Case Vignettes
Instructional Guide (Chapter VII)

Twelve vignettes were generated from actual child welfare cases. The names have been changed, and certain elements have been omitted to safeguard confidentiality. While the case information is incomplete, the vignettes are designed to prompt discussion about children’s experiences of safety, family, permanency, and well-being while in care. Accompanying each vignette are standardized questions for discussion, case-specific questions for discussion, and suggested role-playing exercises.

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This chapter can be used to foster the following competencies for public child welfare work: 1.1, 1.5, 1.13, 2.6, 2.9, 2.10, 2.12, 2.14, 2.15, 2.17, 3.1, 3.6, 3.13, 3.19, 3.24, 4.1, 4.5, 5.1, 5.3, 5.6, 5.7, and 5.9.
Audrey

Audrey (age 10) lives with her foster mother (Ms. Gomez) and four other non-kin foster children. Audrey was removed from her mother’s care when she was eight years old and placed in a temporary foster home. The primary reason for her removal was neglect. A year ago she entered Ms. Gomez’s care. Audrey has weekly phone contact and spends every other weekend with her biological mother. She has no contact with her biological father. Nor does she have contact with her five biological siblings who live in various foster homes throughout the county. When asked who she considers part of her family, Audrey identified her biological mother, her five biological siblings, Ms. Gomez, and her four foster siblings.

Audrey reported that even though she is the newest member of Ms. Gomez’s home, she feels welcomed and comfortable. At the same time, Audrey hopes and expects to live with her biological mother and siblings in the future. When asked if she thinks things would be different if she returned to live with her biological mother, Audrey replied, “Yes, because my daddy won’t be there anymore and won’t be mean to my mom.” She also said, “I will never complain again about my daddy or anyone else, and then I won’t have to worry about the social worker taking me away.”

Audrey sees her social worker approximately once per week and seems to have some definite opinions about her social worker’s strengths and weaknesses. On the one hand, her social worker is “helpful because she picks me up and drives me places and makes sure I get to see my mom.” On the other hand, her social worker “never explains stuff to me like why judges do the stuff they do and when I get to go back home to my mom.”

Audrey identified the court as being in charge of placement decisions. She is angry about the role of judges in her life: “I hate judges because they made me leave my mom’s house and never said how come.” At the conclusion of our interview, Audrey said, “It’s really hard to be a foster child because it’s scary when you don’t know what’s going to happen.”

Questions:
1. What are the positive aspects of Audrey’s experience in out-of-home care?
2. What are your concerns?
3. How would you address your concerns?
4. What services or community resources would improve the quality of Audrey’s experience?
5. What ethnic/cultural considerations seem particularly relevant?

Probes:
1. Audrey is at least temporarily experiencing a loss of contact with her five biological siblings. How do you imagine she experiences these separations? If you were assigned to be Audrey’s new social worker, you might consider providing Audrey with the opportunity to reestablish contact with her biological siblings. What factors are important to consider? How would you proceed?
2. Audrey stated that she considers Ms. Gomez and her foster siblings as part of her family. What could you do to help Audrey maintain continuity with them in the event that she returns to her biological mother’s care?
3. Audrey seems to believe that her social worker “took her away” because she “complained” about her father. In what ways is this belief concerning? What could you say or do to assure Audrey that she is not to blame for her removal? Role play conversations that you might have with Audrey to explain why she was removed from her birth mother’s care.
4. Compare and contrast Audrey’s perceptions of judges and social workers in terms of their domains of responsibility. Does Audrey seem to have an accurate understanding of the judicial system and her social worker’s role within the system? Role play conversations that you might have with Audrey to explain the child protective system.
Jerome

Jerome (age 7) lives with his aunt (Mrs. Franklin), his younger sister (Janea), and Mrs. Franklin’s grown daughter (Latrice). Jerome’s responses to our direct questions about concrete ways in which Mrs. Franklin cares for Jerome suggest that Mrs. Franklin is responsible and generally attentive. At the same time, Jerome seems to experience a great deal of ambivalence when he spends time with Mrs. Franklin, and we know from an independent conversation with Mrs. Franklin that Jerome is persistently challenging in his interactions with everyone in the family. According to Mrs. Franklin, the relationship between Jerome and Latrice is particularly antagonistic. As interviewers, we observed Jerome taunting Latrice. Her response was forceful: “Get out of my way. I hate you!”

