Class Activities for **Chapter 6: Family and Child Welfare**

**Class activity #1**

Break the class into groups of 4-5 students each. Provide them with the following vignette and ask them to read it aloud and answer the questions that follow. After some time, discuss as a full class.

The Jackson family comes in for an evaluation following a referral from the 14-year-old daughter Keera’s school social worker, as Keera’s grades have been declining for the last two years. The family consists of Keera’s parents (Jayson and Shinara), Keera, and her brothers Maxwell (age 10) and Jackson (5). It is quickly evident that there are a lot of problems to deal with in the family. There is plenty of tension between Keera’s parents, whom she says have been on the edge of divorce for years. Keera seems overwhelmed, as do her siblings. The family lives in public housing and much of the surrounding area is heavily gang-controlled and fraught with violence, particularly at night. The apartment itself continually has problems maintaining sufficient heat in the winter and staying cool in the summer. The father, Jayson, is unemployed, and has been for 18 months.

The mother, Shinara, says if Jayson doesn’t get a job soon, she will leave him and take the children. Jayson says he wants to work; he lost his job due to technological advances at the factory, and he has struggled to find new work due to lacking a high school diploma. Keera says she thinks her dad has secretly given up trying to find a job and is satisfied making ends meet with the meager public assistance the family received. Shinara says she is “fed up” with Jayson’s lack of drive, which she attributes in part to his daily marijuana habit. She says the kids do not know about Jayson’s use of pot, but Keera tells the social worker one-on-one that she is worried about her dad’s drug use.

As this family’s social worker, where do you start? How do you determine what steps to take first?

You may also choose to provide some groups with the above vignette and some with the vignette below, which is identical except the names have been replaced with ones that students would more typically assume to come from a non-minority family. It may be interesting to ask the groups how they pictured the family in their minds when the stories were read, and to ask if the race of a family in this situation would impact the sort of assessment or services they received.

The O’Reilly family comes in for an evaluation following a referral from the 14-year-old daughter Maggie’s school social worker, as Keera’s grades have been declining for the last two years. The family consists of Maggie’s parents (Mick and Catherine), Maggie, and her brothers Lochlan (age 10) and Liam (5). It is quickly evident that there are a lot of problems to deal with in the family. There is plenty of tension between Maggie’s parents, whom she says have been on the edge of divorce for years. Maggie seems overwhelmed, as do her siblings. The family lives in public housing and much of the surrounding area is heavily gang-controlled and fraught with violence, particularly at night. The apartment itself continually has problems maintaining sufficient heat in the winter and staying cool in the summer. The father, Mick, is unemployed, and has been for 18 months.

The mother, Catherine, says if Mick doesn’t get a job soon, she will leave him and take the children. Mick says he wants to work; he lost his job due to technological advances at the factory, and he has struggled to find new work due to lacking a high school diploma. Maggie says she thinks her dad has secretly given up trying to find a job and is satisfied making ends meet with the meager public assistance the family received. Maggie says she is “fed up” with Mick’s lack of drive, which she attributes in part to his daily marijuana habit. She says the kids do not know about Mick’s use of pot, but Keera tells the social worker one-on-one that she is worried about her dad’s drug use.

**Class activity #2**

Tell your students to imagine they are employed as social workers at an agency that trains, screens, and approves or denies people who are applying to be foster parents. Ask them to write down answers to the following questions.

1) What would you want to look for when visiting the house of the prospective foster parent(s) for the first time?

2) What sorts of questions do you think would be most important to ask?

3) If you met with a pair of parents who gave good answers and had a safe, clean home in a good neighborhood, but you had an uneasy feeling about the couple, what would you do?

4) You may gain additional information about a prospective foster parent by talking to others who know him/her. Whom would be essential to contact, in your mind?

After these questions have been answered individually, have the students gather into groups of four or five to discuss their answers together. Then discuss as a class.

**Class activity #3**

Break your students into small groups and have them discuss the following scenario and the questions that follow. After sufficient time has passed, discuss their answers with the class.

You are a school social worker at a large public high school of about 2,200 students. In the past few weeks, several female students have approached you and reported that they have been sexually assaulted and/or raped while on dates, and they feel very alone, as they’ve told no one (or, in one girl’s case, her best friend didn’t believe her). This has left them feeling self-destructive at times, though no one currently reports feeling suicidal. Although you cannot introduce them to each other individually without violating their confidentiality, you have considered whether it might be helpful for them to have a support group where they could talk to each other and receive support and validation. You approach them individually with the idea and they are very open to it, so you decide to schedule a meeting with the administrator who serves as your boss.

Upon presenting the idea to your boss, you are surprised to find yourself having to defend the need for the group. The administrator is adamant that establishing a group like this will give the impression that sexual assault and rape are a problem at the school, and she does not wish it to appear that way to the community. She especially bristles at the idea that the group would meet during school hours, causing the girls to miss class occasionally. She says she thinks it is best for you to continue to help the girls individually and refer them to an outside counselor for any further services.

What can you do at this point? Do you need to give up on your idea? Is there a way to continue to try to get the group approved? What options do you have?