

# CASA Continuing Ed Class

## "Building Rapport With Children"

Nurturing relationships between CASA  
Volunteers & the Children they serve.

Tuesday, July 14<sup>th</sup>, 2009

## Class Overview

- |           |   |
|-----------|---|
| 6:30-6:45 | Welcome & Housekeeping  |
| 6:45-7:30 | Class objectives & guidelines<br>Definition of rapport<br>The importance of Rapport<br>Review Rapport-Building<br>Do's & Don'ts<br>Age-Appropriate Activities |
| 7:30-7:45 | Break   |
| 7:45-8:15 | Small Group Exercises   |
| 8:15-8:30 | Questions & Wrap-Up   |

# What is Rapport?

- Rapport is a relationship of mutual understanding or trust between people.
- Rapport is born of mutual confidence, respect and acceptance.

# Why is rapport important?

- You are the voice of an abused child in court. To be an effective advocate, you must perform a thorough, independent investigation of a child's situation and best interests.
- Developing rapport and trust with the child is one of your most important responsibilities. Rapport is the foundation of your relationship with the child.
- You can assess what the child needs and what the child wants only if you have established a relationship that allows the child to honestly share his/her feelings.



Trust...  
is the cornerstone  
of building rapport.

What does trust look and  
feel like?

A relationship characterized by rapport and trust . . .

- Should be built on a sincere interest in the child as a person as well as the child's well-being.

***Isn't this why we're CASA Volunteers?***

# A relationship characterized by rapport and trust . . .

- Takes time and energy.

CASA Volunteers should know that the children have been hurt. So even if you get a cold shoulder, just understand that they don't know who to trust. Don't think they are bad; it is just a security wall.

*~Words spoken by a 16-year-old about the CASA volunteer relationship with a child*

A relationship characterized by rapport and trust . . . .

- Involves actively listening to the child's words and observing his/her nonverbal cues.
- Must be earned and maintained with small, consistent, specific acts.

# A relationship characterized by rapport and trust . . .

- Requires honesty in all communication with the child.
- Is developed for the benefit of the child, not the adult. Keep the focus of your efforts on the welfare of the child.

# How Do You Build Rapport With Children?

- Through positive interaction and that is non-threatening, empathetic (understanding), and engaging.

# Remember...

Overall, rapport-building trumps the interviewing process!

You will always absorb information about the child while building your relationship with them; adversely, you are unlikely to have quality communication without taking the time to establish trust and rapport first.

# Rapport-Building Tips

- **Introduce Yourself**

Offer your name, give the child a small idea of why you are there, and clarify your role with them on subsequent visits.

- **Choose a calm environment.**

Choose a familiar, relaxed atmosphere and minimal distractions. Wear casual clothing during your visit with a child.

# Rapport-Building Tips

- **Watch your body language.**

Use mirroring to imitate a child's body language and posture. Place yourself at or below the child's level to diminish your "authoritative image".

- **Find Common Ground by Learning About the Child.** Ask questions about the child's interests, school, pets, drawings, etc. to find a launching point for conversations. Share bits of information about yourself with the child in the process.

# Rapport-Building Tips

- **Use Active Listening.**

Focus on the information being relayed to you and reflect the information back to the child for accuracy.

- **Choose your words**

Be sensitive to the developmental level of the child and use age-appropriate phrasing.

# Rapport-Building Tips

- **Use Open-Ended & Indirect Questions.**

These create a narrative between the CASA Volunteer and child, allow the child to “steer” the conversation, and prevents the CASA Volunteer from asking “leading questions”.

- **Keep Little Hands Busy.**

Bring Play-Doh, Legos, bubbles, blocks, puzzles, and other small toys that will give the child a focal point while talking to you. This will reduce anxiety and give you an opportunity to play with the child.

# Rapport-Building Tips

- **Engage the Child in Play.**

Throw a ball, read a book, walk around the block, draw pictures...anything that offers you a chance to focus on the child and take a break from the interview. Remember, children have short attention spans and require frequent breaks.

- **Handle Conversations Lightly.**

Begin with neutral topics & signal topic changes to the child. Ex. "Is it O.K. if we talk about the visitation you had with your mom last week?"

# Barriers to Rapport-Building



# Barriers to Rapport-Building

Don't...

- Use legal terminology or acronyms
- Make promises you cannot keep.
- Be afraid of silence.
- Do not “over-talk”.

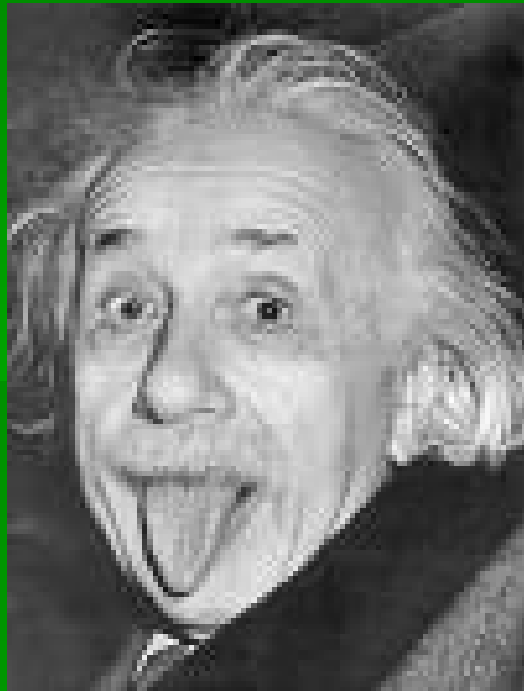
# More Barriers...

Don't...

