

Pre-School Aged Kids (Birth until the start of Kindergarten):

Look for developmental readiness

- Familiarize yourself with the range of normal development for the age of the child
- Are they on track?
- If not, or if you see some red flags, what do you do?
- Are they being exposed to developmentally appropriate activities?
- Are you seeing development over time?

Help their caregivers integrate reading and other school prep activities into their routines

- Sometimes, the problem is simply a lack of knowledge of what to do
- Bright By Three is great resource for ideas, and actual books as well
- Other times, the problem can be a lack of understanding how important these activities are
- Unnoticed developmental delays can be a source of frustration
- What are some things besides reading that babies or toddlers need to practice?

When they are old enough, get them into an educational preschool setting

- Preschool has been shown to make a noticeable difference in grade school success
- The difference it makes is even more pronounced in low resource homes
- There are lots of subsidies and other money available for preschool
- Not all preschools are created equal –
 - Does your kiddo seem to be thriving there?
 - Are they learning?
 - Are they making friends?
 - Do you see any signs of neglect or poor supervision?
 - Are they accredited and up to code?
 - www.colorado.gov/ChildCareSearch

School Aged Kids (Kindergarten through their 14th birthday)

Monitoring attendance, performance, and other official metrics at the school (monthly)

- Gather basic information (grades, attendance, and detention or suspension information) once a month during school (more if there are problems). This information gives everything else you gather context.
- Once you have this basic information, talk to the student's teacher(s) to find out more specifics, like:
 - How they are doing socially
 - Any problems the teacher has noticed
 - Which subjects they seem to like, dislike, excel at, or struggle with
 - When they light up or shut down

If needed, looking into and facilitating the acquisition or updating of an IEP

- If your kiddo has a diagnosed or suspected learning disability, other mental health diagnosis, or a physical disability that interferes with their school experience, they are likely eligible for an IEP (Individualized Education Plan).
- An IEP is an important legal document. It spells out your child's learning needs, the services the school will provide and how progress will be measured. Several people, including parents, are involved in creating the document.
- The first step is to request an evaluation (unless they already have a diagnosis).
- A group of school staff and the parents/guardians (and you) get together to discuss whether or not the kid meets the definition of disability for the purpose of an IEP. If they decide no and you disagree, you can challenge their ruling.
- The team comes together to create the IEP. One of your jobs is to advocate for strengths based planning, which is in the next section.
- IEP plans must be reviewed at least yearly. If you think the IEP isn't working, you can request a review sooner.

Helping the kids identify their strengths and points of joy at school, and helping them build on those

- What do your kids love about school? What do they like to do? What classes do they enjoy? What people already support them at school?
- Build on those things.
 - For example: if they loved a skit they did for class, maybe they can take a theater class or join a club
 - If they love playing basketball with their friends, maybe they can join the team
- Building on strengths and happiness help kids want to go to school more, become more invested in the educational experience, and ultimately be more successful

When Kids Have to Change Schools

- Follow up to make sure records are transferred in a timely manner, and that credits are transferring
- Help the kids mentally prepare for their new school
- Try to integrate them into a new group before they switch, or soon after

Transition Aged Kids (14 years old through whenever they age out or leave the system)

Get them thinking about and applying for college or vocational training

- Many of our kids are in survival mode and have been for a long time. One of our jobs is to get them thinking and dreaming beyond their next meal, day, whatever.
- One way to do this is to talk to them about what they love to do, and what they are good at, and help them think of fields that might be good fits for them.
 - Help them dream big: it is better for a girl who loves animals to try to be a veterinarian and end up being a vet tech than to try for and obtain a job at a call center.
- Once they have an idea (or several ideas) of something they really want to do, you can help them make a plan to get there.
 - What do you need to be a graphic designer? You need to finish high school. You need to attend a 2 or 4 year graphic design program. You need internships. CASAs can help with all of these things.
- Most of our kids should at least consider college or vocational school. It is required for most secure jobs these days.
 - What are kids don't always know is that there is a lot of money available for kids in the system to go to college.
 - Some of our kids have just never thought about it, others think it isn't for people "like them"
 - Many of our kids come from families who do not know how to help them with the application process
- CASAs can encourage them to consider college or vocational school. We can hook you up with people at most of the local colleges who will provide specially tailored tours.
- CASAs can help them look for funding opportunities and help them complete their applications when the time comes.

