

Sandra and Jenny

Mother: Michelle Horton, age 40, Caucasian
Father: Brad (truck driver) not involved, Sandra's father
Todd (married banker) not involved, Jenny's father
Children: Sandra Horton, age 15, Caucasian
Jenny Horton, age 10, Caucasian

Presenting Situation

A school counselor contacts DHR at 9 a.m. to report information obtained from a routine career counseling session with Sandra Horton earlier that morning. The counselor tells the DHR worker that Sandra stated that "mama tied me to the deck with chains last night to stop me from going out again with my boyfriend." Sandra also said she and her sister "stay alone at night" because their mother, Michelle, works third shift as an attendant at a service station. The counselor also reports that Sandra is repeating the 9th grade due to poor academic performance and behavioral problems, including oppositional defiant behavior with teachers.

After consulting with his supervisor, the investigative worker goes to Sandra's school that afternoon to assess the situation further. Sandra, who is cooperative during the interview, discloses that last night her mother chained Sandra to the deck to prevent Sandra from "running away again at night." Sandra says her mother has a long thick chain with a padlock that allows Sandra to have access to the couch to sleep. Sandra shows the worker abrasions on her ankle from the chain. Sandra further reports having to urinate in a bucket by the couch. Sandra relates when she "sneaks out at night it's to go hang out with Jeremy, my boyfriend, so we can have fun." When asked whether Sandra's boyfriend was also a student at the high school, she states "no, I met him at church."

The investigative worker and her supervisor are both concerned about several possible safety-related issues, including physical abuse of Sandra and neglect of both girls at night. There is no previous involvement with DHR for this family.

Current Situation

That afternoon, the social worker goes to the Horton household to interview Jenny and Michelle.

Background Summary

Michelle was born into a poor family in a rural area in North Alabama. She is the oldest of six siblings. Her father, Ed, supported the family by working at a chicken plant. Michelle's mother, Maggie worked as a server at Waffle House but died when Michelle was 14 after a lengthy battle with cancer. Michelle then dropped out of high school to take care of her five younger siblings. Michelle reports that she had been an "A" student when she attended school.

Michelle says that after her mother died her father "was hardly ever around--he worked so much and when he was at home he basically yelled at us and whopped us when we needed it, which was a lot as you can imagine with six kids and no mama." Ed never remarried. Michelle stated that "everything in our family changed after mama died. Daddy kinda disappeared and I tried to step in with my sisters and brothers but it was hard. My brothers kinda went wild and my sister just sorta moped around." Michelle was the family's surrogate mother until the youngest sibling, who was 6 when the mother died, graduated high school. One brother, Steve, died several years later in a drunk driving accident. The worker observes that Michelle discusses her family history without apparent emotion.

Michelle began working part-time as a server at a truck stop restaurant "just off the interstate" at age 16 to help out financially. She worked at the same restaurant and took care of her siblings for about a decade. Michelle obtained her GED at age 22 "in case I could ever go to college." At age 25 Michelle became pregnant "by accident" with Sandra. Michelle met Sandra's father, Brad, while working at the truck stop restaurant. Brad was a truck driver "who passed through here a lot. Michelle hasn't seen him since she told him she was pregnant. Michelle had wanted to marry him.

After Sandra was born, Michelle struggled to make ends meet as a single mother. She supported herself and Sandra by working as a maid and a babysitter for well-to-do families who lived in a nearby town--jobs that allowed her to take Sandra with her. At age 28 Michelle "fell in love" with Todd, a married banker, whose house she cleaned and whose children she babysat. Todd and Michelle had an affair. Michelle thought Todd loved her and that he would leave Lizzie, especially after Michelle became pregnant. Todd stay married to Lizzie and begged Michelle not to tell his wife about their affair and pregnancy. Michelle agreed, hoping he would change his mind. Todd has been married for 20 years and has four children from the marriage. Todd pays no child support and avoids contact with the Horton family.

