

GAL for Minors Volunteer Checklist



Preliminary Evaluation of Case

- Review initial appointment documents from court.
- Review the GAL manual for guidance and information about the appointment documents.
- Identify parties to the case and their relationship to minor.
- Make notes of pertinent missing information, if any.
- Identify initial questions that come to mind.
- Consider in what order you would like to interview the parties.
- Decide where you would like to conduct interviews (at CVLS, your office, or elsewhere).
- Select how you want parties to contact you, and set up a Google Voice account if desired.

Getting Started

- Call the parties to introduce yourself and gather basic information or, in the alternative, write a letter to the parties asking them to call you to set up an appointment.
- Verify that contact information on the appointment order is accurate.
- Verify relation of the parties to the minor and their objectives in the case.
- Set interview times, dates, and location. Avoid any appointment overlap in contentious cases.
- Tell parties what you would like them to bring. See list at bottom of intake questionnaire (proof of residence, income, and public benefits, documents relating to minors' schooling, etc.)
- Keep conversation short—parties will have a chance to tell their story at the interview.
- Make sure parties have your preferred contact information.
- If you cannot reach parties by phone or do not hear back quickly, send letters to the parties asking them to contact you immediately at your preferred phone number.

Conducting Interviews

- Review appropriate section on interviewing adults and children in GAL manual.
- Interview each party separately in private, including children over the age of two or three.
- Clearly explain your role as the GAL. You represent the child and only the child.
- Complete adult questionnaire for adults, and relevant questionnaire for minors (either the adolescent form or that for young children). Don't, however, be limited to the questions on the form. Ask any additional questions you have. Pay attention to answers, particularly, and ask appropriate follow up questions.
- Take some notes during interviews with adults but be sure to listen carefully and watch body language as well.
- Obtain any relevant documentation the person brought make copies if you might need it.. Return originals to the parties.
- Obtain contact information for other helpful contacts: teachers, counselors, etc.
- Make sure parties are aware of the next court date, time, and location.
- Take notes after interviews on factual information and your personal impressions and observations of the parties.
- Make a list of the remaining documents and information you still need from the parties.

- Consider whether you will need releases to speak to doctors, therapists or the like. IF you do, have form releases available and have the parties sign them before the interview ends. Adult parties must sign to release their own information. If you need a release for the child's information, have the parent and guardian sign separate forms. IF you are not sure that you will need releases, contact CVLS prior to the interviews.

Conducting Your Investigation

- Consider what other information you need for your investigation. Consult manual for ideas.
- Write a letter to the parties formally requesting the rest of the information or documents or releases that you need from them.
- Conduct criminal background checks on all adult parties in the home or proposed home.
- Request DCFS documents relevant to the case, if any.
- Consider whether a home study would be helpful.
- Consider asking the court to order adult parties to take drug tests if case involves drug history.
- Reach out to others who might provide helpful information (doctors, teachers, counselors, etc.).
- Follow up with parties as needed.
- Contact CVLS to give a brief summary of what you have learned through your investigation so far.

Analysis

- Familiarize yourself with statute and then consider the relevant factors in your case, *i.e.*, best interests of the minor, whether a parent seeking to discharge can show a change of circumstances, etc.
- Consider what your recommendation will be, if you know, or what other information you need.
- Consider whether your parties need referrals for services (counseling, therapy, parenting classes, DCFS services, medical services, tutoring, mediation, etc.).
- Contact CVLS to discuss your case. We are happy to brainstorm with you.

Preparing a Report

- Review the section on GAL reports in your manual.
- Include all relevant information you have gathered, with a separate heading for each party.
- Refer to each party by one name throughout the report, for example, using their name, or title such as Mother, Guardian, etc.
- Report proven information as factual. If you have not seen proof, say "Mother states/alleges X"
- Keep the body of your report factual. Save all opinions and recommendations until the end.
- Prepare any draft orders you plan or hope to have entered (continuance, drug test, home study).

Submitting a Report

- Email a copy of your report to CVLS for review. If possible, get it to us 5 to 7 days before your court date. Always keep us up-to-date on the status of your case.
- Deliver courtesy copy to 1806 at least three days in advance of your court date, or email it to CVLS so that we can deliver it for you. Your courtesy copy does not need to be signed.
- If possible, send courtesy copies of your report to the parties.
- Bring multiple copies of your report to your court date-- at least one for each party, one for you, and one original, signed report for the court.

Courtroom Logistics

- Finalize any last-minute conversations with the parties in the hallway before entering the courtroom.
- Alert one of the sheriffs on the 18th floor if your case is especially contentious or if you are concerned that a physical altercation may occur.
- Check-in with the clerk when you arrive and hand her all of the copies your report, with the signed original on top. She will file stamp all of them, keep the original, and return all copies to you. Give a copy to each party and give them time to read it before your case is called. Let the clerk know if you are ready for your case to be called or whether you are waiting for someone else to arrive.
- Wait for your case to be called.

Presenting your Case

- When your case is called, approach the bench and introduce yourself as the GAL from CVLS.
- Wait for the judge to identify the parties and for the clerk to swear them in.
- Give the judge a moment to initiate proceedings, or offer to give the judge an oral update.
- Give a verbal presentation of the status of your case and what you would like the court to do.
- Speak clearly and only directly to the judge, referring to him or her as "Your Honor" or "Judge."
- Do not respond to anything a party says until the judge indicates that it is your turn to do so. Never speak directly to the party, only to the judge.
- Listen closely to what the judge says and take notes so that you can alter your draft orders according to the judge's instructions.
- Step outside to finalize any details, such as a visitation schedule for example.
- If you need another court date, ask the clerk for an available date.
- If you don't have a prepared order, draft the order using a blank order and carbon copies.
- If there is another attorney in your case, show your order to the attorney for his/her approval before you submit it to the court.
- Hand your draft order to the clerk for the judge's review and signature and sit down to wait.
- When the order is ready, give a copy to each party. The clerk can make copies if necessary.
- After you leave, mail a copy to all parties who were not present in court.

Case Closure

- Your case will likely involve multiple court dates. Your case is closed when a guardian is discharged, a Petition for Guardianship is granted or denied, and/or the matter is otherwise resolved with no future court dates.
- Make sure all parties understand the outcome and have a copy of your report and all court orders.
- Make sure to let CVLS know the outcome of your case.
- Complete the CVLS case closure form and return it to CVLS in person or by email, fax, or mail.
- Let us know if you are interested in another case, either now or in the future!

Thanks for all your hard work!