



Advocate and Volunteer Policies

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Pledge of Compliance

Advocate Policies and Procedures

First and Last Name (print)

Relationship to Child Advocates of Montgomery County:

(Circle Applicable)

Advocate

Volunteer

Helping Heart

Board Member

Employee

I, _____, acknowledge by my signature on this page that I have received and fully understand Child Advocates of Montgomery County policies that govern Advocates. Further, I agree to execute my duties in strict accordance with these policies. It is my clear understanding that, if I violate Child Advocates of Montgomery County's policies, I am subject to immediate termination of my relationship with this organization.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Overview of Advocate Policies

Mission:

Child Advocates of Montgomery County empowers vulnerable children through advocacy and strengthens their family and community with education, so they can flourish in a safe, nurturing environment.

Vision:

Our vision is a connected community where children and families thrive, and together we work to eliminate childhood trauma, abuse, and neglect.

Child Advocates of Montgomery County Advocates:

Child Advocates of Montgomery County volunteers are the heart of our organization. Through the dedicated efforts of our Advocates, our organization provides advocacy services to children who have experienced trauma, abuse, and neglect in our community who are in the child welfare system, and children and youth who are involved in the juvenile justice court system. Having Advocate policies demonstrates to our community that Child Advocates of Montgomery County:

- Respects and protects the children we serve;
- Values the time, skills, and commitment of our Advocates;
- Maintains policies and procedures for accountability and effective management;
- Works to continually evaluate and improve the Child Advocates of Montgomery County Program.

The policies in this Child Advocates of Montgomery County Advocate manual are intended to provide overall guidance and direction for our volunteers so that they can effectively advocate in the best interest of the child.

Child Advocates of Montgomery County volunteers advocate for the best interest of children and youth who are before the court because of abuse or neglect as the subject of a Suit Affecting the Parent-Child Relationship. The children are either living at home or in out-of-home care. These Advocates are referred to as a child's Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) or CASA Volunteer. Child Advocates of Montgomery County Advocates may also be appointed to serve youth involved in the juvenile justice system, and they will protect and promote the best interest of the youth. These Advocates are referred to as Justice-Involved Youth (JIY) Advocates.

Advocates are welcome to direct questions about these policies to the Child Advocates of Montgomery County staff at any time.

The Program maintains a confidential record for each volunteer that contains:

- Volunteer application;
- Emergency and identifying contact information;

- Volunteer job description;
- Documentation of references;
- Documentation of all record checks;
- Preservice training and continuing education records;
- Performance evaluations and any other applicable documentation related to performance;
- Documentation of volunteer status;
- Copy of volunteer's current driver's license, motor vehicles records check, and verification of automobile insurance (if transporting is applied to the case);
- Documentation of personal interview;
- Name of each child assigned;
- Date of each assignment; and
- Date of release from each assignment.

Section 1 - General Policies

1.1 Requirements to Become a Child Advocate

- a) Be minimum age of 21.
- b) Complete a minimum of 30 hours of blended curriculum, combining National CASA/GAL Association Pre-service Training and Child Advocates of Montgomery County training. This includes at least 18 hours of in-person training at Child Advocates for the staff to evaluate the applicant's suitability to serve as a volunteer, as well as independent learning.
- c) Observe three hours of Child Protective Services (CPS) court and observe at least one court hearing for the Justice-Involved Youth court prior to taking a JIY case
- d) Complete an online application.
- e) Complete an in-person interview with the Outreach Specialist and another member of the Program management team.
- f) Complete consent and release forms for required background checks and pass national criminal, national sex offender, and Child Abuse and Neglect Central Registry background checks. Specifically, these include: a Texas criminal record check (obtained from the Texas Crime Information Center maintained by the Texas Department of Public Safety); a national criminal background check (obtained from the National Crime Information Center (NCIC) maintained by the Federal Bureau of Investigation) that includes a fingerprint check; Social Security number verification; Texas Public Sex Offender Registry check maintained by the Texas Department of Public Safety; National Sex Offender Registry check maintained by the United States Department of Justice; the Child Abuse and Neglect Central Registry maintained by the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services including other counties and states where the potential volunteer has lived in the previous seven years. (Refusal to sign the release of information or to do the background check will disqualify a potential volunteer.) The required record checks will be repeated for each active volunteer annually if there are no Rap Back Services.
- g) Complete and document all screening before the staff person, volunteer, or governing board member is accepted by the CASA/GAL program, and written verification is maintained on file at the CASA/GAL program office.
- h) Submit the names of three or more references unrelated to the applicant. Reference checks of the three references will be completed and documented in the employee file.
- i) Take an oath of confidentiality.
- j) Be sworn in by a judge upon completion of the training before appointment to a case
- k) Complete 12 hours of continuing education training annually for each Program year (Sept. 1–Aug. 31). A new Advocate's first year will be pro-rated (based on the volunteer's date of swear-in). Continuing education hours should be related to the work of best interest advocacy, including but not limited to: (A) the background and needs of children served by the local volunteer Advocate Program; (B) the operation of the court and the child welfare and juvenile justice systems; and (C) the

nature and effects of child abuse and neglect. Continuing education training can be completed through a variety of sources and delivery methods such as education classes, workshops, conferences hosted by the local program or state organization, Program-approved externally provided opportunities (in person or online), monthly Drip learning materials, CASA College independent study, National and Texas CASA webinars, and Program-approved books, articles, and videos. To encourage a diverse learning experience, no more than four hours of continuing education should be completed by reading books/articles.

- l) Be able to speak and write English
- m) Have access to a computer and be computer literate
- n) Have a valid driver's license or state-issued ID
- o) Verbally take an oath in court when sworn in by the Judge:

“I, (your name) / do solemnly swear / that to the best of my skill and ability / I will perform the duties assigned to me / by statute as Guardian ad Litem / I will abide by the orders of the court / and ensure that orders are properly executed / I will respect the confidentiality / of all information or reports revealed to me / Unless entitled by law / or authorized by court order / I will not communicate to any person / anything I learn or obtain / from any report or record maintained / I will faithfully protect and promote / the best interest of each child I represent / until formally relieved / of this responsibility by the court.”

If a volunteer applicant refuses or fails to provide the necessary documentation for screening or fails to complete the required training, the applicant will be disqualified from volunteering with Child Advocates of Montgomery County.

A qualified volunteer who transfers to Child Advocates of Montgomery County from another program must complete the full written application and screening process. They must complete the full preservice training for Montgomery County. It is important for all volunteers to understand the background and needs of children served by the local program, local court, laws, Program policies, investigation, and report writing.

If a volunteer has been inactive for more than one year, the volunteer will need to attend a refresher class with the Advocacy Training Specialist or the Senior Director of Programs and Services. If a volunteer has been inactive for more than two years, the volunteer will need to complete the preservice training again before being assigned to another case. For this document, inactive means the Advocate has not been assigned to a case in the last year.

Child Advocates of Montgomery County does not accept or retain Advocates if they or an immediate family member have been convicted or have prior charges, or have charges pending for a felony or misdemeanor involved in a sex offense, violent act, child abuse or neglect, or related acts that would pose risks to children or to the Child Advocates of Montgomery County Program's credibility. Advocates must immediately notify Child Advocates of Montgomery County of any charges of Class B misdemeanor or higher and of any criminal conviction.

Advocates are prohibited from having direct or indirect financial interest in the assets, leases, business transactions, or professional services of the Program.

Advocates shall not serve as a foster parent for any child whose conservatorship is through CPS unless the Advocate is related to the child.

Advocates shall not be related to any parties or litigants who are involved in the case or employed in a position and/or agency that might result in a conflict of interest.

Advocates shall not serve as CPS mediators.

Advocates should never engage in anything that could decrease the perception of their objectivity in their case.

Each volunteer will sign an acknowledgment that they have read and understand the Advocate Policies and Procedures, and they will receive a copy of the Advocate Policies and Procedures. This acknowledgment is retained by the Program in the volunteer's record.

1.2 Child Abuse, Nonviolent Verbal/Nonverbal Disciplinary Methods

Child Advocates of Montgomery County's discipline policies are consistent with the Texas Administrative Code and minimum standards. The philosophy of Child Advocates of Montgomery County is discipline should be proactive, strength-based, and solution-focused. It is not the expectations that an Advocate will be in a situation where they need to discipline a child. However, should a situation occur, Child Advocates of Montgomery County takes the following position on disciplinary methods. We expect all Advocates to build relationships and form connections with any child they work with and understand the impact of the child's traumatic experiences and personal trauma history. Discipline should involve methods of responding that improve a child's ability to trust, feel safe, and adapt to changes in the child's environment.

At no time does Child Advocates of Montgomery County allow the use of physical discipline, corporal punishment, mechanical restraints, or seclusion.

In addition to corporal punishment, prohibited discipline techniques include, but are not limited to:

- a) Any harsh, cruel, unusual, unnecessary, demeaning, or humiliating treatment;
- b) Denial of mail or visits with their families;
- c) Threatening loss of placement;
- d) Using sarcastic or cruel humor and verbal abuse;
- e) Pinching, pulling hair, biting, flicking, or shaking a child;
- f) Putting anything in or on a child's mouth, such as soap or tape;
- g) Humiliating, shaming, ridiculing, rejecting, or yelling at a child;
- h) Subjecting a child to abusive or profane language;
- i) Placing a child in a dark room, bathroom, or closet;

- j) Requiring a child to remain silent or inactive for inappropriately long periods of time for the child's age;
- k) Confining a child to a highchair, car seat, box, or other similar furniture or equipment;
- l) Denying basic child rights;
- m) Withholding food that meets the child's nutritional requirements; and
- n) Using or threatening to use restraint as a discipline technique.

