

# 7

**CHAPTER 7**

**RESOURCE MATERIALS**



# Communicating as a CASA/GAL Volunteer

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# Reflection/Clarification Phrases

The following reflection/clarification phrases may be helpful in soliciting information from a child.

## FOR REFLECTING WHAT YOU UNDERSTAND

- It sounds like you feel . . .
- So you're feeling . . .
- And that made you feel . . .
- I hear you saying . . .
- You seem to be feeling . . .
- I get the feeling that you . . .
- If I understand you right, you . . .
- Let me see if I'm with you so far—you . . .
- So what you're saying is . . .
- Is that what you're saying?
- My impression is . . . Does that fit?
- Would it be accurate to say that . . . ?
- I'm sensing that you . . .
- Sounds like there's a wish in there . . .
- The part I understand is . . .

## FOR EXPLORING WHAT YOU DON'T UNDERSTAND

- The part that isn't clear to me is . . .
- I wonder if you're feeling . . .
- Could you tell me . . . ?
- Can you say more about . . . ?
- What does that mean to you?
- I can't tell if you feel . . . or if you feel . . .
- What (How) is that for you?
- I don't quite get what you mean—is it . . . ?
- What does . . . mean (to you)?
- How do you view that?
- For example . . . ?
- Do you have a specific example in mind?
- When do you feel that way?
- Are you feeling that now?
- Can you expand on that idea?
- How do you mean that?
- I'm not clear on what you mean by . . .

"Feeling Phrases" by Michigan CASA.



# Practical Pitfalls of Collaboration— & How to Turn Them into Advantages

## COLLABORATING ON TASKS THAT REALLY DON'T REQUIRE COLLABORATION

If you are looking for the fastest way to get a simple task done, don't collaborate on it. If, on the other hand, you want to accomplish something that one person or agency can't do alone or that will have much more impact if done with others, this is the time to consider collaboration.

- **When might it be worth taking the extra time to use a collaborative approach?**

## UNDERESTIMATING HOW MUCH TIME IT TAKES TO COLLABORATE

When you begin collaborating (whether it is with a family or with another agency), first talk over your goals. If you agree on goals, then talk over who will do what, and when. Draft a simple work plan and list both the tasks and how long you think each will take. It takes time to collaborate!

- **Why is it helpful to estimate the time it will take to complete a work plan?**

## LACK OF CLARITY OF LEADERSHIP

The way leadership is handled will make the difference between success and failure for a collaboration. Every group of interagency collaborators needs to figure out how they will make decisions, and who will take responsibility for each task.

- **What can you do to ensure that issues of responsibility and leadership are determined at the start of a collaboration?**

## "TURF" ISSUES

Understanding why people and agencies are often so touchy about their turf can help you know how to handle turf issues. Every person has an identity—the

part of us that says, "I am this, I do that." Work is a big part of many people's identity, and many agency workers' identities are intertwined with the services their agencies provide. Because of these "identity issues," caseworkers often feel blamed or criticized personally when a CASA/GAL volunteer asks for more services or calls attention to delays. As a CASA/GAL volunteer, you can separate the person from the problem by saying, "I know you have done what you can. How can we get this service for the child?" When identities are threatened, it becomes very difficult to collaborate. When you or your collaborators seem to be getting caught up in turf issues, bring yourself (and your collaborators) back to the reason why you are collaborating: to find a safe, permanent home, preferably with the child's family, as soon as possible, honoring the child's sense of time.

- **This is a particularly tricky one for citizen volunteers who are working with agency professionals. What can you do to move things forward while understanding that people's identities are often very much wrapped up in the work that they do?**

## LEAVING OUT KEY PEOPLE OR AGENCIES

If you are beginning a collaboration either with a family or with another agency, be careful not to accidentally leave out important people or agencies. Ask collaborators you trust who the key players are. It is worthwhile to bring families into the decision-making process whenever possible, even though this requires extra time and effort.

- **What would you do if you discovered that you had inadvertently left out a key decision maker?**

## LACK OF A COMMON VISION

Lack of a common goal and differences in ideas about how best to reach that goal are the most frequent



collaboration pitfalls, whether you are working with an individual family or with an interagency group. Taking the time to explore the vision and develop goals everyone supports will pay off in the long run.

- **Why does it work well for a CASA/GAL volunteer to be a leader in keeping everyone focused on a common vision?**

### **LACK OF AGREED-UPON GROUND RULES**

Many potential collaborations fail because participants don't take the time to establish some ground rules everyone involved can agree on. The process of agreeing on ground rules is as important as the list you come up with. Ground rules generally include expectations regarding confidentiality, participation, time frames, and other concerns of group members.

- **Why should ground rules be set right from the start?**

### **LACK OF SKILL IN WORKING CONSTRUCTIVELY WITH CONFLICT**

Conflict is inevitable in collaborations. It can even be a benefit because it can help the group understand each person's or agency's point of view. Good communication skills will go a long way toward resolving conflict. These skills include listening well, reflecting what another person tells you (to make sure you understand), and expressing your thoughts and feelings respectfully.