Prior to our interview with Jerome, Mrs. Franklin reported that Jerome was removed from his mother’s care three years ago and was immediately placed in Mrs. Franklin’s care. Jerome, however, believes that he has lived with his aunt “since [he] was a baby” and does not seem to remember living with his mother. According to Jerome, he sees his mother “only a little bit.” Even though these visits are not consistently positive and seem to evoke a range of strong emotions, Jerome wishes that he saw his mother more frequently. Moreover, while Mrs. Franklin reported that Jerome will not reunify with his mother, Jerome firmly wants and believes that he will live with her again some day. Jerome is aware that he has a social worker who sometimes talks to him about his future. At the same time, Jerome stated that it is his choice to decide whether he will live with his aunt until he is grown.

Although Jerome has not lived with his mother for several years and currently sees her infrequently, Jerome perceives his mother as his primary caretaker. When asked, “Who takes care of you the most?” he identified his “mama.” He continued, “She doesn’t cook for me. She doesn’t wake me up in the morning or take me places, but she takes care of me the most.”

Questions:
1. What are the positive aspects of Jerome’s experience in out-of-home care?
2. What concerns do you have?
3. How would you address your concerns?
4. What services or community resources would improve the quality of Jerome’s experience?
5. What ethnic/cultural considerations seem particularly relevant?

Probes:
1. Jerome is unlikely to live with his mother again, at least while he is a minor. How would this information impact your practice with Jerome and other important people in his life? Role play possible conversations with Jerome about his future.
2. Jerome reported that his mother takes care of him the most. Where do you think this belief (or feeling) comes from? How might this belief (or feeling) impact Jerome’s experience, both positively and negatively, while living in Mrs. Franklin’s care? How would this information impact your practice with Jerome and other important people in his life?
Janelle

Janelle (age 11) lives with her grandparents, two younger cousins, and a two-year-old foster child in an urban public housing development. She has lived with her grandparents since she was removed from her biological mother’s care at age seven. She refers to her grandmother as “mama,” her grandfather as “papa,” and all of the children in her home as “sisters.” When asked who she considers part of her family, Janelle identified an exceptionally long list including everyone in her household, aunts, uncles, cousins, her biological parents, friends, church members, and neighbors.

Over the course of the interview, Janelle offered several images depicting her relationship with her grandmother: “We are best friends because we love to do everything together, especially shopping… My mama knows all the stuff that kids want like pizza and ice cream… We always like to go places together because we laugh at all the same things… I always feel loved in my mama’s family… I can’t imagine being anywhere else.” Similarly, Janelle reported enjoying the almost daily contact that she has with her biological mother. Janelle’s biological mother frequently picks Janelle up from school. They typically spend afternoons together, sometimes with Janelle’s grandmother. To Janelle’s dismay, she sees her biological father infrequently. While Janelle regularly spends time with her biological mother, Janelle wants and expects that she will live with her grandparents until she is grown.

Janelle lives in a neighborhood with an unusually high crime rate, but she reported that she has never witnessed drug deals, nor a range of violent events in or near her home. She said, “There is bad stuff happening, but my mama makes sure nothing bad is going on out there when I go outside to play.” Moreover, Janelle reported feeling “almost always” safe at home and in her neighborhood.

