

Williams Family Exercise

In the following scenario, you are the Child Protective Services (CPS) worker assigned to the Williams' case.

Note: You already completed your safety assessment, which resulted in a determination that:

- All three children (Susan, David and James) are *safe*.

You are now at a point where you need to conduct a formal risk assessment based on the information you gathered during your investigation. Review the information outlined below to refresh your memory regarding what happened with the case. Use the information to document your risk assessment of the family. The trainer will be available to answer questions that you have during the exercise.

Referral:

Per a call you received from ChildLine regarding a referral they received from a school nurse (Ms. Chris Barton, from Baker Elementary School), a student at Baker Elementary (6-year-old James Williams) was observed having three one-inch welt marks on his left arm. The referral source noted that James visited her office because of the pain he experienced. Ms. Barton immediately noticed welts on James' left arm. When examining the marks, Ms. Barton noticed that James "wincing and recoiled" from her. According to Ms. Barton, when she asked James how he got the marks, James said: "I was playing ball in the house and broke a window. Mom got angry and hit me with her belt." Per the report, Ms. Barton noted that she immediately called ChildLine after James left her office around 9:30 in the morning.

The ChildLine representative noted that Ms. Barton stated that the family consisted of the mother (Mary Williams, age 25), father (Frank Williams, age 27), and their three children: (Susan, age 7), (James, age 6), and (David, age 2). Ms. Barton also noted that James and Susan were currently in separate first-grade classes in their school, while David was in Headstart. Ms. Barton stated that James, Susan, and David are often absent from school; and, when they do come to school (according to the children's teachers) the children are often hungry. According to Ms. Barton, James had been absent 8 days; Susan had been absent 10 days; and, David has been absent 10 days. In conjunction with the absences – despite the mother usually showing up on time to pick up David – all children were frequently late. Ms. Barton noted that she was not aware of any concerns relating to David. Ms. Barton offered that the family resided at 2121 South 21st Street, in a city in your county.

Review of Records:

Your review of agency records found one prior involvement with the family 2 ½ years ago. At that time, Susan was referred because she had telephone cord marks on her back, which stemmed from Mary hitting Susan with a telephone cord. A CPS report was indicated due to the severity of the injuries and because Susan had experienced severe pain as a result of being hit. Due to the injuries and the resulting pain, Susan was unable to lean against the back of her chair for several days. The family received

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services for six months and complied with the Family Service Plan. No other abusive incidents occurred. Neither James nor David was involved in the incident. The parents were resistant to ongoing services; however, as there were no incidences of abuse during the course of the six months, or the brief monitoring period thereafter, the case was closed.

The Investigation:

During the current CPS investigation, you visited James in the school and learned from him the following information. James' mother had hit him with a belt. James said that his mother usually disciplined him by hitting him. James said that he was not afraid of his mother, except when he did something bad – like breaking a window. The injury in question consisted of three, nickel-sized welts to the left arm. James stated, when asked whether it hurt when his mother hit him: "It hurt when she hit me and for a few minutes after; but not now... unless I touch it hard." You observed no other injuries. You asked James whether his mother had hit him in the past. James stated that his mother had hit him in the past whenever he was bad; however, according to James, she had never before left marks on him.

While at the school, you also spoke with Susan and attempted to speak with David. While talking with Susan, she told you that she had not been hit by her mother since the last time the agency was involved with the family. Susan appeared to be telling the truth; moreover, you saw no readily-visible injuries. When asked about James and his relationship with his mother, Susan noted that, "Mom hits Jimmy when he's bad." When asked about her father and whether he physically disciplines her, Susan respond that her father never hits her. When asked about David, Susan stated that, "Mom and dad never hit Davey because he is the baby of the family." Susan told you that, although she was never left home alone with David, she was the one who cared for him most of the time because her mother was usually tired.

In speaking with David, you were able to discover that he was indeed hungry by asking him whether he was hungry and David stating (as evidenced by David shaking his head in the affirmative and rubbing his stomach and stating, "Want food."). You saw no readily-visible signs of abuse. David appeared to be a healthy and happy (although self-admittedly hungry) child.

Over the course of the interviews with Susan and James, the two said that they often missed breakfast because their mother overslept – not due to a lack of food being in the home. The children stated that they get themselves up for school. Susan stated that she gets David up and dresses him for school. When asked about whether they ever saw their mother use drugs, the children did not recall ever seeing their mother use drugs or alcohol. In their individual interviews, James and Susan both offered that their father drank every night when he was home. Both children denied ever seeing their father intoxicated. Both children stated that their father and mother routinely fought and frequently yelled at one another; and, both also admitted to seeing the father push their mother on several occasions when he was angry. Both children denied ever seeing their father hit their mother.

The school nurse spoke with you before you left the school. She noted that she was worried that, as it was approaching winter and it has snowed once already, the

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children did not appear to have winter coats or boots. She also told you that she was worried about James and Susan because they were generally good kids; but, James frequently got into fights at school and the school nurse heard from other teachers that Susan constantly tried to boss other children and, as a result, had few friends.

You visited the family's two-bedroom apartment after school ended. You explained the situation to both parents and offered what you learned from the children. You first interviewed Frank, who chose to leave shortly after you arrived. During a brief conversation, Frank stated, "The kids are Mary's responsibility and parenting is the woman's job". He told you that, "Hitting children is alright for a parent to do because they have to learn to listen". Frank also told you that, since he was not the one who left the injury, he did not see the point of meeting with you. He did not mind if you met with his wife or his children. Because Frank left when you arrived at the home, you were not able to observe any interactions between him and the children.

You then interviewed Mary. She initially denied hitting James, but eventually admitted to hitting him on the day he broke the window. She said that this was the first time that she had ever hit James; however, she later admitted to hitting him often once you confronted her with the statements James and Susan made. Mary pointed out that she stopped hitting Susan after the last involvement with the agency. Mary seemed overwhelmed with caring for the children. She stated that her husband believed that child care was solely the mother's responsibility. As such, Frank never helped with the child care responsibilities and rarely had any real interactions with the children. She stated that James can get out of control at times and that he rarely listens to her. She denies her husband ever abusing her and dismissed the yelling and pushing as his way of showing that he loved her. Mary stated that Frank works as a garbage collector and that they often fight over lack of money. Mary noted that Frank drinks every night at home and after work but never gets intoxicated.

When asked about supports, Mary claimed that, after a disagreement with her family, she rarely sees them. The family had moved seven times in the three years prior. Mary blamed "bad landlords" as the reason for the moves but admitted to having difficulty managing money. During the course of the interview, Susan was observed caring for David in an adjoining room. Mary noted that Susan was a big help and often assisted her in caring for David. James continually disrupted your discussions with Mary. Mary threatened to punish him several times if he did not "settle down".

Regarding the living arrangements, mother and father sleep in one room. Susan had her own room. James and David shared a sofa-bed. All utilities appeared to be functioning – although the apartment felt frigid. The home was cluttered with boxes but clean. There was adequate food in the home.

Medical records were obtained for all the children. All were within normal weight range and physically developing appropriately. Nothing in the medical records raised concerns regarding the care given to any of the children, except for the fact that David was behind in his immunizations.

You found no criminal history on either the father or mother.