

COVID-19 Response

3/16/2020

Like many of you, we are paying close attention to the evolving COVID-19 situation locally and nationwide. The safety of the children we serve, our volunteers and our staff is of paramount importance. We are determined to take prudent measures to help keep people safe, while attempting to avoid panic and continuing to fulfill our critical mission. We're adjusting our practices and protocols to prioritize safety while still supporting our essential advocacy for children in need. As the situation is constantly evolving, we will continue to evaluate our practices and response and provide updates here.

Child Visits

For our volunteer advocates and staff, the following changes will be made to our standard child visit practices:

- **Effective immediately we are suspending all child and family visits.**
- We are requiring **weekly** contact via a video-conferencing tool during the hiatus of in-person visits to verbal-aged children, and to caregivers if children are too young to speak. In the event a child is too young for video or phone calls, please use video conferencing when possible to see the children to ensure they are okay while you are speaking to the caregiver. If video is not possible, phone calls will work. If you need assistance meeting this requirement, please let your supervisor know and we will help you.
- **These restrictions will remain in effect through 4/3/2020** and we will reevaluate and communicate with you all again before that time.

The fear and anxiety that many of us are feeling may only be compounded for the children and youth we serve who have also been affected by trauma and may trigger trauma-associated thoughts/behaviors in/from the child or create additional tension in the child's home or placement. Therefore, it is vital to have eyes on the children we serve in any way possible to help them stay calm and connected. Not communicating with a child in these most stressful, difficult times when connections are most valuable could undo all of the work done to create a relationship.

It is vital for the volunteer to maintain regular (weekly) contact with the child either through the use of Skype, Zoom, Google Hangouts, or FaceTime (or other non-video tools if needed), especially where kids are in congregate care settings, such as shelters or Residential Treatment Centers.

Resources for Volunteers:

[Resources for CASA Volunteers Communicating With Children During COVID-19 Crisis](#)

Heart of Missouri CASA Staff Working from Home:

To encourage physical distancing and help as much as we can to flatten the curve of the COVID-19 pandemic, all the staff at Heart of Missouri CASA will be working from home until at least Friday, April 3rd. Staff are available through email and their cell phones, as usual. We will reevaluate extending this when we get closer to April 3rd. You can reach out to us through our [general contact form](#) as well.

Court Hearings

[Per the court](#), all proceedings, except for those listed below are suspended from Tuesday, March 17, 2020 through Friday, April 17, 2020. All cases currently set during the next 30 days, that do not fall into one of these categories, will be sent new court dates. This will be all our cases involving CASA volunteers.

The only proceedings being heard through April 17th:

- In custody initial appearances and arraignments within 48 business hours,
- Bond hearings as required pursuant to Supreme Court Rule 33,
- Any other in custody criminal cases that can be conducted by video,
- 96-hour hearings,
- Ex partes, temporary restraining orders, and preliminary injunctions,
- Juvenile detention hearings,
- Juvenile delinquency cases in custody that can be conducted by video,
- *Abuse/neglect protective custody hearings*,
- Emergency guardianships, and
- Writ of habeas corpus hearings.

Children's Division:

[Temporary Policy in Response to COVID-19](#)