Training Vignette:

Mike
Male, 15

Mike is a 15 year-old boy who is currently living with his grandparents. He is not in contact with his mother who has a serious substance dependence disorder. The identity of his father is not known. His last contact with his mother was more than five years ago. Over the past three months, Mike has grown increasingly argumentative and disruptive at home and school. He was suspended one day two weeks ago for fighting. This has been involved heated arguing and swearing at several other youth. In one fight, he was seen pushing the youth with whom he was arguing. Teachers report that his grades have slipped considerably. He went from being a B/C student to mostly failing his courses this school year. Mike is not in special education – his IQ was recently tested to be 96.

At home, his grandmother reports that he starts arguments with her, ignores curfew, and sometimes stays out with friends until 2 or 3 in the morning. There is no evidence that he has engaged in any criminal behavior. Mike’s problems appear to have started after his grandfather had a stroke. His grandfather is better but experienced partial paralysis that forced him to retire early. His grandmother works at an area grocery store. No other children or adults live in the house, although Mike’s aunt, who has five children, lives in the neighborhood. Mike is reportedly close to his cousins and spends a lot of time at their house. Mike has expressed interest in moving in with his aunt but she is unwilling to take on the added responsibility. His grandparents currently feel like they are no longer able to handle Mike’s behavior and are asking about foster care or residential treatment options. His grandparents report that they do not understand why Mike is so ungrateful to them for taking him in. Mike expresses worries about his grandfather’s health and resentment about all the restrictions they have tried to place on this behavior.

Mike has lived with his grandparents since he was an infant. At that time, child welfare had taken him from his mother due to allegations of neglect. She would leave him alone for long periods of time and failed to address his basic needs. As an infant, he was significantly underweight. He now is healthy and active. His grandparents are not active in a church and neither they nor Mike have ever attended religious services.

Mike reports that he has a girlfriend but has never been sexually active. Mike reports that they have been dating for about 8 weeks. He has a number of male friends at school. His friends have been supportive of him when he has had problems. At the assessment, Mike seemed to be a generally sullen and non-responsive. He was dressed in a baggy shirt and jeans, had his headphones on, and was listening music until the assessor asked him to turn it off. He answered questions but did not elaborate even when pressed. He reports no suicidal or homicidal ideation. When the conversation turned to talking about Mike’s girlfriend, his mood brightened notably and he smiled and talked openly.