Janelle has positive expectations for her future. She wants to go to a college in Atlanta where her uncle, aunt, and grandparents attended. She said that she wants to be a doctor. Her grandmother appears to have played an important role in shaping Janelle’s future expectations: “My mama told me that I’ll be good at whatever I decide to do. I can do whatever I put my mind to.” At the conclusion of the interview, Janelle’s grandmother brought out Janelle’s certificates and report cards. She also showed us an article written for a local paper about grandmothers as foster parents.

Questions:
1. What are the positive aspects of Janelle’s experience in out-of-home care?
2. What are your concerns?
3. How would you address your concerns?
4. What services or community resources would improve the quality of Janelle’s experience?
5. What ethnic/cultural considerations seem particularly relevant?

Probes:
1. What are some concrete ways that you could support Janelle (and her caregivers) to increase the possibility that Janelle will, in fact, achieve her future goals?
2. What lessons could other kinship foster parents learn from Janelle’s grandmother? What could you do to facilitate and support the positive work of these relatives?
3. Janelle lives in a very unsafe neighborhood, although she does not experience it as such. What strategies do you think her grandparents apply to make her feel so safe? Had you been the child’s placement worker, would the neighborhood conditions have influenced your placement decision?
Tran

Tran is a thirteen-year-old Vietnamese-American boy. Tran’s mother and younger sister were killed in Vietnam when he was an infant. Tran and his father subsequently moved to live with extended family in a large, urban city on the West Coast. A year ago, Tran ran away from the downtown hotel where he and his father lived: “I don’t like him. He just lay around. He got drunk all of the time. He stole from me. He hit me bad.” The Department of Social Services subsequently placed Tran in a foster home with Mr. O’Leary, one of the county’s most experienced and reputable foster parents.

Mr. O’Leary’s home is located in a quiet, middle-class neighborhood in the hills. The house itself is spacious and lovely. Books and art from around the world adorn the walls. As Mr. O’Leary says, “They’re there for storytelling and knowledge that there are other worlds out there to explore.” He bought big comfortable furniture so the four adolescent boys in his care would enjoy spending time in the house’s common spaces, as well as their private bedrooms. Mr. O’Leary clearly strives for an orderly home atmosphere and in his efforts to achieve that goal, he regularly solicits support from social workers, therapists, and volunteer mentors.

During the interview, Tran reported that he doesn’t like Mr. O’Leary because “he talks too much and thinks he knows everything.” Tran also perceives that Mr. O’Leary has consistently low expectations for Tran’s future, while Tran himself believes that he will finish high school, go to college, have a job when he’s older, and generally stay out of trouble. In spite of his criticisms of Mr. O’Leary, Tran said that he likes the people with whom he lives and is proud of his new home. When asked if he wants Mr. O’Leary’s home to be permanent, Tran replied, “Yes, my father can’t get at me here, and there’s nowhere else to go.”

Prior to the interview, Mr. O’Leary told the interviewer that Tran steals from the other boys, regularly beats up on a developmentally delayed fifteen-year-old boy who also lives in the home, and is frequently involved in physical fights outside of the home. The Department of Social Services and Juvenile Probation Department are currently conducting two separate investigations into Tran’s behavior. During the interview, Tran reported that physical fighting, stealing, drug deals, and arrests frequently occur in Mr. O’Leary’s home, but Tran did not identify himself as the perpetrator. Tran also said that although he feels safer in Mr. O’Leary’s home than in his father’s home, he still feels “not at all safe” in Mr. O’Leary’s home. Out of any place in the world, he feels most safe in church. At the conclusion of our interview with Tran, we asked, “If you were in charge here, what is one thing you would change around here to keep kids safe?” He recommended that Mr. O’Leary give personal keys to the boys for their bedrooms, install metal bars on the windows, and purchase an alarm system for the house.

Questions:
1. What are the positive aspects of Tran’s experience in out-of-home care?
2. What are your concerns?
3. How would you address your concerns?
4. What services or community resources would improve the quality of Tran’s experience?
5. What ethnic/cultural considerations seem particularly relevant?

