



Navigating Conflict with Confidence

Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA)

Volunteer Training

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Today's Agenda



Your CASA Role & Setting Boundaries



Understanding the 5 TKI Conflict Styles



Problem-Solving Strategies in the Field



Navigating Difficult Parent Interactions



When Parents Try to Divide the Team



De-escalation Techniques



Interactive Knowledge Check & Wrap-Up

By the End of This Session You Will Be Able To:

- 1 Understand your unique CASA role when conflict arises
- 2 Identify and apply the 5 Thomas-Kilmann conflict management styles
- 3 Use practical strategies to navigate through difficult parent interactions
- 4 Recognize when a parent is attempting to divide the professional team
- 5 Apply de-escalation techniques to manage heightened emotions

Who You Are as an Advocate

Your CASA Role

- ✓ Voice for the child's best interests
- ✓ Independent from legal & social work teams
- ✓ Neutral fact-finder, not an advocate for any adult
- ✓ Observer and reporter to the court
- ✓ Relationship builder — NOT a service provider

⚠ What You Are NOT

- ✗ A counselor or therapist
- ✗ A friend or ally of the parent
- ✗ A decision-maker for placement
- ✗ A mediator between adults
- ✗ A messenger for any party

CONFLICT is ...

1

Any situation that occurs when individuals or groups perceive differences or incompatibilities in their goals, interests, values or perspectives.

2

3

5



THE 5 TKI CONFLICT STYLES

Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument

Conflict style is shaped by two dimensions:

ASSERTIVENESS
(concern for self)

COOPERATIVENESS
(concern for others)

Together, these two dimensions create 5 distinct ways people respond to conflict.

Understanding YOUR style — and others' — is the first step to navigating conflict effectively.

→ Let's explore all five...

How People Respond to Conflict

Avoiding

Sidesteps conflict. Low assertive, low cooperative. Sometimes appropriate for low-stakes issues.

Competing

Pursues own goals at others' expense. High assertive, low cooperative. Use only in urgent crises.

Accommodating

Yields to others. Low assertive, high cooperative. Useful when preserving relationships matters most.

Compromising

Both parties give something up. Low assertiveness and high cooperative. Quick fix, but may leave gaps.

Collaborating

Win-win approach. High assertive, high cooperative. Best for CASA — takes time but builds trust.



KNOWLEDGE CHECK #1

True or False?

"Collaborating is not always the best conflict style to use in every situation."

TRUE

FALSE

Styles That Fit Different Situations

Avoiding

Minor misunderstanding with a parent early in the relationship — let it go for now.

Accommodating

Parent needs to feel heard — allow space before redirecting to the child's needs.

Compromising

Scheduling visit conflicts — find a middle ground that works for everyone.

Competing

Child's immediate safety is at risk — stand firm, involve supervisor now.

Collaborating

Long-term case plan — bring parties together for problem-solving.

Practical Tools for the Field

Stay Curious, Not Judgmental

Ask open-ended questions: "Help me understand what concerns you most about this situation."
Curiosity disarms defensiveness.

Focus on Interests, Not Positions

The parent says "I want more visits." To understand the reasons why, you can say, "please tell me more."

Separate People from Problems

Stay focused on the challenges, not the parents.
Work side-by-side on the issue, not face-to-face against each other.

Use 'And' Instead of 'But'

"I understand you feel frustrated AND I need to make sure Sofia attends school" keeps both truths in the room.



KNOWLEDGE CHECK #2

True or False?

"As a CASA volunteer, your primary job in conflict is to help parents get along."

TRUE

FALSE



When Parents Become Challenging

Common challenging behaviors you may encounter:

Hostility / Anger

Stay calm. Use a low, steady voice. Give them space to express feelings before responding.

Crying / Despair

Acknowledge the emotion: "I can see how painful this is for you."
Don't minimize. Gently refocus.

Stonewalling

Don't force conversation. Try: "I'm here when you're ready to talk. I want to understand your view."

Accusations / Blame

Don't defend or argue. Write it down and report to your supervisor. Stay fact-focused.

Manipulation

Be consistent and boundary. Avoid promises. Redirect: "I'm here to support what's best for [child]."

Refusing Contact

Document it. Don't take it personally. Inform your supervisor and continue attempts.



KNOWLEDGE CHECK #3

Yes or No?

A parent is crying and upset. You should end the visit immediately and report the situation.

YES

NO

When a Parent Tries to Split the Team (i.e. GAL, DSS, etc.)

⚠️ This is one of the most common and challenging situations CASA volunteers face.