The goal of discipline is to not only reduce negative behaviors but ultimately to teach the child prosocial behavior, help them gain self-control and mastery, and teach them to get their needs met in more acceptable ways. In addition, the use of **any** type of discipline is prohibited with infants.

Any incident of unacceptable verbal/nonverbal discipline (as described/defined above) of a child that occurs while conducting Child Advocates of Montgomery County business will be considered child abuse and appropriately reported to the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services and law enforcement, as needed. Any staff or Advocate who is alleged to have engaged in any form of child abuse will be reported to the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services and immediately placed on administrative leave for the duration of the investigation. If child abuse allegations are substantiated, the Advocate involved will be subject to immediate termination.

If an Advocate has reason to believe a child has been mistreated, that person has an obligation to comply with the Texas Family Code 261.101 regarding the requirement to report any incident of child abuse or neglect, or any situation in which the Child Advocates of Montgomery County volunteer has reason to believe that a child is in imminent danger. Child abuse can be reported to TDFPS at 1-800-252-5400. The Advocate shall also report these concerns to their Child Advocates of Montgomery County Advocacy Specialist as soon as possible.

1.3 Identification

- a) The Child Advocates of Montgomery County Program staff will provide all Advocates with a copy of the Court Order of Protection and the Certificate of Acceptance to the case. The Advocate should have these items in their possession when executing any of their roles and responsibilities as a volunteer Advocate of Montgomery County. All volunteer Advocates of Montgomery County will be given an identification badge upon completion of the training. All Advocates should show this badge to interested parties to validate their involvement in the case and should always wear this badge when on business for Child Advocates of Montgomery County.
- b) Advocates should not use their personal physical address in any communication or correspondence related to the execution of their duties as a volunteer Advocate of Montgomery County. If the Advocate is asked to provide their contact information, the Advocate should give the Child Advocates of Montgomery County's office contact information. Should an individual request further information, the Advocate should refer that person to the Child Advocates of Montgomery County Program staff.

- c) Each Advocate will be provided with an email address to be used for Child Advocates of Montgomery County business.

1.4 Public Access Statement

We will not allow public access to the information in the custody of Child Advocates of Montgomery County that relates to an Advocate's home address, home telephone number, Social Security number, or any information about their family members without written consent from the Advocate.

1.5 Conflict of Interest

An Advocate should not be related to or otherwise acquainted with any party involved in the case or be employed in a position and/or agency that might result in a conflict of interest. An Advocate of Child Advocates of Montgomery County should not enter into a business, service, or professional agreement with any party to the case to which they are currently assigned. This includes, but is not limited to, client families, community organizations serving the family, CPS, the court, and attorneys.

1.6 Sexual Harassment and Discrimination

Child Advocates of Montgomery County will seek to maintain an environment within the Program that is free from intimidation, discrimination, coercion, or harassment. Discrimination against a child or caregiver based on age, race, religion, national origin, ethnicity, color, sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression, sex (including pregnancy), disability, or physical challenge will not be tolerated. Discrimination against an Advocate based on age, race, religion, national origin, ethnicity, color, marital status, sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression, sex (including pregnancy), disability, or physical challenge will not be tolerated. In the event of a question, complaint, or allegation regarding harassment or discrimination of any kind, the Advocate should speak with the Advocacy Specialist. If the allegation involves the Child Advocates of Montgomery County Advocacy Specialist, the Advocate should speak with the Senior Director of Programs and Services. If the allegation involves the Senior Director of Programs and Services, the Advocate should speak with the President and CEO. If the allegation involves the President and CEO, then the Advocate should speak with the Chair of the Child Advocates of Montgomery County Board of Directors. Contact information is available in the Child Advocates of Montgomery County office. The matter will be investigated in a discreet and confidential manner, and after consideration of the facts, appropriate action will be taken in the best interest of the Advocate and the Program. Such action may include recommendation for counseling, disciplinary warnings, and termination.

1.7 Weapons

Individuals are prohibited from possessing any firearm, ammunition, or weapon of any kind in CAMC offices. There is a prohibition of firearms, ammunition, or weapons of any kind being carried or transported by volunteers and staff while involved in any organization-related activity.

Weapons include but are not limited to guns, knives or swords, explosives, and any chemical dispensing device* that's purpose is to cause harm to another person. This list is not exhaustive and includes any item that can be used as a weapon.

This prohibition includes those weapons carried under license issued by the state of Texas. To legally exclude weapons from the premises, programs are required to post a sign in English and Spanish in block letters one inch in height with the language "Pursuant to Section 30.07, Penal Code (trespass by license holder with an openly carried handgun), a person licensed under Subchapter H, Chapter 411, Government Code (handgun licensing law), may not enter this property with a handgun that is carried openly."

Law enforcement personnel are exempt from this policy.

For purposes of this section, the term "law enforcement personnel" includes:

- Sheriffs and their deputies;
- Constables and deputy constables;
- Marshals or police officers of an incorporated city, town, or village;
- Rangers and officers commissioned by the Police Safety Commission and the Director of the Department of Public Safety; and
- Investigators of the district attorneys', criminal district attorneys', and county attorneys' office.

Violations may result in removal from Child Advocates of Montgomery County.

*Texas Penal Code Title 10 Sec 46.01 (14) "Chemical dispensing device" means a device, other than a small chemical dispenser sold commercially for personal protection, that is designed, made, or adapted for the purpose of dispensing a substance capable of causing an adverse psychological or physiological effect on a human being.

1.8 Substance Abuse

Advocates are prohibited from being under the influence of, using, possessing, selling, or otherwise being involved with illegal drugs or alcohol while engaging in their role as an Advocate for Child Advocates of Montgomery County. Child Advocates of Montgomery County reserves the right to randomly drug test any Advocate who is believed to be under the influence of a substance while performing their role as an Advocate for Child Advocates of Montgomery County. The cost of this testing is paid for by Child Advocates of Montgomery County, and the results are confidential.

1.9 Training

All Advocates for Child Advocates of Montgomery County are required to complete 12 hours of continuing education training (in-service training) annually (pro-rated the first year based on the volunteer's date of swear-in). Continuing education hours should be related to the work of best interest advocacy and can be completed through a variety of sources and delivery methods such as education events hosted by Child Advocates of Montgomery County, Program-approved external opportunities (in person or online), National CASA/GAL Association/Texas CASA webinars, or Program-approved books and videos. To encourage a

diverse learning experience, no more than four hours of continuing education should be completed by reading books and/or articles. In addition, continuing education hours should focus on these five areas:

- a) the background and needs of children served by Child Advocates of Montgomery County;
- b) the operation of the court and the child welfare system;
- c) the nature and effects of child abuse and neglect; and
- d) guiding principles.

Child Advocates of Montgomery County records training hours for a Program year (Sept. 1—Aug. 31). In-service training opportunities and topics may include, but are not limited to, documentation standards, TBRI®, advocating for all children, advocacy in the education setting, community resources, legal training, and recognizing abuse, etc.

Pre-service training is provided to volunteers by a facilitator that has completed the National or Texas CASA Training of Facilitators curriculum.

1.10 Speaking on Behalf of the Agency

Advocates are encouraged to speak about the Program, in general, throughout the community. However, the Lead Outreach Specialist must be informed of any speaking engagements the Advocates may wish to arrange on behalf of Child Advocates of Montgomery County so that staff may assist with written materials or go with the volunteer to help with the presentation.

Advocates are prohibited from speaking about details of any case within the Child Advocates of Montgomery County Program. Advocates are prohibited from speaking to the media about Child Advocates of Montgomery County, unless granted permission to do so from the Child Advocates of Montgomery County President and CEO. Failure to follow this policy can result in dismissal.

1.11 Immunity

Child Advocates of Montgomery County adheres to Texas Family Code 107.009 which states: (a) A guardian ad litem, attorney ad litem, or an amicus attorney appointed under the chapter is not liable for civil damages arising from an action taken, a recommendation made, or an opinion given in the capacity of guardian ad litem, attorney ad litem, or amicus attorney. (b) Subsection (a) does not apply to an action taken, a recommendation made, or an opinion given: (1) with conscious indifference or reckless disregard to the safety of another; (2) in bad faith or with malice; or (3) that is grossly negligent or willfully wrongful.

1.12 Access to Legal Counsel

Child Advocates of Montgomery County does not and will not appoint an attorney for an Advocate's personal use. Child Advocates of Montgomery County does not and will not provide legal consultation for an Advocate's personal use. Child Advocates of Montgomery County does not and will not participate in any legal activities in which a current, former and/or prospective Advocate is involved, unless subpoenaed by the court. Child Advocates of Montgomery County will monitor any legal case pertaining to a current, former and/or

prospective Advocate, in the interest of preventing a risk to the credibility of Child Advocates of Montgomery County.