Probes:
1. Tran is living in a physical and ethnic/cultural environment that is dramatically different in several ways from the one that he left. How do you imagine Tran is experiencing this transition?
2. Hypothesize reasons why Tran feels “not at all safe” in Mr. O’Leary’s home. How would this information influence your practice? What could you do or say to help Tran feel more safe in Mr. O’Leary’s home?
3. Tran wants Mr. O’Leary’s home to be a permanent placement. Suppose Mr. O’Leary’s home is, in fact, Tran’s best option. What short and long term goals would you pursue to increase the likelihood that Tran will remain in Mr. O’Leary’s care until he is eighteen years old? Role play a conversation that you might have with Tran about his future in Mr. O’Leary’s home. Begin a goal-setting process.
Michael

Michael (age 8) has lived with his non-kin foster mother, Ms. Daniels, since he was removed from his mother’s care two years ago. While Michael was placed in Ms. Daniels’ care, his older sister was placed with a relative. Michael has seen his mother nearly every weekend during the last two years. At the time of our interview, Michael had six more weeks before he would reunify with his mother and sister.

Michael said that he is happy about returning to live with his mother again, but that he will miss Ms. Daniels a lot. He said that he will go back to the elementary school that he attended prior to his removal, but that his mother and Ms. Daniels also made arrangements for him to continue playing in the baseball league that meets near the school he attended while living with Ms. Daniels. Similarly, Ms. Daniels told Michael that he can visit her and stay the night if he wants.

Michael and Ms. Daniels have created a scrapbook over the course of the last two years which includes awards, certificates, and a collection of photos documenting Michael’s classes, baseball teams, birthday parties, visits with his mother, various outings, and vacations. Reflecting on the time when he was removed from his mother’s care, Michael said that he was initially sad, but that now he feels good because he has two families. The scrapbook captures Michael’s two families; it includes photos of Ms. Daniels’ extended family, as well as photos that Michael’s mother contributed.

Questions:
1. What are the positive aspects of Michael’s experience in out-of-home care?
2. What are your concerns?
3. How would you address your concerns?
4. What services or community resources would improve the quality of Michael’s experience?
5. What ethnic/cultural considerations seem particularly relevant?

Probes:
1. What are some thoughts and feelings that Michael might experience when he transitions home? How would you assist Michael during this time?
2. Is it in Michael’s best interest to maintain a relationship with his foster mother? Role play a conversation that you might have with Michael about the nature of his future relationship with Ms. Daniels.
3. What function does the scrapbook serve in Michael’s life?
Steven

Steven (age 10) lives with his non-kin foster parents (the Sanders), their 13-year-old daughter, and two other non-kin foster siblings. Steven was removed from his mother’s home at the age of four and has not had any contact with her since he was six years old. Prior to his placement with the Sanders six months ago, he lived in two other foster homes and two group homes. When asked who he considers part of his family, Steven identified all the members of his current household and the foster parents with whom he lived prior to moving in with the Sanders.

Steven identified his 17-year-old non-kin foster sister as the person who takes care of him the most: “My foster mom and dad almost never take me places or eat with me. They never read me stories or play games with me. My sister does everything.” Steven believes that while he felt happy with his mother, he almost never feels happy with the Sanders. Moreover, Steven reports that the other children in his home are always fighting. On the whole, Steven doesn’t like living with the Sanders because “everyone is mean to each other.”

While Steven does not believe that he will be living in the Sanders’ home for more than a few additional months, he does not know where he might live instead. When asked who decides where he will live, his reply was, “I don’t know.” When asked where he would like to live if he could choose, he answered, “I don’t know, but I wouldn’t choose to leave the Sanders’ house because I don’t know where else to go.” During his monthly meetings with his social worker, Steven talks about his dissatisfaction living with the Sanders, but he does not feel that she has been helpful.

