



In the Court of Common Pleas
Lucas County, Ohio
Juvenile Division

VOICES PROCEDURES

Purpose

Why should youth ages 10 and older be encouraged to participate in court hearings?

- **Complies with research establishing that foster youth want to be heard in court;**
- **Sharpens the court's focus on the needs of the child;**
- **Empowers youth to advocate for themselves and to learn to express themselves; and**
- **Provides youth with more complete information on issues that affect their lives.**

Procedures

1. CASA/GAL shall encourage every youth, age 10 and older, to attend and have the opportunity to speak privately to the Judge or Magistrate at all court hearings (beginning with the first Dispositional Hearing, i.e., the Disposition portion of the Adjudication/Disposition Hearing).

2. At least 14 days prior to every hearing, the CASA/GAL shall meet with each youth age 10 and older and discuss this opportunity with the child. The CASA/GAL should bring a VOICES form (found at www.casakids.net) for each child to this meeting.

A. For youth who do **not** wish to attend the hearing, the youth should sign the VOICES form waiving his/her presence at the hearing. The signed waiver form should be presented by the CASA/GAL to the Judge or Magistrate before each hearing.

B. For youth who wish to attend the hearing, the CASA/GAL shall have the youth sign the VOICES form requesting attendance at the hearing **and**:

- Email the caseworker and the caseworker's supervisor, no less than 7 days prior to the hearing, and request that the caseworker arrange for the youth to be transported to court for the hearing.
- Discuss with the youth whether he/she would like to meet alone with the Judge or Magistrate or have another person present for support. Inform the youth that the meeting will be informal and that the youth will be asked how he/she is doing in school and in placement. Encourage the youth to feel free to ask any questions or discuss any issue during their meeting(s) with the Judge or Magistrate.
- Before the hearing begins, the CASA/GAL shall notify the Judge or Magistrate that the youth is present and who the youth wishes to have in the courtroom for support.

VOICES PROCEDURES

(Continued)

Should youth be invited to the mediation? No, Mediation usually takes several hours, and the youth does not need to attend the Mediation to participate in the VOICES program. If the Mediation is successful and the youth wants to speak to the Judge or Magistrate, the CASA/GAL should notify the Judge or Magistrate and all parties that the youth wants to participate in VOICES and the original Adj./Disp. hearing date and time shall become the child's VOICES hearing.

What if there is a no contact order between the child and his/her parent or guardian or the youth is not comfortable attending court at the same time as the parent/guardian? The VOICES hearing should be scheduled on a different date and time so the child does not come into contact with the parent in question. Contact the CASA office and arrangements may be made for the youth to come to court at a different time. It is still the CASA/GAL's responsibility to notify the caseworker at least 7 days prior to the youth's court date for the caseworker to transport the youth to the hearing.

Does the VOICES procedure apply to youth who are in a Planned Permanent Living Arrangement (PPLA)? No, all youth who are scheduled for a PPLA Hearing or Annual Review are expected to attend every hearing. These youth should not be offered the option to waive their presence at the PPLA Hearings or Annual Reviews.

Can youth under the age of 10 participate in the VOICES program? Yes, any party may request of the court the appearance of a child under the age of 10. The CASA/GAL should inform the court of the child's wish to participate and explain why it would be appropriate for the younger child.

What if the youth is unable to participate due to diminished mental capacity? A child 10 or older with diminished mental capacity may be excused from the hearing by the court upon the filing of a motion by LCCS or any other party requesting the excusal of the child from the hearing. Contact the CASA office if this applies to your CASA youth.