Shared Parenting – Case Vignettes

Scenario # 1: First Agency Involvement - James
James, 4 months, has just been diagnosed with cystic fibrosis. His parents divorced prior to his birth, and his father has said he doubts paternity and does not want a role with this child. Thus far James has been cared for by his mother, Denise, with the support of her parents and her sister. The hospital has made a referral to CPS of suspected neglect since Denise is not following through adequately on the treatment that is essential for the baby’s health and very survival. Denise loves James dearly but is limited by schizophrenia, complicated by serious post-partum depression. Her family is trying to be as helpful as they can, but are feeling overwhelmed themselves not only with James’ illness, but by trying to care for Denise, who is becoming increasingly delusional and uncooperative in recent days. In addition, Denise’s mother is caring for her father as he recovers from open-heart surgery. Denise’s sister is a stay-at-home mom with two young children. She and her husband have discussed bringing James into their home full time but they are concerned they can’t afford his medical care and medicine and also that the care he requires might interfere with the needs of their own toddlers. If the family is not able to assure that James will receive proper care, the agency has a foster home standing by to receive him. This is an older couple licensed to care for medically fragile babies. The prospective foster parents have never been willing to work directly with birth parents, and the agency has not pushed the issue since they provide such a needed service.

Scenario # 2: Youth Permanency Planning - Dion and Andre
These brothers have been in foster care for four years and Dion is now 14 and Andre 15. Parental rights were terminated two years ago, and the boys have not had contact with either biological parent since that time. They do stay in close touch with an older sister, Tia, 21, who is now in college and still receiving Independent Living services. Dion and Andre have lived together in three different foster homes, the last for nearly two years. They have a good relationship with their foster parents, Mr. and Mrs. Green, a middle-aged couple with grown children. The Greens were considering adoption but now say they do not wish to proceed, because Dion and Andre say they do not want to be adopted. The boys say they want to stay in their foster home until their sister graduates from college, and they want to move in with her, maybe in another year or two. Tia is encouraging this plan, telling her brothers that she wasn’t adopted and they don’t need to be either. Mrs. Green says, “We love these boys, but why would we want to adopt them when they don’t want to stay with us?” The Greens have regular contact with Tia, and say she is a “nice young lady” but admit they have their doubts that she will be able to provide a stable home for two teenage boys within the next couple of years.

Scenario # 3: Adoption/Young Adulthood - Sarita
Sarita is 18 and a junior in high school. She was adopted at 13 by a single mother, after being in the system since age 5. The two have developed a strong relationship, although both admit it has not always been easy. Sarita entered care due to severe neglect by her mother who had a serious alcohol and drug addiction. Sarita had a strong bond to her birth mother and always hoped to “go home”. Her mother was inconsistent about visiting prior to TPR, but Sarita welcomed every contact, and often made excuses for her mother. After adoption, Sarita maintained occasional phone contact with her birth mother, at first without the knowledge of her adoptive mother. Sarita’s birth mother has now been clean and sober for three years. Although more lucid when they talk, she is still not always responsible or accessible to Sarita. Sarita now has better understanding of her birth mother’s strengths and weaknesses. She has also been open in letting her adoptive mother know about the contact. Her adoptive mother has been accepting of limited phone contact. She is worried that more contact would open Sarita up to greater disappointment and undermine the steady progress she has made. What Sarita would like now is to have a more open and casual relationship with her birth mother. She would like to be able to spend time with her on school vacations and recently told her adoptive mother, “You can’t stop me from seeing her so I wish you would try to like her.”