Child Advocates of Montgomery County does not provide access to legal counsel with relevant legal expertise to clarify the meaning of laws or regulations governing its Program or operations.

1.13 Religion

Advocates will respect the beliefs of the child and/or family for whom they are advocating. Advocates may not attempt to persuade a child or family regarding any religious belief or moral conviction.

1.14 Exception to Policies

On occasion, certain exceptions may be made to any of these policies at the discretion of the President and CEO.

1.15 Program Review

At least once in a two-year period, the Child Advocates of Montgomery County Program conducts a review which includes assessment of the Program goals, objectives, and outcomes as well as alignment with those of National Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA)/Guardian ad Litem (GAL) Association and Texas CASA that pertain to local Court Appointed Special Advocate programs. The review also assesses the degree to which the Program identifies and meets the advocacy needs of the children it serves, as assessed through surveys of volunteers, judges, and other key stakeholders.

Section 2 - Program Policies

The Program Policies specify the roles and responsibilities of the Child Advocates of Montgomery County volunteer and are developed to align with the Texas Family Code 107.002 and align with the National CASA's Core Model and Standards for Local Programs. Child Advocates of Montgomery County integrates the following guiding principles into all aspects of Program practices, policies, and procedures:

- Recognize the importance of family preservation and/or reunification:
 - It is in a child's best interest to remain with their family of origin when safely possible.
 - The program acknowledges that children experience trauma when separated from their family of origin.
 - If a child is removed from their family of origin, it is in the child's best interest to be reunified with their family of origin as soon as safely possible.
 - If a child is removed from their family of origin, the child should be placed with a relative whenever safely possible and in the child's best interest.
 - Strengthening families, through recommendations for services, support, visitation, and communications, is in the child's best interest to achieve stability and/or reunification.
 - The Program requires and demonstrates respect for the parents and all parties associated with the case.
 - The Program ensures that information regarding the family's strengths is incorporated into reports to the court.
 - The Program ensures that information regarding the child's wishes is incorporated into reports to the court.
 - When a court determines a child cannot be safely reunified with their family of origin consistent with legal mandates, another permanent placement is in a child's best interest.

- Recognize the importance of effective advocacy for all children and families.

- Recognize the importance of collaboration:
 - The organization and its volunteers cooperate and coordinate with other volunteer and public service agencies, the courts, community groups, families, and individuals to improve services for individual children and their families, and advocate for needed change in the conditions which adversely affect the children served.

The volunteer is prohibited from making a recommendation or intervening in the physical removal of children to initiate a legal case prior to Child Protective Services making a recommendation on the removal based on their investigation.

2.1 Advocate-Child Relationship

The Advocate is responsible for establishing a relationship with the child that promotes the child's well-being and enhances the Advocate's objectivity while serving as the Guardian ad Litem. To establish such a relationship, the Advocate is prohibited from the following:

- a) Introducing or identifying the child as a child who is assigned to Child Advocates of Montgomery County to anyone not professionally related to the child's case;
- b) Involving the child with anyone who is not related to the child's case;
- c) Taking the child to the Advocate's home or to the home of the Advocate's personal friends or family;
- d) Taking the child to any location that is not preapproved by the child's legal guardian, custodial agency, and Child Advocates of Montgomery County Program Advocacy Specialist or Director;
- e) Purchasing expensive gifts or providing significant material support to the child, family, or caregiver;
- f) Accepting expensive gifts or significant material support from the child or family;
- g) Giving legal advice or therapeutic counseling;
- h) Making placement arrangements for the child;
- i) Taking the child on an overnight outing;
- j) Causing dependency for services that other agencies provide;
- k) Transporting the child in the Advocate's car or on any public transportation, unless approved in advance, and in accordance with our current Transportation Policy. (It is not expected that all Advocates will transport children. If you are interested in this, see the attached Transportation Policy.)
- l) Providing housing or lodging, bathing facilities, or supervision of a child overnight or for any shift while a child is in the physical custody of CPS or assigned to a Program within Child Advocates of Montgomery County;
- m) Engaging in any activities which are likely to result in a conflict of interest or expose the Program or volunteer to criminal or civil liability.
- n) Allowing a child to come into contact with someone the volunteer knows or should know has a criminal history involving violence, child abuse, neglect, drugs, or a sexual offense as described under Chapter 21 of the Texas Penal Code.

2.2 Direct Services

Advocates shall not become inappropriately involved in a case by providing direct service delivery to any parties that could:

- a) lead to a conflict of interest or liability problems; or
- b) engage in activities which are likely to result in conflict of interest or expose the Program or Advocate to criminal or civil liability; or cause a child or family to become dependent on the Advocate for services that shall be provided by other agencies or organizations. Such activities may jeopardize the safety of the child, the integrity of the Program, or the objectivity of the volunteer.

2.3 Length of Commitment

Advocates of Child Advocates of Montgomery County are asked to commit to the Program for a minimum of 12 months or until the case to which they are assigned is closed by the court.

2.4 Supervision

- a) Advocates are assigned an Advocacy Specialist.
- b) Advocacy Specialists provide timely and thorough guidance to volunteers through contact at least once per month by video conference, telephone, or in-person meeting. The Advocacy Specialist will review the issues or progress of the case and the needs of the children in these meetings.
- c) The Advocacy Specialist conducts a review of the case and the volunteer's performance as a Child Advocates of Montgomery County volunteer on an ongoing basis and as a component of case closure.
- d) Each Child Advocates of Montgomery County Advocate is responsible for submitting information to their Advocacy Specialist monthly and upon request.
- e) Each Advocate is responsible for submitting a court report to the Advocacy Specialist two weeks before the court date. The Advocacy Specialist will not change or alter the court report without the knowledge and documented agreement of the Advocate.
- f) Advocates shall discuss any recommendations to the court with the Advocacy Specialist prior to court. Failure to adhere to this policy can result in the dismissal of an Advocate.
- g) A staff person performing the duties of a volunteer shall provide the advocacy and documentation of advocacy consistent with Standard 8.F.

2.5 Professional Conduct

Advocates are expected to always conduct themselves in a professional manner. Personal and professional conduct should uphold the credibility and positive reputation of Child Advocates of Montgomery County in the courtroom and community. Advocates should dress appropriately in modest business casual attire for court and other meetings the Advocate needs to attend.

2.6 Advocate Minimum Expectations

In a timely manner after appointment, the Advocate will obtain firsthand a clear understanding of the needs and situation of the child by reviewing all relevant documents and records, including medical, psychological, and school records, and interviewing the child, parents (as available and permissible), social workers, educators, service providers, child welfare service providers, probation officers, attorney ad litem, any foster parent, and other persons with knowledge of the case to determine the facts and circumstances of the child's life situation and to make recommendations regarding the child's best interest.

- a) The Advocate will identify and advocate for the best interest of the child, considering the child's expressed objectives without being bound by those objectives, by conducting an ongoing review of all the relevant documents and records and through monthly contact or documented attempts with the parents (as available and permissible), caregivers, caseworkers, and Program staff.
- b) Once the CASA/GAL program accepts appointment, advocacy and documentation of advocacy must begin and continue during appointment.
- c) The Advocate will maintain confidentiality of all issues and records of the case, returning all case files to the Child Advocates of Montgomery County Program after the

case is closed and deleting all electronic records related to the case. The Advocate will follow secure transmission policies in all email correspondence that contains confidential information throughout the working of the case.

- d) Communicate with DFPS caseworker after appointment and at least once per month for the duration of the case.
- e) Communicate with the attorney ad litem at least quarterly for the duration of the case.
- f) Have regular and sufficient in-person contact with the child where they live to ensure in-depth knowledge of the case and make fact-based recommendations to the court.
- g) The Child Advocates of Montgomery County volunteer shall visit face-to-face (in person) with the child at least once per month at a minimum unless outlined differently below.
 - 1. If the child is placed 60 miles or less from the Advocate's home, these visits must be face-to-face in-person visits each month. At least half of these visits must be where the child lives.
 - 2. If the child is placed 61 or more miles away, the visit in certain months can include virtual visits as outlined below.
 - 3. If the child is placed between 61 and 120 miles away, the Advocate will meet face-to-face in person with the child at a minimum every other month and have a virtual visit in each month when the child is not visited in person.
 - i. 50% of these visits each year must be where the child lives.
 - 4. If the child is placed between 121 and 300 miles away, the Advocate will meet face-to-face in person with the child at least once every three months and have a virtual visit in each month when the child is not visited in person.
 - i. 50% of these visits each year must be where the child lives.
 - 5. If the child is placed over 301 miles away, the Advocate will meet face-to-face in person with the child at once every 6 months and have a virtual visit in each month when the child is not visited in person.
 - i. 50% of these visits each year must be where the child lives.
- h) If the child is placed over 121 miles away, Courtesy CASAs can be utilized for 50% of the quarterly or bi-annual face-to-face visits. When Courtesy CASA is requested and utilized, it is **required** that they call the assigned Advocate or Advocacy Specialist when on the visit to facilitate a virtual call between all parties.
- i) **For a visit to count as a "virtual visit" an Advocate must be able to see the child. Options include, but are not limited to, the use of FaceTime, Microsoft Teams, Zoom, Google Meet, WhatsApp, and any other medium where the Advocate and child can see each other through technology.**
- j) Any child not seen by the Advocate within the prescribed time, without an approved exception, **must be seen by Program staff within 10 days of the following month.**