Questions:
1. What are the positive aspects of Steven’s experience in out-of-home care?
2. What are your concerns?
3. How would you address your concerns?
4. What services or community resources would improve the quality of Steven’s experience?
5. What ethnic/cultural considerations seem particularly relevant?

Probes:
1. How would you respond to the fact that Steven views his 17-year-old foster sister as his primary caretaker?
2. Steven identified the Sanders as part of his family, but does not believe that he will be living with them for more than a year. What thoughts, feelings, or behaviors might be associated with that experience?
3. How would you address Steven’s feelings of uncertainty about the future?
Tammy

Tammy (age 7) lives with her grandmother in a spacious apartment in a busy, low-income, urban neighborhood. She has lived with her grandmother since birth and seems to have a positive relationship with her. She described her grandmother as both nurturing and strict. When asked about contact with her biological parents, Tammy replied that she never sees her father since he has been in prison for years, but she talks to him on the phone almost every week. When asked about her mother, she answered, “I only saw her once which was when she came to the door and tried to snatch me away from my granny. It was really scary. Now I hate my mom and don’t want to see her again.”

On the subject of safety, Tammy immediately responded, “There’s some stuff I’m not allowed to talk about unless I ask granny first.” She then said, “I don’t want to talk about the bad stuff my mean cousin used to do to me.” When asked about things that she has seen or heard living in or near her home, Tammy replied, “Sometimes I hear guns, especially on the fourth of July. I seen stuff like people dealing drugs and beating each other up downstairs in our building and also down the street.” When asked if she would tell anyone if something happened that made her feel unsafe Tammy said, “Maybe, it depends on what.” While Tammy seems to have been exposed to a fair amount of violence, she reported that her grandmother carefully supervises her and that she feels safe “all of the time” in her grandmother’s home.

Tammy perceives that her grandmother has consistently positive expectations for Tammy’s future. Tammy, on the other hand, believes that she will finish high school and “maybe” go to college. When asked whether she would get pregnant as a teenager, or whether she would use drugs as a grown-up, she responded, “Yes.” To our question, “Do you think that you will stay safe and not get killed?,” she replied, “Maybe.” Finally, Tammy offered a picture of her possible future: “Granny works in the nightclub and takes me there sometimes. Maybe I’m going to work there someday.”

Questions:
1. What are the positive aspects of Tammy’s experience in out-of-home care?
2. What are your concerns?
3. How would you address your concerns?
4. What services or community resources would improve the quality of Tammy’s experience?
5. What ethnic/cultural considerations seem particularly relevant?

Probes:
1. How safe is Tammy in this placement? Would you do anything to lessen the possibility that Tammy might become involved in unsafe situations? Alternatively, would you do anything to increase Tammy’s expectations about staying safe in the future?
2. How would this family’s concern for privacy impact your practice?
3. How would you assist Tammy in developing more positive expectations for her future?
4. How would you assist Tammy in fulfilling her personal goals?
David

David (age 13) lives with his foster father, Mr. Knox, in a small apartment in a busy, low-income, urban neighborhood. Prior to moving in with Mr. Knox, David lived in various group home facilities for children who are severely emotionally disturbed. Although David is considered “SED,” he was well behaved during our interview, attentive to questions, and articulate. Mr. Knox had established a clear behavior management system with strict rules and logical consequences for both negative and positive behaviors (similar to systems that David knew from his experiences living in group homes). Mr. Knox also communicated that he wants David to express himself creatively within his home. When David moved in, they spent time together building a loft for David’s bedroom so he could have a “hangout area.” Mr. Knox and David also painted his bedroom in ways that David wanted. David feels that his room is “really cool.” When asked who he considers part of his family, David identified Mr. Knox, his biological mother (who he sees weekly), and biological sister (who he also sees weekly).

Questions:
1. What are the positive aspects of David’s experience in out-of-home care?
2. What are your concerns?
3. How would you address your concerns?
4. What services or community resources would improve the quality of David’s experience?
5. What ethnic/cultural considerations seem particularly relevant?