- Comment on or criticize the child's behaviors.
- Evaluate case activity to the child.
- Breach a sensitive topic without establishing a relationship with the child.
- Step outside of your role as a CASA Volunteer when building relationships.

# Rapport-Building By Age Groups.

Why?



Because it's all relative!

# Age 0 to 2 Years Old (Infants & Toddlers)

- About this age group: This is the most crucial time in a child's life for developing their physiological capacity to build trust and establish relationships. Children at this age learn to build trust based on the fulfillment of their basic needs. Their brains and bodies are growing at very high rates.

# Age 0 to 2 Years Old (Infants & Toddlers)

Build Rapport by:

- Playing Peek-A-Boo or Pat-A-Cake
- Blow Bubbles.
- Speak in a soothing voice.
- Smiling
- Reading Books
- Use Unstructured Play, such as stacking objects & playing with assorted toys.



# Age 2 to 5 Year-Olds:



- About this age group: Children this age want to please adults and be praised. They are learning about how relationships work.

# Age 2 to 5 Year-Olds:

Build Rapport by:

- Use short, simple sentences with terms the child knows.
- Use play figures, animals, and cars to engage in structured play.
- Invite them to recite their ABC's & 123's.
- Read Books.
- Play the "Squiggle Game".
- Avoid asking questions involving time

# Age 6 to 9 Year-Olds:

- About this age group: Children this age still want to please adults, but are learning how to manipulate their interactions with adults. They are growing more autonomous and are becoming self-directed.

# Age 6 to 9 Year-Olds:

- Build Rapport by:
- Asking them about holidays, pets, school, and friends.
- Playing “Hangman”
- Drawing self-portraits, houses, cars, their family
- Playing with Legos and Play-Doh
- Play the “3 Wishes” Game

# Age 10-13 Year-Olds (Pre-Teens)

- About this age group: This age is learning to test the system. They still want to impress, but will hold back information. These children are developing meta-cognitive skills and often have jokes, secret codes, and secretive languages, such as Pig Latin.

# Age 10-13 Year-Olds (Pre-Teens)

- Build Rapport by:
- Letting them lead the conversation.
- Try noticing things that they look interested in and learn about them.
- Challenging them with board games & puzzles.
- Talking about subjects in school that they excel in.
- Play the “Debate Game”

# Age 14-18 Year-Olds (Teenagers)

- About this age group: This age group is seeking independence and personal identity. They want to be treated as adults and will be more open if treated as adults. Be aware that they will lie to you and will attempt to startle you.

# Age 14-18 Year-Olds (Teenagers)

Build Rapport by:

- Taking interest in their hobbies, movies, and musical tastes.
- Talk about dating, friends, classes, sports, and extra-curricular activities.
- Listen to their speech & learn some of their slang words.
- Urge them to talk about how they envision their future.

# Small Group Activity

- Read the scenario given to your group.
- On a piece of paper, have one member of your group record the steps you would take to begin building a relationship with the child in your scenario.
- Remember to note your selected environment, tone of voice, vocabulary choice, and demeanor with the child.

## Scenario #1:

- George is a 5 year-old victim of child neglect who has been out-of-home for 6 months. He is now residing in a kinship foster placement with his Uncle Leo and his cousins Sam and Susan. George presently has supervised visits with his mother twice per month, and his mother has attended 10 out of 12 visits. George is described by his caseworker as “very shy” and has a moderate delay in his speech development that interferes with his language skills. He speaks little to anyone and often plays by himself, but has several fire trucks that he carries in his pockets. George sometimes gets “lost in the shuffle” around his cousins.

## Scenario #2:

- Jerry is an 11 year-old boy who was taken into the State's custody subsequent to the arrest of his mother for Possession of a Controlled Dangerous Substance. Jerry's mother, Helen, is incarcerated at the Kay County Jail and his father is unknown. Jerry has resided in a kinship foster placement with his grandmother, Dorothy, for 8 months. Jerry has been diagnosed with ADHD, but irregularly takes his prescription medicine for this condition. His grandmother has difficulty forcing him to take the medicine. Jerry's caseworker states that his hyperactivity and behavioral problems disrupt his classroom and interfere with his schoolwork. Jerry's caseworker also states that he "is a likeable kid" but that "he is difficult to talk to because he never stays on-topic for long".

## Scenario #3:

- Elaine is a 15 year-old girl who has been in foster care for 4 years. Elaine's parent's rights have been terminated and she has recently been placed in a group home after running away from her 3rd potential adoptive placement. Elaine told her caseworker that she was "done with this adoption crap" because "everyone just wants to change me" and that she'll "be gone as soon as she can get her hands on some money and a ride". Elaine has multiple piercings on her face and body, tattoos on her arms and neck, dresses like a "Goth" and listens to Screamo music. She listens to her MP3 player for most of the day instead of socializing with the other group home residents. Elaine has refused your first two phone calls to her at the group home.

## Scenario #4:

- Stella is a 6-month old infant who was removed from her mother from birth after her mother tested positive for cocaine. DHS was unable to find stable family members for foster placement, so Stella has been placed in traditional foster care. Stella's foster parents have expressed interest in adopting her. Stella's mother and boyfriend are attending all of the bi-weekly visits with Stella, but they are making no further progress on their treatment plans. Stella's natural father has been terminated by default due to chronic child abuse charges. Stella's caseworker states that she appears to be a happy, normally-developing baby

# Activity Results:



# Recap:

- Developing rapport and trust with the child is one of your most important responsibilities.
- It is the foundation of your relationship with the child and essential in advocating for children.
- Engage youth in non-threatening, empathetic ways.
- Learn about your CASA child.
- Listen to your CASA child.
- Invest in your relationship with your CASA child, it will pay dividends for them in *their* future.