After Jenny's birth, Michelle continued to work as a maid and babysitter and at other odd jobs, so that she could be with her daughters. She could not afford daycare and had no one with whom to leave her daughters. Michelle's three living brothers live 100 miles away in a large city that has more job opportunities, and Michelle's baby sister, Nora, age 30, has been married 9 years and has four children, ages 9, 8, 6 and 5. Nora is an LPN and works fulltime. Nora's husband is a truck driver and is gone for days at a time. Nora is willing to listen to her sister Michelle and tries to give her ideas about how to make things easier. She shows appreciation for what Michelle does in helping their ailing father.

After Jenny's birth, Michelle had a number of affairs, all with married men. This pattern continued until five years ago when Michelle became a Christian. She attends a small rural church almost every Sunday. Michelle feels very guilty about her sexual history and the behavior she modeled for her daughters. When Michelle became a Christian, she sought work as an attendant at a service station on third shift so that she could be home with her daughters when they came home after school. She has worked at the same service station for 5 years. After earning minimum wage for several years, she now earns \$8.00 an hour. Michelle's yearly income is approximately that of the federal poverty level for a family of three in 2006 (Federal Register, 2006, pp. 3848-3849).

Michelle has been able to buy a small 2-bedroom trailer and a 10 year-old Ford Escort. Michelle's father, Ed, age 65, owns several acres and allows Michelle and his granddaughters to reside on his land. Ed lives

on the property as well, in the same small 3 bedroom house where Michelle grew up. Ed had to stop working at the chicken plant several years ago after his health became progressively worse due to emphysema and congestive heart failure. Ed refuses to stop smoking. He also refuses to live with anyone or in assisted living. Because she lives nearby, Michelle is his primary caregiver. Ed's health continues to deteriorate.

In separate interviews, both Michelle and Sandra agree that Sandra is "a handful" and that they have almost daily conflict over "just about everything," including school performance, rules about dating and family chores. The conflicts escalated when Sandra became involved with her first boyfriend several months ago. Sandra is a "C" student at best and doesn't like school. Sandra relates that "my teachers are so boring and none of my classes have anything to do with real life." Michelle states she often loses her temper with Sandra over Sandra's "mouth and attitude." Michelle firmly believes "spare the rod, spoil the child." Michelle quotes Biblical scripture throughout the interview to back up her parenting beliefs and behaviors.

Michelle says that Jenny is the good one; I don't hardly ever have to whup her." Michelle indicates that at times she gets "sick and tired" of being a mother, but the worker observes that Michelle appears to care about her daughters. Michelle wants them to have "a better life" than she has had. Michelle worries that Sandra is "going to make the same mistakes I did."

When the investigative worker interviews Jenny, Jenny is cooperative and seems eager to please. Jenny doesn't remember the last time her mother "whupped" her but Jenny reports that her mother and Sandra "get into it all the time." Jenny says she is scared when she hears them yelling and when she sees her mother "whup" Sandra. Jenny reports that she is also scared when she wakes up at night "with no one home but me and my dog."

Both Sandra and Jenny report having friends at church and at school. Michelle has no support other than her sister, Nora, and says, "Who has time for friends with all I have on me?"

Safety Issues

Physical abuse of Sandra

Inadequate supervision of Jenny and Sandra

Strengths

- The family's basic needs are met.
- The family is willing to discuss their situation.
- The family has a home.
- The family has transportation.
- The family has social support from Michelle's sister.
- The family has church support.
- Michelle has steady employment.
- Michelle has a stable employment history.
- Michelle loves her children.
- Michelle is financially responsible.

- Michelle is intelligent.
- Sandra and Jenny both attend school regularly.
- Sandra and Jenny have social skills and have friends.

Needs

- Jenny needs consistent adult supervision during the day and the night.
- Sandra needs to live in a safe environment free from physical abuse.
- Michelle needs more effective parenting skills.
- The family needs more effective communication and conflict resolution skills.
- Michelle needs respite from care of her father and her daughters.
- Michelle needs to expand her support system.
- Michelle needs more education in order to obtain higher-paying employment.
- Michelle needs to pursue child support from her daughters' fathers.
- Sandra needs to earn at least "Cs" at school and to graduate from high school.
- Michelle and Sandra need to plan for Sandra's future education and/or employment after high school.

