

## Harm Reduction Vignettes from real-life SFCASA Cases

*(names changed to protect confidentiality)*

In the year since being matched, Lynn has worked to build a trusting relationship with her CASA youth, Shareen (13), but it has not always been easy. It can be difficult to schedule with Shareen, who is busy with friends and school, and when they are together Shareen is often quiet. A few months into the school year, Shareen began to leave her foster placement without permission, sometimes for a few nights, and missing school. Shareen says she is “with friends” when she stays away, and comes back tired and hungry. Lynn keeps visiting regularly, and asking open ended questions like “what do you like about staying out?” and “how is it for you when you come back?” She doesn’t push if Shareen doesn’t feel like answering, and tries to spend a fun and “normal” time together. Lynn makes sure that Shareen has her phone number and knows she can call if she doesn’t feel safe. On each visit, Lynn tries to ask one or two questions to help Shareen think through her situation, like “how do you know when you are safe?”, and “what would you do if you didn’t feel safe?” and “What does a healthy relationship look like for you?”, for example.

14-year-old youth “A” an aspiring rapper, wanted to show her ERH her newest music video. Before she started the video she said “I’m showing this to you because I know you won’t snitch.” In the video, she is seen smoking weed throughout. The ERH told her that she was honored the youth trusted her, and was very impressed with her music. She then went on to ask a series of questions about the smoking...is that something you do often? What do you like about it? Where are you when you usually do it? All couched in terms of safety, and preventing her from getting in trouble at school and with her caregiver. By the end of the conversation the youth agreed to refrain from smoking in/around school, maintain regular contact with her therapist and share with them if she was smoking for mental health reasons, and practiced what to do if she felt like she was ever in an unsafe situation.

Sandra has been Josie’s Advocate for almost three years. Josie is a NMD living in supportive housing and recently shared that she has started to drink more, since she can’t smoke weed in the placement. Without judging, Sandra asked Josie how that is going. Josie shared that it’s OK, but she sometimes wakes up on the floor of her bathroom after drinking too much. Sandra continued to calmly ask questions to help Josie think through what she can do to be safer when she drinks. For example, she asked Josie if she can eat a meal before drinking, or drink with friends she trusts instead of by herself. Sandra shares that her relationship with Josie remains strong, and Josie continues to confide in her.