

**ROLE PLAY #4: CASE WORKER TALKS TO A FOSTER PARENT ABOUT A
TRANSGENDER YOUTH**

CASE WORKER

Thank you so much for coming in today.

FOSTER PARENT

My pleasure. You said you wanted to talk to me about a potential placement?

CASE WORKER

Yes. You're one of the few foster parents we have who have experience caring for teenagers. Are you still open to having a teen in your home?

FOSTER PARENT

Yes, I am.

CASE WORKER

That's so wonderful because it can be hard for us to find good homes like yours for our teens. And the young woman I want to talk to you about today is a really great kid. Her name is Arlicia.

FOSTER PARENT

That's a pretty name.

CASE WORKER

It is, right? Here's a picture of her.
(She holds up a photo of
Arlicia)

FOSTER PARENT

My, she's very pretty.

CASE WORKER

Yes, she is. She has a wonderful smile that reflects her positive outlook on life. I'll tell you more about her. Arlicia is 15 years-old and came to us last year. Her father is incarcerated and her mother is dealing with some substance abuse issues, but we all hope that she'll be able to care for Arlicia sometime in the future.

FOSTER PARENT

Has Arlicia been living with another foster family?

CASE WORKER

No, she's been living in a group home. We don't have enough families who are open to taking teens. But Arlicia is highly-functioning, and an excellent student who gets straight "A's" on her report cards. She's an avid reader and has already read through all of Shakespeare's plays, if you can believe it.

FOSTER PARENT

She sounds like a wonderful child.

CASE WORKER

Oh she is! She's very respectful to her teachers and she makes friends very easily. She's very popular at school.

(She pauses, takes a deep
breath)

But I need to share some other things with you about Arlicia. Arlicia has run away from her group home several times and has also been arrested for shoplifting clothing three times.

FOSTER PARENT

Well why would she do that if she's as nice as you say she is?

CASE WORKER

Oh, Arlicia is VERY nice. And all of the things I've told you about her are true. It's just that she gets teased and picked on a lot by some of the other youth in her group home.

FOSTER PARENT

Is that why she runs away? And why would she have to steal clothing? Don't you all provide clothing to foster children?

CASE WORKER

Yes, we do, but...

FOSTER PARENT

And why would they pick on a pretty, smart, popular girl? I thought it was mostly other kinds of kids who get picked on.

CASE WORKER

Well, that's true. But we all know that boys can be pretty cruel.

FOSTER PARENT

Boys? She lives in a group home with boys? Why would you put her there?

CASE WORKER

Arlicia's case was being handled by one of our contracted group home providers, but now her case has come back to us.

FOSTER PARENT

OK, but I still don't understand why they would put her in a group home with boys.

CASE WORKER

Actually, all of the youth in Arlicia's group home are boys, at least biologically. Arlicia is transgender, meaning that she identifies as a girl but is biologically a boy.

FOSTER PARENT

(Holds up Arlicia's picture)

You mean to tell me that this pretty young lady is actually a... BOY?

CASE WORKER

Yes, that's right. Or at least her body is that of a boy's.

FOSTER PARENT

But she doesn't look like a boy. She looks like a girl to me.

CASE WORKER

She would be happy to hear that. Sometimes Arlicia is concerned that she isn't perceived as a girl. But she takes hormones that help her look more feminine.

FOSTER PARENT

I don't understand any of this. Why would she... HE... want to dress as a girl?

CASE WORKER

I know it's a lot to take in and we're happy to provide whatever support you might need in order to better understand Arlicia and other transgender children.

FOSTER PARENT

OTHER children? You have other children like this?

CASE WORKER

Yes, we do. And to tell you the truth, as hard as it is to find homes for any teen, it's even harder for us to find homes for transgender teens.

FOSTER PARENT

Now THAT I understand. I'm not sure I'm the right person for this girl... boy... whatever.

CASE WORKER

Well, I think you might be. We're all learning a lot about how to better address the needs of transgender youth. For example, we typically place youth in group homes according to their biological sex. So since Arlicia is biologically a boy, she was placed in a boys' group home. But that's the reason she kept running away. She just wanted to live among other girls.

FOSTER PARENT

But she's NOT a girl.

CASE WORKER

Well see, she FEELS like a girl. And everything we're learning about transgender youth tells us that how a person feels on the inside sometimes doesn't match the body they were born into. Imagine how you might feel if you were told you always have to dress like a man.

FOSTER PARENT

That's silly.

CASE WORKER

Maybe to you and me it's silly because the way we feel about ourselves on the inside matches what people see on the outside. We choose our clothing to make sure that people see us as women. But to a transgender person, not being able to wear clothing that expresses how they feel on the inside causes a lot of conflict-- internally and in their interactions with others. That's why Arlicia felt like she needed to shoplift the clothing she wanted to wear. She was forced to dress like a boy in her group home, and that's just not how she feels on the inside. And believe it or not, foster youth have a legal right to dress in a way that helps them express their gender.

FOSTER PARENT

They do?

CASE WORKER

Yes. Not to get too technical about it, but the bottom line is that the ways we used to treat transgender youth, like forcing them to wear clothes that don't match their identity and making them live with other youth who are not like them just wasn't working. As smart and nice as Arlicia is, she's pretty typical in that regard. We almost FORCED her run away and steal clothing because the system wasn't being respectful of her gender identity. So we're trying some new approaches because a child like Arlicia, who has a real chance of going to college, should be focusing on her studies and not on whether or not she's allowed to wear a blouse.

FOSTER PARENT

Hmmm. This is making a little more sense to me now.

CASE WORKER

So can I at least get a commitment from you that you'll stay open to learning more about transgender youth and then maybe, one day soon, you'll be able to meet Arlicia in person? She is really such a good kid who just wants what all kids want-- a safe place to live. And you have been such a wonderful resource for so many children over the years that I just know you could be a great resource for a child like Arlicia. What do you think?

FOSTER PARENT

OK, I have no idea what I'm getting into, but let's see what happens.

CASE WORKER

Thank you!!