

HANDOUT #3: CASE STUDY FOR EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION FOR KINSHIP PARENTS

Lorena grew up with her mother, father, and siblings. Her father was addicted to alcohol and her mother attempted to protect her children from his outbursts but was often not able to. Lorena watched her father physically and emotionally abuse her mother regularly. She and her younger siblings would run to their room and lock the door to get away from it. Lorena left home at age 14 and lived on the street with other teens, moving from place to place, staying wherever they could. She began using drugs and doing sex work to support her addiction. During that time, her mother tried, without success, to find Lorena. She also sought help for women escaping violent relationships and left Lorena's father to keep her remaining 2 children safe. When Lorena, still living on the streets, gave birth to Darius, she had no place to go from the hospital, and Social Services got involved. She and Darius went back to live with Lorena's mother. For two years Lorena lived at home, however she often broke the rules, ditched school, left Darius at night to go out, and eventually began using drugs and doing sex work again. When she left for the last time at age 17, she asked her mom to take good care of Darius, and she has not been heard from since. Social Services has tried to find her, without success.

If you are the kinship caregiver for Darius, what might you tell him around age 5 if he asks where his mother is?

Some options to consider:

- a) Your mother, Lorena, couldn't take care of you, and she asked me to be sure you are safe.
- b) Your mother, Lorena, had a hard time taking care of herself, and she could not take care of any child, so she asked me to take care of you.
- c) Your mother, Lorena, made bad choices and messed up her life, and she couldn't take care of you. She knew I would take good care of you, so she left you here with me.
- d) Lorena had grown up problems that made it hard for her to take care of kids. She wanted you to be safe and knew you would be safe with me. I love you and can take care of you so that's why you live with me now. Whenever you want, just ask me if you have more questions.



If you are the kinship caregiver for Darius, what might you tell him around age 10 if he asks where his mother is?

Some options to consider:

- a) Your mother, Lorena, made some poor choices and was taking medicine that she should not have been taking. The medicine made her sick, and she could not take care of you or any child. She left you here with us to be sure you were loved and safe.
- b) Your mother, Lorena, had a bad childhood and did not know how to be a good parent. She made some poor choices and got in trouble and could not keep you.
- c) Your mother, Lorena, had adult problems that made it hard for her to take care of herself or a child. She lived here with us all for a while after you were born, but her problems kept getting bigger, so she decided she needed to leave. She asked me to take good care of you and knew that you'd be loved and safe with us. I wish I knew more to tell you, but I don't know where she is right now. I hope someday she will let us know how she is doing. Do you have any questions I can try to answer?
- d) Your grandfather and I had troubles while your mom, Lorena, was growing up. She didn't have a great role model for how to be a good parent and she didn't take good care of herself. When she lived here with you, she kept breaking the rules, so she had to leave. She knew you would be safe here after she left. Do you have more questions?



If you are the kinship caregiver for Darius, what might you tell him around age 15 if he asks where his birth mother is?

Some options to consider:

- a) Your mother, Lorena, had a difficult childhood. Your grandfather and I fought all the time, and he had a problem with alcohol. She left home at age 14 and was homeless for a couple of years, until you were born, when you and she came to live with me. I knew that she had used drugs when she was homeless and hoped that she could stay clean and take care of you. I helped her in every way I could think of, and I really cared about her. Sadly, she continued to use drugs and behave in ways that were not healthy for her or for you. She left when you were 2 years old, knowing that you were loved and that you would be safe here. I don't know where she is, but I hope she has gotten help with her problems. It is important for you to know that because she used drugs during her pregnancy, you are at greater risk of becoming addicted if you experiment with drugs. How do you feel about everything I just told you? Do you have any questions that I might be able to answer?
- b) Your mother, Lorena, left home when she was 14 and lived on the street with some other kids. She used drugs and was a prostitute to pay for her drugs. It was a hard life. After you were born, you and she came to live here with us, and I tried to help her get her life together, but she wouldn't stop using drugs. She kept leaving to see her friends, and I finally decided that she had to leave. She wanted you to be safe and she knew that I love you and would take care of you. I do not know where she is and whether she got help.
- c) Your mother, Lorena, brought you to live with us when you were a baby. She had a history of drug use and prostitution, and she had been living on the street until you were born. Your grandfather and I had many problems when she was young, and her early life was difficult and full of violence, which is why she left home when she was 14. She tried to take care of you, but she fell back into old habits, and she could not stay here. She knew you would be taken care of and loved, and she told me she wanted that for you. I do not know where she is or if she ever got help. I wish I had more information for you.