Available Resources

Michelle and her family live in a rural mountain area about 25 miles from a small town with a population of about 7000. It has a small hospital, a mental health center, and several physicians. There is a small community college in the town. There are several churches and schools throughout the town. The major industry remains chicken processing. The church they attend is outside the town and has about 100 members, ranging in income from poor to lower middle class.

Child Welfare Competency One Knowledge of Human Development

Case Scenarios

- A. During initial interview the worker discovers that in the last six months, Michelle has been working double shifts to make ends meet, leaving Sandra and Jenny home alone from 3 pm to 8 am.
- B. During the assessment process, Sandra states that she was on the drill team but had to drop out when Michelle's work schedule changed.
- C. During the assessment process the worker finds out that Jenny has been a very active straight "A" student. Her teacher reports, however, that in the last few months Jenny's grades have dropped to Cs. Additionally, her teacher reports that Jenny recently has become more withdrawn at school.

Teaching Tools

- For Case Scenario A, have students write a paper on the stages of human development, in particular at ages 10, 15 and 40, and variations in human development associated with factors such as poverty and the effects that poverty can have on socio-emotional goals and milestones of each age stage. (CWCD 1)
- For Case Scenario B, discuss the safety factors of a 15 year-old caring for a 10 year-old 16 hours/day and the developmental impact on the 15 year-old of being in the parenting role for her younger sister. (CWCD 1)
- For Case Scenarios, A and C, discuss the developmental tasks of 10 year-old Jenny. What are possible effects on Jenny's development of the routine absence of her mother and parenting by her sister? (CWCD 1)

Child Welfare Competency Two Knowledge of Abuse and Neglect

Case Scenarios

- A. In the initial interview with Sandra, the worker observes bruises on Sandra's forearm and inquires about them. Sandra says, "Mama gave me a good whupping" yesterday for sneaking out at night." Sandra laughingly relates, "I deserved that whupping cause I snuck off to be with my boyfriend and left Jenny alone." Later in the interview Sandra disclosed that her mother often "whups" Sandra "with whatever she can get hold of, belts, cords, sticks, curling iron, whatever. Mama has a real mean temper with me but I know I deserve it for being so lazy and selfish."
- B. In initial interviews with the children, Sandra reports "sores" in her "privates" and says that she has been too "ashamed" to discuss this issue with her mother. She says she's had them for a month or so and that the sores "hurt." Sandra states even if she told her mother about the sores, "it wouldn't matter, we never go to the doctor; we can't afford it."
- C. The worker, a recent social work graduate, remembers a class reading and discussion about how poverty is a powerful correlate of reported child maltreatment and thinks this is probably true for Sandra's family.

Teaching Tools

- Based on Case scenario A, discuss safety issues and risk factors for Jenny and Sandra. What dynamics are present in the family that put them at risk for abuse and neglect? (CWCD 2.1, 2.2)
- For Case scenarios A and B review definitions and indicators of abuse and neglect. Discuss whether abuse and neglect is present in this home. Have students write a paper discussing the common effects of abuse and neglect on children and how these effects manifest in this family. Suggested resource: Insight Media (2006) *Child Abuse I: Neglect and Sexual Abuse*, and Insight Media (2006) *Child Abuse II: Psychological Abuse*, (CWCD 2)
- Based on Case Scenario C, have students research the following: Poor people are more likely to be involved in the Child Welfare system than are middle and upper income people. However, the vast majority of poor people are not involved in the Child Welfare system. Discuss the complexity of the connection between poverty, reported child maltreatment, and what might be termed "true" rates of maltreatment (reported and unreported). Suggested resources: Lesa Bethea, "Primary Prevention of Child Abuse", *American Family Physician*, March 15, 1999 - www.aafp.org/afp/990315ap/1577.html (CWCD 2.2)