- k) Visit requirements are minimum expectations, but Advocates are encouraged (not required) to have additional monthly age-appropriate contact with the child to promote connection. Acceptable types of additional contacts may be a visit with the child, a telephone call, videoconferencing, email(s), and/or letters as applicable for the child's age and interest.
- l) Meet in person with the child's primary placement provider in a timely manner after placement occurs and communicate with the placement provider at least once a month thereafter for the duration of the assignment of the child's case.
- m) Advocate for the child's best interest in the community by meeting quarterly, at least, with mental health, medical, legal, and educational systems, subject to confidentiality limitations, including the medical care provided to the child and eliciting, as appropriate, the child's opinion on the medical care provided to assure the child's needs in these areas are met. This includes psychologist, psychiatrist, doctor/nurse, educators, day-care providers, and attorneys. Determine the child's permanent plan, access the educational portfolio and health passport, and make recommendations regarding permanency, education, and medical services, as appropriate.
- n) Seek information about whether a permanency plan has been created for the child and make recommendations concerning permanency that encourage the permanent placement of children with their families, relatives, or through timely placement with adoptive families.
- o) Participate in all scheduled case-related meetings—i.e., ARD, FGC, PC, COS, informal conferences, mediations. Participate in all scheduled case reviews with Advocacy Specialist.
- p) Seek cooperative solutions by acting as a facilitator among parties while maintaining communication with the child's parents, family members, attorney ad litem, teachers, persons with knowledge of the case, and other service providers as applicable to make the recommendations regarding the child's best interest. Collaborate and coordinate with legal, child welfare, and other partners to ensure service provision that is in the child's best interest, following all applicable confidentiality requirements.
- q) Appear at all court hearings to advocate for the child's best interest and permanency. Provide factual information through court report and testimony when necessary, making recommendations about the child's needs and best interest and for specific appropriate services for the child and, when appropriate, the child's family, including referrals to existing community services. Provide written court report for all required hearings—status, initial permanency, permanency, and permanency after final order. Court reports should include recommendations for permanency/concurrent plans, services, and visitation.

- r) On each case the assigned Advocacy Specialist and Advocate will communicate at least once per month in person, by telephone, or video call to update records, contact logs, and participate together in scheduled case conferences as well as to review the issues or progress of the case and the needs of the children.
- s) Inform the court promptly of important developments in the case through appropriate means as determined by the court rules and statute.
- t) Monitor the child to ensure the child's safety and to advocate against unnecessary relocations of the child to multiple temporary placements.
- u) Monitor implementation of service plans and court orders to assure court-ordered services are implemented in a timely manner and that review hearings are held in accordance with the law.
- v) For a child at least 16 years of age, ascertain whether the child has received the following documents: a certified copy of the child's birth certificate, a Social Security card or replacement card, a driver's license or personal identification certificate, and any other personal document the Department of Family and Protective Services determines appropriate.
- w) Seek to elicit in a developmentally appropriate manner the name of any adult, particularly an adult residing in the child's community, who could be a relative or designated caregiver and/or connection for the child and immediately provide the names of those individuals to the Department of Family and Protective Services.
- x) Participate in a minimum of 12 hours of ongoing training per year that is relevant to being a volunteer of Child Advocates of Montgomery County. Continuing education includes, but is not limited to, the following categories: (a) the background and needs of children served by the local volunteer advocate program, (b) the operation of the court and the child welfare or juvenile justice system, and (c) the nature and effects of child abuse and neglect.
- y) Advocates are prohibited from introducing or involving the Advocate's family members or friends not appointed to the case with the child or any other persons involved in the case.
- z) Maintain complete records about the case including interviews and information gathered about the child and the child's life circumstances. Document in Optima all visits and contacts with associated parties in the case (CPS caseworker, attorneys, caregivers, and Advocacy Specialist). Enter all casework time and mileage and training hours in Optima in a timely manner. All documentation must be entered into Optima by the last day of the month.

- aa) The criteria listed above are from Texas CASA’s minimum expectations requirements and Child Advocates of Montgomery County policies. Should these standards change, we reserve the right to change the minimum expectations for volunteer service.

2.7 Case Conflict

It is rare for an Advocate and Advocacy Specialist to be in conflict regarding their positions on a case; however, at times, this situation arises. When an Advocate and Advocacy Specialist have a conflict regarding the handling of a case, reporting of information, or the recommendations being made to the court that cannot be resolved among themselves, the Senior Director of Programs and Services will act as a mediator to resolve the conflict. The Senior Director of Programs and Services will make the final decision.

2.8 Case Closure

The role of an Advocate is by nature a transitory one. An effective Advocate recognizes that children who have experienced abuse and neglect face many unpredictable transitions in their lives. To lessen the negative impact of such transitions, an Advocate is responsible for providing a healthy transition for the child when Child Advocates of Montgomery County is dismissed from the case. It is Child Advocates of Montgomery County’s expectation that each Advocate will carefully plan and execute their final contact with the child/ren served by Child Advocates of Montgomery County, and that their exit from the case is not abrupt. Child Advocates of Montgomery County expects Advocates to cease contact with the child after their case is closed, unless the family of final placement or a youth who has aged out requests continued contact. An Advocate’s Advocacy Specialist can provide resources to assist in smooth transitions for children.

Montgomery County must ensure the well-being of the children assigned to the Program and our volunteers. If at any time we fear for the safety or the well-being of our volunteer or a child we serve, in addition to any situation that impacts our ability to effectively advocate for a child, we reserve the right to request our Advocate be dismissed from the case. Cases will be reviewed on an individual basis if our ability to effectively advocate for a child is negatively impacted.

If a child has run away from their placement and has not been located within 60 days, the Advocacy Specialist will staff this case with the Senior Director of Programs and Services to determine if the child’s case is to remain open or if we need to request that Child Advocates of Montgomery County be dismissed from the case. This decision will be based on the status of the child and our abilities to effectively advocate for the child.

If a child is placed in an unauthorized placement for over 60 days, the Advocacy Specialist and Senior Director of Programs and Services will staff the case to determine if the child’s case is to remain open or if we need to request Child Advocates of Montgomery County be dismissed from case. This decision will be based on the current placement’s willingness to work with Child Advocates, any safety risks identified with the placement, and our abilities to effectively advocate for the child.

Advocates shall return any physical case-related documents to the Child Advocates of Montgomery County office immediately upon closure of the case and delete any electronic records. The Advocacy Specialist will conduct a review of the case, and an evaluation of the volunteer's work at case closure. The Advocate will enter all final case-related contacts in Optima in a timely manner after case closure.

2.9 Grounds for Immediate Dismissal from a Case:

- a) Taking action that endangers the child or is outside the role or authority of the Child Advocates of Montgomery County Program
- b) Engaging in ex parte communication with the court
- c) Violating a Program policy, court rule, or law
- d) Failing to complete required preservice training or 12 hours of continuing education training each year
- e) Failing to effectively carry out assigned duties, which may include not following Program direction or guidance
- f) Falsifying the application or misrepresenting facts during the screening process
- g) Existence of child abuse and/or neglect allegations
- h) Existence of a conflict of interest, which cannot be resolved

All concerns in this area will be brought by the Advocacy Specialist to the Senior Director of Programs and Services, and after verifying the concerns, the Advocate will be dismissed.

A volunteer, employee, or board member who has abused or neglected any position of trust or violated the policies governing ethical conduct or otherwise created a negative image for Child Advocates of Montgomery County may be dismissed immediately.

2.10 Assignment of Cases

Advocates are assigned to children with consideration to the experience, knowledge, skills, and prior performance as a Child Advocates of Montgomery County volunteer, the nature and difficulty of current assignments, and the availability of the volunteer. Advocates shall not be assigned to more than two cases at a time unless they have exception documentation and will not be assigned more than five cases under any circumstances.

2.11 Case Records and Documentation

Advocates must maintain complete records about the case they are assigned to, including appointments, interviews, and information gathered about the child and the child's life circumstances. Case files in Optima must include complete documentation that minimum expectations of service have been met. Minimum expectations require each Advocacy Specialist to maintain contact with all assigned volunteers of Child Advocates of Montgomery County at least once per month. Should an Advocate not respond with the required documentation on their case within that month, the Advocacy Specialist must document their efforts to communicate with the Advocate in Optima in the contact log and set up a face-to-face meeting. During that face-to-face meeting, a plan is established between the Advocacy Specialist and Advocate as to how this will be corrected and how the Advocate will submit their

documentation going forward. The goal is to assist the Advocate in being successful in their advocacy and maintain the connection for the child as well as meet minimum expectations as set by Texas CASA. Should an Advocate fail to submit any documentation in the second month, the Advocate will be removed, and a new Advocate will be assigned to the case. If an exception is made to this, it must be approved by either the President and CEO or the Senior Director of Programs and Services.

2.12 Pictures/Photos

Photos of children in open cases are only allowed when requested or required by the court to be included with the court report or when written permission is obtained from the legal guardian or the young adult, if 18 years of age or older.

