

Applying Ethics

INSTRUCTIONS: Read the case material. Use the questions on Handout #8 to analyze the ethical issues in the assigned case.

A new child welfare caseworker, Aaron Aronson, (33-years old and Jewish), is working with a single mother, Natasha, (19 year old, African American) whose 18 month-old child, Tisha, has been in foster care since being discharged from the hospital after being born with cocaine in her system. The child's foster parents, Mr. & Mrs. Johnson, a biracial couple in their early thirties, have expressed interest in adopting Tisha, who has been in their care since being discharged from the hospital. But now, because of Tisha's high risk for learning disabilities and her tendency to become easily agitated and being difficult to sooth, they are expressing some ambivalence. They also state that they want to continue to care for her in hopes that they will be able to resolve their fears and provide a good home for her. Aaron has not met the Johnsons, but thinks that he may have graduated from high school with Mrs. Johnson. The caseworker's supervisor has just asked Aaron to discuss voluntary termination of parental rights with Natasha so as to prevent the need for involuntary termination.

He goes to visit Natasha and finds her clearly under the influence of some sort of drugs or alcohol or a combination of them. He has never worked with an addicted person before nor has he ever handled a termination of parental rights or an adoption. He is taken aback by her disheveled appearance, the dirty, cluttered appearance of her apartment and the fact that there are only a couple of wooden chairs to sit on in the living room. Natasha stays reclined in a pile of blankets on the floor where she was sleeping before he arrived. She seems to drop off to sleep several times during the discussion. She seems not to understand the seriousness of the discussion, but agrees to sign the voluntary petition. Aaron is discouraged that Natasha has dropped out of treatment for her addiction and tells her that Tisha will be much better off living with the Johnsons than with her and her addiction. He returns to the office with the signed papers, but says nothing to his supervisor about Natasha's condition when signing the papers.