

Week 8 Case Study Discussion

Maggie and Jim

Please read the case study carefully and answer the prompted questions in your initial post.

You are a social worker, employed by a contract agency that provides in-home support for families referred by the Dept. of Human Services. The O'Malley family includes Maggie, 25 years old, Jim 32 years old, and their son Timmy 5 years old. This case was referred to you because of concerns about Timmy. Timmy's daycare provider called Children's Protective Services (CPS) after seeing bruises on his back. You have been working in the home for a month. Although you have tried to engage Jim, you have been unsuccessful. He has threatened you, accused you of meddling and malpractice and made it very clear that Timmy is Maggie's responsibility not his because he works. Maggie also works and that is an area of conflict between Maggie and Jim who would prefer that she not work.

Anytime you have been to the home and Jim has been there and both Timmy and Maggie seem anxious. You privately acknowledge to yourself you are also anxious to be there. You decide to interview Jim and Maggie separately to hopefully gain a better understanding of how you can be helpful to them. When you meet with Jim, he slams his fist down on the kitchen table and expresses his anger that he has to meet with you and that you are not wanted in his home. Jim also expresses his anger at the daycare provider. Jim states the daycare provider doesn't like him and sets him up with CPS because the daycare staff jump to the conclusion that every bruise is the result of abuse. Jim reports that the bruises on Timmy's back are because he fell down the stairs when he was watching him while Maggie was at the store. Jim tells you what a good father he is and if Timmy would only grow out of this 'clumsy' stage, he wouldn't get any more bruises. Maggie wasn't at the house so didn't see what happened.

When you meet individually with Maggie, she seems depressed and withdrawn and discloses that she and Jim are experiencing some marital problems. When you inquire further she discloses that Jim is unhappy with her a lot and criticizes her cooking, how she keeps the house and how she takes care of Timmy. Recently, she reports that Timmy has begun to say things like: "you're a stupid pig" and other statements that he has heard his father say to her. She has told Jim she doesn't want him talking to her like that in front of their son. Jim's response was to slap her across the face and tell her: "I'll call you anything I damn well please". Maggie says she reacted with complete shock and hasn't told anyone about this until now. She tells you: "I shouldn't have confronted him because I know it makes him mad". Maggie then tells you she has a suspicion that Jim was not watching Timmy at all when he fell down the stairs. She then tells you about several different incidents when Jim was angry with her, once when they were driving to her mother's house. Jim started complaining about having to visit her mother and she responded that he could have stayed home, he didn't need to go. Jim became angry and started making nasty comments about Maggie's family. When Maggie asked Jim to stop the car, he began driving erratically and Timmy began crying. At one point, he nearly hit a truck coming towards them. Maggie began pleading with Jim to stop driving. He slowed down and started

laughing at her telling her: "Don't you ever tell me what to do. You see, Timmy is crying now and it's all your fault."

Maggie tells you of several other situations when she and Jim were arguing and Jim picked up and stood Timmy on the edge of a table. Timmy was upset and trying to get off the table and almost fell before Jim grabbed him. Jim's response to Timmy's crying was: "Don't be a sissy boy!" and hit him saying: "Now you have something to cry about". Maggie tells you she is afraid for her son because Jim is so unpredictable.

1. What do you do? What questions do you need to ask?
2. How do you respond to Maggie's comments about making Jim mad, and how do you respond to Maggie's concerns about her son's safety and name calling behaviors?
3. What concerns do you have about Timmy? What concerns do you have about this family? What is your assessment of this relationship?
4. As the social worker assigned to work with the entire family, what do you do next? Some possibilities, are listed, but you may recommend other options:
 - a. Call a family meeting and tell Jim about Maggie's concerns about his behavior and how it is affecting his son
 - b. Keep Maggie's comments confidential
 - c. Call CPS to tell them what you have observed and what Maggie has told you and tell them to remove Timmy immediately (You don't tell Maggie you are calling CPS.)
 - d. Other options?
5. Discuss the goal of your intervention and explain why you chose this (these) option(s)
6. Describe any safety issues and ethical dilemmas you identify in this case and discuss what steps would you have taken to resolve these issues and dilemmas.