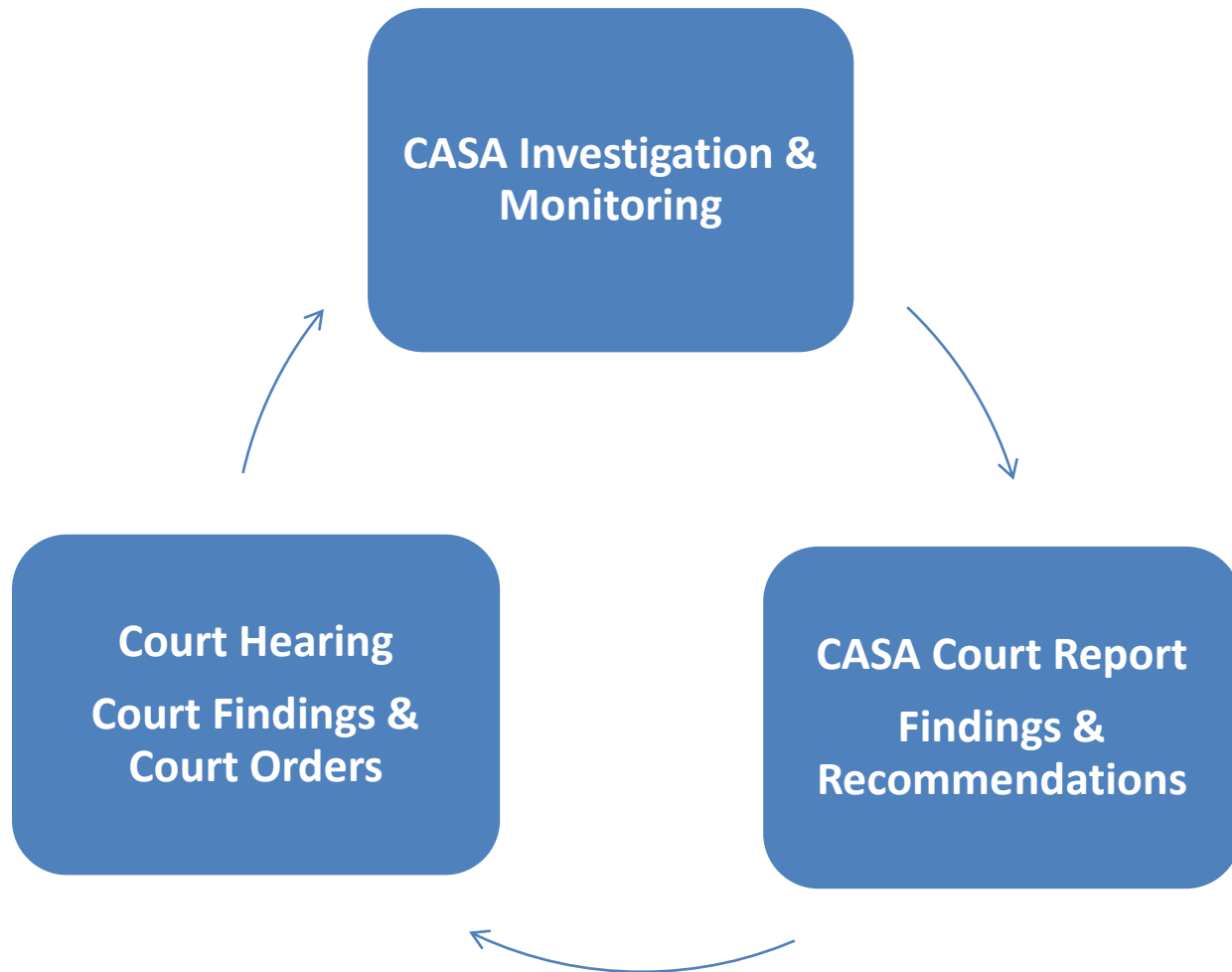
Promote and protect the best interests of the child

Brief, numbered sentences

Child's Interests	Recommendation Examples
Placement	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. The children to remain in their current foster care placement2. The children to be moved to a foster home that is clean and free of health and safety hazards
Services	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Jon to receive a reading assessment2. Eric to have family counseling with NF
Permanency Goal <i>(For permanency hearings)</i>	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. The children to return to NM's home2. The goal to be changed to independence

Court Report Cycle

Each court date begins a new reporting cycle.



Court Report Style Tips

Make your report as effective as possible in court.

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

Court Report Style Tips

Make your report as effective as possible in court.

Don't	Do
<i>Don't stray from the CASA Lake County Court Report Template</i>	<i>Follow the template. If you have questions, talk with your manager.</i>
<i>Don't use the word "kid."</i>	<i>Use the word "child."</i>
<i>Don't use a question & 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.

Don't	Do
<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 – FM called to report that NF 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><i>Krista's Health</i></p> <p><i>Visits with NPs</i></p>
<p><i>Don't use quotes when the exact phrasing is not significant.</i></p> <p>FM 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>FM 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.

Don't	Do
<p><i>Avoid using the word “bonded,” which is a therapeutic term.</i></p> <p>Eric is bonded with NF.</p>	<p><i>Select other words that describe the behaviors that you observed that demonstrate the attachment.</i></p> <p>When NF arrived for the visit, Eric smiled and embraced him.</p>
<p><i><u>Do not</u> reference CW communications in court reports (especially information regarding NPs), unless the information is child-centered.</i></p>	<p><i>The CWs 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><i><u>For example, don't report:</u> CASA had to call the CW many times before the CW called back.</i></p>	<p><i>Talk with your manager about how to address such concerns as:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><i>• Issues with other members of the service team</i><i>• Frustrations in your CASA work</i>

Court Report Style Tips

Make your report as effective as possible in court.

Photos may be attached to CASA court reports to help the judge visualize the children.

- Ask permission before taking and using photos
- Do not photograph people who are not in the case
- Do not display information that could put a child at risk



Left: Ana Loomis (age 8) – 00 JA 100

Right: Yvette Garcia (age 7) – 00 JA 101

Photo taken 9/12/11.

Preparing for Court

Your manager supports you at every step.

- With advice from your manager, alert the CW 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.”

CASA Lake County

Writing Your Court Report

Questions & Answers





Homework

The Kaylee Moore Court Report

- You will receive an email with the court report template for the Kaylee Moore case
- Fill in the court report template with the Findings, Recommendations, Headings from class.
 - Use Word – no pdf or Google Doc files
 - If a Mac user using *Pages* – ‘Save As’ an rtf file...or copy/paste into the body of an email
 - Let me know if you need help with Word, attachments to email, etc.
- Send your report as an email attachment no later than
Saturday, Sept. 24, 10:00 a.m.