- a) All pictures must be uploaded and stored in Optima. Pictures must be destroyed after uploading into Optima and removed from any personal devices.
- b) The use of children's photos in active cases is prohibited in social media, marketing, or for personal use. Photos can only be used when the case is closed and with written permission from the legal guardian or the young adult, if 18 years of age or older.

2.13 Crime Victims' Compensation Claim (VOCA) Procedures

In providing CVC benefit claims, the following procedures have been established:

- a) In cases where Child Advocates of Montgomery County has been appointed, the file will be reviewed to determine if criminally injurious conduct has occurred and if the wrongful acts have been reported to law enforcement. Child Advocates of Montgomery County will work with CPS to obtain a copy of the filed police report.
- b) Child Advocates of Montgomery County will check with the individual caseworker, as agreed with CPS, to determine if the CVC claims application/packet has been completed.
- c) Child Advocates of Montgomery County will explain to the permanent caregiver or family that the child is eligible and ensure the application is filled out and submitted to the Office of the Attorney General—Crime Victims' Compensation Program.
- d) Prior to permanent placement and case closure, Child Advocates of Montgomery County will follow up with family or permanent caregiver to ensure that they have been provided with the necessary CVC documentation. Referral to the district attorney's victim assistance coordinator will also be provided.
- e) Child Advocates of Montgomery County staff and Advocates will receive training from Other Victim Assistance Grants (OVAG) program as to changes in the law regarding eligibility and/or the proper claim procedures.

2.14 Volunteer Safety

Child Advocates of Montgomery County volunteers should not put themselves in personal jeopardy while performing their volunteer role and carrying out their responsibilities. If an Advocate is uneasy about entering a neighborhood or a particular building, or about meeting with a particular party, the Advocate should discuss these concerns with their Advocacy Specialist to make other arrangements. The Advocacy Specialist may attend the meeting with the Advocate to help relieve such apprehension.

We recommend that Advocates give the Child Advocates of Montgomery County office phone number for contact and only give their personal number at their discretion.

2.15 Confidentiality

Advocates often work with confidential, proprietary information and materials. Confidential information (and all documentation and information relating thereto) will be kept strictly confidential by Advocates as per their oath.

All confidential documents should be marked “Confidential.” It will be the recipients’ responsibility to control and return the documents.

Confidential Information:

It is important that each Advocate can identify what information is considered confidential. Listed below are items which must be kept confidential:

- a) Case files
- b) Donor, Advocate, board member, staff personnel records
- c) Any information related to the cases assigned to Child Advocates of Montgomery County and any information related to the families and children served by an Advocate of Child Advocates of Montgomery County. This includes, but is not limited to, the following: medical and psychological reports or information regarding the child and/or their family members.
- d) Any Child Advocates of Montgomery County documentation such as staffing or discussions related to information that may be included in a case file
- e) Attorneys’ offices, staff/Advocate generated court reports and communications with attorneys
- f) Any documents from CPS, law enforcement, the district attorney’s offices, or the county attorney’s offices. This includes, but is not limited to, the following: the name and identifying information of the individual who initially reported abuse and neglect to CPS.
- g) Any document (hard copy or electronic media) marked “Confidential.”

Precautions for Individuals Working with Confidential Information:

Maintaining Confidentiality:

- Keep all confidential documents out of view and/or locked in a secure location.
- Close all doors when confidential discussions occur.
- Confidential information on your personal computer should be password protected and never left open when you step away. Confidential documents should not be stored on your personal hard drive.
- Child Advocates of Montgomery County central case file records are not allowed to leave the Child Advocates of Montgomery County office. The Advocate must maintain the security of all confidential records when in their personal possession and must maintain the security of those records when they are not in the person’s

possession, such as when they must be temporarily left at home or in a vehicle. Case records and notes shall be secured and kept private and inaccessible to unauthorized persons.

Maintaining Confidentiality when Printing, Copying, and/or Disposing:

- Monitor the printer when printing confidential documents. Do not leave print jobs unattended.
- Remove all confidential documents from the copy machine. In the event of a jam, make sure all confidential papers are removed.
- Shred confidential documents at the Child Advocates of Montgomery County office.

Maintaining Confidentiality on the Telephone:

- Close doors when confidential conversations are being made on the phone.
- All conference calls where confidential information may be discussed should be conducted behind closed doors.
- Individuals should be careful what they say when leaving voice mail messages that may contain confidential information.
- Be discreet in communications with others to ensure that unauthorized disclosures do not occur.

Maintaining Confidentiality when Mailing:

- Confidential mail sent by regular mail or courier should be sent in sealed envelopes and marked “Confidential.”
- Mark all confidential information mailed from the Child Advocates of Montgomery County office as “Confidential.”

Maintaining Confidentiality when Emailing:

- Before sending any confidential information via email, individuals should make sure the intended recipient is the sole user of the address.
- Discretion should be used when sharing confidential information by email.
- Child Advocates of Montgomery County programs are required to employ encryption to keep confidential information secure during electronic transmission.
- Optima: Court reports should be uploaded by the Advocacy Specialist or Advocate into Optima for reviewing, amending, or approving purposes. Optima is a secure database that is user-specific and password protected. Therefore, it meets the definition of secure transmission.
- The Advocate will follow the secure transmission standards as set forth by Child Advocates of Montgomery County in all email correspondence. All emails shall have the following confidentiality notice located at the bottom of each email.

CONFIDENTIALITY NOTICE: The content of this email is confidential and intended for the recipient specified in this message only. It is forbidden to share any part of this

message with any third party without the written consent of the sender. If you have received this message in error, please reply to this message and follow with its deletion so we can make sure such a mistake does not occur in the future. Unauthorized interception of this email is a violation of the Electronic Communications Privacy Act, 18 U.S.C. §2510-2521.”

Maintaining Confidentiality in Optima and Other Electronic Information Sources

- Case data may not be put on a thumb drive (which can be easily misplaced).
- All records from Optima should be deleted from your personal device after viewing.

Maintaining Confidentiality When Faxing:

- When using a fax machine to transmit confidential information, plan for the recipient to be available to monitor the fax machine to retrieve the document.
- Verify all fax numbers prior to sending information by facsimile and include the notice of confidentiality with all faxes:

“CONFIDENTIALITY NOTICE: This communication and any attachments may contain confidential and privileged information for the use of the designated recipients named above. This transmission is strictly confidential. If you are not the intended recipient of this message, you may not disclose, print, copy or disseminate this information. If you have received this in error, please contact us immediately upon receipt.”

Maintaining Confidentiality with Social Media:

- No pictures of a child assigned to Child Advocates of Montgomery County, no identifying information about a Child Advocates of Montgomery County child/case/court hearing will be placed on social media—Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, etc.
- Advocates will not discuss frustration with CPS, juvenile probation, foster parent, kinship, child, Child Advocates of Montgomery County, the court, or the “system” on social media.

Maintaining Confidentiality with Texting:

- No identifying information may be included in text messages.
- Children may only be identified by initials.
- All text messages must be deleted at the conclusion of the case.

Section 3: Community Complaint and Grievance Policy

On occasion, members of the community may have concerns about the operations of Child Advocates of Montgomery County. If community members have a grievance, they should submit their disputes or complaints in writing in a timely fashion to either the President and CEO or the Senior Director of Programs and Services via email or letter. This grievance policy will also be used to address complaints regarding negligence or misconduct related to a volunteer advocate's duties under Section 10.002; and CAMC will maintain accurate records regarding active volunteer advocates and inactive volunteer advocates under our program.

The complaint will be reviewed and investigated by the President and CEO. Retaliation in any form against any party who makes a complaint is prohibited. The President and CEO will report back to the complaining party, and CAMC's decision on resolution is final. The President and CEO will make the Governance Committee aware of trends in reported grievances.

If the complaint/grievance is not resolved to the volunteer, employee, or complainant's satisfaction, the issue may be appealed and referred to the CEO and Governance Committee for further review.

The complainant is informed of the resolution of any complaint, subject to confidentiality limitations, and a copy of the notification is maintained on file.

3.1 Problem Resolution, Grievances (377.113 (9))

In the event that conflicts arise between an Advocate and the Advocacy Specialist regarding recommendations or other factors in the handling of a case, Advocates are given every opportunity to express their opinion and to resolve the conflict. If appropriate, and if time allows, the Advocate and Advocacy Specialist will meet with the Senior Director of Programs and Services regarding the conflict and work to resolve it.

3.2 Advocate Grievances (7.A.7.)

Misunderstandings or disagreements may arise in any organization. Child Advocates of Montgomery County values and wishes to promote a cooperative and pleasant environment. We, therefore, encourage an open atmosphere where concerns, grievances, suggestions, and questions can be discussed with Advocacy Specialists and other staff members. We strive to ensure consistent and honest treatment of all Advocates, and as such, staff and Advocates are expected to treat each other with mutual respect. Many problems or concerns can easily be addressed simply by discussing them openly.

When problems continue where Advocates believe action is necessary beyond open discussion, the following steps should be followed:

- Any grievance should first be heard by the Advocate's assigned Advocacy Specialist. A formal grievance should be discussed within 30 days of the incident, or the Advocate waives their rights to continue with the grievance under this policy. Often, no action past this is necessary.
- If the Advocate is not satisfied with the Advocacy Specialist's resolution, or if the Advocacy Specialist is unable to offer a resolution, a written grievance should be filed with the Senior Director of Programs and Services.
- If the Advocate is still not satisfied with the resolution offered by the Senior Director of Programs and Services, a written grievance should be filed with the President and Chief Executive Officer.
- If the Advocate is not satisfied with the resolution offered by the President and Chief Executive Officer, the Advocate should present a written grievance to the Board of Directors.

