

Advocacy from a Distance

In the midst of this unprecedented pandemic, children and families are struggling to make it through each day, one day at a time. Many of our families, already engaged with the child welfare system prior to COVID-19, will have an even more difficult time than the average family.

Fortunately, CASA advocates can still be strong supporters and advocates for the children they are appointed to and their families, while still observing physical distancing and self-quarantining protocols. Many Wisconsin CASA programs have limited or suspended all in-person visits. Virtual visits are encouraged to provide consistency and support to your CASA child during this time of uncertainty. There is a lot of information on our page and in this following document. We hope this will help you personally and as an advocate to your CASA child. Please take a moment to review and be sure to connect with us or your CASA program with any questions you may have; or if you are seeking a specific resource we did not include. Remember we are in this together and want to continue supporting you!

CASA advocates can be a support and resource to birth parents, families, foster placements, etc. during normal times, and this situation is no different. Advocates are encouraged to check in with caretakers regularly as a support system and lending ear. Parents may be struggling with distance learning schoolwork, children's change of traditional routine or lack of services that support our children (therapy, visitations, after school activities, etc.) All of these things may cause trauma reactions for children who already have a history of trauma. Caretakers and CASA's should be aware of this and have behavioral management tools to support youth if needed. If a child experiences a true mental health crisis, please instruct the caretaker to call the crisis hotline at 1-800-273-TALK (8255).

To support a child and their family, when making weekly check in calls, inquire about items such as:

- Health of all household members - physical and mental
- How are school/distance learning assignments being completed? What was communicated by the district/teacher? Is the teacher available via email to help, if needed? Could the CASA assist virtually?
- What is the family doing to keep busy daily?
- Is anyone in the household still working outside the home?
- Has the child/children had any issues behaviorally since being home?
- If the child's visits with their parents/siblings have been suspended due to COVID-19, have they been able to stay in touch by phone?
- Is the household having any other challenges? (Financial, shortage of food, childcare for healthcare workers/first responders, etc.)

- Are there upcoming non-urgent medical/dental appointments for the child/children, and if so, has the Department been consulted to determine whether these appointments can be postponed?
- Does the caretaker have supportive individuals they are relying on right now to stay healthy?

Advocates must remember that advocacy for a child is holistic and is always much wider than the child themselves. Please be sure to make phone contact with anyone else involved with the child's case during this time to determine what their status is currently in relation to the child in question (if services are suspended, being offered remotely, etc.) This includes contact with birth parents, if the child is not currently in their custody. Be sure to make contact and help connect them with needed resources they may be seeking - the same as you would the child's current caretaker.

Keep America Connected: Companies including Verizon, Comcast, and Altice have pledged to keep internet online for customers who can't pay their internet bills, as well as waive late billing fees and open WiFi hot spots. More information [here](#).

New Internet for Students: Charter will offer free Spectrum broadband and Wi-Fi access for 60 days to households with K-12 and/or college students who do not already have a Spectrum broadband subscription and at any service level up to 100 Mbps. To enroll call **1-844-488-8395**. Installation fees will be waived for new student households.

Crisis in health, mental health, domestic violence and child welfare may arise during this stressful time. Some important information and contacts to have on hand both for yourself and for families you work with:

WI Child Abuse Hotline: Be alert and keep an eye out for signs of abuse and neglect, even more than usual, because abuse and neglect have been shown to increase during times of crisis/natural disasters. If you suspect child abuse and/or neglect, call your local WI Child Abuse Hotline [here](#) as soon as possible and alert your CASA program.

Being quarantined at home is not always safe. Your local Wisconsin Domestic Violence Hotline can be found [here](#) 24 hours a day/7 days a week. The Wisconsin Domestic Violence Hotlines provides confidential access to domestic violence information and services, including crisis intervention, referral, and advocacy.

Wisconsin Department of Health - Learn what precautions you can take about the Coronavirus [here](#). Call the WI Poison Center Hotline at 1-800-222-1222 or visit [here](#).

Even though we are physically apart, virtual communities keep people connected and build relationships every day. We hope that this will continue to hold true under these stressful conditions.