

Scenario 1: Reggie

The way Reggie remembers it, he was born speaking his own language, which he has always associated with the strong, peaceful features of his grandfather's face. But then he was sent off to school and told it was wrong to use his own words. When he came back home after school nobody knew him. His grandfather had long since died, and his mother had passed, too, while he was away. Reggie is not proud of the way he lived when he was a young man. He drank and ran around on his wife, and she did the same. When his wife left for good, she left their daughter Shari with her mother, Reggie's mother-in-law. Reggie got clean, though, and he married again, to Cecilia. With Cecilia's encouragement Reggie took his daughter back in. By this time Shari was 11 years old and her grandmother was in bad health. Soon enough Shari was acting like her mother, only at a younger age, and it was not just alcohol nowadays, it was drugs. Reggie could not contain his anger at his daughter's behavior. After the fourth or fifth time he and Cecilia caught Shari stealing from them, Reggie told Shari to leave and not come back. Shari was 18 at the time. Maybe being on her own would be good for her, he thought. Young people have to learn their own lessons. If he was able to figure out his own problems and get his life together, then his daughter should be able to do the same.

Scenario 2: Shari

Shari recently moved back to her home community with her new husband Stan and her two children, 10-month old Josie, who is Stan's daughter, and 8-year-old Damian, whose father has never been in the picture. Shari's father Reggie and stepmother Cecilia have agreed to house them while Shari and Stan look for a place of their own. Shari wants to make a fresh start, and she wants to feel the support of her family. But she has so many bad memories to get past. When her parents were still living together, they didn't bother to keep her safe during the many parties they had. One of their so-called friends repeatedly sneaked into Shari's room and abused her. Then when her mother left and her father decided not to bother raising her, Shari felt like it was more of the same: nobody cared. She got more confirmation of this when Reggie kicked her out of the house during her senior year of high school. Because of that she never got her degree.

The school here is another issue she is worried about. Shari will be sending Damian to the school she went to, just off the reservation, in a farming and ranching community. Almost all of the teachers are white. Shari had made As and Bs in elementary and middle school, and before her grandmother died, she felt sure she would be able to go to college. Her grandmother talked about how she would get a scholarship. They would make it happen. Then in high school, living with her dad and stepmother after her grandmother's health declined, Shari started drinking and using drugs, and she got shoved into special ed. The school back then put Native kids into special ed so they could forget about them, it felt like. She is afraid the same thing will happen to Damian.

Since she left home Shari has struggled. In between relationships she has had to live in her car for long stretches of time. She knows this has been tough on Damian. There were times when she left him in the car by himself for hours and times when she left him exposed to people who she shouldn't have trusted. One of her relationships ended when she found out her boyfriend had photographed Damian in his underwear. At the same time Shari doesn't know how to manage Damian's out-of-control behavior. She sometimes loses her temper with him, warning him that he will end up like his no-good father. Pretty much the only time she knows she can calm him down is if she lets him play on her phone.

Scenario 3: Damian

Damian started 2nd grade in January. He struggled to answer ordinary questions about his family, where he had moved from, and what kinds of activities he liked, but he otherwise appeared to be a bright, cheerful boy with a noticeable desire to please. After a couple of months, though, Damian began getting into trouble for stealing small items from his classmates, and his art assignments often included gruesome depictions of himself committing violence against other people. In the mornings before the first bell, Damian was allowed to play on the classroom computers, but he would not leave the computer when the bell rang or when his teacher told him to do so. Damian's teacher eventually involved the principal because Damian's refusal to leave the computer was disrupting the whole classroom. The second time she was called in, the principal placed Damian in a small unoccupied office and told him he would have to sit alone in the room until he could behave himself. Damian began screaming and flailing, refusing to be left alone in the room, striking the principal when she tried to grab him by the shoulder to get him in a chair, pulling books off shelves and destroying some framed documents and photos that had been hanging on the wall. The principal and school counselor discuss Damian's situation and decide that they need to refer him to IHS Behavioral Health.