- **Why are good listening skills a key to addressing conflict?**

### **LACK OF APPROPRIATE INCENTIVE**

In the best situations, people want to collaborate on behalf of a child just because they see a need and want to help. In reality, it is often unrealistic to expect the families or other agencies to put much time into collaborating unless they can benefit in some way. People and agencies already have too much to do without taking on new projects. Incentives can help the collaboration process by encouraging people to join and stay with the effort. If you are the one calling people together to discuss a possible collaboration, you can begin by briefly explaining what you are concerned about, what you want to do about it, and

why you need their help. Then you can ask for their ideas and reasons for joining in (and what would keep them away from collaborating). This first step works equally well with families and other agencies.

- **How can you, as a CASA/GAL volunteer, help others to see the benefits of using a collaborative approach?**

The materials on collaboration were adapted from *Empowerment Skills for Family Workers*, Christiann Dean, Cornell Empowering Families Project, August 1996. Used with permission.



# Keys to Effective Communication

The way you communicate—and set the stage to help others communicate—can go a long way toward avoiding a conflict or dissipating one. The basic keys include the following:

- Pay attention to nonverbal cues that suggest a discrepancy between what the speaker is thinking or feeling and what he/she is saying. Bring these issues out in the open (but be diplomatic).
- Watch for hidden or incorrect assumptions—your own or the other person’s. Bring them out in the open so mistakes can be corrected. Use reflective listening—state back what you believe you heard the other person say and ask if you understood correctly.
- Work toward open channels of communication. Say what you think or feel diplomatically, and encourage the other party to open up and talk to you, too.
- Be clear. If something is unclear to you, ask for clarification so you understand. And if someone else seems unclear, check this out and then provide the necessary explanations yourself.
- Learn to listen well. Do so with interest and concern and respect. You want to show empathy, and to indicate that the speaker is being heard and understood. Also, listen attentively without interruption or judgment. From time to time reflect back what you’ve heard to show the other person you’re following the conversation.
- Express your feelings and needs in a non-threatening way, using “I” statements. Avoid “you” statements, which can make the other person feel judged, put down, or blamed. An example of a “you” statement would be “You never obey your curfew.” An “I” statement is one in which the speaker takes responsibility for his/her feelings, such as “I feel worried when you come home late.” An “I” statement is less likely to put the receiver on the defensive, thus keeping channels of communication open.

Adapted from *Resolving Conflict: With Others and Within Yourself*,  
Gini Graham Scott, Oakland, CA:  
New Harbinger Publications, 1990.



# Principled Negotiation

Principled negotiation is a method through which issues are decided on their merits rather than through a haggling process focused on what each side says it will and won't do. The method of principled negotiation can be boiled down to four basic points:

## 1. PEOPLE: Separate the people from the problem.

There is an eighty-twenty rule of negotiating for agreement: Listen eighty percent of the time and talk twenty percent of the time. By using effective communication skills, by listening without interruptions, by asking questions, by not arguing, by admitting your own errors, and by empathizing with the others involved, conflict can be resolved. If you are dealing with an angry person, in order to allow yourself and the other to separate out real issues, do the following:

- Change the environment (e.g., move to a different place for your meeting).
- Schedule a series of short meetings (e.g., spend fifteen minutes, and if the person is still angry, schedule again for the next day, and so on, until the anger is dissipated).
- Don't be afraid to bring in a mediator if necessary to help resolve the dispute.

## 2. INTERESTS: Focus on interests, not positions.

Find out the background behind each position, then step back from the positions to see what the interests are. Ask "Why is that position important? What's getting in the way of accepting my position?" Then make positive statements. Say what you do want rather than what you don't want.

## 3. OPTIONS: Generate a variety of possibilities before deciding what to do.

Have suggestions available, but don't get too tied to them. Brainstorm, don't evaluate. Be encouraging. Keep a list in case you decide on a mutual solution that doesn't work. Watch out for "killer phrases," such as "You did a really good job today, but . . ." or "We

tried that before and it won't work." Use building phrases, such as "We haven't tried that yet."

## 4. CRITERIA: Insist that the result be based on some objective standard.

Ask "How will we know if the solution works? How will we measure the success?" Everyone should agree on criteria focusing on success of the solution, not the process. Remember, individuals don't fail, solutions do. If you are dealing with attitudes, figure out the behavior that attitude is affecting. Reason together which standards are acceptable to all.

After going through the negotiation process, check the objective criteria within two weeks. Finally, remember you cannot resolve all conflicts this way (about five percent don't work) but try this process first.

Adapted from *Getting to Yes*, Roger Fisher, William Ury, and Bruce Patton, New York: Penguin Books, 1991.