Probes:
1. How do you imagine being severely emotionally disturbed impacts a child’s experience in out-of-home care?
2. What lessons could other foster parents learn from Mr. Knox? What could you do to facilitate and support the positive work of foster parents caring for particularly vulnerable children?
3. What is the short and long term value of the loft-building activity? What are other ways to achieve similar goals during a child’s transition to a new home?
Arnold

Arnold is an eight-year-old boy who has lived with his grandmother since birth in a low-income, urban neighborhood. He is physically small and shows signs of cognitive delay. While Arnold frequently talks on the phone with his mother, he has not seen her in two years. Arnold believes that he will never live with his mother because “she won’t be out of prison until I am 21.” Arnold has met his father once, but does not have any contact with him. While Arnold does not live with his biological siblings, he sees them regularly and appears to have positive relationships with them.

Arnold has known about and witnessed considerable violence over the course of his life. When he was younger, his mother shot herself in the leg with a handgun. His fourteen-year-old cousin was recently killed. He sees relatives take drugs on a regular basis. He reported that he feels unsafe at school because children often make fun of him and occasionally beat him up. Finally, Arnold reported a high level of exposure to drug deals and violence in his immediate neighborhood.

Arnold reported feeling happy “almost all of the time” with his grandmother. He feels safest in his grandmother’s home and doesn’t generally go outside. He is glad that his grandmother always knows where he is and never leaves him alone. He told us that his grandmother “respects me, buys me clothes, cooks for me, takes care of me when I am sick, plays games with me, helps me with my homework, and lets me sharpen my own pencils.” He likes having his own room with his own television, home video game system, toys, and games. He is also proud of the awards that his grandmother has displayed around the house to remind the family of Arnold’s school achievements. Arnold identified a couple of things that he doesn’t like about living with his grandmother: the roaches (in the kitchen and top drawer of his bedroom dresser) and the strong smell of cigarettes.

Questions:
1. What are the positive aspects of Arnold’s experience in out-of-home care?
2. What are your concerns?
3. How would you address your concerns?
4. What services or community resources would improve the quality of Arnold’s experience?
5. What ethnic/cultural considerations seem particularly relevant?

Probes:
1. How would you address Arnold’s vulnerability and victimization at school?
2. How is Arnold’s grandmother effectively protecting Arnold from danger and instilling a psychological sense of safety?
3. Will Arnold’s grandmother have to change her strategies as Arnold grows older? If so, how?
4. What would you do to maximize the possibility that Arnold will remain safe -- physically and psychologically -- as he grows older?
5. How would you address Arnold’s concerns about roaches and the smell of cigarettes?
Christina

Christina (age 13) has lived with her grandmother, aunt, and younger siblings since she was eight. She has no contact with her mother or father. Christina’s grandmother has threatened to send her away. For this reason, Christina does not believe that she will remain in her grandmother’s care for more than another year. Out of any place in the world, Christina would like to live with her friends. However, since Christina is generally happy living with her family, her second choice is to continue living where she is.

Christina perceives that her grandmother has negative expectations for her future. According to Christina, her grandmother thinks Christina will end up like her mother -- a “drug addict” and “always in trouble with the police.” In fact, the police arrested Christina after she beat someone up near her home. Since then, Christina’s grandmother has attempted to supervise Christina more carefully, but Christina says that her grandmother does not know where she is most of the time. Meanwhile, Christina thinks positively about her future. She expects that she will be happy and successful. She does not want or expect to be like her mother. She also expects that she will graduate from high school, go to college, and get a job. More specifically, Christina said that she wants to be a lawyer or “someone who works to get teenagers off the streets.”

Questions:
1. What are the positive aspects of Christina’s experience in out-of-home care?
2. What are your concerns?
3. How would you address your concerns?
4. What services or community resources would improve the quality of Christina’s experience?
5. What ethnic/cultural considerations seem particularly relevant?

