**COVID-19 Update, March 17, 2020**

The health and safety of our volunteer, staff, families, and community is our primary responsibility at CASA. We want to make accommodations that allow for all to remain safe and well while we navigate through this virus. Please read through this email regarding CASA’s plan of Action in the wake of COVID, and be sure to read through the implications for our children highlighted at the end.

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| **Regarding CHILD ADVOCACY for the month of MARCH:**As of March 16, 2020, Hill Country CASA Board of Directors, out of an abundance of caution, issued a moratorium on all face to face contact for volunteers conducting CASA business. This moratorium will continue until April 16, 2020 OR until further instruction from HCCASA. On March 17, 2020, the Child Protection Court issued orders limiting and/or eliminating contact on cases between parties, courts, parents, and children.We are in contact with local health authorities, the courts and Texas CASA to determine the best next steps over the coming days and weeks, with a commitment to continue service to our children in this uncertain time.While we may be unable to visit face to face, it is important to all of us that our children are protected. To this end:CASAs are expected to make arrangements for a phone or technology based visit with their child (skype, facetime) as developmentally appropriate. If the child is too young for this sort of contact, CASAs should contact placement for updates and to check in. If this contact cannot happen for some reason, advocates should reach out to their supervisor to create an individual plan of action regarding child contact.Some thoughts:* As developmentally appropriate, attempt regular contact with children and assure them that CASA is still here for them
* Children and youth may have concerns about what they are hearing about COVID19 – [www.hccasa.org/covid19](http://www.hccasa.org/covid19) has resources for how to talk to children about what is happening
* Call placements – what do they need? CASA has some resources to support children and placements and also can direct families to community supports
* Amy is putting child activity resources on [HCCASA’s Facebook Page](https://www.facebook.com/HillCountryCASA/) to share with placements
* Continue to document your contacts in Optima, with children and with case parties
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| **Regarding CASA Office Operations:**1. CASA staff are working to prepare ourselves to maintain regular operations remotely. We’ll be testing our remote systems over the coming days and will make announcement when we go fully remote. Please have your supervisor’s cell phone and email address available.2. The court has ordered all case related business be conducted remotely from now through April 1, 2020, and to hold for further instruction. As meetings happen on your case, we will share information about how to participate by phone. 3. Until such time that HCCASA goes fully remote, the CASA office is closed to the public. Visitors, such as CASA volunteers who are feeling well, may call for an appointment to visit. All visitors will be subject to screening prior to entry.  |

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| **Regarding COURT AND MEETINGS:**1.All Court Hearings have been RESET to April 1, 2020 or later. 2. ALL parent-child visits have been suspended until April 1, 2020 or later. 3. ALL case-related meetings are canceled until April 1, 2020 or later.4.DFPS has been placed on travel restriction through April 30, 2020 and many folks are working remotely.HCCASA will communicate any updates as we receive them. |

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| **Regarding TRAININGS:**1.All brown bags / focus groups through the end of May are canceled. 2. CASA staff are working to provide various online means to gain continuing education hours. 3. New Volunteer Training for March will be rescheduled.    |

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| **Some things to keep in mind for our children:**1. Your children are used to seeing you often and rely on scheduled visits to occur. Because we will not be seeing children face to face, be sure we are clearly communicating to our children the reason for that change (court order). Some of our children are far too young to understand the implication of COVID, and we do not want them to feel isolated or as if they did something wrong to prevent your visit.2. As we all know, our children live in a world where everything is unknown to them all the time. They are sometimes unsure if their home and school will be changing, and the response to COVID could trigger a variety of emotions and reactions for our children. Be sensitive to these feelings and be sure to check on your children on how they are feeling in response to the changes surrounding them.3. For many of our children, school is the place they go to feel “normal” – to have friends, normal social interactions, etc. With school cancellations occurring all over the state, it will be important to check in with our kids on this component as well, and make sure that they are feeling as emotionally and socially supported as possible. This may mean increasing contact between CASAs and children or helping to facilitate a plan for placements during this time.    |

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| **FINALLY...** At this time, all advocacy and child visits are expected to begin again, business as usual, after April 16. However, all decisions at this time are fairly fluid and advocates should continue checking [www.hccasa.org/covid19](http://www.hccasa.org/covid19) to stay informed of any changes. We will continue to monitor the situation as best able and will keep in touch regarding any changes or updates to come.Stay healthy…wash your hands…and thank you all for your patience and understanding through these changes. |

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