

The Hummel Family Scenario (Part II)

The Hummel family was screened in/accepted for investigation with an immediate response time due to the indications of both present and impending danger safety threats and risk factors. The immediate response included an unannounced home visit and interviews with all three children, April, and Earl.

When the child welfare professional arrived at the Hummel's home, Earl was not going to allow access to the home or Bobby. He said "this house belongs to April and I ain't lettin' no one come in or see the kid without her bein' here." Earl did give the worker April's work phone number and when the worker called April, she agreed to come right home. When April arrived, the worker explained why he was there. The mother allowed the worker into the home and, after a brief explanation about the purpose of speaking with each individual family member starting with Bobby, she allowed the worker to speak with Bobby first. Earl said "you go ahead and talk to him; he'll tell you I didn't hurt him."

The following is the information learned during the interview with Bobby: Bobby has a serious injury to his eye; a swollen, purplish colored black eye, which caused him severe pain, there was no additional injury. He stated that he received this injury when Earl punched him when he tried to intervene when Earl was drinking and hitting April. Bobby does feel it is his responsibility to protect his mother and siblings. In fact, Bobby is left in charge to take care of Cathy and David frequently when April and Earl go out to bars and/or parties, often leaving the children alone for several hours in the evening. Bobby is afraid when Earl and his mom fight and feels it is his duty to stop him from hurting her. He said Earl doesn't hit his brother or sister but if he did he'd be sorry. Bobby also told the worker that he keeps a baseball bat in his room, in case he needs to use it on Earl. Bobby wishes his mom didn't like Earl and would kick him out. He said if they are home, Earl and his mom spend most evenings in the "Adults Room." According to Bobby, the "Adults Room" is a room that the kids are supposed to stay out of when they (Earl & his mom) are in there to get away from kids. He also said his mother is already gone to work when he gets up for school. He fixes himself and Cathy cereal for breakfast and she walks to school with him and his friend. Earl is still in bed when they go to school. He didn't go to school today because his eye hurt too much, so Cathy stayed home too.

The interview with Cathy yielded the following information: Cathy doesn't like Earl, is afraid of him and fears for her mother's safety. She protects herself by just doing what Earl says, not talking back, and just being a "good little girl." She doesn't worry about Bobby because "he is a boy and can take care of himself." David, on the other hand, "is too little to take care of himself but Earl never gets mad at him," so she doesn't think Earl would hurt him. Cathy had no injury and said Earl never hit her.

April assisted the worker in checking David for injury and even though he had no injury he didn't want to talk to the worker. April said he doesn't speak very well or very much. He stays to himself most of the time, usually in his room playing or sleeping. When April

came home and came in the house with the worker, David appeared to see who was there but then retreated back to his room and stayed there until April brought him out to see the worker.

The following was learned during the interview with April: April says she loves her children and was very upset when Earl hit Bobby. She said he has never hit any of the children before and she hopes he never will again. It is not likely she could stop him if he ever went to hit any of the kids again; she said “I get so scared when he starts hitting me; he looks like he is going to kill me. I can’t stop him from hitting me but I sure won’t let him hit the kids ever again.” When asked how she would prevent Earl from hitting the kids, she was not able to give an answer. April never drank very much before spending time with Earl. Now she drinks a lot and often with him. She said he always wants to drink, hang out with friends, and go to parties and bars, so drinking is the only activity she can share with him. She admits that they get drunk sometimes. April states she really loves Earl and when he isn’t drunk and angry he is a really great guy. April has a full-time job, makes a nice salary, and receives child support from the children’s father. There are no financial strains on the family. She knows most of her neighbors, but has not had time to socialize and keep up friendships because of Earl and her work. The children’s father, Frank, lives about 12 miles away, in the next county. He sees the children regularly: he has them every other weekend and holidays. April thinks he has a new girlfriend. When asked, she admitted that she and Earl go out sometimes and leave the children alone, but she never stays out late because she has to go to work in the morning. She said “at most we go out one or two times a week and never for more than three or four hours.” April said she wakes the kids for school and puts bowls, spoons, cereal, and milk on the table for them before she leaves for work, “Earl is too cranky in the morning to get up with the kids.” April showed the worker the “Adult Room” and said it is there place to get away from the children.

The interview with Earl revealed the following: Earl does drink enough to be intoxicated often, almost every day. When he is drunk he tends to get violent which has, on numerous occasions, led to his arguing with and hitting April. He feels he doesn’t have a drinking problem; he said “I just like to have fun. I could stop any time I want to, if I ever want to.” Earl also said “If I have to stop fighting with April, she needs to stop giving me grief about everything. She can be a real nag sometimes.” He claims he didn’t hit Bobby, Bobby just doesn’t like him because he isn’t his father and wants him out, he said “the stupid kid probably fell out of bed, hurt himself, and blamed it on me to get me in trouble.”

About the house: The front yard is in need of mowing, the back yard is littered with toys, some paper trash and beer cans. Though somewhat dirty and cluttered, the inside of the house is in reasonably good condition with the exception of the “adults’ room.” The adults’ room is where the children are not allowed to hang out or play. This room is for Earl and April to “hang out, get away from kids, relax and drink.” There is some damage to this room resulting from some of the heated arguments/fights Earl and April have gotten into. A phone was pulled out of the wall leaving some phone wires hanging out and there are some holes in the walls. The most concerning condition, which presents a

hazard to the children, especially David, is an electrical wall socket is uncovered with exposed electrical wires sticking out.

Information from Collateral Contacts: Two sources of collateral information were identified in this case: the school attended by Bobby and Cathy and the police department which responded to previous calls to the home.

Contacting the school yielded the following information:

Both Cathy and Bobby do attend school there but they are often absent. Both children are displaying changes in behavior; Cathy is a very bright little girl who was very happy and playful but has become withdrawn and quiet of late. She keeps quiet unless called on by the teacher. When called on, her responses are very limited and her affect is timid and shy. Bobby, on the other hand, has become more aggressive with the other children. He is acting more like a little bully. Both children are dropping in their school performance.

Contacting the police yielded the following information:

The police were called by an anonymous referent and have responded to the Hummel residence on four occasions over the past three months. Each of the four responses found both Earl and April to be under the influence of alcohol and fighting. All four times April had minor injuries from Earl assaulting her. Earl was made to leave the residence on these occasions but April hasn't followed through with seeking any legal protection. In fact, she apparently continues to allow him right back in the home.