Child Welfare Competency Three Knowledge of Services

Case Scenario

- A. During the initial interview, Michelle denies knowledge of any health problems in the immediate family, a situation that she is grateful for because the family does not have health insurance. Michelle relates that none of them have received medical or dental care in several years.
- B. During a home visit with the Horton family, Michelle indicates that she "hates" working at her current job and that she really wishes she had more education so that she could get a better job.
- C. You have been working with this family for several weeks and it has been brought to your attention by Sandra's school counselor that Michelle is still leaving the girls unsupervised at night. The mother relates she feels comfortable leaving them home alone because their grandfather is "just a shout away."

Teaching Tools

- For Case Scenario A, have someone from the Public Health Department come to a class to discuss what kinds of health services are available to poor working people and their children. (CWCD 3.1)
- For Case Scenario B & C, have students compile a resource guide that identify local, state and federal resources available to help Michelle obtain more education and a higher paying job. Also locate formal and informal childcare resources in the area. (CWCD 3)

Child Welfare Competency Four Knowledge of Policy

Teaching Tools

- Based on information in the case, have a guest speaker from DHR present current DHR policy and issues. Discuss and apply DHR policy to this case, with particular attention to DHR policy related to investigation of and services for child abuse and neglect, including the R.C. Consent Decree. (CWCD 4)
- Based on information in the case, have students develop a list of questions they have regarding state law and state policies related to health, education and access to resources that might impact this case. Put together a panel to include, but not limited to, a public health social worker, a school social worker, and a child welfare social worker to discuss state law and state policies and answer questions the class has. (CWCD 4)
- Based on information in the case, have students identify and analyze the ways that federal social welfare policies shape, constrain or positively impact the needs of and services to this family. (CWCD 4)

Child Welfare Competency Five Knowledge of Systems Theory

Case Scenario

- A. During the initial assessment, the worker discusses with Michelle options for obtaining health and dental care and additional financial resources. One solution explored is obtaining child support from Jenny's biological and from Sandra's biological father. Michelle starts crying and reveals she has never told anyone who Jenny's father is, "it's always been a secret." Michelle stated her biggest fear is that this information will get out. Michelle relates she is scared of what people will think of her. She is also scared that Jenny's father will see her as an unfit mother and seek custody of Jenny. Michelle fears the impact such news would have on her family. Michelle states that she has always told the girls they had the same father and that he died in a truck accident.
- B. You have just received a phone call from Michelle stating that her father is in the hospital due to problems related to his congestive heart failure.

Teaching Tools

- Based on Case Scenario A, have students review the main concepts of systems theory. Identify and discuss these concepts as applied to the Horton family's internal functioning, with particular attention to the effects of family secrets on psychological, social and family functioning. (CWCD 5)
- Based on Case Scenario B, have students develop an ecomap on the Horton family. Role play a discussion between the worker and Michelle regarding formal and informal support systems that can help with her family situation, especially with her fathers condition. (CWCD 5)

Child Welfare Competency Six Knowledge of Strengths Based Perspective

Teaching Tools

- Based on information in the case and the case scenarios, have students identify and discuss strengths of Michelle that are not previously identified. Suggested resource: Cowger and Snively, "Assessing Client Strengths", Social Workers' Desk Reference, (2002). (CWCD 6.1)
- Based on information in the case, have students compare and contrast the use of a strengths-based perspective versus pathology-based perspective and apply to this situation. Have students role play interviewing Michelle from a strengths-based versus a pathology-based perspective. Suggested resource: Saleebey, D. (1996), "The Strengths Perspective in Social Work Practice: Extensions and Cautions", Social Work, 41, 296-305. (CWCD 6.1)

Child Welfare Competency Seven Knowledge of Role of Social Work

Case Scenario

- A. The social worker receives a phone call from Michelle who is concerned about Sandra's sexual activity with her boyfriend. Michelle wants the social worker to convince Sandra to "start taking a birth control".