Encourage them to finish school strong

- Once you have them thinking about the future, stress how important it is to finish high school well. Colleges don't take drop outs.
- If they aren't going on for more education, stress how important getting a diploma (or at least a GED) is for any work they might want.
- Colorado has been persistent in keeping students who fall short of graduation requirements enrolled beyond their fourth year of high school and moving them to graduate in five or six years.
- "The graduation rate for the class of 2011 increased from 73.9 percent as a four-year rate to 80.1 percent as a six-year rate. This translates to more than 3,600 additional graduates from this class. Districts and schools are finding ways to support students by making time a variable, and learning and college and career readiness the constant."

Help them plan for their futures, including specific skill building

- Graduating isn't just about going to college or getting a job – for many of our kids, they will have to be full-fledged adults. That means they need to be able to get an apartment, apply for a loan, balance their checkbooks, do their laundry, cook meals, and 1000 other things that adults have to be able to do.
- Do the skills assessment with your CASA kid, and use that as a spring board for making a plan. If they can't cook, who could teach them? If they've never worked a washer, who can show them? You might do some things, but you shouldn't do everything. This is because:
- The number one thing your kids need are stable adults in their lives (permanent connections). They need at least three. Find or help create these people (you can use the diligence search), and use them to help your kid learn what they need. This strengthens the bonds.

How to Get Into the Schools and What to Do There:

1. Once an advocate makes contact with his/her professional team, obtain information about the child's school (and teacher's name, if possible). This request can, in fact, be made in the initial introductory email.
2. During the advocate's initial visit, inform the placement that part of one's duties as CASA is to act as an "educational advocate." During that conversation, you will inform the parent/guardian that you will be meeting with the teacher (and other educational professionals, including counselors), and will remain in contact with (ideally) once-per-month updates. You will also be open to attending IEP meetings, parent/teacher conferences, and other sessions, as needed.
3. While your Court Order of Appointment/Acceptance entitles you to any and all educational information and paperwork, consider obtaining an additional release (documents can be obtained from your coordinator) to expedite the release of information at the school. This release must be signed by the parent/guardian.
4. An advocate's initial contact with the school will, preferably, be in person. One need not call ahead, though it might help to set an appointment of some kind. Your first conversation will be with the school's office administrator, where you will present your paperwork, explain your role, and submit releases, if necessary.
5. If you have contacted the teachers ahead of time, you may also use this first visit as a contact/discussion. If your first interaction with the teacher is via email, you can expect a request for your credentials. Even if you have done this already with the front office, attach an additional copy of your court order for the teacher.
6. Once the paperwork is taken care of, it is important to set a meeting as soon as possible. Before the meeting, put together a list of appropriate questions that will help you better understand your child as a student. The conversation will go where it will, depending on the most glaring needs/concerns, but use this initial "interview" as an opportunity to assess strengths and weaknesses, favorite subjects, learning habits, and attendance matters. Preferably, if there are learning specialists, reading specialists, or tutors that work with the child, attempt to have such individuals at the initial meeting to maximize information.
7. Once information is obtained, meet with your coordinator to discuss initial impressions, ideas, and possible strategies for further involvement. Does the child need additional tutoring? Homework help? Trips to a library? Specialized books/materials? Discuss resources and community partners at this time.
8. While in-person meetings with teachers and other educational professionals are always the best bet, it is certainly acceptable to maintain contact via email from the first meeting forward. At minimum, an advocate should be soliciting updates once per month. Again, these updates should focus on grades, behavior, and attendance, but as you meet with the child on home visits, you may come up with additional questions/concerns.
9. Remember to obtain specifics from the schools and teachers, as an advocate's court report should refrain as much as possible from generalized snapshots ("Johnny is doing well"), and instead focus on goals, strategies, and tangible gains for the child. If, for example, they are behind in reading, it's not enough to simply state this fact in the report. What is being done to address this deficit? More to the point, what are you doing as a CASA to ensure this challenge is met? Specifics, always. Also, include citations and direct quotes in your report, especially if they are dramatic and represent shifts in the behavior/achievements of the student. It is also desirable, if possible, to attach grade reports, IEP summaries, and the like with your report.