

Connect, Nurture, & Change: How to Engage a Child

Leannah Farbotko, LCSW, LICSW
Wondering Together Counseling
SafeSpot Fairfax Child Advocacy Center



Objectives



- Introduce **practical activities** and techniques aimed at helping children feel safe and comfortable in communicating with CASA advocates, emphasizing the importance of **building trust and rapport**.
- Explore age-appropriate strategies **and talking points for engaging children in meaningful conversations**, while also considering the varying developmental stages and backgrounds of the children served.
- Provide advocates with **activities** and interaction techniques tailored to different ages and stages, equipping them with skills to **support children in a supportive and trauma-informed manner**.

Connect, Nurture, and Change

“CASA is a child advocacy organization that seeks to provide trained volunteers to speak for abused and neglected children who are the subjects of juvenile court proceedings. CASA volunteers advocate for safe, permanent homes for children.”

What are some
behaviors you have
noticed when you meet
with a child or teen for
the first time?

Connect, Nurture, and Change





Creating Connection

- Environment: Where are you meeting with this child? What potential stressors are in that environment? What may this child need to feel comfortable?
- Position: You are an adult and therefore automatically in a position of authority. Consider softening your tone of voice, get on the child's eye level, and smile.
- Activity: Engage in what the child is doing or offer options for an activity that is age-appropriate.

Your Connection Toolkit

Toddlers- Kitchen Play Set, Books, Musical Instruments (Tupperware and Spoons work), Puppets

Ages 4-12: Games (Jenga and Candy Land) Magna-Tiles, Legos, Look and Find Books, Art Supplies, White Board

Ages 13+: Tablet to play a game or watch a movie or Youtube video, Games (Uno, Checkers, Pictionary), Art Supplies, Over the Door Basketball Hoop.





Acknowledge.

Do not assume their emotions.

Show interest and be consistent.

Keep showing up.

**What are your favorite
tools for connecting with
children and teens?**

Nurturing Trust



- Listen.
- Explain who you are.
- Avoid promises.
- Tell them the truth.
- Offer options.
- Ask what they think and feel.

Introductions

1. Introduce your name and what the child can call you. “Hi, I am Leannah. You can call me Ms. Leannah or Ms. L. What is your name? What do you like for me to call you?”
2. Introduce your pronouns and ask for their pronoun preference. “I prefer she and her pronouns, what do you prefer?”
3. Explain your Role and Ask Questions:
 - Ages 10+- “What do you know about what is happening with your family and the court process right now? My role in that is to be your advocate, which means I work for you to help the court understand the best way to keep you safe. We will work together as a team to communicate to the judge what is best for you. What questions do you have?”
 - Younger Child- I am an advocate. My job is to help you stay safe and happy. What is something that keeps you safe in the car? (a car seat). What makes you happy? (Chocolate cake makes me happy). As we get to know each other I keep these things in mind to help you stay safe in other places. Another part of my job is to help the judge at court understand who you are and what is best for you and your siblings/family. What questions do you have?”

Nurturing Trust: Toddlers 0-3

- Play based on imagination and independence.
- Give positive attention and offer choices.
- Get on their level both physically and through play.
- Ensure the environment is safe and child friendly and be aware of schedule.
- Consider the child's attachment to caregivers and respect that it will take time for them to warm up to you.

Kitchen Play Set
Books
Musical Instruments
Puppets

Nurturing Trust: Ages 4-12

Games

Magna-Tiles or Legos

Look and Find Books

Art Supplies

White Board

Basketball Hoop or Football

Younger Children (4-8):

- Show interest in their activities by asking what they are doing in their play. “I see you are building a tower. What lives in the tower?”
- Use labelled praises. “I like the way you put the red car on the road.” “I like the way you let me know you were upset.”

Pre-Teens (9-12):

- Children this age are constantly listening and watching.
- They may not trust authority or may be afraid of getting into trouble.
- Show interest in the activities they like. Ask them questions about games they play, characters they like, etc.

Situation: During your second meeting with an 8-year-old girl who is in foster care for the third time, she begins to break your crayons and throw them across the room. What could you do?

Nurturing Trust: Ages 13+

- Teenagers are more aware of what is happening. Therefore, it is important to be honest and answer their questions.
- Remember significant events
- Ask questions about activities other than school.
- Do not try to use slang or phrases unless you are certain of their meaning.
- Follow through with promises.

Tablet
Games
Journal
Art Supplies
Basketball Hoop

Jenga Question Game Ideas

If you were an animal, what would you be?
What is your favorite sport to play or watch?
Would you rather play in the pool or the snow?
What is your biggest pet peeve?
What is one chore you enjoy doing?
What video always makes you laugh?
How would your friends describe you?
What superpower would you want to have?
What is your favorite time of year?
What three things would you take with you to space?
Where would you like to travel too or visit?
If you had an endless amount of money, what would you do?
Would you rather be a cowboy or an astronaut?

What fruit would you be and why?
What is something that helps to calm you down?
Books? Movies? Or TV Shows?
Would you rather go to the beach or the mountains?
What is something that you are afraid of?
If you could be a bird for a day, where would you fly?
What is your favorite character from a book or movie?
Would you rather give up cheese or bread?
What is your favorite cereal?
If you were president, what would you do?
What artist would you like to see in concert?
Would you prefer to paint or draw?
What is your favorite meal?
Would you rather be a pirate or a ninja?

Situation: You are meeting a 16-year-old boy for the first time, who was recently removed from his parents. You introduce yourself and he continues to ignore you and not make eye contact. What could you try to engage him?

Fostering Change



- Involve them in the process when appropriate.
- Empower their voice.
- Be available for questions.
- Prepare them for changes.

*What are your ideas for fostering change
and ways you can empower their voice?*

Video Title: Trauma & Play Therapy: Holding Hard Stories | Paris
Goodyear-Brown, MSSW, LCSW, RPTS
Link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SbeS5iezIDA>

In what ways did she connect with this child? Remember Environment, Position, Activity

How did she nurture trust?

How could she foster change for this child?

“I see what you are showing me, and you can show me more.”