Teaching Tool

- Based on information provided in the case and case scenarios, have students identify and discuss the different roles of child welfare social workers and the importance of each. Discuss any conflicts in these roles and ways to effectively resolve them. (CWCD 7)
- Based on Case Scenario A, lead a class discussion on the role of the social worker in this situation. Role play a conversation between the worker and Michelle educating her on appropriate ways, for her, to address the use of birth control with Sandra. Suggested resource: NASW Code of Ethics. (CWCD 7)

Child Welfare Competency Eight Knowledge and Application of Evidence Based Practice

Teaching Tools

- Based on information provided in the case, in groups, have students research the relationship of maltreatment and socio-economic factors such as poverty, single parents, and geographic size. Have groups present their findings to the class. (CWCD 8)

Child Welfare Competency Nine Understanding of Cultural Competence

Teaching Tools

- Based on information provided in the case, discuss cultural factors of the Horton family related to living in the rural south in the Appalachian foothills. Have students identify how this knowledge facilitates effective practice with this family. Suggested resource: Gitterman, A., Handbook of Social Work Practice with Vulnerable and Resilient Populations, New York: Columbia University Press, 2001. (CWCD 9)
- Based on information provided in the case, discuss the importance of assessing a client's religion and/or spirituality as a dimension of culture. Identify cultural and religious strengths in this situation that can be used as building blocks to facilitate services. (CWCD 9)
- Based on information provided in the case, have students identify potential worker-client differences in this case and discuss how to minimize any negative impact of such differences on the helping process. Suggested resource: Lawrence Shulman, The Dynamics of New Relationships, Peacock Press, "The Dynamics of New Relationships" (p94). (CWCD 9)

Child Welfare Competency Ten Understanding of Crisis Intervention

Case Scenario

- A. During a routine medical exam, Sandra learns that she has herpes. When she discloses this to her mother, Michelle tells screams at Sandra saying, "you slut, you deserve herpes, you are reaping what you sowed and God is punishing you for you sins!" Sandra calls you, the social worker, and tells you about this confrontation. Sandra breaks down while on the phone with you, stating, "I just want to die now".
- B. During a visit with the Horton family, the worker observes Michelle raise her hand as if to hit Sandra during an argument.

Teaching Tools

- Based on Case Scenario **A**, have students review the definition of a crisis, crisis theory's tenets, and characteristics of crisis intervention. Apply these concepts to this situation. (CWCD 10)
- For Case Scenarios A and B, discuss how to apply crisis intervention in this situation to prevent escalation. (CWCD 10)

Suggested Resource

- Suggested resource: Albert R. Roberts, Crisis Intervention Handbook: Assessment, Treatment, and Research, 3rd Edition, 2005.

Child Welfare Competency Eleven Knowledge of Social Work Values and Ethics

Case Scenario

- A. Prior to telling her mother about the herpes, Sandra had called the social worker and indicated that she would rather keep this information from her mother.

Teaching Tools

- Based on Case Scenario A, review the six core values of the NASW Code of Ethics and the ethical standards and responsibilities that follow. Discuss value conflicts that might arise in this situation and how to professionally cope with such conflicts. Suggested resource: www.socialworkers.org . (CWCD 11)
- Based on information provided in the case, have students identify a possible ethical dilemma in this case. Apply Reamer's model of ethical decision making to this ethical dilemma. Suggested resources: Frederic G. Reamer, Social Work Values and Ethics, 1st Edition, Columbia University Press, 2006. National Association of Social Workers, Film: "Professional Choices: Ethics at Work", 1999. (CWCD 11)

Child Welfare Competency Twelve Communication Skills

Case Scenario

- A. You have been working with the Horton family for several weeks. During a scheduled home visit with the family, Jenny discloses that, according to Sandra, she is dating a 22 year old high school drop out that previously used crystal methamphetamine. He has been in treatment and is reportedly a "born again" Christian. Jenny also said that Sandra's boyfriend and some of his friends come over during the week and Jenny is uncomfortable when they are around. When the worker confronts Sandra with this information, she confirms the information shared by Jenny. The worker discusses the need to inform Michelle of this information and Sandra becomes irate and begins yelling at the worker, "you are ruining my life".