Warning Signs

- Parent says "The GAL doesn't care about you"
- "The social worker is lying — only YOU tell the truth"
- Requests you keep information secret from the team
- Gives you one-sided negative stories about DSS or the GAL
- Asks you to write something in your report for them
- Flattery followed by a request to take sides

How to Respond

- ✓ "I work with everyone on the team to support [child]."
- ✓ Stay neutral — do not agree or disagree with criticism
- ✓ "I'm not able to keep that private from the court."
- ✓ Document the conversation word-for-word
- ✓ Report immediately to your CASA supervisor
- ✓ Do NOT become the messenger between the parent and GAL, DSS or other court representatives



KNOWLEDGE CHECK #4

True or False?

"If a parent asks you to keep something private, it's okay to agree as long as it doesn't seem serious."

TRUE

FALSE

Recognizing an Escalating Situation

Conflict escalates in predictable stages. Recognize them early to intervene effectively.

CALM

Signs: Normal conversation, open body language

Your response: Ideal time for rapport-building and information-gathering

TENSE

Signs: Short answers, crossed arms, voice tightens

Your response: Slow down. Acknowledge: "I can see this is stressful."

UPSET

Signs: Raised voice, pacing, interrupting

Your response: Give space. Lower your own voice. Ask: "Can we sit down?"

VOLATILE

Signs: Shouting, threatening language, physical agitation

Your response: Calmly exit. Do NOT match energy. Call supervisor immediately.

Practical Skills to Calm Heated Situations



Regulate Yourself First

Take a breath before responding.
Your calm IS the intervention.
You cannot de-escalate others if you are escalated.



Active Listening

Make eye contact. Nod. Reflect back: "So what I'm hearing is..."
People escalate when they feel unheard.



Use Calm, Neutral Language

Lower your volume and pace.
Avoid accusatory "you" statements. Use "I" language: "I want to understand your concern."



Invite Them to Sit

Sitting reduces physical arousal.
If possible, move to a quieter space and suggest: "Could we sit for a minute?"



Validate Without Agreeing

"I can understand why you'd feel that way" is NOT agreement — it's acknowledgment. It defuses the emotional charge.



Take a Strategic Pause

"I want to give this the attention it deserves. Can we schedule a time to talk this through?" Delays can reduce intensity.



KNOWLEDGE CHECK #5

Yes or No?

"Raising your voice slightly when a parent raises theirs helps them feel matched and understood."

YES

NO

What Would YOU Do?

Please respond in the chat — apply what you've learned:

Scenario A

A parent calls you and says: "Don't tell my caseworker I told you this, but she's been lying in her reports. You're the only one I trust. Can you fix this for me?"

What is the parent attempting? How do you respond?



Scenario B

During a visit, a father becomes increasingly angry about a court ruling. He stands up, raises his voice, and says: "Nobody around here cares about my family!"

Which escalation stage is this? Name two de-escalation techniques you'd use.



Scenario C


A mother has been consistently pleasant with you, but cancels visits last minute and gives vague answers. She seems disconnected and avoidant.


Which TKI conflict style is she using? What strategy could help?





Your Conflict Navigation Toolkit


5 TKI Styles

 **Avoiding** (unassertive & uncooperative)

 **Accommodating** (unassertive & cooperative)

 **Compromising** (unassertive & cooperative)

 **Competing** (assertive & uncooperative)

 **Collaborating** (assertive & cooperative)

Problem-Solving

Stay curious, not judgmental. Help explore options.

Values relationships over solutions. Focus on interests.

Wants mutually acceptable solutions.

Focus on interests. Goal-oriented despite relationships.

Have conversation to identify problem and explore options.

Strategies

Stay calm, neutral tone and body language

Invite pushback - let them know disagreement is okay

Resist first offer for a solution; review the problem.

Invite to sit, stay calm and grounded. Monitor tone of voice

Strategic pause for long-term solution.

Red Flags

Silence; minimizing or dismissing problems

Saying yes to go along with things even when they disagree or feel hurt

Flattery; rushing; avoiding deeper conversations

One-sided stories; using relationships as leverage

Take a deep-dive at perspective taking; Expecting others to share their perspectives



FINAL KNOWLEDGE CHECK

True or False?

"As a CASA volunteer, your ultimate goal in any conflict is to ensure the child's voice and best interests remain at the center."

TRUE

FALSE

Key Takeaways



Your role is always the child's best interest — stay anchored to that.



Know your TKI style and flex it — different situations need different approaches.



Neutrality is your superpower. Don't be recruited to anyone's side.



De-escalation starts with YOU. Regulate first, then respond.



Document everything. Your observations protect the child and the team.



When in doubt, call your CASA Coordinator. You are never alone in this.

Thank you for your commitment to Virginia's children. You make a difference.

Additional Resources:

- 1 The Myers-Briggs Company www.themyersbriggscompany.com
- 2 A FREE Individual Conflict Mini Assessment (handout) upon request.
- 3 A FREE De-escalation Guide: www.leighrlyons.com

Let's Continue The Conversation:

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