Any written grievance should contain the following:

- a description of the problem;
- the date of the incident(s);
- name(s) of individual(s) involved in or witnessing the incident(s);
- the volunteer's suggested resolution; and
- the date the grievance is filed with the volunteer's signature.

The employee, community member, or volunteer initiating the grievance maintains the option to withdraw the complaint at any time.

A full recording of all meetings and discussions will be kept in the volunteer's permanent file.

Although not all problems can be resolved to everyone's total satisfaction, it is through open discussion of problems that staff and volunteers develop confidence in each other. This confidence is important to the operation of an efficient and harmonious environment that benefits all parties. Child Advocates of Montgomery County maintains all documentation on file. The complainant is informed of the resolution of any complaint, subject to confidentiality limitations, and a copy of the notification is maintained on file.

Section 4 - Transportation Policies

It is solely the responsibility of the Advocacy Specialist of Child Advocates of Montgomery County to ensure all documents required to transport are in place and on file at the office in Conroe, Texas. This program may be halted at any time by the President and CEO.

It is recognized by Child Advocates of Montgomery County that a limited subset of youth in the foster care system and regularly seen by their Advocates may benefit from extra time and attention given by their volunteers and, therefore, may grant those volunteers permission to transport children under limited conditions and certain guidelines.

Transportation of children is not mandatory. It is recognized that many children will be ineligible to be transported by Child Advocates of Montgomery County and that some Advocates will not be comfortable with assuming the liability involved. It is expected that transporting children will be an exception rather than the rule and will be a very small part of Child Advocates of Montgomery County's work.

It is recognized that the roles of Child Protective Services (CPS) and Child Advocates of Montgomery County are different. This should be respected and never confused or blurred. CPS works with all children in foster care, under many conditions, and transports children for many reasons.

Ideally, Child Advocates of Montgomery County's role in transporting would be limited to the goals and conditions described below, but at the discretion of the Senior Director of Programs and Services, volunteer Advocates may transport for other reasons if CPS, or legal guardian, and Child Advocates of Montgomery County agree on the need and conditions and sign off accordingly.

4.1 Goal of Transporting

The goals of transporting children are:

- a) To develop and enhance the trust and bond between the Advocate and the child.
- b) To foster open and more effective communication; and
- c) To give the child a sense of a "normal life" experience.
- d) To support activities that promote permanency
- e) To support activities that promote family-child connections

It is not the goal of Child Advocates of Montgomery County to provide routine transportation for which CPS or the caretaker should be responsible.

Common sense and good judgment must be used in every situation, and the child's welfare and safety must always be paramount.

4.2 Qualifying to Transport

- a) An Advocate may qualify to transport for a specific child. Permission for each child will be assessed separately.
 1. No child under 6 will be transported. Children between 6 to 12 years of age should be harnessed in the back seat of the vehicle. Children 6 to 7 years of age must ride in an approved car seat.
 2. No DFPS Intense level child, or a child exhibiting high risk behaviors, will be transported by Child Advocates of Montgomery County.
- b) The Advocate must complete Child Advocates of Montgomery County's Transporting Children training.
- c) The Advocate must provide:
 1. A copy of the current driver's license to the Child Advocates of Montgomery County office.
 2. A current copy of their driving record from the Texas DMV. A copy will be kept on file in the Child Advocates of Montgomery County office. The driver also must not have had more than two moving violations or accidents within the past three years and may never have been convicted of a DWI or driving under the influence.
 3. Proof of current automobile liability insurance of at least \$100,000 Bodily Injury, each person, and \$300,000 Bodily Injury, each occurrence, and \$100,000 Property Damage, each occurrence; including a copy of the coverage, the declarations page, and agent information in the automobile. Copies will be kept on file in the Child Advocates of Montgomery County office and must be updated every six months. This is the Advocate's responsibility.
 4. Proof that car(s) used for transport will be in compliance with Texas vehicle inspection requirements. The vehicle used shall have an up-to-date safety inspection from the state of Texas prior to transport and possess airbags and safety harnesses.
- d) The Advocate must sign the Volunteer Transportation Contract/Request Form, indicating agreement and compliance with the policy.
- e) The Advocate must have been on the case for at least 90 days.

4.3 Approvals and Notifications

- a) The Advocate (together with Advocacy Specialist) must gain written approval from the Advocacy Specialist, Senior Director of Programs and Services, and the child's legal guardian or custodial agency to transport a specific child.
- b) The Advocate must have written approval in advance from the Advocacy Specialist for each specific instance of transport. The Advocate is prohibited from taking a child to any location that is not preapproved by the child's legal guardian, custodial agency, and Child Advocates of Montgomery County Senior Director of Programs and Services.
- c) The Advocate will notify CPS and the Residential Treatment Center (RTC), foster parent or primary caregiver that an individual in their facility or home will be driven

to an identified location and returned after the event or outing. If this is done by phone rather than in writing, the Advocate will make that note for the records.

- d) The Advocate will keep a log of all Child Advocates of Montgomery County transports and enter that information in Optima under the contact logs.
- e) A signed copy of the Volunteer Transportation Contract/Request Form should be taken with the Advocate while performing the visit.

4.4 Specific Instance of Transporting

- a) Transporting must support the child's plan of service.
- b) All destinations must be public places. A child may never be taken to any private residence other than the child's current placement, including the Advocate's home.
- c) There will be no overnight transporting.
- d) There must be two adults in the car with the child at all times. A non-Advocate must have completed Helping Hearts training and a background check and must sign a confidentiality agreement for the specific case.
- e) No nonapproved individuals will be in the vehicle with the children.
- f) The child may never be transported by motorcycle or scooter.
- g) Every occupant of the vehicle must always wear seatbelts and shoulder harnesses while the vehicle is moving.
- h) The driver may not text or talk on a cell phone while the vehicle is moving.
- i) No smoking or vaping is allowed at any time while the child is in the automobile.
- j) Advocates or other individuals in the vehicle are prohibited from carrying weapons, including knives, firearms, or ammunition of any kind while transporting.
- k) Automobile safety is a priority, and the volunteer will report immediately to the President and CEO if there is an accident or moving violation of any kind.
- l) The volunteer will obey all traffic rules including seat belt and child car seat laws and posted speed limits.

It is the Advocate's responsibility that all documents required to transport are in place and on file at the Child Advocates of Montgomery County office. The Senior Director of Programs and Services and Advocacy Specialist will make transport decisions based on each individual case and may for any reason rescind or deny approval to transport a child. Any willful breach of this policy and procedure will be taken very seriously by the Child Advocates of Montgomery County leadership team and may result in the volunteer transporter being removed from the Child Advocates of Montgomery County Program.

Prior to any transport, it is recognized that the Advocate transporting any child has read this document and understands the risks and limitations of this policy and procedure, does this in a voluntary capacity, is knowledgeable of the potential personal risk, and accepts all personal and legal liability.

Section 5 – Social Media Policy

Child Advocates of Montgomery County recognizes the importance of the internet in shaping public thinking about our organization and the children and families we serve. We also recognize the importance of our employees, volunteers, and donors joining in and helping shape industry conversation and direction through interaction on social media. Child Advocates of Montgomery County is committed to supporting honest, transparent, and knowledgeable dialogue on the internet through social media.

As with anything, we need to take some precautions when using social media tools connected with Child Advocates of Montgomery County.

5.1 Social Media Roles: Who Does What?

Establishing a Child Advocates of Montgomery County presence on a public social network (Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, LinkedIn, etc.) must be authorized beforehand by the President and CEO. We will only establish a presence on an additional site when we have:

- a) the resources to consistently maintain a dialogue appropriate for that site;
- b) a plan for the site's use, which will be held in our social media plan;
- c) the chosen social media site aligns with our mission; and
- d) the outreach will increase engagement with a specified, desired audience.

Child Advocates of Montgomery County will maintain only one Child Advocates of Montgomery County page on any social media site used. Event pages and groups may be added as subsets of the primary site with approval of the Communications and Engagement Director.

As an exception, and on a project-by-project basis with specific, advance approval of the President & CEO, it may be possible to establish an additional site for a specific purpose. This will be a rare exception to the general policy of Child Advocates of Montgomery County having only one site on each media.

All official social media accounts are managed by the Communications and Engagement Director, including upkeep of accounts and managing ongoing updates. One additional staff member will have administrator rights to monitor accounts and in case of emergency situations. The Communications and Engagement Director, in discussion with the President and CEO, may grant and/or revoke access to other members of staff to administer groups on the platforms and to post content. We reserve the right to block, filter, or restrict by any means any user's access to a social media site without notice for any reason.

Any paid or in-kind social media advertising must be approved by the Communications and Engagement Director.

Any content related to fundraising, recruitment, or programming will be approved by the appropriate Director before going public.

5.2 What Should You Say Online?

These guidelines apply to all posts on Child Advocates of Montgomery County sites, including both those posting officially as “Child Advocates of Montgomery County,” and those posting on the sites as staff, friends, volunteers, donors, and visitors.