Teaching Tools

- Based on Case Scenario A, identify skills necessary to effectively communicate and interview adolescents. Role-play these skills, along with active listening, in this situation. (CWCD 12)
- Based on Case Scenario A, have students view the film "How to Handle Conflict and Confrontation", Insight Media, 2006. Apply the techniques demonstrated in the film through a role play. Next discuss how to effectively communicate outcomes to one's co-workers, both verbally and in writing. (CWCD 12)

Child Welfare Competency Thirteen Assessment Skills

Case Scenario

- A. The social worker has noticed that Jenny's grades continue to remain at the C level and her teachers say she continues to be quiet and somewhat withdrawn. During visits with the family, the social worker notices that she is also quiet and withdrawn at home. Sandra says, 'Jenny's disappeared into the woodwork in this house.' Michelle states, "I just thank God that only one of them is giving me trouble. I wish I had more time for Jenny but I am frazzled between my job, Sandra, and taking care of my dad." When the social worker talks with Jenny, she says, "I know my mom is having a hard time and I just don't want to make her mad at me, so I just stay in my room. I sort of daydream a lot, that's what my teacher says. I guess she is right. When I start to feel sad, I just don't think about it and I play with my dolls."

Teaching Tools

- Based on Case Scenario A, have students identify concerns about Jenny and what kinds of further assessment and interventions might be considered. (CWCD 13.1, 13.2, 13.4)
- Based on information provided in the case, discuss additional strengths and needs of the family that were not included in the initial lists in the case summary. Suggested resource: Film: "Assessing and Using Family Strengths", Insight Media, 2006. (CWCD 13)
- Based on information provided in the case and the case scenarios, have students review the link between assessment and intervention planning. Discuss and prioritize needs of the family at present, assuming the medical needs have been met. Identify additional information that is needed to effectively plan and implement interventions with this family. (CWCD 13)

Child Welfare Competency Fourteen Organizational and Technology Skills

Case Scenario

- A. The social worker receives a call from Sandra and her mother who are in an argument. Sandra states that her mother hit and shoved her this morning, leaving marks. Sandra says, "I can't take it anymore" and alludes to harming herself. Michelle tells the worker that she has "had it" with parenting Sandra and wants her "out of my house". The worker is currently investigating another case of child abuse and neglect. According to agency policy, bruises, as well as threats of suicide, require immediate contact. In addition to this, the worker has a very heavy caseload due to shortage of staff. According to agency policy, certain deadlines exist for completion of assessments and other paperwork. The worker has two assessments due to her supervisor today by 2 p.m.
- B. The worker has a computerized software system to enter all documentation and assessments related to reports of child abuse and neglect. The system has a history of "locking up" and not working for a few hours at a time. The worker has a tendency to wait until the last minute to enter documentation into the system, a pattern exacerbated by the worker's heavy caseload.

Teaching Tools

- Based on Case Scenario A, explore the worker's options for meeting needs related to both cases. Include attention to DHR's organizational structure, policy and timelines. Have a guest speaker from DHR to provide information about organizational priorities and caseload management. (CWCD 14)
- Based on Case Scenario A, discuss the impact of DHR organizational structure and functioning on the worker. Brainstorm options the worker has to cope with the heavy caseload, deadlines and client crises. When brainstorming, include attention to both professional problem-solving (e.g. use of supervision) and personal self-care as aspects of effective coping. (CWCD 14)
- Based on Case Scenario B, explore ways that the worker can adjust to the current technology. Identify and discuss other ways that technology impacts practice and how to effectively and ethically work with technology (e.g. computers, email, faxes, voicemail, etc.) (CWCD 14)

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