



Educational Advocacy

A CASA Guide by Developmental Stage

I. Pre-School Aged Children

Birth through the start of Kindergarten

1. Monitor Developmental Readiness

CASAs play a key role in noticing whether very young children are developing as expected.

What to look for:

- Familiarize yourself with *typical developmental milestones* for the child's age
- Ask yourself:
 - Are they generally on track?
 - Are there any red flags or delays?
 - Are you seeing *progress over time*, not just snapshots?
- Observe whether the child is exposed to developmentally appropriate activities
- Consider how unnoticed developmental delays may be contributing to:
 - Behavioral challenges
 - Caregiver frustration
 - Missed opportunities for early intervention

If you notice concerns: Talk with your Advocate Supervisor and the caseworker about referrals for evaluation or early intervention services.

2. Support Early Literacy & School Readiness at Home

Often, caregivers want to help but don't know how. CASA support may include:

- Encouraging reading as part of daily routines
- Sharing ideas for school-prep activities beyond reading, such as:
 - Talking and singing with infants
 - Playing with shapes, colors, and textures
 - Practicing turn-taking and following simple directions
- Helping caregivers understand *why* early learning activities matter

Helpful Resources:

Bright by Three – offers free books, materials, and ideas for caregivers

Dolly Parton's Imagination Library – free books for children from birth to 5-years old

3. Advocate for Quality Preschool When Age-Appropriate

Research consistently shows preschool improves later academic success—especially for children from lower-resource households.

CASA considerations:

- Are there subsidies or funding options available? (Often yes)
- Is the preschool high quality?

Questions to ask:

- Is the child thriving there?
- Are they learning and engaged?
- Are they forming relationships with peers?
- Do you notice any safety, supervision, or neglect concerns?
- Is the program licensed and in good standing?

Colorado Child Care Search: www.colorado.gov/ChildCareSearch

CASA Pro Tips — Early Childhood

- Early intervention is *far more effective* than later remediation
- Development doesn't have to be perfect — look for growth
- Caregiver education can be just as important as child services
- Trust your instincts and observations — they matter

II. School-Aged Children

Kindergarten through age 14

1. Monitor School Engagement & Performance (Monthly)

Start with objective data to give context to everything else.

Monthly check-ins should include:

- Attendance
- Grades or progress reports
- Detentions, suspensions, or behavioral referrals

Once you have this baseline, follow up with teachers to learn more about:

- Social functioning and peer relationships
- Strengths and struggles by subject
- Behavioral patterns
- When the child seems engaged vs. shut down

2. Advocate for IEPs When Needed

If a child has (or may have) a learning disability, mental health diagnosis, and/or a physical condition affecting school they may qualify for an IEP (Individualized Education Plan).

Key points CASAs should know:

- An IEP is a *legal document*
- It outlines learning needs, school-provided services, how progress is measured.
- The process begins with requesting an evaluation
- Parents/guardians, school staff, and CASAs are part of the discussion
- If eligibility is denied and you disagree, the decision can be challenged
- IEPs must be reviewed yearly — or sooner if they aren't working

CASA role: Advocate for strengths-based planning, not just accommodations.

3. Build on Strengths, Joy, and Connection

School success is about more than academics.

Ask your CASA child:

- What do you like about school?
- What classes do you enjoy?
- Who at school supports you?

- When do you feel confident or excited?

Then help build on those strengths:

- Clubs, sports, arts, leadership opportunities
- Positive adult relationships at school

These connections:

- Increase school attendance
- Improve motivation
- Support long-term success

4. When a Child Changes Schools

Transitions can be destabilizing and need active advocacy.

CASA responsibilities may include:

- Confirming records and credits transfer promptly
- Helping the child emotionally prepare
- Supporting early social integration when possible

CASA Pro Tips — School-Age

- Patterns matter more than single incidents
- Attendance issues are often the *first warning sign*
- Kids learn best when they feel competent and connected
- You don't need to be an education expert — just persistent

III. Transition-Aged Youth

Ages 14 through exit from the system

1. Encourage Future Planning & Big-Picture Thinking

Many youth in care are focused on survival — dreaming may feel unsafe or unrealistic.

CASA support includes:

- Talking about interests and strengths
- Helping youth imagine multiple possible futures
- Encouraging ambitious goals without fear of failure

Example: It's better to aim for becoming a veterinarian and land as a vet tech than never aim at all.

