

Keeping #EyesOnKids During COVID-19

A COMMUNITY RESOURCE FROM
The Virginia Department of Criminal Justice Services

April 2020



In this time of social distancing, we must all work to remain socially close to children. Child abuse and neglect is likely on the rise in the face of this pandemic, as families are put under more financial and emotional stress, but reporting may be down. Children are no longer in the public eye—they are not at schools or daycare, or in other locations where caring adults would be able to spot signs of abuse.

One group of people who speak up for children is CASA volunteers. They work with children in the child welfare system who have experienced abuse or neglect. They meet with children in person at least monthly, advocate for children's best interests and provide information to judges that helps them make the most well-informed decisions for each child.

These in-person visits provide an opportunity for CASA volunteers to ensure the child is safe and well-cared for. But right now, meeting in person with the children they advocate for is difficult or impossible. This means it is harder for them to gauge what is going on in children's lives, and their needs.

Staff and volunteers throughout the Commonwealth of Virginia are finding creative ways to continue to meet with children. Volunteers are using technology, meeting with children via skype, FaceTime, and Zoom. Meetings are held at a safe social distance on the street at foster homes and neighborhoods.

This kind of creativity is what will make a real difference in children's lives right now. It is the kind of creativity that people in all sectors of society are demonstrating.

If you are willing to get involved in a life-changing and sometimes life-saving cause—the safety, health and well-being of a child—join us in speaking up for a child at this time of community crisis. When the world re-opens, the need will be greater than ever.

- Those who want to change a child's life as a CASA volunteer can use this time to learn more about the children we serve and the process of becoming a volunteer advocate.
- Some local programs are hosting virtual training sessions during this time to prepare for an influx of cases.
- It's up to all of us to make sure children are safe. Here are some resources to learn more or report suspected abuse or neglect:
 - If you suspect a child is in immediate danger, contact the police or 9-1-1.
 - To report suspected abuse or neglect, contact the Virginia Department of Social Services Child Abuse Hotline at [1-800-552-7096](tel:1-800-552-7096).
 - You can also contact the Childhelp National Child Abuse Hotline via text, phone or online chat, to report abuse or if you are afraid you might hurt someone at www.childhelp.org/childhelp-hotline.
 - For information on preventing abuse, visit the website of Child Abuse America at preventchildabuse.org.
 - For information on the Virginia CASA programs, visit virginiacasa.org.
- If you are a parent or caregiver who needs support, contact the National Parent Hotline at [1-855-427-2736](tel:1-855-427-2736) or go to www.nationalparenthelpline.org/what-we-do.