

 Watch this segment with Mrs. Anderson and Nicole. How does meeting Mrs. Anderson in her home help to further the relationship? Are there any environmental/safety concerns that Nicole may have as she is walking in to her home?

It may be helpful to suggest a quiet private space to talk if there are a lot of people around. Sometimes the client puts up barriers, such as loud music, the TV blaring, or a dog barking, as a way to communicate that "I don't want to be meeting with you." It is important to acknowledge that you are not necessarily a welcomed guest. By acknowledging this reality, you may help to reduce the obstacles and work toward collaboration.

Although home visits can be scary, there is no better way to learn about your clients. Visits also give you insight into environmental barriers of the neighborhood, such as lack of public transportation, grocery stores, wheelchair accessibility, and safe parks for some clients, just the day-to-day task of getting up and facing the world can be truly overwhelming. Being nonjudgmental and supportive can provide the client with hope.

In the example in Box 8.8, Julie, the outreach social worker, expects to discuss LaTonya's disease with Mrs. Moore. What she had not anticipated is the issue of Mrs. Moore's pregnancy and its impact on her life. She shifted gears and began to assess the additional family stress rather than focusing strictly on LaTonya's physical health. Julie presents herself as caring and nonjudgmental, and therefore Mrs. Moore appears to be willing to engage in the helping relationship. She sees Julie as a partner and feels hopeful that LaTonya's situation (and her family's situation) may improve.

Box 8.8 LaTonya's Home Visit

LaTonya Moore is a 12-year-old female. She is currently living with her mother and father. She has a younger brother, Dion, age eight. LaTonya has sickle cell anemia disease, an inherited blood disorder that causes anemia (shortage of blood cells) and periodic pain due to sickle-shaped blood cells. LaTonya is more vulnerable to infections and has a hard time fighting them off once they start. Because of this disease, she is considered to have delayed growth and is very slightly built for her age. Both her parents are employed by a local grocery store; her father is the 11 p.m.–7 a.m. manager, and her mother is the head cashier.

The school's outreach social worker, Julie, was notified by the seventh-grade teacher that LaTonya was tired, lacked energy, and appeared to be in pain much of the time. Julie contacted the family and identified herself as the outreach social worker, explained the reason for her call, and asked about coming out to meet them. Mrs. Moore agreed to meet her in their home the following day. In preparation for the visit, Julie read the school file. There was little information except that LaTonya was diagnosed with sickle cell disease when she was a baby. Julie read some information about

the disease (she downloaded information from the sickle cell disease website at www.sicklecelldisease.org). Julie talked to LaTonya's teacher, Mrs. Berry, in order to get a better understanding of how LaTonya is managing in her classes both academically and socially. Finally, Julie consulted with the school nurse, who has been involved in LaTonya's medical care since she came to the middle school. The nurse indicated that LaTonya has frequent bouts or flare-ups related to her disease. LaTonya has missed 10 or more days of school over the past semester. There was no social history or any other information regarding the family in the school records.

Julie is relatively new to her position. She doesn't know the neighborhood well and asked Mrs. Moore for directions. Julie arrived on time. Knowing that Mr. Moore was sleeping, she knocked on the door. LaTonya's younger brother, Dion, answered the door. Julie introduced herself and gave Mrs. Moore her business card.

Social Worker: Hi Mrs. Moore, I spoke to you on the phone yesterday. My name is Julie.

Box 8.8 LaTonya Home Visit (Continued)

Mrs. Moore: Hello, did you have any trouble finding us?

Social Worker: No not at all, you gave me great directions.

Mrs. Moore: Come on in, do you want something to drink?

Social Worker: A glass of water sounds good. (She is aware of the offer and doesn't want to offend Mrs. Moore by saying, "No, thank you.") I am a social work intern at University College. Thanks for meeting with me today.

Mrs. Moore: So why are you here?

Social Worker: As I mentioned on the phone, LaTonya's teacher, Mrs. Berry, is concerned about her and her health and asked if I would come out to talk with you and Mr. Moore.

Mrs. Moore: LaTonya is fine; she is fine.

Social Worker: Mrs. Berry did mention that LaTonya has missed 10 days of school since the beginning of January. Sometimes when LaTonya is in class, she is tired and has trouble staying awake.

Mrs. Moore: Well, she goes to bed on time, and I make sure that she gets plenty of rest when she is home. This is the first time the school has contacted me about LaTonya.

Social Worker: Sorry if my visit is catching you off guard.

Mrs. Moore: Well, yes it is, but tell me more about what is going on at school.

Social Worker: I know that LaTonya has sickle cell anemia disease, and the teacher was wondering if LaTonya was having any flare-ups, which might be the reason she is so tired at school. Mrs. Berry also mentioned that LaTonya is having trouble concentrating during her classes.

Mrs. Moore: Maybe it is the sickle cell causing her these problems, but she hasn't had any flare-ups or infections recently. She has been eating okay, and I take her to see the doctor when she is sick. I know she has been missing some school, but I make sure that we catch up on all her work.

Social Worker: Okay, if it isn't the sickle cell anemia causing her tiredness in school, what do you think it could be?

Mrs. Moore: I don't know. I try to keep up with all her appointments, but sometimes it does get so busy around here that I have to cancel or reschedule appointments. I don't do it very often, but . . . things just get so busy here!

have to find a sitter for Dion, and my work schedule is busy too. My husband sleeps during the day, so he doesn't help much.

Social Worker: So most of LaTonya's health care falls on you.

Mrs. Moore: Yeah, it does, and normally I can handle everything, but I am four months pregnant, and I have been feeling kinda run down myself.

Social Worker: You have a lot going on. You are very concerned about her and do what you can to keep her healthy. Let's talk about what is going on here.

Mrs. Moore: Well, I have the kids, I work all day, and my husband works all night. I don't get any breaks, and if I have to go somewhere, there is no one to help me out. I know that LaTonya wants to play with other girls and have friends, but I am not here, so I say "No." She does watch Dion sometimes but not that often. One thing for sure, we love her. I really want to protect her, I thought I had.

Social Worker: Well, there are some ways that the school can help you and LaTonya. There is a Girl Scout troop that meets once a week after school. One of the teacher assistants, Mrs. Chin, is the troop leader. She is really nice, and the girls do all kinds of fun things.

Mrs. Moore: I can't pick her up after Girls Scouts because I have to be here when the bus drops Dion off.

Social Worker: I don't know if it is possible, but there is a late bus that takes kids home once all the activities have ended. She may be able to ride that bus. I can check into that for you.

Mrs. Moore: Oh, I think she would like that. Do they have a tutor for her after school too? Maybe she could get some help with her homework. I just want her to do well in school. She has so many other things to get her down.

Social Worker: When you say "get her down," what do you mean?

Mrs. Moore: You know, it is hard for her to feel like everyone else. We try to keep up with everything. Now I am pregnant again. Dion is fine, but . . .

Social Worker: Are you worried that this baby will have sickle cell too?

Mrs. Moore: They tell me it's 50-50. I want them to tell me everything will be fine.

(Continued)