Probes:
1. How would you address Christina’s uncertainty about where she will live in the future?
2. More specifically, how would you build Christina’s sense of responsibility for her behavior and understanding that her behavior may have an impact on her ability to remain living with her family?
   
   Role play a conversation that you might have with Christina on this subject.
3. How would you address Christina’s perception that her grandmother has generally negative expectations for Christina’s future?
4. How would you address Christina’s previous and potential involvement in risk-taking activities?
5. How would you support Christina in achieving her personal goals?
Annette

Annette (age 8) lives with her foster parents (the Jacksons) and nine other children, most of whom are unrelated to the Jacksons. Annette was removed from her biological parents’ care when she was five years old. Prior to her placement with the Jacksons, Annette lived with her aunt for a few months and then in another non-kin foster placement for two years.

While the Jacksons have professional jobs, in addition to their responsibilities as foster parents, Annette’s descriptions of them suggest that they are very involved in the lives of the children in their care. They help with homework and meet with teachers. They coordinate daily housekeeping and gardening rituals. They are available to listen when children have concerns. Annette feels particularly close with Mr. Jackson who she calls, “Daddy,” and wishes that she could spend more time with him.

Annette’s primary complaints revolved around relationships with her foster siblings. She reported that sometimes her foster siblings are helpful, but that most of the time, they get really angry with one another. Children who talk about their feelings are teased, and younger children are sometimes forced to give things to older children. Finally, Annette said, “One of the things I really don’t like about living here is that sometimes children blame me for things that I don’t do.”

Overall, Annette reported feeling that she is a part of the Jackson family and likes the people in her home. She stated that she wants to live with her aunt as a teenager, but that she also wants to maintain a relationship with the Jacksons. When asked what she would tell other children who can’t live with a biological parent, Annette said, “Sometimes it is hard being with people you don’t know, but you get used to it.”

Questions:
1. What are the positive aspects of Annette’s experience in out-of-home care?
2. What are your concerns?
3. How would you address your concerns?
4. What services or community resources would improve the quality of Annette’s experience?
5. What ethnic/cultural considerations seem particularly relevant?

Probes:
1. What do you imagine life is like for a child living in a non-kin foster home with nine children and two busy adults? What are some negative and positive aspects?
2. How would you address Annette’s concerns about her foster siblings’ behavior?
3. Hypothesize reasons why Annette might want to live with her aunt when she is a teenager.
Serenity

Serenity (age 13) has lived with her non-kin foster parents (the Burnetts) for twelve years, along with four other children, three of whom are foster children. Serenity has monthly contact with her biological mother. Their visits are “always fun,” and Serenity frequently tells her biological mother about important things that are going on in her life. Serenity reported that she used to imagine living with her biological mother again, but that her social worker was helpful in explaining to her why she was initially removed and why she would not be able to return. Now Serenity does not want to live with her biological mother again, but she wishes that they could visit more often. Serenity has not had contact with her biological father and siblings in several years, but she believes that they live in nearby towns and is very interested in finding them. She has asked her social worker to help her find them, but does not yet know if her social worker will, in fact, help. Serenity reported feeling proud of her home with the Burnetts. She gave many examples of ways in which they are supportive. She is pleased that the Burnetts are pursuing legal guardianship and wishes that they would adopt her.

Questions:
1. What are the positive aspects of Serenity’s experience in out-of-home care?
2. What are your concerns?
3. How would you address your concerns?
4. What services or community resources would improve the quality of Serenity’s experience?
5. What ethnic/cultural considerations seem particularly relevant?

Probes:
1. How would you respond to Serenity’s interest in seeing her biological mother more often?
2. How would you respond to Serenity’s interest in finding her biological father and siblings?
3. How would you respond to Serenity’s interest in being adopted by the Burnetts?