Think of CNN, your mother, and your boss. Do not say anything online that you would not be comfortable seeing quoted on CNN, being asked about by your mother, or having to justify to your boss.

Respect confidentiality. Be very careful not to discuss information that is internal, confidential, and/or sensitive, including organizational finances, volunteer information, etc. If in doubt—ask the Communications and Engagement Director or the owner of the information you want to share.

Give credit when you are influenced by another writer, or when you use someone else’s photos or art. Properly cite sources. Provide a link to the original content and use the author’s/artist’s name whenever possible. Use only photos you have taken yourself or have permission to use.

Share your opinion appropriately. Be interesting and authentic. Use normal language that you would use in a public forum like a school meeting. Disagreements are central to growing ideas, but don’t attack anyone personally. Don’t spread gossip, hearsay, or assumptions. Keep it clean.

Be safe. Don’t publicly post anything you wouldn’t tell a stranger on the street. Opinions and ideas belong in a public forum—your last name, passwords, or phone numbers do not!

Make it look good. Post pictures with comments whenever appropriate and relevant to keep the sites looking good.

5.3 Monitoring

The Communications and Engagement Director or their delegate will be responsible for monitoring social media channels daily and will quickly address inappropriate messages or misuse. Inappropriate content includes spam, advertising, offensive statements, inaccurate information, foul language, or unconstructive criticism.

5.4 Responding to Negative Comments

We are not overly concerned about negative conversations. We will delete negative comments only if they are vulgar, offensive, threatening, or violate confidentiality.

We will respond to negative or inaccurate posts if a response is warranted. We will correct misinformation but not engage in heated arguments.

Media inquiries coming through social media should be referred to the President and CEO or Communications and Engagement Director for an appropriate response.

When disagreeing with others' opinions, remain appropriate and polite. If you find yourself in a situation online that looks as if it's becoming antagonistic, do not get overly defensive and do not disengage from the conversation abruptly. Ask our Communications and Engagement Director for advice on how to disengage from the dialogue in a polite manner that reflects well on Child Advocates of Montgomery County.

If the community steps in to correct inaccuracies or defend the institution, there may be no need for an additional official response.

5.5 Responding to Positive and Neutral Comments

We want our social media pages to be a source of ongoing dialogue. We will respond to any comments (on both the Child Advocates of Montgomery County website and other sites where Child Advocates of Montgomery County is mentioned) if, by responding, we can support an interesting and relevant dialogue.

5.6 Privacy and Permissions

Employees should respect the privacy rights of their coworkers and will not disclose information about work-related events involving other employees of Child Advocates of Montgomery County, its volunteers, donors, and friends without obtaining their permission. Employees will not post photographs or images of coworkers, volunteers, donors, or friends on any social media site without having their express permission to do so. We will protect our constituency by being responsible in how we collect, store, and use data from social media platforms, in compliance with CAN-SPAM laws, privacy policies of social media platforms, Child Advocates of Montgomery County Confidentiality Policy, and Child Advocates of Montgomery County Communications Guidelines.

Stories that are posted on one of our social media pages may be used without additional permission in other formats, including but not limited to:

- a) Child Advocates of Montgomery County website
- b) Thank-you letters
- c) Social networking or social media platforms
- d) Presentations to supporters
- e) Brochures, direct mail, publications, etc.
- f) Video footage featuring our care for children

5.7 Personal versus Professional

When staff communicates through social media, unless authorized to speak on behalf of Child Advocates of Montgomery County, they are representing themselves and should use a disclaimer. If you write anything related to your work at Child Advocates of Montgomery County on a blog or some other online space, make it clear that what you say there represents your personal views and opinions, and that you are not speaking on behalf of Child Advocates of Montgomery County. Share these views under your name and not a pseudonym

or fake account. Use a disclaimer, such as: “I am an employee of Child Advocates of Montgomery County; however, this is my personal opinion.” or something to that effect.

Be mindful that using the statement above does not recuse you from any negative outcomes or consequences of your behavior on social media sites. Also, reposting or sharing a story or post can easily be seen as a sign of approval of that post. Your personal opinions can be linked to or perceived to be linked to Child Advocates of Montgomery County.

Tips for sharing/endorsing:

- Share judiciously
- Customize your privacy settings
- Use quotes for what is said by others
- Make an introductory statement, such as “Hey, saw this interesting thing today”

Remember that what is said on social media platforms (including messaging, emails, and chats) is never truly private. No matter how restricted, anything on a screen can be captured and redirected to a wider audience.

Employees should not engage in any online conduct which:

- Creates a conflict of interest between them and Child Advocates of Montgomery County,
- Creates a conflict with one of the Child Advocates of Montgomery County’s Program participants, or
- Otherwise harms the interests of Child Advocates of Montgomery County.

If a minor Program participant (any Program participant under the age of 18) finds a staff member or volunteer’s personal social networking profile and requests to be linked as a friend, the employee must respectfully deny the request and block them from further contact. Volunteers and employees will contact their Advocacy Specialist or Director if a minor Program participant attempts to contact them through the internet, other than through the email address set up specifically for Child Advocates of Montgomery County.

Section 6: Data Security Policy

6.1 Purpose

Child Advocates of Montgomery County's Data Security Policy refers to our commitment to treat information of children, families, volunteers, donors, board members, employees, and other stakeholders and interested parties with the utmost care and confidentiality. With this policy, we ensure that we access, create, maintain, receive, use, disclose, transmit, or destroy confidential information in a secure fashion that protects against any reasonably anticipated threats or hazards to the security or integrity of such information or unauthorized uses.

6.2 Scope

This Data Security Policy applies to all child, case, volunteer, donor, board member, and employee data. Therefore, it applies to every server, database, and IT system that handles such data, including any device that is regularly used for email, web access, or other work-related tasks. Employees of Child Advocates of Montgomery County must follow this policy. Contractors, consultants, partners, and other external entities are also covered. Generally, this policy refers to anyone we collaborate with or who acts on our behalf and may need occasional access to data.

6.3 Policy

a) General

1. Child Advocates of Montgomery County will provide all employees, volunteers, and contracted third parties with access to the information they need to carry out their responsibilities as effectively and efficiently as possible.
2. Each user shall be identified by a unique user ID so that individuals can be held accountable for their actions.
3. The use of shared identities is permitted only where they are suitable, such as training accounts or service accounts.
4. Each user shall read this Data Security Policy and sign a statement that they understand and agree to abide by its provisions.
5. Records of user access may be used to provide evidence for security incident investigations.
6. Access shall be granted based on the principle of least privilege, which means that each Program and user will be granted the fewest privileges necessary to complete their tasks.

b) Access Control Authorization

1. Access to company IT resources and services will be given through the provision of a unique user account and password.
2. Passwords are managed through Microsoft 365. Requirements for password length, complexity, and expiration are as follows:
 - i. Length: 8 characters minimum and 16 characters maximum
 - ii. Strong passwords must be used. To meet strong password requirements, three out of four of the following must be used:

- access, or transmit the Texas HHS confidential information are permitted to carry out an obligation under the Data Use Agreement for an authorized purpose, unless otherwise approved in writing by a Texas HHS agency.
5. Sensitive systems shall be physically or logically isolated to restrict access to authorized personnel only. This is protected with Child Advocates of Montgomery County's Microsoft 365 membership.
- f) Access to Confidential or Restricted Information
1. Access to data classified as "confidential" or "restricted" shall be limited to authorized persons whose job responsibilities require it, as determined by this Data Security Policy or by the Child Advocates of Montgomery County leadership team.
 2. The responsibility to implement access restrictions lies with Child Advocates of Montgomery County leadership team and IT Services.
 3. Disclosure of confidential information is limited to the minimum that is necessary to fulfill the authorized purposes.
 4. Child Advocates of Montgomery County and its workforce will comply with the applicable provisions of HIPAA and other laws referenced in the Data Use Agreement relating to creation, receipt, maintenance, use, disclosure, access, or transmission of Texas HHS confidential information on behalf of a Texas HHS agency.
 5. Disclosure of Child Advocates of Montgomery County's work product done on behalf of Texas HHS, or publishing Texas HHS confidential information without express prior approval of the Texas HHS agency is prohibited.
 6. Attempts to reidentify or further identify de-identified Texas HHS confidential information or attempt to contact any individuals whose records are contained in the Texas HHS confidential information, except for an authorized purpose, without express written authorization from a Texas HHS agency is not permitted.
- g) Training
1. Child Advocates of Montgomery County will provide training to its workforce who will handle confidential information.
 - i. Training will be annually, and within 30 days of a new hire date.
 - ii. Training must be completed prior to access being given to confidential information.
- h) Destruction
1. Confidential information will be destroyed or disposed of in one of the following secure methods: shredding, burning, degaussing, hard drive overwriting, and/or physical destruction, such that the confidential information cannot be retrieved.

6.4 Technical Guidelines

The technical guidelines specify all requirements for technical controls used to grant access to data.