2. Support College & Vocational Pathways

Most stable careers require post-secondary education or training.

Key advocacy points:

- Many youth don't know college is financially possible
- Youth in care often qualify for *significant funding*
- Some believe college "isn't for people like them"
- Families may not know how to navigate applications

CASAs can help by:

- Connecting youth with college reps and tailored tours
- Assisting with applications and deadlines
- Exploring vocational and trade programs
- Helping locate funding and scholarships

3. Emphasize Finishing School Strong

Future planning only works if school completion happens.

Important points to reinforce:

- Colleges don't accept dropouts
- Diplomas or GEDs are critical even without college plans
- Colorado supports extended timelines for graduation
- Five- and six-year graduation pathways are increasingly common and effective

4. Prepare for Independent Adulthood

Education advocacy also includes life skills.

CASAs can help youth build skills such as Cooking, Laundry, Budgeting, Housing navigation, Employment readiness etc.

CASA Pro Tips — Transition-Aged Youth

- Permanent connections matter more than perfection
- Youth need *at least three stable adults*
- You are a connector, not the sole support
- Skill-building strengthens relationships and confidence

How to Get Into Schools — and What to Do Once You're There

A Practical Guide for CASAs

1. Gather School Information Early

As soon as you make contact with your professional team, obtain:

- The child's school name
- The teacher's name(s), if available
- Any known educational supports (IEP, tutoring, special services)

2. Explain Your Educational Advocacy Role to Caregivers

During your first visit with the placement, clearly explain that part of your CASA role is to act as an educational advocate.

Be transparent about your involvement:

- You will be meeting with the child's teacher(s) and school staff
- You will remain in contact with the school (ideally monthly)
- You may attend:
 - IEP meetings
 - Other school-related meetings as needed

This helps set expectations and builds trust.

3. Make Initial Contact with the School

Preferably reach out via email or phone to set up appointment. Registrars or office administrators are good places to start.

- Come prepared with:
 - Your signed Appointment Court Order
 - An explanation of your role as a CASA

4. Connect with Teachers Professionally

If you've contacted teachers ahead of time, you may be able to speak with them during this first visit.

If your initial contact is by email:

- Expect to be asked for credentials
- Attach your Court Order, even if the front office already has it

This avoids confusion and builds credibility.

5. Schedule and Prepare for a School Meeting

Once paperwork is complete, schedule a meeting as soon as possible.

Before the meeting:

- Prepare thoughtful, child-centered questions
- Be ready to listen and follow the teacher's lead

Topics to explore:

- Strengths and challenges
- Favorite and difficult subjects
- Learning habits and engagement
- Attendance patterns
- Social functioning

 If possible: Invite learning specialists, reading specialists, counselors, or tutors who work with the child to attend. This maximizes information and efficiency.

6. Debrief with Your Advocate Supervisor

After gathering information, you can meet with your Supervisor to:

- Share initial impressions
- Identify concerns or opportunities
- Brainstorm strategies and supports

Questions to consider together:

- Does the child need tutoring or homework help?
- Would library access or specialized materials help?
- Are there community or school-based resources available?

7. Maintain Ongoing School Contact

While in-person meetings are ideal, ongoing communication can happen by email.

Minimum expectation:

- Request updates at least once per month

Focus updates on:

- Grades or academic progress
- Behavior
- Attendance

As you spend time with the child, additional questions may naturally arise — follow up as needed.

8. Translate School Information into Strong Court Reports

CASA court reports should avoid vague summaries.

- “*Johnny is doing well.*”
- “*Johnny’s reading level improved from a 1.8 to a 2.5 after weekly intervention, per his reading specialist.*”

Best practices for reporting:

- Ask schools for specifics
- Focus on:
 - Goals
 - Strategies
 - Measurable progress
- Clearly state:
 - What the school is doing
 - What *you* are doing as the CASA to support progress
- Use direct quotes and citations when impactful

CASA Pro Tips — School Advocacy

- Bring extra copies of your Court Order everywhere
- Schools move faster with relationships — be kind and consistent
- Specifics give judges confidence in your advocacy
- You are not just reporting problems — you are showing solutions
- Always connect school information back to *your actions* as a CASA