

CASA Summary: 25th Annual Community Response to Child Abuse Conference

Sioux Falls, SD – October 2–3, 2025

Core Themes

- Belonging & Hope: A child's ability to thrive depends on consistent support systems. Failure often stems from lack of support rather than lack of effort. CASA volunteers can embody hope by ensuring children feel valued and connected.
- Connection + Safety: True belonging requires both. Safety without connection leads to isolation; connection without safety leads to abuse. CASAs can bridge this balance by showing up with steady, unconditional compassion.
- Extend compassion to the person you think is the problem: this is the measure of true unconditional compassion.
- Belonging is the safety net or seat belt for when life knocks you off your feet.

Key Takeaways for CASA Volunteers

1. Show Up Consistently

“Showing up” is often more important than perfection. If you overstep, ask forgiveness, but never stop showing up. Even one consistent adult can provide a child with stability that changes their trajectory.

2. Foster Belonging and Compassion

Belonging is subjective: every child defines it differently. Extend compassion even to those you perceive as “the problem”—unconditional care is the measure of true support. Always communicate “You matter” to the child—repetition reinforces self-worth.

3. Trauma-Informed Approach

Trauma-informed care means staying curious about a child's history, rather than reacting to behavior at face value. Recognize that feelings of being “alone” multiply trauma. Connection reduces harm. Example: When a teen lashes out or cries, respond with problem-solving compassion—just as you would with a baby in need.

4. Practical Skills and Tools

- TBRI Principles (Trust-Based Relational Intervention): Use interactive play, genuine interest, and consistent presence to build trust.
- ACEs Awareness (Adverse Childhood Experiences): Understanding ACEs helps CASAs better advocate for trauma-informed systems.
- Atomic Habits Insight: Small, consistent positive actions compound over time. A 1% daily improvement has exponential long-term impact.

5. Self-Awareness for Caregivers and CASAs

Caregiver regulation matters: calm adults create safe spaces. Examine your own triggers—ask “Why does this bother me?” to prevent personal history from influencing interactions. Therapy and self-care are vital: a healthy adult presence supports healthy child development.

CASA Action Steps Post-Conference

- Integrate “You Matter” into every interaction—verbally and through actions.
- Apply TBRI strategies: engage in play, build trust, maintain predictability.
- Seek ACEs training to deepen trauma-informed advocacy.
- Model consistency: be present, reliable, and compassionate, even in small ways.
- Prioritize self-regulation: reflect on personal triggers and pursue therapy/support when needed.