

# Communicating with the Court

Stewart Milner, Chief Judge  
City of Arlington

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**“I speak to everyone in the same way, whether he is the garbage man or the president of the university”  
~ Albert Einstein**

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## “The Law”

▸ Art. 45.056(f) The juvenile case manager shall timely report to the judge who signed the order or judgment and, on request, to the judge assigned to the case or the presiding judge any information or recommendations relevant to assisting the judge in making decisions that are in the best interest of the child.

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### **“More Law”**

45.056(g) The judge who is assigned to the case shall consult with the juvenile case manager who is supervising the case regarding:

- ▶ (1) the child's home environment;
- ▶ (2) the child's developmental, psychological, and educational status;
- ▶ (3) the child's previous interaction with the justice system; and
- ▶ (4) any sanctions available to the court that would be in the best interest of the child.

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**“Be sincere; be brief; be seated” ~ Franklin D. Roosevelt**

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- ▶ You do have to communicate with the Judge.
- ▶ The judge does have to communicate with you.
- ▶ Good communication is always a 2 - way street.

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## Direct Communication

- ▶ The less stops a message makes the less likely there is for misunderstanding.
- ▶ Talk to the judge if you can. If your judge is difficult to meet with see if a planned monthly meeting time will work.
- ▶ Short meetings of 15 minutes or so are best.
- ▶ Face to Face meetings are needed but may not be the preferred method of conveying important information?

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## Written Communication

- ▶ Best way to memorialize practices, policies, laws and important matters.
- ▶ Clear concise writing is best.
- ▶ Never write a long memo unless there is just no other way to communicate the information you have.
- ▶ Bullet points are great if appropriate.
- ▶ Reports are a good way to convey information if they are not too long or involved.

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## Communicating New Ideas and Programs

- ▶ Specifically for Judges – back up what you are suggesting with law or with trends in the law.
  - Laws – provide copy of new or existing law.
  - Trends – provide information about what is behind the trend. Support can come from showing what other courts are doing. Support can come from bills that fail to become law but show the direction legislators want to go.

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**“Wise men talk because they have something to say; fools, because they have to say something” ~ Plato**

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**Communicating New Ideas and Programs**

- ▶ Suggesting a new program is most productive if you can show why it is a benefit and how it can be accomplished.
  - Provide a cost/benefit analysis
  - Provide an explanation of the program and the need it fills
  - Provide a basis in the law (Art. 45.051 will cover most issues)

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**Communicating New Ideas and Programs**

- ▶ If you come up against resistance try more subtle approaches
  - Provide newspaper articles or program pamphlets that talk about the program.
  - Provide any other information that doesn't come directly from you.

Remember, ultimately the judge has the call on what programs to allow unless they are required (like minor alcohol violations)

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Good Communication between a judge and juvenile case manager is essential for the effective processing of juvenile cases.

It is also the law. There may be a hundred different models of what "Good Communication" is.

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**"The difference between the right word and the almost right word is the difference between lightning and a lightning bug" ~ Mark Twain**

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