- a) Access control methods to be used shall include:

1. Auditing of attempts to log on to any device on the company network
2. Windows NTFS permissions to files and folders
3. Role-based access model
4. Server access rights
5. Firewall permissions
6. Network zone and VLAN ACLs
7. Web authentication rights
8. Database access rights and ACLs
9. Encryption at rest and in flight
10. De-identification of confidential information in accordance with HIPAA de-identification standards
11. Network segregation

Access control applies to all networks, servers, workstations, laptops, mobile devices, web applications and websites, cloud storages, and services.

6.5 Reporting Requirements

This section describes the requirements for reporting incidents that happen.

- a) Monthly reports detailing all incidents shall be produced by IT support and sent to Child Advocates of Montgomery County President and CEO.
- b) High-priority incidents discovered by IT support shall be immediately escalated.
- c) Any actual or suspected incident, security event, or breach will be reported to the appropriate agency officials and/or authorities, including:
 1. The Board of Directors and Texas CASA will be notified in writing no later than 5:00 p.m. on the second business day following discovery.
 2. Texas HHS agency, regulatory authorities, and other required individuals or authorities will receive immediate breach notification.
 3. Individuals and reporting authorities whose Texas HHS confidential information has been breached, as directed by the Texas HHS agency, will receive notification.
- d) Any actual or suspected data security policy violation should be reported immediately to President and CEO, Senior Director of Programs and Services, or Communications and Engagement Director.

6.6 Ownership and Responsibilities

This section describes who owns what and who is responsible for which actions and controls.

- a) The President and CEO, Senior Director of Programs and Services, and the Communications and Engagement Director may all serve as the Privacy Official and Information Security Official, each of whom is authorized to act on behalf of Child Advocates of Montgomery County and is responsible for the development and implementation of the privacy and security requirements.
- b) The President and CEO, the Senior Director of Programs and Services, and the Communications and Engagement Director may all serve as the Local Agency Security Officer (LASO).

- c) The President and CEO, the Senior Director of Programs and Services, and the Communications and Engagement Director may all serve as the Terminal Agency Coordinator (TAC).
- d) Users and workforce include everyone who has access to information resources such as employees, volunteers, contractors, consultants, and temporary employees.
- e) The Incident Response Team shall be chaired by the President and CEO and include the Communications and Engagement Director, Senior Director of Programs and Services, other employees as necessary, and IT support.
- f) Child Advocates of Montgomery County will require updates to policies, procedures, and plans following major changes with use or disclosure of Texas HHS confidential information within 60 days of identification of a need for update.

6.7 Enforcement

Any user found in violation of this policy is subject to disciplinary action, up to and including termination of employment. Any third-party partner or contractor found in violation of this policy may have their network connection terminated.

Child Advocates of Montgomery County requires cooperation with Texas HHS agencies or federal regulatory inspections, audits, or investigations related to compliance.

6.8 Definitions

- a) Confidential Information: any communication or record (whether oral, written, electronically stored, or transmitted, or in any other form) provided to or made available to Child Advocates of Montgomery County or that Child Advocates of Montgomery County may create, receive, maintain, use, disclose, or have access to on behalf of HHS that consists of or includes any or all the following:
 1. Education records as defined in the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act, 20 U.S.C. §1232g; 34 C.F.R. Part 99;
 2. Federal Tax Information as defined in Internal Revenue Code §6103 and Internal Revenue Service Publication 1075;
 3. Personal Identifying Information (PII) as defined in Texas Business and Commerce Code, Chapter 521;
 4. Protected Health Information (PHI) in any form including, without limitation, Electronic Protected Health Information or Unsecured Protected Health Information as defined in 45 C.F.R. §160.103;
 5. Sensitive Personal Information (SPI) as defined in Texas Business and Commerce Code, Chapter 521;
 6. Social Security Administration Data, including, without limitation, Medicaid information means disclosures of information made by the Social Security Administration or the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services from a federal system of records for administration of federally funded benefit programs under the Social Security Act, 42 U.S.C., Chapter 7;
 7. All privileged work product;
 8. All information designated as confidential under the constitution and laws of the state of Texas and of the United States, including the Texas Health

and Safety Code and the Texas Public Information Act, Texas Government Code, Chapter 552.

- b) Authorized User: a person who:
 - 1. Is authorized to create, receive, maintain, have access to, process, view, handle, examine, interpret, or analyze Confidential Information;
 - 2. For Child Advocates of Montgomery County, warrants and represents has a demonstrable need to create, receive, maintain, use, disclose, or have access to the Confidential Information; and
 - 3. Has agreed in writing to be bound by the disclosure and use limitations pertaining to the Confidential Information
- c) Authorized Purpose: the specific purpose or purposes described in the Texas HHS Contract for Child Advocates of Montgomery County to fulfill its obligations under the Texas HHS Contract, or any other purpose expressly authorized by HHS in writing in advance.
- d) Workforce: employees, volunteers, trainees, or other persons whose performance of work is under the direct control of a party, whether or not they are paid by that party.
- e) Texas Health and Human Services (HHS): Texas Health and Human Services System, which includes the Texas Health and Human Services Commission and the Department of State Health Services.
- f) Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) of 1996: a federal law that required the creation of national standards to protect sensitive patient health information from being disclosed without the patient's consent or knowledge. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) issued the HIPAA Privacy Rule to implement the requirements of HIPAA. The HIPAA Security Rule protects a subset of information covered by the Privacy Rule.
- g) Criminal Justice Information (CJI): data provided by FBI Criminal Justice Information Services (CJIS) necessary for law enforcement and civil agencies to perform their mission.
- h) Criminal History Record Information (CHRI): a subset of CJI consisting of notations written and electronic evidence of an arrest, detention, complaint, indictment, information, or other formal criminal charge relating to an identifiable person. CHRI includes identifying information pertaining to the individual as well as the disposition arising from sentencing, correctional supervision, and release of any charges.
- i) Local Agency Security Officer (LASO): primary Information Security contact between a local law enforcement agency and the CJIS Systems Agency under which this agency interfaces with the FBI CJIS Division. The LASO actively represents their agency in all matters pertaining to Information Security, disseminates Information Security alerts and other material to their constituents, maintains Information Security documentation (including system configuration data), assists with Information Security audits of hardware and procedures, and keeps the CSA informed as to any Information Security needs and problems.
- j) Terminal Agency Coordinator (TAC): serves as the point of contact at the local agency for matters relating to CJIS information access. A TAC administers CJIS

systems programs within the local agency and oversees the agency's compliance with CJIS systems policies.

- k) Access control list (ACL): a list of access control entries (ACEs) or rules. Each ACE in an ACL identifies a trustee and specifies the access rights allowed, denied, or audited for that trustee.
- l) Database: an organized collection of data, generally stored and accessed electronically from a computer system.
- m) Encryption: the process of encoding a message or other information so that only authorized parties can access it.
- n) Firewall: a technology used for isolating one network from another. Firewalls can be standalone systems or can be included in other devices, such as routers or servers.
- o) Network segregation: the separation of the network into logical or functional units called zones. For example, you might have a zone for sales, a zone for technical support and another zone for research, because each group has different technical needs.
- p) Role-based access control (RBAC): a policy-neutral access-control mechanism defined around roles and privileges.
- q) Server: a computer program or a device that provides functionality for other programs or devices, called clients.
- r) Virtual private network (VPN): a secure private network connection across a public network.
- s) VLAN (virtual LAN): a logical grouping of devices in the same broadcast domain.
- t) Breach: an impermissible use or disclosure of electronic or nonelectronic sensitive personal information by an unauthorized person or for an unauthorized purpose that compromises the security or privacy of confidential information such that the use or disclosure poses a risk of reputational harm, theft of financial information, identity theft, or medical identity theft.

6.9 IT Support

Child Advocates of Montgomery County contracts with GTIN Managed IT to maintain and oversee the configurations of all computing systems and devices.

Texas Booster Seat Laws

Texas requires that child safety seats are used based on manufacturer recommendations. NHTSA recommends that booster seats be used in the back seat from ages four to eight and when the child weighs over 40 pounds unless the child is 4'9" or taller. Texas requires that child safety seats are used based on manufacturer recommendations. NHTSA recommends that booster seats be used in the back seat from ages four to eight and when the child weighs over 40 pounds unless the child is 4'9" or taller.

TYPES OF BOOSTER SEATS YOU CAN USE

1



HIGH-BACK BELT-POSITIONING BOOSTER SEATS

Two types of high-back belt-positioning booster seats are available. Both types "boost" your child up so the vehicle safety belt fits better.

- 1 One type provides head and neck support for your child if your vehicle seat back does not have a head rest. It must be used with the vehicle's lap/shoulder belt, never with the lap belt only.
- 2 The other, a combination seat, converts from a forward-facing toddler seat to a booster seat and comes equipped with a harness. This type can be used as a forward-facing toddler seat when your child is age 1 and at least 20 pounds to about age 4 and 40 pounds. When your child outgrows the toddler seat, remove the harness and use the seat as a booster seat with the vehicle's lap/shoulder belt.

2



3



NO-BACK BELT-POSITIONING BOOSTER SEAT

- 3 This type also "boosts" your child up so the vehicle safety belt fits better. This booster seat is used with a lap/shoulder belt. It should only be used in vehicles with built-in head rests.

All booster seats are required by law to comply with the same safety standards as child safety seats. Your booster seat must have a label stating that it meets Federal motor vehicle safety standards.

SOURCE: NHTSA